
Adventure
October 15th
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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

1927

VOL. LXIV NO. 3

Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

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Headings by NEIL O'KEEFFE

Cover Design by EMMETT WATSON

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; Levin Rank, Secretary and Treasurer; Anthony M. Rud, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents.

A New Complete Novelette of the A. E. F.

By LEONARD H. NASON

An
Ambulance Detail
and the
Galloping Ghost
on

THE ROAD THROUGH CHEPPY

A TREE-LINED road went glimmering between forest-clad hills. Green fields stretched from the edge of the woods to the edge of the road, fields littered with rubbish—shapeless heaps, uneven piles, strips of white and of cloth of a color that blended with the grass. The countryside looked like a city park on Monday morning in summer, after the city's poor had picnicked there the day before, and left their newspapers and food remnants scattered high and low.

There had been no picnic on those fields, though. There had been a battle, closely fought, hotly contested, a battle that had flowed on, earlier in the day, into the woods to the north, where it still continued. The rubbish that was scattered about consisted of the packs of the fighters, who, becoming weary of carrying such weight, had cast them off. There were also the uniforms of the wounded, who, having had blouse or breeches cut away to have a wound dressed, had not been re-dressed themselves.

Here and there a rifle could be seen, held upright by its bayonet thrust into the ground, marking a man who had been killed and had not yet been buried. Shells fell in this field with a slam, and the smoke of their bursting went sweeping up the slope before the wind.

A motor vehicle suddenly appeared upon the road, sweeping along at full speed under the trees. Its top bore a red cross, and its side a twisty looking thing on a square of white, the staff of Mercury, together with a long and mysterious number. The vehicle was an ambulance, and those who might see it could tell by its size and appearance that it belonged to the American Army, and was of the type commonly known as G. M. C.

On the seat were two men, the driver and the orderly. The latter's duty was to assist in loading wounded and to replace the driver should he become a casualty. Both men wore overcoats, over which they had put on leather jerkins. They had mufflers wrapped about their necks

and their collars turned up around their ears, for it was bitter cold. It was early afternoon, but because of the season, late autumn, the sun's rays were already beginning to slant and their power and warmth to weaken.

"Slow down, Wally," spoke up the orderly suddenly. "Slow down! I see a sign."

"Where at?" demanded the driver. "I can't see any."

"Well, dig out your eyes then! Right alongside the road, nailed to one o' them trees. Now don't go zoomin' by an' say you never seen it, because they'll take our number an' say we went by an' wouldn't take their wounded."

"I don't want to go zoomin' by, you red-headed nit-wit," protested Wally, "only this road ain't what you'd call safe, and I don't want to stop an' lose all my speed an' find that the sign you see said, '*Sens Unique*' or '*Abteilung*,' or somethin' like that."

"Well, you stop an' be ready to jump out from under your tin hat when we get the load in. That sign's got a cross on it."

"Has it?" sneered Wally. "I heard once of a fellar that had red hair that got his driver to stop under a young hail-storm o' G. I. cans for a sign with a cross on it, only the cross was blue. We don't carry no wounded animiles in this wagon. There's one jughead on it all the time, an' that's enough!"

"You're right," agreed the orderly, "an' that jughead drivin' instead of bein' driven makes this here combination kind o' remarkable."

A slowly rising moan that ended in what seemed a howl of rage and a slam,

as if some giant had banged his fist down upon an enormous table, interrupted the conversation. A shell had moaned out of the sky and thumped down into the field beside the road, where it disintegrated into black smoke and buzzing fragments.

Some of the smoke drifted across the highway, making the men in the ambulance cough as they tore through it. Once clear of that throat-stinging vapor, the driver saw the sign clearly—a box top, or bottom, frayed with many nailings-up and takings-down, on which was painted a crude red cross and the staggering words, "Dressing Station."

"Get out, 'Rooge'!" urged the driver. "Get out an' get 'em started. Yuh see that rose they tossed at us? We don't want no more. S'pose they can see us here?"

"Nah!" replied Rooge. He got stiffly out on the running board and, taking breath, gave a prolonged shout. "Bring out your wounded!"

"Gwan in!" objected Wally. "They can't hear yuh from here."

"Who the hell's doin' this?" inquired Rooge. "I ain't goin' into them bushes without I see some signs o' life."

"Well, don't stand arguin' on that step right in front o' the whole German army!" said Wally. "Come on, give a yell, you an' me together. One, two, three—"

"Bring out your wounded!" yelled the two together.

A faint hail answered them; then, from a clump of young trees beside the road, appeared a group of men, but they bore no stretchers, and all wore on their arms the wrinkled, dirty-white brassard and red cross that was the insignia of the medical corps in the zone of battle. These men carried square, muddy packs, of a model unlike that carried by combatants, and they wore, in addition, canvas bags that had once contained bandages and iodine, but now were flat and empty. There were smears of blood on these bags and on the overcoats of the men, left there by the wounded they had handled.

Their faces were worn and tired, and their legs and feet below their overcoats so covered with mud that it looked as if their lower extremities were made of clay. As they drew nearer and looked at the ambulance with their bloodshot eyes, Rooge and Wally could see that one of them was an officer.

"Do you men know where Recicourt is?" demanded the officer.

"Sure," answered Wally, "it's on the main road, over back o' the hill, on the way to Fleury. We come through there often."

"Well, take these men back there," continued the officer. "They're due for a rest."

"We're supposed to lug wounded—" began Wally.

"Never mind what you're supposed to do!" barked the officer. "These men are ready to collapse. It won't make any difference to the American Army if one ambulance is withdrawn from service for a little while. We've waited for a truck all day and I'm sick of it. Now take these men back and if there's any comment I'll take the responsibility."

"Sir," said Rooge, "what part o' Recicourt do they go to?"

"Any part. Just dump them there. They'll find the place they want to go to."

Another shell hooted overhead and landed on the slope of the field, sending an overcoat or a blanket that lay there soaring. The red-eyed men made haste to get into the ambulance.

"Let her go, Wally," urged Rooge hurriedly, getting in off the step. "All right back there?"

"Wait a minute!" yelled some one.

There was clattering and thumping from the interior, then a cry, "Let 'er go!" and the ambulance leaped forward. The officer waved his hand and ran back into the clump of trees, while the ambulance snored on its way along the tree-lined road.

"This is lucky," remarked Wally. "All these guys are whole an' I don't need to go slow so's not to bump 'em."

"Yeh," objected Rooge, "but we maybe get back soon enough to have to make another trip up here before we quit for

the night. It don't penetrate your thick skull that this was to be our first night off for about seventy-two hours."

"Don't worry, kid, don't worry. Your uncle Wally's runnin' this car."

"That's the hell of it," replied Rooge.

The ambulance continued its way. They sped much faster than returning ambulances usually go, for there was no necessity to think of the wounded within when they came to a shell-hole or a stretch of road that had been repaired with the remnants of near-by towns, broken into uneven hunks by cursing engineers.

The car rocked like a ship and the stretcher hooks ran up and down on the rollers. Once in a while, after a particularly violent dip and plunge, there would be a smothered shout of protest from within, to which the driver paid no heed. Rooge leaned back against the body, ducking his head into his overcoat against the bite of the wind, and appeared to sleep.

"Here!" interjected Wally suddenly, "stay awake, there, Bricktop! Keep your eye on these signposts. They're all on your side o' the car! I don't want we should go curvin' off an' come out somewhere at St. Menehould!"

"I ain't asleep!" protested Rooge.

"Whaddyuh shuttin' your eyes for?"

"So's I won't see you shavin' the whiskers off all these trucks an' what-not we pass. Boy, you'll give me nervous prostitution yet. You strike a bit o' muck when you're makin' one o' your loop-the-loops an' we'll all be ambulance cases without no ambulance. I've had enough o' ridin' on the front seat, without swappin' for a bunk inside. I seen too much o' the care the drivers take."

"Yeh? Well, never mind, just keep your eye peeled for a road that says somethin' about Dombasle or Bethelainville on it."

"Boy, you're bleedin' at the head!" scoffed Rooge. "You won't see no sign way up here about Dombasle. You'll see maybe a sign says Montfaucon, an' you want to take that road that that sign says."

"Listen, skull, button your mouth for a minute an' breathe through your nose. Then your ears maybe can get a chance. I didn't say I wanted to go to Verdun. I want to go to Recicourt, like that doc-major said. Well, Recicourt is this side. There ain't no need o' us runnin' all over the Argonne to get there, is there? There's a shorter road. I don't remember the name, but if I seen it I would."

"Yeh, you'd make a guess at it an' we'd land up in Bar-le-Duc like we did the time we started with the doctors for Epernay."

"Havin' an orderly with me that was drunker than a fiddler's bow an' only half there when he's sober, it's lucky I got even to Epernay."

The ambulance slid down the length of a truck column, swinging and skidding, missing the ditch by a hair's breadth a number of times. The trucks spattered mud on the ambulance, but the ambulance, moving at higher speed, flung the mud from its wheels into the faces of the truck drivers, who expressed their feelings in howls of wrath and deadly insults.

The road, that had been running through thick woods, came suddenly out upon the crest of a hill, beyond which stretched a vista of wooded hill and valley, far away to the heights above Montzeville, and across the Meuse, to a dim blue line on the horizon that marked the site of Douaumont and Vaux. Four roads branched off here, going south, and an additional one that plunged back into the forest to the east. The ambulance slowed, then came to a dead stop.

"Where's the signboard, Rooge?" demanded Wally.

"There ain't none."

"Well, where's these roads go?"

"South. How the hell do I know? Get out your map an' give it a look."

"Nah. It's way in next to my shirt. I ain't gonna unbutton in all this cold wind. I'd catch my never-get-over. There!" exclaimed Wally suddenly. "There's a M. P. Go ask him. Ask him which is the road to Dombasle."

"You get crazier every day!" scoffed

Rooge. "The idea! Ask a M. P. where anything is!"

"Gwan ask him!" yelled Wally. "What the hell do you think I carry you around on this seat for if it ain't to ask a question once in a while? Want me to do all the work? You'll have me loadin' stretchers next. Gwan! Git down an' ask him!"

The truck column now emerged from the woods and, turning, went swinging and banging its way off down the westernmost road. It must have been the sound of its coming that had drawn the military policeman from his dugout in the ditch, for he took the center of the road and waved the trucks majestically onward.

"Hey, M. P.," yelled Rooge, when the last truck had clattered by, "where do these roads go?"

"Lots o' places," replied the M. P. "Where you headin' for?"

"Dombasle," replied Wally.

"Never heard of it," answered the M. P., making motions as if to return to his dugout.

For this he could not be blamed, for the place was open and as exposed to the wind as if it were the very roof of the world. And this wind, as the sun sank lower and lower, grew colder and more biting with every minute.

"We'll go first to Montfaucon," cried Rooge. "Know where that is?"

"Nah, we ain't goin' to Montfaucon," interrupted Wally. "Where's these other roads go, M. P.? Tell a guy, will you? I know the name o' the place but I just can't think of it. Reel off a few towns these roads go to."

"Well, this one goes to Ivory, an' that one to Cheppy, an' that one—I don't know, Cergees, I guess. Off that way you get to Montfaucon."

"Well, where do you go after you get to them towns?" asked Wally.

"How the hell do I know?" cried the M. P. in wrath. "I ain't no damn information bureau; I'm here to direct traffic, stop an' go, stop an' go. Go on down the damn road an' when you come to the end of it you'll know where it goes to!"

After this advice he betook himself to his dugout and was seen no more.

"Whaddyuh doin'—lookin' at the view?"

The two men on the seat of the ambulance turned. There was a man there with the frayed and worn insignia of a sergeant, medical corps, on his overcoat sleeve. About him were grouped three or four of the red-eyed passengers.

"We're askin' our way," said Wally. "I'm tryin' to get you guys to Recicourt as quick as I can. If I was carryin' wounded I'd have a regular route to follow goin' back, but bein' as I ain't, I can pick an' choose a little about the roads."

"What the blue-eyed hell did yuh have to stop in this draft for?" demanded a man who had just appeared. "My teeth are chatterin' all their fillin's out. It never struck you guys that you got the open end o' this ambulance headed into the wind an' us gettin' it all!"

The last speaker's voice was harsh and rasping like an actor on the stage giving a dying speech. His appearance also was sinister and gloomy. He was thin, older by ten years than any of the others, his features peaked and drawn, the skin pulled sharply over the bones, so that his face reminded one of a skull. The high cheek-bones and pointed chin were purple with cold, the needle-like nose was scarlet, and jeweled from time to time with a diamond that the harsh-voiced man dashed away with a hand that might have belonged to the Angel of Death.

"We're goin' on," said Rooge, "an' right now. You *hombres* don't need to get in no sweat. I guess if I got yuh all lost you wouldn't be in such a hurry. If I stop to look at a road, what the hell am I stoppin' for? If I get lost somewhere, what the hell do I go bargin' along for so fast an' never askin' the way?"

"Well, we found the way now," interrupted Rooge. "This here talk ain't gettin' baby no shoes. There's the road to Montfaucon. Whoop down it."

"We ain't goin' that way," replied Wally, cramping the wheel. "We're goin'

through Cheppy. It's shorter. I been up here lots o' times."

"Yuh ain't!" sneered Rooge. "When was you ever anywheres I wasn't along?"

"When you was in the mill for swipin' alcohol outta evacuation!"

"Got any of it left?" asked the harsh-voiced man eagerly.

"It was a long time ago—last month," answered Rooge. "Git in, 'cause we're goin'."

"Yuh know," continued Rooge, "I seen that merry lookin' fellar before somewhere. Now where do you suppose it was?"

"I seen him, too. It's the 'Gallopin' Ghost;' they call him that all the time. I've heard he was a hop-head. MacGarrity was tellin' me, an' he come over on the same boat with him. The Ghost used to get up on the deck an' sound off about their all gettin' ready to drown, an' sheep goin' to the slaughter an' such talk. The gobs put him in the brig for the trip. They claimed he was a Jonah."

"Nice guy to have along," remarked Rooge. "S'pose he'll Jonah us?"

"Jonahs don't affect me," replied Wally calmly. "After about eight months of you I'm proof against anything."

"Let's go to Cheppy," replied Rooge. "Man, you don't need no Jonah—you go huntin' for hard luck. An' when you find it, don't say I didn't warn yuh."

The way led along the edge of a treeless, rolling plain, beyond which, on both sides, were more plains like it, rolling and heaving like solidified mid-ocean combers. They went down a sharp pitch into a town which they learned was Very, from a sign painted on a house; then up-hill again on to another tableland.

The countryside seemed deserted, they were too far behind the lines to see troop activity, and the great arteries of traffic from Varennes to Eomagne, and from Cheppy to Montfaucon, were behind the hills. Over another long hill, like the back of a whale, and then down a gradual slope to the ruins of what had been a town of some size.

"What's this place?" demanded Rooge.

"I know," said Wally, "but I can't quite think of the name. I'll tell yuh in a second."

"I can read the name of it in a second myself," replied Rooge. He leaned out from his side, intent on deciphering the name of the town that was painted on a large sign just at the outskirts. "There's a M. P. there," he remarked, noticing a man that hovered in the shadow of a wall. "What'll yuh bet we get pinched?"

"What for pinched?" demanded Wally. "Why should they pinch us?"

"Oh, I don't know. Runnin' around where we got no business to be. He'll want tuh know what evacuation we're workin' out of an' what the hell we're doin' over here in somebody else's chicken yard."

The ambulance drew nearer, and Wally, seeing the way straight before him, started to increase speed. The policeman came into the center of the road and, turning so that his gun might be seen, held up his hand.

"Told yuh so!" exulted Rooge.

"What's the excitement?" demanded Wally of the M. P., as the ambulance skidded to a stop. "Don't tell me they're shellin' the roads way back here?"

"You ain't got any wounded in there?" questioned the M. P.

"No, I got a wagonload o' pill-rollers been up on the lines for a week or so an' are goin' back to Recicourt for a rest. Why?"

"Good. I been waitin' here for yuh. We got a phone there was a ambulance with a lot o' pill-gunners in it comin' our way. You wa'n't ordered here?"

"No, we wa'n't ordered here!" said Wally, mimicking the M. P.'s New England accent. "We was ordered to go to Recicourt."

"Don't doubt it a mite," agreed the M. P.

He took hold of the car with a bronzed and muddy hand and swung himself to the step.

"Just drive me down to where you see them motorcycles," he said.

"Well, if that's all you want, we can

accommodate yuh," said Wally, "but we ain't got no time to waste here."

"Well, don't be in no great sight of a hurry to get away," grinned the M. P. "I think you're goin' to stay with us a while."

"Gwan!" cried Wally. "You can't go out an' hold up a ambulance that way! We got work to do. You birds think you own France! There's wounded to lug an' all sorts o' things goin' on. You don't know it, o' course, but this here American Army is gettin' its measure took up there in them woods, an' there's twelve baskets full o' the fragments that remain, I ain't kiddin'! Think a ambulance driver's got time to sit down an' drink with every bum that he meets up with?"

"Tell it to the Old Man," said the M. P. "I got my orders to bring you in. If he wants to let you go, that's his business."

"Let us go? We ain't done nothin'! Speak up there, Rooge, why don't yuh say somethin'?"

"I said my say a while back," answered Rooge with a martyr-like air.

"Your say? Your say? When did you say your say?" demanded Wally.

"Up there at the crossroads. I said to take the road to Montfaucon."

The ambulance stopped before a house that was larger than the rest and that had been repaired with blocks of stones and sandbags. There was a sign above the door, "*Sturmabteilung, Gruppe B*," that showed who its former proprietors had been, but a newer sign stated that there were several sorts of things there—a balloon company P. C., a message center, and a command post for a *groupment* of 155 G. P. F.'s. The car's wheels had scarcely come to a stop before a delegation of indignant passengers appeared, headed by the sergeant.

"Heow's crops?" began the sergeant through his nose. "Have we got to wait while you give a ride to every hay-shaker and sod-dinger this side o' Vaucouleurs?"

He stopped in some confusion as he discovered the M. P., and those in rear, running into him, there ensued a moment's tumbling and disorder. Meanwhile the M. P. got down and favored all with an unpleasant look.

"Don't go 'way," he said, "because we got your number. There ain't anywheres you could go nohow. They'd stop you at Avocourt or anywheres. An' then the rock-crushers would get a few recruits."

"What the hell is all this?" demanded the sergeant. " 'Don't go 'way,' says he. Where does he get that stuff at? We're tired, I tell yuh! Man, I ain't done nothin' but daub iodine an' give jolts in the arm to guys for a week, night an' day. I ain't got time to fool away standin' here in the cold!"

"Talk to him," said Rooge, pointing to his companion on the seat. "He was the guy brought us here. I advised otherwise."

"You advised otherwise," cried Wally. "When the hell do you ever advise anything? You're worse'n a guy's wife! 'If you done what I said, John, we wouldn't 'a' got lost.' Whatever a guy does, he's wrong an' you was right."

"Never mind all the lip-music," growled one of the pill-rollers. "It's gettin' late an' we are far from home. Lead thou me on."

He waved a hand toward the west, where the sun was disappearing below the hills in a red glory of mares' tails and scattered, ragged clouds, like torn scarlet cloaks. The morrow would be fine, but cold. The night would be colder, judging from the renewed vigor with which the wind romped across the barren fields.

"The police," remarked Wally, "is hard luck. When they say stop, a guy's gotta stop, especially if he's got a number as big an' clean as mine that my half-witted orderly didn't have sense enough to stick up with a little mud. You guys can go on on foot if you want to."

Feet splashed through the mud and an officer, wrapped in muffler and mackinaw, joined the group. He wore a colonel's insignia, and spat tobacco juice.

"We need an ambulance in this town," he began, "and some medical personnel.

I've been trying to get some for two days, but they won't give me any. Well, by God, if they won't give me one, I'll take one. What more could I ask? Ambulance and dressing station complete. Good. Go find yourselves a billet and prepare to paint."

"Sir," began the sergeant, "we're the medical detachment o' the Tenth Field Artillery, Regular Army, an' we been on duty for weeks without no rest nor nothin', up on the lines, where the fightin' is. We're goin' out for a rest, an—"

"Well, rest here," interrupted the colonel. "Listen. There are about eight hundred men in this town without any medical personnel. And some damned idiot that was just weaned last week has brought in a ration dump and set it down on our doorstep. We'll get a raid, as sure as God Almighty made little apples!"

"D'yuh think I'm goin' to let all these men go without attention just to please a few pill-shooters? Rest here. Go find a hole and climb down it. And don't fade, either. By God, I'd get you back and on the rock pile if I had to go from here to Camp Travis, Texas, after you. I'm a regular myself. This Army needs a few regulars to make 'em snap out of it! Posts!"

He turned on his heel and crunched away.

The M. P. looked upon all with a stern eye, drew his gun, spun it twice about his finger and slapped it back in the holster again. Then, squaring his shoulders, he went away in his turn.

The six medical corps men and Wally and Rooge gazed at each other in silence. Then, as if moved by the same impulse, they turned to look about them at the surrounding country. Barren, empty fields covered with tangled, matted grass, broken walls, windows without frames, and stairways that led up to emptiness. A church, recognizable only by its pointed windows; and in the shelter of its one wall, a cemetery, decorated with the tin rosettes that the French used on their military graves.

There were some old German signs, and some new English ones. At the south end of the town, in the field, was a thing like a great fat grub, an enormous sort of caterpillar, that lay motionless on the ground. It was an observation balloon in its bed. Around this balloon, like ants about a fat worm, and amidst the wreckage and bones of that dead town, swarmed men in olive drab, in overcoats, dungarees and leather jerkins, coming in from this duty and that to be fed and to go to some unpleasant bed to rest for another day of back-breaking toil.

And over all whistled a cold bitter wind, a wind from the North Pole, that, whooping down across the North Sea and the German forests, lost never a bit of its icy piercing quality, and that fell upon these tired men in pitiless ferocity, searching the life blood in their very bones, going through overcoat, leather jerkin, slicker, blouse and woolen undershirt with ease, to take a man's heart in its freezing grasp. The ground had been saturated by weeks of the steady fall rain; a chill dampness as of funeral vaults came out of it, to be hurried along and hurled against these men by the merciless wind, along with an odor of rotting wood, of crumbling plaster and of corruption that had long lacked burial.

"Yuh know, gang," began the sergeant, "I think maybe we run into somethin' soft. I'm just wonderin'. I think we're gonna get a night in. Did yuh hear him say there was a ration dump here? An' this here gang ain't replacements—they're signal corps an' the like o' that."

"I was with a crew once at a corps headquarters," spoke up a man, "an' it was soft. We ate from the general's kitchen."

The blue-cheeked, red-nosed ghost seemed to take heart likewise. He came out of his coat collar like a turtle from its shell.

"Was there any likker to be had where you was?" he asked the last speaker.

"Sure, all kinds of it. Whaddyuh think them generals drink, lemonade?"

"Well, we find ourselves a nice dry billet an' throw down," decided the

sergeant. "Then we'll go for chow. Then we'll make ourselfs a fire an' have a drink o' this an' that, whatever it is, an' then get a good night's sleep for once. I'll fix up a sort o' runnin' guard so that every guy will go on duty about an hour."

"All but the sergeant," croaked the Ghost.

"Yeh, all but the sergeant! What the hell is the use o' bein' sergeant if a guy don't get no privileges? I suppose you'd want me to take all the bawlings out an' then stand guard an' give injections along with the rest of yuh! Well, you're just outta luck, kid. Come on, driver, let's get this bus off the street an' prepare for a quiet night."

"They'll eat good here anyway," remarked Wally. "These guys that live near ration dumps always do. Maybe it won't be so bad. It's too far back to get any shell-fire, an' who knows but if we was at Recicourt we'd have somebody around botherin' us, too?"

Rooge gave a harsh laugh.

"Cheer 'em up, kid," he urged, "you got 'em into it."

"This guy is a comfort to me," said Wally, addressing the silent pill-rollers. "If we'd got pinched in Montfaucon, he'd 'a' said we should have come by Cheppy. If old Chew an' Spit there had his boys out layin' for ambulances, don't you suppose they'd lay for 'em on the Montfaucon road just as well?"

The men by the ambulance observed the soldiers passing up and down the muddy street, blowing upon their hands, beating their breasts and pulling in their necks to the utmost extent, so that their upturned collars might protect them as much as possible against the bitter wind.

The passersby were not combatant troops. They wore dungarees, many of them had on overseas caps instead of helmets and they were hung with pistols, unlike those men who, forced to carry them about to protect their lives, get rid of them the very first instant they are out of actual contact with the enemy. The soldiers in the town were probably pioneer infantry engaged in construction of roads across what had been No Man's Land for four years—members of the balloon company, signal corps and motorcycle dispatch-riders.

"Aaaaarrh!" rasped the Galloping Ghost. "I wonder would there be any drinkin' likker in this town?"

"Don't doubt it," said Wally cheerfully. "Where there's Yanks there's drinks, as my grandmother used to say. Well, boys, get on an' let's see can we find ourselves a hole. 'Find yourself a billet,' says the colonel. But he don't say where. Well, let's find one where nobody else can find *us*. Then if he says, 'Where was yuh?' why there we was. We ain't obliged to run out in the street an' holler where we are every minute. If he can't find us it's his hard luck. We was in the town an' that fixes us. But we couldn't be found an' so didn't get waked up."

"What are you drivin' at?" demanded the sergeant.

"He's tryin' to say," interrupted Rooge, "that we should go off an' camouflage ourselves, an' no one bein' able to find us, we don't get ourselves into no trouble durin' the night."

"Naw, naw," objected the sergeant, "never do, never do. We'll hang up a lantern and a sign an' spread the iodine around. Come on, let's get under cover before it gets dark."

The ambulance swung about and, as it drove slowly down the muddy street, Wally and Rooge on the seat and the passengers hanging on the tailboard or out of the little doors on the side, inspected each ruined house as they passed it. The state of the house itself mattered very little; it was the cellar under it that interested them, but each one at which they paused had either an unhospitable man sitting on the topmost step of the cellar stair or else light came up through chinks in the boarded window, or around the edge of the blanketed entrance, thus showing that the place was occupied and that pill-gunners would be decidedly unwelcome in their attempts to set up a dressing station there.

The ambulance went down as far as the

church, then along a side street that ended in the fields. They could see, from here, dim figures moving about in the gathering dark, the mysterious bulk of tarpaulin-covered heaps and the red glow from kitchens, the smoke from whose newly kindled fires went sweeping off down wind. The men in the ambulance shivered. The sight of the fire made them think of how cold they were, and the thought of the kitchens reminded them of their hunger.

"We ain't gettin' anywhere like this," muttered Wally. "I'm for parkin' this bus right here an' buscarin' around on foot awhile."

"I know somethin' better'n that," remarked Rooge. "This colonel that give us all these bold orders to stay here ought to find us some place to billet. This town is fuller'f soldiers than a Algerian o' coots. Let him find us a place or let us go on home where we'd 'a' been hours ago, if you went by Montfaucon like I said."

"You're a great help to a guy, Rooge," replied the driver. "What I'd do without you, I don't know."

He ran the ambulance off the road and into the field, where he proceeded to shut off the motor.

"Hey, Sergeant," he called, getting down stiffly from his seat, "lookit, we better leave the bus here an' do our stuff on foot. You can't do nothin' in a ambulance but carry guys anyway. It ain't no kind of a thing to hunt a billet with. Why don't yuh ask this colonel where he wants us to put the dressin' station? Tell him we can't find no hole to crawl into here."

"Good idea," said the Ghost, snuffling and coughing, "I'll go with you."

"An' look for coneyac," suggested one of the men.

"No, but we better get in off the wet ground before it gets too dark. If we don't find ourselves a hole now, we never will."

"Why can't we sleep in the ambulance?" asked another pill-roller.

"'Cause it's too damn cold!" replied every one in chorus. "Boy, there ain't nothin' colder in the world than one o' them stretchers to sleep on."

"An' as the ambulance only holds four," remarked Wally, "some o' you guys wouldn't get much sleep."

"Come on, Ghost," said the sergeant, "if you're goin' with me, stir yourself."

The two went off walking rapidly.

"You an' me," whispered Wally in Rooge's ear, "ain't interested in no dressin' station. We run this ambulance. No one won't steal it. If we can't get to sleep nowhere else, we can sleep in it. You know what these fires an' this smoke means? They mean supper. Let's get after it."

"Well, won't they attach us all to the same kitchen?" asked Rooge.

"Boy, you get dumber and dumber. Suppose they do. Didn't it never enter your thick skull that some cooks is better than others, that some outfits eat swell and others slim, dependin' who the mess sergeant crooks from? Well, you an' me, let's inspect kitchens an' pick the one that puts out the best chow."

"You're improvin', Wally," agreed Rooge with alacrity, "you're improvin'."

He and Wally began to move away in their turn, hobbling upon their cold-stiffened legs across the uneven ground. The place was torn and pitted by shell-holes four years old, overgrown with grass and invisible in the twilight, so that a man could fall into one with ease and come cursing out again, bruised with the tin cans or other rubbish that all shell-holes collect.

"Hey!" called one of the pill-rollers after them. "Where yuh goin'?"

"Oh, just lookin' around," answered Wally. "We'll be back by the time the sergeant gets there."

"We don't want to be takin' them along," he continued to Rooge. "Two guys can get a handout anywheres, but eight is another matter. I wouldn't blame any mess sergeant for lookin' sad when eight guys come moochin' around, especially as chow is so hard to get up here now, what with there bein' no roads, an'

what few there is full o' broke up trucks an' John divisions that got lost."

"I don't think we'll get rich food off these kitchens out here in the fields," observed Rooge. "I'd think the ones that was cookin' for the big boys in the P. C. would have some nice place in the town."

"Yeh, but never pass up a bet," answered Wally. "Look 'em all over. It ain't the guys that's bein' cooked for that makes a good kitchen; it's the mess sergeant an' the cook."

They approached, then, the first kitchen. The common, every-day variety of rolling-kitchen was a sort of four-wheeled iron box, in the bottom of which was built a fire; then deep, round receptacles a yard or so in depth and perhaps two feet in diameter were lowered into this box and filled with coffee. Solid food could be cooked in pans on the top, as on any stove.

The kitchen was drawn by a limber that had drawers and mysterious receptacles for the storage of sugar, coffee, salt, and so on, and that served as a pantry. The limber also served as storage space for officers' and K. P.'s' messkits, and for that very precious article, issued in great quantities, lemon extract. How lemon extract could be used in the turning of goldfish, canned willie, corned-beef hash and beans into delectable dishes, might be puzzling to the average civilian, but not to the soldier. Lemon extract was not for the soldiers, but for the cooks, to whom it served as inspiration.

The first kitchen stood boldly in the open field. A tarpaulin held aloft on four poles covered the stove, and formed a kind of shelter for the cooks in case of rain. It gave no protection whatever against the wind. Two men, probably K. P.'s, stood with their backs against the kitchen, clutching themselves tightly, as if to hold their bodies together against the violent shivering that shook them. A man who must be the cook tasted something with a long spoon, and a fourth man, wearing sergeants' stripes, rolled himself a cigaret. To this last Rooge addressed himself.

"We got a ambulance over there," began Rooge, "and we was wonderin' what was the chances on a little chow when it comes suppertime."

"Hmm," said the sergeant, "I guess we could feed yuh."

"What's for chow?" asked Wally, sniffing. He drew near the stove, and tried to make out what was in the pans that simmered there.

"Canned willie and termatters, kinda baked up with a little Karo in 'em," answered the cook.

"We got a cook here can cammelflage that canned bill an' stuff so's a guy would think it was chicken, can't you, Joe?" asked the mess sergeant.

"Oh, I c'n fix it up as toothsome as the next guy," answered the cook modestly. "What outfit you fellers with?"

"We ain't with no outfit," replied Wally, sniffing around the stove. "We're kind of wanderin' Jews."

"There's talk the war'll be over pretty quick," contributed one of the K. P.'s.

"Huh," observed the mess sergeant, "you'll be sayin' that in your sleep if you ain't careful. He asks every guy he sees is it so. How the hell do they know? For me, it'll run another winter. I don't care, so long as they don't put us no nearer the front than we are now."

"It won't be over for a while yet," said Rooge. "This American Army is gettin' dizzier an' dizzier every day. They run around in circles an' get all foul of each other. There's too many of 'em. Lookit how hard it is for a guy to get a night's sleep or a meal o' vittles."

"Well, Sergeant, what time'll you eat?" asked Wally, coming back.

"Oh, 'bout three quarters of an hour. No, half an hour. Days are gettin' shorter an' the gang quits work earlier. Come back in about twenty minutes an' we'll feed yuh ahead o' the line. Ambulance drivers rates a little gravy. Never know when a guy's gonna need one."

"Rooge," began Wally acidly as the two moved away, "for a guy that claims he was a mess sergeant, you ain't got a hell of a lot of savvy. Boy, they was just

outta brains the day you drew yours. Whaddyuh want to go line up to the first kitchen you seen for? Yuh think I come 'way back here for a night o' rest an' to eat canned bill like I was at the front? Canned bill, that's what was in them pans with hardtack an' tomatoes an' stuff, all stirred up."

"Well, that's good stuff," said Rooge. "Whaddyuh expect—roast turkey an' sweet potatoes? A bottle or two o' champagne, too, huh?"

"No, but a guy can take a little look around, can't he? There's more kitchens here, ain't there? There's quarters o' beef, too. I seen 'em goin' by on trucks. Well, some place they must have steaks. Anyway, nice slum made outta real meat, with onions an' potatoes. I seen a cook once when we was at Orleans that could make slum with dumplings. Two dumplings to a messkit. If there was one cook like that, maybe there's two."

"Maybe there ain't, too. You're a damn fool, Wally, an' so I make bold to say. There's a war on, an' when a man finds a cook that can cammelflage canned bill, he wants to stick right to that cook an' not go huntin' for steaks. A cook in Orleans, says you. Well, he'd probably be right up here in this damn Christ-forsaken field makin' dumplin's, wouldn't he? Outta what would he make 'em?"

"We'll find us a kitchen where they got somethin' but hardtack an' willie an' you can stuff your mouth full an' that'll make you shut up!" replied Wally.

They directed their way toward the town, heading for the vicinity of the post of command. If there was a kitchen attached to that post, it would be in the vicinity. They conjectured correctly, for no sooner had they reached the houses than a smell of burning grease and wood betrayed the object they sought. The kitchen was in a shed, an outhouse that had once been used for the storage of wagons or farming machinery. The darkness was lighted by two lanterns suspended from overhead, and a most delicate odor of grilling meat came forth.

"Yuh see," whispered Wally. "what it means to look around a little!"

He and Rooge stepped into the circle of light from the lantern that hung directly over the stove. A man in a heavy, old-issue overcoat with huge cuffs, turned at the sound of their hobnails on the stones of the yard.

"What the hell yuh want?" greeted this man.

"We're a couple o' ambulance drivers," replied Wally a little stiffly. "We get stopped in this town to look after you fellars, an' we was wonderin' if maybe we could get a little supper here."

There was a short pause, then some one laughed sneeringly.

"What the hell do you think we are—the Red Cross or somethin'? I look like a Sally, do I?" inquired the man in the overcoat.

"We better put up a sign, Sergunt," remarked some one in the shadows. "Bums, on your way! We're gettin' too many in here."

"This is an officers' kitchen," went on the overcoated man. "We ain't puttin' out to privates, nor sergeants, nor master-signal-electricians-first-class, neither."

"We ain't no bums," interjected Rooge wrathfully. "We're a couple o' drivers. That is, he's driver an' I'm orderly. We been on the lines all summer an' all fall, too, luggin' wounded. An' when we get stopped in a town, we gotta right to go to any kitchen we want to an' ask for chow."

"Got a order that says so?" asked the man by the lantern.

"No, but—"

"No buts!" barked the man with the overcoat. "We ain't puttin' out! That plain—or you one o' these here Christian soldiers that don't speak English?"

There was hearty laughter from within the shed, probably from the K. P.'s. The man in the overcoat was probably mess sergeant, or some kind of a non-com that threw weight, and the rest laughed to curry favor with him.

"What draft were you caught in?" demanded Wally. This being an insult

blacker than to call a man by the Name, all held their breaths.

"I'll fight any one of yuh for a bag o' Bull right here in the yard," invited Rooge.

"Just step out an' see if Jack Mooney ain't there somewhere," cried the overcoated man excitedly. "We'll see if every Wanderin' Willie an' Dusty Rhodes in the A. E. F. is gonna come into a headquarters mess an' give the cooks an argument!"

The mysterious Jack Mooney must have been right at hand, for at the sound of his name he stepped up, and with him a companion. They bulked large in the lantern light, and from the clubs and whistles with which they were hung, it was plain they were members of the police.

"These here—" began the man in the overcoat.

"I heard 'em," answered Jack Mooney. "Whaddyuh want to do with 'em—make 'em peel a few spuds or chop wood?"

"Naw, we got enough spuds peeled. Run 'em to hell outta here!"

There were no further preliminaries. One of the police seized Rooge and the other Wally. The departure from the yard was swift, and though the red-headed man and the ambulance driver struggled madly, they were but babes in the expert hands of the two huge M. P.'s. There was a thud, and Rooge landed in the road. He struggled to one knee, but there was another thud as Wally's flying body struck him, and Rooge rolled in the mud once more, while Wally slid halfway across the road on his stomach. Rooge was up again, though, and had already made one leap in the direction of the two M. P.'s, but Wally, getting up in his turn, seized the other's arm.

"Nix, Rooge!" he cried. "They'll bat yuh over the head with them clubs an' spill out what little sense yuh got. Lay off 'em! Yuh can't buck them M. P.'s!"

Rooge pulled a second or two, then realizing the truth of what Wally said, allowed himself to be led down the street. Mocking laughter floated after them. The two went on blindly for some minutes, Rooge snorting wrath and Wally trying to remove some of the mud from his leather jerkin.

"Yuh see," said Rooge finally, mimicking Wally's remark of a few minutes before, "what it means to look round a little!"

Wally made no reply.

NIGHT fell and the wind became sharper and stronger. Rooge blew upon his hands, and pulled up his shirt collar around his neck. They found another kitchen, drawn up in a roofless house, but which had a tarpaulin stretched from wall to wall to keep out the rain and prevent the glow of the fire from being seen by prowling airmen.

"You ask 'em," suggested Rooge. "You was the guy that wanted to make the rounds. I'm willin' you should amuse yourself, only remember I ain't bit since noon, and then not much, and I don't care if I do get somethin' to eat right quick."

"You ain't starved to death yet," replied Wally.

He advanced boldly to the kitchen and, leaning familiarly on the table that was stretched across the front of the former room, he peered into the candle-lit darkness.

"How's chances on a handout?" he demanded without any introduction.

"Sure!" said a voice heartily. "Smoke, give this fellar a feed."

"There's two of us," interrupted Rooge hurriedly.

"Well, give 'em two feeds."

"There!" said Wally heartily. "There spoke a white man."

The group of shadows in the candle light seemed to shift and dissolved into a number of men who had been sitting in the favorite position for cold weather; that is to say, with their backs against the stove. One rose and, passing into the obscurity at the far end of the room, reappeared shortly with something in his hands. This he placed upon the table with a thud. The two ambulance drivers looked. There were two wedge-shaped

cans there, like pyramidal tents with the tops cut off. No soldier would need a second look to know what those cans contained. They were cans of what was known as "willie," and at one time were widely used to pave trenches with.

"Ahem!" coughed Wally. "Anything else?"

"Nope. We run outta hardtack at dinner," said a voice beyond the stove. "This is kind of far up on the front and food is scarce."

"What's bubblin' in the marmite can?" demanded Rooge.

"Dish water. We ain't washed yistiddy's pans yet."

The two men before the table departed. They took with them the two cans, however, for this light refreshment had been offered in good faith, and nothing would be gained by spurning it. Once in the street again, they seemed seized with irresolution, for they stood there, blowing upon their hands and stamping their feet in the mud.

"Well, say it!" demanded Wally finally.

He could see that the red-headed man kept casting reproachful looks at him and the suspense of waiting for the other to speak was becoming unbearable.

"I ain't got anything to say," answered Rooge, in a martyr-like tone.

"Well, don't keep lookin' at me then!"

"I ain't lookin'. I'm thinkin'. I'm thinkin' that after all I ain't but half-witted. If I had any brains I'd 'a' got shut o' you long ago. An' I'd be back at that first kitchen eatin' myself bulgeful o' slum right now."

"There anything to stop yuh from goin' back now?"

"No, but I don't quite feel right at leavin' a man that's outta his head to wander loose in these fields an' maybe freeze to death or get run over by a truck."

"That's just the reason I've stuck around with you all these years," replied Wally. "If I was to turn you off an' some one should bang your head up against a wall or a tractor or somethin' was to iron you out, my conscience would keep me awake all the rest o' my life."

"Yeh? Well, I'm goin' back to that first kitchen where they had the termatter an' Karo goulash, an' I'm gonna eat me a supper. I had enough o' your guidin' hand for one night."

"No," said Wally, "I'll go back with you. You remind me of a couple o' Johnmules I had to my ambulance when we was on the Border. You could take 'em right up to a nice feed o' hay an' shove their nose in it, it was no use, they wouldn't eat it; they had to go boundin' off to some cactus bush an' get their old chops all full o' thorns tryin' to gulp down some of it."

"Huh!" grunted Rooge. "You'd probably been runnin' 'em all up an' down the State o' Texas tryin' to find 'em a better pile o' hay than what was issued out to 'em."

"Yeh," cried Wally, "but ain't it funny how you do remind me o' them jugheads!"

They went splashing off down the muddy street, ducking their heads as they crossed open spaces, where the houses had been leveled to the ground and the piercing wind could sweep across the street with no hindrance. They passed the post of command, and the gate from which they had been ejected. There was merry conversation audible, and as they both paused instinctively, they could see the light from the lanterns about the kitchen, and shadows passing back and forth, and it seemed to them that there were faint smacking sounds, as if some one there relished a steak and plunged bread into a gravy-filled messkit.

Rooge, watching and listening, suddenly realized that his hand was cold. He was still carrying the can of corned bill which, absorbing the chill of the night, was rapidly taking on the character of a cake of ice. He shifted the can from one hand to the other and regarded the light. Wally, beside him, felt him make a sudden movement.

"Hey," gasped Wally, "what's bitin' yuh?"

There was a crash from the kitchen, a clatter of glass and falling tinware.

"Hey! Hey!" yelled the men in the kitchen in surprize and rage.

"Direct hit on the light with that can o' bill!" remarked Rooge. "Come on, it's time we left here."

"Gotchuh, kid!" cried Wally.

He hurled his can of beef also, but was unable to tell whether the results had been as good as the first shot. There was a redoubling of the shouts of anger, and feet could be heard running about the courtyard.

"On your way," Wally panted, and the two departed down the street at their best speed.

A cavalcade of mysterious horsemen went trotting by, scattering mud in showers. A limousine, running without lights, tore past, roaring down the street with utter disregard for any one that might be in its path. Otherwise they met no one. The temporary inhabitants of the town—telephone linesmen, road builders or balloon jumpers—were all out of sight in cellar, shed or tarpaulin-roofed room, eating their supper, discussing the conduct of the war or engaging in heated debate as to whose turn it was to hunt firewood.

Wally and Rooge, peering between the houses for the red twinkle of fire that would show them the kitchen they sought, felt lonely and sad. They were hungry, and the wind, instead of going down with the sun, was increasing to tempest-like force, sighing and moaning through the shattered roofs of the houses, and making the burlap curtains in doorway and window flap.

They came then to a gap in the houses that they recognized as the one through which they had entered the town from the fields. They could smell wood-smoke, too, from the kitchen, and hear a murmur of voices and the clatter of knife and fork on aluminum as men waiting to be fed rattled their messkits.

"This is it," exclaimed Wally joyfully. "Let's hurry or we'll be late. We'll go right up. He said he'd feed us ahead o' line."

Rooge broke into a run and, heedless of the danger of going headlong into an old shell-hole, the two dashed up to the kitchen.

"Here we are," panted Wally, "remember us, Sergeant? We got kinda lost in the town an' didn't get back as quick as we thought we would."

"Who are you guys?" asked some one.

It was quite dark now, and the other men about the kitchen were but black shapes against the blacker background of field and distant woods.

"We're the two ambulance drivers you was gonna feed," said Rooge. He essayed to laugh, although there was nothing in the situation that seemed humorous.

"Oh, yes, I remember," said another voice that they recognized as the sergeant's. "Well, fellers, I'm sorry, but you wasn't here when we put out, so we though maybe you'd got invited to eat somewheres else at a better kitchen. We never save nothin' here—we put it all out in seconds."

"You mean it's all gone," gasped Wally, "in just these few minutes?"

"Well, it don't take long to put out," remarked the cook. "We run things through here pretty fast."

There was a short silence, broken only by the clatter of aluminum that the two drivers had noticed before.

"What's all the racket?" demanded Rooge. "Them messkits sound empty."

"Probably washin' em," suggested the mess sergeant.

"An' there ain't a thing left?" asked Rooge.

"Nothin'."

"Couldn't yuh give us maybe a can o' beans or some corned willie?"

"We ain't got any," answered the cook. "We put out everything. These fellars are big feeders. We'll draw some more rations in the mornin', I hope, but if we don't, we'll eat light. Comes daybreak, we'll go over to the dump an' see what we can get."

"There's a dump here in the town, ain't there?" asked Wally. "If you

wanted to go over there now me an' my orderly here would be glad to go an' help you bring back anything."

"No, thanks, we got a cart does all that," answered the mess sergeant. "I'm sorry we can't give you fellars anything. Why don't you try some o' the other kitchens? They all don't eat as early as we do. Maybe some o' the others would give yuh a handout."

"I had enough o' that for one night," remarked Rooge. "This here *hombre* I got with me is too damn particular about what he eats. He'd want to visit every chowgun in the A. E. F. to see if maybe one of 'em wasn't puttin' out turkey an' fixin's, as if they'd give him any if they was."

"Well, we'll be movin' along," began Wally. "If we're still here an' not dead from starvation we'll see yuh in the morning. An' if I ever have to give you a ride in my wagon, I'll be extra careful."

They went forth in heavy silence, stumbling and tripping across the fields, going by natural consent back to the ambulance.

"Yuh see what yuh get by lookin' around," remarked Rooge.

No reply.

"A can o' willie in the hand is worth a ton o' steaks in somebody else's kitchen," he resumed after a minute or two.

Wally still refused to answer. They reached the ambulance, a dark bulk. A scratching sound came from the interior, and as the two hurried that way to see what this might be, a man descended, dragging a pack after him.

"Who's that?" demanded Wally.

"I come back for my pack. We been billeted," said a raucous voice that could belong to no one but the Galloping Ghost.

"Where?"

"Oh, they found us a house with a roof to it an' some nice bunks an' everything. They said it was a old German guardhouse."

"Did they say anything about chow?" asked Wally.

"Yeh. We et a'ready. With all them dispatch-riders an' chauffeurs. Well, I'm goin'. I want to get to bed. I'll show yuh the place if you want to go with me."

"We'll go," agreed Wally. "Maybe one of the crowd got a can o' hash or a piece o' bread left. S'pose they'd have anything at that kitchen? We could go an' tell 'em we was workin' on the car."

"Nah, they won't!" Thus Rooge. "You was the guy that wanted to tear off an' get all filled up with food, an' we ain't had a bite. An' what's the use o' goin' over to no house if we ain't got no blankets to sleep under?"

"Don't you fellars carry no packs?" asked the Ghost.

"No," answered Wally. "When we're out we're workin' an' can't sleep an' when we do our sleepin' we're always back at billets."

"Only sometimes we get mule-headed an' won't take the right road," observed Rooge, "so that when it comes time for shut-eye an' bunk police, we're way out in the sticks somewhere with no chow an' no blankets."

"Don't pay him no attention," said Wally hurriedly. "Come on an' show us this house."

Back across the field they went and once more down the muddy street. There were fewer voices now. The town was already silent and dark. The men in it had been at work since daybreak stringing wire across the freezing fields, shivering about the machine-guns under an observation balloon or rolling wheelbarrows and swinging pick and shovel up and down the roads.

Somewhere a battle raged, but where, or with what success the war was waged they did not care. They had had a good meal, and a night's sleep was before them. To reflect that they might get no breakfast, or that this sleep might be their last, would be useless folly, and would only serve to ruin the fleeting pleasure of a full stomach and a dry, if not soft, bed.

At the far end of the town, beyond the P. C., beyond the last house, a road swung off. Closer inspection showed it to be a driveway, not a road; moreover

it was in good condition, well graveled, and had apparently been rolled. At the end of the drive was a two-story house.

"How come that house got left like that?" demanded Rooge, gazing up at its dark bulk.

"The Boche was in it," rasped the Ghost. "It's all tar-paper an' stuff, but one side got caved in by a shell. One o' our'n, I guess. Them artillery never think when they're breakin' up a house that some one might want to live in it some day."

The three drew nearer, and then it became apparent, as was so often the case, that the house, appearing intact at a distance, was but a skeleton. One side of it had been crumbled into dust by artillery fire or bomb.

"Nice place, ain't it?" said Rooge again.

"Oh, it ain't bad," replied the Ghost. "There's a room upstairs that's jake. All tar-paper so's you can have light an' the Boche not see yuh."

"No, thanks!" exclaimed Wally and Rooge together, "we'll stay underground, if you don't mind."

"The cellar's all caved in," advised the Ghost. "There's a kind of a hole there, but it ain't got but one bunk in it, so we said we'd sleep in the room. They won't shell yuh here. Yuh might just as well sleep in the room as in the cellar."

"Well, never mind that," said Rooge. "Where did you guys eat?"

"Oh, up in the town," said the Ghost vaguely. "Well, I'm goin' up."

He reached out his hand in the darkness and the other two could see that there was a ladder there that led up to a window from which came sounds of lively discussion. A head appeared suddenly from his window.

"That you, Ghost?" inquired the sergeant's voice. "The colonel wants to see you."

"Gah!" cried the Ghost with disbelief. "Whaffor?"

"You're a massager, ain't yuh, in civil life? There's a Boche spy in town. He threw a grenade at the colonel that didn't go off, but it gave him a jolt in the ribs. He wants some one to rub his back. Go on over—maybe he'll give yuh a drink."

"Spy?" cried the three on the ground together. "Where d'yuh get that stuff?"

"Yeh, spy," said the sergeant again. He had evidently come to the window, which, like all French windows, was practically a door, going from floor to ceiling, and was standing there looking down. "Who's that—the ambulance driver? Where was yuh at suppertime? Yeh, a spy. The colonel was out to the kitchen to get him a cup o' cawfee or somethin' an' this here spy throws a grenade an' would 'a' killed him only it didn't go off."

"Did it hurt the cook any?" asked Rooge eagerly. "Or the mess sergeant?"

"No, only the colonel. They got a doctor there, but he said there was no rib broke, only a bang, an' did we have a guy could give the colonel a little rub down. Go on over, Ghost."

"I wish it had killed the cook," began Rooge. "Ow! Who the hell are you kickin'?"

"What's that?" demanded the sergeant.

"Nothin'," answered Wally. "Listen, where can we eat? We were fixin' the ambulance. Did you tell him to save anything for us?"

"Gwan an' show 'em where it is, Ghost. you're goin' that way."

"The hell I am!" replied the Ghost.

"Yes, you are, too," cried the sergeant. "By God, we're gonna have discipline here if nothin' else! I told the colonel you was comin' over an' if you don't go, he'll put you in the mill an' so will I. Gwan. He'll give yuh a shot o' likker—he told me he would."

"No, did he?" asked the Ghost doubtfully.

"Sure, he did. Gwan, he's waitin' for yuh."

"An' show us where we eat," pleaded Rooge.

The Ghost turned and started to retrace his steps to the town, Wally and Rooge following a short way behind.

"Yuh damned idiot!" said Wally huskily. "What did you want to go make that crack about hopin' the grenade killed the cook for?"

"Well, why not?" protested Rooge. "I hope it did. "An' some day when you go kickin' me, you'll find you won't have no need for handkerchiefs the rest o' your life, 'cause I'll pound the nose offa yuh!"

"You an' how many more?" sneered Wally. "But listen. Ain't you got brains enough to figure out that no Boche spy threw no grenade that didn't go off at no colonel? That wasn't no grenade; that was the can o' hash we buzzed at that kitchen."

"No!" gasped Rooge incredulously.

"Sure! Boche spies don't go round throwin' grenades. An' you was about to let on you had a feud on with that headquarters cook, an' two an' two makin' six in this man's Army, the next thing you know we're in the mill for assaultin' colonels."

"Nah," said Rooge calmly. "Well, I still maintain I wish it had hit the cook. If we hadn't thrown it the Ghost wouldn't a had to go massage the colonel an' we wouldn't never been able to find where we eat, it bein' dark now an' all."

The Ghost, having walked rapidly, was now some distance in front.

"Come on up here," he yelled. "There's the place, in back o' that wall."

The Ghost disappeared in the darkness as the two hurried up, but a gentle sound of singing served to guide them through a gap between two piles of rubbish that had once been houses. There was a sound of scraping on metal, the gentle splash of water, and song.

"This is the story of Johnny,
I'll say the story is true,
Don't fill your friend full o' hardware,
Yuh'll get hanged by the neck if yuh do,
Even if he's your man, an' he done you wrong."

The two rounded a corner, and there in a rude shelter of boards was a field kitchen—that is, a few sheets of tin laid over a hole in the ground, with a long and wiggly stove pipe at the end to help out the draft. There was a dim lantern, and in its light one man scrubbed a pan, and sang.

"How's chances on a little feed?" asked Wally.

"We put it all out," said the scrubbing man, "an' there wasn't enough leavin's to attract a fly."

"I could 'a' told yuh how it would be before we come in," remarked Rooge.

"No, but listen," cried Wally desperately, "we're the ambulance drivers that brought in them fellars you just fed. We ain't had any food since last night. A guy could starve here without tryin'. Ain't there a thing left—a little end of a loaf o' bread or anything?"

"Yeh, I know what's left—a can o' goldfish or corned willie," said Rooge.

"Nope," answered the third man, "but I can give yuh a can o' beans."

"Apiece?"

"Yup. They won't eat beans here. We always have lots o' beans. Meat an' goldfish goes big, though."

"What the hell kind of a crowd do you feed?" demanded Rooge.

"Prisoners o' war. They always halt here goin' back an' peek awhile. They eat bread like it was cake an' goldfish like it was turkey with fixin's. They don't hold to beans, though."

He arose and, wiping his hands on his dungarees, rattled in a dark corner and appeared with two cans of beans. They were not the large quart size, but small ones, such as were issued to troops late in the war, after some one had realized that a quart can of beans is a heavy weight for a man to carry; and since it is more than he can eat at one meal, once opened, three quarters of the can have to be thrown away.

"Ain't got no bread?" asked Rooge.

"God, ain't you guys never satisfied?" cried the third man. "Want butter, too? Wouldn't like a fried egg to go on that bread, would yuh? Well, yuh won't get it. What the hell! All you bums are the same. Give yuh a can o' beans an' yuh want a chicken dinner!"

"Listen," cried Rooge, "take these here damn beans, will yuh, an' shove' em

up your left nostril right to the elbow! If they ain't good enough for the Boche, by God, they ain't good enough for me!"

"Shut up, Rooge, you damn hammerhead," interrupted Wally. "You ain't got the sense God give a goose. Give us them beans, cook or Sergeant or whatever you are, an' much obliged. Don't mind this lad—he's a little off his conk, with fightin' an fatigue, an' only bein' half-witted anyway."

"He ain't no cook nor no sergeant, neither!" scoffed Rooge from the shadows whither he had retired. "He ain't nothin' but a K. P. What's he scrubbin' them pans for?"

Wally hurriedly seized the two cans of beans, but the third man seemed not to have heard, and had returned to his labors and his song.

"This is the story of Johnny,
And now my story is done.
More trouble's started than finished
When a girl goes an' buys her a gun,
An' gets killin' the man what done her wrong."

"What the hell do you have to go an' antagonize every one for?" demanded Wally wrathfully. "You're gonna get that tile-roof o' yours caved in some day!"

"Nah, but the idea o' givin' two hungry men a can o' beans out of a prisoner o' war kitchen grinds me," replied Rooge. "It grinds me worse'n to think o' all the wasted years I been ridin' around with you when I might 'a' been home makin' fifty dollars a day in a shipyard. Hey! Where yuh goin' now? That ain't the way home!"

"I know it ain't," answered Wally, "but when we come down here I caught a glimpse of a lot o' lanterns an' one thing or another that looked like this ration dump we heard about. Let's go over an' see if maybe a can o' jam wouldn't kinda stick to our hands as we was passin' through."

"More likely some big supply sergeant's foot would kinda stick to our rear," said Rooge sadly. "I had enough o' that for one night. I'm goin' home an' eat my beans an' to bed, an' the next time I tell you to take a road, I hope you'll take it."

THEY went back to the house. Wally, with the aid of a flashlight, explored what seemed to be a dugout in the cellar, but it had been partially destroyed and nothing was left but the wreckage of wire bunks and a few shreds of blankets. The room on the ground floor was almost intact, with tar paper shutters closing the windows, and a door backed with a blanket. Rooge sat there on the floor, sadly attacking the can of beans with the opener on his pocket knife.

"Jake," said Wally, sweeping his light around. "All nice and tight here. What's this I see? A fireplace! Boy, I'm glad I came. We'll build us a fire! I'll borrow a messkit off the pill-rollers an' heat up the beans. Hot supper! Dry bed! What more could a guy want? What the hell is this?"

His flashlight fell upon a tin bucket lettered with the words, "A Co." It stood near Rooge, and was full of water.

"It was in the kitchen," answered Rooge, "an' I took it along. We'll need it to wash in. You never think o' these things, but I do. Water's scarce up here. I ain't seen a water-cart since we come in the town. I like to shave in the morning."

He continued to eat the beans, shaking the can so that portions of its contents fell into his mouth, since he had no fork and his pocket knife was too thin to serve as an eating utensil.

Wally wandered about the room looking for wood, but this portion of the house was intact and there was nothing to build a fire with. He went outdoors again and Rooge could hear him scratching about in the shattered portion of the house.

Upstairs all was quiet, except that now and then a dull sound, or a muttered word, showed that the pill-rollers were there and probably already asleep—asleep, with a full belly, and no further care for the morrow. Nothing to do but sleep and arise when day came, to find their transportation waiting for them to

take them on their way like millionaires, whereas the men that did the work, he and Wally, were below, awake, cold and fed upon what the prisoners of war had refused to eat. Thus ran Rooge's thoughts. On the other side of the wall wood cracked, as Wally tore and pulled in search of fuel.

"Oh the name of the place wuz January Farm
It was there that the big fat general come to harm.
So we like coneyac an' we like wine,
An' when we can't get neither we can drink iodine."

Song from without. Rooge pricked up his ears, and Wally ceased tearing away the wall. Feet stirred overhead. Voices, dim and indistinct, questioned.

"Hey," called a voice, "where's the ladder?"

Rooge went to the door. There was no mistaking that rasping voice.

"What's the matter?" called some one from above.

A beam of light shot down as Rooge opened the door.

"It's the Gallopin' Ghost," called some one. "What's the matter, Ghost?"

"Machine-guns they rattle, the cannon they roar,
I don't wanta go to the front lines no more.
Take me over the ocean, I never wanted to roam.
Oh my! I'm too young to die!
I wanna go home!"

The Ghost sang, then relapsed into sobs at the foot of the ladder.

"'Jever see such a saturated solution of soldier?" demanded the sergeant in a tone of admiration. The beam of the flashlight from above wandered from one of the Ghost's hands to the other, possibly to see whether any of the solution was still left.

"You know me, don't yuh, Ghost?" asked Rooge in a conciliating tone, drawing near. "Where'd yuh get it?"

"Now, listen!" called several voices at once from the window above. "We'll look after him. He's in our outfit. Come on, Ghost, we'll come right down."

Several men hurriedly descended the ladder. Wally appeared in the glow of the light from above, his arms full of wood.

"What the hell!" he demanded.

"'S all right," said the pill-rollers hurriedly, "we'll look after him."

"An' if he's got any left, you'll look after that, too," remarked Wally.

The sergeant, holding the flashlight, descended in his turn.

"Never mind, Ghost," he said soothingly, "you're among friends now. Been drinkin' a little, have yuh? Well, we'll look after yuh. You know *me*, don't yuh?"

The Ghost ceased his weeping and in a firm voice agreed that he did know the sergeant, and that too well. He expressed the belief that the sergeant's birth was not legitimate, and that some of his actions since were even less so. There was smothered laughter from the window.

"Well, let's get him to bed," said the sergeant hurriedly. He moved forward and all clustered about the Ghost.

"C'm on, old feller," they said, "we'll help yuh up the ladder."

The Ghost offered no resistance, but, pulled by a man on each arm and shoved by one on each leg, suffered himself to be shoved up a few rounds of the ladder.

"Hey!" he cried suddenly, "there's hands in my pockets! Police! Hey, gang up, they're pickpocketing me!"

Shouts such as this at night in the zone of the armies are liable to attract too much attention, and several hands were immediately clapped over the Ghost's mouth.

"Shsh now!" pleaded the sergeant. "Don't get noisy, Ghost—you'll get us all in the mill. Nobody's got their hand in your pocket."

"They have, too," protested the Ghost. "I felt 'em."

"It must have been them ambulance drivers," said the sergeant soothingly, "they're all crooks, *you* know that. Go on, pull him up, you two guys—what the hell are you waitin' for? He weighs a ton. Sure, it was them drivers, Ghost. They're always robbin' the wounded."

"They're welcome to anything they get off the wounded that go through my hands," observed the Ghost.

The pill-rollers continued the ascent of the ladder.

"Out of the jaws of death, out of the mouth of hell,
Bring me a bottle of likker, fetch me a slim mamselle."

They reached the window, there was a brief struggle, then the Ghost was precipitated within the house and all was silent.

"'Juh hear them cracks about ambulance drivers?" demanded Rooge wrathfully. "I've a good mind to drive off an' leave 'em to walk. An' they rush him right up the ladder an' never say aye, yes or no. Where d'yuh suppose he got it?"

"Never mind 'em—they're simple. If they had brains they wouldn't be in a pill battery." Wally bent over and fumbled about for the wood he had dropped in the excitement. "Come on in, I'll build us a fire," he invited.

"I'd rather build me one on my inside," said Rooge, "with some o' that stuff the Ghost has got in his. I wonder did that colonel give it to him. It ain't likely. I never heard of a officer givin' likker to a enlisted man yet."

Wally went in, and Rooge followed. The flashlight showed that the fireplace had been used at some recent time, although the ashes there had been changed to a kind of lye by the rain of the past two or three days falling down the chimney.

"Tear us off a few hunks o' that tar paper, will yuh?" asked Wally, putting down his wood.

"They was in such a hurry to get him away because they was afraid he'd tell us where he got it," soliloquized Rooge. "They'll give him the third degree up there an' find out. Dirty dogs! By God, if I was Jack Pershin', I'd purge this man's Army o' pill-rollers, so I would."

"T' hell with that!" cried Wally. "Get me some paper to start this fire with, will yuh?"

"I don't want no fire," replied Rooge. "I'm hot enough now. Nothin' makes me madder'n to see a guy that's drunker'n I am. I should 'a' gone with him to show him the way, or be company to him, or somethin'."

Wally abruptly left the room, banging the door behind him. There were ripping sounds from without the house as he tore off tar-paper. It was wet, he found when he returned, and too thick to burn. Rooge muttered to himself and from time to time shook a mouthful of beans out of the can. He gave sharp exclamations at intervals, for the room was dark and his aim was poor, and often icy lumps of beans went down his neck.

Wally went forth into the night again and tore up handfuls of the rank dead grass. He went back with this and, aided by the paper from his can of beans, with some shreds of wall paper he had found, he succeeded in nursing some tar-paper into a blaze.

"You realize, you poor goop, that it's gonna be a hell of a cold night an' we ain't got no blankets?" demanded Wally. "Bein' as I built this fire, I suppose you'd be willin' to warm yourself at it."

"Don't want to," replied the other. "You had no business comin' this road anyway. If we'd gone through Montfaucon like I said, we'd been home in our own outfit now, goin' to bed in our blankets."

"Yeh, or we might be on our way up through the woods on the hurricane deck o' that ship o' ours, goin' out on a hurry call an' no prospect for sleep either. Here we are in a nice dry house, warm, with a fire goin'."

"It ain't warm, an' the fire ain't goin' yet," objected Rooge. "I bet them guys upstairs are gettin' themselves drunk right now."

Wally made no reply, but continued his labors at the fire. He blew until he was black in the face, he waved his tin hat, he cautiously fed the flame with splinters from the pieces of boards he had brought in. It caught finally and the flames began to give out some light and a little heat. Wally piled on more wood. The wood was damp, soggy with the years and years of a climate where no day passes without its hour or more of rain, and it did not burn readily. Smoke rolled up the

chimney in clouds and escaped into the room, making the two men cough.

"Put on lots o' wood," urged Rooge, "an' fill the place full o' smoke. It'll fumigate the cooties outta here."

"Never mind the coots," replied Wally. "Give us that can opener."

He opened his can of beans and, pausing to put some more wood on the fire, to the great increase of the smoke it was giving off, he went out, and Rooge thought he could hear him ascending the ladder. Sure enough, words came down from the room above. Wally had evidently gone there to borrow a messkit. The conversation was long and animated; then finally Wally descended the ladder and came into the room again, slamming the door behind him.

"They're still conversin' with the Ghost," said he. "Yuh couldn't get no sense out of 'em. So rather than have an argument, I just took hold of the first messkit I see an' come away. They got candles goin' up there to show how dark it is. It's warmer though than it is here."

"Huh," remarked Rooge sagely, "all this heat you're makin' here goes right upstairs. If you'd went to school after the fifth grade, you would 'a' known that hot air rises."

"It's a wonder you ain't gone away like a balloon long ago then," replied Wally.

He finished opening his can of beans, emptied them into the messkit and then, finding a tiny tongue of flame, began to warm them above it. Rooge still sat on the floor in the darkness, sniffing from time to time with a martyr-like air, and making such remarks as, "I wonder what the boys in the Adrian barrack are doin' now." Or, "Who do you suppose is sleepin' under my six blankets tonight?" Or, "I heard talk that the mess sergeant got hold of a case o' eggs somewhere an' that we was to have had ham an' eggs tonight."

Wally made no reply. There was a long silence, broken only by the sputtering of the beans in the messkit as they began to heat up.

"Hey!" said Rooge suddenly, in such a different tone that Wally jumped nervously and looked around. The red-headed man came forward so that the feeble light of the fire fell upon his wide, startled eyes. "You hear what I do?" he demanded.

Wally listened. He could hear the beans sputtering, the rushing of the draft up the chimney, but nothing else. The wind without had died down, and the town, having gone to sleep, no sound disturbed the silence.

"Whaddyuh hear?" asked Wally.

Rooge's eyes blinked; then Wally heard, himself. Far, far away, and dimly heard, as through a field-telephone, was a faint jingling. Sleigh-bells, perhaps, but for the fact that their sound was never heard in that part of France. Wally scrambled to his feet. He listened again, and the sound came plainly.

Somewhere out there in the night a frightened man beat upon a sheet of iron. Did any one else hear? Wally turned to rush to the door, but at that instant, with one simultaneous whoop of horns and clang of iron, the town awoke. No Fourth of July or the eve of a Presidential election ever was marked by such a crash of sound. Rooge also leaped into action.

"Gas!" he bellowed and, seizing the bucket of water, soused it upon the fire.

"Ah, the damned wild, crazy idiot!" cried Wally. "What in the name of hell an' little angels sing is the matter with you?"

"Gas!" yelled Rooge again. "In an alarm o' gas, put out all fires! Them's orders."

Rubber snapped, and there was a sound of grunting. The red-headed man was climbing into his gas-mask.

Once in a gas-mask, a man seems to be in a world of his own, shut off from all his fellows. There is darkness, his nose is clamped by a powerful spring, and he breathes only through his mouth, in which there is a huge hose and a sort of gag. There is a sensation of being under water, at great depths. No sound comes, save the blubbering and goozling of the

exhaust valve as the man exhales. The pain of the nose-clamp becomes intense, and the sensation of smothering in black depths unbearable. The soldier then removes his mask to see whether there is any gas.

"Sniff! Sniff! I don't smell no gas," muttered Wally.

"Maybe your own smell is so ripe nothin' else gets by it," remarked Rooge, removing his own mask to talk.

"I didn't hear no shell," continued Wally.

"Gas shells don't make no noise," replied Rooge.

"They do when they're comin'. We're outta range, anyway."

"Well, gas goes twelve kilometers behind the lines—I read about it in a lecture. How far are we back here?"

"Never mind. You didn't have to go put out the fire. What the hell is eatin' you? Don't you want a guy to be warm? I ain't had no supper yet, neither. There ain't no gas. An' me blisterin' my hands pullin' those boards off an' everything. I'm offa you for life, yuh poor damned goop! If brains was all the money in the world, you couldn't send yourself a postal card."

Wally groped his way to the door, tore it open and went out.

"You brung this all on yourself," Rooge comforted him at his elbow. "Maybe some o' these guys'll be gassed, and then we'll get the job o' takin' 'em outta here."

"Git away from me!" replied Wally, snuffling. "There ain't no gas here! I know gas when I smell it! If you put out my fire for nothin', you an' I part an' you walk home!"

"Well, if it ain't gas, it's some kinda hell!" answered Rooge calmly. "Listen to 'em."

The bitter wind that had whistled about the fields earlier in the night had now died down, so that the air, though cold, was lifeless. Horns cawed and iron clanged. Voices called here and there excitedly, men shouted, lanterns twinkled about like fireflies. The two could hear running feet, hoarse calls, something about, "Get up the colonel, we're under gas!" Then some one farther away, from the sound of his voice, yet clearly and distinctly said:

"You're crazier than a coot! We're too far back to get any gas!"

The two wandered around the corner of the house, with no more purpose in mind than to see what was in the farther fields, from where most of the noise seemed to be coming.

"There's the gas!" shrieked Rooge.

Again the sound of snapping head bands and stretching rubber as he put in his mask. Wally took a longer look.

"God!" he whispered.

Some fifty or more yards across the fields was a dark bulk, with many smaller dots of blackness, probably shelter tents, that surrounded it in regular lines. Lanterns glittered there madly, like sparks flying from a forge. The place teemed like an anthill, every ant with a light. Sweeping down to this anthill, and overlapping parts of it, so that the lanterns gleamed from time to time ghostily, was a white blanket of vapor.

Wally had never seen a cloud-gas attack before, and his heart chilled. Yet why should the cloud cover that one part of the field? He looked about him in the darkness and discovered. Above his head, and not far above it either, was a tin stovepipe that projected from the side of the house. A few threads of smoke still came from it. Aha! The tar-paper, and the damp wet wood, and the old fireplace!

This cloud of smoke, rolling down the wet fields, clinging to the ground, projected before the wind that was strong enough to carry it on but not to disperse it, had arrived among those shelter tents, and some gas guard, lonely at his solitary vigil, or mad with the thrill and excitement of his first night on the front, had raised the alarm, whereupon every other gas sentry had repeated it, that being the standing order for such events.

"Let's go away from here!" said Wally hurriedly.

All this noise and sounding of alarm signals would rouse the whole sector; some one would eventually discover that the white vapor was smoke and not gas, and there would be what the Army called a "steaming investigation" to find out where the smoke came from. It was not criminal to build a fire, but he that was far away from investigations of any kind was also far away from trouble.

"These guys are Johns," continued Wally. "Look at 'em run!"

The troops in the gas area must have marched in after dark—since they had certainly not been there when Wally and the pill-rollers had first gone to the house. They were infantry, for there were stacks of rifles that were continually being upset with a crash by running men, or that other men strove pantingly to unstack, believing themselves on the eve of a mass attack by the enemy. It requires more finesse to unstack a rifle than to stack it, it being necessary to disengage the stacking swivel with a very delicate turn of the wrist.

These men, blinded by their masks and beside themselves with excitement and panic, made no delicate whist play, but simply pulled, a procedure by which wild horses could not break a stack. Officers rushed about, gurgling in their masks, men pushed and pulled at other men, some formed ranks, others ran hither and yon, tripping over tent-ropes, crashing down whole rows of tents upon protesting occupants, and all in a gurgling, choking silence most uncanny to the listener, for these men were all in their masks.

"Take off your mask," whispered Wally to Rooge. "That ain't gas, that's smoke."

There was a sound of cautious sniffing.

"Gwan, take it off," urged Wally. "Don't yuh suppose I know? Didn't I build the fire?"

"I ain't takin' no chances," replied Rooge, as he removed his mask. "It would comfort me a lot if I was to die from gas to have you say you made a mistake."

"Well, take it off an' keep your eyes open. Somethin' tells me there'll be pickin's here."

Rooge gave a harsh laugh and groping, found Wally's hand, against which he rubbed something.

"Blankets!" gasped Wally. "A'ready! Where'd yuh get 'em?"

"A little bird flew down with 'em in his beak."

The two began to wander about the stricken encampment. No one came down from the town to aid, for the men there, hearing the gas alarm, pulled their blankets about their heads and went to sleep again. Probably many of them did not even put on their masks. As for coming out of their dugouts to see what it was all about, or to lend aid to stricken comrades, they were weary from breaking rock and pulling heavy wire over rough ground. The men in the shelter-tent encampment were left to their fate.

Flashlights twinkled, lanterns gleamed among the tents. Some formed ranks and tried to call a roll. Others, for some unknown reason, struck their tents and tried to make up their packs. The fact that every one was in his mask complicated the affair terribly, for no one could give orders. Gas discipline in that organization was excellent, for the men kept their masks on, and made no move to inspect the air for themselves to see whether it contained gas. The smoke that lay about and had wandered here and there in waves about the height of the tents soon disappeared, since the source of it had been quenched by Rooge's bucket of water; and, noting this, Wally tugged at his companion's elbow.

"It's time we faded," said he. "How many blankets yuh got?"

"About eight. I got me a nice new officer's slicker, too. One o' them with a camel's hair linin'."

"You lucky bum! Lemme see!" Wally inspected the slicker with his hand. It was obviously new, and as Rooge had said, had a detachable lining. "Oh man!" muttered Wally again. "an' you was the guy that was crabbin' about

comin' the wrong road! How many o' them would you have got goin' through Montfaucon? That thing's worth more'n two months' pay. Maybe more'n three. Now ain't yuh glad we come through Cheppy? Gwan, say yuh was wrong!"

"The night ain't over yet!" replied Rooge.

"Boy, when you go to hell you'll kick 'cause the fires ain't hot enough!"

They began to draw away from the encampment, not too rapidly, nor too obviously. They might always run into the circle of light from a lantern, or an inquisitive flashlight might fall upon them with their burden of blankets. They finally got safely away, and at a little distance from the camp Rooge halted and put down his blankets.

"I'm gonna try on this slicker," he announced. "Maybe it's too big."

"You should worry, you can wear it over your overcoat."

"Well, it might be too small. If it is, I'll have to sell it."

"Ah, yuh dumbell!" cried Wally. "Can't yuh wait until morning? How can you tell in the dark if it fits or not?"

"Nah, I don't want to wait. If I got to sell it, I want to be thinkin' about the price I'm gonna ask for it. If it fits I'm gonna wear it. It'll keep me warm." He put down his blankets and seemed to struggle with the coat.

"Them planes are makin' a hell of a racket," said Wally.

"What planes?"

Rooge paused in putting on the coat. The sound of airplanes in the zone of the armies was so frequent an occurrence that few even noticed their passing overhead. But this was night and there was a drumming boom overhead that startled even Rooge into attention.

"They're flyin' kinda low," he said. "This here thing is too small, I know. I can't even get my arm in the sleeve."

The planes came nearer, and directly overhead their roaring seemed to beat about the men like breakers on rocks. A sudden new sound cut through the humming with frightful sharpness, a swishing as of a gigantic sword blade, the whistle of a rocket that descended from the sky instead of ascending from the ground—a swishing that changed in the instant to a sound like the pinions of a swooping hawk, but larger than any hawk that had been beheld by man.

Wherram! The ground leaped up to meet the sky of flame. Stones and dust flew, stinging the faces of the horror-stricken men. *Whoom!* Another explosion, not like a shell, that penetrates a foot or two, then bursts with a healthy clang, but deep, sullen, tremendous, as of a buried giant that coughed, and spewed up tons of earth from a great depth. The roar of the planes beat down like the wings of attacking birds.

In this particular town there was a ration dump, a balloon and a command post of an Army corps. The latter had moved away late in the afternoon, but the enemy did not know it. Hence, three targets for a night bombing squadron, all in a small area, and if one escaped, it would be very unlikely that the others would. Too many lights, too many kitchens blazing, too many men running about with flashlights. And so the bombers had come to flatten things.

Rooge and Wally stood still, holding each others' hands. They were too old at this sort of thing to lie down. Those bombs were the size of a corpulent man, and, having bored their way into the ground some fifteen or twenty feet, they would uplift an area about the size of a city block. What odds to a man who was in that area whether he stood or lay down? The men in the shelter-tent camp, being already awakened, and many of them in ranks, went away from the vicinity, and any troops that waited for them would wait in vain for another week.

A bomb landed in that camp and scattered remnants of shelter-tents and blankets all over the surrounding landscape. Another struck the town, with an awful crunching of falling house-walls; then one fell, that by the sound of its rushing, headlong descent, would land right at the feet of the two trembling ambulance

drivers. The blast of the explosion knocked them flat; and they lay, blinded by smoke and dust, and choking with the sting of the burned picric in their throats.

"Gah!" choked Rooge at last. "You alive, Wally? Wally! Where are yuh?"

"Aw-awright! God! Where did that one go?"

Rooge struggled to his knees. His head spun, and his ears rang so that he could hardly hear. There was a cloud of black dust against the blue-black sky, that belched from the ground as from a volcano.

"D'yuh hear the planes?" asked Wally.

He could not tell, from the buzzing of his own head, whether the planes still hovered or not. It seemed to him that the roar of the motors was fainter, that suddenly they were gone.

"Can yuh hear the planes, Rooge?" he demanded again. "Didn't get hit, did yuh? If you did, you're outta luck, 'cause I ain't got any first aid packet on me."

"The house!" answered Rooge. "What become o' the house?"

The house indeed. The two knelt so that they could get the profile of the near-by country against the skyline. The cloud of dust and smoke still hung along the ground, but it was not so large nor so thick that it could hide the house. The house, therefore, had disappeared, and the center of the dust cloud came from just about where it had stood.

"It's gone," muttered Wally, then he gave a sharp cry. "Them pill-rollers is in it!"

He began to run toward the dust cloud.

"They ain't nothin' but pancakes now!" panted Rooge after him. The red-headed man, encumbered as he was with blankets and his stolen slicker, could not run as fast as Wally, who reached the ruins of the house first. The bomb had struck beside it, digging an enormous hole that still gushed smoke, but the shock had been too much for the house, which had collapsed into a pile of rubbish and jagged timbers.

"Hey!" yelled Wally. "Any one in there? Yuh hurt?" He seized a timber and aided by Rooge, tore it aside. Dust and smoke hid everything, and there was no response to their calls but a fearful silence. "We gotta get 'em out!" panted Wally. "Maybe they ain't dead! Suppose they was just hurt? Grab hold, Rooge!"

They tore down a great sheet of scantling and tar-paper that had formed part of the old roof. They listened; no sound. Wally shot his flashlight into the tangle of wreckage.

"They're all dead!" whispered Rooge.

"Somebody might be caught under a beam or something, an' if we could get 'em out we—"

Again the sound of motors overhead. Wally grabbed wildly in the dark but found nothing. He heard feet pounding and dashed in pursuit with some success, for he had not gone four steps before he had grasped the red-headed man's arm.

"Stay right here, old boy!" panted Wally. "You ain't no gopher to be gettin' to your hole the first sound you hear! You stay an' help me dig out those pill-rollers!"

"Them planes has come back!" protested Rooge.

"Stick around! You're just as safe here as anywheres!"

"I ain't!"

"Well, you stick around!" yelled Wally. "What the hell do you mean by beating it?"

"Lemme alone! I'm goin'! Yuh think I'm wantin' to get killed with this new slicker an' everything?"

"Don't argue with me!" yelled Wally.

He would have said more, but he heard more running feet and a number of men fell upon the ruins of the house and began to tear away at them.

"Hey! What's the idea?" demanded the two ambulance drivers together, forgetting the object of their discussion and running back to the house.

"There's guys in there!" yelled the newcomers. "Give us a hand to dig 'em out!"

"There's planes around!" warned Rooge.

Nevertheless, he seized hold of a mysterious piece of wood and dragged on it. It did not budge, but some one heard him grunting and gave aid, so that the beam finally came loose at its lower end and they could drag it away. They worked madly.

These men, decided Rooge, must be engineers from the town. There were shouts in that direction from time to time, and what seemed to be lively excitement. The boom of motors overhead, that would not have drawn a snore from any one of these men an hour ago, was now the signal for great straining of the ears, and sighs of relief when the roaring died out in the distance. All yelled, all gave directions, all heaved at beams and tore at blocks of stone.

Rooge and Wally would encounter each other for a moment, then the tide of labor would carry them apart again as some one would cry:

"Gang up on this beam! Hey, give us a hand here!" Or, "All t'gether on this rock! Let's get these fellars outta here before they're sure 'nough dead!"

Backs began to ache, hands were torn and blistered, and in spite of the sharp cold of the night the men perspired freely. A lantern approached, swinging in short quick circles, as if the man that carried it were in a hurry.

"Hey! Hey! Put out that lantern—you'll draw fire!" shouted the men that labored among the ruins.

"Fire hell! Them planes are gone long ago!" replied a scornful voice. One or two moved away from their toil to extinguish the lantern by force, but halted a little confusedly, for the lantern's rays shone upon a large pistol, a bayoneted rifle and a black brassard that must bear the fatal letters in red. The newcomer was an M. P.

"Where the hell are them two gold-brickin' ambulance drivers?" demanded the M. P.

"They're underneath this house!" shouted a chorus that drowned out two voices who had said feebly—

"Whaddyuh want with 'em?"

"Under the house!" cried Wally, strongly enough now. "They ain't no such thing! The pill-rollers is under there, but we wasn't in it!"

"Give us that lantern a second!" said some one.

The light was shoved into Wally's face. He opened his mouth to express his bitter objection to such actions, but the words did not come. The face on the other side of the lantern was that of the medical corps sergeant.

"You!" said the two simultaneously. "Where the hell was you? You wasn't in the house!"

"We was—er out huntin' firewood," said Wally.

"So was we," answered the sergeant. There was a snickering from the darkness.

"We didn't find it neither," said a voice.

The sergeant laughed.

"Ah well," he remarked, "we was out huntin' for some of that what the Ghost got. It's in the town an' we was aimin' to have some of it. Here! What the blue-eyed hell!"

The lantern had been suddenly snatched from his hand, and even as he and Wally watched, it was lowered midst a snarl of boards.

"There's a guy in there!" cried a man, "I c'n see him!"

All rushed over, barking shins, nearly breaking their legs falling into holes, and stepping on board ends that snapped up and smote the stepper. They looked into the hole, amid shattered boards, dirt and curtains of old rotten wall- and tar-paper. There was a man there, stretched out, half covered with dirt, but plainly clothed in olive drab.

"Have him out!" shouted four or five different voices. "Grab hold o' the beam. Lively, now! Come on!"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" The M.P. came clambering up on the pole of rubbish. "That's my lantern you guys got. I come over with an order. Where's the ambulance driver?"

"There's a guy dyin' under this stuff!" protested the sergeant.

"Well, dig him out, but first I'm goin' to say my say. They want the driver o' that ambulance. One o' them bombs knocked the P.C. down an' some fellars was hurt. They want to take 'em out."

"Well, we're gonna dig this guy outta here first," said Wally, already tugging on a beam.

"That don't interest me," said the M.P. "I give yuh the order an' my nose is clean! You can obey it or not. One o' you guys hold the lantern an' I'll give yuh a hand."

With the lantern, the men could see which beam to pull, which one held up the others, where a board went into the criss-cross and where it came out. They were down to the imprisoned men in no time, and with a final shout, they tore off the last beam, seized the limp form and carried it out of the hole. The sergeant brushed the dirt from the other's face, unbottoned his overcoat and opened his blouse and shirt.

"Put that lantern a little lower," said he, feeling for the heart with an expert hand. "I think he's alive."

They lowered the lantern. Once more from throats already hoarse they pushed a simultaneous shout—

"The Ghost!"

It was indeed the Ghost, sleeping the sleep of him who has gazed overlong upon the cognac when it was brown. They marveled among themselves; then, one by one, the pill-rollers remembered that, having started out with the Ghost in their midst to show them where he had got his liquor, each one had managed to get a little ahead of the crowd, to be the first one to arrive at the place where the liquor was supposed to be, and that those who supported the Ghost, finding themselves outdistanced, had left him to his own devices and hurried on after their fellows; whereat he had turned about and gone back to the house again. Along with the firmly fixed belief in soldiers' minds that a newly killed snake will move his tail until the sun goes down, that a cat must be killed nine distinct times and that a drowning man will come up thrice, is one that a drunk never gets hurt. This was not true with the Ghost, for they found he had a broken leg.

"Well, yuh got him out," said the M.P. finally, breaking on to the clamor of excited comment. "Gimme my lantern an' you drivers come along with me. Only the drivers they need. We got a doctor."

"Well, we'll go get a stretcher an' take out the Ghost, too," said the sergeant and, leaving two men with the Ghost, the entire party went rapidly into the town.

One of the first bombs had landed in the center of the town, missing the post of command by some ten yards; but those portions of the ruins that had ascended with the force of the explosion, coming down, had flattened everything for a very wide circle. Wally took one look, and then he and Rooge departed for the ambulance.

"Let's go get the bus, Rooge," he said. "Here's where we roll."

"Good. I wanta get this slicker outta sight under the seat anyway. Man, when I saw that M.P. I thought he was after me already."

"You an' that slicker!" said Wally bitterly. "I ain't heard you make any cracks about the wrong road since you got hold of it."

Rooge made no reply.

The ambulance, much to their relief, they found intact, but surrounded by a clamoring crowd, each soldier of which wanted it for some member of his own organization.

"Git away!" said Rooge. "There's a doctor down at the P.C. an' that's where we roll from. Bring your wounded down there. Back her up, Wally, an' I'll walk ahead of yuh. Wait, now, till I light up."

He rolled and lighted a cigaret, then holding it as a torch, he waved to right or left with it, to indicate to Wally which direction to take. The ambulance backed out to the road, turned about and followed by the crowd, went down to the

main street and so to the P.C. A lot of men had been hit in that raid, and they were laying them out in front of the P.C., while the doctor and the medical corps sergeant went about writing out their tags and the other pill-rollers applied dressings.

"I suppose we might as well go on with the first four, sir?" asked Rooge of the harassed doctor.

"Well, yes—er—no, what's the hurry? Wait until we get them all in from the field and see who's hurt the worst."

"We better go," cried Wally, from the ambulance. "Ambulances is scarce round here, an' we may have to evacuate this whole crowd ourselves. Don't argue with him, Rooge—grab the first four worst ones an' shove 'em in."

The doctor was new at the front and, after all, these ambulance men seemed to know their business. He went back to writing tags and Rooge and the sergeant began an inspection. Wally got down from his seat to prepare the ambulance, letting down the seats, running the hooks back to the best positions to receive the stretcher handles and unrolling the back curtain. In went the first one, a man with a piece of bomb through a lung; another who had been dug out from a caved-in cellar with three ribs and both legs broken, a third with a severed artery.

"One more, Rooge," called Wally. "Come on."

The bearers approached and started to roll in a stretcher.

"Hey!" cried Rooge suddenly.

Wally, on his way to the seat, turned and went back.

"What's the matter?"

"This guy's got on one o' them old issue overcoats with cuffs!" answered Rooge excitedly.

"Well, what of it?" asked the medical corps seregant.

"Yeh, we remember a guy with one o' them old-timers overcoats on," yelled Wally. "Here! Who's this guy?"

"Who's the guy, Sergeant?" asked Rooge. "You wrote out his tag."

"Gee, I don't know. I don't remember."

"It's the mess sergeant o' Headquarters Troop," spoke up some one. "He was asleep in that barn that got caved in."

"Yeh," remarked Rooge, "we know him."

He said no more, and the hooks squealed as the stretcher was shoved in.

"Hey! Hey!" came faintly from down the road.

"Hey! Hey!" nearer at hand.

Men arrived at a run, panting, four men with a stretcher on their shoulders.

"Hey, take out this guy with yuh!" they gasped. "He's hurted bad."

"'S full," began Rooge, but the others interrupted.

"Take him out," they said again, "it's the Gallopin' Ghost."

"Right!" said Rooge emphatically. "Pull out that last one yuh put in!"

"No! No!" yelled several. "No, that's the mess sergeant—he was in the barn—he got hit, too— No, no, he was in first—gwan with him outta here!"

An M.P. shoved his way through the crowd and majestically ordered the ambulance to move on.

"M. P.," said Wally, "you don't throw no weight here. This is business. Out with that guy in the overcoat. We select who goes in this bus, accordin' to how they're hit. Am I right, Sergeant?"

The sergeant said nothing, having an eye to the M.P.; whereupon Rooge seized the stretcher handle and hauled out the last passenger himself. Wally took the other end of the stretcher and they laid it in the mud.

"Ever hear o' two ambulance drivers bein' called bums?" asked Wally. "I heard once of two that got spun outta a place, 'cause they asked for a handout."

"Never get fresh with ambulance drivers," said Rooge. "A guy never knows when he'll need 'em. Run in the Ghost, Sergeant."

They ran the Ghost in, and the pill-rollers pressed about to say good-by and to press his hand in the darkness. The sergeant bent down and whispered in the

Ghost's ear, but not so low that some of the bystanders did not hear.

"Ghost, you know *me*. You're goin' out an' can't use it. Where'd yuh get that likker yuh had?"

"That's a babeee's parayer at twiligh'
For her dadeeee over theah!"

Thus sang the Ghost, feebly and huskily. They ran him in and buttoned down the curtain.

"Now that we're outta town," said Wally, once the ambulance was well on its way. "I'll tell yuh about the Ghost's likker. I got it. He had it in his hand when he first come home full o' song. So in the dark I got it before them pill-rollers could get near him. Yuh mind I was gettin' wood? I heard him comin' first. We'll have a little of it now. I didn't mention it before, bein' sore at you for crabbin' an' not helpin' me to build the fire."

He hitched himself around on the seat and drew out something that gurgled from his inner pocket.

"Man, that's a funny shaped bottle," said Rooge, taking it. "What's in it?"

"Oh, some o' them orange likkers or cream de mint or somethin' like that. The colonel give it to him for givin' him the rub, I know. Take a shot of it."

There was a sound as of a man drowning. Rooge had not waited to be invited, but had taken the shot at once.

"Ah, blood-sweatin' hell!" he gasped. "Turn your light on this!"

They examined the bottle together, at imminent risk of wrecking the ambulance. It was small, square and bore a white label on which was a picture of a horse, a cow, and a dog, with the words:

EXCELLENT FOR ALL SPRAINS, BRUISES, STRAINED LIGAMENTS, SPLINTS, CURBS, AND KINDRED AILMENTS OF MAN OR BEAST.
ALCOHOL EIGHTY PER CENT.

"Liniment!" said Wally bitterly. "Now where'd he get *that?*"

"Off the guy he was rubbin'." Rooge shook the bottle. "It's almost full, too. He must 'a' got two or three of 'em."

"What a low guy!" muttered Wally. "I'd rather we took out the mess sergeant, even if he wouldn't feed us!"

"I've heard o' that Ghost that he'd drink an' enjoy carbolic acid, but I can't," observed Rooge. "You want this?"

Wally making no reply, Rooge heaved away the bottle.

"Well, Wally, tough luck," he continued cheerfully. He leaned over the side and, opening the little door under the seat, carefully brought out his slicker.

"I think I'll put this on," he remarked. "I feel a mite chilled. It's a nice slicker, Wally. Too bad we couldn't find two. I oughta make quite a hit with the *mamselles* the next time we get a leave."

Wally maintained silence. He had set his heart on a drink, and the feel of that bottle against his ribs had kept his courage high all through the terrors of the night. His disappointment had been bitter, and the thought that he would have to drive the rest of the night, while Rooge exulted about his acquisition of a brand new camel's-hair lined trench-coat was not pleasant.

"Gimme the light," went on Rooge.

He turned it on the coat calling Wally's attention to the leather buttons, the warm thickness of it, the extra lining of oilcloth that would defy the hardest rain. He turned the coat over and lettering caught his eye. Broad across the back, in letters two inches high, was stenciled, "Lieutenant James K. Barton, 302 Infantry."

The man that wore that coat would be marked all over France, and its owner had had that fact in mind when he had so stenciled it. Rooge could not even use it as a bed covering without danger of arrest. There was a slight rattling sound as the coat followed the bottle overboard. Wally was heard to chuckle.

"Laugh if you want to," said Rooge in tones of pain. "That's you all over."

"I ain't laughin'," said Wally, though his tones were those of pleasure. "I'm just smilin' to myself. Rooge, you're right an' the world is wrong. We should 'a' took the road through Montfaucon."

Spruce Beer and Other Things

BY

ARTHUR WOODWARD

MANY of the boys who took part in the Big Fuss naturally thought that all the orders issued by the C. O.'s to keep "the privates and corporals, too" out of mischief and make them earn their dollar a day emanated from the fertile brains of the higher-ups who had nothing more to do than to see to it that the rank and file did not enjoy the war. If some of the *soldats* who still have those ideas would read the "Orderly Book and Journal of Major John Hawks" who was on the Ticonderoga-Crown Point campaign under General Jeffrey Amherst in 1759-1760 they would see that the life of soldier-men has changed but little in the past hundred years or so, save perhaps in the matter of spruce beer.

In those days it seems the powers-that-be recognized the fact that fighting men should have little luxuries regardless of expense. Imagine "Orders of the Day" in 1918 reading like this:

"Spruce beer is to be brewed for the health and conveniency of the troops which will be served at prime cost; 5 quarts of molasses will be put into every barrel of spruce beer. Each gallon will cost near three coppers."

Shades of bay rum and lemon extract! Three cents a gallon for beer! Moreover, those so inclined might have their own private stills, to wit, another general order a week or so later:

"As by the order of the 7th it was said spruce beer would be brewed for the Army it is not thereby intended to hinder any of our people from brewing spruce beer; All setlars are att liberty to brue as much as they will."

Snicker, those of you who felt your faces redden under the lash of the order: "Sergeant! Take that man's name and put him in the awkward squad." Snicker now eight years after it is over and sympathize with those men of one hundred and sixty-six years ago.

"The recruits & awkward squads of ye regulars to practice with powder and ball at a mark as often as the commanding officer of Corps thinks it fit between the hours of 5 and 8 in the morning."

Who said the A. E. F. had a monopoly on cooties? Those of you who swore and scratched have sympathy and an understanding of the following bald-faced order:

"It is reported unto me that some of the men are lowsy, therefore, it is expected that the Captains or commanding officers of Companys enquire into the affairs & if there is any that is so to order them cleaned, otherwise they will louse the whole."

Does that last sentence recall any memories of certain "Bolsheviks" in the outfits who refused to take a bath when water was plentiful, and the orders committed orally by the captain to the sergeant and thence to the companions in arms of the unwashed ones? Yea, verily. Squalling, protesting bodies sprawled on wet, concrete wash-house floors while willing hands made light labor, assisted by scrubbing brushes and brick dust. Rough but efficient.

Miscellaneous orders. Are any of them familiar?

"It is expected that men on no account whatever to touch the 5 days' bread they were ordered to receive."

Iron rations?

"Whosoever is found in the Camp guilty of playing cards after the publication of this order must expect to suffer for disobedience of orders." . . . "No card playing in company street" said our captain—but ah, how simple to roll under the tent into A Company's street where there were no restrictions.

"The Adjutant is to order all the men off Duty in Generall Lyman's Regt to turn out & exercise three hours in the forenoon & three hours in the afternoon the Major to exercise them. All former orders to be obeyed." Goldbrickers and bunk-fatiguers, front and center—ho!

Says our C. O., who was a West Pointer: "It is peace time now and it is bad for morale and discipline to let the men lounge around the barracks all day. One hour drill is not enough. Therefore it is ordered that the captains of the companies will personally take charge of the drill from nine until twelve in the morning and one until four in the afternoon. To be obeyed until further orders."

"Orders is orders" says our captain, "and as such were made to be busted. We will drill for an hour on the parade grounds until the Commanding Officer goes down town to his club or wherever it is that he goes. Sergeant, march these men behind the barracks and dismiss them. If I catch a man showing his nose outside the squad rooms before I give the word, just as sure as God made little green apples", says our captain, "I'll put him on permanent K. P. or send him to Leavenworth for life. That's not a threat, it's a promise."

HELLWARD

THEY called him "Hellward", on the beach. That was just a pleasantry. He cared little. He had been called worse than that. His name was Aylward. In all the island of Tobago he had no friend. That was understandable, for he was without doubt a bad egg. Even on the indulgent seafront he had no credit any more. An egg, before it is broken, at least may not be utterly bad. Hellward was bad. He was broke.

And yet there was just one person who had been his friend and who still was, if he but knew it. She was coming along the side street now, all sunlit gingham and prettiness. Hellward was rather a mess. He had been kicked off the sidewalk that morning by a colored policeman. He was ragged and but half shod; he was hungry, too, if looks might be trusted.

But he knelt in the gutter, by a pool of unevaporated night rain, just finishing the painful operation of shaving without soap. Always he shaved. No matter how far down in other ways he fell, he would shave with that old army razor of his, though the heavens fell. It was his one last hold on the decency his heritage had given him. He wiped his face on the rags of his sleeve as the girl half paused.

"Hello, 'Little Fellow'," he greeted her, hurriedly slipping the razor into a pocket which miraculously continued to hold it.

Little Fellow was the name he had given her, half affectionately, half humorously, in the first days of their acquaintance. Her name was Mae Frances, but nobody had ever heard Hellward refer to or call her by any name but Little Fellow. And there was a time, not so long ago, when Hellward could still frequent the public places of entertainment, with head erect, when he could still take a lady with him and confer no disgrace upon her by doing so. Gossip had once given birth to the rumor that Hellward's Little Fellow would marry him and replace him on that higher plane which was his by right. But gossip was wrong. Little Fellow came into his life just a bit too late.

Hellward was already going down on greased ways when he pulled her out of a shark-infested sea and thus introduced himself to her. But what little of brightness continued to come into his life came through her, and he knew it. He met her rather quivery smile with a brave bluff. There was always that little quiver in her smile. At least, of late.

"Have to see a man about a ship today," he told her.

She shook her head, still smiling. His

A Down-and-Outer on a Cholera Ship

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

appearance was not such as to impress men who had ships. He noticed her gesture; still he bluffed.

"A cart splashed me all over with mud. Have I got it all off?"

"You're incorrigible," she laughed, fumbling in her handbag. "I have a job now. Nursing. So now's the time for me to pay back some of your good turns to me. Take this. Get some breakfast. Then buy yourself a clean linen suit before you see that man about the ship. You can repay the loan out of your advance."

Protesting all the while that she was talking, Hellward yet held out a shaky hand for the money. He licked his dry lips. Scarcely waiting to thank her, he shuffled off down a side street and burst through the green swing-doors of a negro groggery. Little Fellow watched him with pitying eyes. She had stubbornly held on to her hope that he might yet be reclaimed. She walked dully on her way now, feeling her hope diminish.

MANY years before, Hellward had been a man. His meritorious record was not yet forgotten. Even the negro who kicked him off the sidewalk in the morning had done so with scarcely concealed trepidation only quelled by the police uniform. Tobago knew Hellward at least as skipper of island schooners and brigantines. There was a strongly plausible legend that previous to the small skipper days the man had held command in the big liners; but so far as the islanders were concerned, there had never been a time when he was sober.

When he dived into a school of sharks and hauled Little Fellow from between their teeth, he was so drunk that aghast onlookers said that the sharks must have turned up their noses at him, thus giving him time to pull off the rescue. Little Fellow indignantly refuted that story when it came to her ears; but since she blushed a bit while doing so, men only smiled kindly at her and let her keep her faith. But the story was true and, like truth, it stuck.

If the liner yarn was true, it was not hard to assign a reason for his fall. He lost his first brigantine command after three amazingly fast and profitable voyages. Liquor, of course. But his employers forgave him simply because of those fast and profitable voyages, which had put them into a money-earning class after years of mildewed poverty. They gave him another vessel, too, a new one.

And he lost her the first voyage, with six men.

He never got a command again. He went mate of a native-owned sugar-drogher, under a mulatto skipper. That job was lost when he, full of black rum, let go a tackle and dropped a hogshead of crude sugar through the bottom of a lighter and killed a stevedore, besides sinking a small fortune in sugar.

While he held jobs he had friends, for Hellward was in at least three ways a gentleman. He carried liquor without spilling it. He had the cool courage of a Bayard. His smiling courtesy was as famous as his daredevil seamanship was before the fall. So, after the last job went, he could still command funds. Men believed he would come back into decent employment and still make good. As long as his clothes were decent that belief persisted. His skin was pink and white, for all the tropic sun.

He was personally clean, even after his lodging was closed to him and he secretly slept in a stable, which was too small to house the automobile that had displaced its former long-eared occupant. And he shaved religiously. Then the time came when men would buy him a drink, though they would give him no money. That was when he learned to eat unripe bananas from the plant and over-ripe mangoes, oranges and pines from the market.

Always he had the tale at his ready tongue's end, of a vessel to be put in his charge. At first he believed it. Little Fellow encouraged it, for she saw, very keenly indeed, with all the sharp sight of warm affection, that for just so long as he believed would his faith in himself flicker and remain alive, if no more. But even her warm heart could not keep alive forever a hope which he himself killed. She liked the pride in him, which prevented his accepting money from her. But that too had died.

For several days he had told her the same old yarn about seeing a man about a ship; for several days she had made the same remark about the advisability of fitting himself out with clean clothes before meeting a prospective employer. She had seen him do just what he had done this morning—take her money and fill himself up with rum.

She had sorrowfully decided to give him no more clothes money. She could room at the little hospital where she nursed. The doctors would like that, because the hospital was full and the island was in the grip of a dengue fever, which was proving more deadly than usual. If she stayed there, she would not meet Hellward every morning. On her rest days she could take another direction and avoid him still. The decision hurt her, made her eyes dim; but she had done all that she could, many times more than anybody else and a thousand times more than anybody expected of her.

It was noon when Hellward was ungently urged through the outward swinging green doors and advised to go jump off the dock by a chocolate-hued prize-fighter whose girl seemed unduly smitten with Hellward's somewhat moldy charms. Hellward did not jump off the dock. He sat on an empty barrel in an alley near-by, fell into the barrel and went to sleep.

Had he decided to jump off the dock, he might have found a fair audience, for half the idlers of the town were down on the front, watching a tall ship come up from the sea in such slovenly fashion as to attract attention.

"One of them coolie ships from India, ain't she?" a man asked.

"Looks like the *Avon*," said a knowing one. "Must all be drunk aboard of her, by the way she's lumberin' along. Look at her gear. I'll say she's in a mess!"

The big square-rigger did look a mess. Her upper sails had been let go and not hauled up. The yards swung crazily. She was steering like a sand barge in a cross-rip. And the harbor-master's boat sped toward her. Soon she came to anchor, far out, and her sails simply caught aback as she swung, for there was no attempt to bring her to in the regular way.

Something was wrong, that was certain. The harbor-master's boat was seen speeding back, and everybody in her gesticulated and shouted to all the other boats on the adjacent sea. Those boats, too, ceased rowing toward the ship and hovered where they were, as if unwilling to believe what they heard. Then the harbor-master landed, spitting with excitement. He was a florid, red man, but he had turned almost ashen. His eyes held stark fear.

"Cholera!" he gasped. "Stinking full of dead coolies—three hundred alive and crazy with fright. Every white aboard of her dead. The third mate brought her in and he died while he was talking to me! My God!"

Dengue fever filled the hospital. Quarantine was full of detained ships. Not a doctor in the island but was already half dead from lack of sleep and sheer exhaustion. And here came a ship full of cholera, sailed in on a dying breeze by a dying hand.

"My God!" the gasp went up in echo.

BUSINESS men and port officials, government men and plain members of the citizenry, idlers, transients and bums —every man capable of standing on two feet gathered on the waterfront. They stared out at the big coolie ship with goggling eyes, hoping her crazed mob of coolies would not dare the sea to escape the ship of death. And Hellward slept in his capsized barrel, breathing stertorously, dead to the world.

"What'll we do with the pest-ship?" the question flew.

"Not even a warship to take charge of the mess. If those crazed coolies decide to jump overboard and swim ashore, some of them are bound to land, and that'll be hell let loose."

That was the only answer ventured. The dengue fever was upon the islands. Periodically it visited them, and sometimes badly. This was a bad visitation. Worse than usual. Nobody dared to think of what would be the result of cholera stalking through on the heels of the fever.

"We must get that ship away," the harbor-master said.

The *Avon* was one of a line of ships regularly carrying East Indian coolies to the West Indian plantations. She ought to have gone to Demerara. But the dying third mate had said that she was out of her course. He had carried her to the nearest port. That was all he could do. And the men who had boarded the ship realized that the youngster had pulled a heroic thing in doing it.

"But we can't have her here," they agreed. "Things are bad enough now. Our trade'll be ruined if that mob of plague-carriers lands here—and land they will. They're too crazed now for a few police to hold 'em."

"There's Hellward, sleepin' it off in a barrel down Bug's Alley," ventured one.

He grinned as he said it; but nobody saw the joke. This was no time to chatter about the town disgrace, when out there at anchor was a shipload of death just aching to stalk ashore. But the man had an idea behind his seeming levity.

"He's a sailor, isn't he? Was a good one, too, by all accounts. Make him captain of the *Avon*, and send the coolies to Demerara, where they belong and where they can be taken proper care of."

Harbor-master and merchants, waterside idlers and boatmen, all swung around to look at the proposer of such an ingenious plan. But there was no grin to match his. He alone appeared to believe in the idea.

"That's a fine scheme," grunted the harbor-master, who was really only a wharfinger, an old sailor himself. "It's fine, but for one thing. Hellward ain't no damn fool, drunk as he is. Try some other notion. Trinidad's only twenty miles away, but I don't hate Trinidad that much. Besides, Trinidad's chockfull of trouble as it is, what with dengue, and hurricane, and—"

"Hellward will sail that ship and be proud to," said the proposer, still grinning.

Nobody liked him very well. In the islands life was usually cordial. Men met

men and forgot, for an hour, the dire grind of money-making and trade conflict. But even in the club the islanders found an always fresh, fruitful topic in the skinflint life motive of Jered Treweeks, whose forefathers had been chased out of New England for meanness.

"Give him plenty of rum and get him full to start, and Hellward 'll sail any ship he's captain of right through the hole in the wall with all sail set, and meet the underwriters with that pink and white smile of his— Damnation! What are you yawping at me like that for? Haven't we to get that pest-ship out of here?"

He was right. They all knew it. Good, bad or don't care, every man there knew their island was ruined once those coolies got ashore. There was not a man there who would have refused a subscription to a hurricane fund or to buy a ticket for a sick benefit or to donate a basket of comforts for the stricken family of the meanest in the island.

But here was the life-blood of their material welfare being threatened. Besides, close as she was, the pest-ship was still an abstract thing, not yet to be touched by physical hands. Hellward might get through, too; then look what a regeneration. Why, it might even be the making of him.

Thus did the leaven work in otherwise decently doughy minds.

"It's not such a punk plan at that," the harbor-master said.

He told his launchman to keep an eye on the *Avon* and suggested an adjournment to the club, to frame the details.

Before the sun was half-way down, an imposing committee of business men lifted Hellward from his barrel and politely waited for him to shake the dust from his eyes. Bleary eyes, they were, and puzzled. The harbor-master, wise old seadog, cunning in tricks, without ostentation handed Hellward a flask of fine old brandy.

"You take a snifter o' this, Cap'n. I know how the dengue takes a man. Can't have you knuckling under now, sir, not when the job you've been waiting for so long is waiting for you. Drink it down, Cap'n. Let 'er go!"

Hellward had not been so decently treated for a long time. He swallowed the fiery old spirit, smooth as milk to take, but holding the jolt of electricity in its smooth flow. He gazed around curiously at the notables supporting him. He grinned. The proposer of the scheme was grinning, so why should Hellward not grin? When the pint of brandy was down, it resurrected all the dead embers of his previous carouse. In five minutes he was in a fine state of exaltation, ready to kiss a girl, fight a gorilla or swim the Pitch Lake of Trinidad.

A man was brushing straw from his clothes; another had fished his battered solar *toupee* from behind the barrel and was punching it into shape; one of the merchants, who had endured his friendship longer than the rest, put a fresh flask of brandy into Hellward's ready hand. The spokesman coughed gently and made the proposition.

"Hellward, you've been in hard luck for a long time. We all know your record. There's no better seaman living. It's only proper that you should be in good employment. Unfortunately our shipping has fallen off. But your chance has come. Accidentally it's true, but a splendid chance none the less. That ship out there is the *Avon*, coolies to Demerara, and put in here with all her officers dead from one mishap or another. Take her, Cap'n. Take her to Georgetown, and if the owners don't give you permanent command of her, it 'll be no fault of ours."

"The chance of your life, Hellward," the harbor-master put in, with something of an honest choke in his voice. "Fine ship. Plenty of coolies. Short passage—"

"We'll put plenty of liquor aboard."

"To hell with your liquor!" laughed Hellward, blinking in the sunlight and trying to picture that fine tall ship out there.

The brandy was almost gone from the second flask, and his vision was not very clear. But he knew the *Avon*. Everybody knew Nourse's crack ship. He held

his head sidewise, like a bird, peering at the drop of brandy remaining in the shaking flask. For a moment it seemed as if he were about to toss it into the gutter; but he drank it, gagged on it and pitched the flask into the barrel.

"If you're not lying, give me another drink and put me on board," he said, drunkenly pulling himself erect, with a stagger. "It's three hundred miles to windward, land to loo'ard and a mighty current to buck; but I can sail any ship ever built to hell through highwater and I'm here to prove it. Where's the boat?"

Eager hands gave him another flask. They put him into a boat and bribed a drunken negro to row him out. A youth, who had once been his cabin-boy, looked on with goggling eyes. Not brave enough to face a trip in that death ship, yet remembering those days when Hellward was a man to sail with, good and kind for all his hell-raising, the youth fully realized what his old master was being shoved into. And off he trotted to tell the only person in the island who seemed likely to care.

And while the boat took Hellward out to his new command, Little Fellow stood at an open jalousie in the little hospital, gazing after him with an expression which was compounded of horror and indignation. She could see the piled cases of liquor in the boat. There was something about the ludicrously erect figure in the stern of the boat which easily connected cause with effect. All the town knew about the ship and the cholera. The doctors had shaken their heads over it. They were already working at top load.

When Little Fellow protested to them, they tried to make her see that nothing else could be done; that, after all, Hellward might come through with unexpected hope for the future. Their words had no comfort for her. She stood watching until the boat drew alongside the ship and the boatman shouldered Hellward over the side and hove the cases after him. Then the boatman shoved off and rowed away as if the devil had beckoned.

HELLWARD climbed to the poop of his new command. He wanted to look her over. The disarray of the gear shocked him—and the wild appearance of the coolies. The moment they were aware of his arrival, they came clamoring aft. And Hellward was no fool, even as the harbor-master had said. He saw the trouble in a moment. And he dodged inside the chart-room, locking out the mob, to give himself breathing space.

He was drunk enough to laugh. Through a porthole he scrutinized the clamoring wretches for a long moment and laughed at the joke played on him. The log lay open on the chart. The last entries were there, two days back, in a shipwreck of a scrawl telling in the now dead third mate's hand of the sickness and the death, of the ship carried to leeward of her port by the strong current, and of his sighting Tobago. That was all.

Some oilskins hung on hooks. There was a watch cap, too. The late owner had undoubtedly died of cholera. It had the insignia of the master. Hellward took it down and clapped it on his head, tossing the old solar *toupee* into a corner.

Then he opened the door and stepped outside again, right into the midst of the frenzied coolies. He spoke to them in the Hindustan coast dialect. He knew it well enough to talk soothingly to them. Soon they produced from among them a scowling *serang* and two frightened *tindals*, who told him that the lascar crew had long since refused duty, being afraid.

"One hundred coolie die, sahib. Too much bobbery. No can do."

Hellward laughed again, grimly. When the ship had been anchored, she had been placed far enough from shore to make it unlikely that anybody would attempt the swim. And boats remained at a distance. The ship's decks were filthy. Coolies lay about in all stages of illness. Some were dead. Right across the galley-door sill a corpse lay with one arm stiffly in the air. And a shining black face, a negro face, glared through the door from inside. A quavering, throaty voice that should have been a lusty roar bawled to Hellward.

"I'se de cook, sar! Git me out o' dis yar. Hyar's a man die right befo' ma doah!"

"Step over him!" Hellward said.

But the darky shook his head and glared down at the dead guardian of the door.

Hellward spoke again to the natives. He told them he had medicine. He made them carry aft the cases the boat had brought and, when he had them all in the chart-room, he smashed one open and opened the bottles. The stench of the ship was throat catching. He drank from a bottle of Demerara rum until his eyes streamed.

"Bring a dozen good men, *serang*, and tell 'em I'll make 'em well. Here, you and the *tindals* take your medicine first."

He poured rum into a dirty tumbler from the chart table and gave it to the *serang*. "Drink it down, man! Hell, it's not as nasty as all that!"

He knew the Easterns would not be used to that liquor; but he believed that if once he got a shot or two into a man's stomach, that man would be capable of doing work, no matter what color he was. And he watched the *serang's* face anxiously. The man coughed and choked. The *tindals* were scared. But then the *serang* got his breath, and his eyes began to glitter. The *tindals* swallowed their liquor without protest. So did the chosen men.

"Fine, now we'll get the anchor up," laughed Hellward, finishing the bottle in hand and starting forward with a queerly willing crew.

At the galley he stopped to haul away the dead jailer of the cook. He would need a cook soon, if only to boil water for cleaning.

Men intently watching from shore saw a gang of men tramping around the *Aron's* capstan. Through binoculars they could make out the tall, lean, soiled figure of Hellward standing on the knighthead, watching the crawling chain. And later on they saw the untidy yards braced into some sort of trim. Sails that had been just let go were slowly hoisted again.

The harbor-master, who had a fine binocular, noticed a coal-black darky, in a cook's apron and cap, trotting often from aft to forward with a bottle and tumbler.

So people ashore felt safer as evening drew on. Hellward was doing his job. Slowly, true, but then he had no easy job. The chief thing was, he meant to carry out what he had undertaken. He showed them *that* as the sun went down. On the *Aron* soon twinkled the red and green lights of a ship under weigh.

And on the *Aron* a fear-crazed crew labored under the tongue-lashing of a rum-crazed master. They stumbled over prostrate, whining sick in the gathering darkness of night, trying to get the ship to sea.

Hellward ate ravenously of curry and rice—the first real food he had eaten in many days. The darky cook followed him like a shadow. There was no mate, no second. Hellward staggered from forward to aft, overseeing everything. When the anchor held fast at the final bite, he ran to add his strength to the bars and found his stumbling way aft again to take the helm.

The ship was moving at last. She began to turn slowly under the pressure of her backed foreyards. Hellward watched her with a curious sense of elation. He was so full of rum that even the black night seemed golden. The soft splashing of sea about the turning hull was musical. He fancied he heard voices in it.

"Hyah, Cap'n! Heah's a pusson swimmin' abohd!" yelled the cook. "Gawd! What he want abohd heah! Yo' bettah push off back, thar!"

"Perhaps that dead one you hove over ain't dead," chuckled Hellward, peering into the dark sea.

"Throw me a line—anything, quick!" came a faint voice, and Hellward was galvanized into action. He flung the end of a bunt-line, hurriedly putting a bowline into it, and feverishly hauled aboard a nurse's cap, and a bathing suit with Little Fellow inside.

"I—I had to—come," she panted. "You don't know what they have sent you to! It's—it's—"

"It's fine," he laughed, lifting her and holding her upright. "Here, you're all shivery, Little Fellow. Cook, where's that rum?"

"I don't want rum! Can't you understand? This ship is full of cholera!"

Hellward chuckled again and made her swallow a few drops of liquor.

"Just to stave off the chill," he assured her. She choked on it, but was immediately grateful for the glow that ran through her. "I know all about the great joke," he went on, while the ship slowly turned and he watched the breeze. "The dear fellows. I owe all of 'em money. They had a right to play their joke on me. But—"

He broke off, twirled the wheel, and shouted to the *serang:*

"Swing the foreyards! Shift over the headsheets!"

While the braces squealed through the blocks and the heavy yards came around, he dragged in the spanker sheet with his own feverish strength. Then, gentling the ship to a course by the helm, he again turned to Little Fellow.

"But don't you see, the joke's on them?"

"You—you're not going to take this death ship to sea?"

"To Demerara! Want to go back, Little Fellow?"

The girl looked shoreward. She shivered in her wet bathing suit. She had dared that long swim simply to warn him, sure he could not know. The decks droned with the cries of the sick. She well knew that sour smell of the dead. While she stood there in silent wonder, Hellward called the *serang* and bade him lower a boat.

"The breeze will blow it to town," he said.

"Not for me!" she cried then. "You're crazy and you don't know what you're doing; but I'm going with you."

"You're a little heroine," he laughed, pulling her ear, "but really I think you had better go back. This won't be nice."

"I can't go back!" she stated definitely. "They won't let me land, now I've been aboard here. Show me how to steer and try to find some clothes for me."

WHILE he was gone, some of the stricken coolies saw the town lights receding. That was enough to turn their misery to panic. In a surging wave of pitiful nastiness they swept aft. Hellward stumbled on deck, with an armful of male attire, just in time to shield Little Fellow from their frenzied hands.

"Get dressed—any fashion—and hurry back," he told her, shoving her into the companionway and shutting the slide.

Then he harangued the mobbing coolies, holding the ship to her course, calling on the *serang* and *tindals* to assure the sick he spoke the truth. He told them he was taking the ship to a place where doctors of their own race could tend them. He drank from a bottle of rum while he talked, and talked wild beauty in consequence.

He gave the *serang* and *tindals*—the boatswain and boatswain's mates of the lascar crew—rum with generous hand, until they achieved a grandeur of vituperative speech which made his own efforts no longer necessary. They harangued the coolies into frightened docility, led them to the hatchways and shut them below, with promise of medicine from the sahib's black bottle.

But more than promises were needed. Little Fellow came on deck in her bathing suit and wrung out some clothes over the side.

"I washed them," she said. "Now I'm going to boil a lot of fresh water. Where's the kitchen?"

Hellward gave her the wheel and sought out the cook.

"Doctor, keep a fire going. The little lady who swam out is a nurse. Understand? She'll make us all well. You see that she isn't molested."

But the darky cook was still goggle-eyed with fear. Only in the white man's presence was he at ease. He told Hellward so without shame. Hellward hauled a bottle from his pocket, drank a lusty swig himself and handed the rest over.

"Swallow this."

The darky's eyes bulged out as the strong sugar spirit tickled his Adam's apple.

"Cap'n, ef ah only had a razzer, now, ah'd hold de fo't agin a millyum!"

Hellward grinned at the swift transformation. He fished in the only pocket that would hold anything and handed his precious razor to the "Doctor."

"Lawdy! Yo' one of ma own kind!" the darky said, thumbing the blade.

Hellward shook his head foolishly. The liquor was all awork within him. Through the haze of it he only knew that for the first time in his adult life he would have no time for shaving.

Little Fellow boiled water. She dried her washed borrowed clothes in the galley, cut off sleeves and legs and clothed herself. Outside the galley door the big-eyed negro cook stood guard with the razor, brave as a lion now. And on the poop Hellward steered the big ship, keeping every man who had shown willingness to work right there with him.

What he had to do was hard enough. The only white man on board a ship that required at least twenty men to work her, even according to the Act, which was no pamperer of sailors, he must flog the *Avon* out into the teeth of the trades in order to fetch far enough to windward to make Demerara on the next tack. It would be a nice moment when he tacked ship—with his decks full of sick and terrified coolies and a crew only kept to pitch by liquor that he needed himself.

And now, while the lights of Scarboro town still winked at the sea rim, he could still see the joke he had played on the jesters who sent him to sea. Truly nobody else could have seen the joke as he saw it. He left the wheel for five minutes. He had not forgotten his seamanship. It took him just two minutes to discover how the *Avon* would sail with a becketed wheel, close-hauled.

In the chart-room he took a sextant from its box that was clamped to the bulkhead. He had no use for the instrument just then. But there was a good big index mirror on it, which reflected his image, master's cap and all. He quizzed the reflection, swaying on uncertain feet to the ship's easy roll. No doubt he was very drunk. He shook his head at himself, reprovingly, but himself only grinned at him, and he had to grin back.

"They sent me out to square their tiddley little accounts," he grinned. "If I get out to windward and can't tack ship for lack o' men, their nice li'l island won't get bellyache. But if I can tack ship myself—all 'lone—only I got Li'l Feller—hell's bells—hot in here."

Something cold and wet around his brow shocked him into semi-sobriety. Little Fellow was there, clothed like a nymph in a scarecrow's rig, smilingly slapping her wet bathing suit to his head.

"We must first put you into good shape. then start on the patients," she said, "How far is it to Demerara?"

That showed the faith of her. Hellward never gave her an answer. Between them, the night was passed in driving the ship to a fair offing, determining the sick from the dead and reading up from the ship's library. She asked of the few poor books some light on a dark subject. He tried to discover if by any means the slog against the trades and the current might be avoided.

Little Fellow discovered much. She found that hot baths and hypodermic injections of saline fluids were still among the best remedies at her disposal. He found out that there was but one way to get to Demerara with his freight of sick and that was to drive to windward, tack ship and run down to the river.

He could run the ship ashore on the northwestern shore of South America; but that was the sole alternative. That would be the result of his laying a course direct for Georgetown, with the tremendous current sweeping up the coast on his weather bow. The landward tack would take him so close to Trinidad that even a half-dead coolie might swim the distance. The seaward tack took him so far to sea that the run to port looked like a voyage.

And he was sleepy. Not for a long

time had he gone beyond the hour of sleepiness without being able to sleep, somewhere. He held the wheel himself, watching the dark loom of Trinidad to the westward. Just as soon as the ship came within two miles of that he would put about and stand out to the northeast. Just now the trades were light. It might take four hours to come to that two-mile limit. He called the *serang*, bidding him set a helmsman who could be trusted. Then he took Little Fellow into the chart-room.

"To do a good job tomorrow, we must get fit now," he said. "Sleep. I'll call you at daylight. Don't be afraid."

She looked at him with wise eyes. Well she knew every aspect of him. If he slept now, it would be the profound sleep of thick intoxication. He would awake when wakefulness came, not before.

"Sleep," she said. "I am not afraid and I'm not a bit sleepy. I'll wake you; then I'll sleep."

To humor her, he lay down on the chart-room settee, meaning to stay awake until he saw her drowse and then to insist that she sleep. He fell into a stupor. Little Fellow bravely remained awake. But she knew nothing about navigation or seamanship. Vaguely she realized that the darkness to leeward was growing darker.

DUSKY figures gathered about the poop ladders, chattering sibilantly and pointing. Somebody called out softly and the helmsman answered. Down in the blackness of the waist the clang of a door shattered the midnight quiet. That was punctuated by a rousing African yell of fright and followed by the same African voice, yelling through a window that the cook was shut up in his galley.

The helmsman suddenly stole toward Little Fellow, silently, like a ghost. Little Fellow darted to the chart-room in alarm.

"Wake up! Wake up! I think they're—"

The helmsman caught her and seized her. She screamed. It was perhaps the only thing that could have awakened Hellward. Her scream penetrated through the fog of liquor to his brain. In one rolling, staggering swoop he was on his feet and beside her. Beside her and into the middle of a raving, panting mob of suddenly determined cravens, inspirited by the near loom of land.

His persuasive speech and his potent rum had gained him their service at first. When the rum died and he slept, selfishness ruled them. It was at that moment that the man who had once been a man came into his own. His own brain was none too clear—until Little Fellow's scream penetrated to it. But the moment that he collided with the milling mob he was awake and the complete master.

One brown face he smashed with his fist. That released Little Fellow. Through the darkness he swiftly took in all of the situation. There lay the land, with the ship snoring gently toward it at deceptive speed. The yells of the cook still cracked the air. The fall of the first man halted the rest, for they were not of the breed that fights. And over all thrummed the music of the trades in the rigging, the running harmony of the seas alongside, the echo of sick cries suddenly risen to the knell of the pack.

There was but one thing to do. Hellward saw there was no hand at the wheel. He let it remain so. The ship would come into the wind, left alone, and the breeze was mild enough to let the ship get caught aback without grievous risk. But getting aback would cause enough surface commotion to frighten some of the lascars into obedience, which was what he wanted.

Meanwhile the mob was threatening. He snatched up the coil of the mizzen topgallant halyards, a good stout rope, slung a knot into the end of it and walked, flailing, against them, grunting as each blow fell:

"Work, get rum baksheesh! No work, get rope baksheesh!"

And when he had driven them to the rail, and the ship was all in the wind, her canvas thundering and her gear clashing, he rushed upon them in a fury, cursing them fearsomely and grabbing the *serang*.

To him he made plain the fate of the ship unless she were brought about on the offshore tack. Awakened abruptly, the lees of a debauch stinging his throat, Hellward possessed arguments not to be disputed.

He drove the lascars around the black decks, from brace to brace, hauling up tacks and sheets, thumping them here, kicking them there, getting order out of confusion, until the big ship leaned the other way and began speeding once more through the seas with her head toward the broad ocean.

It was the last time that he had to beat his men.

With daylight came the beginning of his real task, which no beating might help. Little Fellow was up all night. She refused to sleep after that alarm.

As soon as the light shone on the broad decks, there was no sleep. There were a score of dead to bury. Rum and the cook did that job. Rum kept the lascars at heel—swabbing decks after the dead were launched, trimming yards to the stiffening trades, setting light sails to get every knot of speed out of the ship. Lifeboat waterkegs were emptied and refilled with boiled water. No man might drink any other water than that. Tanks were locked, and Hellward tied the keys about his neck.

At the helm he watched the ship himself. With the strong trades blowing, steering was easy; but he had to make speed, too. No ship steering herself can make the course a fine helmsman can. But there were other duties. Little Fellow must go below to see the sick coolies; and the moment the hatches were opened, up rose the wave of tortured humanity, red-eyed and frantic. Only sight of the cresting seas, the absence of the land again, terrified them beyond their sick fears.

So through the livelong day Little Fellow and Hellward, the shameful, went the rounds of mercy. A darky cook, with goggling eyes and drooping lip followed them with hot water and salt. A lean *serang* and two leaner *tindals* stared at the little procession, so fearlessly handling the unclean sick, and hoped that the time would soon come for the issue of more of the white man's black bottle medicine.

BY AFTERNOON of the first day at sea, every dead coolie had been buried and every dying coolie made clean, at least. The rest had been isolated. To them Little Fellow gave all her attention. Hellward fumbled with instruments long in disuse to find how his ship was going.

By evening the wind had strengthened and there was far too much sail on the ship. The foreroyal cracked and blew away in shreds. Hellward laughed. He had just taken a sight of an evening star, and had celebrated the finding of his position from it by opening another bottle of rum.

Little Fellow had felt his pulse and begged him not to drink too much. He had promised her. There was no such thing as too much. He knew cholera—better than she. Besides, he felt weak when he didn't drink. She couldn't understand that, of course.

At midnight the *serang* came to him, whining:

"Sahib, the *tindals* are sick. There is a dead man in the forecastle. Six men are weeping."

Little Fellow was in the saloon making tea. Hellward went forward to see the new sick. There were three dead lascars. Two were warm; that had fooled the *serang*. Cholera cases often stay warm after death.

"Get men and bring the dead out," he ordered.

The *serang* put his head under his arms and would not move. Hellward dragged out the dead, one by one, and hove them into the sea. The effort made him pant. Shaking his head, he stumbled aft and fortified himself with rum.

In the dull gray of the morning the main and mizzen royals split and vanished. The flogging of the canvas snapped the mizzentopgallantmast. Hellward looked up and did not grin. The wind was booming. The ship carried too much sail. The lascars were already lying out on deck, waiting to die, and Little

Fellow passed from one to the other with a hypodermic, hopeless, but smiling.

"Have to bring her about, Little Fellow," Hellward croaked at eight o'clock. "God knows how, but we've gone far enough to windward. You hold the wheel. I'll tell you what to do."

She saw him for the first time in daylight unshaven. His eyes were red and about his mouth there were lines which she had not noticed before.

"Why don't you sail back to the island?" she queried, taking the helm.

Her own face was drawn with weariness. There was a pitiful droop to her lips; but her eyes were brave and steady. She simply could not see how any man could handle the job Hellward was saddled with.

"Nobody else would have even thought of sailing these poor creatures down to where they belong. If you hadn't happened to be there, the folks would have taken care of the ship."

"Hold the wheel and do as I tell you, Little Fellow and you'll see how easy it is to finish a job once it's fairly started," he grinned.

He wiped his lips with a dry hand and started forward. He came back. With a bottle in each hand he went among the poor remnants of the crew. Lifting each head, he tilted a bottle until the man coughed. Soon he had four lascars tottering about the reeling decks. Then he led them to the gear, put it into their palsied hands and, together, they hauled up the heavy courses. He motioned to the wheel, and Little Fellow put down the helm.

Slowly the big ship swept into the wind. A sea curled over the rail as the bows checked. It struck two of the lascars, knocking them flat. The other two ran crying to the forecastle and slammed the door. The ship fell off with her headsails all aback, having crossed the wind. She rolled down until the sea spouted through the scuppers and clear across the deck.

Desperately Hellward plunged from brace to brace. Some of the yards took charge and swung with terrifying clash. The mizzentopmast came down. Little Fellow left the wheel, afraid that he was buried under the débris.

He appeared, his head bloody, but he grinned at her. Even she knew that the grin was nothing but a brave bluff. How well she knew his bluffs!

"She looks like hell, Little Fellow, but we've got her about, and all we have to do now is sail her. You go and rest. I'll steer."

There was no rest. There could be none. As he had said, the *Aron* looked anything but shipshape. Had a vessel sighted her there must have been an investigation. But all along that frequented stretch of sea no sail appeared—no smoke. The girl watched the man keenly. Her own face was pallid, and she felt ill. But now she had absorbed the idea that this was one thing he meant to finish; and anybody else on earth might try to dissuade him, not she.

There was no longer any sign of life in the crew. Her own sick lay in rows about the decks, bathed in sunshine and strong breezes. She could do no more for them. Even if she knew what to do, it was hopeless. She could scarcely walk.

"Rest," he frequently grinned at her.

"Why don't you rest?" she as often retorted.

THE WIND grew into a gale. A gale with a blue sky and bright sun, but a slashing wind none the less, which drove the ship thundering through the sea with sprays all about her. Every two hours the cook called out that the water was hot. Then Little Fellow tottered her dreary rounds again, with the faithful darky bearing a steaming caldron. But soon even that was no longer possible. Hellward left the wheel and caught her on her last return, as she stumbled.

He carried her to the chart-room settee. For the first time he considered putting back to the island. She must have seen it in his face.

"You won't go back now," she whispered. "You must not!"

"If you say carry on I'll carry on," he said, shaking his head.

For the rest of the day he tended the sick. That night the cook fell ill. Hellward surrounded himself with the rest of the rum and steered through the night. When a piece of gear parted in the darkness, he howled challenge. An unseen sail cracked like a gunshot, and the threshing of the rags was like a hundred whips. He drank to the sails that were left and sang ribald sea songs.

Between times he looked in at Little Fellow. Towards morning he had to drag himself. He shook his head foolishly, believing he had been drinking too much. She too shook her head, but it was because of what she saw in his haggard face. When the sun came up again, and he took out the sextant to make the morning observation, he was shocked at his own reflection in the mirror. Two days now he had not shaven.

"No wonder you shake your head, Little Fellow," he said. "I look lousy!"

He got his sight and shakily worked out the ship's place. In the daylight the ship looked like a derelict. Broken gear hung about her like tangled vines. Ribbons of canvas cracked in the stiff breeze. But she sped through the roaring seas like a clipper. Somewhere out there ahead lay the coast he steered for.

He had not slept since Little Fellow awakened him that first night out. His feet felt as if they belonged to somebody else. His head, he knew, belonged to him. it throbbed so. For hours he staggered about, looking at the sick coolies. He looked in at Little Fellow every hour. It was worth the effort just to see her try to smile up at him. The cook was curled up in his galley, sure he was dying and wishing death would hurry and come.

THERE was a gray line ahead and to starboard. The sun set behind it and showed it up. He went to tell Little Fellow, but she was asleep. He put his hand on her hair, and she put her hand on his, smiling in her sleep.

"My captain!" she murmured, half awakening.

He went out feeling queerly unstable. When he saw the loom of the land, he had entertained the notion of running direct for it and beaching the ship. There would be no settlement just there. He had meant to ask Little Fellow about it. Now he had no such notion. His feet and legs had mutinied against him. His head, even if it belonged to him, was no friend of his. He only knew that his hands were his because if he gripped one with the other he could feel the touch in both.

He went to give the cook a reviver. He tumbled down the poop ladder, neither feeling the fall nor breaking the bottle. That was something. He poured rum into the darky as long as he could hear it going down the man's gullet; then he finished the bottle in one long swig. The ship lurched and the gear clashed, as she luffed, the helm untended. His sailor's instinct drove him to the wheel at a shambling trot. Instinct held him there.

As the hours of darkness drooled along, Hellward found himself reviewing the position. He heard the weak and weakening cries of the coolies. That could not be mended. Lucky if they got in alive, anyhow. If he did, they might. That was all there was to that. He felt the uneasy reel of the ship, still carrying too much sail. She must carry it unless it blew away. So much for that, too.

Somewhere out there ahead he would soon see the Georgetown light. And before he could anchor his ship he would have to get the anchor ready. That was impossible. That was that.

There lay, to starboard, a jungle coast with a beach. He could easily run the ship on to that. And it would be so easy. And he was so weary. He had never before realized what it meant to desire sleep and have sleep to be so coy. Coy wasn't the word. Sleep now was unapproachable. He could almost see the jungle shore. A small helm, and in a little while he could sleep.

"My captain!"

Through his buzzing senses he heard

that again. She had told him to carry on. He wanted to go to see her again, to tell her she pinned her faith on a rotten reed. But now his legs would not hold him. His face was cold. There was a queer sinking at his stomach. There were whirling lights all about him. Yet that one right ahead did not whirl. He tried his legs again. They utterly refused to carry him. He could not stand at the wheel.

That was foolish. How could a man steer a ship to port if he could not stand? Thank fortune there was still some rum. He could get that, even if he could not stand. But what the devil made his stomach so queer. Like water it was. Water with lumps of ice floating in it. He reached a bottle and drank. The ice melted. Slowly. Then he knew he was flat on the deck, reaching up for the wheel spokes. That would never do.

The lights whirled. Still there was that one light ahead that did not whirl. A long way off it was; but it did not whirl. Cursing his legs, that had never failed him before, Hellward groped and scrambled until he had unshipped the two parts of the steering grating. Beyond that he had no knowledge of what he was doing. He only knew that all around that light which did not whirl, other steadfast lights were grouping themselves; and that must be Georgetown. He readily found rum and celebrated the discovery by roaring scraps of "Rolling Home" in a voice that he did not recognise and thought was rotten.

Georgetown. There was a river bar there. The *Aron* could never cross it before high water—nor without a pilot. Good. It would be almost dawn when he came up with the bar. He could never bring the ship to anchor. If his legs had not refused duty he might. If Little Fellow were not so sleepy— He cast that idea out.

Little Fellow was in the chart-room, guiding him with her good counsel. A fellow could not be in two places at once. What better than to bring the ship up on the bar? As good as putting her on the quarantine ground. That was the thing to do. They'd let him sleep then. Let the ship sail on.

LITTLE FELLOW stumbled out into the pearly dawn, frightened by the sudden bumping of the ship. She collided with the darky cook, who was also scared out of his galley by the shock.

Over the rail came a boat's crew of sailors dressed in navy rig. All stared at the *Aron's* wheel. Hellward hung there, a steering grating under each armpit, propping him up, and all around him rolled empty rum bottles.

"A proper rummy," grinned the first sailor.

"A proper man!" said Little Fellow angrily.

She told the officer all about it before fainting in his arms.

They took the ship to quarantine and her crew to the hospital. The cables brought the rest of the history from Tobago, where people who were really astonished took great credit to themselves.

The agent's wife put Little Fellow to bed, and that was the end of that, until she got well. She was more exhausted than sick.

The agent of the *Aron* brought the best doctor in Demerara, and they turned a half of the house into a hospital, solely devoted to the care of Hellward. Little Fellow was up and about long before Hellward came out of the deathlike torpor he fell into the moment the ship struck the bar. She was forbidden his room; that was because she was still susceptible to shock.

But there came a day when the door to his room was left ajar, when the doctor joked with the agent's wife, when Little Fellow was told she might peep in at him. Then she was shy. She did peep. Just a tiny peep.

She saw the nurse offer him a tray with a small glass of brandy and a tall decanter of water. He seized the brandy avidly. Under his nose the glass stopped. His nose wrinkled up curiously and he made a queer grimace, setting the glass down, still full. He said nothing to the

nurse; he simply grabbed the water bottle and drank from the neck until it was empty. Then the nurse went out with a look of amazement. She took the brandy and drank it herself in the passageway, as Little Fellow slipped into the room with a hand mirror held behind her back.

"Hullo, Little Fellow!" he cried.

His voice was weak, but it held all the joyous timber of their first acquaintance. She stepped to the bedside, suddenly putting the mirror before his face. He stared at his reflection for a moment. He passed his hand over his face. He grinned, and then he laughed loudly.

"Holy smoke! I'm clean!" he said. "Dammit, I look like a newborn infant, How about it, Little Fellow?"

"Don't know about the infant," she laughed shyly, for he was dragging at her hand, "but you are a newborn captain, if you want to be. The *Avon* agent says you can have command of one of their small steamers on the coast here. Do you know you're famous?"

"If I am, I owe it to you, Little Fellow," he said, drawing her nearer.

"My captain!" she whispered.

For Ways that are DARK

Wu Gun and the Joss Stick of Slumber

By GEORGE T. FRY

ILOBANG lay like a flower garden in an arm of the sea. The prosperous Philippine trading town had enjoyed three hundred years of prosperity. Its Capitan Chino held sway over as rich a realm as any commercial sovereign in all the East.

Every Oriental town has its Capitan Chino. He is a combination chamber of commerce, national bank, shipping agency, commercial broker, justice of the peace and adviser in general to the entire Chinese population. Old Chen Wan held that exalted post at Ilobang. How long he had held it no man knew, since none had reached his age, and he was there when the oldest of them came thither.

He was ponderous, unusually tall for a Chinaman, powerful of frame, and he displaced all of the available space in the great throne-like chair that stood in the rear of what might have passed for a general country store, decked for a masquerade. The chair was as massive and as ponderous as the dignity it was called upon to support. Its legs and arms had been carved by some master hand, long since gathered to its honorable celestial ancestors.

There hung about the walls all manner of wares. Dried onions dangled in strings. Hoes, picks and shovels were to be seen. Bags of rice, boxes of various goods—a veritable rural store that might have flourished in an Illinois river town forty years agone. Behind the store stood a great warehouse that covered what would have been an entire city block. It held the aggregate wealth of the native endeavor from all of the surrounding country. And a stockade, high and whitewashed, encircled the entire warehouse, with a huge, attack-defying gate opening on a side street only. Behind this gate sturdy Chinamen stood guard at all times. None passed that portal save the family of the Capitan Chino. Even he did not use this gate.

Nobody, for that matter, ever recalled having seen him outside of the limits of his commercial kingdom. He came to the store through a secret rear door leading to his harem. He departed through this same door, and if he, during the many years of his reign, had been one inch beyond these confines, none could remember the fact.

From time to time he had added to his supply of wives until the total now numbered seven. They were all mestizos—half-breeds with Chinese fathers and Filipina mothers. They were all fairly young and extremely fair to see. This bouquet of feminine attraction that lived on the floor above the warehouse, hung with rich, quaint and alluring stuff, was guarded with jealous care.

Its members sallied forth once each week, leaving silently through the side gate and tripping daintily to the Catholic church where they attended the Mass. They looked neither to the right nor yet to the left as they went and came. They spoke to no person. At a respectful distance followed a few husky Chinamen, regarding with superior disdain the little army of fighting cocks that the Filipinos had tethered by their legs the while they had their souls purged, prerequisite to the Sunday sessions of the world's biggest cock-pit.

Day by day, usually in the mornings, Chen Wan sat in his throne and scanned, through the heaviest rimmed and thickest pair of horn-set spectacles that ever weighted a nose, little notes in Chinese handed to him by an attendant. They concerned the making of crops, the financing of small farmers, the sailing of his ships for Manila, their cargoes and the general affairs of the day.

Some two miles from this strange citadel of trade a great sawmill whirred its way. Its owner, Algernon Buckingham, was no less of a personage in Ilobang than the Capitan Chino. The age of forty found him with a record of past performances that ought to have served any man for a lifetime. As the younger son of an English nobleman, he had wasted all of the money and patience the family could, or would, bestow. He had abused his friends, exhausted the moneylenders and cut a swath through Deauville, Nice, Monte Carlo and the Continent generally. He had gambled, he had loved and he had fought.

And then came scandal, and the name of beautiful Lady Alice was coupled with his own. And with the scandal came the decision of the family that he would do well to become a remittance man.

He took his sentence of banishment in good part. He cared not in the least whither he went, but took the first ship—anywhere.

"I will get off when the notion strikes me," he said.

And thus it came about that he was sitting in a café in Manila one fine afternoon when, over the Scotch, he fell in with Old Bader, a German trader who had been in the islands for a long time.

"You live here?" asked the Englishman.

"No, down the coast—a week's run by boat. I set up down there many years ago. Made some money in hemp and copra and the like—a little in rubber. But what gets me is that nobody has sense enough to cash in on that timber. Why, man dear, they've got a wood down there that is tough as pig-iron and takes a polish like mohogany. Some fellow set up a sawmill, but he let it go to nothing. If I had some white man to run it, It'd make us both rich."

"What's the matter of letting me have a go at it?"

"But would you?"

"I'd jolly well like the fling."

IT THUS came to pass that Ilobang shortly received a new citizen—a tall, powerfully set Englishman with a red, round face and the energy of the devil. He took the sawmill, he turned out the timber, and the money began to come in bunches. The prodigal son was supplying his own veal, with Scotch and wine on the side. Bader sold the whole plant to him and went down the coast seeking gold.

Years went by, with Buckingham acclimated in his lonely home. His one companion now was a recently acquired servant. Wu Gun was the laziest, most indolent Chinese in all the settlement; but he was likewise the best cook, and had an uncanny way of taking a basket on his arm, going to market and coming back with a wonderful supply of fine things that cost so little that his employer was prone to overlook his many apparent defects. Algie grew to half love, half tolerate his servant, who spoke no English and used a broken, pidgin-Spanish for his means of communication.

Buckingham went at times to Manila for a little fling and he became a man of such note that it became quite the thing when a worth-while Englishman wearied of Manila to run down to Ilobang for a visit to the timber lord. A strange mystery began to envelop him.

They heard of his success back in the London clubs. They wondered why he elected to remain for the rest of his days far from his early scenes. And the speculation only added to the avidity with which his fellow countrymen seized any opportunity to visit his retreat.

Captain Oliver Redmond had known Buckingham in his fastest days. He had matched his own golf skill with the dashing Englishman of other days. They had shared money and escapades. Redmond, loafing about Manila one fine morning, bethought himself to pay his ancient crony a visit. He took passage on the weekly packet and dropped off at Ilobang. Redmond had given no notice of his intention to visit his old friend.

"Did any one know where Mr. Buckingham's place was?" he inquired.

Did one? Everybody did. Each day the swashbuckling Britisher had come dashing into town on a pony that seemed hardly half his own size. He was an institution. And it was little time before Redmond found himself, duly piloted, on his way to the Buckingham bungalow.

Buckingham sat, feet on the rail of his porch, idly contemplating the vista. He recognized Redmond from afar, and he ran to greet him, throwing his great arms about the slender army captain with the affection that another might have shown a girl.

"Wu Gun!" he shouted. "Don't you know what to do for a gentleman?"

"Me no *sabe*," retorted the calm, imperturbable Chinese.

"I don't see why in hell you don't learn a white man's language," growled the master.

He turned to Redmond. "Pardon, old friend, I quite forgot that my man knows no English, and the blooming idiot never understands me in my own tongue." He turned again. "Wu Gun!"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Scotch *y agua frio, muy pronto.*"

Wu Gun moved as rapidly as his sedate habits permitted. He came with tray, glasses, and Scotch. Then he took from its hook an earthen vessel which, wet on the outside, hung suspended by a cord from the center of the ceiling. The men filled their glasses. They toasted one another. Redmond's artistic eye struck the earthen vessel.

"Curious bit of pottery, I'll say what," he ventured.

"Yes, it is a rare old vessel that I picked up from a rich Chinaman. It is worth its weight in gold. You know out here we get cold water by hanging a vessel like this from the ceiling. It is wet outside, and the process of evaporation does the rest." Wu Gun's dinner for the night was a gem. The old friends enjoyed it. They talked of other days and other places.

"Are you contented here?" asked Redmond.

"Supremely. I'm my own army, navy, police, House of Lords, Commons—and I'm king."

They went to the veranda to smoke. Wu Gun, the stupid, sat on the steps, peeling potatoes against the coming of the morrow.

"But you haven't told me what brings you out here," said Buckingham.

"Same old business—arms and the hero stuff. You know, of course, the turn of

affairs in China. We have some northern Chinese friends who are somewhat short of arms. They have some fifty thousand White Russians ready to join in the fun. Chang Tso-lin has the Russians under cover. They have no arms and ammunition—that's my business."

"How?"

"We bought up a lot of Russian rifles left in America after the war—fifty thousand of them. We have two million rounds of ammunition. We shipped the lot from San Francisco as machinery and it is due to arrive in Manila next week. Then we transship to a tramp that is in charter and off for the Yang-tze. I am going back by the next boat and engage a crew."

"What sort?"

"Chinks—northern Chinks, of course. Nobody would suspect such a crew."

"But the Chinese are not so easy to handle just now."

"Nonsense. I've Captain Owen Thompson, Lieutenant Winston Uphill and Lieutenant Gerald Hyman with me—all modest merchantmen for the time. And there is old Dave O'Rourke, the toughest and funniest quartermaster that ever sailed the seas. Those lads could handle a battleship loaded with Chinks, and we only need a matter of twenty-five." He paused. "By the way, old top, what time does the next boat go up?" he said.

"Week from today; that will be Wednesday at ten o'clock."

"Cheerio. We will forget China until then."

AND FOR the days that followed they were as merry as two children. They ate, drank and sang. They visited the strange spots about the quaint old town, and turned their hands to making a one-hole golf course.

And the morning following the arrival of Capt. Redmond, old Chen Wan, the Capitan Chino came, as was his wont, to the ponderous throne. He read the daily run of notes, handed silently by his attendant. He gave directions in guttural tones. The attendant handed him a brown slip, written in Chinese. Chen Wan looked at it long and earnestly. Then he passed it slowly over a little incense-burner at his side and it crumpled into blue ashes.

The days galloped at the Buckingham bungalow. Wu Gun seemed to become more and more trifling. His shuffling feet stumbled often on the pathway of duty. Buckingham noted that the meals were not as good as usual.

"I'll have to get a new man," he said, after cursing the offending slave one day, and hearing the unmoved, bland servant merely respond, "Me no *sabe, señor.*"

Buckingham had recourse to his usual formula—

"Scotch, *muy pronto!*"

Wu Gun placed the bottles. He came dutifully bearing the precious water-jug that had attracted every art lover that came that way.

A crash!

Buckingham leaped to his feet, too astonished to talk. His frame shook with anger. Wu Gun had dropped the precious jug and it lay, in a hundred bits, on the floor. Master seized slave by the collar. He rushed him to the front door, and with one mighty kick sent him sprawling down stairs to the lawn.

"All finished; *vamose pronto!*" roared the master.

The injured Wu Gun fled.

Tuesday night came. Buckingham, in honor of the last evening with his friend, with a new Chinaman as a cook, regaled him with choice food, wines and liquor. A couple of American officers, from a neighboring post, were bidden to the festivities.

"*Bon voyage,*" toasted Buckingham.

"A lucky trip to you," said the American, half suspecting the destination without knowing the purpose of the guest.

A FILIPINO trundled Redmond's kit down to the dock the next morning. As the two friends came along later, no packet loomed at the accustomed place.

"Deuced queer," said Buckingham.

"I've never known it to be late before."

They sauntered to the Capitan Chino's store. A dapper Chinaman, educated in the Singapore schools and speaking perfect English, greeted them.

"No, gentlemen," he said, "the boat is not late. We had a large rubber consignment that was urgently desired at Manila for transshipment to America, and the boat went out last night."

"Hell!" said Redmond.

"Extraordinary," echoed Buckingham.

"And the next boat?" inquired Redmond.

"It will surely sail on scheduled time next Wednesday," said the Chinese.

"There's nothing to do but to make the best of it," said Buckingham. "Anyway, you are in no hurry."

"No," replied Redmond," the goods from Frisco will just about be getting in then. I only wanted to be a little ahead of time, you know."

Back to the bungalow.

Another week. Wednesday morning. Redmond stood on the deck of the packet waving good-by to his friend.

Manila. Busy little tugs darted about the harbor. Flags of all nations fluttered jauntily in the breeze. The packet made its careful way to the dock. Capt. Owen Thompson stood waiting for his chief.

"Just in time," said Thompson cheerily. "Wireless says the steamer will dock tomorrow. We've got the tramp all ready—only to pick up the Chink crew. Must be northern, you know. That's a matter of an hour only, for the town is full of them, looking for work."

And the next day, the steamer from America discharged her "machinery." A husky lot of longshoremen transferred it to the tramp, and by the time they had finished, Redmond and Thompson came back with the twenty-five Chinese who were to form the crew. Every mother's son of them spoke the dialect of the Manchu.

Two days later. The dingy tramp nosed out of the harbor, headed for the China Sea. At evening, the Chinese cook, the best they had ever seen, served excellent food. He was an artist in the officer's room. He brought dainty sugared things at the close of the dinner and lighted delicate incense wafers that perfumed the room and delighted the senses.

Two more days.

A smooth sea; the crew working perfectly; meals perfect; the incense burner playing gently upon the senses; O'Rourke, the funny, keeping the officers roaring with his imitations of officers he had known. No need to be concerned for two more days—then eternal vigilance.

It was the third evening. Uphill stood watch on the bridge while his companions gathered for dinner. The smooth-treading servitor of the dining room did his offices with his usual speed. He lighted the incense. The men at table suddenly slumped in their chairs.

When they awoke, all were securely handcuffed and manacled. Chinese with polished revolvers stood guard over them.

Uphill, meantime, was brought into the room. A rope loop had been deftly dropped over his arms as he stood at the wheel, and he was a captive before he had a chance to fight. It was a surprize affair, too quickly executed to permit him to give a note of warning.

"You will be perfectly at ease," said a natty Chinese, in perfect university English. "There is no reason to be alarmed."

"But do you know that you have mutinied against the king's officers and are likely to be hanged?" demanded Redmond.

"We are told by Confucius," retorted the guard, "that life is at best uncertain and the manner of its exit is unimportant. Besides, might I inquire why your manifest shows that you are carrying machinery when you are transporting arms?"

Redmond growled.

"And what is that to you?"

"Nothing in particular," rejoined the guard, "excepting that the kind of machinery you have is needed much more by the Cantonese than by your Russians."

Redmond started.

"And," went on the Chinese, "we are

going to take the liberty of landing it on Hang-chow Bay, instead of having it diverted to the Yang-tze as you had intended. But you will be well treated. Only do not attempt to make trouble; it is useless. You see that you are guarded by Chinese soldiers."

He pointed to four men, intelligent, alert and well armed.

Four more days. Land in sight, a little inlet on the Bay of Hang-chow. The yellow men had run the gauntlet of guarding ships with rare skill—not an interfering hand from any side—British flag spanking the breeze from the stern. The ship was beached, not docked.

Chinese seemed to spring from the ground to hasten the unloading of the ship.

"Will you gentlemen oblige me by coming ashore?" asked the leader.

The handcuffed and manacled British followed his lead, under the armed guard of the alert four soldiers. A transport-wagon awaited them. They went on and on for many miles through lines of Chinese who paid no attention to them, save to salute the man who rode in front with the chauffeur—for the transport was modern and gasoline supplied its horses. The wagon at length halted at field headquarters. The leader escorted his charges to the commander, he seemed to pay small attention to them. Redmond looked inquiringly at his chief captor, and at the man of executions, with his great sword and its red silk ornament, who stood ominously in the offing.

"He says Major Ing-fu will attend to your comfort," said the Chinese.

Major Ing-fu, lithe, erect and curt, received the party with much show of courtesy. He gave a quick command in Chinese. The handcuffs and manacles dropped.

"I am depending upon your honor, gentlemen," he said. "Anyway, as you can readily see, escape is out of the question. You will be shown every consideration and returned to your own government—unless you will otherwise. That, of course, is a matter for your own good judgment. Meantime, you are my guests. I shall be only too happy to have you request anything you wish."

The four Britishers found their kits from the ship carefully placed in the ancient house that served Major Ing-fu as his workshop. They found servants to attend them. In the evening they sat with the Chinese major and talked. He was a remarkably interesting person. He knew Montmartre by night, and the Louvre by day. He knew their own London as they knew it. One evening he was particularly pleased.

"You may be interested to note," he said, "that thanks to your contribution, our forces have just won a telling success fifty miles north of here."

Redmond winced.

"And," resumed the major, "I am, with much reluctance, going to part company with you. You will be conducted to a port where you will be among your own people. I am sorry that other matters engage me."

He said it with the air of a man really regretful.

"You have been a real sportsman," said Redmond, "and deucedly kind to us. Gun-running has its chances, and we took ours. But do not think that we are unappreciative. But I would like to know how you came to find our secret."

"Gladly," said the major, with a smile.

"We knew from our intelligence service that Mr. Buckingham was much sought by all worth-while Englishmen who came to the Philippines. We knew, of course, that the British, our chief enemies, would make use of Manila; and so promising a prospect as Buckingham was not, of course, to be overlooked.

"The command sent one of our men, Wu Gun, down to Ilobang where he obtained employment from Mr. Buckingham. Capt. Redmond was one of the visitors who came that way, and he told Mr. Buckingham of his mission. Wu-gun heard the conversation. He had the Capitan Chino send out his packet ahead of time, with instructions for Manila.

"Captain Redmond enjoyed himself at

Ilobang while Wu Gun went to Manila to arrange a personally selected crew for him. One of them, a chemist, who came from Cornell University, had perfected a gas that might be released by the simple act of burning a joss stick. Its effect is instantaneous slumber—I think you gentlemen will testify to its efficiency."

Redmond grinned and nodded.

"You know the rest of the story," continued the major.

He lighted a cigaret.

"You are departing tomorrow," resumed the major. "One of my assistants will attend you."

He raised a glass.

"To your health, gentlemen."

"And to yours," said the four Englishmen.

"And," said the major, "if you chance to visit Ilobang again and see Mr. Buckingham, I beg that you will present my compliments to him."

"You know Buckingham?" queried the amazed Redmond.

"Very well, indeed, gentlemen. You see, I am—or was—Wu Gun."

FISWOODE TARLETON

tells of Kentucky Mountaineers and the Pledge of

BLOOD

SOL JETT, called "Solomon the Wise," sits on his home-made chair in front of his cabin that is shaded by a sycamore tree, folding his long beard in his lap. His woman, whose eyesight is dim and whose wrinkles and lines hold shadows, is sitting on the stoop, rubbing her knees and shins. Solomon stroking his beard in the shade, and his woman baring her legs to the hot sun. The two waiting, waiting, waiting.

The man's sharp eyes are peering through a vista in the low foliage and laurel scrub; he is watching the Leeston road at the foot of the short slope. The woman's ears are harking. His eyes and her ears are alert, waiting. Birds hop near, hop on the ends of the stub. Some sing bravely in the sycamore. A gray squirrel climbs the old man's leg to his knee. Old, scarred, yellow-tooth squirrel is looking the patriarch square in the eyes. Fighting days over, the squirrel is waiting for his grains of corn.

Solomon, called the wise, watching for the flash of a white horse: his woman harking for hoofbeats. She'll hear before he can see. They are waiting for the coming of their grandson on his blue-grass horse. Their grandson, Sheriff Floyd Jett.

The fractious, blue-grass horse will come like the wind. Faint hoofbeats in the distance will be heard. A clattering next. Then hoofs striking the red-clay road like thunder.

The old man takes a deep breath. He shifts in his chair. The squirrel climbs to his shoulder, rubs its nose against Sol Jett's ear, the ear of Solomon the Wise, so called by folks in Leeston, on the ridges and in the valleys.

Cocking her head and opening her mouth to hear the better, the woman of Sol Jett points an ear toward the Leeston road; she is reaching for sound, for the first hoofbeats of the white horse of the law—the law made by man. She leans over nearer her man as if telling a secret.

"Floyd air a-comin'!"

Her ears that hear, but his eyes that see. His eyes now fasten intently on the trail. Her part is done. She waits. Her ear has heard. His eyes will see.

In a minute he can hear the hoofbeats down the road, a clatter of hoofs. Fast gallop. Flash of white pretty soon on the Leeston road below. Like the wind the horse passes the trail before he is stopped and turned. Sol Jett can see his grandson throwing his weight on the curb-bit, using all his strength to hold the blue-grass horse that wants to race uphill.

"Floyd air a-comin'," the old man says.

He shifts again in his chair. The squirrel jumps to his knee, then to the ground. Birds take wing. Sol Jett's woman stops rubbing her shins and knees. She turns her head; her dim eyes can just see.

Vaulting from the saddle, the rider, Sheriff Floyd Jett, throws the reins over his horse's head, steps slowly to the stoop. Long mountain strides bring him there quickly.

"Well," he says, patting her head and nodding to Sol Jett. "How're the old folks. How're the pains, granny?"

"Hit air tougher, Floyd. Cain't git about much. Lucky yore grandpap's legs air a-holdin' out."

"Sun help the legs?"

"Wal, I dunno. Hit hain't a-hurtin' 'em none."

Sol Jett's eyes are fastened on the star, just showing under his grandson's coat.

"And how are you, grandpappy?" says the sheriff.

"Purty well, I reckon. Right smart fit, I reckon."

Sheriff Jett squats on the ground. He points his finger at each of the old folks in turn.

"You ought to come to Leeston to live with us. Always told you that. You'd be taken care of. Wouldn't have to move."

Two heads shake as one.

"Reckon not," says the old man.

"Cain't," says his woman.

The county officer is looking over the old woman's head; his eyes are fixed on the interior of the cabin. Both the old people see where his gaze is directed and they shift restlessly.

"How air you-uns, Floyd?"

He turns his gaze from the cabin to the timbered hillside.

"Fine," he says absently, "fine. Pap and maw and Judith all fine. Young ones all fine. Yes, 'most everybody's fine."

A period of silence follows, a silence that grows heavier as it drags along. Only the breathing of the three people can be heard and the occasional snapping of the white horse's bit as he reaches to feed on the leaves.

LOOKING at him intently, Sol Jett, called Solomon the Wise, waits, waits for his grandson, the sheriff, to speak of that which brought him in a mad ride from Leeston. The woman watches and waits. The man and woman waiting for their grandson to show his hand. Waiting to match their wisdom, years, against the quicker, more impulsive reasonings of youth.

The sheriff's expression softens; his brows that have been wrinkled and have been showing deep reflections now straighten. He looks kindly at his grandfolks.

"Tough about Clem," he says.

He draws his knees in, rests his elbows on them. His face rests in his palms and his eyes look down the trail.

"Can't understand it," he adds. "Thought Brother Clem and Ted Daniels were on good terms. Thought their fool feuding was done for. Not a month back I saw them playing cards in old man Steele's store in Leeston. And now—and now, Clem's killed Ted. My brother's started a fire that's a-going to burn for another fifty years. Trouble and bloodshed enough in these hills without my own kin starting more. Can't understand it."

Old Sol Jett fastens hard eyes on his grandson and strokes his beard.

"Hit war a-comin' tuh Ted Daniels."

The woman nods. Keeps her dim eyes on the sheriff. Her own blood but an

instrument of the law, therefore a bit outside the pale.

"Grandpappy, no man has murder coming to him," the sheriff says. "Some men are better off dead, that's right. But it's for the law to punish. I don't know yet why Clem did Ted Daniels in. Right now that isn't the point." The county officer glances around the timbered slope and down the trail. "Right now the whole Daniels clan is hunting Clem, beating these hills, combing every patch of brush. They've got this district surrounded."

The faces of Sol Jett and his woman are expressionless as they stare at the sheriff. But Floyd Jett is looking over the woman's shoulder again, gazing into the cabin. He sees the old muzzle-loader, blunderbuss gun leaning against the door frame, a gun that kicks like a mule. Within her reach, too.

"Grandpap, where's Clem?"

"Dunno. Hain't seed Clem."

Sol Jett turns his eyes on his woman. Their eyes meet. No change of expression that can be noticed; but the sheriff feels that something has passed between them. Once more he looks over the woman's head. Nothing but a cot-bed and bench can be seen. But it isn't his eyes that the sheriff is depending upon. One of those hunches that come to peace officers of long experience has come to him. Yet, he waits. Waits and wonders and ponders.

His old grandma is watching over his brother Clem like a hound over her pups. Clem, their favorite grandson; maybe because he's the youngest. Sheriff Floyd doesn't resent their caring more for Clem than for himself. Everybody mostly likes Clem. Twenty-two year old hillman. Good-looking, with all his freckles. Soft spoken, but a temper lying deep down in him—a temper that he, Floyd Jett, has never been eager to arouse. Hard-working boy, too, his brother Clem. Owns the finest cabin for forty miles around—an ornament to Porky Ridge, this cabin with two big windows that always shine.

Big clearing planted with corn. Hogs that live in clean, well kept pig-lots. Shelves of jellies put up by his grandma. Polished home-made furniture, a great chair of white oak, where his grandpap likes to sit by the hour and and look out the clean windows, when it's cold. Sometimes he gazes up at the well fitted, heavy rafters overhead.

Spick and span home, made ready for the Meadowes girl, Rana, from Cone Mountain. Rana Meadowes, one of the belles of the hinterland, going to hitch with his brother in two months. Rana Meadowes, who makes hats and sells dry goods in old man Steele's Leeston store, never made up with men until she met Clem. Shy, sensitive girl, proud and aloof, maybe, but an angel. Looks like an angel, thinks Floyd Jett. And now, now Clem's killed Ted Daniels, started a war, is under the shadow of the rope.

The county officer rises and steps higher up the slope, where there is an opening through the pines, where he can see across the valley to Porky Ridge. His eyes sweep the wooded ridge-side for five minutes. He's about to return to the cabin when he perceives dimly, between the summit and base of the ridge, things moving. Men moving. He returns to the cabin. Stands near his grandpap.

"Why'd Clem kill Ted Daniels?"

"Dunno. Reckon he had tuh."

It's possible they don't know, the sheriff thinks. Wouldn't really have to know if Clem didn't want to tell. Being Clem, being the pet grandson, he'd be in the right. He'd have their protection without telling why he did in Ted Daniels.

A faint sound reaches the sheriff's ears, a woody squeak. His grandma hears it too and her eyes flash to the sheriff. The old man doesn't move, doesn't bat an eye; his ears didn't catch the sound. Now the old woman fills the whole doorway with her body, lies lengthwise across the doorstep, glances at the rifle-gun and watches the sheriff again. She's a forbidding guard. First time he's seen her

sit on the step. She's always in the other big chair made by Clem.

"Granny, Clem'll be a lot safer with the law." He leans nearer. "Know that the Daniels, Cherries, Shakespeeres and all them are closing in from all sides? Know what'll happen if they take Clem? They'll swing him sure."

"Law!" says Sol Jett. "Huh! Thar hain't but one law fitten tuh trust. An' yuh reckon Clem's kin air a-goin' tuh set quiet when the Daniels pack o' skunks come hyar. Reckon we-uns seed tuh hit 'at our own folks'll be a-ready. Blood law! 'At's hit! Law air a-settin' in the blood. Law hain't in co'te houses. 'An' hit ain't on yore goshamighty badge. Reckon we-uns air a-goin' tuh set like sleepy hound-dogs when tha Daniels and them come to fotch Clem. Hain't fer nothin' I walked half tha night to git our folks together. I reckon thar'll be none o' 'em a-holdin' back. We-uns know whar tha law sets. Yuh got larnin', Floyd Jett, and yuh got tha law 'at's writ in books."

Old Sol Jett leans forward in his chair. His eyes are hard and sharp.

"Law 'at's writ in books. Law 'at men git from word-readin'. Wal, 'at law o' yores cain't be trusted. *Blood kin!*"

The sheriff gives a sigh. His face remains passive.

"Yes, blood can be trusted, though the law doesn't sit in it. You don't mean law, anyway. You mean loyalty or something like that. You mean sticking by."

"Wal, stickin' by air tha law!"

"LISTEN! I want to get Clem away with a whole skin before that Daniels gang traps him. Clem'll be safe until trial. He'll get a square deal," says the sheriff.

The sound of distant gunfire comes from across the valley. The three people know what it means. The Daniels and the Jett clans have met. The firing is rapid at first, quick and fast at the first clash. Then, as men find cover, the shooting becomes intermittent. Shots grow farther apart. Men are behind trees or boulders and ledges. Evenly matched in marksmanship, they are all cautious.

"Clem!" The sheriff says it.

Sol Jett stiffens in his chair. His woman, with a swift movement, grabs the rifle-gun. With the butt under her arm, she covers the sheriff, who remains standing, passive.

"Clem, I know you're in there. Listen to me. They're coming for you Clem. They're going to trap you, like a rat, and swing you. Want to save you. Want you to have a fair trial. Don't make me come in there after you."

"Reckon our folks kin hold tha Daniels," says Sol Jett; says it to Floyd Jett, but his words are not meant for him.

"Clem! Know that granny's got me covered? Know that if I come in after you she'll shoot? She's got the old muzzle-loader. I'll land in the cabin without a head on my shoulders. But I have to come Clem. Have to! Because you're my prisoner."

"Reckon our folks kin hold the Daniels," repeats Sol Jett.

"Know that there'll be three to one against them? Maybe more. Know that the Daniels can hold our folks and spare enough men to trail down Clem?"

The sheriff takes one step forward and his grandma cocks the rifle-gun.

"Hear that, Clem. I take another step, and what happens?"

Sol Jett sits rigid in his chair. His fingers twitch and grip his beard. He looks at his woman, seems to be trying to get her eye. But her eyes are on the county officer. Her finger's on the trigger, ready to squeeze.

"Clem, I'm going to take another step, maybe two. Your grandma'll kill me. In half a minute, Clem. Going to start in after you."

Ten seconds pass. Then footfalls. A pale face framed by the doorway. A muscular, wiry, bared arm reaches over the woman's shoulder, takes the gun without her resisting.

"Knew you'd come, Clem."

The county officer whistles and the white horse trots up.

"Don't want to put the bracelets on you, Clem. Want your word you won't make a break."

"Won't break."

Shooting comes again. Sounds nearer. Talk becomes sharp, quick. Sharp command to the horse that backs near the stoop.

"Jump to the saddle. Don't touch the ground," says Floyd Jett. That dog of the Shakespeere's will run you down this far. That man-killer. Want to get you to the court house before they're wise."

Clem Jett, clearing his grandma's body, jumps to the saddle. The white horse rears; his eyes flash. It takes soft words and patting before the horse settles, before the sheriff can climb on. The horse, unused to carrying double, shakes his head and prances. Hoofs cut; small feet go deep in the ground under the weight of two men. Just before disappearing through the mouth in the trail the sheriff, glancing back, sees his grandpappy leveling the hoof-holes with a hoe.

"Grandpap'll do that clear to the road," says the sheriff. "Won't anybody be able to tell that a horse came in here."

"Cain't hear yuh, Floyd," says Clem Jett.

"Just talking to myself."

THE SHERIFF'S thoughts are unspoken now, but they are still connected with his grandpappy. The old man hasn't lived his seventy years in the wild hills for nothing, even if he is wrong about some things. And folks don't call him Solomon the Wise without reason. For the preachers who argue with him, who try to get him to meeting, to the altar, and for the circuit judge and circuit attorney he always has the same answer.

"Law, hit sets in tha blood," or, "God Jesus, he sets in tha blood. Don't set in co'te rooms. Don't set on the pulpit."

Makes no difference, Moses or Blackstone; his grandpappy means all law; all men are ruled by their blood. Extravagant maybe, but the sheriff has seen the wisdom of his grandpappy borne out by life sometimes, many times. He's seen men with learning stumped by the old hillman who can't write or word-read. Learning must be in the blood, too. Are all things in the blood of men to stay, to build or destroy?

"Things of the blood," the sheriff says out loud.

"Air yuh a-speakin', Floyd?" Clem Jett says it close to the sheriff's ear.

The county officer doesn't answer. He pulls his horse to a stop where the trail ends at the road. Both men listen and peer up and down the road. When the sheriff gives his horse the spare spur, he starts to bolt; he's eager to run, race some more, even with a double load. Floyd Jett holds him down to a slow canter. The horse's mouth is held open by the tight curb, yet he pulls hard on the reins. The red clay road begins to curve around the hill, and the sheriff can't see very far ahead.

"Floyd," Clem Jett whispers.

"Yes."

"Yuh know 'at Cherrie gang hain't fer roun' tha hill. Thar shack air close tuh tha road. Cherries and Daniels air kinfolks. Maybe thar a-guardin' tha road from this end."

Pretty soon the sheriff halts his horse and pats the animal's neck gently with the palm of his hand. He looks around and listens. He can hear nothing ahead, behind, or on either side. Yet he feels that he's hemmed in with his prisoner. Things are too quiet. To go back is worse than to go ahead, because a mile back the clay road dips into the creek-bed and the creek-bed lies between Nightcap Mountain and Porky Ridge, where the two clans are warring. And he'd be going away from the court house and Leeston.

They must go on. Safety lies ahead in Leeston, if there's any such thing. But ahead, the Cherries—some of them, at least—are on the lookout; they are covered by pawpaw bushes or laurel

scrub, ready with rifle-guns. And the Cherries can shoot anything which moves.

Floyd Jett's eyes fasten on the embankment on the left, a steep bank reaching twelve feet to the dry creek-bed. Creek-bed of big stones, polished and worn smooth by old, old torrents, heavy mountain rains ages ago and ages back beyond those ages.

Dismounting, the sheriff throws the reins over his horse's head, just as a deep-throated baying comes from across the valley. The sheriff sees his brother pale slightly and twitch his face muscles. The man-chewing dog of Ned Shakespeere is on the trail; must be just leaving Clem's cabin, with a fresh, clear scent clear to his and their grandpappy's shack. The Daniels are holding the Jetts while the dog comes on. More rifle shots. But the bayings still come. There's a space of time only thirty seconds long when the sheriff's mind seems to clog. But the half-minute seems an age. Clem is twitching his muscles fiercely. The sheriff bites his mustache, looks at the embankment again.

"On my back," Sheriff Jett whispers, "on it quick!"

Puzzled, Clem Jett transfers his hundred and fifty pounds from the horse to his brother's back and shoulders without touching the ground. The horse shys at the sudden movement; then he steps to the opposite roadside to crop grass. The county officer, when he gets his balance under the load, steps to the embankment. It's steep, and his heels go deep into the soft earth. At the foot of the bank he shifts his load again and, stooping, makes his way carefully under cover of the embankment, keeps close and tests each stone before he throws his weight.

Slow work. Seems to take hours to reach the log ford which the sheriff knows is below the Cherrie cabin, out of sight of the men who are surely lying in ambush. Clem, to keep from slipping off, locks his hands around the sheriff's throat.

THE BAYINGS of the Shakespeere hound sound nearer and nearer. When the log ford is reached there's a struggle up the bank. One step at a time, sometimes two steps back to keep his balance, the sheriff finally stands on the road, again peering up and down. He whistles. He is answered immediately by the clatter of hoofs. Soon, the saddle stirrups swinging, the white horse comes like the wind, his head held just high enough to keep the reins off the ground and free of his forelegs. The horse stops short when the sheriff steps out of the scrub by the roadside and holds up his hand.

On the horse again, Clem Jett slides back on the horse's rump, giving the sheriff leg-room to mount. They are off once more.

Clem Jett speaks close to the sheriff's ear—

"How about Gus Andrews an' them?"

The sheriff shakes his head.

"They're all right. Friends."

They have a straight road ahead for half a mile. Passing a trail mouth they see two men with axes standing by a white-oak tree, open-mouthed and big-eyed. The sheriff waves his hand; so does his brother Clem. These gestures of greeting seem strange—racing with death and throwing salutes to the two Andrews men. Gazing back, Clem Jett sees the Andrews men throw down their axes and start up the slope. For their rifle-guns; they're friends of his brother Floyd; they'll enter the war, too, on the Jett side.

Pretty soon the sheriff slows down his horse. A quarter-mile down the road he can see where the roads entering Leeston make Five Corners in Leeston, and he can see the elm trees that shade the court-house yard. Sees a mountaineer, afoot, coming down the east road toward Leeston, carrying a scythe blade. The hillman's legs move in slow long strides.

"Broke his hay-cutter handle," says Clem.

Sheriff Jett looks around at his brother,

his brother who's being hunted and whose mind is far adrift of vital things. The sheriff shakes his head slightly. He can never tell for sure, can never even guess what his brother is going to say or do next. Speaking gently to his horse, the sheriff holds the animal down to a walk.

The eyes of the sheriff become sharp; he's feeling ahead with his eyes. He'd like to get his prisoner in jail without anybody's noticing. He knows that, besides the curious town-folks, there's likely to be one or more of the Daniels clan in Leeston, ready to carry the news back to the hunters of his brother. So with his eyes fixed down Main Street, he walks his horse slowly past Five Corners, cuts across the road to the drive leading to the court house and his barn.

He sees that the porticos are deserted, but there are forms lying in the grove below the business stores. Just before the drug store building comes between the grove and him, he sees a figure rise in the grove and make off slowly. Another figure emerges from the doorway of the bank building; it's Gabriel Jett, a cousin. The man who got up in the grove is one of the Daniels crowd. Both watchers will hustle to inform their own.

CLEM JETT slides off the horse on to the step at the back door of the court house and follows the sheriff inside. The horse makes his way to the barn. The two men pass down the hallway, past the cells to the sheriff's office stairway leading to the court room above and past the cells to the sheriff's office. Jailer Saul Bankey is asleep in the big chair. When Jett touches him on the shoulder he opens his eyes and stretches, spits out the window. When he rises to give Sheriff Jett the chair he sees Clem.

"Wal," says Jailer Saul Bankey and shakes Clem's hand. "Wal."

His face is suddenly clouded. The signs in his face and manner are like barometers. This old mountaineer jailer, uncle of Floyd Jett and Clem is as sensitive to the atmosphere of peace and war as a delicate instrument. He feels atmosphere. Most mountaineers, through generations of private warfare, have something of this dog instinct, premonitions of what is coming, but Saul Bankey has it strong.

The sheriff watches the shadow on the jailer's face; so does Clem. The brothers read the signs.

Before the jailer can ask, the sheriff tells him about getting Clem away from his grandpap's before the Daniels and their kin surrounded the place, before they nabbed Clem, before "Judge Lynch" had a chance.

Pulling his chair away from the window, the county officer motions for Clem to sit on a stool, Saul Bankey leans his gaunt form on the edge of the desk.

"Clem, what was it Ned Daniels did to you? Why'd you do him in, Clem?"

The young hillman frowns to himself. His eyes are solemn and look down at the floor. He traces out something on the floor with his boot-toe.

Sheriff Jett makes out the "R" his brother traces in the dust on the floor.

"Clem," says the sheriff softly, "it's best for me to know everything. He puts his hand on the young hillman's shoulder. "Anything to do with Rana, Clem?"

Looking up at his brother, Clem nods his head.

"'At's hit." Then he looks at the floor again.

"Let's have it all, Clem," says the sheriff. "It's going to make a difference. I've never found you in the wrong, Clem. You see I can be stronger if I know what —what I'm fighting for. I mean—"

The sheriff pauses, conscious of a slight slip he made. He's fighting for the law, for justice. He mustn't let blood ties inflame him, influence him. "Law sits in the blood." He wishes this philosophy would stop creeping into his mind, wishes his grandpappy hadn't spoken that way. His grandpappy's words are taking on a rhythm; they are like a persistent drumming in his ears.

"I mean, Clem," the sheriff continues, "I mean that it's better for you and for me and for Saul here to know. Did Ned

Daniels commit anything, did he do anything to—"

"No. Didn't touch. Jes' said."

"Said to who?"

"Ned Daniels, he tole me somethin' 'bout him an'—her. Hit war a lie."

Saul Bankey grows red in the face. He brings his fist down hard on the desk.

"Hit war a lie effen hit war bad. 'At's right."

"Clem," says the sheriff, "what did Ned Daniels say, that he cut you out? That he was courting—her? Anything like that?"

The young hillman hangs his head, looks at the floor again.

"Ned Daniels said he war a-courtin' her heavy."

"Huh." The sheriff looks at Jailer Bankey. The eyes of both men flame. Both pull at their fingers, breathe heavily. Clem looks out the window, over the head of his brother.

"Said—"

"Yes, what else, Clem?"

"Said—she air easy."

Jailer Saul Bankey's face is a livid red. His mouth sputters.

"'At—"

"Sssssh."

The sheriff shakes his head at the jailer. The sheriff's face is burning, too. His blood's rising against his will. Rana Meadowes, who is to marry his brother in two months, slandered!

"Where'd you meet Ned Daniels," asks the sheriff.

Clem Jett looks up now.

"On the crick road. Reckon both o' us war arter rabbits—dogs along. Ned he fust begin a-sayin' I warn't so damn smart, a-sayin' I warn't so damn choice in choosin' gals. Wal, 'at's all he say fer a bit. But I knowed what he war a-comin' tuh. 'At is, I knowed he war a-throwin' slam-words at—her. I jes' lay my rifle-gun upside tha crick bank an' went fer Ned, aimin' ter take hit outten his hide an' head. Ned, he war afeard ter mix, an' kep' a-backin' down tha crick, his rifle-gun a-coverin' me. Nex' thing I knowed he war a-callin'—

"Fine an' easy, Clem!"

"Seemed like he war a-singin' hit, makin' a tune outten hit. When I reached fer my rifle-gun he let loose. I heered tha bullet a-singin' past my ear 'an I up an' popped Ned Daniels square. Went home then, an' then to grandpap's."

Jailer Saul Bankey is about to explode again, but is silenced by the sheriff.

The county officer leans very close to his brother. Speaks almost in a whisper.

"Wasn't anybody heard Ned Daniels say these things about Ra—about her?"

"Nobody heered fer as I know. An' nobody hain't a-goin' ter heer. Not even my grandpap."

Floyd Jett's eyes grow moist. He steps to the office window and looks out. So this is the way Ned Daniel's persecution of Meadowes had to end. This is the way Ned Daniels aimed to get shut of Clem— Thought Clem would believe. Thought Clem would lose his faith. Ned Daniels didn't take into account some things; he didn't consider that the better folks wouldn't lose faith in Rana.

Yet there are those in the hills and the settlements, who would cling to and feast upon Ned Daniel's words of nastiness and untruth. In Leeston, where laziness and idleness and jealousy are the chief pastimes of the no-accounts, they'd spread slander like fire. In the hills or villages, once a bad report gets out about a woman or girl, she's ruined. Gossip evolves into a horrible, twirling monster—an anaconda that crushes and breaks the spirit. Let the slanderous lie that Ned Daniels flung at his, the sheriff's, brother in the creek-bed find lodgement in one gossip-hungry ear, and there would be plenty to pass it along, plenty to believe, plenty to see to it that Old Man Steele made Rana quit his store.

But the worst tragedy would be the death of Rana Meadowes' spirit, the blow to her highly sensitive nature. His brother has evidence that can't be used, a defense that a fair-minded jury would free him on quickly. And he can't use it, won't use it to save his neck.

A wall seems to suddenly surround the

sheriff. Evidence that's forever locked. Clem Jett, his brother, sitting on the witness stand, dumb. Convicted. Prison for life or hanged. The county officer shudders to think of it. He stoops over to his brother Clem; pats him on the back. And Clem smiles. He understands.

WHEN the sheriff turns again he sees something down Main Street which holds his attention. Under the porticos of the business stores, men are appearing one by one, walking stiff-legged, all carrying rifle-guns, rifle-guns tucked away in their jean pants. They lean against the posts of the porticos or back against the walls near the doorways. The sheriff recognizes them; they're all his kin and Clem's. His kin, or some of them, got to town first. First, second, third, even fourth cousins. The Farrels, Valentines, O'Gowds, hurrying to town from far hills, when the word was passed along.

Long mountain strides, turning aside neither for laurel, bramble or rocks. The sheriff can picture them—grim soldiers of the blood, keeping up the steady gait for mile upon mile. The kin of the Jetts have the advantage; they have the doorways of the business stores. Doorways are small forts; and the stores are retreats, if they are pressed too hard.

Wheeling suddenly, the sheriff goes to the front court house door. He stands on the steps and peers up and down Main Street. He fixes his attention on Five Corners and on the fenced-in pasture beyond, where a dozen hillmen are lying down. Their bodies are unmoving; their big felt hats are pulled down over their eyes; but, under the hats, sharp eyes are watching the enemy under the porticos and the sheriff on the court house steps. A springless wagon, drawn by a bony black horse, comes down the Porky Ridge road and stops near the meadow fence, behind a patch of saplings. The saplings and the brush shield the wagon from view.

Sheriff Jett knows that in that wagon, probably covered with sacks, are rifle-guns, one for every man in the pasture. But God only knows what a hillman's strategy is going to be.

The men under the porticos find doorways now and pull their rifle-guns out of their jean pants. Some kick their hound-dogs and order them home.

Atmosphere, the feel that comes before mountain warfare, is like the ominous heaviness before an approaching storm. Things now are strangely still. The souls of men seem to break off all signs of life. No whispering, even; just readiness. Now and then a hound-dog whines, paces up and down the road without purpose, puzzled as to where to go. This atmosphere makes those outside the threatened conflict seek cover.

Fallon, the druggist, issues from his doorway. The hillman, standing there, steps amiably out of his way while he locks the door. Fallon steps swiftly down the street and disappears into an alleyway between the harness shop and restaurant.

Old Man Steele takes in his bread and vegetable boxes. He's carrying in the last one when Rana Meadowes steps out under the portico. She throws quick glances around; then she runs her hand across her brow, looks toward the court house. She steps off the portico, down to the road and starts toward the court house yard. The sheriff holds up his hand. Old Man Steele runs after her, pulls her back into the store.

A woman is sewing before an open window in a small house next to the general store. She looks out and suddenly lays her work down and rushes out to pick up a kitten on the porch. The windows come down, and the shades. The restaurant-keeper, Old Man Dodie, the harness maker, the cashier of the bank, have a look outdoors and bolt their doors.

Leeston is bound and locked, both sides of Main Street from end to end, except the court house. Only the men standing in doorways like carvings and the sheriff are visible. And the silence becomes tight. A single leaf falls from an elm that crowds the portico, flutters in

the air, draws the eyes of men in the store ambuscades. The hound-dog whines again.

Beyond Five Corners, in the pasture, a hillman rises, walks slowly over to the fence bordering the South road and climbs under. He walks slowly across the road, his eyes looking down Main Street. He disappears in the thicket on the other side of the road. Pretty soon he comes back, taking another look as he crosses to the pasture. The sheriff knows that in the short glance of the hillman his eyes took in everything. Crossing, his eyes took in the west side of the street; re-crossing they took in the east side.

In the pasture again, he squats. The other men don't look up, don't lift their hats; they are listening under the cover of them, though. Their ears are wide open and the man who crossed the road is talking. Another hillman rises and crawls under the fence bordering the Leeston road; he follows the road until he's out of sight of the sheriff.

Sheriff Jett looks down the jail hallway, sees his brother and Jailer Saul Bankey come out of the office, walk over to a cell and stand.

"Floyd!" Jailer Bankey says it low.

"Yes."

"Air we-uns a-goin' ter lock up Clem?"

The county officer takes another look up and down the street.

"Put him in a cell but don't lock it." The sheriff doesn't look around as he speaks.

"I hain't a-promisin' nothin'," says Clem Jett.

Sheriff Jett doesn't seem to hear. Jailer Bankey opens the cell door. Clem Jett enters, closes the door mechanically.

The sheriff leaves the door and walks briskly to his office. He takes four carbines from the gun-rack—extra guns for deputies who are sworn in sometimes for a man hunt. The sheriff sees that the magazines are full and stands the carbines against the wall. He shuts the front court house door and bolts it and he locks the rear door.

From the window in the sheriff's office, he and Jailer Saul Bankey watch and wait. The atmosphere seems to be heavy, as if it is weighted with a humidity, a heavy silence before the thunder and lightning. The deputy sheriff somewhere in the hills serving papers; the other laid up with a bullet in the shoulder. The sheriff thinks of Steve Dodie, the town marshal.

"Where's Steve?" the county officer asks.

Jailer Saul Bankey scratches his head.

"He air at Anathoth. Said this mornin' he reckoned he better fotch 'at scamp boy Len Taney from Anathoth hyar. Len Taney he got rarin' drunk and shot up tha town, yuh reco'lec?"

"Yes, know all about it. So Dodie just happened to think of going after a window-smasher, and his town's about to be riddled. Huh! No deputies; no town officer. Can't swear in any deputies; can't swear in my own kin. And neutral folks are in hiding. Hate to do it. Hate like hell to do it. Got to, though. Just got to do it. Can't handle it all alone. Can't fight a whole army. And I've got a prisoner to protect. First duty's with my prisoner."

Sheriff Jett walks to his desk and picks up the phone. With his hand on the receiver he still hesitates.

"Hate to ask the Governor for the militia. Looks like I'm weak. But I can't fight an army alone, can I, Saul? Can't protect my prisoner if the Daniels break down the door. And I can't see a war go on in the town. Got to ask for the militia, Saul. If the mob of Daniels isn't stopped in time, if they batter down the doors, if they get their hands on Clem—"

"Hit air tha on'y way, Floyd," says Saul Bankey. "We-uns cain't stop 'em effen they git tuh tha door. We-uns air jes' two; hain't a army."

"Yes, got to do it."

The sheriff takes down the receiver. He makes his request quickly, sharp to the governor. No need of stretching out his humility. Odds thirty to one. A prisoner entitled to a fair trial. A mob bent on lynching. The street lined with the

prisoner's kin. The sheriff rattles off the situation. Says thanks. Hangs up the telephone receiver.

"Had to do it, Saul."

"How long yuh reckon afore thar a-comin', the fightin' men?"

"Well, they're camping between here and Anathoth. Been on sort of an endurance-test march. May be here in two hours. Can't say. You know these roads. Governor said he'd telegraph the company at once."

JAILER SAUL BANKEY, who has been looking out the window, suddenly calls to the sheriff.

"Look yander, Floyd. What yuh reckon 'at Valentine boy air a-levelin' his rifle-gun at?"

The sheriff sees the tall thin figure in the doorway of the general store, aiming his gun up toward Five Corners. Sees a flame leap from the muzzle, hears the crack that identifies a Mauser. Other guns speak from other doorways—a rattle of gunfire that sends the sheriff to a front window in the hallway. The mob from the pasture tried to advance on the jail from the pasture, but they are being driven back. With no protection from the hail of bullets, they retreat to the pasture, carrying two wounded. The kin of the sheriff and Clem, secure and invisible in the deep doorways of the business stores, stop their fire.

A lull now. But it's more unnerving than the sounds of conflict. The advance of the Daniels from the pasture was checked; but there's the unknown to be reckoned with. There's some new strategy forming, new tactics. Jailer Saul Bankey's face takes on lines of deep concern. The sheriff opens the front door and peers out. He sees several hillmen bending over the wounded in the pasture, tearing off their sleeves and binding arms and legs. Then he sees them all, except the wounded, stand up in the pasture, look down Main Street. Looking and waiting. For what?

It's a half hour before the answer comes, a half hour of suspense.

In his cell Clem Jett walks back and forth. Jailer Bankey's face seems to be frozen in its expression of concern. The sheriff, standing at the front door, twists his mustache and leans on his carbine. Not one answer, but many come. A score of rifles, most of them repeaters, speak so fast from the grove below the business stores that the fire seems to issue from a Gatling-gun. Windows of the business stores smash.

The men standing in the doorways of the business stores return the fire. Caught between two points of assault, they step out only to fire and then duck back. Blood enemies settling down to steady war. The sheriff and Saul Bankey see the Valentine boy waver on his legs, clutch at the window frame of the general store, back unsteadily to the door and sink to the floor. The two officers see the door open, see the form of Rana Meadowes appear. She drags in the Valentine boy and closes the door again.

A steady fire comes from the grove now, and the men in the pasture make another advance. They advance without being under fire now. Held to cover by the wing in the picnic grove, shooting from behind thick elm trees, the men in the doorways are powerless to check the score of hillmen advancing on the jail. The man standing in the doorway of the bank building, one of the Farrels from Nightcap Mountain, a cousin of the Jetts, topples over, lies on the floor and feels his side.

The hillmen from the grove spread out as they approach the jail. When they're fifty yards away, the sheriff holds up his hand. They stop, listen to his warning, listen to his arraignment of the uncivilized, lawless taking of the law into their own hands. Some of the hillmen spit their contempt. Some laugh. Some shout to advance. All hold rifle-guns ahead of them ready for quick throws to the shoulder.

Without warning, a shot is fired at the sheriff. He feels the whip of the wind over his head; the tail drag of the bullet lifts his hair. The bullet punctures the

two-inch oak door as if it were paper. Sheriff Jett makes a quick throw to the shoulder and fires. The man who fired at him drops his rifle-gun; his arm hangs useless.

Springing back, the sheriff closes the door and bolts it again. Twenty rifle-guns make almost a sieve of the oak door. A few slow, big caliber bullets, after puncturing the door, drop with a thud.

The jail windows shatter now. Lead bullets strike jail bars and drop, flattened like buttons. Steel-jacket bullets ricochet, fly their erratic courses, hunting soft spots to lodge in. In the grove below the business stores and in the court house yard, a steady fire. Men lie helpless in the doorways of the business stores. Twice the sheriff and Saul Bankey spring to the window for a pot-shot and spring back. Bankey catches a bullet in his hand.

Clem Jett comes out of his cell and grabs a carbine, takes the place of the jailer at the office window. Floyd and Clem Jett are making a last stand. The door is quivering from the rush of men, the hurling of their bodies against it. The sheriff fires through the door; he empties his carbine and grabs another. A low cry comes from outside—the thud of a falling body. Frenzied hate, blood hate, is impelling the souls of men, making them indifferent to danger.

The door's going to be broken in; seems to be no doubt of that. It seems to be Clem Jett's destiny to swing from a tree limb. He leaves the office window and joins the sheriff in the hallway. They back down the hallway when the screws in the bolt on the door begin to loosen. They back as far as the stairway leading to the court room above. The forty-four, loaded is in the sheriff's holster.

"When the door comes in, it'll mean surrender," the sheriff thinks.

"Oblivion, when the door comes in," thinks Clem Jett.

Clem thinks of the green in the court house yard, looks through a back window at a plot of thick high grass. Soon green will turn to blackness, then oblivion.

"Wait!" says the sheriff. "Listen! Hear anything?"

Neither man seem to be sure of their ears for half a minute. The assault on the door suddenly stops. The gunfire is silenced in the grove below the business stores.

"Horses," says the sheriff.

"Horses," repeats Clem Jett.

Yes, horses. The thundering of their hoofs on the clay road grows louder—a rush of hoofs mingled with shouts. Running to the shattered front window, the sheriff and his brother see the hill mob retreating toward Five Corners and the pasture, carrying its wounded and hurrying madly away from the onrush of the mounted State Guard. The two men see the cavalry of the militia in hot pursuit, see the soldiers swing from their saddles and cover the hillmen.

Another detachment of the Guard is taking prisoners in the picnic-grove or running them down before they can reach the narrow trails on the mountain back of the grove.

Folks are coming out of their homes and business stores now. Some are helping the wounded, who lie in the doorways. Old Man Steele looks out the door of the general store, then brings out his box of bread and crates of vegetables and brooms. Rana Meadowes comes out and stands under the portico, shading her eyes and gazing at the court house. She's slender and pale and unnerved.

IN THE hallway of the court house, the sheriff touches his brother Clem on the shoulder.

"Got to lock you up, Clem."

The two walk toward the end cell; but they are stopped by a hollow, unharmonious, cold laugh coming from the crowd, gathering around the general store's portico. The sheriff and Clem Jett instinctively look through the office window. They see Gabriel Lackey, the degenerate from Porky Ridge, standing in front of Rana Meadowes. He's laughing and brushing one forefinger over the other, making that sign of shame,

devised somewhere, sometime, by the sons of men.

Clem Jett goes pale, then livid. Then there *was* a witness to the shooting in the creek bed. There *was* a pair of ears that heard. Down by the creek, hidden in the brush or behind a tree, this Gabriel Lackey, this long-haired and whiskered shell of perversity and filth, heard Ned Daniels yell the lie about Rana Meadowes. And he'll pass it on; he'll whisper the lie to some willing ears, and it will travel, spread like the forks of lightning.

"Come Clem."

The sheriff gently pulls at his brother's arm. And while he urges, a conflict goes on within his mind. Out there in that shell of degeneracy is evidence that could clear his brother. A fair-minded hill-jury, chosen from neutral men, would free his brother in ten minutes. Yet—

Clem Jett makes a quick movement, jerks the sheriff's forty-four free from its holster and backs down the hallway to the rear door. He throws back the bolt and, still covering the county officer, peers out. The militiamen and their prisoners are out of sight in front of the court house.

Reaching the stable, Clem Jett mounts the white horse and dashes out, not down the drive but back of the court house, down a narrow lane that runs the full length of the town. He turns the blue-grass horse into an alleyway between the drug store and restaurant.

Gabriel Lackey, across the street, is still making the symbol of shame. Rana Meadowes, puzzled, drawing her hand across her forehead, starts to retreat into the store. A town idler is whispering to Gabriel Lackey and the degenerate is about to whisper back; he gives a laugh.

The white horse plunges, mad and snorting from the spurring of Clem Jett's heels. He crosses the road in great bounds, silencing talk in the court house yard, making the militiamen sit rigid on their horses, making the commanding officer pause in his ascent of the court house steps, making the captured hillmen open their mouths, too surprized to speak.

By the portico men and women flee from the rearing horse, narrowly escaping his flying hoofs.

"Rana!"

Rana Meadowes, stepping to the edge of the road, is pulled up to the saddle, in front of Clem Jett.

Gabriel Lackey turns to a town idler.

"I'm a-tellin' yer I heered somethin'."

"What yuh heered, Gabe?"

"I'm a-tellin' yer I heered somethin'. This-un knows somethin'. Funny, I'm a-tellin' yer."

"What air hit, Gabe?"

"The town idler pulls his ear over near Gabriel Lackey's mouth. Two women creep up near, cock their heads.

"Ho-ho!"

Gabriel Lackey leans over, his eyes leering at Rana Meadowes.

The first word of his, the degenerate's whisper is cut off by the roar of the forty-four in Clem Jett's hand. The listeners are robbed of their joke, since a man can't talk without a mouth.

Before the bystanders realized it, before the captain or his militiamen realize it, the white horse bolts through the yard between the general store and the little house. Everybody hears the rattle of hoofs in the dry creek-bed road before there's any perceptible movement, before the hillmen prisoners shout to the mounted Guard.

The sheriff leaps from the court house steps to the yard, grabs a Springfield service-rifle from a militiaman and mounts the nearest horse. The county officer scatters the knot of people standing around the writhing, fallen form of Gabriel Lackey; his horse hurdles the body and follows the path taken by his own blue-grass mount.

In the creek-bed road, Sheriff Jett stops his horse for a few seconds. He can't see up or down the creek. Too many twists and turns. But he hears hoofbeats coming from up the North branch, spurs his horse onward, follows.

Pretty soon the creek-bed straightens out for almost a mile, and the sheriff has a glimpse of the blue-grass horse, of

Rana Meadowes held tightly in front of his brother—Clem Jett's slender figure sitting like a centaur.

The sheriff fires in the air with the Springfield, then in the direction of the fleeing fugitive. The two shots only make Clem Jett drive the blue-grass horse harder. He disappears around a sharp bend.

For a few minutes the county officer lets the militia horse slow down to a walk, thread its own way between the rocks, go around the boulders, instead of stepping over them, hesitated before clearing a hole.

Jett is thinking, thinking that if Clem Jett's caught he'll have no defense. He'll swing to spare Rana. It's in the Jett blood, this chivalry that was strong in his ancestors who fought with the Stuarts, with Washington; the chivalry that attended his forbears when they followed Dan Boone over the Wilderness Trail, through Cumberland Gap to face warring Shawnees. And chivalry's still in the blood, as strong as it was at the Jamestown landing.

The sheriff straightens up in the saddle. Snaps his fingers in front of his face. He's sheriff, not judge. Yet, here he is, holding court. Trying his brother's case. About to give a verdict. Sheriff. High-sheriff, about to acquit his blood-kin!

Blood! Blood! Gallantry in the blood.

Again his grandpapy's words ring in the sheriff's ears—

"Law hit sets in tha blood."

The glint of the star, pinned to the sheriff's shirt, flicks the tail of his eye. Flashes a code, flashes a pledge. Pledge of the blood!

He spurs the militia horse. The horse bounds. The blue-grass horse is faster, thinks Jett. Built for speed. For dashes. But he's carrying double. Legs too thin. Thoroughbred's too high-bred to carry his load far. Won't last to the county line.

The stocky limbs of the militia horse fall into a steady gallop. The creek-bed resounds to the clatter of hoofs. Sparks fly from the shadowed gravel. The corners of the sheriff's eyes see the blooming tops of the high laurel strangely—mad mountain-men's faces, white with froth.

"Watch for this Man—
Suspected of Murder"

The Pearls of Lingay

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

POWELL'S eye caught the words in black letters as Tromp was opening letters and newspapers. The schooner *Aldebaran* had brought mail to the island of Gooralaya. Now she was close-hauled on the port tack as she stood out through the entrance to the bay, making a good slant for the reef opening. The rising moon made her sails plainly visible from the open *kajang* of the Grand Hotel of the Far East, which was owned by Tromp and operated with a native staff.

Powell gave no sign that he had seen the police circular. He had arrived in the *Aldebaran*, and now he was in a chair with his white-shod feet on the high sill of a front *kajang*, watching the schooner sailing out into the moonlight. He was a young man, dressed in clean white duck. He had all the outward signs of prosperity. With him he had brought considerable baggage. Tromp, having not a single guest in his hotel, was glad enough to welcome a man who announced an intention to stay for several weeks; besides, Powell had already shown a willingness to spend a dollar without looking at both sides of it before he rattled it over the tap-room bar.

WATCH FOR THIS MAN—SUSPECTED OF MURDER

Powell's attention had been attracted to the black printed heading on the sheet of paper by a thump of Tromp's great hand which made the lamp jump on the table. Powell turned and peered at him questioningly.

"Again, all the time the police want me to be working for them!" exclaimed Tromp disgustedly. "For nothing do I run a business only to catch men what are murdering!"

"What's that?" asked Powell.

He grinned a little; but his affability did not overcome the look of hardness in his thin and heavily tanned cheeks. His gray

eyes were keen and searching as he turned to Tromp, pretending to be puzzled by the words of the big Dutchman.

"Why not the government sends men to stay here in Goorabaya and arrest men for themselves?" demanded Tromp. "I can't chase these duffers!"

He held out the circular to Powell, who picked up his big sun-helmet from the floor and swung round so the light from the lamp would strike the reading matter.

Tromp leaned back in his rattan chair and blinked his blue eyes at the lamp. He was a man of tremendous bulk, with yellow hair trimmed so closely that his pink scalp showed under the stubble. He reached for his pint-size porcelain pipe and swung its curving bamboo stem to his mouth, puffing, to find that it had gone out on him. He reached for a bowl, full of rough Sumatra tobacco, and began to fill the pipe.

"Somebody kill somebody somewhere," growled Tromp as he sucked at the stem of the pipe, "and to Goorabaya they come quick, mostly! So! The policers from everywhere sends me orders how to catch 'em up." He sighed dismally.

"Oh, I see," said Powell. "This is a warning circular for a man who had committed a crime."

"Sure!" said Tromp. He waved his hand to the wall near the door, close to where Powell sat. "Plenty I got of such stuff. Look! On the wall up. Nobody pay me rent for hanging such foolishness. It gives a bad look to my hotel—strangers read all of it and go away quick, with so many crookish pictures. I look like a jail already."

Powell turned and looked at the swale wall before he resumed reading the circular in his hand. The wall was decorated with many police warnings, some of them with pictures of wanted criminals. Though there were many other slips posted, such as notices to mariners and other government data, the wall was chiefly taken up with the rogues' gallery of men wanted by the police from Sydney to Singapore, from Manila to Hong Kong. Tromp's hotel was a clearing house for all such information, it being located on an island which was a port of call for vessels trading or picking up cargoes from various islands in the group.

"There's a lot of money offered as rewards," said Powell. "If I give that exhibition a good study, I might recognize some of the birds wanted and make a pretty good thing out of it." He laughed lightly, as if this amusing idea appealed to him.

Tromp gave a snort of disgust.

"Huh! A lot of fat this put on my ribs! Not so, Mr. Powell. Never I can catch one so I make a profit from it. But troubles from it I get plenty."

Powell leaned toward the lamp and scanned the poster with care. It had apparently been prepared with haste in order to catch vessels leaving for the southern islands, so there would be no delay about forwarding the alarm. This is what Powell read:

> There is a reward of $1000 for this man, maybe more later. He was seen on the island of Lingay a couple of days before Andrew Burns, owner of pearling fleet, was shot and killed in his house. Fifty thousand dollars worth of pearls and some cash, taken by the murderer, who evidently escaped from the island in some vessel which sailed before the murder was discovered. Notify and hold for us or warn masters of vessels entering or leaving your port.
>
> Name, Giles, so far as known. Either an American or Australian. White, brown eyes, left leg or foot a little lame, or he had a sore foot. Seen on beach several times by natives employed by Burns. Wore white but dirty trousers, khaki web belt, jacket of blue cotton; probably stolen from a Chinese, soft brown shoes. May try to sell a pearl or two. May hide in jungles near settlements and steal food, waiting for months before attempting to ship as sailor. Will want change of clothes, probably; and any man of beachcomber type, even if in good clothes, may be the wanted man. Take no chances—this man is probably armed, is a killer, so do not let him know you suspect him in case a man appears who answers in any detail the description.

POWELL tossed the sheet back on the table.

"You'd better keep a sharp eye out for this man, Mr. Tromp. He's likely to

show up here—and it'd be quite a feather in your cap to catch him."

"Feathers!" exploded Tromp. "By jump, all the feather I want I can pick from off chickens what I got myself. Feathers I can not eat and pay bills with already."

"But a thousand dollars," said Powell, "that's a good profit."

"Sure, you get it, good it is," agreed Tromp, "but what I do with him, I catch him? Shot do I want to be for catching him?"

"No," said Powell, "you'd find it dangerous to monkey with a man like that—his neck is in a noose already, and one murder more or less means little to him."

"And easy I am to hit, too," said Tromp with a grin.

Powell laughed heartily.

"That's so, you're a pretty good target. But fifty thousand dollars worth of pearls are nothing to sneeze at. I wouldn't mind picking 'em up myself."

"Huh! You not find the pearls, I bet! Hiding 'em he would be, a slick one like that."

"I'd keep that paper out of sight, if I were you," said Powell.

"From sight? How you mean?"

"What good does it do to post it up on the wall? If this man Giles comes along, the first thing he'll read is all police warnings, and then he'll know you've got his description. That may make him more dangerous. Why, he might even shoot you, because when he sees it, he'll know that you've read his description, and he'll want to fix you so he can get away again."

Tromp thought over Powell's idea. It seemed logical. If a man came to the hotel and did not know his description was published and a reward out for him, he might leave again by another boat and have no inkling of the fact that he was wanted until captured by the skipper or turned over to the police of some port.

"No," he decided. "If I not put this up, maybe I lose my concession—but I hang it behind the door up."

He hove his great body out of the chair, groaning as if the process were painful to him. He took the sheet and walked to the wall, drew the door back and stuck the poster over a nail in a strip along the swale wall. Then he pushed the door back, masking the circular, winked at Powell and, puffing on his pipe, walked to the rear of the room and scolded through the back veranda to the cook-house because dinner was late.

"YOU DIDN'T seem to recognize me," said Powell, when Tromp returned to the table and gathered up the clutter of papers and mail, getting ready for the coming meal. Powell grinned up from his chair. "I've been here before, you know."

Tromp stared across over the top of the lamp.

"You! Before, I have seen you?"

"Certainly. I was here about four years ago."

Tromp looked puzzled and annoyed.

"Never, my friend," he said slowly. "I have see a man once, again I always know—and you I have not see before this day."

"Nonsense!" declared Powell. "This time you're fooled. I'm an agent for a ship-broker in Manila. I came here to sell a schooner to the planter that had Lindsay's plantation before Lindsay bought it."

Tromp took a couple of steps toward Powell, leaning forward and peering closer.

"Maybe you are right; I am old getting."

Powell laughed and clapped his hands.

"I had the corner room upstairs, and there was a bamboo ladder from the upper veranda at the same end as my room."

"By jump, I guess you know, yes," declared Tromp.

"I remember that ladder. It was handy. I could walk out on the veranda and come down without using your creaky old stairs."

Tromp brightened.

"Yes, it is so. Before you have been

under my house—four years back I have the ladder, yes."

But still there was a look of puzzlement in his eyes, for though the mention of the ladder convinced him that Powell had been there before, the hotel man's recognition of the guest was not actually accomplished. He continued to stare questioningly at Powell.

"Oh, I know what's wrong," said Powell. "I had a mustache when I was here before and I've got it off now. That's why you didn't recognize me."

Tromp grunted assent.

"If you go shaving yourself to pieces, how can I know it?" he demanded with a chuckle.

He reached for the big lamp's halyard and drew it down from the center of the ceiling, applied a match to the wick and hauled the lamp up again. In this better light he took another survey of Powell.

"It is so," he declared. "I know now, my friend."

But Tromp lied, for he did not want to admit that he could not remember Powell.

"I missed the ladder against the porch when I came up from the beach this afternoon," said Powell. "What's become of it?"

"Oh, the ladder! Yes, she blow down in the big wind last year. Out back it is. Again, I can put it up, if you like, my friend."

"Fine!" said Powell. "Then I'll take that same corner room that I had before."

"In the morning, I fix the ladder," said Tromp.

"Would it be any great trouble to put it up tonight? Then I can go down in the morning without waking everybody; sometimes I rise early, and I like a walk on the beach before breakfast."

"Sure!" said Tromp. "I tell the boy. Easy it is to fix, and quick. But there is no trouble about waking up people around here—I wake sometimes my boys with a board."

Tromp stepped to the rear veranda and gave orders to Malay servants to get the ladder back in place. In a few minutes there was a banging outside and a rattling of the upper veranda.

"Now, not so long, we have something to eat," said Tromp.

Powell yawned and stretched his arms.

"I'm pretty tired," he said. "Didn't sleep very well in the schooner last night, and I'm almost ready to drop in my tracks."

"You feel better, you have a good rice-table," said Tromp.

"Maybe I'd better go up to my room and have dinner sent, if I could. Then I can tumble into bed. If I should wake in the night and feel hungry, I could have something there for a bite, you see."

"Just what you like, we can do it," said Tromp.

"No other guests, you say?"

"Nobody, not for some time I have here. Mr. Lindsay, maybe, come over tonight for a game of cards. But if you stay long, I be kept from going bust." He gurgled at his joke.

"I'm in no hurry to leave, but if a little coasting steamer comes in this way, I'll go to either Zamboanga or Java."

Tromp shook his head doubtfully.

"Not so many steamers come, unless maybe somebody wants to come here. Nobody know how long it be before you to Java can go."

"I need a rest," said Powell. "It's nice and quiet here. I wouldn't mind if I had to stay a month—my pay goes on just the same."

He yawned again and looked about at the clutter of his bags and canvas-roll. He moved toward the stairway.

"I show you the room, yes," said Tromp.

He called for a servant. A Malay came running from the rear veranda and, at Tromp's order, loaded himself with the luggage and started up the stairs. Tromp followed, with the small lamp in his hand.

On the landing Tromp led the way to the left to the corner room. The door was of laced rattan on bamboo frames. The boy went in when Tromp opened the door.

There was a great cane-bottomed bed,

with a long bolster, or "Dutch wife" running from head to foot. There was a table and a wash stand. A spacious clothes-closet, made of a rattan door and two side pieces of split bamboo against the partition of the adjoining room, stuck out into the room. The sides or front did not run up to the rafters, so that it looked like a great chest standing on end.

Part of the room, especially over the bed, was covered with canvas laced to the walls. This was a protection against dust falling off the bamboo rafters and exposed thatch, where lizards crawled about. Frequently bats got into the room and disturbed the dust overhead on the rafters. The mosquito-netting over the bed was folded on the wire frame which was strung around the head and foot posts. Two chairs were near the small table.

Tromp opened the *kajang*, which swung inward from rattan hinges at the top; it was really nothing but a section cut out of the wall and transformed into an awning, a door and a window, all in one. Outside was the upper veranda, with its low-hanging eaves of thatch.

"You find comfort here," said Tromp, as he pointed out to the moonlit palm grove.

Powell stepped out to the shadows of the veranda and looked at the shining sea. The *Aldebaran* had made her northing after passing the reef-break and was out of sight. The ends of the ladder stuck up over the railing close at hand. He struck a match for a cigaret.

"Yes, this is fine Mr. Tromp," he agreed. "So peaceful. I think I'll wait here until my dinner comes up."

"For this room you are the boss," said Tromp. "But the lamp—it is more better not to leave it here with the *kajang* open, so many bug come, you know. So I blow him out."

He snuffed the flame of the lamp and creaked away over the bamboo floor and down the stairs.

Powell smoked in silence for a few minutes, pacing slowly up and down the veranda. He could hear the chatter of the Chinese cooks in the shack at the back of the hotel. Tromp suddenly broke out in scolding and warned them all that, unless they kept still as mice, not one would be left alive by morning. They were still for five minutes after his tirade; then once more the chattering resumed.

The boy presently came up with a great tray, lighting his way with a candle. Powell stepped inside and looked at the food. There was a great pyramid of rice, with fried chicken, roasted yams, a bowl of gravy for the rice, a big bowl of turtle soup and tremendous slices of bread with brown crusts. There were dishes of green vegetables, a pitcher of water and a bottle of pale red wine.

Powell gave the boy a tip and snuffed out the candle. He went back to the veranda for a minute; he took three matches to light his cigaret this time. He resumed his pacing.

AS POWELL turned to the end of the veranda, with the moon behind him, he saw a figure rise slowly to the top of the ladder. The head and shoulders of a man stood clear in sharp silhouette. Powell moved swiftly toward the ladder and, as he reached it, the man on the ladder swung off lightly and stood beside him.

Walking in step, Powell and the man moved to the *kajang* and passed into the room. The newcomer made for the bed and sat upon the side of it. Powell lighted the candle and secured the door to the landing with an inner wire hasp. Then he closed the *kajang* and, lifting the table with the food, moved it toward the bed. The man who had just arrived made a gesture of satisfaction at the dinner placed before him.

The newcomer, seen in the close light of the candle, was wearing a brownish beard of several days' growth. His tanned face was round; his bearded jaw was heavy; his brown eyes glistened with sweat. He was panting slightly, as if he had been running for some time before he climbed the ladder. He wore white trousers that were dirty and a trifle short.

A khaki web belt held them in place. His feet were covered with brown cloth-topped low shoes in a bad state of repair and the socks hanging down from his ankles were of different colors—one brown, the other black.

"That blasted ladder was on the moonlight side of the house," he whispered. "If it'd been on the dark side, I'd 've made it easier."

Powell clattered the dishes around on the tray for a minute.

"What's the odds now?" he asked. "You made it, and that's good enough."

"I don't think anybody saw me, at that," went on the other cautiously. "Getting off the schooner was the hardest. I thought she'd sail on me before it got dark enough; but as luck had it, she was close to the warehouse and, when the moon came up, the shadow was thick."

"Everything worked slick as a whistle," said Powell. "Cut loose on the grub."

"No fear of me not eating. With things this way, we can stick it out for weeks, or as long as we have to."

Powell nodded.

"If anybody comes, and I have to open the door, you just duck for that closet and lay low. If Tromp sees you, the fat's in the fire. He's seen your description; but he hung it behind the door."

"Sure it won't get lost there?"

Powell grinned and helped himself to a plate full of rice.

"Mr. Giles, you've got a suspicious brain. How could a police circular hanging on Tromp's wall possibly get lost? Eat your chow and don't worry. There's more than one way to skin a cat."

II

POWELL could hardly believe his eyes as he turned from the warehouse to go back to the hotel and saw a strange man lying in the hammock in the palm grove.

"Where did that bird come from?" he asked himself. "No vessel in sight in the eight days since we've been here—and a new bozo pops up in that hammock!"

It was early in the morning. Powell had not breakfasted yet. He had taken a short walk on the beach and then dallied about the warehouse for a quarter of an hour or so, waiting to be called by Tromp when breakfast was ready. And in the few minutes that Powell had his back turned to the hotel, this amazing thing had happened.

Tromp always had a hammock slung between two trees in the palm grove, about midway from the veranda to the beach. And this man in it, lolling at full length and smoking a cigar, seemed as much at home as if he had been there a week.

Powell could see that the stranger wore a blue suit and a white shirt. His hands were folded under his head and his feet were thrust high at the other end of the sloping hammock.

"It must be Lindsay, the planter!" Powell told himself.

So he moved on, changing his direction a little to walk straight up to the hammock.

Glancing at the upper veranda, where Giles was probably on watch behind the *kajang*, Powell got another surprize. His eye caught a flash of red and he knew at once that Giles was flying the danger signal that they had agreed upon—a red handkerchief hung on the raw edge of the wall, where the *kajang* was cut out of the swale front of the hotel. But the morning breeze was blowing the handkerchief inward, so only a little of it was in sight. And Giles did not dare to step out on the veranda and set his signal in a better position.

"Giles has heard something, that's a cinch, and he's been trying to get my attention. And it strikes me as mighty queer that the first fifteen minutes I've not kept a close eye on the veranda, this stranger should be hanging around!"

He hesitated a minute, wondering whether it would be better to go straight to the hotel and learn what Giles knew, instead of trying to scrape an acquaintance with the stranger. It seemed the wiser plan to move to the hammock, for Powell could pretend that he thought the man in the

hammock was Tromp. It might look suspicious to attempt to evade the hammock, under the circumstances.

"I'll take the bull by the horns and see what I've drawn," Powell decided.

With head bent as if in thought, he idled along, picking at the fallen palm spines with his stick. He advanced to within ten feet of the hammock without being hailed. He knew that the stranger was watching him closely. Looking up suddenly and showing a little surprize, as if this were the first time he knew anybody was about, he nodded, smiled and said:

"Oh, good morning! I—I didn't know —anybody was here!"

The man in the hammock did not lift his head. He took from his mouth a badly chewed cigar, turned his head sidewise and spat to the ground. His face was burned brown; he lacked a shave and his bristly cheeks were marked with deep lines; and his teeth were stained. His forehead was furrowed with a pair of sharp vertical lines that began between his black eyes, so his aspect was stern and forbidding. He was not enthusiastic about making friends.

"Yes, it's a pretty fair morning," he grumbled.

He stared at Powell, as if disapproving the clean white suit with the carefully pressed trousers, taking in every detail from shoes to sun-helmet. And he made not the slightest attempt to pretend any agreeableness.

"I've heard of you, sir," went on Powell. "Glad you've come over—it's a bit quiet and lonesome here."

The stranger looked startled. A puzzled look came over his face. He sat up in the hammock and spat again. His light blue suit proved to be dungarees faded from much washing—trousers and jacket such as seamen use for working clothes. But the shirt was of fine quality, white and clean except for droppings of cigar ashes. A gold watch-chain hung athwart his front from each side pocket. The man's stubby fingers were marked from the middle knuckles to the backs of the hands by patches of black hair, and the hairy-backed hands were scarred with sea cracks that were healed. His low shoes were of a leather that had a reddish hue, but they were of surprizingly good quality for a man who was wearing dungarees.

"Oh, you've heard of me, have ye? Is that so? All I can say, mister, is that's news to me."

He looked disturbed and his voice was a low growl, tinged with menace. His right hand, which was on the side of the hammock away from Powell, slipped down to his belt.

"Why, you're Mr. Lindsay, the planter!" said Powell, now a bit surprized himself.

"I thought you made a mistake. No, my name ain't Lindsay—and I ain't no planter. My name's Harrington."

"I'm sorry I made such a mistake," Powell hastened to say. He looked confused, turned a little and took a step away. "Didn't mean to intrude. I just —just didn't know there was any other white man on the island—that is, there's been no boat—"

"No, there ain't been no boat that you know about," said Harrington with a grin.

He seemed pleased that Powell was embarrassed. His lips, stained by the pulpy cigar, hung limply with an insolent expression. Then he screwed up an eye, took the cigar in his teeth again and gave it a testing puff to make sure it was not totally dead. His eyes wandered over Powell, watching with care for the slightest move and studying the well-dressed man with reflective intensity.

Powell glanced to the upper veranda. He could make out a vague shape in the shadows at the side of the partly open *kajang*. Giles was watching the conversation.

"I think I'll go on up to breakfast," said Powell.

"Don't let me drive you away," said Harrington. "You know, mister, I didn't come to Goorabaya to bite anybody. I expect to be kicking around this place for some time, so we'll probably know one

another better—and I don't believe I got your name, but you got mine, mister."

"I was so surprized," confessed the other. "My name's George Powell. I'm an agent for a ship-broker, Mr. Harrington. I'm stuck here for a few days, waiting for some vessel that'll take me on my way."

"You don't have to 'mister' me—just plain Harrington's good enough. And I'm pleased to meet you, George Powell."

There was the same hidden insolence in his tone, and he grinned as if he had a joke on Powell and already knew all about him. And Powell did not like the way the loose lower lip lifted at the side and showed the dirty teeth in a fang-like way.

"Maybe you'll come along and join me at breakfast, Harrington?"

"No, I've had mine already, thanks."

"Oh, you've been in with Tromp?"

"Sure have. I took a shot of coffee and let it go at that for now. But you tuck some chow under your belt and come back and we'll chew the rag a little. I've walked ten miles this mornin' and my dogs are good and tired."

He made a gesture toward the beach, in the direction of Lindsay's plantation, which was opposite from the way Powell had gone walking that morning.

"Oh, you came that way; but I didn't see you. And that beach is in sight for a long way."

Harrington frowned a little.

"No, I guess you didn't see me. I struck a trail in the brush after I passed Lindsay's place and come into Tromp's joint by the back. But there ain't nothing wrong with the way I come, is there?"

Powell gave him a quick glance.

"No, I didn't mean that, of course. But I've been in sight of the beach and I couldn't see how you got here from Lindsay's way, and I not see you. And if you know a brush trail, you've been here before."

"Never been here before. I just hit that trail by luck, and the beach was a little hard goin', and the trail was easier under foot."

"Then some vessel has been past Lindsay's?"

"Yeh—put me ashore before daylight way beyond Lindsay's."

"I suppose so," said Powell. "You could hardly make ten miles afoot since daylight, and it's not seven yet."

Harrington cleared his throat harshly and spat. Again he was annoyed.

"Before daylight's right. And maybe it looks shady, too. That's what you're thinkin' in your mind, ain't it, Powell?"

He threw back his head and gave a gruff laugh that was not without mirth, a jeering laugh that mocked. Powell joined in the laughter. It seemed the better thing to do.

"No, I could hardly think there was anything suspicious about a matter I knew nothing about. And what if I did feel suspicious? It's certainly none of my business, anyway; but I've been puzzled, that's all. Sorry you think I'd want to probe—"

"No offense, no offense," Harrington broke in heartily. "I tell you what, Powell, I am down here on what might be called a business that's a little under cover."

"How do you mean?"

"I'm lookin' for a man that I'm fairly sure's hidin' on this island."

Harrington lifted his head turtle-wise and peered around him, as if fearing that there was a chance that he might be overheard.

"A man hiding? Why, what's he hiding for?"

"I ain't prepared to say just yet. But you can be kind of a help to me. I'm on the hunt for a man with a lame foot."

Powell tilted his sun-helmet to the back of his head and shifted his feet.

"That the only description you've got?"

"It's the best part of it. He's a beach-comber, in old clothes. I thought maybe if you'd been down the beach that way, you'd seen something—signs of smoke and so on, or old fires—or anybody that jumped out of sight into the jungle."

Powell shook his head.

"Why, no, I can't say that I saw anything suspicious, unless it's tracks, and if your man's lame we could—"

"We'll have a look at 'em later," said Harrington eagerly. "And we'll have to keep a sharp lookout for that feller! He's a mean *hombre*. He shot a man, a few weeks back, and robbed him."

"You mean you're after that man who shot Burns, the pearler on Lingay?"

Harrington gave a quick kind of jump and sat up in the hammock.

"How the hell did you know about it?"

"All I know is that Tromp got a notice about the man—and his description. It's a police warning, posted up in the tap-room."

Harrington dropped back into the hammock and gave a long low whistle.

"Oh, so there's a circular out! That's news to me. I didn't think a police circular'd get down this far in such a short time."

"There's a thousand dollars—something like that—for the man," said Powell. "I didn't pay much attention, naturally, but Tromp handed it to me and I read it over."

"I ain't thinkin' about the reward," said Harrington. "My row with this bird I'm on the hunt for is that Andy Burns was a square man, white as they make 'em. And I'm goin' to make it my business to get this man who done for him."

"I rather think the police will get him."

"What good are the police when a man gets away on these islands? Just send out notices—that's all they do. And what's the good of that? I'll give him a notice that'll stay with him, if I can drop a gun-sight on him."

Harrington leaned over in the hammock and tapped the butt of a revolver that was in his hip pocket.

"Then you must have known Burns well?"

"Know him! I worked for him three years. I ought to know him. It was me that found that last bank of pearl-shell that put a fortune in his pocket. I had charge of some of Andy's pearlin' boats. And then this vag of a beachcomber comes along and blows Andy's back out and cops the pearls."

"How'd you know he'd got on this island? I've been here eight days, and Tromp has said nothing of seeing any beachcomber."

"He just naturally must have hit this way. What other place would be handier for him from Lingay?"

"But there's been no boat here from Lingay for weeks and weeks, according to Tromp."

"He wouldn't have to git here straight from Lingay, of course. I was away with the pearlin' schooner when Andy was shot. That's the schooner that dropped me off this mornin'. And she's coming back for me in a week or so, when I've scouted this island."

"It'll be a big order to hunt the jungles of Goorabaya for him. I doubt you could catch him that way."

Harrington shook his head.

"No, I can't comb the jungles; but if I stick around this hotel long enough, he's bound to show up in time—here or at Lindsay's place. That's what I'm bankin' on. He'll be snoopin' around not far from here, keepin' an eye out for a ship to get away again."

"Have you seen Lindsay?"

"No, I aim to later, but no great hurry. I'll go over in a day or two."

Powell turned to the veranda of the hotel.

"Yes, you ought to warn Lindsay. He'll want to know it if there's a murderer running around loose on the island. Well, see you later."

"Say, don't spill the beans to Tromp on this thing," said Harrington. "He's a gabby old party, so the less he knows the better."

"Oh, certainly, I'll keep a tight lip if you like," and Powell moved away.

Tromp was missing from the tap-room, but his voice placed him somewhere in the rear of the building. There was a steaming pot of coffee and some hot biscuits on the table, and Powell helped himself to breakfast.

TROMP returned presently, wearing his old straw hat. He had onion shoots in his hand, and a trowel, evidence that he had been messing about in his little vegetable garden. He gave a prodigious wink and twisted a thumb in the direction of the palm grove before Powell brought up the subject of the new guest.

"Look out for this feller who just come. A gun he has got in his pants and he comes private on Goorabaya. A boat puts him before the day on the land, and that's always bad monkey business."

"I talked with him a few minutes, and he's a queer customer. I can't say that I like his looks myself."

"Such eyes he has got I do not like," went on Tromp in a quiet tone. "And such a snooter he is. Everything he looks over."

"How did he look things over?"

Tromp gestured to the wall.

"Oh, everything he can see. Too, he looks at these policer papers, careful a lot, like maybe he's got his brother there. And he asks about you, also."

"Oh, so he questioned you, eh?"

"Everything he want to know about you, my friend. When you come, when you go maybe, where to and how much money almost—do you spend it plenty he ask."

Powell lighted a reflective cigaret.

"What room has he got?"

"Up next to you beside," and Tromp pointed to the ceiling with his trowel.

"Maybe he's a *secreto*—a detective."

Tromp shook his head in doubt and bent to peer out through the *kajang*, to make sure that his new guest was still in the hammock.

"Fine *secreto* he would be, that duffer. More like he come from jail out when nobody is looking."

He went behind his bar and fumbled in boxes and drawers, looking for seeds. Powell was not much impressed by Tromp's opinion of Harrington. Tromp was likely to judge anybody by their clothes, and a man in dungarees would not rank very high in the estimation of the hotel-keeper.

"What did he say he's here for?" asked Powell.

"Oh, a cow-and-cock story he tell," said Tromp in disgust. "Always the same lies such duffers tell. From a fishing boat he says he landed, and soon the boat come back for him. That business I never likes; it means troubles for me always."

"Yes, I rather think he's lying," agreed Powell. "We'll keep a close eye on him; but if you're wise, Tromp, you won't let him suspect that we think there's anything wrong about him."

"Polite I can be to his money, yes. No matter how I like him, he spends a little cash and don't steal nothing, I got no bother."

Tromp wandered out the back door, bound for his vegetable garden, his pipe in full blast.

Powell got up and looked over the police circulars on the wall. He drew the door back to look for the poster that described Giles. It was missing from the nail.

"So he read it before he talked to me, eh?" said Powell. "I can see that Mr. Harrington is a pretty foxy party."

He turned to the *kajang* and looked out. Harrington was still smoking in the hammock. Then Powell sat down at a table, slumped down in his chair so that his legs were well under the table, spread a newspaper over the front of his coat, the sheet so slanted up against the edge of the table that a servant or any other person entering the tap-room would think that he was reading.

He unbuckled a money-belt about his waist, reaching in through the front of his shirt. He drew the belt partly out and, extracted from it a ball of cotton. Examining the tiny ball of cotton, he made sure it contained a small pearl of fair value. Six of these little cotton balls came from the belt. They were transferred to a sheepskin wallet, which revealed tiny pockets when the sides were opened like a book.

Securing his belt again, Powell walked to the stairway and, taking care that he

was not observed by Harrington, went up the stairs. When he had gained the landing, walking with great care, so as not to make any noise, he hesitated a minute and listened.

The door of his own room was closed and, as he knew, made fast from the inside. The door of the next room was open. Powell cautiously made for the open door. The *kajang* was opened for an airing, there were fresh sheets laid out on the cane bed, and a pitcher of water was near the washstand.

Powell crossed the threshold and gained the clothes closet, which was against the wall farthest from the wall of his own room. The closet, like his own, was lined with loose canvas strips hanging from the top, as protection for clothing against the sharp ends of the interlaced split bamboo which formed the wall.

Powell left the wallet with the pearls wrapped in cotton on the floor behind the loose canvas strip.

As he was about to leave the room, he craned his neck and looked into the palm grove. He saw that Harrington was sauntering up through the grove toward the hotel.

Getting down on his hands and knees, in order to equalize the strain of his weight on the flooring, he got out on the landing and made his way swiftly down the stairs, reaching the tap-room before Harrington arrived.

III

GILES was roused from a sleepy state of mind by the voices of Tromp and Harrington in the tap-room. Powell had gone for his early morning stroll of observation, and at first Giles thought that his companion had returned.

But there was no mistaking the fact that a stranger had arrived at the Grand Hotel of the Far East and, to the surprize of Giles, Powell seemed to be unaware of the fact that a new guest was in the tap-room.

Giles made for the *kajang* and looked out. Powell, his back to the hotel, was near the warehouse down on the beach. And there was no sign of a vessel, either in the harbor or at the jetty near the godown.

Without delay, Giles put up the red handkerchief which was a signal of caution to Powell. And about that time the stranger moved into the palm grove. Giles watched him go, thinking he would keep on to where Powell was standing. But the newcomer made for the hammock, and a few minutes later Powell discovered Harrington.

Servants came up and prepared the room for the new guest. This warned Giles that the stranger would be on the other side of the swale wall. And it might be handy to observe the new guest when he had no idea he was being watched.

The clothes closet, which Giles used for hiding, was against the partition which separated the two rooms. Inside the closet, Giles waited until the Malay servant had gone below, and then he pried a tiny hole through the swale wall which backed the closet. That gave him a peep-hole into the room that Harrington would occupy. As the walls were like the texture of a great basket, it was not difficult to separate the strands of woven bamboo, and such a hole would not be noticed in a wall made of tiny interstices.

Giles was watching at the hole, when Powell came up and deposited the wallet with pearls in Harrington's clothes closet.

In a few minutes Harrington and Powell were in conversation below; both ordered more coffee from the bar-boy. Giles listened, but he could make out little of what was said. He felt that they would be in the tap-room for the next few minutes, so he unfastened the door, slipped to the landing and moved into Harrington's room. He closed the door behind him as precaution against being seen by a house-boy.

Giles took considerable time to reach the clothes closet, both because he did not want to betray his presence to those below by the creaks that went with rapid movement over the floor and because he wanted to make sure that Harrington and

Powell were remaining in the tap-room.

When he reached the closet, he found the door difficult to open without having it scratched along the floor, for it was hung on loose rattan hinges that did not hold it up well. Inside, he felt about on the bottom of the closet until he had located the wallet with the pearls. This he put into his pocket.

He waited a few minutes, listening, before leaving the closet. And the next thing he knew, somebody was coming up the stairs. It was Harrington. This was proved by the fact that Powell was at the back of the house, calling to Tromp. And Tromp invited him to go to the garden.

GILES did not dare now to pass through Harrington's door to the landing, for the hiding man knew he would be seen. He lifted the rattan door of the closet, so it would move clear of the floor, and shut himself in the closet. Through the crevices of the door he saw Harrington enter, close the door and, throwing off his dungaree jacket, stretch out on the cane-bottomed bed. He did not pull the mosquito-netting over him, but lighted a cigar

The closet was stifling hot. There was a canvas top over it, part of the canvas ceiling which extended over the bed. And the place was reeking with dust. Giles gave a suppressed sneeze.

Harrington sat up in bed. Giles sneezed again and he happened to have a hand on the closet door when the sneeze got in its full effects. The door moved, and Harrington, a revolver in his hand, hopped out of bed and covered the door.

"Who's that in there?" demanded Harrington. His voice was low.

Giles made no answer.

"Come out—or I'll let a bullet through you!" growled Harrington.

Giles thrust the door open.

"Don't shoot. You've got me—and I didn't mean no harm."

As Harrington backed away, the revolver ready and on the prisoner, Giles stepped into the light from the *kajang.* Harrington surveyed him coldly.

"Where the devil did you come from?"

"I never touched any of your stuff, sir," said Giles in a whining tone. "I been hungry, that's all, and don't give me away."

"Come out into the room," commanded Harrington, who seemed puzzled and not a little agitated. And, as Giles obeyed, the man with the revolver gave a gasp of astonishment, for Giles walked with a decided limp.

Then for the first time Harrington took careful note of the clothes Giles was wearing—dirty white trousers, an old khaki web belt, a sleeveless undershirt that needed washing, and feet with one black and one brown stocking, heels and toes gone. And Giles' beard, some two weeks old, was grimed with a grayish kind of paste which was dust mingled with sweat.

"Room sneaker, eh?" said Harrington. "And a good picker when it comes to quarters, m'lad! Playin' stowaway ashore and makin' a good job of it—up to now."

"Yes, sir," admitted Giles abjectly, with a look toward the door. "I been sleepin' in this room, unbeknownst to the skipper below, and you moves in, see? So I have to dig, but I didn't look to take any of your stuff—honest, I didn't."

"You could have skipped before this."

"I did, but I leaves my 'baccy bag behind, in the clothes locker, sir. So I comes back for it."

He drew a corner of the sheepskin wallet from his trouser pocket and showed it as proof of his words.

"How long you been kickin' around this island?"

"Uppards of a couple of weeks."

"How've you fed yourself?"

"Snitched my grub mostly. The bloke next door—him what Tromp calls Powell—he eats a lot topside here, and I've had fair good pickin's."

"What're you hidin' for?"

"Waitin' for a ship that'll give me a berth or let me work out. If Tromp knowed I was here, he'd send me away

with the first coast guard that comes. You knows how that is, sir."

"How should I know? I'm no beacher."

"Don't go and peach on me to the Dutchman. You looks like a sailorin' man, and—"

"Got a gun on yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Turn about, and let me see."

Giles turned about and Harrington slapped his clothing to make sure that there was no concealed weapon.

"How'd you come here?"

"I give a ship the jump and just hid here. I gets up the ladder in the dark—and then you two toffs blow in, and I'm on the jump. If another comes, I'm fair bilged and I'll be on the beach outside and maybe shipped off to jail."

"They can't jail you if you've kept your hands clean."

Giles snickered.

"Beachers in these islands is hated like poison—and we're slammed in jail if we ain't workin' and payin' our keep ashore."

"Yes, I know that. But I need a man—to go along with me and—look after things—in a schooner that's coming for me."

"A berth! Along with you, sir?"

"Yes, in a schooner. But I don't want Tromp and this man Powell to know I've picked you up this way. You might be turned over to the coast guard, anyway. It'll look bad for me to pick up a beacher, 'special after you've been on the mooch here."

"I could hide, sir."

"Where?"

"In the next room—and some chow now and then, if you'd fetch it. I could hide here well."

Harrington gave thought to the matter. He pocketed his gun and paced the floor, head bent. Suddenly he turned to Giles.

"Didn't I see you in Lingay few weeks back?"

Giles gave a quick twist to his head and he seemed to shrink a trifle. He slumped forward a little and his knees bent. But he recovered himself, his back straightened and his lips curled into a weak grin.

"That's where I see *you*, sir! I knowed I'd seen you before!"

He wet his lips with his tongue and swallowed with difficulty, brushing the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Yes, I was there. And I knew Andy Burns."

Now his eyes bored at Giles with a satisfied look, a knowing look. Giles winced again. His legs actually trembled for a second.

"Was you the bloke that was stoppin' at his bungalow that I seen a couple of times of evenings?"

"I'd say so. And what were you doing at Lingay?"

"Oh, just on the beach, like I mostly am. And when did you go away from Lingay?"

A crafty look was in his eyes, and he scanned Harrington anxiously, as if wondering just how much the man really knew.

"In the schooner *Warrior*."

"That was a Friday, sir, wasn't it, now?"

"Yes—a couple of days before Burns was killed."

Giles swayed, put out a hand and reached for the back of a chair.

"Burns! Him killed! Why, that's somethin' I never knowed!"

"You left before he was killed, I'd say."

"Yes sir! Must have been afore any killin'."

"Then how'd you know the *Warrior* sailed on Friday, the mornin' after Burns was killed—and before anybody else knew it?"

Giles choked and brushed at his forehead with a shaking hand.

"You said, sir, you sailed afore Burns was killed," he replied weakly.

"And that's where I fooled you, young man! You know when the *Warrior* sailed—and it was after Burns was killed, not before."

"But I didn't know Burns was killed, sir—that's what puzzled me up."

"Where are the pearls?" asked Harrington, his voice soft and silky and almost a whisper.

Giles gave a gasp of anguish and stared up at Harrington.

"What pearls? I don't know nothing about no pearls," he breathed huskily.

"Take it easy," soothed Harrington. "Don't make a row—or you'll have Tromp on us. You got away with the pearls from Burns, and before he was killed. I ain't sayin' you killed him, but it's awkward for you. Now, if you'll cough up where the pearls—"

"I never got no pearls!"

"Let me see that 'baccy bag in your pocket, the bag you come in here to mooch out of the closet. Come on with it. I won't split on you, but you've got to cough, or I'll hand you over to Tromp, and that means jugged for the coast guard."

Giles whimpered a little, but Harrington had his gun out again, so the sheepskin bag was handed over.

"That's all I got, sir. I couldn't find only a few."

Harrington opened the purse and drew out the cotton balls, one at a time, and examined the pearls.

"Now don't try to kid me, young feller, m' lad. You're no man to go about on the smooth, sellin' pearls—you'd be snatched for it. But I can sell 'em for you, and all I want is a fair bite on the commission."

He pocketed the purse. Giles looked hopeful; yet there was still a shade of doubt in his eyes.

"You'd sell 'em and give me the dish?"

"I couldn't give you the dish, because if I did I'd stand to have my neck stretched if you made a row about me—and I ain't lookin' for that special kind of trouble."

"What trouble could you be in, sir?"

"Mixed in the killin' of Burns, and I'd have a hard time to clear myself if I got tangled up with you in this pearl deal."

"What'd mix you in a killin'?"

"Steady as she goes—because you killed Andy Burns."

Giles leaped to his feet, his face convulsed with horror.

"I never! I got the pearls, but I never done for him!"

"Go easy!" warned Harrington, with a nervous look about, his head slanted to catch the distant voices of Tromp and Powell in the jungle garden. "The police are on your number, and they want you for killin' Burns. With a reward out—so don't play me no smart dodges, or you'll never get away from here. Here! Look at this circular and maybe you'll listen a little closer to what I tell you to do, Giles."

With shaking hands the prisoner grasped the circular. He caught his breath as he read; he fell back in the chair as he realized that his name and description was known to the police and posted in various islands and ports.

"Where have y' got the rest of the pearls?" pressed Harrington.

"I'm fair caught!" gasped Giles. "Buried down the beach—and if you'll help me—"

"I'll see you out of here, safe enough, if you'll do what I tell you," said Harrington eagerly, but in a low voice. "I'll git clothes off Tromp and—"

Giles held up a warning hand. There were footsteps on the front veranda below and, as they listened, they heard Powell ask one of the servants where Harrington had gone.

"He'll be coming up," whispered Harrington. "Get into that closet—and here—take this handkerchief—and mind you don't go sneezin'."

GILES got to cover, partly closing the door. And in a few minutes they heard Powell coming up the ladder. He entered his own room through the *kajang*. He was heard moving about, muttering in surprize. And there seemed to be a note of complaint in his voice.

"Oh, Mr. Harrington, are you in?" Powell called out.

"Yes, I've been snoozin' a bit. What's up?"

Powell did not reply. Instead, he

stepped out on the veranda and moved to Harrington's *kajang*, his trousers visible under the lower edge of the awning.

"I'd like to see you a minute," said Powell, and he spoke with confidential caution.

Harrington went to the *kajang* and peered out through the opening at the side.

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Somebody's been in my room," whispered Powell, "and stealing grub."

Harrington pretended surprize. He pressed in between the *kajang* and went out, feeling safer to get Powell away.

"That's somethin' to look into," he declared. "Maybe I was right. You know what we talked about this mornin', and if somebody's hidin' in this hotel—"

"I've searched my room," said Powell, "and you'd better have a look around yours—the clothes closet, you know. And I'll have a look at the vacant one beyond."

Powell drew a small automatic pistol and moved to the other *kajang*.

Harrington, satisfied that he was to be left to search his own room, returned through the *kajang*. He saw at once that Giles was unable to close the door of the closet without making too much noise. But Harrington could close it now, for Powell would assume that any scraping of the door on the floor would indicate that it was being opened instead of closed.

Harrington seized the frame to swing it.

"Nobody here," he called to Powell. "I'll be with you in—"

At that instant his right hand, grasping the frame, was grabbed by Giles. And Harrington's jaw got a crushing blow. He reeled backward, and Giles, still gripping his hand, went with him and bore him to the floor. As they crashed, Powell slipped through the *kajang*. Harrington found himself in the grasp of two men, one with an automatic pressed against his ribs. His revolver was snatched from his pocket.

"You're under arrest!" said Powell. He snapped a handcuff on the wrist that Giles was holding.

"What's— Say, this man killed Andy Burns. Look out!" spluttered Harrington.

"You didn't hear me, I'd say," remarked Powell. "I told you you were under arrest yourself."

They let Harrington sit up on the floor.

"What you mean—arrest? There's the man to arrest. Are you blind?"

He stared about him wildly and his voice came in grunts, his jaw swelling from the terrific blow that Giles had landed.

"You're arrested for having stolen pearls in your possession, for attempting to aid a fugitive from justice to escape, and—"

"You can't arrest me for nothin'!" raged Harrington. "I'm after this man; he's got Andy Burns's pearls—and he killed him!"

"Save your breath to save your porridge," said Powell. "This man Giles didn't kill Andy Burns. He couldn't. He's in the secret service and he wasn't anywhere near Lingay when Burns was murdered. But you were, so—"

"You're crazy! I got the pearls in my pocket, and Giles has got the rest buried—"

"Stow that kind of gab!" broke in Giles. "I've no pearls hidden, but you think I have. The pearls you've got in your pocket, taken from me, are only bait. And nobody stole pearls from Andy Burns in the first place. You killed him and, when you heard that fifty thousand dollars' worth of pearls were taken by a man of my description, you wanted 'em. Also, you wanted to hang the murder on me—thought the police would hold me for the murder after you'd trimmed me of the pearls. You tried a little double-cross, Mr. Harrington, and you got your fingers pinched. You left Lingay in the schooner *Warrior*—a fact we wanted. You admitted it to me. That poster downstairs fooled you, young feller m'lad, as you like to say, and hiding an escaped criminal for pearls walked you into the trap. When you think it over—and you'll have plenty of time to think—you'll find you can't kid us. We've been three jumps ahead of you all the time."

Slow Fire

A Sergeant of Marines Returns to the Rangeland

By JOHN WEBB

SERGEANT BILL SHAY, U. S. Marines, after almost nine years away from his native rangeland, was returning home, was returning unheralded and unsung, almost a stranger. He had left long before the war and was returning after it; during his absence many had left for "over there", and some had not come back.

So Bill was almost forgotten, save by a few former intimates and, of course, Sis and Pop—Old Bill Shay. Bill's father had married late in life and was quite old now. His mother was dead.

"I wasn't much to remember," mused Bill, blinking out over the sun-drenched prairie that stretched out for miles all around the speeding train. "Not much."

It was good to forget some things, though. War, for instance. What was it that "Sawbones" said at Brest?

"You've been scrambled up quite a bit, Sergeant, but you're tough and will grow together again. Don't think too much about the war. It's over—forget it."

Doctors were good at telling a man what to do.

"Forget it!" Just like that! "Oh, I know it isn't so easy," added the doctor. "Go home, out to that cow country of yours, and you'll be your old self in a year or two. I bet that old pioneer father of yours will welcome you with open arms, eh?"

Bill nodded, but told himself, sadly, that it looked like a mighty poor bet. Now, sitting here in the train, Pop's parting words came back to him:

"All yuh do is loaf around and drink likker and crawl like a angleworm every time somebody looks rough at yuh. Ain't yuh got no spine? Godamighty, I'm ashamed of yuh, I am."

"Yuh won't be long," retorted Bill, "'cause I'm gettin' away out of yore sight pretty soon."

"Yuh are, are yuh? Think yo're

scarin' me, huh? Go now, durn yuh; get out and stay out!"

But Pop had been right, Bill admitted now.

"I was sure a weak-kneed, useless animal. Pop was right."

Now he was going home.

He took from his pocket a crumpled letter and read it for the dozenth time; read it slowly, dwelling long on the parts of consequence.

> Dear Bill:
>
> The trouble I told you of in my last letter has been getting worse. About the water-hole, you know. The Carney brothers—you don't know them; they came here after you left—claim the hole is on their land and tried to get it, but Pop had the land re-surveyed and the courts uphold him that it's his. . He told the Carneys they could use it, but they want to own it, so they can keep everybody else off; they tried to buy it from Pop, and when he would not sell they started trouble. . . .
>
> It has been almost a week since I started this letter, Bill, and something terrible has happened. Pop has killed Buck Carney! They had a gun-battle and Pop won. Oh, Bill, it was awful! Buck was scared, I guess, and he missed Pop four times. And Pop's eyes are bad, you know, and he fired five times at Buck before he hit him. Buck drew first and there were some good witnesses, who swear Pop shot in self-defense, so that's all right; but, oh, Bill, I'm worried sick, because Buck's brother Mike is out to get Pop. He hasn't made any outright threats, but he's saying awful things about Pop and everybody knows what he is up to.
>
> And Mike is a regular gunman, Bill. He's a snake. Buck was stupid and a bungler, but Mike is dangerous. If he and Pop meet with guns, Pop won't have a chance; he is so old and his sight is so bad, though he won't admit it.
>
> I don't know what you can do about it, Bill, and I'm not trying to tell you, but I know you, Bill. Pop has never said anything about you since you went away. But I know in his heart he wishes you were back. But he wouldn't admit it; you know how stubborn he is. I'm going to tell him I've been writing to you and try to talk him around.
>
> Between you and me, Bill, I'm admitting I'm afraid of Mike Carney, for Pop. I wish I were a man.
>
> —SIS.

"If you were," said Bill softly to the letter, "yo'd be a mighty good one, Sis. And if yo're afraid—"

He suddenly gritted his teeth in an effort to control matter with mind. People said the war was over, but he knew better; his battered body was still being punished, still fighting.

But, in a way, he could not complain; there was one thing to encourage him—his health had been improving right along. That doctor had been right; it would not be long before he would be himself again. The range country was the place for health.

Who-oa! He brought himself up with a jerk. Health? Perhaps this Mike Carney jigger, the gunman, would have something to say about that!

"I'm kinda tired o' battlin'," mused Bill. "Gosh, can't a man have a little peace?"

He tried then to take his mind from unpleasant matters and gazed out the window at the miles and miles of prairie slipping eastward; at the occasional little town, or herd of cattle.

Three days of travel had done him no good. He was sick and full of pain and lay back in the cushioned seat with his hat over his eyes.

"EVER hear of Mike Carney? That's him over there."

Bill had been dozing. In the seat behind him two men were talking in guarded voices. Bill had observed them and, by their appearance and the snatches of conversation that drifted to his ears, had judged them to be a couple of ranchers. Now they were speaking of Mike Carney, who was apparently something of a celebrity in these parts.

Vaguely Bill recollected that the train had paused at a little station some minutes back and that some one had boarded and taken the seat across the aisle at the end of the car and was facing him obliquely. From under his lowered hat-brim he studied the man.

A tall man, lean, brown, wiry; a man of bone and sinew, and hard as nails.

High cheekbones, slanting eyes. Black eyes that glitted and never drifted from point to point in casual interest, but darted with a quick, intense abruptness. Narrow hips and good shoulders and long, slender brown hands; nervous hands that were never still, but tapped jerkily upon the window sill or toyed with a button, when they were not rolling a cigaret. He was wearing a new blue serge suit, a spotless white shirt with attached collar, a black silk bow tie and a fine white Stetson.

"Shore, that's Mike Carney."

"Heard of him plenty," said the other man. "First time I ever seen him. Bad *hombre*, huh?"

"He's a whizzer. Bad and mean. Him and his brother Buck stole the Kettle-Bar outfit from old man Evans by refusin' to renew his note when they promised they would. Mike shot Dick Cole, over to McKeever. Dick went for his gun first, too, I hear. Fast? Mike! I'll say he's fast! I remember the ole Dodge City and Cimaron days—went through all that—and when I say Mike is fast, I guess yuh'll take it I know what I'm talkin' about. He's a dinger!

"Know 'Chuck' Baker, don't yuh, what used to be deputy marshal at Antone, and then went dealin' 'em for the Buckhorn—'Hold-Card' Mullins' place? Yeah, that's the jigger. Well, I seen Chuck and Mike Carney have a little argyment over a jackpot one night, and Chuck went for his gun. Yuh'll admit Chuck was better'n middlin' fast, won't yuh? . . . You betchuh he was! Well, Chuck slapped his gun butt first, but before he got his gun out he was lookin' in Mike's and Mike was grinnin' at him with that snakey smile o' his'n! He'd'a' put a slug in Chuck, too, on'y I guess they was too many around, and it would'a' been murder. Not that he minds killin'—nobody knows how many he's knocked over, and a lot of 'em thought they were gunmen, too."

They shifted to other subjects, and Bill dozed off again, lulled by the monotonous *clack-clack-clack* of rail joints and the warm, sweet breezes that swept through the train.

"LA SALVILLA next stop—La Salvilla! . . . No, ma'm, you don't change here. H'lo, 'Timmie'! How's the missus? . . . Next stop La Salvilla!"

La Salvilla—home! Bill Shay stretched his tired body. He pulled his battered suitcase from the rack overhead and placed it in the aisle.

He would stay in town that night, at the hotel. He would somehow get word to Sis and find out how Pop felt about him, before going out to the ranch. It would not do to blob right in without any preparation or warning; the old man needed plenty of time to come around, to put aside his stubbornness.

The train was slowing and Mike Carney had arisen and was starting for the exit. Bill followed and, a few minutes later, was making his way along the little town's main—and only—street.

It was not strange that no one recognized him. This Bill Shay was not the easy-going, indolent, rather handsome young fellow they had looked upon as harmless but useless; this was a grim, battered man of thirty-five, with a drawn face and a thin, irregular scar that ran from nose to left ear, with a bluish pucker at each end. He limped slightly too and, in moments of laxity, drooped a little.

The old familiar sights and sounds of the town flooded back upon him. Three leathery punchers, lounging on the store porch, their horses tethered to the hitch-rack at the edge of the high board sidewalk. Carl Striberg, the blacksmith, shoeing a horse in the street. "Ma" Sheppard—wasn't that Ma Sheppard?—sitting in a buckboard; probably waiting for "Pa," who could talk the ears off a mule. In front of Clark's Elite Eating Palace, a stony-faced Indian, a strand of red cloth in his oily black braid. A Mexican boy, his hat over his face, asleep on an empty packing-case in front of the livery stable. And over all, dust and heat, heat that you saw—the glimmering waves of it—rather than felt.

La Salvilla—home!

"A nice quiet year of rest," mused Bill, "and I'll be myself again. Then I'll pitch in and work. This is the place for health and strength."

He snarled under his breath. Health! He had not come home for health. He had come home to face that damn snake, Mike Carney. No health in that.

"Mad dog! Look out—mad dog!"

Bill screwed about. He dropped his suitcase and picked up a small rock. The dog came charging straight down the middle of the street, foaming at the mouth and snapping in the air at imaginary obstacles.

Across the street, the lean Indian-faced Mike Carney, too, swung about. For one instant he faced Bill, his darting glance searching for the menace the shout had warned him of. One instant—but in that instant Bill saw something that surprized and startled him, something that leaped from those metallic black eyes—fear! Fear that teetered between control and panic.

No mistaking it. Bill had seen that light too many times before. And in the eyes of brave men, too.

Carney's glance leaped upon the low-running dog. Then his gun was in his hand. How it got there, Bill did not know; but there it was, in Carney's hand, a long black frontier model Colt, and his thumb was on the filed and polished hammer prong. The dog had swerved slightly and was headed straight for Carney.

He fired three shots so swiftly that the explosions rolled like one. Behind the dog little spurts of dust had leaped into the air. Carney had missed. He fired twice again, and then there came a heavier explosion and the dog sprang into the air, turned over and came down with a thump, quite dead.

Carney swung toward the store porch, where gray little "Cal" Summers stood with a smoking shotgun in his hands.

"Kinda hard to hit a runnin' dog," called Cal. "Thought I'd kinda make sure of him with a load o' ten-gage."

Carney showed white teeth in a twisted, nasty smile. His quick fingers snapped shells into the empty chambers of his six-gun. He darted a sidewise look at the dead dog, some fifty feet away.

Then, in a spirit of braggadocio or anger, or both, his gun roared into action and he sent five bullets into the lifeless body. It was enough to convince any one that Mike Carney, despite his miserable exhibition of a minute before, was a first-class shot.

And fast? Bill Shay, still standing across the street with the rock in his hand, was telling himself that he was looking upon the fastest gunman the West had ever seen. Probably he overstated it, but even those old-timers whose standards of comparison were such men as "Bat" Masterson, "Wild Bill" and Sam Bass, admitted that Mike Carney was fast—fast!

Bill picked up his suitcase and went on toward the hotel. He was very thoughtful. Mike Carney, he of the lightning draw and the high-speed thumbing, was the man he seemed destined to go up against. And Bill himself was as slow as mud; his slowness and clumsiness in the days before his departure had been laughable, and now, after eight years, he knew he was even worse. At drawing, that is, once he had a gun in his hand—that was another matter.

IN HIS hotel room, Bill took from his suitcase the uniform in which he had been paid off and honorably discharged from the Service. He tossed the blue coat, with its sergeant's chevrons, wound stripe and service stripe, upon the bed. He placed the blue uniform cap beside it. Then from the tray of the suitcase he took a number of medals—Mexico, Good Conduct, Distinguished Service and a Croix de Guerre. Then there was another, a jingly affair of silver bars—Expert Rifleman, the highest award for marksmanship.

He placed the bars on the palm of his hand and stared at them. He had earned that award. He could shoot, with rifle or

Service pistol. He had belonged to a pistol team that had won a U.S.M.C. championship. At Vera Cruz, back in 1914, he had crouched in the ruins of a shelled house and knocked over nine Mexican attackers in a row, without a miss. In Haiti he had picked a *caco*, or bandit, out of a tree at five hundred yards, with one shot. At Chateau-Thierry—

Well, at Chateau-Thierry his marksmanship had won him that Croix de Guerre.

But of what good, he asked himself, would his marksmanship be against a man like Carney, who could draw and fire while Bill was reaching for his gun? In the Service you drew at leisure, you aimed carefully, you fired when you were on; here, in the West, the drawing, aiming and firing blended into one single, continuous motion; you simply fired.

It was logical to conclude that a man with several .45 slugs in him would forget all about drawing and aiming and firing. Quite logical. Bill thought of that dead dog. He thought, too, of the wasted shots that had proceeded the death of the dog; and deep in his brain something clicked. But he was too weary and sick to think further about it and he put it aside for the present.

He lay upon the bed and stared up at the ceiling. He was suddenly despondent, as if nothing mattered. At least, he was not afraid of death; he knew that. There came into his throat the old leatherneck slogan:

"Come on, do you want to live forever?"

That was the spirit. He was a leatherneck. What mattered odds? In that moment, for all of his weakness, he was filled with an utter contempt for Mike Carney, the killer and his lightning draw. What damn fool leatherneck ever counted odds, regarded the strength and position of the enemy, gave a hoot for handicaps?

"Come on, do you want to live forever?"

He sat up on the bed and tossed the uniform back into the suitcase. Then he slept.

FLORENCE SHAY, Bill's sister, almost ten years younger than he, threw a magazine across the living-room and glared at her father, who sat buried in pipe smoke by the table.

"Pop," she blurted, "you're an old—old—"

"Mebbe I am," broke in Pop, "but I'll spank yuh if yuh say it, kid."

Wonderingly he thumbed the tobacco in his pipe. He was a giant of a man, with a yellow beard and sharp gray eyes; seventy years old he was, but boasted that he was as good a man as ever. An untruth, and he knew it. There was no doubt, though, that he was as stubborn as ever; more so, if possible.

"What's wrong with yuh, or with me?" he wanted to know.

"The way you've acted about Bill, that's what." Her eyes flashed angrily. "I'm tired of keeping my mouth shut about him—oh, I haven't forgot you said never to mention him to you; I'm doing it, anyway, and if you want to put me out, too—"

"A-a-arrugh!" rumbled the old man and puffed fiercely. "That useless pup!"

"That's what you called him, when you put him out, and a loafer and a weakling besides; but you were wrong, still wrong and I can prove it!"

"A-a-arrugh—what?"

"I say I can prove Bill is not what you called him."

"A-a-ar— What the blazes you talkin' about, girl? What's he gone and done—spit in a sheep's face or somethin'?"

Nevertheless, despite his scornful words, he had sat up straight and the clouds of smoke about the gray mane were thinning.

"He's a hero, that's what! A hero!"

"Humph!" snorted her father, but he had forgot his pipe entirely now.

He leaned forward a little to squint at her around the lamp shade. Looking back at him, she remained silent, whetting his curiosity. From the outer darkness beyond the screened door came the champing of a horse in the corral. A slender roll of paper in Sis' hand rustled as she fingered it.

"Humph!" snorted the old man again, and she knew it was to urge her on. Trying not to show his interest, the stubborn old mule!

"Bill," she said at last, "was a Marine at Chateau-Thierry."

"A what?" He stared at her.

She repeated the information, then added:

"He served two enlistments in the Marine Corps—eight years. I used to get letters and postcards from him right along, from all sorts of queer places, but he never said what he was or what he was doing. A few months ago Joe Price—you remember Joe Price, who went across and was killed?—sent me this—" she tossed a thin magazine upon the table—"with Bill's name in it. I wrote to the editor of the magazine and he got the letter to Bill, and Bill and I have been writing back and forth ever since."

Her father, his pipe out now, was fumbling with shaking fingers for his glasses, but she took up the magazine and said:

"It's the *Stars and Stripes*, published for the soldiers of the A.E.F. Listen to what it says about Bill."

She read, while he stared at her and puffed futilely upon his cold pipe.

A well-done story, spirited, enthusiastic, if lacking in literary finish. The story of a hero and his deeds. The story of Sergeant Bill Shay, of the Marines, a fighting leatherneck. Of fighting stock, this Bill Shay, the son of a man who had helped roll back the frontier of the West—grandson of a famous scout and Indian fighter—a fighter of a line of fighters—

Wounded in Mexico, Santo Domingo and three times in France— Had been twice cited for extreme and exceptional bravery under fire— Croix de Guerre— Kissed by General Somebody or Other—a fighting fool. Shrapnel wounds—wonders of facial surgery— Coming out of the ether, when they held a mirror before him, he said, "Doc, I'm a different man! Do I keep the same name?" Wanted to go right back to the Front, but was being sent to Brest, thence home on the disabled list. Sergeant Shay was going home. So long, Bill, and good luck!

Old Man Shay took something from his mouth as Sis finished. It was an inch of pipestem.

Bill Shay, a fighter of a line of fighters. The old frontiersman gulped. He sat stiff and straight, like a soldier at inspection, his knobby brown hands clenched on his knees, his deep-sunk gray eyes looking off into the distance, through the walls, through the night, through the years back into the past. Indians, rustlers, bad-men, Mexican raiding parties, land-thieves and would-be kings of the range—Old Bill Shay had fought them all and survived, won. Now young Bill.

"Mebbe," he faltered hoarsely, "mebbe it's—it's some other Bill Shay."

"No, it's our Bill! Your son; my big brother!"

Her father reached out, took the magazine from her and smoothed it on his knee. He placed his old-fashioned glasses on his hawk's nose and stared at the magazine; at the title—*The Stars and Stripes*—at the crude cartoons and illustrations; he drifted abstractedly through it and then back to the item his daughter had read aloud.

"And guess what, Pop?"

Old Bill looked up as if coming out of a dream; he had been alone with his son.

"Humph?"

"Bill is coming home!"

He started at the news. His eyes lighted, then dulled; then he jerked back in his chair and braced his feet on the floor as if to resist a sudden pull.

His daughter said nothing. She knew what was going on in that hard old head. Pop was fighting his own battle now, fighting against the thing that had brought him through the battles of the past—his stubbornness. It could work for evil as well as good.

But surely, she felt, he could not hold out now. Bill had proved himself, and she knew that in his heart her father was glad and proud. She watched his face soften and the sullen stubbornness

leave his eyes. He relaxed and nodded to himself. He had whipped his worst enemy. Her heart leaped as she saw the victory. She spoke excitedly and blundered:

"Just you leave Mike Carney to Bill! Bill will know how to handle him—"

She broke off too late. Her father had started up and his face had darkened. She could have bitten her tongue off. Old Bill's nostrils quivered. The son whom he had called a weakling and put out was coming home to protect him from a gunman. From Mike Carney! As if he were afraid of that dandified young would-be bad-man!

"I'll handle Mike Carney," he said gratingly. "That—that—tell that brother of yours to stay away."

"Oh, Pop, let him come home, and talk things over with him; get to know him."

"No!"

"But—"

"No! Go to your room."

She leaped angrily to her feet and reached for the magazine.

"Give me that! It's mine. You don't deserve to even read about him. Give me it!"

She had a grip of the magazine but could not loosen his strong old fingers. He held on passively for a moment, then threw her away.

"Go to your room, I said!"

She went. And as the door closed behind her Old Bill spread the crumpled magazine upon the table by the lamp and bowed his head above it.

ANDY CARR, bronco peeler for the Ax-Head outfit, shook his head in lingering wonder, as he stared at his old pard, Bill Shay, back from the war. Bill had quite a time of it making himself known to Andy; the latter still felt as if he were talking to a stranger. Bill sure had changed.

"I don't get what yo're aimin' at, fella," said Andy, "but I'll do it. Sounds kinda crazy to me. Say, Bill, how yuh've—"

"Changed. How many times you said that, Andy? But about this thing, now. There he is, Andy!"

Andy swung and looked across the street. There, leaning against a porch pillar, stood Mike Carney, the gunman. He was as immaculate as usual and apparently cool and comfortable despite the hot glare of the morning sun.

Bill nudged Andy and they crossed the street, bound ostensibly for the open door of the store behind Carney. Andy nodded to Carney and said good morning, and at that instant Bill drew his handkerchief with a flirt and raised it to his moist brow. Then he stopped and looked down at a bright object that had tinkled to the ground.

"Dropped something," said Andy and, picking up the thing, held it in his hand looking at it curiously. "What is it, anyhow?"

"Medal," said Bill. "Medal for expert marksmanship with rifle and pistol. Got it in the Marines."

"Good shot, are yuh?"

Bill nodded modestly.

" 'S about the on'y thing I can do real well, Andy." He was standing now with his back close to Carney, so that the latter could not help hearing every word that passed. "Yessir, if I can't do nothin' else in the world, I can shore shoot. Seems like I can't hardly ever miss, somehow. I'll give yuh an idea o' how good I am, Andy; yuh'll be surprized, you knowin' how rotten I used to be."

He shook from his coat pocket a flat, black automatic, a big wicked looking weapon, Service type, caliber .45.

"Got a coin, Andy—a dime or a nickel?"

Andy searched his pockets. He had no coin. He turned to the thinly smiling Carney, who had been listening to the talk of Bill, whom he did not know, with amusement.

"Got a coin, Carney?"

Carney investigated and produced a nickel.

"That'll do," said Bill. "You take it, Andy, and walk over that way with it."

He motioned with his hand toward the blacksmith shop. Andy strode off down the street and after what seemed a reasonable shooting distance stopped and looked back.

"Keep on," said Bill. "Yuh ain't tired, are yuh?"

Carney gaged the distance with a quick glance and looked at Bill. When Andy stopped a second time and was again waved on, Carney lifted one eyebrow in wonder. Was this fellow with the scarred face really as good as he thought he was, or was he merely a boaster trusting to luck to pull him through? When it happened a third time, and Andy found himself against the side of the blacksmith shop and could go no farther, Carney burst into a laugh.

"That'll do," called Bill. "See, can you stick it up there against the boards?"

Andy picked up a sliver of wood, wedged it in a crack between two boards and set the nickel upon it. From where Bill and Carney stood it was a tiny pinpoint of bright metal.

"Good shot, stranger," said Carney, holding in his laughter, "if yuh make it! Fact is, it's an impossible shot!"

"Oh, no," disagreed Bill.

"I can almost see it," remarked Carney sarcastically.

"Guess yuh ain't got trained eyes, like I have. Yuh see, I'm a expert marksman, U. S. Marines."

Carney choked. This fellow was funny!

Bill raised his pistol, took a short aim and fired.

Carney could not see the coin because Andy, immediately after the shot, had stepped forward and shut off his view. Then Andy bent and began to paw around in the dust by the side of the shop.

Andy straightened. He stared for a second at something in his hand, then came slowly back to them. He held out a coin and Carney moved forward the better to see. The coin was bent and twisted and there was a dark-rimmed hole in it!

"One shot," Bill was saying, "don't hardly give a man a chance to show what he can do. Now if yo'd take about six or eight coins and scatter 'em around promiskus like, I could plug 'em all, one after the other. I ain't fast with a gun, yuh know, but I never miss! Oh, I forgot somethin', Andy. See yuh later. So long, stranger."

He limped hurriedly back across the street and entered the hotel.

"That," said Andy amazedly, "was what I call shootin'!"

Carney was still staring at the coin. He took it in his hand and turned it over and over.

"Who is that jigger?" he asked.

"Him?" Andy looked up from the cigarette he was making. "Why, young Bill Shay, Old Bill's son. He just come back from France, where he tried to win the war alone and darn near done it! Well, s'long, Carney."

A HALF-HOUR later, Andy slipped into Bill's room, where the latter, one trouser-leg rolled up, sat massaging some rather ghastly scars.

"Well, it worked," grinned Andy; then his brows puckered in puzzlement. "But darn if I can see what good it'll do."

"Psychological," said Bill. "Yuh see, he knows now that if he kills my pop he'll probably have me to deal with too, and he'll be turnin' over in his mind them remarks I made about never missin' a shot—and after that coin stunt he'll likely believe it."

"Just the same," protested Andy, "whether he believes it nor not, it don't foller that he's gonna pack up and vamose. He's a tough baby, I'm a-tellin, yuh! He's got the name o' never sidesteppin' anybody."

"So I hear. I ain't thinkin' he's gonna run."

"What then?"

"Well, yuh see, it kinda evens things up. I know he's a lot faster'n me with a gun and most likely he's tellin' himself I'm a better shot than he is. It gives us an even break, and that's all I want. I got him figgered, Andy, to be one o' them jiggers that can fight a rip-snortin'

battle as long as they know they're winnin' or likely to win, but when it's a toss-up they kinda wilt."

Andy shook his head.

"Still I don't getchuh. If you and him mix, he's gonna draw, and he'll have his gun out before you can remember whether you put yours in your pocket or left it home on the mantel. What difference will it make how good a shot he thinks you are?"

"Maybe none," answered Bill. "I'm just playin' a hunch, Andy. Where yuh goin'?"

"Uh—oh, guess I'll ramble out toward yore Pop's."

"What for?"

Andy shifted from one foot to the other and began to hunt for the makings.

"Well," he said, "yuh see—uh—" He left off, red as a beet.

"Gosh!" grunted Bill. "I a'most forgot about her mentionin' yuh so much in her letters. Andy Carr says this and Andy Carr says that! Well, yo're a good citizen, Andy."

"Ain't good enough," admitted Andy confusedly, "but I'm doin' my best, Bill, savin' money and everything, and she says—"

"Don't inflict it on me, cowboy; I had a buddy overseas that used to tell me what his girl used to say, and it was downright sickenin'. Say, don't go sayin' anything about me to Pop."

Andy scratched his head.

"Well, I was thinkin' maybe I could talk to him and maybe pound some sense into his head."

"Don't try it! Yuh ain't got none to spare, fella, and he's got more'n you and me together. Don't go thinkin' he's a hard-hearted old tyrant, 'cause he ain't. If I had a son like I was eight years ago, I'd take him out and drown him. Him bein' a kind-hearted gent, he let me live."

Andy said reluctantly that he guessed he had better mind his own business, anyhow, and he went out.

TWO HOURS later, three miles from the Tumbling S, he saw a rider coming toward him at a gallop, and when he saw who it was, he put spur to his mount and hurried to meet her—Florence Shay, astride her little paint cow-pony, her hair all wind-blown and her manner excited and anxious.

"Oh, Andy!" she cried as they pulled up together. "Have you seen Pop? He left for town without saying anything to me."

Andy shook his head.

"No. I branched off and went over to Wilkins to talk about them cows he's maybe gonna sell me—us."

She gripped his arm.

"Oh, Andy, Pop's gone to town to find Mike Carney. Elkie Harris, our top hand, says Pop told him he was gonna settle things once and for good. Said he heard the things Carney was saying and there wasn't any use putting off something that had to come some time, and might just as well come now. And he wore his gun."

"Gosh!" grunted Andy.

It looked bad. He knew Old Man Shay didn't have a Chinaman's chance with Mike Carney in a gun battle. Twenty years ago it would have been different; but now, old as he was, and shaky, and with bum eyes and all—well, all Old Man Shay had now was plenty of nerve.

"I don't know what to do, even if I do get to town before—before— If I go to the sheriff it won't do any good; he can't stop it. All he can do is put somebody in jail after it's done. And besides, Pop would raise the dickens and probably take me home and lock me up if I tried it. He won't let anybody interfere when he's doing something he figures is right. And when somebody does go to jail, you know it won't be Carney—not that it would do any good if he did, after—after—"

"Yeah," said Andy.

Sending one man to jail never yet has brought a dead one to life. And Florence was right. Carney knew how to beat the law. He would make sure that Shay went for his gun first and that there were witnesses about; then he would beat him to it with ease. That was Carney's cunning way when he knew he held the upper

hand. He had fired in self-defense. You can't hang a man for defending himself, no matter what he did to egg the other man on. Oh, Carney was no fool.

"By gosh!" groaned Andy, and swung his horse about and headed back for town. "Come on! By golly, I'll cross horns with Carney myself before I'll let him pull anything on your Pop! Tickle that horse of yourn!"

On the way, he told her of her brother's arrival in town the night before; she had known Bill was homeward bound, but had not known when to expect him. She was eager for news.

"Oh, he's all right," Andy assured her, "on'y kinda—kinda different—you know."

"He's sick! Oh, poor Bill! Is he very sick, Andy?"

"Oh, he ain't exactly sick; just kinda weak and tired like. But he says he feels a whole lot better after a good night's rest and all," he added hastily and truthfully. "Yeah, he's better already, and I guess a year or so and he'll be as well as anybody."

He told her little by little, so as not to shock her too much, how Bill had changed —his limp, his paleness, the dreadful scar across the side of his face.

"When yuh look at him," he ended, "yuh know yo're lookin' at a man that's been through somethin'."

"Poor Bill!" sighed the girl and urged her horse to a swifter pace. Now they could see the little town.

A SATELLITE brought word to Mike Carney of the arrival in town of Old Bill Shay, the man who had cut off Buck Carney's career of evil. Mike's fingers beat a swift tattoo upon the chair that he straddled upon the hotel porch and his gaze leaped past his informant and down the dusty street. The news acted upon him as a tap upon a tuning-fork; a man of steel springs, any emotional impulse set him vibrating.

"He just rode in and put up his horse at Moran's," said the satellite. "He's wearin' a gun, Mike."

"Yeah?"

"Guess he's lookin' for trouble, huh, Mike?"

"Dunno. You stick around, Red, and see what happens. *Sabe?*"

"Shore."

Red knew the part he was to play in the coming duel. He would be one of those who would get up on the stand in court and swear truthfully that Carney had not been first to go for his gun, that Carney had killed in self-defense.

Red went across the street and sat on a box in front of the store. Mike remained where he was, watching the street and drumming upon his chair. Close by, two cowboys were discussing young Bill Shay and his exhibition of the morning; several men had seen it, and the news had spread quickly that Bill Shay was back and had somehow become a miraculous pistol shot.

There could be no doubt that his stunt of the morning was miraculous. Men had paced the distance and marveled. How a man could see a nickel at that distance, much less hit it! Few of them could see anything smaller than a tomato can.

Like all interesting bits of news, it had been enlarged and added to. The maid of all work at the hotel had seen Bill's medals on the bureau in his room and had told of them, though by the time she had a listener she forgot just what medals they were and called upon her splendid imagination to invent the kind and number of medals a hero should have. She evolved a heroic deed to go with each one. Whatever she did to facts, she took nothing from Bill.

The stories spread. They grew. The Germans Bill had killed or captured! The machine-gun nests he had wiped out single-handed! The wounded buddies he had brought back on his shoulder! Bill, actually a hero, became a super-hero; actually an excellent shot, he became a superlative one—the man who could not miss!

It all drifted to Mike Carney. It did not frighten him, but it made him think. The results of that thinking was the con-

clusion that young Bill, should he horn in, as there was no doubt he would, must not be allowed to get that never-missing gun into action. He must be shot down the instant that he reached for it. And upon his ability to draw a gun swifter than any man in the world, Carney was willing to bet his life at any time. Red, across the street, made a slight motion with his hand, and Carney arose and tightened his gun-belt. He loosened the gun in the holster beneath his serge coat and shifted the holster into the precise position that suited him best. He rolled a cigaret, lighted it, took a few puffs and snapped it away. Nervous he seemed and was; it was his jumpy, jerky, quivery nerves that made him dangerous.

Another satellite had joined Red. Two cowboys, who had been arguing earnestly in the street, stopped suddenly, looked at Carney, then toward the Elite Eating Palace, and made hurriedly for the nearest shelter. Carl Striberg, the blacksmith, who had been lounging in his wide doorway, edged back till only his face showed around the door frame. A woman dragged a small boy into a store.

Carney broke a matchstick between his teeth, spat it out and toyed with a button on his coat. His black eyes glittering like polished coal, his mouth drawn out in a thin, tight line, he went down the hotel steps to the board sidewalk. He stood there with his hands in plain sight, his thumbs hooked over his belt and his slender brown fingers drumming upon the polished silver buckle.

Then from the door of the Elite came Old Bill, a big tan sombrero atop his mane of gray hair, a heavy old frontier model Colt slung at his thigh. He looked across the street, saw Mike Carney and brought up with a jerk.

"Carney," he called abruptly, "yo're a low-down liar! Them things yuh been sayin' about me are lies! To yore face, yo're a liar!"

But Carney was not to be taunted into going first for his gun. Too many eyes were watching from windows and doorways.

"Shay," he answered, "yo're takin' advantage of yore age. Yuh know I wouldn't hurt a helpless ole wreck like you."

"What?" Old Bill gasped. "A helpless old wreck! Why, you—you—"

"Aw, stop fakin'. Yuh been gettin' away with that ole pioneer stuff long enough. Come here in the ole days and killed Injuns and rustlers! Don't pull any o' that stuff on me, yuh ole thief!"

Old Bill was breathless. He was blind with rage. He had never been one to talk about the things he had done; there had been plenty of others to talk for him. An old faker—and a thief—

"Yeah, yo're a thief! Yuh stole that water-hole from me and Buck, then shot Buck from under yore coat."

A lie, as every one knew, but it accomplished its purpose. The old man's rage had settled into a deadly calm now. Law or no law, he would kill Mike Carney. His hand was on his gun, but he did not draw. The reason was that two men were standing behind him in the line of fire; he could see them out of the corner of his eye.

"Get out of the way!" he snapped over his shoulder. "Move, yuh fools!"

But the men did not move. One of them, Shay knew, was young Andy Carr; the other was a pale man who limped and wore his hat low over his eyes. They had entered the Elite while Old Bill was bracing himself with a cup of coffee at the counter; they had settled in a far corner. The man who limped had sat with his face toward the wall.

"Andy, yuh fool, get from behind me!"

Mike Carney, still standing in the same position with both hands in plain sight, watched narrowly. He saw vague forms in the doorway behind Shay, but could not make them out. Probably, he thought, Clark, the owner of the place, and his dishwasher.

Why didn't they move? In a minute old Shay might forget his anger and remember the law. All Carney's taunts would then have been in vain. But, ah, Shay's hand was closing upon his gun-butt! He was going to draw.

But he did not draw. Two pair of hands came out of the doorway, clutched the old man by the shoulders and dragged him inside. Carney stared in amazement and spat out sizzling curses between gritting teeth.

Inside the restaurant Old Bill Shay struggled savagely, and not weakly, by any means. But four men had him now and held him down, despite his best efforts to throw them off. One of the men was Andy, and Andy was working swiftly and expertly with a lariat upon the old man's wrists and ankles. Assisting him were Clark, the dishwasher, and the man who limped. In a few seconds they had Old Bill bound hand and foot and rolled him safely under a table.

From a rear room came Florence Shay. Old Bill saw her, but was too taken up with other things just then to wonder at her presence. He roared for her to release him. She paid him no attention; instead, she leaned forward tensely and stared with frightened eyes out through the front doorway. The limping man had gone out and Old Bill could see him upon the porch. Andy, Clark and the dishwasher had remained in the restaurant and were peering cautiously over the window sill.

OLD BILL suddenly ceased his furious struggling and subsided; he was stunned into amazed silence by something in the limping man's manner, in his drawling voice when he spoke—a something that struck the old man like a blow.

"He's old all right, Carney," young Bill was saying, "but he ain't what yuh would call a wreck; just the same, yuh said he was takin' advantage of his age when he called yuh a liar, and yuh hadda let him get away with it. Would yuh let me get away with it if I called yuh a liar, Carney? Would yuh? I'm gonna find out— Yo're a dirty liar, Carney, like he said—a dirty liar!"

Carney's eyes were black pools of venom now. The play was being taken away from him; he now was the taunted. He was standing with his feet widespread and his body bent forward a little from the hips. He was watching Bill's right hand, or rather, what he could see of the shoulder and arm. Bill was standing with his left side slightly toward Carney, so that his right hand was beyond his body.

The thought was racing through Carney's head that Bill's right hand might be in his coat pocket, might be gripping the butt of that deadly automatic! If so, Carney in his imagination could see that black muzzle covering his heart, could imagine the bone-smashing thud of the lead pellet and the hot, grating instant of agony as it tore into his chest.

But he could not back down. Twice he had been called a liar to his face, and he could not hedge. It would make him a thing of scorn. He, who had built up a reputation as a dangerous gunman and a bad man to cross, would be laughed out of the state. No, he could not hedge. To a man of Carney's twisted pride, reputation was a thing to be fought for to the death.

He would fight. Damn the law! He would draw quicker than he had ever before—so swiftly that young Bill Shay would not have time to fire from his pocket. He would be able to boast afterward that he had drawn and killed a man who held a loaded gun trained on him, that he had drawn and fired before the other could pull the trigger! He would sling lead so fast that men would talk about it for years.

He must fire lightning fast and must follow his first shot with a second and a third, so, that if the first one should only wound, the second and third would finish it. He must stop that trigger finger, must blast the life from the man who could not miss. That phrase he had laughed at. It was ridiculous, of course. But he was not himself now, and the phrase kept leaping through his head—the man who could not miss.

And all the other wondrous things they were saying about this ex-leatherneck—they tumbled back upon Carney

and lay like a vast weight upon his self-assurance. His superb self-confidence weakened, bent and almost broke. His feeling of superiority was shattered, as if for the first time in his gunman career he knew he was facing a better man than himself. He had nothing left but his speed, and that, he told himself, he must make the most of.

A thought occurred to cheer him, a thought of what would come after. He had a record as a killer and did not want to buck the law again without a sure defense—and here it was. Bill Shay with his hand on his gun, ready to fire from his pocket. A contemptible, cowardly thing, to a Westerner. A Western jury would give a verdict of self-defense without leaving the box. And beyond Bill Shay, peering from doors and windows, were at least a dozen men who knew the position of his right hand—good citizens who would testify truthfully as to what they saw.

Carney's reasoning was good as far as it went, but it did not go far enough; he was too quick to assume that Bill's right hand was in his pocket. It wasn't; it was hanging loosely at his side, out of Carney's sight, but in plain view of the men on Bill's side of the street, and it held no gun.

Bill had forgotten his wounds and weakness now. The old leatherneck recklessness came back upon him and he laughed. He was facing death and knew it; but he had done it many times before. The old battle slogan rumbled in his throat—

"Come on! Do you want to live forever?"

Then, aloud:

"I called yuh a liar, Carney. You got a streak o' yella in yuh, too. I seen it in yore eyes yestiday, when that dog come gallopin' down the street, and I see it now. Yuh come here to town to kill Pop, yuh low-down snake—" He broke off and waited calmly.

Carney had braced himself anew. He was tensed to show such speed as no one had ever seen before. Speed! His utmost speed! His right hand blurred into action. Then he was squirting crimson flame from his hip. Three times he thumbed his Colt; the bullets left the muzzle almost as one—but they missed their target.

Bill's draw was slow, more than slow compared with Carney's. The gunman was firing again, frantically, and one bullet drew a thin red line across Bill's cheek.

As coolly as if upon a pistol range, Bill aimed and fired. He did not miss.

Bill blew the smoke from the muzzle of his black automatic and looked in the street, at the sprawled body, toward which men were running. It was over. He had been fired upon; he had fired back in self-defense.

His sister was clinging to him and sobbing. Andy Carr had him by the arm. Inside, his father, spluttering and fuming, was arising after being freed of his bonds by Clark and the dishwasher.

"Gosh!" breathed Andy. "Gosh, Bill, I thought he had yuh, fella! Wasn't he a streak with a gun?"

"Fast, yeah," said Bill. He was a little breathless now, at the let-down. "Too fast. He was a bunch o' nerves—all keyed up. Wasn't thinkin' of anything but speed. 'Stead o' makin' sure of me with one good shot, he tried to empty his gun into me. 'Fraid one shot wouldn't stop me. Scared 'cause of that trick we pulled on him this mornin'. He was keyed up too tight."

"Trick?" broke in his sister, who had heard of the stunt. "It was wonderful shooting, Bill."

"Not so wonderful," answered Bill. "I couldn't see that nickel any more'n anybody else could."

"Then how—"

"Andy changed coins when he was scratchin' around in the dust. We had a dime, a nickel and a quarter all ready—punched holes in 'em with a nail and colored the rims with lead, at the hotel—so no matter what Carney give us to shoot at—"

He wavered a little on his feet. He

daubed at his bleeding cheek with a handkerchief. He limped inside to his father.

"You—you—" Old Bill fought for breath. "Why did you hafta horn in? Dammit, that was my fight. I'll—I'll—"

"You will like the devil!" cut in Bill. "Pipe down! I did it because I wanted to. What about it?"

Old Bill stared at him. He made funny noises in his throat. He opened his mouth and shut it and clenched his old hands.

Then, suddenly, he realized that he was a little tired. He realized too that he had not relished facing Mike Carney; the strain had taken something from him. Yes, he was tired—tired of fighting life alone. There had been times when he wanted to let down and rest awhile, but when you're all alone—

Mistily he saw that the others had moved away and were keeping the crowd outside. Florence and Andy Carr had their backs turned and were whispering. He was alone with his son—his son, the weakling who had become a man. He moved a step nearer that battle-scarred man. Then an arm slipped over his shoulders and a young hand gripped his.

"Pop, old-timer," said a husky voice in his ear, "le's us go home."

"Yeah, yeah," croaked Old Bill eagerly, "yeah, Bill, le's go home."

Before the Bow and Arrow

BY M. R. HARRINGTON

THE Indian's bow and arrow have figured so long in song and story that we have come to regard them as much a part of his picturesque stock in trade as his scalp lock or his tomahawk. But now archeologists who have been grubbing in dusty dry caves in various parts of the country are trying to tell us that the bow and arrow is not so venerable after all—that it seems to be a comparatively new addition to the red man's equipment, and that the earliest tribes had nothing of the kind. Instead they were equipped with a curious contraption known as the spear thrower or *atlatl*.

What is a spear thrower? In simple terms it is a stout stick, some twenty inches long, with a carefully wrought hand-grip on one end and a peg or a hook-like projection on the other. By clutching the grip, at the same time resting the butt end of a light spear against the peg, then casting the spear with a swift overhand motion, the ancient hunters and warriors succeeded in throwing the missile farther and with greater force than they could accomplish with the hand alone. Why? Because a twenty inch spear thrower made a man's arm just twenty inches longer, and gave him just that much more leverage; just as a little boy can do a lot more execution with a mud ball slung from the end of a willow switch than he can if it were thrown with his bare hand. The spears, judging from the examples uncovered in the caves, were some five or six feet long, and were sometimes feathered like arrows. The flint points were very much like arrowheads, only larger and heavier.

And now it seems not at all unlikely that all the tribes of North America used the spear thrower instead of the bow and arrow in very early times, and that the larger flint-points picked up in most parts of the country, points that have always seemed rather too heavy for arrows, are not arrowheads at all but points for the spears or darts hurled with the help of a spear thrower. If this is true they belong to an older age than the smaller flint-points, which are the real arrowheads.

How the bow and arrow first came to America, where from and by what route, may always remain a mystery. But the time of its coming may be guessed—within a few centuries at least. Archeologists tell us that the early Pueblos who lived in Arizona and Nevada about the time Christ was preaching in Palestine were well provided with bows and arrows; but that the ancient Basket Makers who occupied the same territory about two thousand years earlier used the spear thrower altogether and never heard of a bow and arrow. So we can not go far wrong in guessing that the bow reached this country some time in between, say, one thousand or fifteen hundred years before Christ.

Certain it is that when the white invaders reached North America they found the bow and arrow everywhere, while the spear thrower survived, in competition with the bow, only among the Eskimo of the north and among a few Mexican tribes, notably the Tarasdos in the south, and had died out everywhere else.

And it is only in these widely separated districts that the spear thrower may be seen in use today. And strange to say, it is now kept by the Mexican Indians entirely for hunting wild ducks and geese, while the Eskimos, three thousand miles away, use it mainly for the same purpose.

"The Curse of Gold" and a North Pacific

IKE

the Diver's Friend

EDWARD MATTHEWS, ESQUIRE, lost his philosophy in the Klondike gold rush. He himself never burned, of course, with a feverish lust for frozen gold. The disaster was accomplished by "Ike the Diver," that kind but unreasonable man. He and Ike the Diver were famous friends at the time the steamship *Portland* rounded Three Mile Point and swept down to the Schwabacher wharf. There, a crowd of gaunt, worn, hot-eyed miners packed a ton of gold-dust down the gangplank and gave the news of George Cormack's fabulous strike on Bonanza Creek, to Seattle and to the world.

The gold fever raged along the waterfront as violently as it did in any other section of Seattle. But Edward Matthews, Esquire, was not shaken. He philosophized as calmly about the stupendous and thrilling news as he did about stowing cargo in a barkantine. Even when the gold rush threatened to end his friendship with Ike the Diver, Edward Matthews, Esquire, still discoursed on fate and folly, with fair and reasonable words.

Then over him Fortune shook her golden bough and moved Edward Matthews, Esquire, from certainties to doubts.

"If a philersophical man like I am can't stand prosperity, 'oo can?" he said to Ike the Diver. "Nobody, I says. Nobody can stand prosperity. But some does. I'm beginnin' to won'er wot it's all about, Ike, old man."

II

IT WAS the summer before the start of the rush to the Klondike territory that Edward Matthews, Esquire, met Ike the Diver. The meeting occurred accidentally, in a crowd that was watching Seattle's Fourth-of-July illuminated bicycle parade. The cyclists, men and women, boys and girls, some three thousand of them, pedaled slowly down the city's broad main avenue, their wheel spokes flashing from the colored lights that shone in the fir-bough arches fastened to the seats and curving over the cyclists' heads. The thousands in the crowds jamming the sidewalks were enchanted with the spectacle. There was never a break in the cheering.

Edward Matthews, Esquire, was not greatly impressed.

"It's perty enough, I'll s'y that." He spoke to the man on his left. "But you 'aven't the genooine science of cyclin' over 'ere at all. 'Oo in the paryde 'as the correct posture, I arsk you now? They 'ump theirselves like they was blinkin' ryders. It's the fault of their trynin'. They've never learnt the correct cyclin' form, y'see. Scorchin', scorchin' is all yer blarsted Yank cyclists think of. Now, you arsk me, I'll tell you wot's wot about the science of cyclin'. It's this w'y—"

Edward Matthews, Esquire, burbled and rippled on in a fair and reasonable discourse on cycling, as it was correctly done in old England. To his inexpressible pleasure he saw that his neighbor

Longshoreman

By

JAMES STEVENS

was beaming on him more brightly at every sentence and showed never a sign of interruption. Edward Matthews, Esquire, was so heartened and inspired by this unusual reception that he kept on philosophizing for five minutes after the parade was over.

His audience, a lean, stooped but broad-backed man, was still beaming attention from his pale-blue eyes. For the first time since he had reached America, Edward Matthews, Esquire, felt that he had exhausted a subject. He could not say another word about cycling without repeating himself. Another subject must be brought up. Such a good audience must not be lost. Besides, the man appeared to be kind and liberal-minded.

"I s'y, ol' cull, I'm a bit dry. 'Ungry, too. 'Ad a blinkin' lot of 'ard luck. Shanghaied out of Liverpool and 'ere just two weeks. A strynger 'ere and I can't get work. I'm on my uppers for fair. Wot s'y you set 'em up? You do and I tell you wot yer blarsted Fourth of July's all about. The American rebellion, and all that."

The audience spoke for the first time, in a deep voice that had an unnatural flatness.

"You'll have to write 'er, friend. I'm deefer'n hell."

For a moment Edward Matthews, Esquire, was appalled. But for only a moment. After a brief pang of disillusionment he remembered his parching throat and his empty stomach; he noted the friendly twinkle in the stranger's eyes; and so he made the motion of hoisting a drink to his mouth and manage an expression of doleful appeal. The deaf man grinned understandingly.

"Throat's itchin', is she? Let's drift into Ole's."

He pushed through the crowd, and Edward Matthews, Esquire, followed closely. He said never a word until he had downed two schooners of beer and some fistfuls of rye bread and cheese. Words then eddied over his tongue, but he was loath to waste them on a deaf man. He was perplexed. A liberal-minded and attentive man stood beside him. A good-natured giant kind of man. A man worth having for a friend. A man seemingly eager to have his mind improved by fair and reasonable words. But a man without ears to hear. Aye, there was the rub. The deaf man settled the problem himself.

"Have another, mate?" his booming flat voice asked. "All right. Go after the free lunch much as you want, too. You seem like a pore, starved critter. You go on and talk some more, though. I like to be talked to. Nobody will hardly ever do it, for I'm deefer'n hell. I ruint my

ears at deep-sea divin'. I'm longshorin' now. The boys on the beach call me Ike the Diver. I'm deef, but you go ahead and talk. You're a born talker, I see. I've took a likin' to you. Don't know your name, but I'll call you 'Mouthy'. Have another beer, Mouthy; then you talk."

It appeared that this was an unusually long speech for Ike the Diver, as he said little more from then until the hour he carried his liquor-smitten but still gabbling friend down to his tideflat shack. Edward Matthews, Esquire, had talked and talked until an expansion from beer, a stuffing of free lunch and hoarseness overwhelmed him. But at every pause Ike the Diver said:

"Talk some more, Mouthy. Mouthy, you just keep on talkin'."

So the friendship between Ike Roberts, deaf ex-diver and lonely longshoreman, and Edward Matthews, Esquire, of Liverpool, England, began. It was soon celebrated all along the Seattle beach.

III

SEATTLE was only a small city, a sawmill center and lumber port, in '96; but men loved her then, as men always love a city built on hills and fronted by deep water. Seattle had her beauty of heights and slopes, her wharves pointing toward the smooth water and green islands of Puget Sound, toward the open ocean, Oriental shores, and the ice-bound coast of the Bering Sea.

Seattle had beauty in '96, though hers was a toilsome past. The city had been rebuilt over the ashes of a great fire, had grown sturdily from the labor of men driving wharf piling, logging big timber, sawing lumber, stowing lumber in the holds and stacking it on the decks of schooners and barkantines, mining coal, and erecting houses until Seattle was crawling lustily through the clearings between timbered hills.

In August, George Cormack was discovering the golden dirt of Bonanza Creek; but the news was eleven months away. Seattle only toiled for her future. She was not yet smitten with dazzling dreams of frozen treasure, of northern gold.

It was a lean year for labor. The waterfront saloons along Railroad Avenue had more idlers than customers. Whenever a ship was moored at one of the wharves the chief stevedore picked his men at the pier-shed gate. The saloons were emptied during this process, and the longshoremen made a shouting, milling mob at the gate, leg-aprons buckled around their waists and knees, wooden-handled iron hooks swinging from their belts. The chief stevedore picked his favorites. The lucky ones were formed into gangs of hatchmen, slingmen and truckers.

The discharged cargoes were barrels, bales and cases of dry goods and groceries, crates of machinery and furniture, sacks of vegetables, tubs of butter, casks of wine and kegs of beer. In the empty ships were stowed cargoes of lumber and coal. Longshoring was grinding labor in '96. There were twenty-hour shifts.

If there was a rush to get a cargo stowed, the longshoremen were held to the hatches and slings for a straight ten hours. No time off for lunch. No breathing spells. Let a man complain, and he was kicked off the dock, and a tougher one was picked at the gate. Stowing a lumber cargo was back-breaking labor. Rough, green timbers and boards. Stacks ten feet high on the dock floor. Heave the lumber off the stack. Pile it on the sling until a load was made. Straighten up for the ten seconds it took the winch-driver to lift the load head-high. Then bend over and heave lumber until another sling was filled.

That was the work of the men on the sling gangs.

Down in the hold the hatch gangs sweated in semi-darkness, dragging the lumber into place, binding each board and timber so that the cargo could not shift in the roughest sea. It was labor for broad-backed men like Ike the Diver. Edward Matthews, Esquire, might have been a first-rate trucker and a shrewd

handler of light cargo on the wharves of Liverpool; but the chief stevedores turned him down on the Seattle beach.

"Avast! You're no good for this lumber cargo. All right, Ike, you deef Siwash. All right for you, Ike."

That was it, nearly every time.

Edward Matthews, Esquire, never allowed such rebuffs to crush his philosophical faith in himself. He permitted no resentment against the chief stevedores, no bitterness against his lot to grow in his soul. Whenever a number of ships in port caused him to be picked at the gate, he was properly grateful, and he showed it by bestowing, on the chief stevedore responsible, an informative discourse on the superior longshoring practises of Liverpool.

And the gratitude and appreciation of Edward Matthews, Esquire, for the friendship of Ike the Diver, were boundless. The big longshoreman never came off of a wearying shift of stowing lumber but what his philosophical comrade was ahead of him, tidying up the tideflat shack and cooking a meal on the rickety stove. And as he cooked he talked with joyous unrestraint.

"It's perty orful, Ike, ol' man; it's orful and sickenin' for a civilized chap like me to 'ave been lugged orf like a dead cow and berried in a blinkin' 'ole like this 'ere. I feel sometimes like I'd lose all my sperit, I do. 'Ere I am, Edward Matthews, Esquire, of Liverpool, England, and I 'ave to stoop and truckle to the boss stevedores of a mud'ole of a port like this 'ere one. Berried to my eyes in it, I am. A pearl 'as been cast before swine, if I do say it myself. All they can s'y is, 'Cast off! Avast, you blighter!'

"And me a-knowin' more about stowin' cargo than the 'ole blarsted lot of 'em! If it wasn't for you, Ike, ol' man, I'd starve, s'elp me! Much they'd care. Well, I'm w'ytin' and w'ytin'. I'm a patient, philersophical man, I am. That's Edward Matthews, Esquire, of Liverpool, England. My time'll come, says I. 'Be a philoserpher, Edward,' I always says to me when the boss stevedores turn me down at the gate. And I always am. My time'll come, Ike ol' man. And when I'm a boss stevedore myself, or a wharfinger, more likely, if I get a bit more of ejucation, I won't be forgettin' your friendship and loyalty. You don't know 'ow you've comforted this pore exile, Ike—"

"Hey, Mouthy, the bacon's burnin'!" bawled Ike the Diver, rising on his bunk until he rested on his elbows. "Go on talkin', Mouthy, but turn over the bacon!"

The philosopher had been tapping his left palm with a fork, to properly emphasize his ideas. Now he lifted it up, whirled and jabbed a strip of bacon with such fervor and haste that sizzling grease was splattered on his bare arm.

"Ow!" he yelped. " 'Ell!"

The pain from the burns silenced him while he stirred the frying potatoes, looked into the coffee-pot and sliced some bread on the scarred oilcloth of the home-made table.

"Hurry up with them spuds and bacon, Mouthy!" called Ike the Diver. "I'm so hungry I could eat the tar off a rope. Get the grub on the table and then talk all you want. But get the grub on the table first, Mouthy."

"In a jiff', Ike ol' man. In a jiff'. Yer ol' woman'll soon 'ave yer supper fixed. A bit of patience, Ike, ol' man."

It was a good meal, and Ike the Diver showed his appreciation by beaming on Matthews for a good half-hour after he had eaten his fill. He puffed on his pipe and grinned. The serious-faced little man across the table was talking to him. Ike enjoyed seeing him talk. He liked to watch the lights change in the sober gray eyes, the play of wrinkles that made a wide ladder reaching from thin, sandy eyebrows to sparse, light-brown hair, and the varied movements of the lips that always had their corners drawn down in an aspect of solemn wisdom.

Ike liked Mouthy to sit and talk to him. He couldn't understand what the talk was about, but he couldn't remember any talk in the days before his deafness that was particularly worth understand-

ing. Mouthy sat and talked, and the tideflat shack wasn't so lonesome any more. But he was tired. Twenty hours of heaving lumber—

"Got to roll in, Mouthy. Like your talkin', but I got to roll in."

The friendship of Edward Matthews, Esquire, and Ike Roberts, deaf ex-diver, grew stronger as the winter months passed. For four months the philosophical Englishman failed to be picked at the gate, for ships that steamed and sailed through the winter fog of Puget Sound to the Seattle wharves. But Ike the Diver was often picked, and he kept grub in the tideflat shack. Every kind of work was scarce, and Pat Noonan's and the other saloons along Railroad Avenue were packed with idle men.

Below Yesler, loggers and sawmill hands in pitch-stained overalls, mackinaws and ducking coats, loafed in such hospitable places as Billy the Mug's, or sat in the lobbies of cheap hotels and stared through the windows at dray teams plodding through the everlasting rain. Mid-December, and the news of George Cormack's strike on Bonanza Creek had reached Circle City and Forty Mile. But Alaskan news was still ice-bound. Seattle heard it not. She was still a working city, seeing only a future of labor with lumber, shipping and coal.

Spring days, and work opened up. Loggers and laborers drifted to the woods, the mines and the mills. Fishermen sailed the sound again. Hatch gangs, sling gangs and truckers were busy along the beach. Edward Matthews, Esquire, was picked at the gate twice in ten days. He made fifty dollars, and he bought two slabs of bacon and a sack of potatoes for the tideflat shack. And he gave good old Ike a royal night of it. For the first time he was the one who bought all the beer over Pat Noonan's bar, who led the way below Yesler, took a fling at the roulette wheel in the Standard Gambling Hall and guided Ike the Diver into the blushful mysteries of the Paris House.

All the while, Edward Matthews, Esquire, discoursed happily on the beauties of friendship and the power of faith. The chief stevedores were recognizing his true worth at last. His time was at hand. He'd be a chief stevedore himself in a little while. Then he'd prove that what he was doing tonight for Ike the diver was nothing at all. Nothing at all.

"You're talkin' good, Mouthy," Ike the Diver said again. "Mouthy, you just keep on talkin'."

Edward Matthews, Esquire, was rather sore of head the next morning. His stomach didn't feel right. And it was distressingly hard to be hopeful. He was silent at least half of the time, as he and Ike tramped up to Pat Noonan's and waited with the other longshoremen for a ship to dock. There was no work that day or the next. It was the beginning of another slack spell on the Seattle beach.

IV

EDWARD MATTHEWS, ESQUIRE, sat on a beer-keg in Pat Noonan's saloon, gazing moodily through the open door and striving to make his state of mind match the brightness of the sunlight that flooded the avenue and the wharves and made splatters of gold on the gray waters of the sound.

The waterfront out there was alive. Drays were bumping along, the horses sweating, the harness shining. The masts of many ships appeared, slim and cool in the shadows of the pier-sheds. He could hear the rattle of winches, the banging and scraping of handling cargo, the shouting of chief stevedores. Over at the Schwabacher wharf a mob was watching the loading of Klondike freight and miners' outfits into the *Portland*.

Edward Matthews, Esquire, was the only idler in Pat Noonan's. He was proud that he had kept his head and not gone wild about the gold discovery. Let the whole city rave, but he, Edward Matthews, Esquire, would keep cool. He was not to be turned aside from his purpose.

Still, it was hard to be firm and hold to the faith in himself, the way fortune had been serving him. He had worked on

only a dozen ships in a year. This very morning he had been told to cast off at three different gates. And good old Ike had been acting so strange ever since the gold and the stories of the miners on the *Portland* had set the city crazy. Reading the papers all the while he was off shift. Not even looking at him when he was cooking the meals and talking his best.

He was so dry now he felt he would choke. And not a farthing in his pocket. He drew a deep sighing breath, felt his mouth get dryer as he whiffed the sour, earthy smell of beer, and his eyes widened with longing as he gazed at the deserted bar. Pat was standing in the door, watching the loading of the *Portland*.

All fair insane about the Klondike. All mad with a fever for the yellow dust of gold. Poor blind humanity. Folly! Folly! Any thinking man should know that the rich big bugs would flock up to the Klondike territory now, with their lawyers, and hog everything. The poor should stay where they belonged. The poor should be made to see. But they wouldn't listen to fair and reasonable words. He'd tried to reason with them and he knew. It was a mad, foolish world. Philosophy was the only shield. And sometimes it was very thin. Edward Matthews, Esquire, despondently kicked the beer-keg with his heel and hummed dismally:

> "It's the rich gets all the gr'vy;
> It's the pore that gets the blyme!"

But the poor helped the poor. Good old Ike. Their friendship was fair beautiful, it was. The big rich bugs could hog it all they pleased; but gold couldn't touch the friendships of the poor!

His meditations were disturbed by the roaring voice of "Hooks" Bartell, chief stevedore of the Sound Steamship Company.

"What the hell you know about it?" growled Hooks to Pat Noonan. "What you know about it, Pat? These longshoremen's been starvin' for four years, but now they's plenty of ships and good cargo, they're all achin' to hang up their hooks and hit for the gold cricks. How many's bought passage on the *Al Ki* and the *Portland* I don't know. Hope they all rot with the scurvy. Grief ahead. All the good boys pullin' off the Seattle beach, and the wharf-rats that'll take their places'll make it lousy as Liverpool."

Edward Matthews, Esquire, felt his philosophy give way before a rush of patriotism. He slid off his beer-keg and strode to the bar.

"S'y, big feller, wot's th' matter of Liverpool, I'd like to know? Wot you got to s'y ag'in Liverpool, you big stiff? Wot the blinkin' 'ell do you know about Liverpool, ennyw'y, I'm askin' yer? Well, stand and stare when I arsks you a civil question, you 'ook-eyed blighter!"

"Do you want a drink?" asked Hooks Bartell calmly. "Have one. Anything you like. Only shut up."

"Talkin' about this beach gettin' lousy as Liverpool—w'y, you couldn't even dream about this beach bein' like Liverpool in any w'y, shype or form. 'W'y not?' you arsks me. And I tell you. Becorse this blinkin' ol' pill of a beach is such a blighted little ol' pill of a beach, it couldn't even smell like Liverpool! Now, mytey, yer arskin' me something about Liverpool, w'y, I'll tell you something about Liverpool, in reasonable langwidge—"

"Oh, shut your jaw!" bawled Hooks Bartell. "Shut up, or I will amputate that jaw of yourn, as I've threatened time and again! Here, Pat, give him a scoop of suds. No such luck as this wharf rat hittin' for the Klondike and freezin' his vokel cords or his jawbone—"

"Me? You arsk if I'm goin' in this blinkin' ijiotic gold rush? Me—gor-blimey, you arsk if me, Edward Matthews, Esquire—"

"Get away from me!" yelled the tormented chief stevedore. "I'll have you shanghaied, damn if I don't! Cast off! Avast, you mouthy hellion!"

Edward Matthews, Esquire, shrugged his shoulders resignedly. It was always just like that, he thought, as he drained the roomy scoop. They would never

listen to him, the chief stevedores wouldn't. But he was patient and meek. Waiting for his time to come.

He returned to his beer-keg and resumed his doleful watching of the bright and busy waterfront. He closed his ears to the talk of the ignorant chief stevedore until he heard Ike the Diver mentioned by name.

"Yeah, he's just another of the good boys that's hangin' up their hooks. Walked off the beach not an hour ago and booked passage on the *Portland*. Hell's bells, Pat, I'll have to stay full of red-eye all the time, or else take out for the Klondike myself."

Edward Matthews, Esquire, started to arise and protest against such a ridiculous statement. It showed how much Hooks Bartell knew. Showed how much sense a man had to have to be a boss stevedore on this pill of a beach. But he sat down again. He was struck by the conviction that Hooks Bartell was speaking the truth. Ike's reading of the papers for hours at a time. Never watching him any more while he talked. Ike was a poor, simple soul—and even the mayor of the city had resigned and was joining the rush—it was likely true. Ike the Diver was going to the Klondike! The first real friend he'd ever had. It was shocking, that's what it was.

"Gorblimey!" groaned Edward Matthews, Esquire. A black cloud settled over his mind, making humanity seem foolish and foul. "Gorblimey, life is a rotten ol' lay again. I feel like I could bawl. Ow! 'Ell!"

The boss stevedore went on talking to Pat Noonan.

"Pour me another snifter, old settler. Hear about 'em dry-dockin' and paintin' the *Eliza Anderson?* Oldest side-wheeler on the sound. Been laid up for five years with the tides runnin' through her. I was down to the dry dock and I could jab my fingers into her side anywhere below the waterline. She'll prob'ly drown a hundred on her first try for St. Michaels. Well, it's not my funer'l. I'm stowin' cargo."

Edward Matthews, Esquire, felt an impulse to tell the real facts about the outfitting of rotten ships for Alaska, but he was too downhearted. Philosophy had fled. He could only think about Ike the Diver and sit and groan:

"Ow! 'Ee's leavin' me. Only friend I ever 'ad. 'Ell!"

V

EDWARD MATTHEWS, ESQUIRE, and Ike the Diver stood on the Schwabacher wharf, a mad crowd milling around them. The *Portland* had steam up. The rattling winches were lowering the last of the Klondike outfits into the hold. A line of men was pushing up the gangplank; the decks were already alive with faces and loud with shouts. Ike the Diver extended his paw, his pale-blue eyes got their friendliest shine, and the two friends had a long, solemn handshake.

Edward Matthews, Esquire, felt his throat choke up and his mouth turn dry. His eyes were brimming. He couldn't say a word, not one blinking word; he could only look up into the gaunt, wrinkled, good-natured face of old Ike, and think of all the grief that was ahead. But there was nothing he could say or do about it.

Last night, when the two were alone in the tideflat shack, he had tried to write a philosophical warning and protest which would persuade Ike from his folly. But his pencil would never throb with eloquence like his tongue's eloquence. It hadn't been any use. It wasn't now. Here in this drowsy sunlight, with the waters of the sound smooth and shining, with the city so peaceful and secure on her green hills, it was easy for unthinking men to see treasure for the digging at the end of an ocean and river steamboat run.

A philosopher like himself could see perils and hardships, cold and hunger, scurvy and fever and the overpowering greed of the rich big bugs and their lawyers. But it was too late for philosophy now. Gold! Gold! Gold! The *Portland* had brought down a ton of it. Men were

mad to get to the Klondike territory. Poor old Ike no less than others.

The handshake was ended.

"So long, Mouthy. You stick to the shack and whenever you feel downhearted, you just start talkin', Mouthy. Talk about the times we'll have when I come down with a ton of dust. So long, Mouthy."

Ike the Diver was gone, tramping up the gangplank.

And Edward Matthews, Esquire, hadn't been able to say a word of farewell. Many words were throbbing in his head. But it was no use to try and say them. Ike the Diver was mad with the blasted gold fever—going away. For how long? Forever, most likely.

The *Portland's* whistle boomed again, and the steamship moved from the dock piling. The crowd cheered wildly. An answering cheer thundered from the decks. The smoke from the steamship's stack rolled blackly against the blue of the sky. Her wake eddied and foamed. Rowboats and small sailing craft rocked over her waves as she swung out into Elliott Bay. The faces on her decks became splotches of white. The cheers sounded faint and far.

The crowd on the wharf was silent as the *Portland* turned into a fading black smudge at Three Mile Point. She was gone. Husbands, brothers and sons were gone. And friends, too, thought Edward Matthews, Esquire.

"YEAH, you'll do for a hatch gang this ship," growled Hooks Bartell from the gate of the Sound Steamship Company. "But keep your trap closed, or you'll cast off. Well, step along! Avast, Swanson, you're oary-eyed. All right for you when you sober up. Step along!"

Edward Matthews, Esquire, was longshoring alone on the Seattle Beach.

There were plenty of ships at the Seattle wharves in the summer days. The *Excelsior, Capilano, Al Ki, Mexico, Queen, Hueneme, City of Topeka, George W. Elder, Roanoake, Islander, Cleveland, Ohio, Rosalie, Willamette, Humboldt,* steamships and schooners, "anything that would float," were loaded with passengers and freight for Alaska, the Yukon and the Klondike.

River steamers and bulky scows were towed behind the big ships. And Edward Matthews, Esquire, made the hatch gangs all summer long. The Klondike cargoes were like the light stuff he had handled in Liverpool. Longshoring now was not the back-breaking, strong-arm labor of stowing rough, green lumber.

Down to the wharves the drays carted crates of bacon, barrels of flour, boxes of evaporated fruits and vegetables, sacks of corn-meal, rice, coffee and beans, bales and cases of corduroys, rubber boots, hobnail shoes, woolen socks, mittens and gloves, suits of heavy underclothing and mackinaws, hats and caps, blankets and fur coats, bundles of picks and shovels, axes and saws, stacks of gold pans, rolls of tarpaulins, kegs of whisky, wine, beer and nails.

He knew the stowing of such cargoes, did Edward Matthews, Esquire. His philosophy bloomed again. His faith in himself flourished once more, for the post of chief stevedore shone before him as a bright promise, until autumn's end. If he had kept his faith to himself and only dreamed about the promise, as he did when he was in the tideflat shack, eating lonely meals and seeing Ike the Diver coming off an Alaskan ship next year, ragged, hungry, disillusioned, to be greeted by a chief stevedore, to be greeted by himself, Edward Matthews, Esquire, risen in the world, but still loyal and true, and to be offered a checker's job—aye, that was a dream!

But Edward Matthews, Esquire, was bound to talk of his faith and hope all along the beach, in the holds and in Pat Noonan's. No one would listen; and some, especially the chief stevedores, would threaten to amputate his jaw and operate on his tongue. That was how much sympathy and understanding there was in this blinking pill of a port.

"If you know so much about stowin'

cargo, try to show us with something else besides your jaw!" Hooks Bartell, that ignoramus, would yell. "All I've ever seen your mouth do is hold up a ship. Fall to or cast off!"

Thus unappreciated, Edward Matthews, Esquire, was still being picked at the gate, a plain longshoreman, when the winter rain and fog came to Puget Sound. Alaska shipping was halted by Northern ice. Lumber and coal cargoes again. Never mind! The gold fever was still raging. By spring tens of thousands would be flocking to Seattle from all over America to go North on the first ships to sail. There would be more green longshoremen on the beach.

The old-timers, who had not succumbed to the gold fever, were stirred now by the promise of fifteen dollars a day wages in the Klondike. Edward Matthews, Esquire, warned them. A meal up there cost a dollar and a half. A pair of shoes cost a fortune. Whisky was fifty cents a glass. Tobacco was out of sight. There was the danger of scurvy and the Yukon fever. He felt it was his duty to warn the old-time longshoremen who remained. But if they left in the spring—well, so much the better for him.

Many of them did go on the first ships, and it was better for him. Seattle boomed and blared when the passage to Alaska was open again. Thousands swarmed First Avenue. Below Yesler, the tenderloin became a riotous and wealthy district. The city cast off her working clothes. Seattle became a frontier queen in a dancing skirt, with a red sash draped rakishly over her shoulder, with a glass of wine sparkling in her hand. The gold rush roared to its highest pitch in the summer of '98, and Seattle flamed with a new spirit that was never to be lost.

Ships from the Alaskan coast brought down more Klondike stories and more Klondike gold. In hotel lobbies, saloons and dance halls, hot-eyed men chanted the epic of the Yukon River, White Horse Rapids, Lake Linderman, Circle City, Forty Mile, Dawson, the Chilkoot Pass, Skagway and the frozen treasure of the enchanted northern creeks.

Indian, Dominion, Bonanza, Eldorado —trickles from the laboring glaciers of the North. Dirt piled up in the long, dark hours of winter. Gold washed out in the light of the midnight sun. Gold! Gold! Gold! Tons of yellow dust on every ship!

Set us out another snifter, bartender! All promenade to the bar! Yea, Bill, we're on our way to the goldfields, to the frozen fields of gold!"

"It's no use talkin', I know," Edward Matthews, Esquire, would declare in Pat Noonan's. "No use. But I feel it's my bounden duty to call yer attention to the fack that for every blighter wot packs a full chammy skin poke down a gangplank there's twenty be'ind 'im wot's ragged and 'arf-starved, scurvy-eaten and fever-blasted, 'avin' nothin' but their gladness to be 'ome. 'Ow about the Copper River district, I arsk you now? 'Ow about the pore devils starvin' up there? And 'ow about the rich big bugs in the Klondike? You 'ear 'ow they're 'oggin' it all, don't you, mytes?

"'Oo can buck a feller like this McDonald—the king of the Klondike, they calls 'im. The rich big bugs 'ave their lawyers and their gangs. I prophesied 'ow it would be. But it's no use talkin'. I only 'opes I'll 'ave my boss stevedore's post before good old Ike comes back. A wreck 'ee's sure to be. But I, Edward Matthews, Esquire, 'll tyke care of my friend and myke 'im 'earty and 'ole, a man in 'is right mind ag'in. 'Ee's all I'm wytin' for, is Ike the Diver. To 'ell with yer blinkin' gold."

Thus spake the philosopher.

VI

ON A JULY day Edward Matthews, Esquire, knew the golden hour of his life. He was living it in Pat Noonan's waterfront saloon. In dignity and silence. Yes, sir, he was taking it blinking well, he thought, in exactly the right spirit. His faith in himself had been justified. He was still the philosopher, so he was

dignified and silent. To talk now would mean that he must boast and brag. And he would not do it. He only nodded and smiled when Hooks Bartell shook his hand, congratulated him, ordered two mugs of beer and lifted his own as comrade to comrade. As chief stevedore to chief stevedore. Thirty minutes before, the manager of the newly organized Far North Steamship Company, an Englishman who could appreciate a learned longshoreman from the Liverpool beach, had made the hopes come true. He, Edward Matthews, Esquire, was a chief stevedore, at last. He was to begin his new duties tomorrow, he informed Hooks Bartell, with just the proper dignity.

Tomorrow— Now let Ike the Diver, good old Ike, return. He would soon learn then what a true and loyal friend he had. He should be cared for, as he had cared for Edward Matthews, Esquire, the unfortunate exile. He should be shown that philosophy also had its rewards. He should be shown the folly of going mad over gold. But gently. With tact. Edward Matthews, Esquire, would never lord it over his good old friend. Ike the Diver should have a decent, easy job. One must be saved for him, one that would do for him as long as he lived.

Edward Matthews, Esquire, was torn from the beatific dreams of what he would do for Ike the Diver by an excited bawl that sounded through the saloon door:

"The *Roanoake's* at the Pacific Steamship wharf! Loaded with gold! Come on, mates!"

Edward Matthews, Esquire, followed the rushing mob with a dignified step. Seattle was emptying her uptown streets. People were running in droves down the hills and over Railroad Avenue. But Edward Matthews, Esquire, chief stevedore for the Far North Steamship Company, never hurried. He watched the docking of the ship and he heard the mad yells from her decks and the shouts of the crowd, with condescension. He watched the haggard, bearded miners coming down the gangplank with only sober pity in his eyes, until he saw shoulders that had a familiar stoop—a grizzled beard covered the miner's face; but there was no mistaking the eyes.

"Ike, ol' man—Ike, ol' man—"

"Hello, Mouthy. What's the matter? Ain't you still a-talkin'? How you been makin' it, Mouthy?"

Poor old Ike, lean and worn, dressed in ragged coat and pants, roughshod, not a total wreck as he'd feared, but in a bad shape, as anybody could see. Edward Matthews, Esquire, felt his eyes dampen with pity. But his heart swelled with pride. This was indeed his golden hour. Good old Ike—he must let his friend know that there was a good time ahead before he started talking. He had started a search for pencil and paper when he saw Ike the Diver opening the pockets of his mackinaw. They were crammed with greasy sacks.

"Thousands, Mouthy," said Ike. "I stagger when I carry 'em. We start out right now to paintin' the town, Mouthy— Why, Mouthy, what's hurtin' you? Got a bellyache, Mouthy?"

For Edward Matthews, Esquire, had sat down suddenly on a pile of rope and now he was bending over, holding his face in his hands and groaning.

"Ow! It's ever the w'y. 'Ell!"

Gold. Ruinous gold. It was ever a curse in the hands of a man like poor old Ike. It was shocking, horribly shocking, to find good old Ike a blinking Crœsus. Staggering under a load of gold. Talking of painting the town first thing, of course. The beautiful plans were in ruins. Ike must be cared for. He should not paint the town. He should put the gold to proper use. Edward Matthews, Esquire, his true and loyal friend, would see to that.

Ike should be guarded and watched, made to keep enough of his gold to secure a fair living in his old age. He would be hard to manage. But it must be done. No use to think of his chief stevedore's post now. He would have to sacrifice that. His duty was with Ike. How would

he manage? He could not think. Not after such a shocking blow. The beautiful plans were in ruins. Old Ike a blinking Crœsus. His mind was in such a blasted stew.

"Come on to the Rainier Grand Hotel, Mouthy," said Ike the Diver. "We're goin' to get us some swallertails and plug hats, and then we're goin' to start paintin' the town, Mouthy."

"Ow!" groaned Edward Matthews, Esquire, as he got to his feet. "I must think and think. Wot to do? Wot is a philoserpher to do with sacks of gold? 'Ell! To 'ave my 'opes all end this w'y! Ain't it a blinkin' shyme?"

The philosophy of Edward Matthews Esquire, never had a chance against Ike the Diver's gold. It was shaken as soon as the friends entered the gilded lobby of the hotel. The opulence of plush and draperies in their magnificent bedroom brought philosophy down. The plug hats and swallowtails smothered it. The very form of it was washed away by glasses of champagne.

Ike the Diver and Mouthy Matthews painted the town, and the story of the painting became one of the epics of the gold rush.

"We'll start at the Horseshoe, Mouthy," announced Ike the Diver, when the two were in their royal raiment. "I've always wanted to make a splash in the Horseshoe, Mouthy."

The Horseshoe was a glittering uptown saloon with solid mahogany fixtures. Its mirrors were French plate glass. The fixtures had taken the Grand Prize at the Centennial Exposition. The saloon's interior was the handsomest on the Pacific Coast. A sterling-silver horseshoe, with nails, toe-and-heel calks of solid gold, ornamented the polished surface of the bar. The great mirror was flanked by mirrors in horseshoe frames.

Exotic bottles with rainbow labels were stacked between mahogany columns. Pyramids of crystal glasses sparkled and flashed from clean cloths of linen. The floor was tile. The brass foot-rail was polished every hour. There was a vault-like safe, with individual boxes wherein the Klondikers could deposit their dust.

Ike the Diver strode to the bar of the Horseshoe, deposited his gold and ordered champagne for the house. And Edward Matthews' story of his friend's achievement in the Klondike was listened to by men whose white fingers flashed with diamonds.

Thus philosophy died.

THE STANDARD gambling hall, with its twenty-five games of faro, roulette, chuck-a-luck, fan-tan, knew the pair on their first night of painting the town, and on many other nights. Ike the Diver bucked the wheel, and Edward Matthews, Esquire, discoursed on the fickleness of fortune when he lost. He was listened to with respect, for he wore a swallowtail and a plug hat and he was the partner of a wealthy Klondike man. He read his name in the papers, saw a description of himself in print. The painted ladies of the dance-halls and the Paris House lavished their fairest attentions upon him and listened with humility to his moral admonitions.

Aye, it was fair glorious, it was. How was a man to think, how was he to keep his philosophy, how was he to cherish such a simple hope as that of becoming a chief stevedore, when he was enjoying such glory, when he was wearing a swallowtail and a plug hat, drinking champagne and being admired by beautiful women? How was he now?

Remember the bitter life he'd always had. And now it was fair heaven, it was. He'd philosophize with Ike the Diver soon enough. Show him how he should save someting to take care of himself in his old age. There were pounds and pounds of gold remaining, thousands of dollars. A few would be enough.

The best of all was down at Pat Noonan's. The famous pair nearly wrecked the waterfront when they got all the longshoremen of the beach jammed into Pat's place. Ike the Diver bought with such extravagance that Pat had to hire an extra pair of bartenders. And

at last he had to send to the wholesale house for a load of champagne.

"We'll buy our old mates nothin' but champagne, hey, Mouthy?" said Ike.

Edward Matthews, Esquire, solemnly nodded agreement. It was nothing but right. Give the poor some of the rich big bugs' fine fun when there was a chance, he said. He discoursed for a full two hours, for every time Ike the Diver ordered another round of champagne, he would say:

"It's good to see you talkin' again, Mouthy. You just keep on talkin'."

The two friends painted the town for a week—two weeks—a month—two months—and at the end of October the owner of the Horseshoe showed Ike the Diver an empty deposit box. Ike blinked his pale-blue eyes for a moment; then he grinned down at his friend.

"Looks like we'll have to take down the old hooks again, Mouthy. Guess we'll have to trade our plug hats and swallertails for mackinaws and overalls."

Edward Matthews, Esquire, had nothing to say. He was stupefied. He'd thought there were thousands yet. It was shocking. He was overwhelmed. Broke! Ike the Diver was a poor man again. Not a blinking cent left to protect him in his old age. And it was all the fault of Edward Matthews, Esquire. Just when he had needed it most, he had let his philosophy go.

"Ow!"

"Well, Mouthy, we've had a high and hellin' old time of 'er, anyhow. We sure painted the town, Mouthy. Guess it's us for the old tideflat shack now, though. Let's rustle some bacon and spuds; you cook us up a good supper, Mouthy."

VII

HOOKS BARTELL was picking them from the crows of longshoremen that was milling around in the rain before the Sound Steamship Company's gate.

"All right for you, Ike. Step along. Cast off, Mouthy. You're no damn good for this lumber cargo. Step along. All right, Swanson. Packin' anything on your hip? Got to stay sober, mind. Step along!"

Swinging his hook, Ike the Diver tramped on through the gate. Edward Matthews, Esquire, turned back toward Pat Noonan's. It would be the same old story all winter, most likely. Loafing at Pat's, waiting for a chance at a ship. Frying the bacon and spuds, boiling the coffee and slicing the bread for good old Ike. No chance to be a boss stevedore next summer. Opportunity knocked only once, all the philosophers agreed. Well, he'd got his own philosophy back again, anyway. He'd proved it right. His time had come. But he's been ruined by gold. Hereafter, he could only hold himself up as a warning.

"Look at me standin' 'ere," he would say. "Once I was full of pride. And once I was a blinkin' milyunaire. A bloated Croœsus, I was. Look on me, young man, and tyke warnin'. Alw'ys be true to yourself, as the poet says."

Aye, he had salvaged a bit of his philosophy. The curse of gold had not left him an utter ruin. And Ike the Diver was still his true and loyal friend. Good old Ike would never neglect him and fail to say:

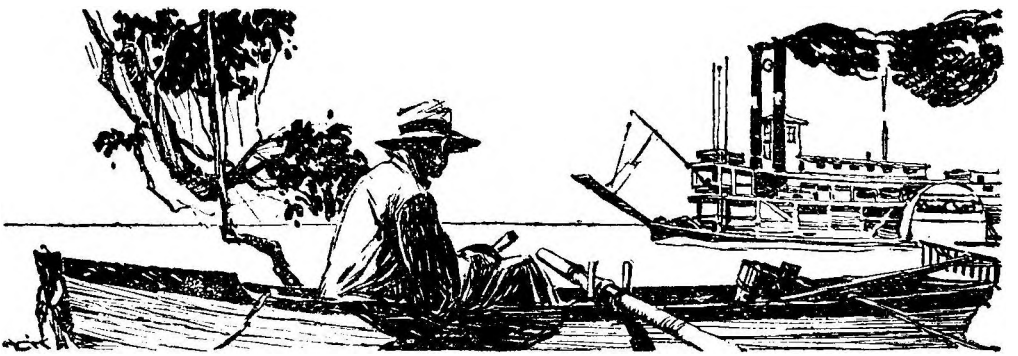
"I like to see you talk, Mouthy. Mouthy, you just keep on talkin'."

Continuing

ALAN LEMAY'S

Novel of Boom Days and Mississippi Steamboats

Old Father of Waters



WHEN Arnold Huston's steamboat, the *Peter Swain*, burned on the river, he went back penniless to his home at Natchez; here he met his cousin, Will Huston, who informed him that he had foreclosed on the property and that it now belonged to him. A quarrel resulted and a duel was arranged.

For a second Arnold chose a suave young gentleman, by name Mark Wallace, who first tried ineffectually to dissuade him from going through with the duel, and then conducted him, still suffering acutely from burns, to the home of a friend to prepare himself for it. Here he first glimpsed beautiful Jacqueline DuMoyne.

When Arnold was well enough to discuss business, Wallace told him of a plan to buy up some old river boat, refit it, and offer part ownership and the captaincy of it to him. In the midst of all this Arnold was sent for by Caroline Shepherd, a young lady of means and position, with whom he had fancied himself in love. But she seemed unduly concerned about Will Huston's welfare, and Arnold came away with his heart quite free, but with a heightened interest in Jacqueline DuMoyne. From Wallace he learned the story of her past—of her unfortunate marriage to the reckless young rake, Andrea DuMoyne; of his various escapades; of his curious dagger duel in the dark with Jean Fouchet, and his flight and mysterious disappearance into the bayou.

The cousins met for their affair of honor. Arnold had decided secretly to withhold his fire. But Will, by nature nervous, was scared into firing by a jerk of the other's hand; and Arnold, maddened by Will's shot, blazed away blindly—a shot that went wide of its mark, but which shocked Will into a dead faint.

It fell to Arnold Huston to arrange

for a crew for the new steamboat project. Without cash, with but his word to offer as security, he sought out an old swamp-rat, Walt Gunn, who lived by his Bible, his rifle and by certain shady dealings; and this man, sensing Arnold's intense earnestness, finally agreed to deliver to him a crew of black men. Then Huston came to terms with Captain Pumpernickel, a roly-poly, slovenly, strange little man who used his steamboat, the *Frontier City*, merely as a place to live, letting her slowly rot in dock rather than sell her, not because he was unwilling, but because he was victim of fear that all possible purchasers were trying "to come it over him." He agreed to turn over the boat for Huston for three hundred dollars a year and a free cabin aboard the rest of his life. Huston hired a Scotsman, Arthur MacMaugh, to purchase and install the new power the boat was to have.

While general overhauling of the *Frontier City* was going on apace, Will Huston paid Arnold a visit, but not of conciliation. Being under the impression that Arnold was still paying court to Caroline, he threatened Arnold to ruin his project if he so persisted; and Arnold, irritated at the presumption of his cousin, only laughed at him. Will left in a furious anger. Mark Wallace, who had listened in on the quarrel through a partition, now reproached Arnold for having further antagonized Will, since he, with his great financial power, was quite capable of doing them damage.

Arnold made another trip to the swamplands to see Walt Gunn about certain supplies of grain and molasses. He found the place deserted, and narrowly escaped death from an automatic rifle contraption Gunn had set up against intruders. Dejected and drenched by several hours in the rain and bogs, he returned to his boat and found Mark Wallace in an ugly mood. Wallace had been distinctly chill toward him for some time, much to Arnold's puzzlement, and now everything became clear as Wallace talked.

"Jacqueline told me she thought you were falling in love with her," he said.

"And you have some interest in that quarter yourself?" Arnold retorted hotly.

"I have, and if I find you in my way I'll break you with no more compunction than I would any other pauper. Remember, my friend, that everything you have is by my sufferance!"

A gleam of madness shone in Arnold's eye. He seized Wallace by the collar and shook him like a rat, then tossed him aside with disdain.

"You'll fight me for this!" screamed Wallace.

"No," said Arnold with a calm smile, "I'm tired of fighting cowards. Now get out. I've work to do."

XX

AT EIGHT o'clock, in the black rain Huston robbed his boat of two hours of his time to go to Jacqueline DuMoyne.

Every man in the boat's personnel had responded mightily to Huston's appeal for speed. An hour after Mark Wallace had left the boat, Huston had been in overalls in the engine-room. Both his mates were by that time out on errands; the second engineer had gone to wood-lash a wood-barge from across the river, and to round up the last necessities. A Cajun boy who was an engine-room striker was bossing a gang of negroes with scrub-brushes. To his surprize, the spurred efforts of them all were outdone by the silent efficiency of that dour man of the engines, MacMaugh; after all, it was upon MacMaugh that all their chances turned.

Until noon Huston and MacMaugh labored alone. They were working on the "doctor," the fiddling pump that kept the water-level in the boilers the same. MacMaugh had accepted Huston's services dubiously at first. He had been given no reason to think that his captain knew a boiler from a turbine. At the end of an hour he had no more doubt.

"If I'd had two men like you, we'd been up-river last week."

"Pass the graphite," said Huston.

Reinforcements came at noon, a first engineer borrowed from a friendly boat and two others picked up in the town. They were an assorted looking crew. One was a fat man with a walloping big mustache, through which he shot tobacco juice with a whistling noise at intervals of one minute. Huston found himself timing his accomplishments by that whistling squirt of juice. Another was a little wisp of a man with glasses and a peaked face; his big bony hands were loosely affixed to his spindling forearms. The third was a thick-wristed Norwegian, whose methodical competence contrasted with the apparent blankness of his huge face.

These men started work slowly at first, with a detached interest. Then presently the close-lipped intensity of Huston and MacMaugh took them, and things began to get done. By the middle of the afternoon the five of them were working in a silent furor of speed, emphasized by the clank of their tools and the short directions of MacMaugh. At six o'clock the Norwegian put down his tools and picked up his coat. No one followed his example. The fat engineer shot him a contemptuous glance and whistled tobacco through his teeth. The Norwegian put down his coat and did not again relinquish his wrenches that night.

They ate dinner standing, cramming their mouths with greasy hands, and in five minutes were back at their work.

During this time Arnold found himself.

There was something familiar and reassuring in the very hazard of the situation that had enveloped him. He was in a good position to lose everything that he cared about, with Will Huston bearing down hard with an unexpected financial strength, and his own partner so inconceivably changed that Arnold was at a loss to understand what had happened. Yet he found a new exhilaration in the extremity of his predicament. He was like a man who, about to succumb to the attack of a single adversary, fights with a surpassing fury upon finding himself beset by six.

How he was to master Mark Wallace and defeat Will Huston he had no idea. Nor did he have any illusions as to what chance he would have with Jacqueline DuMoyne if these things were done. The first thing was to get the steamboat upriver, so that her immediate usefulness would not be lost to both Mark and himself.

The steamboat men that he had gathered about him found him transfigured. There was no more humor in his face now than before, but there was a glint in his eye that goes with the love of battle in all men, let the devil-luck run as it may.

At eight o'clock he suddenly laid down his tools and kicked his overalls off on to the floor.

"I'll be gone for two hours," he said, "and be back for all night."

MacMaugh grunted; the others scarcely looked up. They didn't have time, knowing what was ahead of them in that night of rain. Huston raced upstairs to his stateroom, begrudging every moment that he lost. He had shaved that morning, and did not repeat the operation now. He scoured the grease from his face; it would not come off entirely from his hands. A black slicker was over his shoulders, but he was still tying his tie when a few minutes later he stepped into a skiff by the *Frontier City's* side. A powerful negro was waiting at the oars.

"Now you move!" snapped Huston, pushing off with a shove that sent them three fathoms on their way; and the slave made the water foam from the bow.

In the streets of New Orleans the rain seemed thinner, yet possessed of dark misty depths. Here and there it glinted silver where shone a light. But the lights themselves glowed magically orange, each one doubled by a reflection of itself below in the wet. On the Rue Chartres he was admitted to the small door in the timbered portal.

"WHAT was it," asked Jacqueline DuMoyne with a little smile, "that her name turned out to be?"

"Whose name?"

"Why, the name of your steamboat!"

Arnold smiled.

"I don't know."

"But—Mark said she was to take to the river in the morning."

So he had been there, then!

"Yes, I ought to be with her now. I'm goin' back in a minute."

"But it has to have a name!"

"Yes," he admitted, "I suppose so."

"You're not going to leave it *Frontier City?*"

"No, that's painted over. Anyway it wouldn't be good business, and the crew wouldn't like it. She has to have another. The carpenter was askin' just before I left. He's boss painter too. He couldn't paint in the rain, but he'd made a pair of light signs, tall as a man, to be nailed to the paddleboxes, after bein' painted inside. And he wanted to know what her name was. I couldn't tell him. I told him to go ask the engineer and put on whatever he said."

"I know what I would have named her."

"Why didn't you then?"

"I thought Mark—"

"I don't think Mark ever gave it a thought. Anyway, I forgot to ask him."

"I think," she said, "it should be called the *Arnold Huston*."

He laughed softly, but so harshly that she looked at him in surprize.

"When you get back you'll probably find he's named it just what I said," she told him.

"He'll more likely name her '86-96 *Stroke*'," Huston thought.

"Will the boat pass," she asked him, "out there where I can see it?"

"At about five o'clock in the mornin', I think."

"I'm going to watch it go by."

"She won't be much to look at, I'm afraid."

"But it's—" he had a fleeting impression that she had started to say "ours," but the sentence remained incomplete.

She suddenly extended her arm, and her soft fingers lifted his own.

"Your hand is hurt!"

He wanted to grip her fingers, but he recognized her detached intention and withheld. His long corded hand lay relaxed, grimed with black engine-grease. Its look of being worn and bent with toil was purely an illusion of its weariness; but of course she couldn't know that. A trace of blood had reappeared, where the slip of a wrench had sent his fist crashing against a bolt head.

"Oh, I always hurt my hands."

Her fingers withdrew as gently as they had come.

"Mark told me," she said, "that—that you and he had quarreled."

He drawled.

"What else did he tell you?"

"That was all."

She was timorous, hesitant; yet he felt that she was being drawn to him by an overwhelming pity. He turned his face toward her with the slow shadow of a smile, warm, assured, faintly amused. For a brief interval they sat in silence.

He looked out toward the Mississippi. He could feel the river, invisible beyond the cloaking mists of dark rain. The strong swing and pull of the current surged in his blood.

"How many things happen," he said softly, "that a man knows nothin' of! Perhaps my fortunes have been discussed in this very room."

"Yes," she said.

"I think," he said levelly, his face still turned to the river rain, "I've been blindfolded, in some ways."

"Oh poor Arnold," she burst out. "Like a picador's horse!"

It was the first time she had used his name. An old fire that had long sulked blazed up, so that as he slowly turned his eyes to her they were full of flame. He was in that mood of recklessness in which men of all times have walked into enemy gunfire. He felt a lift of proud power, edged by an utter indifference to catastrophe or loss. He would have walked

directly into his death with that same glow in his eyes, that same smile.

Because Mark Wallace had felt his strength, Jacqueline knew more than Huston suspected, more than Huston himself. Yet—

She could not look into his face and believe this man defeated. She thought—

"He has something, knows something, that makes him master of them all."

What it might be she could not imagine. But it was impossible to believe that this was not the man with the whip.

He said—

"Perhaps."

With a queer sense of distance he heard her say—

"You can't let them down you—now."

They held each other's eyes until hers dropped.

"One thing," he said, "is clear to us both."

A certain new quality in his voice carried to her such an inescapable significance that one hand fluttered to her throat, and she rose. Her eyes wavered on his.

"What—"

He stood before her; his corded hands cupped her shoulders. Afterward she found that the hurt hand had left a touch of blood there.

"That I love you."

The hands from which Mark Wallace had been unable to free himself drew her against him. She was motionless as he kissed her mouth.

He let her drift from him a moment after that. But she swayed so that had he wished to release her shoulders he would not have dared, lest she fall. Her eyes brimmed, but there were no tears; and though her shoulders shook as with sobs, her lips were quiet and no sound came. Her head was a little to one side, and she was looking at him through eyes strangely narrowed, oblique dark slits in a face gone deathly white. They might have expressed terror—appeal—hate—some hard twisting emotion that he could not read.

He never could remember just what she had said. The harsh, case-hardened shell of his own mood made him impervious to external things, even to his own effect upon her. He set her down among the cushions of the settee. She told him in a choked voice something to the effect that she wanted him to go away, to leave her to herself.

"You belong to me," he told her. "I'm not to be denied."

As he went out she called after him, in a small voice,

"I'm going to watch for your boat."

She worried afterward as to what he might build out of that, but she could have spared herself the trouble. Huston was in no mood for the taking of soundings, and after a brief bitter smile let it drop from his mind. The one thing that he did not forget was the warmth of her lips under his.

XXI

FOR AN hour the rain had been decreasing, first to a drizzle, then to a descending mist; as the gray dawn swelled rapidly into a universal bluish light it stopped altogether. The mild, dark wood-smoke from the stacks had been drifting down to touch the surface of the water, muffling close about the steamboat in the rain. Now it rose and drifted away, leaving the cool morning air lucid.

The carpenter's crew of blacks was struggling with the signboards that were for the present to bear the boat's name. Now that they had to be suspended and nailed to the paddle-boxes, the light signs seemed acres in extent. The negroes shuffled themselves, heaved and cursed. There were whooping shouts, a great stamping of bare feet and the rattling of tackle.

MacMaugh came and stood at Huston's elbow where he leaned on the rail. The engineer seemed unwearied by the night's exertions. His movements were economical of effort, and he knew how to rest as well as the next; yet he forever seemed to be doing something, about to

do something or planning to do something. When none of these attitudes were possible, it appeared that MacMaugh was waiting. Never under any circumstances did he seem to be merely taking his ease, as Huston looked when he leaned on the rail in the company of his cigar.

"How do you like it?" the engineer asked.

"Looks good; looks great. I'll have to see her lay against the current before I say for sure."

"I meant the boat's name," said MacMaugh.

"Oh—her name!" Huston chuckled dryly in mockery of himself that he had forgotten to ask what it was. He experienced a moment of ironic panic, for fear that these steamboat men of his, in absence of any instruction from him, had given his boat some foolish label.

"Did you name her?" he asked.

"I understood that it had been left to me," said MacMaugh.

"It was."

"I see you don't think well of her name," said MacMaugh oddly. "Well, I named the name. I did not do so without consulting the other officers, these men of your own choosing. And if—"

"I don't even know what her name is," Huston put in.

"You had best be looking to see, then," MacMaugh advised.

Huston leaned far out over the rail, peering through the gray light of the dawn. At first he could not see the face of the huge wooden plate. Then it swung about on its spider webs of tackle, and he made out in letters black and red:

ARNOLD HUSTON
NEW ORLEANS

His emotion was one of embarrassment. He did not know what to say to MacMaugh, and remained for some moments staring blankly at the sign, as if it were almost beyond his capabilities to read two words.

"I don't think," he said at last, "it was hardly right to name her that."

He had been trying to decide whether or not he should allow the name to be put up, and was still uncertain. It was too late to paint another name now, and they could hardly take the rebuilt boat on her maiden trip with no name at all. It could have been worse; other men had given their own names to their boats before.

"I would not have thought you the man," MacMaugh was saying, "to begrudge his name to his boat."

"It isn't that," said Huston uncertainly.

"The *Huston* is a good boat," MacMaugh went on, using the new name already. "I am proud of her myself, what little part I have had to do with her in her powering. I don't know what she can do, no more than you; but this I can tell you, though she may be small, she is no boat that a man would be ashamed of. There are big names on the river, carried by boats that will not carry them as fast nor as neatly as she."

"I'm as strong for her as you are," Huston insisted, "but—"

"I thought you would be glad to honor the boat with your name," MacMaugh continued.

The man seemed vaguely hurt, not at the questioning of his judgment, but as if some sort of offense had been offered the boat to which he had given his labor.

"The boat is worth any man's name," said Huston. "Only it doesn't look like I have the honor due me, hardly."

"Honor due?" It was apparent that MacMaugh had no conception of what Huston was talking about.

"That's it."

"It's the boat honored," said MacMaugh. "A man can honor a thing with his name. How can a thing honor a man? A thing is what men make it. Except the engines, which I sometimes think the devil made, or else got inside them afterward. If you don't like the name, it is because you are dissatisfied with the work that has gone to make her. After all, let me ask you, whose name else did you have a right to give her?"

"Nobody's," Huston admitted. "I

thought prob'ly the name of a place—"

"Argh," said MacMaugh, and went below.

They breakfasted immediately after that—grimed, tired men. Yet, in accordance with the etiquette of all good packets, the officers of the boat all wore their coats. Only Captain Pumpernickel came slopping to the breakfast table in a dirty undershirt and unlaced boots.

In fulfilment of his contract with the old man, Huston had assigned Pumpernickel an unimportant but comfortable stateroom, where he received the adequate service always accorded first class passengers. He no longer ate breakfasts that had been cooked the night before, and his room was neatly kept. With the cares of life lifted from his shoulders, Pumpernickel applied himself to the task of keeping comfortably drunk at all hours, and staring at the people working on the boat. The old man had been de-flead along with the rest of the boat and her equipment, including the cat. With this accomplished, he was no longer an active menace. It appeared, however, that he might be a source of embarrassment in other ways.

"Huh-uh," said Huston, waving him away from the table.

"Lot o' noise last night," said Pumpernickel, his dry voice testy. "Man couldn't get any sleep. Like to know the sense—" He was about to sit down.

"Captain Pumpernickel!" said Huston. "You can't come to my table in that condition!"

"How?"

"You go get a collar and coat on!"

Huston had a hard, resonant, slightly nasal voice when he gave commands. It cut through Pumpernickel's deafness.

"Who?" Pumpernickel exploded. His piercing glass-marble eyes popped at Huston.

"You know who I'm talkin' to!"

"Ye mean to say I can't come to my own table—"

"It ain't your table," Huston corrected him.

For a moment the small puckered mouth in Pumpernickel's loosely folded face expressed a frozen astonishment. Then, without another word he stumped off to his stateroom and his door slammed with a frightful bang behind him. He was not seen again until the rest had gone; then he slunk forth to eat with the second engineer.

There was little conversation at breakfast. They were a group of men various in degree of polish, age, character, and interest in the boat. Each was intrusted with some necessary function of the boat's existence as a working thing, although, since there were no uniforms among steamboat crews in those days, appearance did not distinguish one from another.

Huston sat at the head of the table. At his right hand, as befitting his acknowledged position, sat the "longest" of the two pilots, Harry Masters. He was a great, thick mountain of a man weighing only slightly under two hundred and fifty pounds, with a good-humored blank face mounted between side-whiskers. His eyes were prominent, at once bulging and heavy-lidded. Here was a man Huston was fortunate to get. In spite of his unwieldy mass he had a delicately skilful hand at the wheel, a fine instinct for a shifted channel, and an almost perfect sensitivity to the response of his boat.

Opposite him sat Nate Lacrosse, his mate, whose head was a close-cropped bullet, with eyes so squinted and so deeply screwed into it that the man seemed to be in pain. A glimpse of them told better than words how the sun-glare on the river could punish sensitive eyes. In contrast to the immaculate Harry Masters, Lacrosse wore his clothes in a way that enabled him always to look collarless, no matter what he might have on. This man was not quite so good by reputation as Harry Masters; but he knew his river, and his mishaps had been few. Considering the comparatively small size of the *Arnold Huston*, they were lucky to get him, too.

MacMaugh ranked next, of course, tall and dour, with a great disordered shock

of hair above a rubbly face on which the bristle was seldom allowed to show. His eyes were like raw steel.

One other man was there at that breakfast table, who later was able to influence Arnold Huston as much as any man ever could. He was the youth that Huston had chosen for mate. A good deal of a boy, some of the others thought him; but Arnold had been a mate himself at eighteen, and believed that he had discharged the duties thereof as well as most, and a good deal better than some.

The mate's name was Tommy Craig. He was of about Huston's size, and five years younger; but Huston looked by twenty years the more experienced man. Craig's hair was the color of dull brass, his eyes blue in a face whose complete homeliness was qualified only by the laughter that seemed never more than temporarily suppressed. The older men, with the exception of Huston, supposed him to be incompetent, naturally: he did not have their experience on the river.

But Craig, nevertheless, could fling a gang of negroes against a task with a speed which would have meant sulks and disorder under many an older man. The hookworm had passed him by, and a continual fear of missing something had slipped in instead. Consequently no emergency, in his watch or in any one's else, was likely to find him in his bunk.

And he did not seem to know the difference between a disagreeable task and one replete with interest.

There were a dozen others there, of varying importance to the boat—a knotty second mate; first, second and third clerks; two watchmen who were hardly more than boys, in accordance with Huston's belief that greenness was preferable to defeated antiquity; a carpenter who was only a temporary fixture; a grizzled bartender who was in his own way the greatest individualist of them all, and one or two more.

They finished breakfast at last. It had been a dull necessity to some of them at least, though it had taken little time and less speech.

Huston said,

"All right, boys."

They separated, going to their various posts. Those who were off duty drifted to the boiler-deck. MacMaugh went down to his engines, the pilot aloft to his wheel, Tommy Craig to the forecastle to direct the casting off. Huston himself went up on the hurricane-roof, which was in reality the third deck above the water. As he stood at the forward rail the Texas-house was behind him, abaft the two towering black stacks that rose abreast, one on each side of the boat. On top of the Texas towered the slender, well glassed structure of the pilot-house, highest of all.

Below, from the forward rail of the hurricane roof, Huston commanded a bird's view of the open forward section of the main deck, the clearing spot from which all cargo would be discharged or carried back into the depths of the deck-room or hold. Not all captains assumed this post when making or leaving a landing. Some preferred the closer surveillance possible from the boiler-deck or even the main deck itself, from which latter point a whip could be applied to sluggish blacks upon occasion. To Huston the hurricane was a place from which he could send his voice battering down with heavy effect, yet without ever seeming to raise it above the tone, damaging enough, that the distance itself suggested.

Huston yanked a cord that was attached to the rail, ready to his hand. At his feet the mellow, dangling voice of his bell answered.

"Cast off!"

Running negroes cast loose the shore ends of the lines, others on the main deck coiled the ropes in.

"Take in your plank!"

"*Bong!*" said the bell, the signal to the pilot. The negroes who had cast off ran with that appearance of unperturbed leisure that is possible to no other race in the world, to leap the widening gap of brown water to the steamboat's guards. Tommy Craig was singing out in a hard, drawling voice in imitation of Huston's

own, getting the unwieldy stage plank aboard and into its place. A bell jangled in the engine-room, and another. Down by the surface of the water, where the big engines lay, the voice of the steam began to speak in steady *whoofs* as she backed out.

"Up—river; up—river; up—river!"

The bell in the engine-room spoke again; the great paddle-wheels idled and stopped. Still another bell.

What happened then was an impalpable thing, a transpiration of something more significant than the mere fact that the engines answered, that the steamboat surged easily against the current and began to walk upstream, gliding smoothly over the surface of the river. They all did that. It was the feel of her, the pulse of life and capability, that meant something to these men who had studied her and labored over her to make an old boat with a bad name into something new and good. It was the first expression of a newly powered steamboat, a boat whose engines had never before taken her into trade.

No one would have been surprized if, after progressing four miles upstream, MacMaugh had signaled to turn back. There are overhaulings, readjustments and replacements in the building of a boat, as well as a first assembling of her component parts. Yet, in that initial movement of hers, when she first breasted the current and set her unfamiliar engines to kicking it away behind, it seemed to Huston that she gave him a lifting promise of unsuspected things.

The captain had no function on the hurricane roof after she had taken the stream. She was the boat of the pilot and engineer then, and until the next landing Huston would be needed no more. But for a long time he stood there, forgetful of the soot that sprinkled the shoulders of his coat and the carelessly slanted brim of his Panama. They were making their way upriver slowly, in deference to the newly installed engines, and he could tell nothing about her yet. But he was sensing the effortless drive of her engines, the faint, smooth tremor of the superstructure to the pulse of the stream, the feel of her hull resistance to the churring paddles. Here, away from the rest, he was alone with his boat.

If ever a man loved a boat, Huston loved his namesake then; not with the slow habitual affection that long association brings, but with the thrill a man feels when new vistas open, promising the fulfilment of hopes only half existent because only half understood.

They made Baton Rouge with scarcely a pause, and there MacMaugh worked a day and a night. She went on effortlessly against the current to Natchez, to Vicksburg, to Greenville; and at last to Memphis, where she lay five days, and was completely overhauled.

There they turned back, and went booming downstream, well laden, with MacMaugh throwing her into long bursts of speed that surprized them all. They were nearly back to New Orleans before Huston drew from the dour engineer a definite prediction.

"MacMaugh," said the riverman, "can she beat the *Tennessee Governor?*"

"Handily," said MacMaugh, for the first time dropping evasion.

"The *Mount Haskett?*"

"She'll make a race out of it."

Even Huston's optimism was skeptical in the face of the monotoned expectations of the engineer. Yet he placed this man's judgment above his own. He suddenly brought forth the name of the boat that had been in his mind from the beginning—that of Will Huston's fastest packet.

"Can she take the *Elizabeth Grey?*"

"The *'Galloping Betsy'?*" said MacMaugh. He did not answer at once. He seemed to be going into one of his spells of listening to the engines, his eyes hazy, his ears intent upon some hidden note in the voice of the oiled steel. "Mmmmm—" he said at last. "No."

Huston turned away. Then MacMaugh suddenly burst out with a wholly unexpected contradiction:

"Yes, by God! I think she can!"

XXII

JACQUELINE, serenely graceful, came forward to receive him as he was let into that high room on the Rue Chartres; but in spite of the swift intoxication of her renewed nearness Huston was instantly aware of the presence of Mark Wallace, a shadowy form seated on the far side of the room. The man dominated the room like a statue of raw iron seen through gauze, as dark and hard and downbearing of mood as Jacqueline was light and lovely.

Wallace sat with his chin on his chest. His fine dark eyes, bleakly hard, forbidding though indifferent, still retained that patrician keenness of perception which never entirely left them, yet they had the cold impersonality of the eyes of a cuttlefish. It was perhaps only a quarter of a minute in which he met Huston's gaze before he rose; but in that interval in which he remained a motionless figure of ebony and chalk, it seemed as if he were never going to move at all.

The gay, cultured irony that had made Wallace's face charming was gone. In its absence an unsuspected strength was revealed in his features, as if the muscles over his cheekbones had become more noticeable, and his relaxed mouth became ascetic and enduring. It was his face with the life gone out of it, leaving lineaments of strength that had been unperceived before.

Huston had time to note these things. The days in which they had been understanding friends seemed struck from the record, as if they had never been lived.

"Just in?" Wallace asked, rising at last.

They shook hands with a specious sort of dry-palmed grasp.

"Not an hour."

"How is the *Arnold Huston?*"

There was no emphasis in Mark's voice as he pronounced the name; he said it as he would have said *Frontier City*, or any other.

"Fast; faster than any of us believed."

"How was the trip?"

"We made expenses."

"Was that all?"

"Good God, man!" Arnold burst out uncontrollably. "We're lucky to avoid three months of trials and tinkerings!"

"Oh, of course," Wallace conceded lackadaisically.

"I was able," said Huston more equably, "to make arrangements that will make our next trip more profitable."

"That's good."

There had been an attempt at agreeableness in Wallace's voice every time he spoke, a concession that the presence of Jacqueline could not entirely account for. It was the sort of effort that Mark might have made in weariness to entertain a stranger. Huston felt more menace in this odd mannerliness of Mark's than there could have been in overt threats; it was as if the man felt it necessary to conceal behind this flimsy screen something too elemental in its potentialities to stand the light.

"I'm anxious to hear more of the trip," said Wallace naturally, "as you can imagine. I hope you'll excuse me now. I'll appreciate it, Captain, if you'll call at my rooms as soon as you are at leisure."

"Tonight?"

With the news of New Orleans developments still unknown to him, Huston was nevertheless ready to match indifference with indifference. Wallace shot him a curious glance.

"Most assuredly, tonight."

"Very well."

"May I have a word with you, madame?" said Mark distinctly.

That was really a statement to Huston, of course, that he had intruded before a conversation was complete. He took himself to the far corner of the room, where he stood looking out at the Mississippi shipping, half seen in the light of the low-rising moon. He could hear the two of them whispering by the door, and he scorned himself that he should have to correct an instinctive attempt to hear what they said.

He did not turn when Mark left the room, but remained staring moodily out the window as Jacqueline came slowly

across toward him. When he finally glanced at her he was shocked to see that her face was white with terror which she was evidently struggling to conceal. In his astonishment he stood gaping, without words at his command.

She paused uncertainly, but she was first to speak.

"Oh, Arnold, I'm at my wit's end!"

Two strides brought him close to her.

"Jacqueline, what is it?"

For all the peculiarity of the situation, he knew that he would never again forget the sound of her voice as she spoke his name. There was tenderness and richness in the timbre of it, low in her throat, and the subtle suggestion of an accent not his own. For him there was in it an exquisite pain, at once the gift of a beauty beyond understanding and the suggestion of a beauty denied.

Slowly he ran his fingers through his hair. As his hand fell away he repeated—

"Tell me what it is."

It seemed to him that he had croaked the words, when he should have been pressing her gently in his arms, whispering tendernesses as his lips touched her hair. But his arms dangled woodenly at his sides, under his control only as far as the paddle-wheels are in the control of the pilot, indirectly through cords and distant bells.

"Tell me what's the matter," he said again.

The sorrow that was in her eyes, as she turned them slowly to his, cut through him like the stroke of a blacksnake whip.

It is possible that in their brief silence she could see him understandingly, in lights which he never suspected—his rumpled, unruly hair, his high-keyed countenance that the river had carved to suit its needs, his steel-gray eyes, his lean strong hands. Behind these things perhaps she felt the man's vital, stubborn strength, the strength not of weight and mass but of pliant steel; and the deep welter of another emotion than that of pity, a thing possessed of a power that could turn all that gray steel in the man to molten flame, and stir a deep quiver of response within herself.

These were things that Huston could not know. He saw himself only as an inarticulate yokel, hopelessly inadequate in the face of a situation the keys of which had been denied him. He groped uncertainly.

"If Mark has—" he began hesitantly, and stopped. But she had caught his meaning.

"No, no; Mark is doing the best he can."

There was despair in her voice; and his jealous resentment of Mark's greater privilege died away in such a surge of blindly understanding pity that he forgot the mystery from which he was debarred, forgot his own awkwardness, forgot everything except the unhappiness in the delicately contoured face and the depths of the dark eyes. Gently he took her slender hands in one of his own, and with an arm about her shoulders led her toward the settee, the river-window settee from which they had so often watched the boats.

He had meant to place her among the cushions there, to talk to her gently, soothingly, blindly comforting her hurt, trying to bring the color to her cheeks again, the smile back to the mouth he had kissed in a time that seemed ages ago. She had seemed apart from him tonight in spite of her lonely need, as if she had never been held in his arms. He had believed for a moment that all that was past; that he could comfort her as a brother might comfort a little girl. It was an illusion that crumpled, like tissue paper in flame, at the soft rondure of her shoulders within his arm, the slender softness of her fingers in his own.

He bit his lips, but even as he sought to steady himself she must have felt the quiver of his arm about her shoulders, and sensed the new racing of his pulse. Somehow he led her to the settee, though a heady dizziness swirled up out of the struggling emotion within so that his steps faltered. They were before the window

where he had meant to put her down, to comfort her with words.

For an instant he wavered, and she looked up at him. In her face was wonderment, and acceptance, and a sadness tinged with fear. But in the depths of her wide eyes there was a new dark flame. For an instant the dark flame met and merged with the steel-gray glow.

Between them a barrier broke under the force of a flood released. He drew her against him; then her arms tightened about him, and her warm lips quivered under his own.

Her face was quiet with the promise of a new peace as she presently leaned against him, their arms about each other, her forehead against his cheek. Over Huston there was a great glow of happiness—a surging, welling, soaring happiness. For a long time they stood together, too closely bound by the partial satisfaction of their contact to speak or move.

It was Jacqueline who finally spoke, her voice softly low and vibrant.

"Where is our river?"

She reached out slender uncertain fingers, and made a hand's breath opening in the mulberry curtains that until now had made the window opaque.

Suddenly he felt her body go rigid in his arms, and her hand drew back as if it had been burned. She drew a great shuddering breath and gave him one upward glance so full of horror that his own body stiffened with shock; then she averted her face.

"Jacqueline! What is it?" There was no answer. "Darling, tell me!"

"Nothing, nothing—"

She broke from him and dropped upon the settee, hiding her face in her arm.

Huston struck aside the curtains with a furious sweep of his arm. Beyond the roofs that shone vaguely in the light of the moon the ancient Mississippi lay silent under the still boats. Closer, below in the narrow cañon of the street, he could see the opposite banquette, where a single overcoated figure slowly walked, dim against the dark shadow of a great arch. Then there was the balcony immediately beyond the glass; only a segment of it could be seen.

He heard Jacqueline say, "No, no!" as he clapped his hand to the latch of the French window; but he wrenched it open and stepped out. The balcony was less extensive than he had supposed, shallow and extending but a pace beyond the window itself on either side. It was empty. He whirled and, with his back against the curly wrought-iron of the rail, he studied the bleak dormered eaves a long cat's leap above, under the formless impression that some unknown horror had been on the balcony and escaped that way. Then he turned back, leaned down and searched the street below, empty as far as he could see, save for that one inconspicuous figure across there, slowly making its way off.

He went back to her, softly latching the window behind him.

"It was nothing, my dearest," he said gently.

She was sitting up, now, her face composed, though very pale. It seemed to him the life had gone from it, even from the wonderful dark eyes. He would have sat beside her, but she slowly rose; and as he moved to take her in his arms she put her hands before her. He took them between his palms.

"Jacqueline!"

"Arnold—" there was a breathless catch in her voice—"you must go away—"

Suddenly the tears streamed down her face from the dark eyes, melting now, that had seemed brushed on delicate paper with dark ink.

"You're mine," he told her passionately. "You've got to be mine!"

"Sometime, perhaps, if God is good. But my dearest, it can't be now. Please, please go!"

"But when am I to see you again?"

"Not—until I send."

He suddenly crushed her in his arms. She clung to him with upturned face as he kissed her eyes, her tear-wet cheeks.

XXIII

AS THE little door in the massive gate closed behind him, Huston felt an exulting sense of power which threatening difficulties, known and unknown, served only to whet. A joyous belligerency was in his blood, a need of battle; he felt that he could kill with his hands a man who so much as blundered into his path.

In this mood, his eye fell upon an overcoated figure standing hunched, cramped, in the corner of the gateway's thick arch. It was the man, Huston thought, whom he had seen walking the other side of the street a little while before; though, since this seemed of no significance to him, his mind immediately dropped the fact. In his rashly war-like mood it was the attitude of the shadowed figure, at once appearing permanent and waiting, that irritated Huston.

The man was probably a beggar, he thought; but his mere presence under this particular arch, among all those that the city afforded, was sufficient excuse for Huston to pause a moment, staring angrily. The high-flaring coat collar of the day was about the man's face, but over it a pair of bead-like pupils stared back at Huston from sagging whites. The riverman's resentment was increased by his inability to cut down those malignant eyes, as steady and unblinking as his own.

"What are you doin' here?" he growled.

There was a pause, so long that Huston was about to press his demand when the other suddenly spoke.

"I have as much right here," said the unknown, "as you have—and maybe more."

No breath of conciliation was in that cold voice, only a taunting insolence and a contradicting authority. Huston burst into fury.

"What do you mean, sir?" he snarled.

With a quick step and the reach of a lean arm he seized the other man by the front of his coat near the throat, jerking him roughly into a position in which he could see the face. To his suddenly increased anger, the twisting away of the coat lapels failed to reveal the features of the stranger. The moonlight into which he had stepped showed full insolent lips, and those floating black pupils of eyes in dirty whites which the sagging lids exposed; but between mouth and eyes the face was concealed by a broad black band of cloth.

"Masked!" Huston burst out. "Masked, huh?" His fury at the presence of this lurker at Jacqueline's very doorstep now broke its last restraint. With an inarticulate oath he suddenly ripped the mask from the stranger's face. Soft black silk came away in his fingers.

Huston's grip relaxed, and he started back. Close before his own there was revealed a face so hideous in its mutilation, so utterly inhuman as to convey a ghastly shock. The nose, save for a bit of the bridge, was gone, revealing a cavity, black in the uncertain light. Above, those haggard eyes, with the great sprawling whites undercircled in black; on either side, cadaverous cheeks, hollow and wasted in contrast to the loose, full lips.

The lips now drew back from strong teeth in a leer so savage that Huston expected instant attack—until he realized that the man was laughing at him. While he still hesitated, revolted and uncertain, the death's head suddenly turned away, and the man walked rapidly toward the corner. Huston looked after him as a man hypnotized. Not until the apparition turned the corner and disappeared did Huston realize that if he had reason for warning the man away before, it was doubled and tripled now.

He hastened after, only to find when he too had turned the corner that the fugitive had disappeared. Slowly he walked along the banquette, guessing as best he might into which of the doors the man had gone, more uncertain with every stride. For another twenty minutes he patroled that street, waiting for the man to reappear. In the end he had to concede that the trail was lost.

After he had given up and turned his steps toward Mark Wallace's rooms in the Rue Royale he turned back twice; once to patrol the side street again, to assure himself that the hideous stranger had not come out; and once on an impulse to see whether Jacqueline was really safe—an intention that dissolved into a long gazing at her windows, and nothing more.

He put the inhuman face from his mind, and sought out Mark Wallace. Yet all that night he was haunted intermittently by visions of that isle of houses rising sheer above its stagnant gutters, its balconies overhanging the street; a great massive block of dwellings set wall to wall, roof to roof, court to court. What tortuous passages lead from one to another, so that one who had access to one might, knowing his way, have access to nearly all? Somewhere in those contiguous rabbit-warrens was the most precious thing in life, the beloved one who to him was the heart of all beauty, the meaning of all things. And prowling some hidden passageway—how near?—an evil figure with a noseless, death's-head face.

XXIV

DUST, dust, dust over everything in the narrow room of Mark Wallace, an impalpable, fragile film of it over the walls of books, over the bronze bust on the chimney shelf, over the transparent shade of the lamp. In the midst of these gray-filmed things, Mark Wallace's face, conspicuous by its non-relation to the dust, like translucent porcelain, delicately tinted by the firelight.

Huston let himself in without summons; then for a few minutes stood leaning with his back against the closed door, looking at his friend—if the man could still be so described. Wallace looked up when he first came, and for a moment or two met Huston's eyes in a gaze without obvious meaning; then returned to looking at the red-breathing coals.

It was hard for Huston to comprehend, as he gazed across at Mark's half-averted face, that they had quarreled bitterly, that they were no longer the same intimate friends. Mark's face was quiet under the rumpled drape of his seal-brown hair: a sensitively beautiful face, for a man, with fine steady dark eyes. He looked as he had always looked, in the years in which they had been the closest of friends. A little finer drawn, perhaps, with a deeper shadow under the perceiving dark eyes.

"If ever you stand in my way—" It was almost impossible to remember the insolence of Mark's voice, with a tinge of mockery in it, that day in the cabin with the rain outside. "If ever you stand in my way, I'll break you with no more compunction—" Hard to believe that Mark had said that. Yet Huston was almost in a mood to understand that, now. Within the hour Huston himself had felt the surge of battle, the eagerness for something in his way that he could break.

He tired of the silence at last. Coming forward, he dropped wearily into a chair and bit off the end of one of his lean cigars.

"Mark," he said with a touch of the vigor that every thought of MacMaugh's engines brought back to him, "we've got a fast boat there. She'll outdo ninety per cent. of the shipping on the river, I honestly believe."

Wallace did not answer at once. When he did speak his voice was dull.

"I'm sorry to hear it," he stated.

"What!"

"I said I'm sorry to hear it," Mark repeated, pressing out his voice a little more strongly.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" Huston demanded.

"I'm not interested," said Mark, still dully, "in what sort of performance the boat will turn in for the benefit of your bastard brother."

The beginning of a flush tinted Arnold's cheek bones.

"Whipped, are you?"

Wallace glanced at the riverman, and stirred.

"There's a point," he answered, with such a flat defeated somberness that Huston cooled, "there's a point beyond which I can not offset the difficulties which you bring on to us."

"What's happened while I was gone? Are your notes called?"

The faintest sort of bitter smile altered the modeling of Mark's face.

"Look here!" said Huston. "If your financing has been so damned weak that it's collapsed and undermined all the work we've been to, you'd better come out with it!"

"The notes are not called," said Mark distinctly. "I don't know why they're not, or why we're not bankrupt today, as the result of your entanglement with Will Huston. Suffice it that I was temporarily able to controvert that—God alone knows how."

Huston opened his mouth to speak, but there were no words there. Mark's face was quiet, his voice was his own; yet there came from him such a conviction of unavoidable defeat, defeat beyond hope, defeat beyond recrimination, that Huston was checked. He was thinking of those steady, pulsing engines of the *Arnold Huston*, of her full-powered answer to the pilot's bell, and the ease with which she kicked the river miles away behind her. But beyond that, he was thinking of the financial salvation her labors would mean in a time comparatively short, if she were only given that time; and of the river victory whose beginning she was to be.

He told himself that they couldn't get her from him now. She was more than a steamboat—she was a golden stroke of fortune, a victory in herself and a mother of victories. With the *Arnold Huston* under steam, no power that Will could bring to bear could cancel away the income nor the prestige of their fast packet. Yet—there was that finality of defeat in Mark Wallace's figure, in his relaxed hands, in the room itself with its gray, shrouding dust.

The possibility occurred to him that Mark was lying down, quitting, as a result of sheer exhaustion. Yet Mark, even more than he, was staking everything on the success of this enterprise. If they lost, Huston would be penniless, with a heavy debt; but he had had little enough to lose. Mark too would be penniless, with the makings of a fortune lost, and greater debts than his own.

"Can you raise any money?" Wallace murmured.

"Not a picayune, and you know it, and you've known it from the start!"

The other did not demur. Silence returned to the room, the soft silence of the dust. Huston was gathering himself for a verbal attack, phrasing in his mind what he should say to this man to bring him out of his accursed lethargy. If the situation were as bad as Mark's attitude implied, they needed to thrash it out, set new forces moving, retrench at once for a new and more bitter fight. But before he was ready, Mark spoke a single sentence in such an unexpectedly strong voice that Huston was startled.

"Walt Gunn is dead."

"What?"

Wallace did not repeat.

Huston's momentary surprize did not long engage his attention. He was thinking not of Walt Gunn's mishaps, but of the future of the *Arnold Huston*. "What has that to do with us?" he asked impatiently.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know?"

"Our contract holds good with his estate, I presume, if you're worryin' about that passel of niggers."

"You mean to say you didn't know that every one of those blacks you've got there is stolen property?"

"Stolen? Those niggers?"

"That's what I said."

"I? Knew it?"

"You understood me."

Huston blazed.

"Of course I mean to say that I didn't know it! What sort of fool do you take me for?" A swift suspicion burst upon him. "Wallace, if you sent me there to fetch stolen slaves I'll—"

"You fool, d'you think I'm as short-sighted as that?"

"Well, what's the answer?"

"Gunn's death gave away his game. It means that we haven't a deckhand, a fireman, a cook, or a steward—that's all. No, it isn't all. It means that you are implicated for receiving stolen property; and consequently that I am implicated, with the *Arnold Huston* back of us for forfeit."

Huston sat silent for a moment, glaring. Then:

"We'll fight of course. By the time it's been through every court in the land we'll damn well see—"

"Fight with what? Oh, we'll clear our name. A blank reputation is good for something, thank God! Unfortunately, your next slip will find us with no reputation at all. However, I hardly think there will be a next time, in the case of the *Arnold Huston*."

"Well if we don't fight, just what the hell are we goin' to do for hands?"

"What are we going to do anyway? You realize, of course, that the law, with a little prompting from the Will Huston interests, will tie the slaves up anyway. Don't deceive yourself that we would have the use of them while the court action dragged through!"

"But—"

"I have no intention of arguing with you. By accepting the situation and handing over the blacks we clear our skirts. Which is exactly what I have guaranteed to do."

"You've guaranteed—" Huston stammered with anger—"you've— D'you think you can give away— Damn you, if you've double-crossed—"

"Now you look here," said Wallace with cold bitterness. "There's a thing or two in this that will stand explaining from your angle. Just exactly what did you find when you last visited Walt Gunn's?"

Mark's narrowed eyes laid against Huston's like razor blades, and Arnold was checked. He considered whether it was worth while to answer this question completely; then contemptuously put aside subterfuge.

"I found desertion," he said.

"What else?" Wallace pressed him.

"What the devil do you expect I found?"

"I think," said Wallace, "that I know you well enough to forecast your actions." Suddenly he whipped out, "You went into Gunn's cabin, did you not?"

"Certainly I did."

"And found there?"

"Nothin'! What'd you think?"

"I thought perhaps," said Mark coolly, "that you might have noticed the corpse of Walt Gunn."

Huston hesitated.

"It wasn't in his bed," he stated.

"Gunn, of course, was not murdered in his bed."

"Murdered?"

"Certainly."

"You said nothin' about murder!"

"You did not perceive," said Mark, "by the appearance of the corpse that the man had been murdered?"

"I tell you," said Huston, between anger and puzzlement, "I saw no corpse!"

"You were in the cabin?"

"I prob'ly sat there for over an hour."

"In the front room?"

"Certainly."

"Then the remains of Gunn were in the room with you at the time."

"That's—" Huston started to say. There suddenly came back to him with a chilling vividness the cabin in the deserted clearing, the wavering light of the candle, the heavy creaking chair—and, with a gruesome shock, that great shapeless mound of dirty clothes in the corner, hiding the work of a stirring rat—

"Good God!" Huston ejaculated. A shudder passed over him. He almost jumped to his feet, but settled back.

"Hm," said Wallace, "I see you didn't realize what you were in the presence of. You haven't lied to me as much as I supposed."

Huston let that pass. They sat in silence for a time, while Mark gazed into the faint ebb and swell of the fire's glow.

"Well, said Huston at last, "we'll have to scramble for some more niggers, I suppose."

"We haven't heard the last of it, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"If any one wants to press the case against us, I fancy a very pretty case can be made to show that we have been accessories to nigger-stealing. Will Huston will see that it is pressed, trust it."

"But our contract with Gunn—"

"You have it in writing? I thought that in dealing with Gunn—"

"No," Huston conceded, "it isn't in writin'. But surely—"

"Oh, I didn't say the case would hold. Only sap time and money, and increase the instability of our position. It'll just throw the balance, that's all. Our hands are in the trap, my friend."

"I'm damned if they are!"

"Yes?"

"I'll round up another batch of niggers—"

"Can you?"

"By God, I've *got* to!"

Wallace smiled.

"You h'ist up on your end, Mark. Play the game out, man! And if I get the niggers and you hold out for two months more, the *Arnold Huston* will have earned enough to—"

"If, if!"

"We're not whipped yet!"

Wallace did not answer. Huston waited for further remark until he was tired of it. Sarcastically he said at last,—"Is that all?"

"No," said Wallace.

"Well, let's have it." Huston's voice was becoming increasingly ugly.

"Will Huston has purchased our notes."

"You fool," Huston shouted, "why didn't you say so!"

Wallace shrugged contemptuously.

"When?" Arnold demanded.

"Today."

"What amount?"

"Nearly ten thousand."

They eyed each other blackly until Huston's glare bludgeoned down Wallace's eyes. There was a long silence.

"A wonderful botch you've made of your end of this," Huston said at last. "How much grace can you force out of him?"

"None."

"None? Any court in—"

"If we do get grace he'll tie up the boat with court actions—"

"They'll have to catch her first! We can take to the upper river, or the Ohio. Thirty days' trade would give us—"

"Catch her?" sneered Mark. "You don't know what you're talking about."

Huston gnawed his lips, and fell silent.

"There is just one chance in the world—no, two chances—of saving ourselves from ruin," Wallace said slowly and intensely. "The first is that you go to Will Huston, conciliate him, concede him whatever it is he wants, apologize to him and induce him to call off his damned dogs. Reveal your relationship, perhaps—but that's up to you. With that done, our financial situation is clear and the Walt Gunn episode becomes trivial.

"It's the force behind these things, supplied by Will Huston's money and political pressure that makes them dangerous." Wallace suddenly burst out vehemently, all his slow poise forgotten. "For God's sake, Arn, have you no sense at all? Haven't you any obligation to me? We've got the start of a fortune in that boat—are you going to lose it for both of us in a silly quarrel that doesn't amount to two pins outside of your infernal pride?" Mark's face was white, his eyes glittering.

"You're talkin' rubbish," said Huston.

"You mean that with everything in the balance you wouldn't—"

"No," said Huston.

"To save my fortune and yours, to pave the way for God knows what success—"

"No," said Huston again.

Mark Wallace's tortured eyes blazed at Huston helplessly.

"Your fortune—"

"Nothing of mine will ever be built on the gift of Will Huston," said Arnold.

"Mine, then—"

"Let me tell you somethin' I got from you. 'If ever you stand in my way, I'll break you without—' "

"You're determined to hold to your suicidal—"

"Yes."

"Then," said Mark, suddenly quiet, but whiter still, "there is one other way out."

"That's—?"

"To sell your note to Will Huston."

There was a long silence. When Mark Wallace had looked into Huston's steady steel eyes as long as he could bear, he settled back and lighted a cigar with shaking hands. Then Huston smiled, and a new gleam came into his eyes.

"Yeah," he said, "I thought you'd come out with that."

The smile baffled Wallace.

"Perhaps," he said ironically, "you failed to grasp the trend of what I was just saying."

"No, you were threatenin' to sell me out to Will Huston. I understood you well enough."

"You thought I was joking perhaps?"

"No, you were in deadly earnest."

"If you think you have grounds to fight—"

"None at all."

He drew a folded paper from his pocket, and handed it to Mark.

"I want you to sign that."

"What is it?"

"That's a ninety-day option on your interest in the *Arnold Huston*, at a price of ten thousand dollars."

"It's not the slightest use to you."

"Sign it."

Huston rose.

"What the devil do you think you can do with—"

"I've given you your chance," said Arnold, "and I'm sick of you. Now you can take your little piddlin' profit and get out."

"What makes you think I'll—"

"Because you're yellow to the core, and glad to get out of this with your skin. And because I'm not goin' to pull the chestnuts out of the fire until you do!"

"There's nothing you can do, anyway!"

"No?" Huston's smile was bitter as gall. "I advise you to sign."

"You are a fool," said Mark contemptuously.

But he obeyed.

XXV

THOUGH it was after two o'clock when Huston left Mark Wallace's room, he was up at seven, and slowly bathed in cold water. He shaved with the utmost care, chose the best shirt that he owned. His eyes were calm, his hands steady and slow. At eight he downed a breakfast consisting of more Creole coffee than food; and at nine-thirty, fresh-skinned and assured, he strolled into the office of Will Huston.

Arnold thrust directly into the inner office where, in accordance with the regular habits that were at once his hobby and his leading asset, Will Huston sat reading his mail. He did not look up as Arnold came in.

It was a plainer office than Huston had expected to find. There were no rugs on the floor, no vast open spaces, no row of clerks. The small room was made stuffy by the heavy black walnut cabinets and desk, filigreed with pinnacle upon pinnacle of turned and jig-sawed wood.

Will sat at a plain table, his papers littered in front of him. His head was bowed and, though he faced the door, he appeared not to hear the sound of the latch, for he did not look up. It was such an office, and such an attitude, Arnold thought, as old Dennison Huston would have liked. In exteriors at least, Dennison had done his work well in the molding of this son of his who in reality had never been his son.

"Well, you ass?"

At Huston's voice Will looked up suddenly, startled. But the expression that immediately replaced that of surprize was noncommittal, except for a certain eye-gleam that bespoke a malicious pleasure.

"To what am I indebted—" he began with a beautifully simulated politeness that Huston was forced to admire.

"Why, thank you, I will," Arnold smiled, seating himself. He drew out and lighted a cigar like a railroad spike.

"What can I do for you?"

"As we were sayin'," Huston began, "Come to think of it, what were we sayin' the other day on the boat when you had to rush off? Somethin' about your breakin' me, wasn't it?"

"I've quite forgotten," said Will without expression.

His pale rounded face was politely indifferent. There was a steadiness of eye, Arnold thought, that he had not noted before. Business seemed to be agreeing with Will, now that he had some authority of his own. Agreeing a little too well, perhaps, to judge by the increasing puffiness under Will's chin.

"Seems like to me," said Arnold, "that when you make threats you ought to jot 'em down. Can't carry 'em out if you can't remember 'em."

Will Huston's long full lips formed a smile so like that of their father that a queer sensation ran through Arnold, almost as if his father's ghost had appeared between them.

"I had a burst of temper, perhaps," Will said. "I don't recall what I may have said. Nothing offensive, I hope. If so I will withdraw it, if you like."

The cool hypocrisy of the man surprized Arnold, almost delighted him. He felt a momentary curiosity to see what strain the attitude could bear.

"You guess Caroline Shepherd is safe, then, for the time bein'?"

A swift shadow passed over Will's countenance, for an instant it seemed to Arnold he could see into hidden depths of anger, despair and hate. He was instantly assured that whatever front Will wished to place before himself, the elemental factors beneath remained unchanged.

The shadow passed, leaving Will's face as politely expressionless as before. There was only a shade of stiffness in his voice as he answered—

"I'd rather not discuss that."

"I see where you've laid down a trap or two for my boat," said Arnold.

Will did not conceal that he was slightly annoyed. This was not the way business matters were approached. Arnold knew that as well as Will. Yet it was impossible for him to take a different attitude toward his half-brother after their years of submerged war. It was only open to him to go on, playing this new game in their old way, Will evasively treacherous, Arnold striking directly at the point with a swaggering contempt for the other's reactions.

Will Huston's eyebrows raised in question.

"You know what I'm talkin' about," Arnold grinned.

"I haven't the faintest idea," Will answered.

"But I'm ready to tell you," Arnold went on, "that the fish has slipped through the net. You'll have to come again, old man!"

Will smiled. Knowing the workings of the man's mind, Arnold knew that Will was contemptuous of what appeared to be his shallow bluff. Arnold grinned.

"I happen to know that you hold quite a lot of our notes."

"Oh, that!" said Will, stirring perfunctorily. "An agent of mine was instructed to acquire a small amount of commercial paper, for investment purposes. Imagine my irritation to find that he had bought some of yours. Ridiculous! A dead loss, I haven't the least doubt."

"You're callin' the notes, of course."

"There is hardly anything else to do. We must take a certain loss—but cover what we can before it is too late," said Will, judicially detached.

"Then why do you say that you didn't try to catch my boat—hadn't any idea of what I was referrin' to?"

"You don't mean," said Will, affecting surprize, "that you have to liquidate the boat in order to cover?"

"You know damned well we can't cover any other way, my little man."

"Really," said Will, smiling. "Now that's too bad!"

"It is, in a way," said Arnold. "She

isn't an easy boat to replace. Still, it clears the financial situation."

"Yes?"

"We're lucky," Arnold went on, "to be sellin' the boat high where we bought her low. Even with the notes covered, we'll be able to equip another, of a sort, on a much firmer basis. But—"

"You have a purchaser?"

"Why certainly."

There was a stilted silence. Will's eyes were steady on Huston's face, and by the very texture of the quiet Arnold knew that headway had been gained.

"Your maneuver did one thing for me," he said. "It scared Mark Wallace out. I have his quitclaim on payment of what he put into it. Damned glad he was to get out, too. So that the profit necessarily falls to me, in return for my acceptance of the risk."

"Oh, nonsense," said Will, laughing outright. "How could you accept a risk? You couldn't accept a risk to cover the shoes you stand in."

"Would you like to see Wallace's signed agreement?"

"Certainly not. I'm not interested in your antics from any standpoint whatsoever."

"You'll just have to make a guess," said Arnold, "as to whether I'm lyin' or not. If I was you, I would assume that I am."

"I do."

"And now," said Will, "the proposition?" There was in Will's eyes the sensuous keenness with which a cat plays with a mouse.

"Oh," said Arnold, "you knew I had a proposition?"

"Of course," said Will with a contemptuous chuckle. "Otherwise why would you be here?"

"How smart you are!" said Arnold, careful that his sarcasm should be devoid of any trace of bitterness. "I do have a proposition."

"I'm waiting to reject it."

"You're a fool," answered Arnold brazenly, "if you don't."

"Then why do you offer it?"

"Because that's exactly what I take you for."

Will flipped the pencil in irritation.

"Come, come, you're wasting my time," he complained. "Why are you here?"

"I'm a pig," said Huston gratuitously.

"I realized that."

Arnold grinned, and put the grin away, its service done. But for a few moments he retained a slight smile, as the gray steel of his eyes became shrewd, boring into Will Huston's.

"I'm not satisfied with my profit, as long as there is a chance for more. It happens that I know you, almost as well as you think you know me. You possess one good trait that I know of, which your best efforts have failed to suppress."

He paused.

"And that is?" Will's lurking smile of anticipation returned.

"Not generosity to the fallen," said Arnold, "like you thought I was goin' to say. There aren't any fallen. But you're a gambler. A trait that gets you into trouble, and therefore compels my admiration."

"Yes?"

"You have one fairly fast boat," said Huston. "That's the *Elizabeth Grey*. My own boat—"

"*Your* own boat?"

"I'm speakin' for Mark Wallace as well as myself. He's goin' out of steamboatin'."

"Well?"

"I thought you might like to own a faster boat than the *Elizabeth Grey*."

"Faster than the *Galloping Betsy?* Your old tub, I suppose? This is rich!" Will laughed insolently, but with a genuine enjoyment. "Go on, say it! For a slight advance over and above your notes, you'll sell me the *Arnold Huston*, letting down the other buyer, won't you? Yes, like hell!"

"Like hell is right," said Arnold.

"Well, I won't buy—"

"You haven't the chance."

"Good. Ha-ha-ha-ha!" Will's enjoyment of what he conceived was Arnold's last play exceeded all bounds.

"I started to say," Arnold went on, "that the *Huston* can beat the *Grey* to Memphis. And we'll bet our boat against the *Grey*—"

"You'll what!" Will Huston was brought to consideration at last.

"We'll give you a match race, winner to take both boats!"

"You're crazy!"

A certain confusion in Will's eyes told Arnold that the man was hastily trying to compute what this new possibility might mean to himself. The game was in the balance. As Will Huston decided, so the cards would fall.

As a silence came between them, Arnold felt suddenly that his plan, which had seemed so brilliantly daring to him upon its conception, was only a pitiful subterfuge, hopeless, an obvious last resort. Will Huston already had him and Wallace in his pocket; why should he risk their escape now?

Then, with swift acceleration of the pulse, he saw that his half-brother had taken the other line. Watching him keenly, understanding the man to the core, he could almost check off Will's ideas, one by one, as they went through the other's head. If the notes he held put Wallace and Arnold Huston under, how much worse would they be broken if the value of their boat were also subtracted? If indeed they had obtained a buyer who would pay an exorbitant price—by no means impossible—it meant that they might slip through his fingers altogether. The doubt that Huston's poker face had instilled was, after all, getting in its work.

Arnold's heart suddenly gave a great bound. Into Will's face was coming a new smile, the smile of a man who has had his enemy delivered into his hands with a completeness beyond all expectation or reason. Even before Will spoke, Arnold knew that he had learned the time of the *Arnold Huston* in her upriver stages; that no doubt for an instant entered Will's head that his *Galloping Betsy* could swim circles around Huston's aged boat, let the mishaps fall as they might!

"We'll just put that in writing," said Will drawing paper toward him.

On the spur of the moment Arnold daringly pushed his success.

"I'll want odds of course," he said reservedly.

"Odds?"

"You'll have ten thousand additional upon the *Grey*."

"In addition to the boat herself? Ridiculous." Will flung down the pen he had caught up.

Arnold rose.

"Oh well—no bet, if you don't want it."

Will reluctantly picked up the pen again. After all, it was not as if he had believed there were a possibility for him to lose.

"Have it your own way!"

XXVI

THE MISSISSIPPI swept around its bends with a strong swing and pull—the river under the boats and the river in Huston's blood. He strode down the dark Rue Chartres lightly, with only the slightest hint in his long-legged walk of the swagger that is never quite separable from Irish blood. He was fresh from a full twelve-hour sleep, though he had been dog-tired before that. They had made another trip to Memphis, since Arnold had caught Will Huston in the wager that was to be the salvation of their boat. He had insisted on the prerogative of that last trip before the race, and Will, eager in his belief that his relative was under the heel at last, had been forced to concede.

Huston and Arthur MacMaugh had made a long trip of it, lying up twice for engine work. At Baton Rouge, on the downstream run, they had lain over for days, and had had the engines down until hardly a bolt and nut had remained together. Then, with the complete assurance that she was right, they had slowly drifted her down to New Orleans, refusing passengers, hardly more than dipping her paddle-wheels in the current. More than three thousand miles of travel since the engine installation had taken

the stiffness out of her. The iron monsters in the engine-room were working effortlessly; even MacMaugh's rockbound face showed a glow of anticipatory pride.

Above all, they had assured themselves of the *Arnold Huston's* upstream speed. MacMaugh's final verdict was in, more assuring to Arnold than his own:

"She'll never fail us; she'll do it, man! If God wills—"

He had been unable to see Jacqueline again before the hasty departure on that upstream trip, though he had three times gone to knock at that great arched gate in the Rue Chartres. The black, wizened face at the wicket had turned him away each time. He had been forced to content himself by sending her no less than four laboriously composed notes within twenty-four hours. It might have worried him that he received no reply; but he had other things to worry about then.

They had labored longer than they had expected at Baton Rouge, with the result that as they at last made the levee before the New Orleans Place d'Armes it was dusk on the eve of the race. Huston, wakened from daylight sleep by the ringing of the final bells, ate dinner alone, while MacMaugh returned to his engines and his grease. The engineer contemplated taking down that water-feeding "doctor" again, to scrape and tinker at some minor bearing that another man would have been glad to let alone.

The stars were out as Huston went ashore, turning his steps directly to Jacqueline's home. In the morning the boat of his name was to begin her great effort, the long grind that was to establish them once and for all, and so clear the path to greater things.

He left behind him a steady seethe of labor on the *Arnold Huston*. The slaves whom he had obtained from Walt Gunn were gone, held in idleness, most of them, while litigation sought to divide them among owners who had not seen the play of their muscles in many a long day. In their places labored a new picked crew, "free men of color," most of them borrowed from the captains or owners of other steamboats. Huston still had friends on the river, men who would put themselves out of their way to help him in a pinch.

The new-borrowed gangs were working in long files, unloading the cargo of slow freight that the *Huston* had brought down from Baton Rouge. They trotted, bent under their burdens, in long lurching strides timed to the jouncing spring of the stageplank, big hands flopping, heels flung out on every step. The negroes whose job it was to lift the heavy burdens to the shoulders of the others sang at their work. Long after Huston had left the boat he could hear one great baritone voice that must have rung far up and down the river:

"Come a long way! Come a long way!"

A rhythmic cry, timing the heave of the load, falling into that steadier rhythm of the broad bare feet on the plank.

It followed after him, that careless negro voice, melodious and strong, expressive of brute strength, and the joy in strength. Somehow like the voice of the Mississippi, like the voice of his steamboat, now gathering herself to churn her heart out in his behalf. After he could hear the singing voice no more he found there was going through his brain a song the roustabouts had sung in the loading at Baton Rouge, an improvised song, without rhyme or fixed text, full of repetitions and a jogging, jouncing refrain, timed to the lilt of the stageplank and the black bare feet:

"Steamboat *Arn Huston*,
She haht made out ob arn,
Big ol' arn gizzard,
Big ol' arn lights,
Gwine a-whoopin' up de ribba
Fo' to beat de hot-foot *Betsy*,
Come along you niggahs to de promis' lan'!

"Steamboat *Arn Huston*,
She haht all gol' an' arn,
Golden arn gizzard,
Golden arn lights.
See dem whoopin' niggahs
On de hot-uh foot-uh *Betsy*
Ain't a-gwine a-git dah,
'Cause she ain't got time!"

In his stride there was the resilient swing of the youth that was still his. Never in his life had Huston been happier than he was tonight in the opposed lights of love and coming battle, with his future wavering in the balance and his fortune more than ever an uncertain thing.

He knocked lightly at the great gate of the house in which Jacqueline lived, and almost instantly the little iron door behind the grilled wicket flicked back, revealing the wizened face, dim beneath the glint of the bald black head.

"Huston," he said.

There was that momentary rattle of bars behind the small door in the great one, and he was let in. As he stepped over the foot-high threshold of that tiny door, a pulse of emotion undermined the rigid mood of war in which his absent interval had been lived. On the upriver trip Jacqueline had been to him a constant warmth within, a beacon-light of promised things; yet she had seemed distant, somehow, her voice half lost in the constant driving demands of his toils. The turmoil that his father had predicted for him had increased about him, partly drowning out the overtones of his beloved dream. But as he stepped into the great flagged hallway he felt suddenly the nearness of her again; and he was near to being overcome by the realization that she was here, and he was to see her again and hear her voice.

The door above was held open for him by the slave; and as he entered he hardly dared lift his eyes lest they find Jacqueline not there and the room as empty and meaningless as all places without her had come to be. Then he saw her standing near the middle of the room, leaning on the table with the lamp, and his heart leaped—and fell.

She seemed infinitely tired as she stood there, her figure drooped and somehow worn. There were dark smudges under the faintly slanted eyes in a face always pale, but paler now than he had ever seen it before. She was more than ever like a drawing in delicate pencil, with the eyes brushed in with black ink. And in her dark eyes he read such an inexpressible despair that for an instant the life went out of him, as if steam that moved him up-current had suddenly died away. He recovered himself immediately.

"Jacqueline!" he cried out, "What is it?"

She yielded to him as he swept her into his arms. Once more, as when they had last parted, he kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her hair. She leaned nervelessly against him, supported by his arms.

"In God's name, Jacqueline, tell me what's happened!"

It was moments before she answered him; and when she spoke she only said:

"I knew you would be here soon. I saw the *Huston* go downriver to her landing, and I listened to her whistle. I could hear her bells tinkle; it almost seemed to me I could hear your voice—"

He remained silent, holding her close, clumsily comforting her with his hands. When at last he drew his breath to question her again she startled him by suddenly crying out—

"I can't tell you!"

"But—"

"I can't! I can't!"

"If you'll only tell me what it is, I'll—"

"There's nothing on the living earth that you or any one can do."

He tried to answer her and found himself wordless, checked by the finality of her tone. Looking suddenly up into his face, she saw, unbelievably, the most incongruous thing she had ever known—the gray eyes filled with tears. The answering tears welled into her own. Trembling, she hid her face against his coat.

"Oh my dearest," she cried, suddenly clinging to him, "you must love me so!"

"This will work out," said Arnold. "When we've whipped Will Huston's *Gallopin' Betsy* nothin' will be able to stop us—nothin' on the river or any place else. If you can't tell me what's hurt you, that's all right. But we'll beat this thing—"

She slowly shook her head.

"I can't see you any more. You must never come here again."

"Jacqueline!"

"It's true. You—"

"I'll accept no such circumstance," he told her calmly. "I'm not to be turned aside."

They were silent. Her voice presently came to him small and muffled.

"There is one thing you can do that I will bless you for."

"Name it."

"We have only a little while left to us; perhaps a quarter of an hour more. Be kind to me, tell me that you love me. For just this little while let's forget everything and pretend that it's to be forever."

He wanted to tell her that it was to be forever, but he felt that he must humor her until she should be less weary and distraught. He bowed his head.

Below and beyond the river window where they sat spread the quilted pattern of the roofs, their slopes and counter-slopes reflecting with varying radiance the little light of the sickle moon. Beyond that, the pale pilot-houses of the levee-nosing steamboats rose like watch-towers before the red and green riding-lights of half-seen ships. Under the still-riding ships Huston could sense the invisible Mississippi's turgid current, wheeling the broad flood around the bends with a mighty swing and pull. A grave sadness was upon them. Yet they were happy, for a little while.

Jacqueline suddenly sprang to her feet, wrenching herself from his arms.

In the next few moments no reasonable thought found time to trace its way through Huston's mind. For an instant he stood beside her, his arms pressed against his sides, seeking to snatch some explanation of her movement from her face. His eyes jerked away to follow her terror-stricken gaze, and saw only the gray masking curtain of the farther door from which she had always appeared. As he looked, the gray folds moved ever so slightly—no more than as if they had been touched by a faint breath, and then hung still.

Huston's thin lips drew back from his teeth. It was pure instinct that made him vault the settee, charge across the room and dash the curtain aside.

The elbow of an unlighted passageway opened before him, empty, black. Its emptiness mocked him as for an instant he stood and listened. From the throat of the passage, like the touch of a whisper, came the faint sound of a retreating step.

Jacqueline's cry rang in his ears as his sudden burst of fury carried him into the narrow-walled dark. He ran cat-footed, on the balls of his feet, his hands in front of him to find the turn of the wall. One of his hands made a motion toward his shoulder holster, but checked as he remembered, even in his madness, that it was not there.

The passageway angled twice, and let him into a high hallway, dimly lighted. On either side were evenly spaced white doors, silent and fixed, as if they had never been opened since time began. From the far end of the hall a narrow curved stairway led up into impenetrable dark. He was forced to pause, listening for a sound that might indicate which way he must go.

From the stairway came the sound of climbing feet, regular, plodding, without haste or stealth. In the baffling dimness at the upper bend of the stair his searching eyes imagined a slowly moving shadow, seen momentarily before it merged itself with the blackness above. Not running now, but with long quick strides, Huston gained the stairs and went up them three at a time. Under an unseen door in the musty blackness of the upper hall there showed a dim crack of light.

His shoulder crashed against the panels as his hand found and twisted the knob. The unlocked door shuddered as it swung wide. Huston stopped, breathless, and stood swaying on widespread legs; and a terrible cold chill went over him at what he saw.

Behind a heavy oaken table a figure sat with casually crossed legs. Across the middle of the face, flat where the nose should have been, lay a black silk bandage such as had come away in Huston's fingers once before. The fish-cold eyes

pressed unfaltering and expressionless against his and the full lips below the mask stirred in an odd smile.

Huston sickened under the disgust and horror of his discovery. The heat of his fury died in the chill, but beneath his revulsion he was as hard as if he had been a tool in the hands of powers outside of himself. His baffled mind conceived but one idea clearly—that this mysterious, unbelievable menace with the death's-head face must be destroyed, done away with forever.

The fighting part of him was trying to decide swiftly what his move should be. The position of the man's arms suggested that there might be a pistol in the hands hidden by the table's edge, but he was undeterred by that. He took a slow step forward, a creature of instinct without plan, moved only by the feeling that it was necessary to get closer before he should strike. The death's-head spoke, its voice formless and blurred—

"Well, Captain Huston?"

"I think," Huston heard his own ironic voice say, "you have the advantage of me."

As Huston advanced another slow stride the muffled, noseless voice answered—

"Your conclusion is correct."

There was a step at the door, and the rustle of full-billowing skirts. He knew that Jacqueline was at his shoulder.

"Want to explain yourself?" Huston said steadily, moving closer again as he spoke. Two paces more.

The death's-head laughed, a laugh as blurred and noseless as its voice. Huston advanced a step.

He felt Jacqueline's fingers on his arm; then suddenly she was between them, her back to the table, her eyes dark, slanting slits in her white face.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, in a voice so cold and low that he could not believe that it was hers.

"What—" Huston gasped. He stood staring at her, utterly dazed. He collected himself with a supreme effort to say, "Who is this man?"

"He is my husband—DuMoyne."

In the silence that followed all the reality of his surroundings dropped away from him, as if he had come to the climax of an impossibly evil dream. He swirled, lost in bottomless space, out of touch with all reasonable things. He struggled to recover himself, groping for understanding. His eyes searched her face, and found nothing there that was akin to what had gone before.

"You mean—"

"I mean that you are the intruder here." The moment of silence was ended by that hideously soft, muffled laugh. "I've had enough of you," DuMoyne said. "Now get out!"

The red despairing wrath surged up into Huston again, and he raised his hand to thrust Jacqueline aside, to fling himself upon the monster beyond. But his hand fell away again, and he stood bewildered.

"Madame DuMoyne and I understand each other," said the noseless voice. "You are quite superfluous here."

"Do you expect me to—" Huston began.

Jacqueline answered—

"I expect you to do exactly as he said—get out!"

"How can I leave you with this—"

"Get out!"

He desperately searched her face for a contradiction of her words, then turned and sought the darkness of the hall. Somehow he found the dim well of the stair.

XXVII

THE WIZENED guardian of the lower gate peered at him curiously as he swung open the small door for Huston to pass out, but the riverman did not see. He stepped slowly over the high-timbered threshold of the door in the gate, his muscles moving as if against their will. He wanted to rush out, to go plunging away, escaping the horror of the house that no longer held anything for him except disaster; but he was unable to stir his limbs to haste.

His heel caught on the high threshold,

so that he stumbled. Then he leaned on the corner of the gate, in the very shadows where he had first seen the grotesque figure of DuMoyne—and laughed. The bitter laughter welled out of him, peal upon peal, through the throat that had laughed so easily all his life, until he could only gasp and suck in deep breaths of the misty river air to satisfy the exhausted shudder in his chest. And with that done he strode off hatless up Chartres, his gait loose-muscled and swaggery, without a thought for where he went.

There must have been a glint of that crazy laughter in his eyes when he rolled at random into some waterfront saloon, for at the sight of him a group of rivermen, nondescript officers of nondescript boats, burst into a genial cheer.

"Cap'n Huston of the *Huston*, by God!" roared a liquory voice.

"Toughest damned skipper of the fastest damned boat that ever—"

"Up with the *Huston!* To hell with the *Betsy Grey!*"

The race between the *Arnold Huston* and the *Elizabeth Grey* for both boats or nothing had been the leading fuel for argument all night. Half a dozen of his acquaintances and friends, all looking alike to him tonight, rushed to drag him forward with rough, friendly hands. They were half-seas over already, most of them; the whiteness about Arnold's mouth assured them that he was the same. He let them haul him up to the bar, grinning back at them with a show of teeth that passed for good humor. He cared nothing for what he did or how he might appear.

"Hooray fer Huston of the *Huston!*"

There were answering bawls. Some drunkard of other allegiance recklessly raised his voice in behalf of the captain of the *Grey*.

"Hooray fer Sawkes of the *Betsy!*"

"And a rope to hang him!" shouted another.

"Who said that?"

"Me!" three voices instantly answered.

A thundering brawl began in the middle of the floor, went muddling and thumping toward the door and swiftly ended with the ejection of the staggering miscreant. A maudlin figure or two rolled in the sawdust, fumbled up and reeled back to the support of the bar.

A tall tumbler of whisky was poured for him, and he gulped it down. It was not the last. As the vertiginous warmth of the liquor rose to his brain he laughed with the others, joked uproariously, slapped backs, sang. Then in a brief silence, in which they paused to raise glasses to their lips, the death's-head face swam before his eyes again, crossed by a black silk bandage where the nose should have been. It leered at him over the tiny pool of his whisky glass, freezing the unnatural laughter on his lips.

He disentangled himself from the drunken rivermen presently, under circumstances which he never remembered. Indeed, there was little in the next few hours that he could ever again recall. He remembered afterward that a thick figure of a man with a blurred face and sharp glittering eyes had stepped near him in some other saloon, somewhere along the levee front. He could see the big red mouth, blaring words.

"A-hey, Huston! Pretty sick, eh? Wish the *Betsy* was safe on a mud-bar, eh? Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

He stood staring at the man, with what sort of an expression he never knew. He was trying to make out the man's features. He didn't know why he was presently moving toward the thick figure nor what his intentions were. But the man spoke hasty apologies and, glancing back warily over his shoulder, lost himself in the crowd.

Again, in some half-deserted bar, he remembered that the bartender had dared pour his second drink for him after Huston had slopped the counter pretty thoroughly in pouring his first. He dashed the whisky glass into the bartender's face, wrenched the bottle from a fat hand and went lurching out. Some one opposed him at the door, mouthing something about the color of his money. Huston swung the bottle at the man's

head, smashing it against the jamb of the door. Then he strode out into the night, unchallenged.

Sometimes he was aware that a group in some hazy bar was looking at him curiously. Sometimes a man followed him with his eyes, and muttered to a neighbor behind his hand. Fixed lights swirled and moiled before his eyes. Within, the black desolation lay undiminished—grew, if that were possible—and the horror of it remained undulled.

Burning sickish liquor, hopeless emptiness of crowded places, reeling lights, blurred vacant faces, lurching steps, meaningless moving forms. Jacqueline—where have you gone? Cold, desolate madness, a leering death's-head face.

It was beyond midnight. Where his insensate feet had guided him he had not cared. If he had consciously sought any certain place, it is doubtful whether they would have carried him there. He didn't recall going down the slant of the cobbled levee nor lurching across the stageplank of his boat, with those borrowed negroes shuffling out of his way. He was there, though, in his stateroom on the *Arnold Huston*, the boat of his name.

There were faces about him in the light of his lamp. Tommy Craig was there, and the three clerks, the open-mouthed steward, both watchmen and a smudged engine-striker from below. Well known faces, all of them, yet strangely unfamiliar, too. He sat sprawled with dangling arms, staring at them senselessly from under his brows.

"Jee-eezus!" said a voice. "What a bun *he's* got on!"

"Tighter'n a drum."

"Paralyzed."

"Peetrified!"

"Shut up!" snapped Tommy Craig. "Captain Huston!" he called, tentatively, as a man calls into the dark. There was no answer. Craig, with blasting oaths, herded the crowd out that had bulged in the door to stare, and slammed the door. "Hey, you! Come to life, will you! Huston!"

He shook Arnold roughly by the shoulders, without eliciting reply.

"Fer God's sake, what's the matter with you? Is the bet off?"

Craig shook him again, this time with all his strength.

"Off what?" said Huston thickly.

Tommy Craig stepped back in despair. He flung open the door, and the steward, who had leaned his ear too heavily against it, tumbled in. Craig brought him upright by the collar.

"Here, you! Gimme gallon o' black coffee. Dick! Dip up a bucket o' water! Two-three buckets!"

"'Tain't no use. He's peetrified. You'll never bring *him* to!"

"It's a damned lie! I've got to."

They loitered.

"You'll never—"

Tommy Craig leaped at them, sending the nearest of them reeling with his fist. He turned furiously upon the others, but they were on their way. Savage with a night's overwork and worry, Craig returned to Huston.

"Now, you cheap rumhound!"

With two or three wrenches that spared no buttons Craig stripped Huston to the waist. He got one of Huston's arms over his shoulder, and half led, half carried his captain to the deck. The buckets he had called for were ready now. He lifted one of them as if it had been a cup and forced Huston to drink until he choked. Then he flung Huston on his stomach over the rail of the guards, and with one hand forced into his throat emptied him as if he had been an old sack.

Pulling him inboard again, he jammed the captain's back against the rail, held him by the belt and three times smashed him across the face with his open hand. Huston's head went up, and the first light of fire came into his eye.

"Now," Craig commanded, "let fly with them buckets."

They "let fly" gladly enough, putting the zest into it that underlings always feel in any temporary humiliation of one superior to them in command. Four buckets of cold water poured over Huston's head and naked torso, silvery

cascades of liquid ice. Huston gasped, spluttered, shook his head, and flung Craig back; but he let the mate lead him back to his stateroom.

"That coffee ready?"

Coffee was always ready, a great hot boiler of it on the galley stove in which the fires never entirely died. Craig, having slammed the door again in the faces of the crew, scrubbed his captain with a rough towel. When he had got half a quart of coffee into him, bitter black, Huston shook his head, and grinned like a man coming out of sleep.

"Well, are you there?" demanded Craig at last.

"Seem to be."

"Then for God's sake," burst out the youngster, "tell me over again how you want this thing ballasted!"

Huston smiled. Craig's terrific earnestness made him repentant and ashamed.

"I guess I misunderstood you," Craig rushed on. "When I come to load her like you said, it seemed like all the strain come in one place and her nose rode as high as ever."

Huston got paper and pencil, and with shaking hands drew diagrams. His brain was far from clear, and he was shivering under the damp towel with which his shoulders were draped; but the explanations that the mate wanted came steadily enough. The points in question were fixed things in his mind, deeply staked there by the long study he had given them. They discussed the ballasting until Craig understood. It took about fifteen minutes for that.

"Why didn't you ask MacMaugh?" said Huston when it was done. "He knows that stuff better than I do."

"MacMaugh has the whole guts of her apart," Craig told him. "He told me to see you; he didn't have time." The young man added, "If I was you I'd go check up on that old boy—if you're able. Don't look to me like he's goin' to have her ready to go."

Huston smiled again, sardonically. He could picture himself checking up on MacMaugh.

"Well, is that all?"

"Well, here's a letter for you." He produced it as an afterthought, and handed it to the captain. It was addressed in Mark's hand.

"Wait a minute," said Huston.

He ripped the envelope, rubbed his eyes with his fingers, leaned close to the light and read:

Well, Arn, Old Man:

Jacqueline tells me that you know about DuMoyne now. I have known of his return for weeks, though he did not actually intrude himself until today. I gather that she treated you rather brutally. She wants you to know that she was sorry to do that, but you were on the point of making a corpse of yourself, or words to that effect, for DuMoyne was armed.

This thing has been a good deal of a nightmare to me, as you can very well imagine. It excuses, I think, my rather uncertain mood lately, and my apparent loss of interest in the boat.

I am fighting DuMoyne tonight, and will appreciate your attendance as my second, inasmuch as the arrangements, while a little out of the ordinary, are of a conclusive nature. The messenger who brings this will bring you to where I am.

I realize that you have had something of a shock, and I beg of you that you try to pull yourself together enough to win this race with the *Galloping Betsy*. Now that the uncertainty of the thing is over you should be able to see that there is nothing so frightfully extraordinary about a man's getting hit in the nose with a knife.

Ever your obedient servant,

—W

Huston raised his eyes to Tommy Craig.

"Where's the man that brought this?"

"It wasn't a man—it was a nigger. He—"

"Where is he?"

"I'm tellin' you, damn it!" The old hero-worshipping Craig was gone, leaving only a habit of obedience and an impatience to get at his job. "He left."

"What!"

"He left, I said!"

"What do you mean, sir?" The thickness went out of Huston's tongue, and a familiar fire kindled in his eyes. "What business had you, sir, dismissin' my niggers?"

"He wasn't—" began Craig sullenly.

"You stand up to me, sir?" Huston blazed.

The youngster's tune changed.

"I didn't know you wanted him," he said.

"How long ago did he leave?"

"Nearly an hour, sir."

"You don't know where he went, I suppose?"

"I ain't any idea, sir."

"What the devil did he look like? Had you ever seen him before?"

"No sir. He was dressed somethin' like a house nigger, and he had a broad nose and thick lips—"

"Bah! Get out of the way!"

Craig jumped to the door.

"Is that all you want of—"

"Go on to your work!"

Huston followed him out, putting on his shirt and coat as he went. Hatless and disheveled, but with the color coming back to his cheek-bones, he strode up into the town.

XXVIII

THE COOL breath of the river was in the town, faintly rimy with the mist that rose almost nightly from the Mississippi. It cooled Huston's blood as he walked, so that his step quickened and his sluggish veins stirred to new life. The drunken moil of despair was past, behind him like a mucky river bar over which a boat has floundered into clear water again.

He was returning to himself, though the dark mood remained, even when all heat had gone. He was cool and possessed, far less fatigued than he had thought. The greatest change that the night had brought him was that his mind was functioning shallowly, as if a blank wall stood where before he had perceived depths of mysterious beauty, and hope.

He reached the house in the Rue Royale where Mark Wallace had his rooms, and obtained admittance at the lower gate. Rapidly he climbed the steep, winding stair into the unlighted blackness under the eaves. The door of Mark Wallace's study was locked, and there was no answer to his knock. Without hesitation he burst in the door with his shoulder, and struck a light.

Dust, dust over everything in the narrow, familiar room—over the walls of books, the bronze bust on the chimney-piece, the shade of the unlighted lamp. Across the floor a water-roach as big as a mouse fled silently, out of dust into dust beyond. On the tabouret a pipe spilled its ashes into the open pages of a book printed in some unfamiliar tongue. Huston struck a second match, searching for some message that might tell him where the owner had gone. There was nothing, though, so much as to indicate that Wallace had been in the room since Huston had last seen him there.

Huston swore, and returned to the street. Systematically, with a conscientious thoroughness rather than with a hope of success, he set out to search for Mark Wallace. Since the negro messenger had returned without him, Wallace had probably procured a substitute second. He therefore first sought certain men whom he thought it likely that Mark would choose.

A round dozen men were routed out of their beds that night to greet a tousle-headed figure, clothes rumpled and tie askew. They were unanimous in their ignorance of the whereabouts of Mark Wallace; unanimous too in the opinion, as they went grumbling back to their beds, that Captain Huston was maudlin drunk on the eve of the race that was to decide his fortune.

He made the rounds of the livery stables next. At the first he hired a saddle-horse from a reluctant stable hand who finally let him have a decrepit beast in exchange for cash in advance. In response to his questions, designed to find out whether Wallace and DuMoyne had left the city streets by road or water, he obtained stares of curiosity and avowals of ignorance, wherever he went.

He decided that they had gone off by water, probably. It was hopeless, if that was the case. The all-night coming and going on the levee made all inquiry futile.

Remembering the manner in which DuMoyne had fought before, in a deserted house somewhere on the bayous, he went with little hope to the lugger basin, and learned nothing from the watchmen there.

All this took time, and his soberness was an aging reality as his search neared what promised to be a futile end. Toward the last of it he had begun to feel, as the result of his very efforts, that he had desired intensely to be with Wallace, rendering him whatever aid he could. After all, in spite of their quarrels and the parting of the ways which they had reached and separately passed, Mark Wallace was at heart his friend, one of the oldest and most valued he had known. A great proportion of the affection Huston had once held for Wallace came furtively back now that Mark was in the presence of what might be his death.

A terrible sense of mystery and desolation increased about Huston as he galloped those empty narrow streets without result. It was as if the antagonists had disappeared utterly by some hidden means which he, perpetually doomed to be uninitiate, could not know.

It was curious, and yet typical of the new shallowness of his guiding mind, that while he sought with increasing desperation for some remote clue, the thought of going to the house of Jacqueline DuMoyne occurred to him last. He swore at his obtuseness when this most obvious of all expedients came to him. The night was old, by then. Even as he flogged the listless mount to a renewed effort, Huston felt that he was too late, that there was no longer any reason why he should go to the place that should have been first in his thoughts.

He hauled the aged animal to a sliding stop before the house in the Rue Chartres, and left it with the reins on its neck. Then he sprang across gutter and banquette to the arched gate. He struck the little door in the great gate heavily with his foot, to rouse the old man within; and under the impact of his boot the unbarred door swung wide.

He stepped unaccosted into the vaulted carriage-way, where a smudgy lantern with an untrimmed wick still burned.

"Hallo!" he shouted. "Hi there!" and loudly shook the bar of the door.

His voice reverberated hollowly in the passage, in the courtyard beyond; but there was no answer, nor so much as the stir of an answering foot.

He strode forward over the flags, the ring of his heels echoing from the vaulted stone above. An ugly anger came into his movements, attesting to the waking of emotions that had three hours before seemed dead. As the black courtyard opened before him he stopped and raised his voice again. The feeble yellow rays of the smoky lantern were powerless to penetrate the dark, but the sky seemed less black than he had thought. By its faint light he could partly make out architectural forms—the black cave-mouthed arches where the stables were and the galleries before the slave-quarters. It was to these last that he angrily turned his voice.

"Well," he shouted, "are you going to let anybody come and go that wants to?"

Silence, complete, unwhispering. Not even the guilty creak of a negro's cot. Unreasoning, he strode across the courtyard and ran up the flimsy stairs to the pigeon-loft slave-quarters above the stables. He kicked open the nearest door.

"Come out of it!" he snapped. "Move, now!"

No answer. He swung up the lantern and stepped in. It was vacant of human life. He grunted and stepped on to the next.

The house of Jacqueline DuMoyne had once been a pretentious establishment, and the quarters for slaves were many. Two layers of small rooms, the second and third floors above the stables, ran around three sides of the courtyard's well, their walls joining to the house in front. He explored them rapidly, a glance sufficing for most. Many were storage rooms now, padlocked from without, and that saved time. A few held the stuffy, warm

odors of recent occupation; all were empty now.

Huston stood on the top gallery at last, and stared across the court at the fan-lighted windows of the house, dark and still. A cold fear touched his face with damp hands. Where were the slaves? Certainly not in the silent, brooding house. Some terror had come upon them, so sudden and so great that they had forgotten all consequences and loyalties, and fled. To that superstitious race a glimpse of the death's-head face would have been enough to accomplish that. Its effect had been to leave Jacqueline without so much as a black man's hand to be raised in her defense.

His anger rose, mingling with that increasing fear. The blank wall in his mind crumpled like a curtain dropped by a breaking string. A great rush of remorse overwhelmed him as he saw what he had done. DuMoyne was a maniac, for all he knew, warped in mind by his ghastly deformity. She had stepped out of Huston's arms, turned and used a pathetic subterfuge to shield him from danger; he had left her with the knife-maimed man. Mark Wallace might have been dead these many hours if his written account of the situation meant anything.

Where was DuMoyne and where was she?

He rushed down the flimsy wooden stairs, across the courtyard to the house and up to the second floor, calling her name. He strode madly through the echoing rooms, fearing unguessed horrors to be revealed behind every door. Leaving the second floor half-searched, he took the curved dark stair leading to the top floor and went driving into the room where DuMoyne and Jacqueline had last been seen.

Nothing there, no sign. He ransacked the entire top floor, finding only echoes, and dust. If at any instant an insane figure with a noseless face had flung upon him out of the dark he would have been unsurprized, yet for himself he was devoid of fear. The terror that stiffened his throat was for Jacqueline alone, for his beautiful one that he had so lately held safe in his arms, and now was lost to him in the ominous mystery of the silence and the dark.

He returned to the second floor, searching anew. Not a room, not a closet remained closed to him now. Their dark caverns made his voice sound hollow and terrible as he called her name. He came to a locked door and, using his shoulder as a ram, smashed it open, splintering the wood about the lock. For a moment he paused on the threshold, trying to steady the jerk of his ragged nerves.

The shadowy room he had opened exhaled a faint fragrance that instantly made his blood leap. He had not noticed that she had used a perfume, yet now that it came to his nostrils it made the memory of her poignantly vivid.

"Jacqueline!" he cried again; and raising the lantern high he pressed into the dark, dreading what he might find there.

It was her room. Her bed was there, untouched. His eyes ran hastily over the furniture, the rich and dainty things that had had the infinite privilege of living intimately with her. There was no closet, only a massive carved armoire. But, forcing himself to leave no possibility unprobed, he opened that. Like everywhere else he had searched, it was devoid of any sign of evil, or of news.

A delicate silk garment brushed the back of his hand. He paused to touch it with his fingers, held by the feeling that it bore an intimate kinship because it had been close to her. He was thinking that this soft thing of silk had once rested within the curve of his arms, had been warm under his hand. Suddenly he gathered it between his palms and buried his face in its folds.

XXIX

HE STEPPED out through the little door in the great gate at last, at once relieved and hopeless in the certainty that nothing further was to be learned within. The sky was graying with the approach of dawn. The faces of the

buildings across the street, that had been only black hulks before, were beginning to show contour and detail, patterned in blocked tones of gray. He realized that it must be five o'clock. The horse he had ridden was gone.

He leaned once more in the corner of the gate. At six o'clock the *Arnold Huston* and the *Elizabeth Grey* were to start their long upstream grind that was to change the ownership of a steamboat and decide the fortunes of Huston and Wallace. There was work to be done.

He walked to the moorage of the *Arnold Huston* and paused for a moment at the top of the levee. All up and down the riverfront figures moved in the bustle preparatory to the starting of boats. Before the *Arnold Huston* a small throng was gathering, drawn by news of the race.

She lay white in the gray of the dawn, his boat that he had worked for and loved. His eye ran over her clean, strong lines—smooth, compact, balanced. The *Elizabeth Grey* had pulled in alongside in a berth readily conceded by a neighboring boat in honor of the race that was soon to commence.

The rival boat was bigger than the *Huston*, with bluff square lines, tall and rugged. She towered over the lesser boat—bigger paddle-wheels, wider guards, greater stacks, bigger everything. Her scrubbed paint was older and duller, so that she looked like a great veteran of a boat that was about to put a young upstart in its place.

A gaunt, skeletonesque look about the *Grey* immediately caught Huston's eye. He suddenly raised an eyebrow as he saw that not a door nor a window on the *Elizabeth Grey* contained a panel or a fragment of glass. She was stripped to her frame; the wind would blow through her woodwork as through a picket fence. He had looked for something of the sort, and was not disturbed.

He strode down the levee and joined Tommy Craig on the forward deck. The young mate was waiting for him in an angry mood. He was in shirtsleeves as usual, his brown corded arms bare; his tangled hair was like dull, ragged brass, and a trace of red touched the blue of his eyes.

"So you're here at last!" the youngster burst out. "Good God, man, it's damn near time!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Huston, with humorless sarcasm.

He suddenly felt infinitely lonely. The realization swept him that these men who had given their best to the boat believed that he had lain down, had failed to back them in their strenuous efforts to win for him. It was his name that would ring up and down the river if the *Huston* won, and his pocket that the advantage would go into. He could not blame them for their resentment that he alone, of them all, should have drunk and caroused the precious night away, putting himself out of condition for the emergencies that would fall to his decision, leaving them undirected in their labors for his boat. No word from him, no possible explanation could make them forgive him for what they thought he had done. It wouldn't be *his* name that they would vote to put on his boat, if they had it to do over now.

"D'you see the *Grey?*" Craig went on. "Naked as a lizard—not a door or a piece of glass in her! The wind'll go through her like a tin horn, while we go blowin' around like a paper sack! That's what they call racin' a 'regular run,' is it? Are we goin' to stand—"

"No," said Huston. "That's easily remedied."

"Shall I get axes and—"

"Not now."

"But—"

"Give 'em the satisfaction of imitatin' them in dock? We'll be a furlong ahead of 'em in half an hour; then out with everythin' that'll move. That's what'll drive 'em crazy, instead of givin' 'em a laugh."

"All right, that's only the beginnin'—d'you know how she's goin' to load wood? Our niggers got it from their niggers. What d'yuh think they've done?"

"What?"

"They've got barges waitin' at every wood-yard they'll touch; they're goin' to lash the barges astern and toss on wood goin' full steam! While we—"

Huston smiled.

"You must think I'm a fool. We've got as many pine knots as they have, an' oil to boot. I saw to that last trip.

"Why the devil can't you tell a man?"

"I didn't tell anybody I didn't have to; I kept my mouth shut in hopes that Sawkes might not think of it. Is that all the bad news?"

"No, by God! A nigger just come runnin' with word from Harry Masters."

"What!"

"He was throwed by his horse as he was ridin' in this mornin' from the plantation where he stayed overnight. Hit his head on a tree, and ain't conscious yet. They think he's got a stove skull. May pull through and may not. I—"

"When did that message come?"

"Fifteen minutes ago. He said—"

"Have you sent for another pilot?"

"No. Who the devil is there that can handle it? I thought—"

"You wasted fifteen minutes?" Huston bellowed.

His mind was racing now. For one thing, he could have killed Tommy Craig for blurting out that deathly story in front of the hands. Whites of eyes were showing in the black faces, here and there. Every negro aboard would be certain in his conviction that the boat was voodooed. Huston's odd behavior had already prepared them for that. The starch would be out of them now; probably the whip would be singing before they were four miles up the river. This in place of the singing gang that had shouted "arn steamboat" the night before!

All that was only in the tail of his mind. What he was trying to concentrate every mental effort on was the name of a pilot then in New Orleans, a long pilot of long pilots, a man who could instantly be found.

"Jean Brule!" he yelled suddenly; and his third clerk, a hatchet-faced Cajun boy who he happened to know could run like a deer, leaped up almost at his elbow.

"Yessuh!"

"You know where Madame Fanchon's boarding house is, in Bourbon Street? Run like the devil was after you, get into the house if you have to smash the door and jerk Cyrus Meller out of bed with your own hands. If he can get here in fifteen minutes his price is his own. Bring him just as he is—you know what's happened. He can put on my clothes when he gets here. Now, run! Petrie! Run to the Place d'Armes, get a coach an' flog as hard as the horses can pelt after Jean, to bring Meller back. Move!"

They were on their way, Brule already out of sight over the levee. Craig exploded bitterly.

"Cy Meller couldn't get a rowboat over to Algiers!"

Huston couldn't bring himself to order the boy silent.

"He's a good long pilot," he answered. "The best I know of in New Orleans today, that isn't tied up with some boat. If we had two hours, I'd beg a pilot from some other boat here. We haven't time to even find out who came in durin' the night, let alone find him."

"You're a pilot yourself," Craig came out flatly, his reddened blue eyes burning with impotent fury. Older men would have stood back, but every known responsibility made itself felt on Tommy Craig's shoulders, then. "I know what kind of a pilot you are, and you know—I don't care what you say."

Craig's voice was low, suppressed. The *Elizabeth Grey's* guards almost touched those of the *Huston*. The crew of the *Grey* probably knew the predicament their rivals were in now, but Craig's instinct was to rob them of all the satisfaction that he could.

"Goin' upriver this last trip," Craig rushed on, "I saw you lay her square in her marks in the hardest crossin' this river's got. You got the feel of the boat—Cy Meller hasn't; he couldn't steer the race you can even if he was anywhere near the pilot, which he ain't!"

Huston's cheeks were sucked in

between his teeth. What little color he had had when he came aboard had now slowly drained away, leaving his face gray. He shot his eyes to Craig's for a moment before he turned away, but the youngster read nothing there.

Not once since Huston had left the silent house on Chartres had he considered the possibility of his making the trip upstream. That his absence might lose them the race, their fortune, their boat, he had recognized as a foregone likelihood, yet one to which he gave no weight. If he had known that Mark Wallace was with Jacqueline it would have been another thing. But no word from Wallace had come.

With Jacqueline's whereabouts a mystery, and Mark Wallace's fate unknown, he felt he would have seen the river dry and all boats rotted before he would have abandoned his search.

The sun was rising now, through the wisping river-mist. The clean, bright rays scintillated over the wavelets where the wind played, and gleamed along the white paint of the boat. In the new sunlight he was almost able to persuade himself that his fears of the night had been futile things. Almost—not quite. If Will Huston insisted on forfeit—and Arnold thought he would—Huston would sacrifice the boat; but he could not go with her, now.

He had the strength, though, to make light of their hazards for a few moments yet. His smile was not far from convincing.

"You're powerful anxious to captain this boat, aren't you?" he said gently.

"Captain, it ain't that," Tommy began.

"Well," said Huston, "it may come to that, like as not."

He turned and climbed the stairway to the boiler-deck. Across the rail, so little higher that they were almost on a level, lay the boiler-deck of the *Elizabeth Grey*. Captain Sawkes was there, talking to Will Huston; they were smiling, conversing in low voices. As Sawkes saw the captain of the *Huston* he instantly raised his hand and came forward smiling; but Will strolled away. The captains exchanged genial greetings.

"Your old tub is looking all-fired handy," said Sawkes pleasantly. "I was just saying to Mr. Huston, the *Betsy* has a race on her hands if ever she had one. I wouldn't give odds to any man, I'm telling you frankly."

Sawkes had a full-blooded, vital face, gray hair, a merrily sharp brown eye. Huston thought him a good riverman.

"Well," said Huston agreeably, "we'll do our best to make it an interestin' trip for you, Captain; I *think* she'll hold together to Natchez, providin' we can find the way."

"We'll be glad to show you the way," Sawkes grinned. "No trouble at all!"

"How d'you want to make the start?" Huston asked.

"I'm upstream of you, so I'll back to the outside. That gives you the slack water—what do you think of that? If the current starts carrying us downstream, I better drop in behind you, huh?"

"Fair enough."

They completed their last-minute arrangements. It was only a few minutes before the appointed time. Long since both steamboats had gathered their full poundages of steam. The heavy smoke rolled from their stacks; from below came the clump of passed wood, the voices of negroes, the clang of fire-doors. In a few minutes, bells and whistles, unless—

Unless Cy Meller failed to come. If that happened, what explanations could he give, what arrangements could he attempt? Will Huston was there. He might or might not claim forfeit. Tommy Craig was at his elbow, but Huston did not feel he could face him. He turned sick at the thought of the man of the engines below. Everything was ready now, with all that they had fought and labored for wavering on the scales. They would have to take their chance on Will's accepting a postponement, that was all.

Over the top of the levee, four hundred yards downstream, he suddenly caught sight of Jean Brule, running—alone. Sickness took away Huston's

strength. He felt that he must at least for a moment be alone. Hurriedly he shook hands with Captain Sawkes, mumbled something, turned away. Unsteadily he walked to his stateroom. Only a moment to steady himself, alone. Nate Lacrosse was in the pilot-house, MacMaugh below at his levers; Craig was running up the steps to the hurricane-roof, assuming the only thing they all could assume, knowing that Huston was a licensed pilot—that he would take his trick at the wheel.

His head was down as he fumbled open his stateroom door. Then he froze motionless on the threshold as there came to his nostrils a faint perfume, a thin suggestion of a fragrance that he would never forget. He lifted blank eyes.

Jacqueline was there.

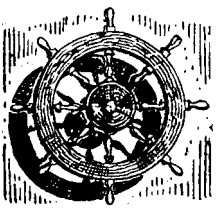
She said:

"I'm ready to go where you go. I couldn't stand that empty house any more."

"Where's Mark?"

"I don't know," she said.

TO BE CONTINUED



Railroad—the signal flare of courage

SAM SAM

By T. T. FLYNN

LIFE itself is speeded up on the far-flung miles of the D. and R. system, where the great steel monsters pound from horizon to horizon, spouting smoke and fire, screaming hoarse warnings to the outside world and drawing after them strings of all-steel coaches that shake the very earth with their passing. Men come and men go. All types—all kinds. And now and then comes one who stands out from all the rest.

Such a one was Sam Sam—who was born Samuel Samuelson, with a withered right leg.

McGann made it possible—McGann, with his twisted sense of humor, his spiteful disposition, his petty shortcomings. McGann, the black-browed, the bull-necked, the biggest frost that ever filled the super's chair on the Santee division. It was one especially shabby trick of his that back-fired and turned evil into good.

What put the desire to be a railroader into Sam Sam's head, no one ever knew. It grew up with him. Sprouted from the days when he had to sit helplessly by and watch the other fellows play firemen, policemen, prizefighters, choose sides for baseball, football and all the rest of youth's lusty games.

It's hard to sit by with a withered leg and watch the young huskies maul and rough each other—and feel their glances. The contemptuous glances, the pitying attentions that sear and sear and sear to the very raw soul. And the glances of the girls, indifferent, pitying, too; turning always away, away to the stalwarts who can stroll and dance and do.

It's hard to be the "Limpys" and the "Crips," who sit by the hour and wistfully watch their indifferent companions;

whose timid advances are rebuffed unthinkingly, uncomprehendingly; who try to hide the stricken look on their faces, the hopeless droop to their shoulders, the added drag to their hobbling progress, as they turn away, back to the prison of loneliness and yearning.

Sam Sam went through it all. He grew up a short, slight youth, whose withered right leg, with an extension sole on the shoe, barely served to hobble on, just kept him from the use of crutches. But his affliction put no marks of rebellion on his face. Always near his lips lurked a ready smile. His eyes alone were wistful.

In the winter there was school. Summers he clerked in his father's little grocery store and dreamed. They were in his eyes, those dreams. He would be a railroad president some day. The future, the far, distant, golden future beckoned, promised. A railroad president, with prestige, power and a private car—a position where a withered right leg counted for naught, a place where a sturdy heart was everything.

A stout heart had Sam Sam. Every summer he tried for work at the Santee shops, the Santee Union Station, the freight yard. And everywhere the huskies had captured all the jobs. Every year the same.

And every year Sam Sam limped slowly back to the counter of the little grocery store and took up his prosaic task of weighing sugar and salt and beans until the opening of school, reaching to this shelf and that—and dreaming, dreaming of another summer, another chance. Fate couldn't frown every year. There was justice for a stout, enduring heart. There had to be.

In Sam Sam's seventeenth year justice hid her face while his mother passed peacefully to that land where all dreams are golden and true. And that summer for the first time Sam Sam faltered. He was too heartsick, too lonesome to care for the future, to know or feel anything but the miserable present.

But his stout heart carried on In his eighteenth year, the year he was graduated from high school, he tried again. And found once more that there was no room for one with a withered right leg.

With despair in his eyes Sam Sam went back to the grocery shelves again, for years this time, not months.

Four years later he was still there, when his father died of cancer. Died over a period of months. Dark months, cruel months, when the hospital bills mounted and mounted and the savings shrank to nothing; and at last a full mortgage was plastered over the little grocery stock.

And all to no avail. In the fall Sam Sam found himself without a father, without a store, without a future. In that black moment of his life he clutched at the golden dreams of his childhood. He turned again to the railroad.

WHY HE went to the superintendent of the whole Santee division this time, he alone knew. Perhaps on the theory that if the super couldn't find him a job no one else ever could.

At any rate he rode the elevator to the second floor of the Santee Union Station, limped down the long corridor, paused a moment before the door marked J. E. McGann, took off his worn cap and entered.

The small anteroom was empty. Sam Sam ignored the mahogany benches against the side walls—the benches on which those who desired to see McGann were wont to cool their heels until such time as the dignity of the super was impressed upon them and he in his pleasure deigned to see them. There was an inner door. Sam Sam crossed the room with his uneven stride, opened it and limped through.

He didn't know the super; couldn't have known or he would never have gone to him, for McGann, super of the Santee division for a bare six months, was no true son of the thundering road of twin steel rails. He was no pride to the men who were under him. He fawned upon those over him, bullied all under him and used the power of his office to gratify the

mean quirks with which his nature abounded. Not a man's man, this McGann, in any sense of the word; nor a woman's either, for that matter. The favor of a powerful member of the board of directors was his only excuse for being where he was.

McGann was in his office, dictating to Wurtz, his little, fat, oily secretary and "yes" man. When the door opened, McGann glanced up. His heavy black brows bent in a frown as Sam Sam entered.

"What do you want?" he barked.

"A job," Sam Sam declared, limping slowly across the thick green rug to the side of the large flat-topped mahogany desk.

He stopped there and smiled hopefully. McGann's eyes ran over the slight form, took in the threadbare suit, the shoes, old through their brave coat of polish. He noted the withered right leg that caused Sam Sam to limp so heavily.

The ready smile, the wistful, hopeful look behind it, McGann did not notice, being the sort of man that he was.

A real man, with the body and health that was McGann's, would have felt pity. McGann merely scented an opening for his own particular brand of humor. His black brows smoothed out and his thick lips twisted in a mocking smile.

"What kind of work can a cripple like you do?" he demanded brutally.

The cruel question struck home. The smile passed from Sam Sam's face. His eyes darkened with hurt. His fingers dug into the old cap; but his heart was yet stout.

"Give me a job and I'll do it," he said bravely.

It was too good a chance to pass up.

"I've got an opening for a trackwalker," McGann replied with mock generosity. "The work is not hard—only about twenty or twenty-five miles a day to walk."

Wurtz took his cue. His pulpy, oily features worked in a smirk and then he chuckled audibly until his unhealthy carcass shook.

Sam Sam did not acknowledge the lash which was being laid upon his spirit. Straight he stood and gazed steadily at McGann. And the hurt in his eyes sank and scorn entered them. For in those seconds he gaged his man correctly.

A few seconds of his scorn, and McGann began to grow uncomfortable. Like all bullies, scorn could strike through his hide. His face flushed slightly. He demanded harshly—

"Well, say something!"

Sam Sam ignored him, turned on his heel and started to limp out, back to the friendless world, into a future dark and hopeless as ever.

McGann scowled with irritation. Somehow he felt that he had got the worst of the exchange, even though Sam Sam had said nothing. And Wurtz had been a witness to the event. McGann was unwilling that it end so. A paper on the flat-topped desk started a chain of thought in his mind. He called:

"Wait a moment. Can you do anything with the Morse code?"

Sam Sam hesitated, halted, clutched at the faint straw of hope and turned.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I can send and receive."

McGann stated briefly:

"We need a man in the station at Iron Mountain siding. Do you know enough Morse to handle a station key?"

"I think so. I've sent and received a lot. Some of it pretty fast."

"Where? Have you railroaded before?"

Sam Sam grinned slightly.

"I had a set of toy trains one Christmas," he replied, "but I learned Morse on my wireless. I've been a 'ham'—had an amateur wireless station for seven years."

"Wireless!" McGann grunted. "What makes you think you can take railroad work? It comes fast when it comes."

"I know I can take it. You can try me out."

"The dispatcher will do that. Can you be at Iron Mountain day after tomorrow? The agent's resignation takes effect then. There's a small house near the station where the agent lives. It's company property."

"Can't I get a room in a boarding house?"

"Yes," McGann replied smoothly, "if you can locate one that will suit you. The outgoing agent will give you a line on things. Do you want it?"

"Yes, sir," Sam Sam said eagerly, "I'll be glad to have it."

The tense, strained look passed from his face. Happiness flooded it as he realized the golden future was in the way of being the golden present.

"All right. Go down the corridor and let the company doctor look you over. Tell him I said to pass the leg. Report to me day after tomorrow morning. I'll give you a pass to Iron Mountain."

Sam Sam's first correct impression of McGann was swept away. Through tinted glasses of happiness he saw a generous and kind man, a worthy superintendent of that great road, the D. and R. His voice was husky as he said:

"Thank you, Mr. McGann. I'll never forget what you've done for me today."

McGann waved his hand and smiled at some secret thought.

"That's all right," he replied. "I'm more than glad to do it."

The fat jowls of Wurtz shook in a snicker. A buzzard stripping the meat from a nasty joke. But Sam Sam saw only friendliness and kindness. His eyes were misty as he limped out.

WHEN the door had closed behind Sam Sam, McGann exploded in a burst of mirth; then he parodied in an imitation of Sam Sam's voice:

" 'Thank you, Mr. McGann. I'll never forget what you have done for me today.' "

"Ha, ha, ha! The richest thing I've seen in a long time!" Wurtz wheezed, pulling out his handkerchief and pawing at his little red eyes. "Honestly, chief, you got the greatest sense of humor I ever saw. This is rich!"

McGann nodded in appreciation of his own cleverness.

"I couldn't help it," he said. "It was too good a chance to miss."

He picked up the paper that had prompted his kindness and chuckled again as he glanced over it.

"Wait till he sees what you handed him!" Wurtz exclaimed. "I'll bet he takes the next train out."

"Of course he will," McGann chuckled. "That's the only reason I gave it to him. I've already got a man picked for the place. Had him in mind as soon as this agent gave up. I'll have my man there within three hours after this fellow leaves."

"I'd give a week's pay to be there and see his face when he gets off the train at Iron Mountain siding." Wurtz snickered.

McGann chuckled, lighted a cigar and leaned back to mull over the thing again.

Another scabby trick—or meant to be. McGann knew Iron Mountain siding well. But it did put Sam Sam on the payroll of the D. and R., saved him from limping out of the office jobless. For, after all, railroading is a man's game, of the body and of the heart. And, however willing the heart, it must have the body to back it up. Sam Sam's body was not much to boast about, and his withered leg was a cruel handicap.

McGann, delighting in a cruel joke, made the offer. Sam Sam satisfied the dispatcher on his Morse.

THE AFTERNOON of the second day the local set Sam Sam and his two suitcases on the platform at Iron Mountain siding. His first impression, as the grimy local puffed away up the grade, was of loneliness. That is the keynote of Iron Mountain siding—solitude. It is on the eastern slope of the mountains which rise across the western end of the Santee division, mountains even higher, more rugged than those that cause the main line to rear in that winding, twisting ladder called Twenty Mile Grade, some hundreds of miles farther east.

At Iron Mountain siding the grade lies along the banks of a leaping mountain stream—a frothing, boiling thread of water that has cut down through the rocks for ages. Down, down it has gone, and the uneven rock walls of its patient

labor drop a full thirty feet below the road-bed. At the bottom the stream itself boils along in a narrower channel.

There are three reasons for Iron Mountain siding. Three only. The first is the rickety branch line that cuts off from the main track at that point and meanders back some half-dozen miles to a group of coal mines. The mining camps are sere, unwashed, unpainted communities, whose very existence seems forgotten by the outside world, save for the empty coal cars that go in and the full ones that come out.

The second is the rutted, narrow wagon road that wanders back along the mountain side to the state highway, some four miles off. Along this road, from time to time, inhabitants of the lonely hills appear, claim freight or send freight, or once in awhile buy a ticket and go away.

The third is the siding. The steep mountain grades level a bit at that point. Above, the tortuous grade climbs and climbs, seeking by devious ways the easiest path to the summit of the range. Below, the same track drops down and down, far to the level lands of the valley. In all that great climb or descent, there is only one place where a train can get off the single main track and let another pass—the siding which stretches above the small station.

A lonely place, Iron Mountain siding, with its short stretch of main line, its siding, its mountain stream brawling in the gorge just across the track and, looming above everything, the forested mountains. Nothing else. No houses. No human neighbors.

The sun was dropping to the mountain's crest. Shadows were creeping out, cool shadows, for it was late fall. Sam Sam stood on the small platform and watched the back of the last coach dwindle, then crawl around the curve, a quarter of a mile up-grade. For a moment the labored exhaust of the engine floated back. Then that, too, seemed to still. A great quiet fell over the scene. Sam Sam limped a step, halted and looked around with indecision.

At that moment the door of the station opened and a tall, thin, sad-faced man emerged. He nodded and queried—

"You the new man?"

"Yes," said Sam Sam, grinning, "I guess I am."

"We'll let it go at that," the sad-faced one declared. "Might be some mistake if we inquire too deep. And I'm going to clear out of here on the seven o'clock if it's the last thing I do in this life. Brown's my name—Aleck Brown."

Sam Sam shook hands.

"Mr. McGann said you were leaving tonight," he remarked.

"I reckon he did say it. I didn't give him no room for doubt on that subject." Aleck Brown bit down violently on a quid of tobacco and then expectorated forcefully. "I told him all over two pages I was going out tonight—and just why I was going. I reckon there ain't a bit of doubt in his mind about the matter now."

Sam Sam grinned.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about the place."

"Enthusiastic!"

Aleck Brown's power of speech failed him for the moment. With a sweep of his arm he took in the station, siding, coal-road switch, stream gorge and the surrounding hills.

"This place," he stated wrathfully, "is the nearest place to a cold hell that I ever heard of. I been here a year. That's longer than any other man ever stayed—an' longer than any one else ever will, I reckon. This place is known all over the division as the worst berth of 'em all. They stick a man here when they want him to quit and can't find an excuse to fire him. Well, I stood 'em off a year, but I'm through. I'm going back to farming."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Matter? This ain't a job! It's slavery! Got to be around the station all day. Nothin' to do but set where you can hear the key— An' onct in the night get up an' come clear over to the station an' see that everything is all right with orders and such for the limited trains."

"Good night!" said Sam Sam, relieved. "That doesn't sound very hard."

"Hard! Just wait an' see how you like it after a few months. The hands on the clock'll slow down till you think they've stopped traveling. There ain't a soul to talk to from one day's end to the other. Such folks as does come here to get freight an' such don't stay long. And most all the trains go right on through. Thousands of people pass every day, and there ain't one to sit down an' talk. Wait till you make a few night trips from the house back to here. It's worth a man's life to go over that path in the day time, let alone in the dark. It's a wonder I ain't killed myself long ago."

"What path is that?"

Brown pointed across the gorge. On the other side was an area of an acre or so, reasonably level. It had been cleared and a small house had been erected.

"Come here an' look," Brown commanded.

When Sam Sam limped across the track and stood on the edge of the gorge, he saw that below them a small wooden bridge spanned the mountain brook. A tortuous, rocky path reared up each steep side of the gorge.

"There! That's what you got to come an' go on! A regular death trap! I told McGann so in my resignation!"

Aleck Brown's dubious gaze went to Sam Sam's withered leg. Sam Sam noticed.

"You don't have to say it," he said with a smile. "It looks like the going will be hard this winter."

"Take my advice," Brown said, as he turned back to the station. "Climb on the train with me an' let this station and the road go to pot. The Santee division ain't worth a hoot since this McGann came on it, anyway. If you don't know it, you'll find out soon enough."

"Did you write McGann about all this? Tell him how bad that path is and everything?"

"Got it all off my chest when I wrote my resignation."

Sam Sam grinned wanly.

"I'm beginning to know McGann better," he said. "Wonder what he would take to cut a throat?"

"Do it for nothing, I'll bet," Brown declared pessimistically. "I tell you railroading's gone to the dogs, it has, when a man like McGann can be super. You take my advice and break away."

Sam Sam shrugged.

"I'm here. Guess I'll stick."

"All right. It's your funeral. Come in the station and I'll give you a list of what you got to do. Then we'll go over to the house."

The duties were not heavy. Take care of such freight and express as came in and went out. Sell an occasional ticket and remain close to the key and watch for orders. Extra freights were often run in; passenger trains were late; specials went over the line. Iron Mountain siding was the only place for miles where they could pass one another.

Carrying his suitcase, Sam Sam stumbled after Aleck Brown, down the rocky, twisting path to the little bridge over the boiling stream and up the steep, far side to the house. Small it was, but substantially built. Two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. Back of the house was a spring.

"Reckon that's the reason they put the house over here," Brown remarked as he took the water bucket and went out to fill it. "They got no water on the station side. There's a trough and water tank at the foot of the mountain. Engines has to fill up there."

He cooked a hasty supper of tinned food, talking volubly as he worked.

"There's some food here—enough to last a few days. The trainmen'll bring whatever you want. Just make out a list and give it to them. They know what a hard place this is, and they're real nice about helping out. Bedding goes with the house—what there is of it. Any of the firemen'll give you coal off their engine, an' you can break your back carryin' it over here."

They ate. Then Sam Sam washed the few dishes, while Aleck Brown packed the

last of his things and made ready to leave.

It was dark when they left the house. Sam Sam groped ahead with a lantern. Brown followed with his suitcase, grumbling at the steep path, the fortune that had cast him in that lonely spot for a year and uttering profane statements that he would never again be caught in that part of the country to the day he died.

All in all it was a jolly welcome to a jolly position, if one chose to look at it that way. Because it was a real job on a real railroad, Sam Sam did. He stood on the dark station platform and watched the bright-windowed evening local slip down the grade with Aleck Brown.

As it gathered speed, faded to a twinkle of red end-lights and then winked out, he took a deep breath and grinned.

"Cheerful fellow, Aleck," he said aloud to the vast, silent night. "I'll bet he will rise up in his casket and say a few words about Iron Mountain siding."

Then, because he had been bred in the city and had never spent a night alone in the country, he shivered slightly, picked up the lantern and hobbled swiftly into the four protecting walls of the station.

THE NIGHT was long. Sam Sam knew it—every slow, dragging minute. He sat in the station all night, keeping awake by listening in on the messages that sped up and down the wire and starting nervously every time he heard the wailing screech of an owl in the woods.

The cool dawn righted things once more. He limped down the tortuous path to the bridge, stumbling once and scraping the skin off his knee, climbed up the other side and entered his cottage. Setting the cheap alarm clock that Brown had left, he tumbled into bed and snatched a few hours of sleep.

If McGann and Wurtz could have watched Sam Sam that first night, could have seen his heart jump every time an owl hooted, they would have been well repaid. If they could have seen him, as he stumbled on that path that early dawn, bruising his knee until the blood ran, their cups would have been running over.

But they did not. Sam Sam cheated them out of the big laugh that they were counting on, for he stuck. The loneliness, the steep path, doubly dangerous to him, the dark nights, not even the ghostly owls and creatures of the long black hours had the power to outweigh his years of golden dreams. He had his fingers into a good job and he clung to it desperately.

Thursday he arrived at his lonely post. The long hours of Thursday night he sat in the little station, wide-awake. The next afternoon, Friday, McGann dropped into the dispatcher's office in the Santee Union Station.

"How is everything at Iron Mountain?" he queried expectantly.

"All right," the dispatcher answered. "I had him on the wire a few minutes ago."

McGann frowned slightly.

"Are you certain everything is all right?"

"He is tending his key all right," the dispatcher replied, "and I guess he likes the post. I asked him how he was getting along and he said he was sitting on top of the world."

"Huh," McGann grunted, then snapped, "keep a close eye on him. Let me know as soon as he makes a mistake."

The dispatcher knew what was up. Wurtz, in an effort to play up to his chief, had started the story around, giving Sam Sam about twenty-four hours at Iron Mountain. McGann had been fooled. And now he evidently intended to seize on the first mistake the new man made and fire him. Whatever the dispatcher's personal view of the thing, he had his job to consider. So he nodded and assented with a wooden face—

"All right, Mr. McGann, I'll do that."

But Sam Sam didn't make any mistakes; if he did, they were covered before they got to McGann. For some one had seen the amusing side of the thing and had started the story rolling. From one end of the division to the other it went. McGann had tried to put one over on a cripple and had been fooled. They were with Sam Sam to a man.

McGann chafed. But there wasn't anything he could do about the matter. Sam Sam fulfilled his duties to the last notch, and the super couldn't fire him out of the job without a reason. Even McGann had to answer to higher ups.

Day followed day. Sam Sam slipped into the routine of his work, grew to know the night better, lost his fear of the owls. Over the telegraph wires he made friends with the other operators—men he had never seen and probably never would, but friends, nevertheless.

But the biggest thing that happened was inside of him. He was on the first rung of the ladder and dared to aspire higher. It had been done before, could be done again, if the fellow had the right stuff. Sam Sam was optimist enough to discount the drag of his withered right leg and plug eagerly toward his goal. As he worked and dreamed, loyalty for the D. and R. grew in his heart. A fine road, a great road, the best in the country, it became to him.

THE DAYS sped into weeks, and then a month. December came, and snow. He swept his switches clear, his station platform clean and the rocky path bare; he kept the fire going in the station and laboriously lugged buckets of coal down into the gorge, up the other side, to the small house.

A quiet life, far removed from the Santee Union Station and McGann. But one day a through train slowed and McGann and Wurtz stepped off.

Sam Sam limped out of the station and met McGann's brusk greeting with a cheerful grin. Iron Mountain siding was neat, orderly and as it should be. His mind was easy on that point.

McGann, wrapped in his great overcoat, began to prowl about. Wurtz tagged at his heels, his little red eyes doing their stint. Sam Sam watched them a few minutes. Then, as they paid him no attention and the air was cold, he went back into the warm station.

Presently McGann's roving eye noted the wires running under the main track and over the edge of the steep gorge bank. He followed them and saw that the wires ran down to the bridge and up the other side.

"What's this?" he growled.

He turned toward the station and bellowed—

"Come out here!"

Without waiting to don his overcoat, Sam Sam limped out and joined them.

"What," McGann demanded harshly, pointing, "are those wires for?"

"Telegraph wires," Sam Sam replied.

"What are telegraph wires doing there?"

"I thought," Sam Sam explained, "that if I ran the wires over to the house and put a sounder and key by my bed, they might come in handy. The dispatcher might want to get me some time when I'm not on duty."

McGann digested that.

"Foolishness," he growled after a moment. "Why didn't you get permission to do it?"

"I didn't know it was necessary."

Just then Wurtz had a thought. He said smoothly:

"This man has to make a trip over to the station at eleven o'clock every night, chief. I expect he wanted to get out of it."

"No," Sam Sam retorted indignantly. "I wasn't thinking of that. But it does save the trip. If I have to set a signal or anything I go on over."

McGann paid no attention to his words.

"I thought there was something behind it. Getting lazy already! I might have known that a man without energy enough to grow a decent leg wouldn't have much life in him."

Sam Sam flushed. Wurtz grinned. McGann set himself to deliver a good "bawling out" on general principles. But just then a whistle blew, down the grade. It was the local, following the limited on which McGann had come. The super let the bawling out slide and came to the point of his visit.

"Tomorrow," he snapped, shaking a warning finger, "the vice-president of the road and his party will come through

here on a special. The vice-president is giving the road an intensive inspection. He and his party will spend a few minutes here.

"Get everything in the best shape you can. I'll be with the party. If one thing is wrong here, I'll see that you remember it."

"Yes, sir," Sam Sam promised. "I'll see that everything is all right."

"It had better be," McGann growled.

The local thrust a blunt nose and a plume of smoke around the lower curve. McGann led the way back to the station platform.

"Remember now," he warned, as the local neared, "I'll stand for no foolishness. The men who put marks against the Santee division are going to hear from me."

Sam Sam looked him in the eye. His face was wooden; but in his eyes the old scorn for McGann blazed again. The super saw it. His face wore a scowl as he swung up the steps of the local.

IT SNOWED that night, a full six inches. Sam Sam was out early the next morning and at his work. Once again he cleared the station platform, the coal-road switch, the siding switch nearest the station. And then he took his broom and limped the quarter of a mile up-grade to where the siding cut back into the main line. That switch he also cleaned out.

The rest of the morning he limped about the station, doing all he could to make things look their best. In the early afternoon the dispatcher wired that a local freight was coming up the mountain. The special of the vice-president was following after. The freight was ordered into the siding until the special passed.

Not long after that, the scrubby freight labored up and stopped below the branch-line switch. In the train was an empty coal car. Hastily the crew cut it out and the engine shunted it a few rods up the branch line. A brakeman hurriedly set the brakes and left it. The next train of empties, going in, would pick it up and take it back to the mines.

There were five boxes of freight for Iron Mountain siding on the train. It pulled forward to the platform. Just then the warning whistle of the special floated up from below.

The trainmen hurriedly dumped the boxes out on the platform, and the freight pulled up ahead in the siding.

Sam Sam was flustered. The boxes, dumped unceremoniously on the platform, did not look well. He began to move them into the freight room. By the time he was on the third one the locomotive and single car of the special ground to a stop by the station.

Sam Sam went on with his work. That seemed the only thing to do.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw five men alight from the private car. One was McGann. By his side was a shorter man with a small mustache and an alert air. By McGann's obsequious manner it was plain that the small man was the vice-president of the D. and R. A small man. True, he did not have a withered leg, but he was small. McGann hung on his every word and glance. Sam Sam allowed his mind to linger upon some remote point in the future, when there would be a new vice-president—with a withered right leg—and McGann would still be there to take the vice-president's orders.

It was a satisfying prospect. Sam Sam smiled at the thought, as he lifted a heavy box in his arms and staggered toward the door of the freight room. Samuel Samuelson, vice-president of the D. and R.! With his private car and—Just at that moment Sam Sam's good foot came sharply against the baggage truck's handle. He stumbled and, because he had only one good leg, he went on over. The box of freight flew out of his arms and crashed to the boards. One corner splintered. Excelsior and broken bits of dishes fell out.

Every one in the party looked at him. McGann scowled blackly.

Sam Sam scrambled to his feet; he stood looking miserably at the box. He heard a voice say—

"He's not a very heavy man for such work."

McGann answered, not quietly:

"I know! Poor choice! But he knew Morse and I had to have some one in a hurry. This is the first thing against him that's happened, as far as I know."

"Well," said the voice, and Sam Sam knew it was the vice-president speaking, "say something to him about it. Must be more careful. We want to keep the damage claims down as much as possible."

McGann answered hastily:

"I will. While you are looking around I will talk to him."

They moved off. Steps approached. Sam Sam turned, looked up into the black face of the super. McGann gritted.

"You clumsy fool! I might have known better than to put a cripple at work. Why didn't you wait until the vice-president had gone before you tried to act like a real man?"

Sam Sam stood silent, swallowed dumbly.

"I haven't time to say everything I want to," McGann snarled, "but I'll be back in Santee tonight, and I'll take action. There'll be a real man at this station inside of two days or my name isn't McGann. You clumsy clown!"

Sam Sam turned white and said appealingly:

"It was an accident. I won't let it happen again."

"It won't!" McGann promised nastily. "I'm going to see to that!" He turned away, muttering wrathfully under his breath.

Sam Sam let him go. He knew there was nothing that he could say. McGann would not listen. With a heavy heart he set about getting the last of the freight into the freight room.

The visit of the vice-president lasted only ten minutes. The party climbed back into the private car. The conductor waved to the engineer. The powerful engine moved easily up the grade with its light load.

Sam Sam watched it go and, as it passed on, his golden dreams passed also. The bright future faded, darkened once more to a cold void. A chill wind had begun to flow down from the mountain ridges. He shivered and limped back into the station.

THE WIND continued to rise. Over the high crests, banks of clouds rolled. At five o'clock, when Sam Sam locked the station and started down the steep gorge path, stinging bits of sleet were beginning to drive down.

Darkness fell while he cooked supper. The wind continued to rise. The sleet rattled in sharp bursts against the tin roof of the little house.

He ate, washed the few dishes, tidied up the place and then sat dully by the stove. He hardly knew what to do or where to turn. In a few days he would be adrift again. This time there were no golden dreams to turn to, no future to hope for.

Not the least of his pain was the thought of leaving the D. and R. The road had grown to mean more to him than just a great organization of men and material. It was nearer his affections, nearer his heart. He was being torn from something that had grown to mean a great deal to him.

Shriller grew the wails of the wind; louder the beat of sleet on the tin roof. The house shook, quivered in the rushing blasts that howled down the mountains.

Sam Sam picked up a magazine. His miserable thoughts would not concentrate on the story. Finally he tossed it aside and went in to the telegraph key by his bed to make sure that the line was open.

It was. For a time he talked with an operator fifty miles away. One of the friends whom he had never seen—and never would know again.

The clock hands crept around. After an age it was eleven o'clock. The dispatcher reported all clear and no orders. Sam Sam undressed and rolled in his blankets.

THREE hours after McGann left Iron Mountain siding, he parted with the vice-president and his party. They were off the Santee division by then, in the territory of another superintendent. McGann sped back to Santee on a limited.

The storm was already high when he arrived. He remained in his office to keep an eye on the workings of the division. Wurtz came back from his supper and kept him company.

Midnight came and passed. Down the long miles of the Santee division the cold blasts rushed and snarled and fought. The sleet froze, and the ground became one glare of ice.

The station restaurant sent a hot meal up to McGann and his secretary. They ate it in the warm comfort of the office. After they had their fill McGann gave Wurtz a fat cigar and thrust another into his mouth. As the blue smoke curled lazily and they lolled back in their easy chairs, McGann related the incident that had happened at Iron Mountain siding that afternoon.

"It was just the thing I have been looking for," he stated. "I'm going to fire him."

Wurtz laughed.

"I knew he would slip up," he said. "Only a matter of time when you were after him, chief."

"Yes," McGann agreed, "I had my eye on him."

Wurtz took the cigar out of his mouth and inspected it with his little red eyes. His fat cheeks suddenly crinkled in a chuckle.

"What's the matter?" McGann inquired.

"I was just thinking," Wurtz explained, how that fellow would swear if he had to get out of his warm bed and go over to the station. You remember, he ran extension wires over to the house so the dispatcher could get him any time of the night."

McGann's thick lips parted in a smile.

"You could have the dispatcher call him and tell him to go over and see if the signal light is burning at the upper end of the siding," Wurtz suggested. "It would cool him off a little."

McGann chuckled, closed his eyes and visualized the thing. Suddenly he waved his cigar and said—

"Go in and tell the dispatcher to do it.

Wurtz waddled eagerly out.

DOWN the high hills swept the icy gale. It shrieked and moaned and dashed savagely against the little house at Iron Mountain siding. The noise of its onslaught on the tin roof was deafening.

Sam Sam stirred uneasily in his sleep. He sat up suddenly as the staccato burst of the telegraph sounder dinned into his ears.

Again it came—I-M—I-M—I-M—his call.

He reached through the darkness to the table by the head of the bed, found the key and answered.

With a rush the message came.

"Inspect signal light at upper end of siding. Report back at once."

Sam Sam repeated the order back; then he sat listening to the storm. The room was icy cold. No need to wonder how it was outside; how the footing was on the gorge path.

He was off duty, practically discharged. There was no good reason why he should leave the comfortable bed; no reason, save that the D. and R. needed him. He shivered; then he threw back the covers and stepped out into the cold, dark room. He found matches, lighted the lamp, dressed hurriedly. In five minutes, heavily wrapped, clutching a lantern in his mittened hand, he stepped out the front door.

The wind caught him as he left the front porch and lashed about him, pushed, beat, tore at his balance. He staggered, braced with his good foot. The foot slipped on the ice-covered ground and he fell.

Sam Sam broke the force of the fall with one hand. With the other he saved the lantern. In a moment he was on his feet once more. Carefully he limped ahead. Above the fleeing clouds, a full moon was shining. Some of the light filtered

through. That and the lantern-light made the path plain.

The steep way into the gorge was a death-trap, with each stone sheathed in a wet, slippery coating of ice. Sam Sam went down the only safe way. He sat down on the ground and inched and slid to the bottom.

He could not slide up the other side; he had to keep on his feet and claw and stagger manfully. It was hard. The lantern made one hand almost useless. His withered leg was of small use. With his free hand and one good leg, he mounted, a foot at a time.

Five feet from the top his good foot was hard against a rock. It slipped suddenly. He staggered, lost all balance, strove frantically to regain it. No good. Down in a heap, with the good leg twisted under, he fell. The bone snapped, sickeningly.

The sudden rush of pain drove a cry through his lips. He let go of the lantern and clutched at the rocks with both hands. The two-handed hold saved him from a longer fall back into the gorge and aided him to roll the weight of his body off the broken leg.

The lantern rolled on down, making an irregular path of light in the night. The wire guards saved it for a space; but an extra hard smash against a rock broke the glass. The storm snuffed the flame. Sam Sam, prone on the path, was alone in the ghostly dark of the storm wracked night.

The broken leg was alive with hot, darting pains. He twitched it and groaned aloud as the pain increased sharply.

The cold drilled through his heavy clothes and warned him that he could not stay there long. A few feet above was the main line grade. Just across the track was the station, with its banked fire. His good leg was broken; his withered leg was of little use. He set his teeth and began a pain-ridden crawl up the ice-sheeted path.

An inch, a foot at a time, he made it, gained the level way beside the track and lay for a moment, panting; then he crawled over the track to the station platform. While he was resting a few seconds on the platform, he saw a dark blur below the station—a black mass where nothing but open space should be.

He looked hard and made out, after a fashion, the side of a coal car, jutting out over the main line. He stared stupidly. It couldn't be; yet it was. No doubt of it. He crawled a little way toward it, to make sure. It was.

Suddenly the thing flashed clear in his mind. It was the empty coal car that the local freight had shunted hastily up the branch track, whose grade rose a trifle as it curved away from the main line. The end of the coal car was barring the right of way.

It was easy to see how it got there. The brakeman had been in a hurry and had not set the brakes as tightly as he should have. The end of the car was facing the thrust of the sweeping gale. Perhaps the vibrations of the last passing train had set the empty car rolling. Perhaps the push of the blast itself. Anyway, it had rolled down the slight dip to the switch and had pushed on through the switch and come to rest across the main line track.

There it was, a barrier of steel, blocking the way of the next train that came down the mountain.

A chill ran through Sam Sam as he realized that it was about one in the morning. At one forty-four the Hill and Plain Express was due to come plunging down the steep track. On the minute always—the Hill and Plain. It was the fastest train on the D. and R., one of the fastest in the country. There were no slow points on its schedule. The downgrades of the mountain were taken fast.

Long, heavy, all-steel, it could not stop quickly, especially on the slippery downgrade tracks. At that moment it was rushing through the dark night, filled with sleeping men, women and children—thundering along the track that was always kept clear for it, the track that now was closed by a barrier of steel.

At the side of the track, waiting, was the deep, rocky gorge, with the chill mountain stream leaping at the bottom.

When the cold, gray, storm-swept dawn broke over Iron Mountain siding, how many dead and dying would be scattered on the cold icy rocks below? Sam Sam shivered at the thought. Alone—with one withered leg and one broken leg. On all that vast mountainside there was no one to whom he could turn for help. He had less than forty minutes to hold back death from those who were sleeping peacefully in the speeding Pullmans.

He could not move the car. He would have to stop the Hill and Plain Express before it got to Iron Mountain siding. The dispatcher could not hold it at Murrey Bend, the little station far on the other side of the mountain.

He writhed around and crawled frantically into the push of the gale. White fire coursed through his broken leg, but he gave it no thought. He reached the door of the station, unlocked it with fumbling fingers, got to the key and called the dispatcher.

With trembling fingers he pounded out the warning. The dispatcher flashed back—

"Hill and Plain passed Murrey Bend five minutes ago."

Sam Sam stared helplessly about the dark interior of the office. Passed Murrey Bend! There was not one spot between the Bend and Iron Mountain siding where the speeding train could be stopped or warned.

The sounder burst out in rapid Morse.

"Flag it down," the dispatcher ordered.

Sam Sam gave him the tragic news:

"Can't walk. My leg is broken."

A space of ten tense seconds.

"I'll order out the wreck-train," the dispatcher stated.

The wire went blank.

The wreck-train! A fine thing to have at once; but it would not bring back lives from the chaos in the bottom of the gorge.

Flag down the monster locomotive with its flashing machinery, the swiftly rolling tons of steel thundering down the steep, icy track after it— No signal at the station would do it; no signal at the curve a quarter of a mile up. Far beyond the curve the engineer would have to see the red flare of warning.

Flag it down— His leg was broken. It hung stiffly out from the bench and great flashes of pain coursed through it. A broken leg and a withered leg.

OUTSIDE, the storm raged past. The sleet beat down. The little office shook in the gusts. Sam Sam stared wildly about. The minutes were fleeting. On the wings of the storm the Hill and Plain Express was plunging ahead to meet its doom.

Sam Sam slipped back to his hands and the knee of his withered leg and lurched across to the locker where the signal flares and the warning torpedoes were kept. Hastily he stuffed an overcoat pocket full of torpedoes; he thrust a half-dozen flares into the other pocket; turned toward the door and gained the outside. The fury of the wind seemed to have increased. The rushing blast of sleet-filled air pushed against him, beat at his face, drove the icy breath through the heavy clothes to his slight body.

He crawled across the platform. He dragged along between the rails. He turned his face up-grade and began to crawl doggedly into the teeth of the wind, his broken leg dragging helplessly behind.

Over the long miles of the Santee division the storm wailed and sobbed. And death rode with it. In distant Santee the wreck train, ever ready on its track, pulled on to the main line, flung sparks high from the locomotive stack and began a wild race to the lonely mountain siding where death trysted. Another special was hastily thrown together for the doctors and nurses and supplies which would be needed.

On the second floor of the Santee Union Station, McGann, white of face, paced restlessly back and forth in the dispatcher's office. Wurtz cowered to one side, silent. The two of them had toyed with a cripple. Now death itself was jesting.

Death riding on the gale. Only a short, slight form with a withered leg and a

broken leg, crawling, inching, squirming up the wild, dark mountainside to meet it.

It was living hell. The muscles of the broken leg writhed, pulled and ground the broken ends of the leg bone together. Such pain Sam Sam had never before felt or believed possible. The freezing blast of the storm could not keep the sweat of suffering from his forehead. It sprang out in great drops and rolled off to the ice beneath.

But the torpedoes were safe in the left-hand overcoat pocket; the signal flares in the right. The station had disappeared in the darkness behind him.

The wind-driven sleet filled his coat collar and drifted back down his neck. It beat at his eyes until they flooded with tears. It sapped and sapped at his slight strength; but his mittened hands and withered leg pulled his slight body steadily forward—inches, a foot at a time, but forward.

The green signal light at the upper curve winked out and drew closer.

The ice melted on his mittens and they became sopping mops of cold. It soaked through his trousers and numbed the flesh beneath.

Great sobs, driven by the pain and weakness in his body, wrenched from his lips and were caught up by the jeering gale. Ceaselessly the pain surged in sickening waves, sucked and sucked at his strength.

Long before the green light at the curve was near, he had to halt, fall flat on his face, fill his gasping lungs with air and wait for strength. As the green light drew abreast, then fell behind, the pauses came more often. But each time, after a few seconds, he doggedly crawled on.

What time passed he did not know. Ages of agony to him. Ice beneath, darkness about, cold storm and pain everywhere. He crawled, straining his eyes for the first sign of the Hill and Plain's headlight. When that drove down through the night he would have done all he could. Until then his duty was to struggle on.

He did. Long minutes, cold minutes, when the storm and stabbing pain fought to hold him back. When the light at the curve was far behind and there seemed no light and no life in all the world, the screaming challenge of a whistle came swooping down on the gale.

He stopped and listened.

Again, clearer this time. After it, a pale finger of light traced across the scudding clouds.

Doubt fled. Sobbing for breath, Sam Sam tore off his sodden mittens, thrust his numb hand into the pocket where the torpedoes were. The fingers were almost lifeless, but he forced them to do his bidding.

One by one he clamped the torpedoes on the rail in a little row that would explode in a series of reports, when the heavy locomotive drivers passed over them. The reports would warn the engineer to stop at once.

Crawling ahead, he clamped another series down and then still another. Three warnings in a row. Little flickers of light that did not come from the outside world were dancing across his vision as he bent the last fastening home.

Again the whistle screamed, now much nearer. The finger of light suddenly erupted, a dazzling beam that poured through the slashing lines of sleet.

Sam Sam dragged the signal flares from his pocket and dropped them on the snow before him. The whole world was beginning to whirl. His body shook with weakness.

With an effort he picked up one of the flares and twisted off the cap. He scraped the sandpaper-covered end of the cap across the flare end. It burst into brilliant red light. He jammed the steel-tipped end down into the ice, so that the flare stood upright and burnt freely. Then he uncapped another and set it off. The express was nearing. The tracks already vibrated with its progress. The headlight was blinding in its brightness.

The whistle wailed acknowledgment of the flares. Sparks showered from the sides of the train's trucks as brake shoes bit down against the wheels.

Sam Sam heard the whistle as from a

great distance. He stared stupidly at the light rushing down upon him. Dimly he realized that he was in the middle of the track, that in another moment the heavy train would roar over the spot where he sprawled.

Wearily he moved. His muscles were slow to obey.

The locomotive whistle wailed warning.

The sickening waves of pain began to lift from Sam Sam's body. The bright headlight began to draw away.

In the dark locomotive cab the engineer went rigid and forgot to breathe as his eyes riveted on the crawling figure that hardly seemed to move. His hand pulled down on the whistle cord.

The blasts barely entered Sam Sam's consciousness. A dark night, that had no storm and no cold, no headlight and no wailing whistle, began to settle down over his senses. But his body crept on automatically. Just as the ponderous steel monster rushed down upon him he rolled off the rail and settled into soothing oblivion.

The whole length of the long, all-steel train ground past his crumpled form. Three sharp bursts of reports shattered the night. Slower went the train, and slower, as the brake shoes won the battle against momentum. Finally the staring, red end-lights came to a stop a hundred yards below.

Far down around the curve, the engineer dropped from the locomotive cab, a smoking flare in his hand, and ran back through the storm. He came to the slight form, sprawled motionless on the ground.

The white face, marked with suffering, the withered leg and the broken leg revealed themselves, as the engineer bent over the prostrate body.

The grizzled veteran of two-score years at the throttle guessed the truth from what he had seen as his engine bore down on the crawling form.

"Hell!" he said huskily.

He set the flare down, stooped and picked Sam Sam up bodily in his strong arms and carried him into the warmth and comfort of the last Pullman.

A few minutes' work with the engine cleared the line. While that was being done the conductor went to the station key. The word went up and down the D. and R. that the Hill and Plain Express was safe.

ONCE more riding the wings of the storm, the great train took up its thundering race with time. In the last Pullman a doctor, who was a passenger, worked over the unconscious Sam Sam.

They took Sam Sam to the Santee Hospital. They set his leg and put him in a bare room on a white-sheeted hospital cot. There his pain-weary eyes opened, and he looked once more on the world—the dark, stormy world, where there was no room for one with a withered right leg. Dark thoughts closed in upon him, so that he turned his face to his pillow and gave way to them.

A little later McGann came. Not a contrite McGann. Not a shamed McGann. For it was not in the man. But he came. And when the nurse left them, he brought forth a yellow slip of paper and gave it to Sam Sam.

"The vice-president wired this," he said.

Sam Sam looked at him doubtfully, then reached up, took the paper and read it.

The words made strange meaning. He read them again, and again, till there was no doubt. The vice-president had wired:

> Offer agent at Iron Mountain siding transfer to my office. I can hire muscle. But I need loyalty.

Sam Sam lay for a moment; then a half-laugh, half-sob shook his slight form. He reached under the covers and patted his withered right leg.

"A stout heart," he murmured. He smiled.

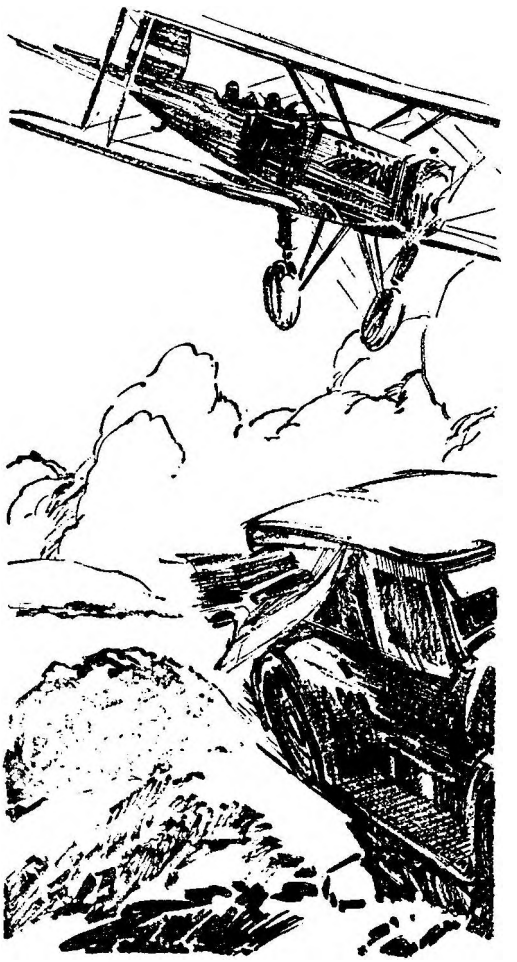
McGann looked down at him, heard the words, looked again, shrugged and took his departure. He didn't understand. He couldn't.

An ex-infantry officer

THINGS WORK OUT

By

THOMSON BURTIS



THE SLIGHT soirée under discussion—Captain "Hummer" Howard, Air Service, vs. Major Obadiah G. Schulz, Air Service—had a number of results, one of them being to satisfy me that certain conclusions to which I had come previously were approximately correct. Having been bounced from a large number of pillars to most of the adjacent posts during my thirty odd years of existence, I had pretty nearly decided that if no arguments, fights or debates took place except when one man was absolutely right and the other absolutely wrong, this world would be as peaceful as a church on Monday morning.

And after that annoying week, referred to above, when Hummer and Obadiah and, in fact, the entire McMullen flight of the Air Service Border patrol went crazy, I was sure of my ground; I decided that the number of people who were as white and pure as the pinfeather on an angel's wing could be counted on the fingers of the Venus di Milo, and that by the same token those who were incurably black could hold a mass meeting in an upper berth. If you agree this far, it leaves most of the world painted different shades of gray, doesn't it?

Well, so much for that. Having erupted with opinions, I might as well complete the job and get myself out of the way to clear the decks for action. I had little to do with the whole matter, except, perhaps, to contribute more than my share of the asininity which was about; but I happened to be planted in a grand-

with the Border air patrol

stand seat where I could watch everything but the actual revolutions of the men's minds—and they weren't unduly rapid at that.

All you need to know about me is that my name is "Slim" Evans and that I was undoubtedly the tallest, thinnest, dumbest and luckiest flying officer on the Border patrol, which the Army Air Service runs along the Rio Grande. For almost five years, off and on, I'd been stationed with the McMullen flight of the patrol, McMullen being the most easterly station of the outfit. The western terminus was Rockwell Field which, as you might say, abuts on the Pacific Ocean. McMullen was a hundred miles or so from the Gulf of Mexico.

ON THIS particular day in January the Texas atmosphere was in revolt. There was a combination norther, rainstorm and hurricane. It was chilly and wet, and the ten flyers and observers of the flight were gathered in the recreation room, their feet toward the open fire, glasses in their hands and tobacco in various forms in their mouths.

Everybody was there except "Hummer" Howard, our temporary C.O. while Captain Kennard, our regular taskmaster, was in Washington for three months' special duty.

In a moment Howard threw open the door and strode in. His face was sort of sullen and his dark eyes had lightning in them.

"Just got the mail," he announced. "Well, boys, you're due for a new papa."

"What?" barked "Penoch" O'Reilly, in the deep voice which was ludicrously disproportionate to his small body.

"You heard me," Howard said with southern deliberation, "and what a papa!"

My ears were pricked forward, let me tell you. When you stick a dozen men, under a continuous flying strain, to live by themselves in tents, the bird who runs you assumes importance. A C.O. on the biggest post can make life miserable for every man on it—or pleasant. When you have an isolated outfit of a few men, he assumes the importance of God.

"You say, 'and what a papa,' " I repeated. "Know him?"

"Not puhsonally," drawled Howard, his dark face set, "but plenty by reputation. His name is Majuh Obadiah G. Schulz, an ex-infantryman who was the hardest-boiled M.P. officer in France—"

"Good God! I've heard of *him!*" erupted Jimmy Jennings, a slim, hand-

some young devil who'd got his five planes in France and owned a dozen decorations which he never wore.

"Me too," assented "Tex" MacDowell, getting to his feet and leaning against the mantelpiece. "But how does he get sent down here, and why?"

"Why? How the hell do I know? Because I fell down on the job, I suppose."

Howard's slow words in the Louisiana drawl, as thick as cream, were almost shaking with feeling. Knowing him as I did, I guessed that the reason wasn't entirely the personality of Major Schulz. Hummer had done a darn good job as C.O. Furthermore, any man hates to be deposed from power. And Hummer got more of a kick out of being C.O. than most men, and had worked harder at it.

He had run the flight at a tough time, too. Three airplanes had been operating back and forth across the Border, smuggling in immigrants at a thousand dollars apiece, and we'd flown ourselves ragged night and day to bag 'em. We'd flown until three of our ships were crack-ups—"Pop" Cravath and Jack Beaman in the hospital—and the remaining superannuated ships just wrecks.

The motors had more than the hundred hours allotted to them and must be overhauled; three of the De Haviland fuselages had more than two hundred hours in the air and were due for turn-in to be rebuilt; every last flyer was one jump ahead of a fit, after six hours a day in the air for almost a month. Howard had run the job like a soldier; he had the mechanics working night and day and liking it; he'd kept the ships in the air, until the job was done, by his sheer personality and leadership which made the mechanics work like blazes for him.

"Shucks! Be yourself, Hummer," jeered "Sleepy" Spears gently. He'd opened one eye when he heard the news, and now both of them were looking out at the world beneath heavily drooped lids. "You know it isn't that."

"Why isn't it?" demanded Howard belligerently. "Captain Kennard'll be back in six weeks, won't he? This bird is an amateuh, sent down heah on temporary duty until Kennahd gets back. What does that mean if it doesn't mean that I'm fiahed?"

"What do you mean—amateur?" demanded big, blond George Hickman.

"Hell, he was an M. P. who'd never been off the ground in France," Howard told us, "and his pilot book came in this afternoon, with his ohduhs. He just learned to fly aftuh transferring to the Air Service six months ago, and he's got fully ninety-five houahs in the air, total. Count 'em—ninety-five!"

"That's not so good," Jimmy Jennings said in his quick, flashing way. "That is, if—"

"Anyhow, what's this idea of transferring all the high-rankers that want extra pay into the Air Service, and putting 'em in over birds that've flown more over the lines in France than they've ever spent in the air in their lives!" "Dumpy" Scarth said disgustedly.

"When does he arrive?" inquired MacDowell, his big body slouched against the wall.

"Search me," Howard said savagely, "but damned if I'm going to make any special preparations. They don't like the way I ran this flight, eh? Well, we'll let the Majuh fix it up as she should be fixed."

The boys being tired and their nerves sort of frayed after three busy weeks, and the day being dark and dreary, they started a good, old time army grousing match. At that, the Air Service has what might be called a bit of a kick coming. Most of the flyers started during the war, and they got killed before they ever got high rank. Being run by transferred high-rankers, who can't possibly know as much about the main business of the service as their lieutenants, isn't so good.

Hummer Howard didn't say much. He just lay back in his chair and smoked, with his bushy black eyebrows drawn together and that mahogany face of his, dark as his eyes, stared into the fire.

Did you ever know one of those guys who seemed to have everything? You

know, the kind that all the angels combined to make. Well, Captain Hummer Howard was one of those *hombres*, or seemed to be. In the first place, he'd been a great college athlete and was blessed with both fatal beauty and winning ways. He was big and broad-shouldered, with thick black hair and straight-looking black eyes and a symmetrical snoot which was garnished by a nose just big enough to keep him out of the matinée idol class and curving just the right way to keep him from being spoiled by it.

And he was a good egg. He'd knocked down eleven Boche in France and got to be a lieutenant-colonel, temporarily, and in command of a squadron at twenty-five. I'd heard he'd done sort of a poor job on discipline, being so friendly with the bunch, over there. Anyway, he was now a captain and a famous flyer and all that, but he hadn't tried to high-hat us when he'd come to McMullen. Was sort of humble, as a matter of fact. When Kennard was ordered away he'd taken command, of course, and done a good job, as I said before.

Of course, he had his faults. He had a temper that showed once in a while and self-confidence on the ground and in the air that wasn't far from conceit. I guess he felt pretty good about himself, but he didn't talk about it or show it much. Maybe a certain intolerance, an "I'm always right" feeling deep within him; but his smile made up for his temper. His humility, when he knew he was entirely ignorant of something, offset his forthright laying down of the law on matters with which he was familiar.

And as far as I know there wasn't a man, woman, child or dog who didn't like him, including yours truly, Slim Evans.

He didn't join in the general grousing, as far as actual speech was concerned; but it was as plain as the nose on my face that he was sore and that he drew but one inference from the prospective arrival of the major. That was, of course, that the powers that be didn't think him capable of handling the flight.

THE NEXT day was dark, foggy and cold, with drizzles of rain. The bunch didn't seem to think it was any brighter when a radiogram from Donovan Field, up near San Antone, announced that the major would arrive that afternoon. We all waited around, killing time, and the bunch was apprehensive and inclined to think that life was an evil thing, totally without merit. Hummer didn't order any special preparations for the reception of the new C. O. The post was not washed and polished for his inspection, nor did any of the flyers take it upon themselves to slick up their departments. I suppose it was a sort of defiant bravado. Anyhow, the major was condemned before he started. An atmosphere of hostility to his presence, himself personally and his past record was obvious around the flight.

Hummer went in to the depot to meet him, while we waited around the recreation room. As soon as they had arrived, Hummer came in.

"Come on ovuh and meet the boss," he directed, and we trooped to headquarters.

The major stood behind his desk. He was dressed in full uniform, and his blouse was one of the old, short ones which had been in vogue before Sam Browne belts were authorized. Above the tight collar his face was leathery from exposure. His mouth was thin and straight, his nose large and wide, his gray eyes cold and very keen. His iron-gray hair was cropped very close to his head, sticking up in a short, stiff pompadour, which reminded one of a convict just starting to let his hair grow. He was short, stocky, powerful looking, and his face looked as if it were hewn from granite. Bushy gray eyebrows were drawn together over that long nose. He gave the impression of trying to find out all there was to know about each man, as he was introduced. His keen eyes fairly stabbed into you.

"Lieutenant Evans, stay in here a moment," he said harshly. "Lieutenant O'Reilly, wait outside until I'm ready for you. You too, Mr. Spears."

While Pop Cravath was in the hospital I was temporary adjutant, which meant that my desk was just outside the tiny private office. I wasn't at all surprized when he directed me to stay. But I waved gently in the breeze which blew from his mouth as he started in on me. His words were terse and clipped, shooting forth from beneath his small gray mustache like so many shots.

"You will go to your quarters, shave and police yourself generally and report back to me," he commanded. "That will be all. Tell Mr. O'Reilly to come in next, please."

I walked out in a daze, like a spanked kid. I had been giving my face a rest from the razor, at that, and I could come close to tripping over my whiskers. But was I sore? That old martinet had acted precisely as he would have had I been just out of the cradle. Report back to let him feel my face for a wild whisker!

Penoch O'Reilly and Sleepy Spears got the same medicine for an oil spotted shirt and a non-regulation necktie, respectively. Sounds funny for supposedly grown men to act the way we did, but by dinnertime the flight was stewing. The major, during dinner, fired a volley of questions at us, most of which Hummer answered briefly. After dinner the major went to his tent, and the poker, bridge and crap games started. He wandered in about ten o'clock and looked around for a moment. His mouth was just a thin line, and I thought I could hear his teeth click. He said nothing, but went out after glancing at a magazine.

FOR THE first time in weeks, I was on the job at eight-thirty next morning. The fog still hung low and the air was chilly and wet. The major was already on the job.

"Put out two post orders, Lieutenant," he told me tersely. "Look up the article in army regulations concerning gambling, quote it, and direct that all gambling of any nature whatsoever will be stopped immediately on this post."

Once again he had me gasping for air. Was there a law against penny-ante in the army? Sure. Always has been. So is there a law in Connecticut that you can't kiss your wife on Sunday.

"The second one," he went on vigorously, "will direct that all officers of this post will appear for dinner in full uniform. Blouses will be compulsory. Orderly! Get Captain Howard and have him report to me at once. Evans, get in touch with all the officers in charge of departments and notify them that Captain Howard and myself will make an inspection at ten o'clock."

Well, I put out the orders, but there was never more of a waste of typewriter ribbons and paper. The news was around the post like wildfire. Tex MacDowell, a well poised and judicial young man, caught me out in the main office just before the inspection.

"So it's against the law to play bridge at a half-cent, is it?" he demanded, "and we appear for dinner complete with nosebag, spurs and footlocker, huh? I suppose this is going to be a damn swell army now."

Evidently it was. I didn't go on the inspection, but I had an idea that no shrinking cigaret butt had escaped the major's eagle eye and that he had trailed the last cockroach to its lair. Sure enough, he strode in with fire in his eye and each hair of his mustache shooting sparks. In one minute an orderly was scooting around, and ten minutes later the officers of the post were gathered in his office.

"Gentlemen," he barked, "this is unquestionably the sloppiest army post it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. The men are dirty, undisciplined and evidently lazy; the officers, to a man, are neglecting their departments; the condition of hangars, buildings and barracks is disgraceful and the appearance of the post—rotten. I was ordered to this post at my own request, for the purpose of getting some flying practise on the border, but I see that there is another job to be done as well.

"Each department head will devote

the day to cleaning up, getting his papers in shape and putting things in military order. Any man whose department can not pass inspection tomorrow will be confined to this post for two weeks.

"Captain Howard, you will be operations officer from now on. You will have a desk in the adjutant's office. For the present, all other officers will remain in their respective positions."

I glanced over at Hummer. He was standing stiffly, his turbulent dark eyes blazing into the major's. That speech had been an indictment of him—an unjustified indictment, from any standards other than a West Pointer's—and the job to which he had been assigned was the last insult. An operations officer gives orders for flying; but on the Border, with regular patrols, the job amounts to about as much as being mailcarrier to the Statue of Liberty. It was making the highest ranking man on the post a figurehead.

"Your first order, Captain," the major went on incisively, "will be that regular formation practise, one hour a day, for the entire flight will be held every flying day until further orders."

"What?" exploded Howard, and the mouths of the rest of us fell open gently.

"I think I made myself clear?"

"Yes, suh. But, Majuh, on flying days every man flies from two to fouh houahs, and in emuhgencies more, and every man has more than a thousand houahs in the air."

"What of it?"

"They don't need formation practise and never use formation!" Hummer told him savagely. "They fly themselves half to death, more than any othuh outfit in the country that I know of."

"You have your orders, sir!" thundered the major.

"By God, Majuh, you just got heuh and I'm telling you—"

"Silence, sir, or you will be put under arrest for insubordination."

Schulz was standing like a rock, his eyes giving forth sparks, but that rough-hewn face was immobile. Hummer radiated the hot resentment within him. It seemed that there was a volcano inside him and that the fire could be seen through his eyes.

For a moment he gave the impression of a man crouched for a spring. Hate was in his eyes, that dropped for a moment, rising again to meet the steely ones which were glaring at him.

"Very well, suh," he said with an effort.

There was more to the major's speech, and every word of it stung. Finally he let the boys out, and I strolled forth from my sanctum to the porch. I knew there'd be an indignation meeting in progress, and there was.

"Formation practise!" howled Penoch O'Reilly. "We never use it; we don't need it; we fly all a man can stand, day in and day out. Damn this business of having to take flying orders from a man who hasn't been in the air in his life as long as any one of us has hung upside down in it!"

Hummer Howard paced up and down in uncontrollable agitation. He said not a word. Finally he and I left the mob and went into our combined office. Hummer put out the order and also another one. That other one was to the effect that machine-guns would be removed from all ships pending their departure, on the first clear day, to be turned in for new ones at Donovan Field.

It rained that afternoon, but the major was merciless. He had the raging Scarth and more than fifty scowling mechanics at work in the rain all afternoon—spearing pieces of paper, lonesome cigaret butts and divers brands of débris all over the post. At meals he talked shop, turning them into executive session, the better to give his opinion of Air Service discipline in general and that of McMullen in particular. He had the idea that many a non-flyer has had before—that the object of a mechanic's life was to do "fours right" and that flyers entered the Air Service because they wanted to command men.

No card playing that night, for the major was right on the ground to enforce his order. Time hung heavy, and nine

o'clock found most of us leaving him flat, huddling in Tex MacDowell's tent, drinking liquor and cursing the luck that sent amateur martinets in to command an Air Service outfit.

AT TEN the next morning, just as the dreaded inspection was about to start, the phone rang. Outside it was foggy, but there was no rain. The cold, though, was that raw cold which would freeze the liver of a brass statue.

Howard got it just an instant before the major lifted the receiver on his own extension.

"Yes suh, McMullen. Howard talking. What? Where? How long ago? Suah, we can handle it until Laredo gets theah, anyhow."

He slammed the receiver on the hook, as Schulz strode out into our office.

"Where did it come from, who was it and what is it?" he barked.

"Call from Sam Jackson, suh, that lives thirty miles down from heah and about the same from the rivuh. He just saw a big cah go by his cabin, holdin' a bunch of men that he's suah are foreignahs who've been smuggled across the rivuh and are bound no'th. I'll get one ship off to spot 'em and ride hard until Laredo can get theah, with guns. We'll send a radiogram right away."

"Why Laredo? You're crazy! We're nearest."

"Yes, suh," Howard explained wearily, "but we've flown ouah ships right into the ground. Those wrecks cut down ouah ships, and we used what was left so much in all this flying we been doing, that every motuh is overdue for overhaul and in bad shape; the fuselages are mostly shaken to pieces—"

"They run, don't they?" demanded the major bluntly.

"Yes, suh, but they're hardly fit to fly the two houahs to Donovan when the weather cleahs. And we haven't got guns on 'em—"

"Why not?" spat the major.

"It takes time to unrig 'em—they shoot through the props—and so I ordered them off yestuhday so we could take off for Donovan the fuhst time the weathuh cleahs."

"Who gave you the authority to do that?" roared the major. His fist thudded to the desk as he leaned over Howard. "What do you mean, sir, usurping authority in that manner? Leaving our working tools useless, spiking our guns—helpless before any call to duty that comes? Why, dammit, sir—"

"Laredo can get anywhere between here and there in two houahs, suh."

As he said this Hummer leaped to his feet, his black eyes blazing furiously. He rushed on:

"This is simple—if you knew the Borduh! One ship can cu'cle over this cah while Laredo sends two ships with guns and holds 'em until customs men can overtake 'em and investigate. A radiogram right now—"

"Just a minute, sir. I'll give the orders in this case and in all others. Do you understand? You will order the sergeants to get out all ships at once. Evans, tell the flight to be prepared to take off in formation in ten minutes! We'll radio Laredo from the air if we find we can not handle the job ourselves, Captain."

"Great Lord, Majuh!" stormed Howard. "You aren't going to make the boys fly those crates out theah, ah you? One is bad enough."

"I am, sir, and your advice was not asked."

They hated each other, personally, I suddenly decided. The repressed, icy Schulz and the fiery Howard both showed it, in their different ways. And Howard lashed himself on, careless of consequences.

"I don't give a hoot whether it was asked or not! You'ah a majuh, suh, but you don't know flying and you don't know the borduh flying and you're sending six ships out to pot one measly cah on the ground, when it might be murduh—"

"Enough, Captain."

Schulz's words sort of hung in the air, although they had been spoken quietly,

His lined face was as grim and bleak as the side of an icy crag, and those stony eyes bored steadily into Howard's.

"Take your orders, sir—and not another word!"

He stood there like a rock, and his mind, I thought, was as immovable as his body. For a second the fiery Howard stood up to him. Their eyes locked in battle. But the major's eyes did not give, and suddenly Howard's big body slumped. Without a word he went out, and I followed him on the jump.

As the ships bellowed away on the warm-up, the flyers gathered around in a raging group. No one there would have relished the duty of flying out into the thin fog with the best ship on the field, but they'd have done it cheerfully. Sending those hulks, all of them, out to spot one measly automobile was like turning out the Federal army to catch a bobbed-haired bandit.

"Look at those props!" raved Dumpy Scarth, walking up and down. "Nearly every one of 'em cut to pieces by the rain last week. I'd hate the job of flying mine to San Antone along the railroad, with plenty of fields."

"And we fly in formation," mocked deep-voiced Penoch O'Reilly. "Well, it's going to be a loose one as far as I'm concerned."

"There'll be no formation, and we'll radio Laredo as soon as we're in the air," snapped Howard. "What does he think a hundred ships can do, without guns, that one couldn't? Let's go!"

THE CREW chiefs climbed out of the front cockpits, and the pilots got in. I was Howard's observer for the time being. I'd been cracked up two weeks before and wasn't yet in shape to pass a flying exam, but I was filling in as observer during the shortage and the tough flying we'd been going through.

"I notice the valiant major isn't going himself," Howard threw over his shoulder. "Said he'd stay and receive reports."

Well, a C.O. isn't required to go, of course.

I, like any flyer, hated to trust myself to another man. When that old motor hums I want Slim Evans' hand at the stick, and no other's. I may not be so good, but I prefer to have a chance to break my own neck.

However, if there was one man I could fly with who gave me at least a little confidence in his ability, it was Hummer Howard. He was a pilot after my own heart, from his careful instrument-reading and method of throttle-handling to his landings.

Consequently I sat back in a relaxed manner as he taxied forth, turned the ton and a half De Haviland with rudder and stick and gave the Liberty the gun. All twelve cylinders were firing rhythmically; but there was nasty vibration, due to the slightly unbalanced prop. We'd done a lot of flying in the rain the past week, and all our sticks had been pretty well chewed up.

He leaned against the stick and held the D.H. on the ground until she had plenty of speed. By the time he had eased her off and cleared the buildings on the southern edge of the airdrome, Jimmy Jennings was in full cry behind us. By the time we had circled the field once all the ships were off.

We "rendezvoused" at a thousand feet; they slid into a loose V-formation behind us. The thin fog made it impossible to see for more than a mile in any direction.

Hummer headed northwest, planning to hit the road, which was thirty miles west of us, at about the spot where our informant's house was. Most of the inhabitants of that section would send us a tip whenever anything whatever seemed amiss with travelers through the mesquite. Sam was one of the most reliable. That road was much used by mysterious riders.

I was unwinding the antenna as Howard gave the signal—rocking his ship—to break formation. It was strain enough on a flyer to pick his way in that fog, without having him all tensed up trying to keep a ship going a hundred miles an hour, with no brakes on it, within a few feet of

another plane. Major Schulz appeared to be unable to realize that a Border patrolman's business was to watch the ground, and not to freeze his eyes to another ship to keep from hitting it. How, I mused, did he think we were ever going to keep watch for anything, if we flew formation?

"We're in for a sweet six weeks," I reflected sourly. "Suppose they don't order him away after Kennard gets back?"

Pretty soon the long antenna, with its heavy "fish" at the end, was straight out behind us, and I was working the key.

> Have two ships ready and stand by. Tip on car which may contain smuggled immigrants. Out after it, but have no guns, and ships in bad shape as you know. Will radio news in ten minutes.

THE LAREDO bunch knew the condition of our ships and had, in fact, been patroling the full territory between them and McMullen. Furthermore, the chances were ten to one that if that car held an illegal cargo of any kind and was in the hands of an experienced smuggler, said gentleman would give himself away when a patrol ship started acting curious. It almost never failed. And with a whole flight buzzing around his ears he'd have a hemorrhage.

I looked back at the ships. There were but four that I could spot, the last one but dimly outlined through the mist. I gazed around the skyline, trying to pick up the other one.

Then I saw it, and I was gripping Hummer's shoulder. He turned and, as he saw that one De Haviland, spiraling earthward over trackless mesquite, his smoldering eyes met mine for a second and then he banked abruptly.

It was the next to the last ship—that should be Jimmy Jennings and George Hickman. And it was diving toward the gray-green chaparral which was all that the eye of even a hawk could see below. Not so much as a tiny clearing—and you may know that a D.H. hits the ground at close to seventy miles an hour, no matter how you try to stall it.

It was an eternity before the crash came. Jimmy stalled as we circled over it. The next second the bomber had mushed into the treetops. For an instant it seemed to slide along the tops of the gnarled 'squite trees. Then the nose dropped down, and the tail of the ship thrashed over. There it stayed motionless, half on its back, tail in the air.

Then came seconds of suspense—enough to tighten bands around the heart of any flyer, as we peered downward to see signs of life.

Thank God we got them. I saw Hickman crawl from beneath the ship. He seemed to be all right. He was at work underneath it, now, extricating Jennings. Finally both men were waving handkerchiefs at us.

They were safe, but they had a fifteen mile walk due south to the river and then a few odd more miles before they'd find a house. There wasn't a single thing we could do except what I did—radio Laredo the approximate location and tell them to get a ship off with food and water, find them and drop it to them.

In those moments of waiting I found a germ of real hatred for that cold, craggy-faced C.O. back there, snug in McMullen. When Hummer Howard straightened the ship and sent it on its way he shot one look at me which was no argument against my own emotions. That boy was seething.

It was but ten minutes before we hit the rough little dirt road which wound lonesomely through the mesquite and turned northward on it. Sam's house passed beneath us, with Samuel himself in the midst of his few cleared fields and ranch buildings. He was pointing north—the direction in which we were flying.

Twenty miles ahead, a small black bug seemed to be crawling along that gray ribbon of road, like an overfed beetle. With four ships following in file, we dropped earthward, the wires shrilling and the motor's roar deepening as Howard dived fast to save time. Every extra moment in the air with those ships, that still had a three-hour trip to Donovan before they were torn apart, was so much extra risk.

Finally, a hundred feet high, we were

banked steeply, circling the car. It was full of men, craning their necks to see us. We got down until we were scraping the trees while the other ships circled aimlessly overhead. I signaled them to stop, and they did. No less than nine men scrambled out of the car. For a moment there was an argument that, from the gestures, was no mild affair.

I still didn't know what to do, nor did Hummer, apparently. Any car would have stopped, if its driver knew the Border. If we could only land, I was thinking.

I scribbled a note, finally, and dropped it above them as Hummer sideslipped the ship vertically downward.

> Sorry if we're doing you an injustice, but you will have to drive back to the Jackson ranch and give an account of yourselves to us.

We could chance a landing back there.

The driver read it. He looked like a Mexican to me, by the size of his straw sombrero. It could have sheltered his whole family, including the pigs. He hopped into the car; the others followed him pell-mell. Looking at them closely as I could, I was morally certain that not a man was an American and that there was a nice, quiet, little delivery of Italians in progress.

Hummer got a bit higher as the car hurried southward and then shut off the motor.

"I'll send the othuhs home; we'll watch 'em; you radio Laredo to send a couple of ships with guns on 'em, and as soon as they get heah we'll go home!" he shouted.

We motioned the others to go home; I radioed the message. By that time the car was nearing the ranch. Our ship was vibrating a good deal from the unbalanced prop, and I was glad to see a few open fields in sight ahead. If they stopped we might even chance landing to talk it over. We both had on our Colts, of course. However, it was much better to have one ship in the air with authoritative guns to see to it that the ground man was treated with respect, even politeness.

But the car did not stop. It was big and fast and it roared past Sam Jackson's ranch-house like the Twentieth Century making up time. Now we were flashing earthward at a hundred and seventy-five miles an hour, hunched down behind our windshields to keep from having the breath blown out of our lungs. If we only had guns to spray that road with to stop 'em, I was thinking. That spig was taking a tall chance—or was he an old hand around the river who had come to know ships and had seen that we had no guns? A good many of those *hombres* had grown to know airplanes about as well as we did during the five years we had frolicked over them.

He must have noticed that we were unarmed when we flew low, I decided, for nothing could stop him. We were ten miles south of the ranch now, over the unending chaparral. Laredo would fly up the river and follow the trail north. We'd land 'em before they got back across, I felt sure.

Hummer sent the De Haviland, quivering in every spar from the speed, squarely across the outlaws' bow, so to speak. We weren't ten feet above the mesquite, nor more than fifty feet ahead of the car when I stood up, fighting the terrific airblast to stay upright. I motioned them back; but the car did not slacken speed.

As far as they were concerned, the D.H. was a butterfly. Some one in that crowd realized that we had no guns, because he could see none.

Hummer banked around and held up his gun significantly, pointing down at the car. We could take a potshot at them, with some chance of hitting them, by doing it as we came toward them from behind, but that, to me, seemed useless at the moment. We'd wait until the last, giving Laredo a chance to get there and do the thing right. One burst of machine-gun fire, in the road in front of them, and those wolves would be bleating lambs, huddling together until ground men got to them.

I shook my head and cut the gun.

"Wait until ten miles from the river!" I shouted, and he nodded.

The motor roared into full cry. Some-

how there was a queer tone to it, as if every one of the four hundred and twenty horses had developed a deeper voice—

Bang! My eardrums split as there came a horrible noise that sounded as if the universe had blown open. Merging with it, rising to a horrid scream, came the noise of the racing Liberty, going so fast that it could not keep up with itself. Fine sawdust seemed to sweep around my windshield, and something bounced off the top of the cowling, missing my head by an inch. My hand darted for the throttle. As I drew it back, turning off the motor, the ship hovered in a stall.

Ahead of me Hummer Howard was slouched in his seat, his head barely visible and a great gash in the left side of his helmet, through which blood was oozing.

The rain-bitten propeller, vibrating in its unsteady orbits, had come to pieces, and one of those pieces had hit Howard. A chunk of mahogany, thrown off by a six-foot propeller which is heavy enough to make a good load for a strong man, and revolving sixteen hundred times a minute, takes a back seat for no bullet during the first few yards of its flight.

Mechanically I got hold of the stick in the back cockpit, my feet found the rudder, and I nosed the ship down. I cut the switches. We were but five hundred feet high. A mile back of us were the men we were after, and I was alone.

There was but one thing to do to make the wreck easier and to hold them up a trifle. Hummer Howard might be dead, but I couldn't figure that he was.

I stalled down over the narrow trail as slowly as I could. Fifteen feet high, the wingtips just above the low trees, the ship hovered for a moment. Then it dropped downward, mushing forward as it dropped.

The trailing edges of the wings must have hit the trees first. With a thousand pound motor in front to drag the nose down and that glance from the trees, the ship seemed to snap forward. The radiator hit the road squarely. As we bounced my head bounced off the front cowling. I was dizzy and weak as the ship went into the air a couple of feet and the tail flipped over. We crashed upside down, as the crackle of ash and the tearing of linen bellowed its message into my ringing ears.

As I loosened my belt and dropped into the wet sand there came a blast of heat from the hot motor. Thank heaven the gas tank hadn't burst; but the feedline had broken and the gas on the hot motor had ignited.

My head wasn't clear, and I was in a daze as I ripped and tore my way through tangled wire and smoldering linen to get at Howard, hanging upside down like a spitted goose. The motor and the linen and wood which had crumpled over it, formed a bonfire right by him. In a second, it seemed, the flames were all about him. I pawed frantically at his belt catch. It was like a nightmare. I had a conviction that it couldn't be true.

My sleeves were afire as he dropped to the ground. I groped for him in the smoke, got him, bore him out of the fire and then smacked out various incipient fires which were torturing me. I put out his flames, too, with hands that were now raw and sore, and then I felt his heart as the fire raged within twenty-five feet of us.

He was alive, but he had a whale of a gash along his scalp.

I was more normal now and without delay I picked him up and carried him into the mesquite. I went quite a way, too, and laid him down in some undergrowth. Eight foiled aliens alone with us in the 'squite might not be pleasant company.

I stole back and saw, from a distance, how they got through that fiery barricade. They were fools to take a chance on the gas tank, but they did. The extreme edges of the wreck were right close to the trees on either side. They debated a few moments; then the driver got in his car and gave it the gas. He went through the fringe of flaming débris like those three old Biblical birds in the furnace, and he made it.

Incidentally, if you've ever thought that a drunken shiek with one arm around a girl, the other hand occupied with a

whisky bottle and his foot clamped down on the accelerator is a wild driver, just ease down to Mexico and watch a spig take a flivver after the morning swig of *habanero*. You'll see driving as is driving.

The aliens, talking Italian, climbed in on the other side, and they were off.

I ran back to Howard and found him sitting up.

"Greetings," he drawled. "I figured I might be alone around heah. Got smacked by a piece of prop, eh? Almighty! I got a headache."

"Better get over it," I advised him. "Damn if I can carry you ten miles to Sam's. I—"

"Listen," he commanded, and I did.

There was a faraway drone and then there were two specks in the southern mist—barely discernible, but there could be no doubt. Laredo had arrived.

"Two men walking through the 'squite somewhere; two ships a-crashed; one man wounded that we know of," Howard said slowly. "I hope the major'll be well satisfied with himself by the time we-all get home."

Gazing at the clotted blood, which seemed to cover half of his black hair, and remembering those minutes when Hummer had hung in the fire, I joined in the cursing.

"It's a cinch that not a McMullen ship should have been out. If there should have been one, either Jimmy and George, or us, would have escaped," I agreed. "Well, let's go."

Which we did, walking fast to restore circulation in our refrigerated bodies. Howard, being a tough bird, got along all right.

We were fortunate. The Laredo boys remembered Sam Jackson's ranch, and it wasn't long before the car, escorted by a circling plane, overtook us. We stopped them and rode the running-boards. The sullen occupants had no communication whatever with us. Eight of 'em couldn't talk English, I guess, and the cross-eyed spig, who was their conductor, pretended that he couldn't, despite our reminders that he had turned around after reading our note. Surprizingly, he seemed to be able to talk Italian.

The other Laredo plane had gone on ahead, and "Pinky" Summerall and Jim Weathers were waiting at the ranch. The other plane landed and, in a very few minutes, our captives were roped and hog-tied, awaiting the arrival of customs men by automobile. Hummer and I stood up together in the back seat of Pinky's plane, the adjustable observer's belt around us both, and he flew us the thirty miles back to McMullen, taking off again as soon as we'd hit the ground to return and pick up Weathers.

"DID THEY all get back—outside of Jimmy, I mean?" I asked the sergeant, and he shook his head.

"Jest got news of Lieutenant O'Reilly," he stated. "He lost his course in the fog, I guess—anyways, he had a forced landin' twenty miles up the railroad and blew both tires and ripped off his tailskid. Ship's out now droppin' him tires and skid."

Penoch hadn't been on the Border but a month and he'd gone too far north on the way back. The sergeant was just about to remark on Howard's head, when an orderly saluted with the new precision, in vogue since the major's advent, and said—

"The major wants you both to report to him at once, sir."

In a moment we were facing him, Howard, tall and dark and lowering, careless of the blackened blood on his head.

"What happened?" barked the major, and Howard told him in his deliberate way.

"I see," snapped Schulz.

He got to his feet and seemed to plant himself solidly, legs wide apart. That square, lined face of his was grim, the gray eyebrows close together.

"Captain Howard, what were your orders when you left here?"

Hummer's stormy eyes burned into his superior's.

"To lead the flight after that suspicious cah," he snorted, "and—"

"In what manner, sir?"

"Why, uh—I don't know—"

"In formation, was it not?" the major inquired crisply, his gray eyes glinting coldly.

"Why, yes, suh, but you see—"

"I see nothing, sir! Nothing except deliberate and wilful disobedience of orders. It resulted in one man's being lost."

Those cold words lashed the seething southerner into sudden fury. His dark face turned a dull red and his eyes were pools of hate. I had never before seen Howard like that.

"Damn it, Majuh, you don't know flying and I do!" he exploded. Now his speech came as rapidly as it usually was slow. "Flying fohmation was foolish in the fog; the men couldn't watch the ground, and—"

"That will be enough, Captain!" snapped Schulz. "One more word of that kind and I shall be forced—"

"I don't give three whoops in hell what yo'ah fohced to do!" Howard told him levelly; and now he was leaning on the desk, staring into the stocky major's face. "Yo'ah my superiah officah, suh, but yo'ah not a flyuh: you don't understand it yet, and I do! And I'm telling you that ouah ships shouldn't have gone out in the fuhst place; if they did have to go out, one was enough until Laredo came with guns; and if they all went, fohmation was foolish, uncalled foh, wrong tactics—"

"Captain Howard!"

That harsh combination of syllables seemed to crackle out at Howard with electric force. It stopped Howard's rush of words as if a hand had been clapped over his mouth. For a long five seconds the eyes of the two men locked.

Then, quite deliberately, the major's words fell like clinking ice in the tense air of the room.

"Captain Howard, you will consider yourself confined to the post, under arrest. You will be court-martialed on charges of insubordination, lack of respect for a superior officer, conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and negligence in the carrying out of your duty. Because we are short of men, you will fly as usual and carry on your regular duties pending the making out of charges and action thereon. That will be all, gentlemen!"

There he stood, like an immovable rock, and his grayish face and rugged features seemed to be made of that same rock, or anything that might be harder than that. For a moment Howard was like a man stunned. Then murder leaped into his eyes, and his great fists were clenched at his side. His lips were drawn back in a snarl, and his oil-grimed face was like that of some devil smudged with the smoke of hell.

"Very well, suh."

He had difficulty in mumbling the words. He stood there for a moment, eyes raging into the narrowed ones before him, which were like two strips of cool green ice across the major's face.

Abruptly he turned and strode out, myself paddling along behind.

"Great guns!" I breathed. "Did you ever—but, of course, Hummer, you got pretty tough to an old martinet you didn't know very well—"

"Don't—talk to me!"

I looked at him quickly. Those words had come forth with difficulty, as if he were strangling. And what I saw shut me up for a moment.

Have you ever seen the rolling eyes of an outlaw horse? Then you have some idea of what Hummer Howard looked like. For the first time I saw some of the things in his nature which he had kept bottled up until now.

He went into his tent, and I left him there. The news spread rapidly until even the enlisted men, already muttering under the crack of the major's whip, knew it. The flight was boiling all afternoon. At five o'clock most of the bunch were gathered in the recreation room, their hands itching for the cards and their tongues wagging morosely on the same old subject—Obadiah G. Schulz.

Hummer Howard walked in, and for some reason there came a quick silence. He looked pale; but he had himself under control.

"Well, how's the convict?" Penoch O'Reilly asked finally. "Want somebody to put up bail for you so you can go see Polly Thomas tonight? Ho-ho-ho!"

Hummer's face twisted in a mirthless smile.

"Now, our dear papa, who's trying to make an army out of us—" Tex MacDowell started, when Howard broke in as if his thoughts demanded expression right then and there.

"Our West Point papa," he said slowly, "needs some of the medicine he's familiar with."

"What do you mean?" snapped Dumpy Scarth.

That little fat devil had been among the angriest in the lot.

"Oh, nothing," Hummer said quickly. "Just—"

As he went on to talk the group fell silent, and a new spirit ran through the room. Howard, gazing around at us, suddenly became serious himself. I'm not making any excuses for myself, or for Hummer least of all. I'm simply reporting the fact that in less than fifteen minutes ten flyers had coagulated into a hard mass, grimly determined to hew to a certain line, let the chips fall where they might.

THERE was an undercurrent of tense excitement as we piled into the mess-hall at the crack of the gong. Young Dumpy Scarth appointed himself a look-out at the door.

Let me slide in one bit of explanation here, so that you can get the full effect of what was about to happen. It's an army custom that all sectors of military etiquette go by the boards at meal time. Nothing stops the eating, except a verbal command. There is no coming to attention at the entrance of a superior officer; the arrival of the chief of staff with all of his fourth assistant deputy sword-carriers and a brass band wouldn't suspend a single knife in the air.

"Here he comes!" Dumpy barked suddenly and dived to the table.

The flyers looked at each other quickly. The younger men were glittering-eyed and tense. Even the somnolent Spears was flushed and excited.

Immediately we started talking and laughing loudly. It seemed to me that there was almost a note of hysteria in it. Penoch O'Reilly's "Ho-ho-ho!" rang out continuously; Dumpy talked in a high voice; the rest of us contributed to the supposedly jovial din.

Every eye rested covertly on the door. It came open, and the short, powerful figure of the major filled it.

As if every mouth had been closed by the pulling of one string, absolute silence fell. It was like a physical blow, more terrible than any words or action could have been.

The major halted in his tracks. Not a man said a word or took his eyes from his plate. We went on eating in deadly silence.

I stole a look at him and I saw that harsh face go pale, when his eyes swept the table. He seemed to falter a bit as he started for his seat. And as he sat down at the head of the table, there was a look in his eyes which I have never seen before or since.

We were giving him "Coventry"—the most insulting, terrible ordeal which the army knows. You may not believe it, but there never has been a man whom it hasn't broken eventually, if he suffered it for long.

That meal was hours long. Not a word spoken, except to ask for the salt or something. And Schulz, realizing perfectly what was happening, held his peace. He did not try to get a word out of us. The atmosphere seemed stifling and close, and there was something unbelievably sinister hanging over that table.

And over the entire flight, too, for the next week; Coventry continued, except when a direct question forced a brief conversation with Schulz. At every meal we made sure that we were on time, or ahead of time, and three times a day the dining-hall snapped from artificial din to nerve-wracking silence at the entrance of the major. The one time he entered the

recreation room in the evening, the same thing happened, and he did not set foot there again.

He did not weaken, but his eyes were sunk in his head and the skin drew tightly over his angular cheekbones as the days went by. It was next door to mutiny, and to his dying day it would follow him to the ends of the earth if he stayed in the army and any of us talked. Nevertheless, with the lines furrowed deeper on his haggard face, and that dead look in his eyes, he fought us as silently as we fought him.

We got our new ships from Donovan, and he drove us until it seemed that flesh and blood could stand no more. We flew patrols from dawn to dark; and not an hour of the day from reveille to retreat was let to go to waste. Inventories, policing the post, formation flying practise, garrison school—the orders poured forth, always written, as he strove to make us cry quits. The entire flight was confined to the post for individual and trifling falls from grace; and the squadron mechanics, it seemed to me, were close to open revolt.

It was a madhouse, with some deadly thing, like a poisonous miasma hanging over it. The meals were hours to dread. Sometime I myself felt as if I must break forth into a nervous shout to break that horrid silence. Schulz moved in an atmosphere of mortal enmity which grew in strength with every passing day.

As the tension tightened in that wordless battle, every man showed signs of the strain. The little idle time that we had was devoted to never ending discussion of the issue which had usurped all other interests. We got into the habit of talking in low, guarded tones, as if a shadow were swooping down to engulf us and a climax we dreaded was just around the corner. Every nerve was frayed to the raw. Our weary bodies were close to exhaustion as the major, with a face like a death's head and a spirit which was slowly crumbling, fought Hummer Howard and his allies.

Hummer, having been the C.O., it was natural for the old men to come to him with many questions which should have been presented to the major. Howard made decisions and gave orders without the pretense of consulting his commanding officer. It was partly because the major was no expert on questions concerning flying or the technical angles of engineering. Howard, pale and hollow-eyed as the charges against him were forwarded on to San Antone, usurped authority continuously.

Time after time a written order from the major countermanded his own, but that did not stop him. Specification after specification of insubordination were added to his list. I'll swear that the two men, on opposite sides of a closed door, seemed to be fighting to the death with little slips of paper.

The weather turned unbearably hot, which made the ceaseless work more of an ordeal. There was storm in the air, just a week after Coventry started. It seemed to me that Hummer and some of the others were becoming frightened at what they had done. This couldn't go on forever—and yet what could stop it? We had built a Frankenstein's monster which bid fair to destroy the flight and ruin every man in it.

As for me, personally, I paced up and down for many a weary hour, mulling things over in my mind and wondering what to do. Gradually there arose a certain admiration for that indomitable old man, asking no quarter and giving none, but going down the army plank fighting to the last. That day, at noon, I noticed it particularly as he marched in, daring us to do our worst, and picked at his almost untouched plate as the silence seemed to rush against him in waves. It was a tangible thing, that menacing quiet. He could have taken his meals alone, but he refused to shirk his ordeal.

I realized that day that the end was not far away. In the office and at the table, it was plain what was happening. His hands shook uncontrollably; one eye twitched unceasingly. He seemed to have lost thirty pounds in a week. His movements were jerky and nervous, his eyes like those of a cornered rat, and it seemed

to me that sheer tragedy lurked in their depths.

He would break soon, but he'd carry on to the last. Asking no advice, his life as solitary as if he had been marooned on a desert island, he tried with silent desperation to break us before we broke him.

AT THREE o'clock that afternoon rolling piles of black mist came churning in from the Gulf. The sky was a murky mass of swirling fog, with lightning playing through it; but there was no rain, as yet. It was as dark as if twilight were setting in at three-thirty, and every soldier in the flight was busy staking down the tents as the wind came in stronger puffs and an oppressive sultriness hung in the air.

I was back in the office, alongside Hummer Howard, as the first patters of rain came and the thunder grew in strength. A ripping crash made me jump as if a dentist had hit a nerve. I, like the whole flight, was next door to a nervous wreck.

As the thunder died away and the rain swelled to a torrent, battering on the tin roof above us, the jangle of the phone made both Hummer and me jump again. Howard had grown thinner, too, it seemed and his eyes were unhealthily bright.

I answered the phone. I heard the major, in his own office behind the closed door, lift his extension receiver as I said:

"McMullen flight — Border patrol. Lieutenant Evans speaking."

"Who? Evans? This is Sergeant Gale, cavalry! Lieutenant! Me and another sergeant from Laredo been out huntin' for a few days and we just seen two big ships come over from Mexico and get forced down by the storm! Each one's carryin' about eight men—big ships, they are, with one motor each."

"Whereabouts?" came the raucous snap of the major. "This is the commanding officer speaking."

"Yes, sir. In a field about eight miles west o' Carana, sir, and about ten miles north o' the Border, alongside an old shack some spig must o' lived in. We can't do nothin'; but they's no doubt these guys is got a bunch o' foreigners with 'em. We couldn't git very close, but we think most of 'em is chinks! If yuh can git here and hold 'em, I'll telephone the customs men and rangers, but it'd take 'em two or three hours."

"How's the weather down there?" I cut in.

"Awful thunderstorm, sir, but I got a notion it won't last none. She's blowin' north. I—"

"Telephone the customs men, and we'll be there," the major told him coolly. The receiver clicked decisively.

The roar of the rain on the roof had died a bit—the rain was slackening.

"Two more of those Mexican ships full of chinks!" I told Howard briefly. "Damned if they're not getting wise!"

It was a fact. Previously, the few airplane attempts at smuggling had been done at night, when the roar of a motor, no matter how high, was a dead giveaway. Now they were flying very high in broad daylight, trusting to the number of airplanes on the patrol to get them by people on the ground without undue curiosity. The same thing worked up at San Antone, where there were dozens of ships in the air from two flying fields.

The door banged open, and there was the major. Those anguished eyes glared into mine.

"Evans, get all the flyers together, immediately, in this office! Howard! Order six ships on the line and warmed up at once!"

There was a second of silence, broken only by the patter of rain on the tin roof. Howard's mouth opened twice, but no words came.

"Snap into it!"

We got to the door and in a second were outside. The rain had died, temporarily, but the sky was inky. To the west where we'd have to go, driving rain could be seen. Lightning flashed through that opaque wall of mist like heavenly fireflies in some swamp of the sky, and the rumble of thunder was continuous.

"God!" breathed Howard. "Don't open your trap when you get back, Slim."

And he was off. The flyers were swarming into the office as I got back, and the rain was starting again. The electric lights were on. The major stood behind his desk as he faced his grave subordinates.

"Two alien ships, full of Chinamen, down near Carana," he said crisply. "You will take off at once and get them—Captain Howard, flight commander. Hold them until the customs men arrive."

"We can't go in this storm!" Howard told him.

"You can! On an occasion like this, rain means nothing!"

"We can't!"

"You have your orders, sir. Is this a boy scout troop, or a flight of the Border patrol?"

Howard's face reddened darkly, and his eyes were like the sky without.

"You orduh us to go, do you? Well, every man in this flight refuses to go, suh."

The major seemed to expand, and there was madness in his eyes. His even, icy tones raised to a veritable roar.

"By thunder, this is mutiny!"

"It is not mutiny, suh! It's resistance to cold-blooded murduh, that's what it is!"

"You bunch of yellow-bellied rats! A disgrace to the uniforms you wear—the uniforms that you won't wear if I can strip them off you, so help me God! You damn sniveling—"

"Shut your mouth!" yelled the infuriated Howard.

I leaped forward as he jumped alongside the immovable major. His face was fairly grinding into the major's. He hadn't given a step.

"In army regulations you'll find that no man can be forced into the air against his will, and we won't go! A radiogram to Donovan Field—"

"Almighty!"

It was like a prayer, that hail to the Deity. Suddenly the major seemed to totter a bit. Folds of flabby flesh sagged in his face, and his eyes were bewildered, like those of a wounded animal, as they traveled slowly from one set face to another, and stared into eyes which stabbed him with their hate.

"Orderly!"

It was scarcely more than a hoarse croak, but the orderly heard it.

"Tell the flight sergeant to warm my ship," he said, moistening his lips.

He was like a man mortally stricken. I think he realized then how greatly he had failed.

"That will be all, gentlemen."

No sooner had the solemn gang gathered on the porch, silently watching the rain which slanted before the howling wind, than he came out of the building in flying clothes, walking slowly. Not a man moved or spoke as he plodded into the rain and over to his warming ship.

He got in as if it were difficult for him to move. He was a weak old man, then. He did not taxi to the end of the field to take off. The motor roared into life, and he hurled it into the teeth of the wind, straight across the field. Like statues we watched him wobble off the ground. He was a very poor, inexperienced pilot. He circled the airdrome for a bit of altitude, the ship blurred in the rain and mist, and then turned westward, riding the wings of the storm.

My fists were clenched, and my heart pounding until it seemed to shake me. He had gone alone, with almost certain death ahead, because he was a rotten flyer, and in that moment I knew that he would not be sorry if he were gobbled up by the gods of the storm.

We looked at one another like murderers signaling the guilt they could not force themselves to name. Howard fairly leaped ahead and walked up and down furiously. Mechanics, huddled beside the ships in the rain, watched us curiously. No man, it seemed, felt like breaking the taut silence.

"I can't stand it! I'm going!"

It was an anguished cry wrung from Howard.

"He's a damn bull-headed fool, but he's got guts and he can't be out there alone! I'm going!"

His words were like a spark let loose in a dynamite vault. Something seemed to snap in every man.

"So will I!" snapped Tex MacDowell. The others were crowding forward, eyes glowing fiercely, and a babble of incoherent words shrilled through the steady pour of the rain.

"No you won't!" Howard yelled at them. "There's no need for many ships; its criminal foolishness for any D.H. to go up in this."

"Ah, have a heart, Hummer!" yelled the impulsive Scarth, and Howard whirled on him fiercely.

"Have a heart nothing! I'm your C.O. this minute, and not a ship leaves the ground but mine until the rain stops. How about you, Slim?"

I was cuckoo, too.

"Ready right now!" I shouted, and for the moment the battle ahead was a source of ferocious satisfaction to me.

TEN MINUTES later I was feeling differently. We were two hundred feet high, and the rain was a torrent. Each drop stabbed my face until I almost blubbered with the pain. The roar of the four hundred and fifty horsepower Liberty was drowned by the continuous crackling explosions of the thunder. The ground was indistinguishable, and we could barely see to our wingtips. The lightning split the blackness in continuous glares, as the shaking ship battled into the teeth of the tempest.

Moment by moment it grew worse. I could scarcely see Hummer, ahead of me, despite continuous wiping of my fogged goggles. The wind was rising. A ton and a half of ship, pulled by that great motor at more than a hundred miles an hour, was thrown about like the puny thing it was before the might of the storm. The altimeter was going crazy, it seemed—now a thousand feet, then a sickening drop in some downward current which brought the ship down until it had to be fought off the very branches of the mesquite. The world was a hell of bellowing motor, roaring thunder, the shrill of the tortured wires and the howl of the wind. I was hunched into a ball, my hand over my face, feet and fingers on the controls to help Howard fight the giants of the air.

For one sickening moment we were in a spin, as a great gust of wind stalled us, left us there, and the nose dropped. It was an age before Hummer, using all his strength, could get it out of the spin, and then we barely escaped the trees. It was black as midnight in the center of the storm, and the compass, as the electricity in the clouds affected it, was as useless as a match would have been.

It was impossible to keep the ship level, with no ground to guide the pilot—and the wind to fight. Time after time it was thrown half on its back as the eddying winds got under a wing. And all the time there was the pounding of the rain and the dread of the lightning, which played around us as if getting the range before annihilating the presumptuous humans who were challenging it.

The ship was vibrating until the struts jumped in their sockets; the wide-open motor held an ever deeper note as it fairly shook itself from its foundations. The propeller was gradually being chewed to pieces. I actually prayed that it would last through.

Now we were in the vortex of the storm, I thought vaguely. I seemed to be without feeling. My face was one vast, dull ache, and I couldn't have sworn to the fact that there was an earth below whereon people were sitting quietly in front of their fires. It seemed as if the universe were going mad. Our ship was whirled in its tracks several times, and we were flung about like a chip in a whirlpool. No use of trying to keep direction now, nor to read instruments, nor to try to keep level.

We were as helpless as a man in a canoe caught in the Niagara. Hummer, head high and face thrust out as if to dare the storm gods to do their worst, froze grimly to stick and rudder; and we hung on and waited. Our motor might as well have been a one-lunger; and the ship, its dope scaled off by the rain and its every brace

strained to the limit, was only a frail kite, after all.

There came a moment when the little patch of the world around us seemed to be revolving dizzily. The lightning was a continuous white-hot glare, playing on all sides of us, and the thunder was right next to our ears. Soaked, frozen and battered, I hunched over, grabbed the stick, tried to hide my face and sat there helplessly, as I felt the wrenching of the abused ship and waited for it to rip apart.

Gradually it seemed to my stunned brain that the thunder was less close and not quite so frequent. The lightning was occasional now. The wind was throwing us about, and the ship was still an outlaw bronc trying to throw its rider, but somehow it seemed peaceful. I looked backward, and I shuddered as I saw what we had passed through. It was like a gigantic, pink mass in the sky, alongside which the lighter fog around us seemed pale. It was shot with lightning which never ceased; the thunder crashed out at us from it.

"We're getting to the edge!" I yelled at the top of my lungs, and could not hear what I said.

The Liberty seemed to pick up speed, and its roar seemed to strengthen. The mist lightened. The ground was in sight, five hundred feet away. The rain was nothing now, degenerating to a drizzle.

And the De Haviland hurled itself out into dazzling sunshine which turned the ground into a gigantic spread of watery jewels. I looked south. The river was barely discernible, ten miles or more away. We'd gone way off course, but we were through.

And we were nearing Carana. I shook Howard, and he turned a face that was like raw beef to me. His swollen eyes, a red glow in them, burned into mine as he grinned a wolfish grin.

I pointed southward. The Bar Two ranch-house, painted white, was there; and Carana was but twenty-odd miles farther west

Soon it was in sight, while my eyes searched the sky for specks. I thought I saw one under the clouds ahead. The sunshine was but temporary—a small hole in the blanket of murky vapor. Those smuggling ships must have gone. The field was but ten miles away and there was no sign of them.

Right then they took the air. Scarcely a hundred yards apart they rose into sight above the mesquite. And now I was sure that a mile ahead of us was another ship, its dark khaki hard to spot against the clouds.

"Damned if Schulz didn't get through," I marveled with a sudden warmth going through me. I felt as if I'd just had three drinks and a letter from the bank telling me that I was not overdrawn after all.

The D.H. ahead was lower than the fugitive ships. So were we, but Hummer did not try to get higher. The throttle went all the way ahead, and seventeen hundred and fifty revolutions showed on the tachometer, as the ship hurtled through the air.

HOWARD turned to me and pointed, as he switched his course to southwest, toward the river. The two ships far ahead of us were turning southward, scudding for the Border.

Schulz had changed course, too. He must be very close to them, I thought. He was at least a hundred feet lower, too. But those alien craft were lumbering and slow, heavily weighted as they were, in comparison with our two-mile-a-minute D.H.'s. He ought to start getting altitude, for safety. They undoubtedly had guns.

"Oh, the fool! The damn fool!" I groaned. "I knew it!"

Hummer turned to me, but I didn't bother with him. I was straining my eyes ahead. What the major did seemed characteristic of the bull-headed old-timer. He had zoomed upward at the lead ship. Sudden sparks glowed against the dark background—from the side of the ship.

The next second the D.H. was fluttering downward. In a partial "falling leaf," it dipped and dived and side-slipped down, plainly out of control. There were a few

small fields—merely clearings in the endless mesquite—but as I watched that ship with narrowed, watering eyes I felt that fields would do him no good.

Then I yelled again as I saw the ship come level—and stay that way. We were so close now that I could see that his prop had been shot off. He circled down, one turn, and was coasting over the mesquite for a landing. He hit the wet ground like an express train. The ship bounded into the air and collapsed on the ground, upside down. It was a motionless heap of wreckage, and not a sign of life came from it.

For an eternal minute I waited for the flames to glow against the ground, but none came. He was knocked out, maybe dead. But if he were alive he wouldn't burn.

We were but five miles from the Rio Grande, now, and the other ships, side by side, were diving for the Border. They wanted to gain speed. Hummer did not have to climb. The D.H. roared toward them diagonally. Two miles from the river we were a hundred feet above them and less than three hundred behind the ship to our left.

I had knocked down one Boche in France, but now I saw what made an eleven-plane man. Down came the nose, and suddenly the machine-guns spat fire through the invisible propeller. The tracers went above the plane ahead, and slowly the nose came down, an eighth of an inch at a time.

We were close now. I felt sorry for those poor chinks.

The tracers were going through the top of the propeller arc, and I saw it fly to pieces. He had shot off their propeller from behind, and I did not believe a bullet had touched a human being, as the ship circled downward with the splintered ends of a propeller hub revolving slowly in front of the radiator.

As we rushed toward the second ship, it surrendered. It was spiraling down, within sixty seconds of safety, as we rode hard on it from above. There was a small plowed field below, alongside a cabin. Mexicans were standing there, watching.

I knew what would happen—and it did. Both under-carriages sank in the soaked earth, and the ships turned over. One of them performed the maneuver with truly Oriental sluggishness and dignity. From every corner of the wrecks men popped forth into the open air, and I did not believe that any one was hurt.

Howard, his cheeks appearing sunken, now, but his eyes with the old reckless zest in them, smiled at me as we circled our prey and put a circle of machine-gun bullets around them, just to illustrate the festivities which would come to pass if some one made a cock-eyed move for the river, a bare mile away. They huddled below us like cold cattle as I unreeled the radio and tapped out a message calling Laredo ships to stand by if our gas ran low before the ground men arrived. It was still stormy between us and McMullen, but our gang would receive the message, too.

Well, we'd got the ships, I remember thinking—good haul. This flying stuff from Mexico was getting serious. They used a bunch of planes around the oil-fields, carrying payrolls and passengers, and some of the boys who picked that section for free-lance flying were just natural born chance-takers when big money was in view.

Somehow the problems of the Border didn't interest me so much right then. Nor the chinks and their pilots below. To me, that little heap a mile away was a bleak and pitiful little monument. I had sort of a cuckoo reaction; I got to feeling sorry for the major. Sometimes I get tender-hearted as the devil.

I got to thinking that he was perfect and we were a bunch of thugs, and all that. About what he'd call us—a sloppy, undisciplined, disrespectful collection of crazy flyers. That's what most of the army thought of us. He had company.

After three carloads of men, including cavalry and customs boys, had the smuggled aliens doing the lockstep back toward the Border, Howard swooped down

and dropped a note which sent one car around a rough trail for the major. We circled as they dragged him out.

I was all worked up as I waited for the signal we'd specified in the note.

They were waving a handkerchief. He was alive.

Even Hummer Howard frolicked a bit, as we circled the storm, broke international law into smithereens by flying across a small sector of Mexico, and came down for the landing in a series of the flossiest side-slips and stalls you ever saw.

HUMMER handled the flight, of course, during the three weeks it took Schulz to patch up an ankle, set a few ribs, get enough stitches out of his head to hold an old-fashioned bustle-cover together, and get back to McMullen. For some reason, our course of action with him had not been a prominent subject around the flight, and the boys seemed uncomfortable as his return drew nigh.

Whether by accident or design the deponent knoweth not, but he got in by car after the entire flight was in bed. We were in absolute ignorance of his presence in our bosom, so to speak, as we gathered to inhale some nutriment next morning.

His entrance into the dining-hall had more effect than if we'd raised our eyes and beheld the general of the armies trundling in on a high bicycle. The buzz of conversation ceased abruptly and we stared at the square-faced, angular-jawed major, with our mouths open.

He came forward evenly, but it seemed to me that there was shrinking in his eyes, as if he were afraid. It grew unbearable as he took his seat.

"Glad to see you back, Major! How do you feel?"

"Pretty fair, Spears," he answered quietly.

Sleepy, bless him, had made the plunge, led the way and broken the ice. It was funny. No man could wait to get an awkward inquiry in. Schulz, his face immobile and his eyes emotionless, answered evenly, sometimes gruffly.

I got out quickly and went over to the office. He followed in a moment and went into his own sanctum. Right on his heels was Hummer Howard. The big Southerner got some papers from his desk and marched in there as if a short rest in the electric chair were waiting for him. I heard him clear his throat.

"Majuh, I've changed patrols a little bit since you were gone. Here's the new schedule foh youah approval or rejection," he said in that slow, almost negro-like drawl. "I'd like to know too, suh, whethuh you approve of my requisitioning some of those new landing-flares for the flight."

"Think we need them?" barked the major.

"Yes, suh."

"Go ahead then. You know conditions better than I do. And say, Howard, what do you think of the idea of—"

I galloped out of the office and frisked about like a playful giraffe who feels the sap of spring in his ancient bones. We had a new papa, and love conquers all.

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for Readers, Writers and Adventurers*

More Rage Than Rhyme

THE following was discovered in one of the angles of Dartmouth churchyard, Devonshire, England—on a large tomb placed at some distance from the other graves. We take it they didn't like Tom.

THOMAS GOLDSMITH

Who died 1714

He commanded the Snap Dragon, a Privateer belonging to this port, in the reign of Queen Anne:
In which vessel he turned pirate, and amass'd much riches.
Men that are virtuous serve the Lord,
And the Devil's by his friends ador'd;
And as they merit get a place
Amidst the bless'd, or hellish race.
Pray then, ye learned clergy, show
Where can this brute, Tom Goldsmith go,
Whose life was one continued evil,
Striving to cheat God, Man, and Devil?

Reefs Off The Ironbound Coast

MOST LANDSMEN who set themselves up as navigators on a voyage of this length, are apt to shoot the sun from a ship on the breast of a fleckless, open ocean, graph their Sumner lines—and then find to their intense amazement that they are navigating the headwaters of the Ganges, or are stranded eighteen miles inland from Boston light . . .

Reading one of Leonard Nason's stories, this sea captain spotted two improbabilities, though neither of a truly grave nature. Let him state his case.

Dear Sir:

For years I have been in the habit of reading ADVENTURE, whenever I have been able to get it. I have forgotten the title of the first war story from your pen that caught my attention; but that particular voyage one of our passengers happened to be General Biornstad, whom I persuaded to read the story. I wanted to know whether it gave a true picture of army life during the war. The general said it did, and enjoyed the story very much.

Well; in the February 15th issue I noticed with some surprise that you had departed from your regular theme and written a sea story. Having had not a little experience in ships and with men of the kind you elected to describe, I was very curious to find out, whether you would be able to do this adequately, as your information necessarily must be second-hand. At least I seem to remember that you, Mr. Nason, during the war, served in the Marines; and that you are of an age that precludes the possibility of your ever having served in those hellships.

And I was very agreeably surprised. The whole yarn was very realistic and even reminded me of some of my own experiences. There were two details, however, that betrayed you to a deep water sailor. On page 134 you have "the old man" giving orders, "Shake the reef out of the foresail. Main topgainsl and fore royal." It is an impossible order. The three things would *never* be done simultaneously. Before the fore royal could be set, what about the fore topgallant sail?

On page 136 you have the ship squaring away the second she had passed the Diego Ramirez. As a matter of fact no ship would dare do that. It was considered essential to work a good deal to the westward, out of respect for the iron bound Chilian coast, here constituting a lee shore.

—CAPT. OLE BULL,
S.S. Bergenefjord,
Den Norske Amerikalinje.

AND herewith is Mr. Nason's answer. It may be well to underscore the statement that he was *not* a marine.

Dear Captain Bull:

I was very pleased to receive your letter about my sea stories. You are right about the mistakes. Who am I to say otherwise? Nevertheless I am tickled pink. If a guy like me, that never got beyond being peggy of his watch, and not a very good one either, can write a yarn about the sea, *and work the ship*, get up her anchor, set and take in sail, wreck and get the boats from Valpar also, to Rapanuie, so that a captain in steam and a descendant of a race that makes the best sailors that ever set hand to rope, can only find *two* mistakes in it, then I'm satisfied! I am more than that; I am delighted with myself. The editors of ADVENTURE wouldn't agree with me here; they don't want a guy to make *any* mistakes. Well we can't please everybody. I repeat, that your letter pleased me more than to have sold three stories in a lump. It's some job to take a three-master round the Horn and only make two mistakes.

I wasn't with the Marines during the war. I was with the Third Division, Regular Army. There's a distinction. I live in France, but I'm planning to go to Oslo or Bergen one of these days, and if I do I'll see if I can arrange it while you're in port, so we can have a game.—STEAMER.

Paymaster Comin' Down the Road

Cotton all chopped an' de hoe-handle bruk,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Paymaster comin' down de road, oh baby!
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Cotton all picked an' carted to de gin,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Bootlegger waitin' wid a bottle full o' gin,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

All de yeller gals have a big time tonight,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Three on one dice, four on de odder,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Ole mule dead an' de levvee done,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Pair in sight an' de third one in de hole,
Paymaster comin' down de road!

Paymaster comin' down de road, oh baby!
Paymaster comin' down de road!

The Fish Cache

A FROZEN fish sails through the air. One click of a malemute's jaws, a gulp—and it's gone! And yet so fiercely competent are the digestive apparatuses of these animals, that not even the slightest apparent discomfort occurs!

Salmon are caught here during their run in the latter part of July. They are split up the center, the backbone removed, and hung up to dry, having first been cut through to the skin in strips about one inch wide.

They are used extensively by those driving dogs, a feed being about 2½ lbs. per dog per day when being worked, and less when they are not working.

The R. C. M. Police use this kind of dog feed entirely, having found it the most satisfactory and the least cumbersome. The heads and tails are removed, and the fish baled in bales of about forty-five to fifty pounds each, which would be equal to from two hundred and thirty to two hundred and sixty pounds of green fish.

Further north where salmon are not so plentiful, and also in other places green fish are used, merely being caught through the ice and frozen, and are fed to the dogs in that state, although some prefer to thaw them out and cook them before feeding to the dogs.

The only ill effects I have ever known from the use of this kind of feed to dogs are worms, due to flies getting to the fish before they are properly dried.—DAWSON J.

Mummies With Big Feet

PERHAPS a note of levity is irreverent, when dealing with such grotesqueries as bodies of grown men that have been shrunk down to the size of Punch and Judy dolls, yet we have a theory. We hope, for scientific reasons, that Mr. Woodward of the "Ask ADVENTURE" staff receives a serious and exhaustive answer to his query. But meanwhile, may we not suggest that possibly the jungle enemies of the Jivaros were really hardboiled hombres?

Last night I read that yarn "The Place of Birds" by Lewis J. Rendel in a recent issue of ADVENTURE and there was one point in the story I would like to clear up for scientific reasons. I do not know Rendel's address, so will mail the letter in your care.

On page 70 Rendel states that the shrunken men "manufactured" by the Bugres are about three feet long "made of *soft* tanned leather."

Now I am only familiar with the shrunken bodies

and heads produced by the Jivaros or Jibaros (Spanish pronunciation of b and v is almost alike) who dwell in the hinterland of Ecuador. These bodies and heads are of tanned leather to be sure—but—the danged stuff is as hard as iron; or to compare it more accurately, to an old-time Plains buffalo shield. There is little or no give to the bodies so prepared; and it sounds like a woodpecker rapping on a hollow log when one taps the dried man with one's finger. In view of this fact, that the Jivaros "tan" their trophies to such a degree of hardness, I am wondering just what process is used on the victims by the Bugres?

I'm not writing this in a spirit of "riding" Rendel, but to find out, if it is possible to do so, if any such specimens as he describes have ever been brought out of the country. There are so many tribes in South America and so many things we *don't* know about them, that I am quite ready to be convinced of almost anything. If Rendel has any such trophies in his possession or knows where I can see one, I'd be very grateful for information on them.

It so happens that we have two entire bodies from the Jivaro country as well as some twenty human heads and five or six sloth heads treated in the same manner as the men's top pieces. The bodies, as I have stated, are very hard and light and about three feet long. The hands and feet are the only parts that have not been worked down in proportion with the rest of the body. For your own information, said specimen not being on display, one of the bodies is that of a Spaniard reputed to be a Spanish officer. At any rate he is of European cast of features, and hairy as an ape. The hirsute appearance is more pronounced because of the bunching of the hair with the shrinkage of the skin. The shrinking process is carried out with liberal and patient application of hot rocks, sand and magic.

If Rendel has been in that country and can give me any dope on the soft tanned bodies of the Bugres (I'm not familiar with the name of that tribe) I'd certainly be glad to hear from him.

Also I wonder if he has ever seen any of the Mundurucu head trophies from Brazil? Those little relics are similar to the heads taken in Borneo, the skin tanned on the skull, and eyes filled with gum and bits of bone; hideous looking things.

—Arthur Woodward.

No Argument

A QUESTION was raised, in respect to one of Gordon Young's recent stories. A reader believed the tomahawk a distinctively North American weapon. Mr. Young explains:

Regarding the use of tomahawks among South Sea natives; this is o. k. They are hatchets sold by traders, to which natives usually fit handles of two or three feet in length. The trade name for them is "tomahawks."

I don't want to lose any money, but I would be willing to bet a dime that I have used the word often before. Anyhow there can't be any argument in Camp-Fire, or elsewhere, about it.

—Gordon Young.

Pots of Gold

WAS ALL of the wealth of the Confederate States, buried before the surrender at Appomatox, recovered? Or are some of those rich golden caches still underground along the railway right of way near McLeansville, North Carolina? Perhaps some reader has heard more definitely of their fate.

"Toward the close of the war I was stationed in Richmond, Virginia, as Captain of Co. C, 4th Mississippi Infantry. The Yankees were closing in on us, and we saw that the days of the Confederacy were numbered. I was called to headquarters and told to report at the railway station at 6:30 P.M., with my company in marching order, three days' rations, and forty rounds of ammunition, there I would entrain and be given sealed orders as to my mission.

"I had, as I remember, about 78 men, most of them swamp hunters and river men from my State. We found the train made up of four box cars and three flats; on the rear one was a three-inch rifle fieldpiece, and its complement of gunners. The other two flats were loaded with iron cooking pots, their lids being fastened on with heavy wire. I was to open my orders at Greensboro, North Carolina.

"We traveled all night, and reached Greensboro the next day about 4 P.M. There I opened my orders, and found the following instructions: "*You are to proceed to Greensboro. The following night, you will go by way of the N. C. R. R. to McLeansville. After leaving McLeansville, you will bury these pots in groups of three on each side of R. R., not over one hundred paces from right of way. In case there are houses, proceed; also plot the places as nearly as possible.*"

"We went as directed, and buried the pots in lots of three, digging holes about three feet deep. We buried them for a space of about 16 miles. We then went to Company Shops, where there was a repair shop, and a turntable. We turned the engine and went back to Greensboro. From there we proceeded to Richmond, but before we reached there we were fired on and the train derailed. Most of my men were captured, my second lieutenant and myself escaped, and for some time we scouted around, till the surrender. Then we would not take the oath, but went over into Mexico, where I became interested in the development of a mine which fortunately paid, later on. I married a Spanish lady and have prospered. Every year I have thought I would go back to North Carolina, as I am sure I could locate some of these places; but business cares have taken

up so much of my time that now I feel that I am too old; and besides, have more money than I ever will be able to spend."

THIS was told to me by Captain J. W. Duchase of Tampico, Mexico. He asked me where I was from; when I said Greensboro, North Carolina, he told me this story. Company Shops has since been renamed Burlington. Fifteen or twenty years ago a negro was plowing a lot for a gentleman near McLeansville, his plow hooked something, breaking the point. He found that he had uncovered a large pot filled with twenty dollar gold coins! These coins were discolored. The negro took a handful of them and went to town. The next morning, thinking they were of no value, he sold them for ten cents apiece. I saw some of these coins, as I lived near there at that time. The next day parties went to the place where he had plowed up the treasure, and found evidence that three pots had been dug out. The man for whom he was plowing had been in straightened circumstances before this. Since then he has been prosperous; but he would never tell how much there was of the gold. There may be much more.—FIRST LIEUT. HARRY P. WHITE, Mebane, North Carolina.

The Dynamite Song

We're the hardrock men
  And we work underground,
And we don't want sissies
  Or foremen around.
We work all day,
  And we work all night,
And we live on powder
  And DYNAMITE!

Then slam it with the singlejack,
  And turn it around!
We're the hardrock men
  And we work underground!
We work underground
  In the candle light,
And we live on powder
  And DYNAMITE!

Old Johnny Deen
  Used lots of dynamite;
He crimped all his caps
  With a single bite.
But he got some new teeth
  From a dentist one day—
And the first cap he bit
  Blew his whole head away!

Then pull out the steel
  From the hole in the rock!
And put in the spoon
  And heave out the muck!
Fill her up with powder
  And tamp her down tight,
And break down the face
  With DYNAMITE!

Oh, sometimes she shoots
  When you don't want her to,
And then she won't shoot
  Spite of all that you do!
And that's why dynamite
  Is just like a mule—
And the man who says it ain't
  He's a goldarned fool!

Then slam it with the singlejack
  And turn it around!
We're the hardrock men
  And we work underground!
We work underground
  By the candle light,
And we live on powder
  And DYNAMITE!

Know Your Ropes

THE WRITER of the following letter, himself a captain and a marine surveyor, gives a clear statement which ought to close the rope controversy.

I wonder if I can help at this battle of Manila hemp, without getting both sides to the dispute on my neck?

I have been sailing in British ships, both sail and steam since '92, so that I can't tell what the different kinds of rope are called among American seamen, generally; but I have never heard a sailor talk of Manila hemp when describing a rope, although I have heard of such a fiber.

I have always been taught to describe rope as either Manila or hemp. Manila was used for running gear, tarred hemp for bolt-ropes, lanyards, standing rigging and such like. Untarred hemp was used for lead and log-lines, etc.

I would not say that a man who spoke of Manila hemp was not a sailor; but of two seamen applying for a berth, other things being equal, I would be inclined to sign on the one who spoke of Manila in preference to the one who spoke of it as Manila hemp, even if the latter were correct.

The only authority I can quote on this subject is Lieut. Commr. Austin M. Knight, U. S. N., in "Modern Seamanship." Here is what he says:

"The rope commonly used on shipboard is of three kinds: hemp, tarred and untarred, Manila and wire. Coir is sometimes used for heavy tow-ropes, for which it is particularly well adapted. Ropes are

made also of flax and cotton, but these are not suitable for use at sea.

"Much confusion results from the common practice of designating all ropes made from vegetable fiber, as 'hemp.' This mistake is almost universally made by other than seafaring people in referring to Manila; which is sometimes called 'Manila hemp', but oftener simply 'hemp'. Hemp rope is made from the fiber of the hemp plant, which is cultivated extensively in many parts of the world, but especially in Italy, Russia and the United States. Russian hemp is very generally used for cordage, Italian hemp for packing, and American hemp for small stuffs.

"Manila rope is made from the fiber of the wild banana, and comes principally from the Philippine Archipelago."

I served in various capacities on sailing vessels till 1906 when I sat for my master's ticket, and went in steam until 1919; and since then until recently I have been sailing as master of schooners and one bark.—G. N. MACMINN.

Spirit of Youth

SEVERAL years ago — yes, a good many, now I come to count them—a thrilled and wide eyed youngster edged up to the kindly warmth of the Camp-Fire, and made his bow to the old-timers seated there. More than likely they were amused; yet they treated him in kindly and tolerant fashion. Through the years he got to know them. His stubby pipe grew caked, and as rank as theirs. For the most part, he listened—since these men were the salt of the earth; men whose features might be craggy and seamed from the buffetings of pampero or simoom, of blizzard or white-water spume, yet whose eyes held steady—able to smile into the teeth of bitterest adversity.

Yet he had a yarn or two of his own; and in due time, told them. One concerned the first copies of ADVENTURE which had come his way. It had occurred up in the spruce forests of British Columbia, at the time the Canadian National Railway was grading its last bit of track along the Skeena River into Prince Rupert.

Near the boiling springs of Lake Lakelse stood a cabin with bunkhouse and bathhouse attached. The bathhouse was all tub—an enormous tin lined bowl in which the terrifically hot water flowed without cessation, and in which a half dozen river fishermen could steam out their rheumatism, at once.

One eight-second scalding in that tub, and the newcomer hastily decided in favor of the lake waters—even at that season of the year, when salmon eggs turned all the streams to orange red, and snows were creeping down the sides of the mountains.

The entire reading matter of the camp consisted of three ancient, battered copies of a magazine one visitor had not encountered. As the days passed he took his turn in reading them—often hunched in a mackinaw beside a candle, long after the stove fire had died.

It happened that the tale which gripped him most, a long novel of South Sea adventure—"King Corrigan's Treasure" by H. D. Couzens—was not concluded until the issue which followed the last of the three old copies.

Nothing could be done about it; there were no newsdealers in that vertical land, and practically no mails. The story remained unfinished, but the youngster never forgot it.

By the Camp-Fire, a long while afterwards, a grizzled veteran of the Klondike rush supplied the last chapters by word of mouth, recalling gladly the fate of Harvey and Anita, of the well loved Billy Englehart. And that helped much.

But just this morning that chap, myself, reached over to a bound file of all the copies of ADVENTURE, drew out one of the earliest volumes, and read, with a smile in his eyes, the stirring conclusion of that splendid tale.

Since that old day I have been an ADVENTURE fan; I still am, more enthusiastic than ever. My pledge to old comrades, and to new friends I may be fortunate enough to make, in the firelight, is that our magazine always will be planned for those "men who may die, yet who never grow old"—the men who keep youth alive in their hearts.

—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK *Adventure*

For *free information* and *services* you can't get elsewhere

HERE are two monographs by Lieutenant Francis V. Greene, U.S.N.R., on the subjects of "Enlistment in the U.S.Navy" and the "United States Naval Academy at Annapolis." Copies of each may be obtained by addressing this department of *Adventure*.

The U. S. Navy desires young men of the white race, citizens of the U. S. between the ages of 17 and 35 years, who can read and write, are of average intelligence, and who can pass the required physical examination, and who can furnish good recommendations from former employers. Men who are married or who are heads of a family with others dependent upon them are not considered good material for the Navy due to the low pay to start. The enlistment contract is for four years and *must* be filled. Boys 17 years of age do not enlist for four years, but only to serve until their 21st birthday.

Young men first enlisting in the Navy usually do so as apprentice seamen, spend four months in training, two of which are at a shore training station, and the other two at sea on naval vessels; he is then eligible for his first advancement, from this on up his advancement in rank and pay is subject to limitations of time and is entirely up to himself; if he qualifies for promotion he will get it.

From time to time a few tradesmen are enlisted in the Navy as vacancies occur, but in such cases the man must be a finished journeyman tradesman. Everyone enlisting in the Navy has the same opportunity to learn trades, each man makes his own choice, takes a competitive examination for entrance to his chosen trade school, then takes the course for that trade, and is again examined for graduation. The best time to put in application for detail to trade schools is after the first month at the shore training station. None of these apprentice tradesmen is given a rating or non-commissioned officers' appointment until he has completed one year's service in the Navy. In addition to trade schools there are educational courses open to every man in the Navy, these being conducted by the Navy Department, the man being assisted by the educational officer aboard ship.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE U. S. NAVY

All organs of the body must be sound and in normal condition, especially eyes, ears and heart. All bones must be sound, joints of normal size and no deformities of the bone structure whatsoever. Improperly healed fractures, bow legs, knock knees, flat feet or hammer toes are causes for rejection. Eyes 20/20 and ears 15/15. Most common causes for rejection are: Underweight, flat feet, underheight, piles, venereal diseases, varicocele, rupture, poor teeth, infected teeth or gums, adenoids, hypertrophy of tonsils, valvular disease, tachycardia, color blindness, near and far sightedness, defective hearing, skin diseases. Not less than twenty sound teeth, with four opposing molars and four opposing incisors. Filled teeth, properly done, may be counted as "sound" teeth; bridge work or crowned teeth do not count as sound teeth.

The minimum height is 64 inches; weight varies for age under 21 years, from 110 to 148 pounds; over 21 years of age a man regardless of height must weigh at least 128 pounds.

It is suggested that an applicant for enlistment be examined by a local physician, who can consult the above, so that he can give information as to the applicant's chance of passing the examination by the Naval surgeon. If any defects are noted it will save the time, trouble and expense of a trip to a recruiting station, as the examination is very rigid and severe. If the applicant resides in the same town where a recruiting station is located, of course he can report there at once for the examination; there is no charge for the work of the surgeon.

In addition to the physical requirements the following is required of all applicants for enlistment:

Two recommendations, covering the past two years and if possible to be from former employers.

If less than 18 years of age, one of these recommendations must be from your last school teacher.

If less than 21, the consent of your parents, to be sworn to before a notary public on a special form that the recruiting officer will furnish.

If over 21, the certified copy of your certificate of birth, or your parents' affidavit as to birth.

If married, the sworn consent of your wife.

If you have had service in other branches of the military departments, Government or State, discharge must be presented. If in service, discharge must be effected before enlistment.

You must be a full citizen of the U. S.

You must have completed the sixth grade of grammar school or have picked up an education that can be considered the equal of the sixth grade.

PARTIAL NAVY PAY TABLES

(per month)

Chief petty officer with permanent appointment	$126.00
Chief petty officer with acting appointment	99.00
Petty officer 1st class	84.00
Petty officer 2nd class	72.00
Petty officer 3rd class	60.00
Seaman 1st class	54.00
Seaman 2nd class	36.00
Apprentice seaman	21.00
Firemen 1st class	60.00
Firemen 2nd class	54.00
Firemen 3rd class	36.00

As a permanent addition to the base pay, the pay of each rating is increased by 10% of the base pay upon the first four years of service, and by an additional 5% after each succeeding four years of service up to 16 years. The maximum increase for longevity is plus 25% of the base pay. The top pay of the Navy as an enlisted man is $157.50 per month. There are special additions to the regular monthly pay for certain services, such as messman, diver, submarine duty, signalman, etc. A man enlisting in the U. S. Navy receives an outfit of clothing value of $100.00. When discharged he receives travel allowance from place of discharge to place of enlistment at the rate of 5c per mile. If a man completes an enlistment with honorable discharge, and reenlists within three months after discharge, he will, if a chief petty officer or petty officer 1st or 2nd class, receive an honorable discharge gratuity of $200.00; if he is a petty officer 3rd class or non rated man he will receive $100.00.

At the recruiting station after you have passed the doctor's examination and are ready to be enlisted, you will have to sign the following certificate.

"I have had this contract fully explained to me; understand it; and certify that no promise of any kind has been made to me concerning assignment to duty, or promotion during my enlistment."

A great many men sign this certificate without understanding fully what it means. Some men sign it without knowing what the shipping articles are.

The Shipping Articles are the articles or conditions under which you come into the Naval Service. You bind yourself to do certain things and the U. S. Government binds itself to give you certain things in return for your services. What do you agree to do? What does the Government agree to do? Until you can answer both these questions fully, you should not sign the certificate. You should always find out exactly what this agreement is by asking one of the men in the recruiting station; any of them will be glad to explain it to you.

Read the Shipping Articles carefully. Take the first one. According to the conditions laid down in this article, you agree:

To enter the service of the U. S. Navy.

To go where you are told to go, either on board ship or to any station to which the Government wishes to send you, but the Government makes no promise to send you to any particular place.

You also promise to do your duty to the utmost of your power and ability. This means that you will try your *best* to carry out any orders you may get, to do any work that you may be told to do.

You agree to obey the orders of the officers and petty officers on board ship or on shore, who may be placed over you; this means that you will do as you are told to do. It does not mean that you will do as you think you ought to do, but it means that you will carry out the order at the time you were told to carry it out. If you are not willing and ready to do as you are told, the Navy is not a good place for you, and you are not a good man for the Navy.

Take the second article—According to this article you agree to serve in the Navy for four full years, unless you are discharged for some reason. There is no other way in which you can leave the service with any credit to yourself except by discharge of the Bureau of Navigation as the result of an emergency which could not be foreseen at the time of enlistment. If you do not do your duty, if you are dirty and sloppy in your habits, if you are constantly in trouble of one kind or another, you may be discharged as undesirable or unfit for the Navy. If you run away you will be considered as a deserter, and, as such, you can be arrested by any policeman or constable; and your family and your friends who know that you have deserted, and who let you stay with them and do not inform the Navy Department, will be liable to fine and imprisonment. If you desert in time of war, you will be no longer a citizen of the U. S. If you will read Section 1422 of the Revised Statues of the U. S., which is printed in fine type in the Shipping Articles, you will see that in case your time of enlistment expires while you are at some place outside of the U. S., the Government will send you to the U. S. After reaching the U. S., you are furnished travel allowance from place of discharge to place of acceptance of enlistment at the rate of five cents a mile the same as any man whose enlistment expires in the U. S. If you enlist in New York and you happen to be in San Francisco at the time your enlistment is finished, the Government will pay you a travel allowance of five cents

a mile from San Francisco to New York, that is five cents a mile for 3180 miles, or $159.00. If there is any necessity for keeping you in the service after your enlistment is up, the Government reserves the right to hold you as long as there is any real necessity for doing so although the law does not permit the retention of a man beyond 30 days after arriving in a U. S. port; but in this case you get paid 25% more for overtime.

By the second article, you agree to obey the laws, articles, and regulations for the Government of the Navy. If you do not know what the Articles for the Government of the Navy are, you should read them over.

In the Shipping Articles, the U. S. agrees to pay you a certain sum every month from the day on which you enlist. This amount of course increases as you secure promotion.

Do not sign your name to anything that you do not understand.

Read over the Oath of Allegiance carefully and be sure that you understand it, this is it:

"I do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies whomsoever and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles for the Government of the Navy.

"And I do further swear or affirm that all statements made by me as now given in this record are correct."

By this oath you bind yourself to serve the United States only. It makes no difference what your father's nationality may be or where he would like to have you serve. If this country should go to war, you would be bound by that oath to fight for this country, no matter whether you had to fight against your father's people or not. According to this oath, you swear that all statements you have made are correct. If you make any false statements, you will be guilty of fraud; and, if the fraud be discovered later, you may be tried by a general court martial.

You also agree to submit to vaccination against typhoid fever and to such other preventive measures as may be considered necessary by Naval authorities.

Take notice of the statement that the Navy Department makes no promise of any kind about promotion or sending you to any particular ship or shore station (Article 4). If the Navy Department were to make promises of this kind to men, it might not be able to keep the promises on account of unexpected changes of circumstances; therefore the Department will not make promises. When you are about to leave the Training Station, you may be able to get orders to some particular ship by making request to go to that ship.

After reading this over, give the matter careful consideration before enlisting, be sure that is what you wish to do. After you are enlisted stick, do not desert. Remember that you will have to stand on your own feet in the service, what you qualify for you will get, there is no limit to how high one can go if he starts young enough. There are a very large number of high ranking commissioned officers in the service that started their Naval career in the same way that you will start.

THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

THE U. S. Naval Academy is a school for the practical and theoretical training of young men to fit them to become commissioned officers in the naval service of the U. S. The students are styled midshipmen. The course of study is four years. Midshipmen who graduate are appointed to fill vacancies in the lower grade of the commissioned personnel of the line of the Navy, and occasionally to fill vacancies in the Marine Corps and in certain of the staff corps of the Navy.

APPOINTMENTS—Five midshipmen are allowed for each Senator, representative and delegate in Congress, five for the District of Columbia, fifteen each year from the United States at large and 100 from the enlisted men of the Navy and Marine Corps. The appointments from the District of Columbia and the U. S. at large are made by the President, and are reserved for the sons of officers and enlisted men of the Navy and Marine Corps, as these men are not usually enabled to acquire a permanent residence in any district. Enlisted men of the Navy are appointed by the Secretary of the Navy after competitive examination. Candidates must be actual residents of the district from which they are nominated. The appointments by the Senators, representatives and delegates in congress are entirely in the hands of these gentlemen, so all correspondence and applications must be addressed to them personally.

EXAMINATIONS—Two examinations are held for the admission of midshipmen each year. The first is held on the third Wednesday in February and the other on the third Wednesday in April under the supervision of the civil service commission at certain specified points in each state and territory. All those qualifying mentally, who are entitled to appointment in order of nomination, will be notified by the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., when to report at the academy for physical examination, and if physically qualified, will be appointed. Examination papers are all prepared at the academy and the examinations of candidates are finally passed upon by the academic board. Certificates from colleges and high schools are considered in lieu of the entrance examinations at the academy.

MENTAL REQUIREMENTS—Candidates will be examined in punctuation, spelling, arithmetic, world's history, geography, English grammar, United States history, algebra through quadratic equations and plane geometry (five books of Chauvenet's geometry or equivalent).

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS—All candidates are required to be citizens of the U. S. and must be not less than 16 years of age nor more than 20 years

of age on April 1st of the calendar year in which they enter the academy. A candidate becomes eligible the day he becomes 16 and is ineligible on the day he becomes 20 years of age. Candidates are required to be of good moral character, physically sound, well formed and of robust constitution, the height of candidates must not be less than 5 feet 2 inches between the ages of 16 and 18 years, and not less than 5 feet 4 inches between the ages of 18 and 20 years. The minimum weight at 16 years is 105 pounds, with an increase of five pounds for each additional year and fraction of a year over one half. Candidates must be unmarried.

PAY—The pay of a midshipman is $750.00 a year, beginning at the date of his admission. Midshipmen must supply themselves with clothing, books and so forth, the total expense of which amounts to $350.00. Traveling expenses to the academy are paid by the Government.

ENLISTMENT—Each midshipman on admission is required to sign articles by which he binds himself to serve in the U. S. Navy during the pleasure of the President of the U. S.

Two booklets on the Naval Academy and the appointments thereto can be secured free of charge by writing and addressing The Superintendent, U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

Whales

ON THEIR capture and disposal. Did you ever hear of the bombing of one of these sea monsters before?

Request:—"Your letter about ambergris was very interesting.

How do they capture the whale, to get the ambergris?"—HERBERT WOLFE, Los Gatos, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The latest style of vessel for whaling is so arranged that two doors are opened in the bow of the vessel, and the whale is floated inside of the ship, and cut up for the try-kettles, which are located on deck.

When a whale is captured (harpooned and brought to the vessel), an instrument like a gigantic hypodermic syringe is inserted into the dead body and air is pumped in until the whale floats "high."

If there are other whales near by that need attention, then a flag is stuck into the blubber and the body is cast adrift; a fresh line is coiled and the chase begins afresh.

The harpoons of late date are shot from a gun.

A whale ran aground in shallow water inside the Atlantic entrance to the Panama Canal, and was killed by machine-gun fire by canal employees, who undertook to salvage it for oil and bone.

The whale was too heavy for the 75-ton railroad crane to handle, so a tug fastened a line to the carcass and towed it to a point 12 miles outside the breakwater, where a naval airplane dropped two bombs, each weighing 160 pounds, from a height of 1,900 feet, and thus destroyed said whale.

Bullets in Flight

FAST as they travel, they are not faster than the eye under certain light and atmospheric conditions, or when moving against a background of white cloud.

Request:—"Is there any record of rifle or pistol bullets, not tracer, being seen in flight by persons firing them? The ex-Navy men among the officers here, with the exception of myself, don't believe they can be seen.

However, I clearly remember seeing Colts automatic .45 cal. bullets in flight while firing on the 50-yard range at Guantanamo in January or February, 1916, when I was a gunner's mate on the U. S. S. *Rhode Island*. It also seems to me we saw .30-30 bullets in flight a few times on the 200-yard rifle range. Of the .30-30's I'm not positive, but the .45's, yes sir, absolutely.

They could only be seen in the early morning with the sun, like a red ball, rising over the hills to the rear and left of the targets. They appeared like a glimpse of a black fly or bug between the man firing and the target. Of course any one who flinched the least bit could never see them, but I remember hurrying to the range, along with some shipmates, on several mornings to try our luck seeing bullets in flight. And a number of us sure saw them.

I also remember seeing one-pounder shells, not traces either, in flight a couple of years before, when I was a 12-inch gun pointer on the *Minnesota*. Said shells were fired in sub-caliber practice from guns mounted on saddles on the barrels of 12-inch guns and were fired by the pointer at his regular place inside turret, with his head in conning tower and his eye at pointer's telescope. Of course one couldn't see these shells in flight at all times; atmospheric conditions etc. had to be right."—GEO. L. EASTMAN, Hog Island, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—You win; bullets up to the .30 caliber Model 1906 in velocity and caliber can be seen in flight, if conditions, meaning atmospheric and optical, are right.

I have myself seen bullets of .22, .44, .45 and .30 caliber fired both by myself and others both on the ranges and in the field. But conditions, particularly light and density of atmosphere, must be in perfect accord for this to be done. You are absolutely correct in your contention as to the small arm bullets. I can't say as to the heavies, as my experience with them is confined to certain abortions we youthful angel-dodgers used to make from gaspipe and old gun barrels for the proper celebration of July 4th in the glad days of old.

A chap can see a momentarily-glimpsed silvery streak going down the range from the flanks of the firing post; from the rear you see the black dot, as you say, but so briefly that one can not be sure he saw something, or just had a delusion and twitching of his eyes. If you shoot the .45's up in the air, particularly against a white cloud, you can frequently see them plainly. I've noted this in aerial shooting.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *out November 1st*

Sleepy Stevens

Shotgun Gold

A Complete Novelette

by W. C. Tuttle

When *Hashknife Hartley* and *Sleepy Stevens*, homely knights errant of the cattle country, rode into wide open Turquoise town, they discovered that the only certainty in connection with the mysterious shootings that had been going on was that one murder would follow hot-foot on the heels of the one before. *Roaring Rigby*, the new sheriff, arrested *Pete Conley* because he was a half-breed, and rich young *Franklyn Moran* on general principles; but *Hashknife*, from long experience, knew that a little .22 shell by a kitchen door may oftener than not serve very well as a peg to hang a murder on.

Hashknife Hartley

The Million Dollar Boots

by Ralph R. Perry

They had been made for the crews of German submarines. Boots to brag about, to sprawl in the bunk with and to display where every man-jack in the forecastle could envy them. *Sid Roberts* bought the only pair in Bremen. A half-hour later *Flatnose Amberg* bought an identical pair—from the same oily little shopkeeper, in the same waterfront shop. Which would not have mattered much, had not the two men returned from a spree the next morning—with but a single pair between them.

Penoch O'Reilly

Salute

A Complete Novelette

by Thomson Burtis

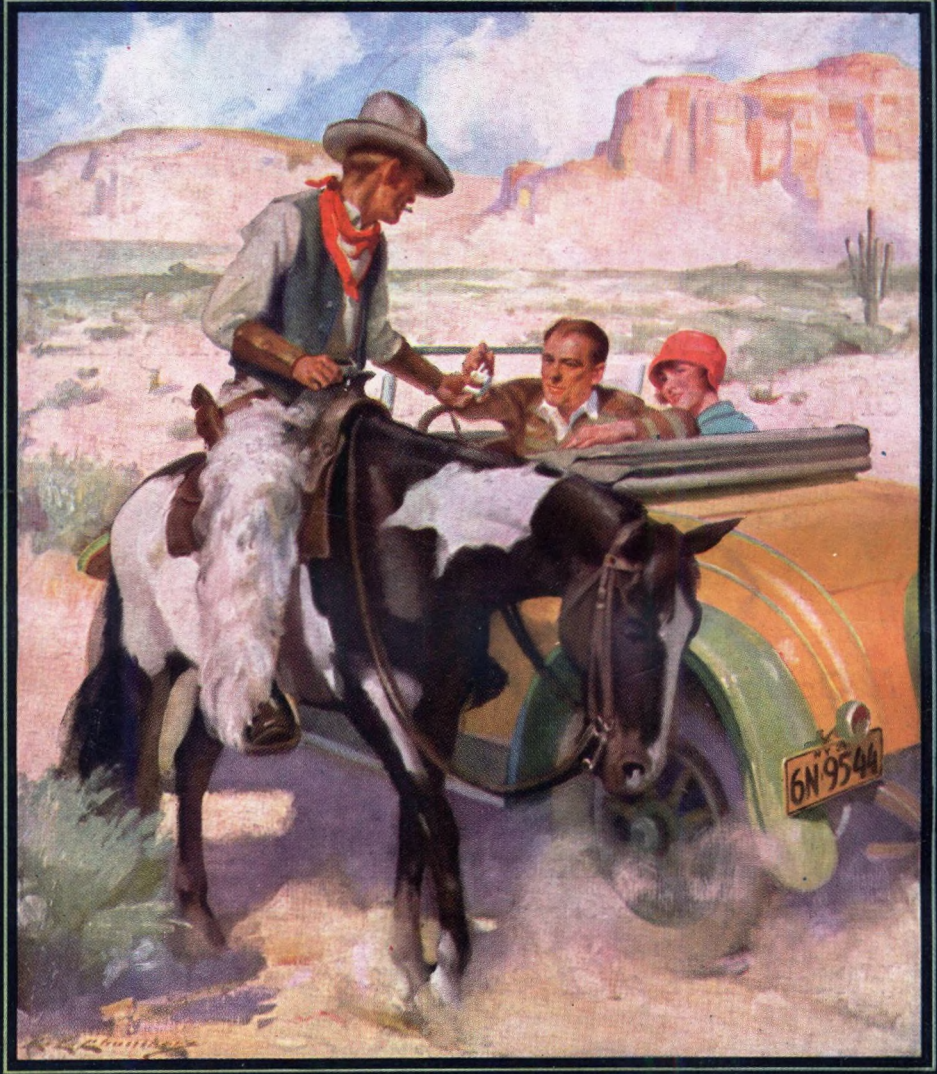
The DeHaviland crashed into the floodwaters bristling with shark-fins, and while *Slim Evans* peppered the waters with machine-gun bullets *Penoch O'Reilly* jumped from his ship to rescue the crippled pilot. That he was *Penoch's* enemy, a crook and a scoundrel, made no difference. For Penoch had flown with him in France, and knew what *Slim* was later to learn—that in spite of everything the fellow had in him the stuff of heroes.

Slim Evans

And—*Other Good Stories*

Conclusion of OLD FATHER OF WATERS, a novel of old steamboating days on the Mississippi, by ALAN LEMAY; AT LASKER'S LANDING, Civil War spies and sharpers, by HUGH PENDEXTER; THE HAND IS QUICKER, the almost perfect crime, by BARRY SCOBEE; THE PURPLE MONKEY, a story of Chinese cunning, by CARROLL K. MICHENER; THE COMMITTEE, a bid for law and order, by RAYMOND S. SPEARS; NOVEMBER, the band-saw and the lynx, by RALPH W. ANDREWS; THE BLUE CORD, a mystery of a Philippine garrison, by THOMAS C. COPPERIDGE.

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month



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