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ADVENTURE

THE MAN'S MAGAZINE OF EXCITING FICTION AND FACT

Aug., 25c

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SHORT STORIES

RUN AWAY FROM MURDER ..... Jim Schraeder 14

THE GOLDEN EMBLEM ..... Bill Adams 24

THE CROSSING OF THE SEVEN ROCKS ..... Frank P. Jay 38

NOVEL

THE WATER HOLE ..... Floyd Mahannah 20

PICTURE STORIES

THE VALLEY OF DEATH ..... Robert Bridgeport 16

HER BEST MODEL 27

HUNTERS OF THE REEF 32

THE DUELLING DOG OF MONTARGIS ..... John V. Grombach 36

DIG MY GRAVE DEEP ..... J. Stanwell-Fletcher 41

HUMAN BLOWTORCHES ..... Curt Gunther 42

TRUE ADVENTURE

DEATH AND THE WHITE QUEEN ..... T. Calvert 3

BOOTS IN THE FACE ..... Nicabar James as told to Alexander Lake 11

I LIVED WITH THE WORLD'S FIERCEST BANDITS ..... D. Gordan MacKay 22

THE MAN WHO LOVED MONEY BEST ..... Jack Kofoed 30

THE DEVIL'S SON ..... Gordon MacCreagh 34

STREAMLINED PIRATES ..... Ben Preston 59

THE TUMBLEWEED WAGONS ..... Rod Lengel 80

DEPARTMENTS

CAMPFIRE 4

ASK ADVENTURE 6

MEN'S MART 8

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS 44

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DEATH AND THE WHITE QUEEN

by T. Calvert

EVER since 1852, when surveyed by Sir George Everest, the great Himalayan peak of Chomolungma has put its siren's call to men of all nations. Down the years, it lured fifteen men of many expeditions to their doom, until conquered finally by Tensing, a Sherpa porter, of the British Hillary Expedition, on May 29, 1953.

Of those who met death attempting to scale the White Queen, the case of George Leigh-Mallory remains outstanding as a mark of a man's intrepid perseverance and the grim irony of fate.

Mallory went out with the first British expedition in 1921, reaching 23,000 feet from Llapha Pass, a cruel and gruelling ascent, without oxygen, over snow and ice hazards that could not be thoroughly studied in advance, even through a telescope. At that time, it was the conviction of many experienced Alpinists that Chomolungma would never be vanquished by men climbing without the aid of machinery—a taboo among dyed-in-the-wool mountaineers.

In 1922 Mallory tackled the great snow peak again, reaching 26,985 feet in team with Summervell and Norton. This was again without oxygen. The team of Bruce and Finch reached 27,300 with the aid of oxygen tanks.

Much had been learned that would help future climbers, but a great deal of it was of a negative nature. It was clear that men would never get further up without the aid of oxygen, but the additional weight and cumbersome equipment cost heavily in vitality and balance.

But Mallory was still determined, and he was backed by men of equal courage. In 1924, the expedition tackled the snow peak in earnest, making three assaults during the year, so strenuous that their hard bodies were trimmed to rawhide.

Climbing up the last stage alone, Norton reached 28,306 feet. Barely a 1,000-foot gain, but still a gain. The expedition took fresh heart.

On June 8, Mallory and Irvine, a young Oxford Alpinist, started from camp at 27,000 feet. They were watched through field glasses, but what happened to cause the first ill omen remains cold Chomolungma's secret. Mallory lost his ice ax. At just what level he lost it has never been discovered.

However, the two men were apparently in good condition as observers watched them assault a steep face, and followed their ascent to 28,230 feet. At that point, a snow flurry blanketed them from view. It was the last time they were seen.

Nine years later, the Hugh Rutledge expedition of 1933 found Mallory's ice ax at 27,400—only 400 feet above the camp.

Had Mallory lost it there or from above? If from there, and the camp had seen it fall, rescue might have been possible.

Yet Mallory's death was not in vain. His findings were of vital importance to later expeditions. ■ ■

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CAMPFIRE

Lake: Big-game hunter, scout, writer.

ADVENTURE is our business, but every once in a while we gulp a little when something really extraordinary comes our way. "Boots in the Face" is just such a story, and the author, Alexander Lake, is a pretty unusual guy himself. He writes:

"Although I'm sixty, I'm known in Africa as 'the last of the old-time white hunters.' While hunting was my chief source of income, I spent a lot of time as scout with the British Army, and in running down slavers and narcotics peddlers for Portuguese and French authorities. It may surprise you to know that slave-running is still a profitable business in Africa—if you don't get caught. Woman slaves find a ready market in Saudi Arabia.

"Part of my income was derived from capturing animals for Hagenbach's circus and European zoos. At sixteen I became apprentice-hunter to Nicobar Jones—an American from Ohio, and with him hunted in Rhodesia, Angola, the Cameroons, Nigeria, Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanganyika and Neyasaland.

"These days I do considerable work as advisor to Hollywood's producers of African animal pictures but I live in the extreme northwest tip of California—as far away from Hollywood as possible. My African books are top sellers in fourteen countries."

Ludlow: Record-breaking motorcyclist.

WE'VE snatched another top man in his field for one of our Ask Adventure Experts. The one we're proudly showing off today is Fred Ludlow, our new Motorcycle Expert. Here's a man who has been earning his living with or on a motorcycle for the past forty-five years.

Fred Ludlow started riding motorcycles in 1909 as a delivery boy and three years later started racing and competing in all classes of events with motorcycles he built himself.

In 1917, Ludlow enlisted as a dispatch rider with the Signal Corps. He went to France with the Second Division, and after five major battles, ended up in Germany as first sergeant mechanic in charge of all the motorcycles in his battalion.

After two and a half years of service, Ludlow joined the famous Harley-Davidson racing team and in 1921 won both the Canadian and American dirt track national championships. The American championship was held in Syracuse and on that day Ludlow won five national championship races, breaking three world records. One of his records, the fifty-mile, still stands.

When the Harley-Davidson factory stopped racing, Fred Ludlow joined the Pasadena Police Department, later becoming a motorcycle officer. He is still employed there and has been a motorcycle officer for almost thirty-three years.

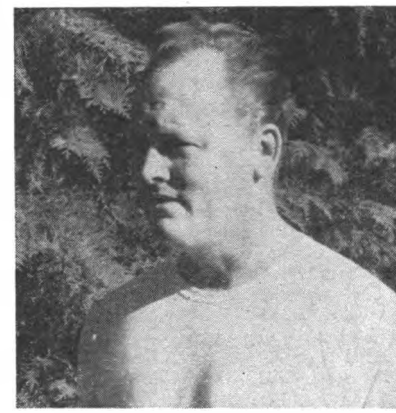
Ludlow continued to compete in races and endurance runs through the years and has been appointed to various posts in the motorcycle-racing field. He established records, made rules, and built faster motorcycles. Any questions?

FLOYD MAHANNAH tells us that his idea for "The Water Hole," on page 20, originated during a recent trip he made to Death Valley. It seems that even the Valley couldn't stand in the way of determined tourists, and civilization has finally come, but good. Mahannah was shocked and we were mildly stunned ourselves when we read his report.

"I found automobiles streaming along paved highways at sixty miles an hour and better. I found hotels, motels, and camp grounds, all full and overflowing. Scotty's Castle is a hotel now; and while there's still nothing but sand in the bottom of his swimming pool, the rest of the joint was really jumping.

"At the nearby ghost town of Rhyolite I found the town still there with the wind blowing free through empty-windowed walls, and the sun still striking down through the shattered, roofless old bank building into the rubble-filled basement vaults where once the fortunes in gold lay. Maybe you'd still call it a ghost town, but the ghosts had long since headed for the hills. Where the gun-toting miners once walked, now prowl the camera-toting tourists, clambering through the ruins, snapping their busy shutters and sifting the rubble for souvenir fragments of old whiskey bottles turned a delicate lavender shade by the action of the sun's rays over the years.

"And late that night, bedded down next to a small army at a water hole called Mesquite Springs, I lay in my sleeping bag looking at the mountains in the brilliant moonlight and listening to the wind in the mesquites—a sad sound, largely lost in the uneasy mutter of the camp and a plaintive wail from a nearby tent: 'Gee, Daddy, your feet stink!' It occurred to me that this was a very far cry from the



Mahannah: Lives adventure, writes it.

day when making a water hole could be a life-or-death gamble for a prospector who wandered too far looking for gold. And I think that was the beginning of the story.

"And while we're on the subject, it's only fair to give credit to the old-timers and the stories they tell about how they used to beat the heat, thirst, and starvation before the arrival of General Electric, General Motors, and General Foods in the desert. They were ingenious, those old guys, or they wouldn't be here to tell about it."

From what he tells us, Mahannah rates a triple A for being an Adventurer, an ADVENTURE reader, and an ADVENTURE writer.

PROVING to our readers just how expert our Ask Adventure Experts really are is something we hate to pass up. We present to you, for instance, the case of John V. Grombach, boxing and fencing expert on ADVENTURE Magazine for thirty

years and author of "The Duelling Dog of Montargis" on page 36.

A former all-round athlete at West Point and in the Regular Army, Grombach resigned his commission in 1928 after having been on a U.S. Olympic boxing team, amateur coach of a U.S. Olympic modern pentathlon team and a number of U.S. Olympic and International fencing teams; player and coach of an all-Army Corps Area football team; athletics officer of the First Division; polo player and National Match rifle and pistol shot. He also held the world's record for the United States Army bayonet course.

His business activities were interrupted by World War II when he was called back to military service as a colonel on the War Department General Staff. Released in 1946, he was and still is a general business and public-relations consultant with headquarters in New York City. As an avocation he has continued his avid interest in athletics, especially in boxing and fencing. He produced the Max Baer radio program, initiated the Gillette Cavalcade of Sports, and represented in radio and TV the Madison Square Garden, Twentieth Century Sports Club, etc. He has been a licensed manager of professional boxers in the State of New York, referee, judge, Boxing Commissioner of the Panama Canal Zone and author of articles and books on boxing.

Colonel Grombach has participated in some thirty seasons of national and international fencing matches, winning or tying for first in the National Open or Masters Tournament in 1929 and in 1950. He was runner-up in the Masters last year. He has also been a Medalist in many fencing competitions and has competed in seventeen countries in Europe and Latin America.

Colonel Grombach also was a crack pistol shot and winner of a European duelling pistol competition. ■ ■

Grombach: West Pointer, expert fencer.

ASK ADVENTURE

BILLY SOUTHWORTH'S WHEREABOUTS

I would like to know what happened to Billy Southworth, the former manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, after he left them.

RICHARD PAGE

Aurora, Ill.

Billy Southworth, former manager of both the St. Louis Cardinals and the Boston Braves, is now employed on the scouting staff of the Milwaukee Braves. He joined the scouting staff of the old Boston Braves shortly after relinquishing his Boston managerial job in 1951.

FREDERICK LIEB

LIVE ALONE—BUT LIKE IT!

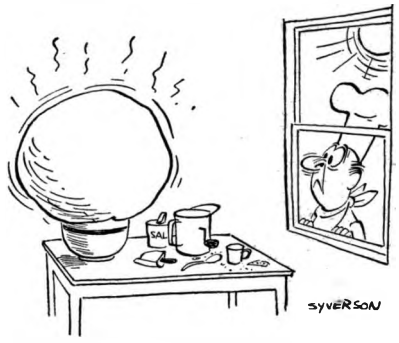
Are there any places in this country or nearby where a person might spend several months in semi-isolation and live "off the land?" I would prefer a southern climate or a mountain area during the spring through fall seasons. I would also like to "rough it" by getting all or most of my food and provide for my own shelter, keeping the cost down to a minimum.

EVERETT P. BERGERSON

Madison, S. Dakota

Before you do anything about living from nature, get a copy of *How To Survive on Land and Sea,* a naval aviation training manual available in some public libraries or from the Dept. of the Navy for about $2. It tells you exactly what you can and cannot eat, how you can live off the land, and hundreds of useful facts about surviving in every type of terrain without civilized aid.

From my own experience, which is supported by the previously mentioned book, the one best place to live from nature is a tropical beach. Nowadays, it's not too easy to find an uninhabited tropical island. Even the Grenadines in the West Indies are all inhabited or are unsuitable for some reason such as having no water. To my mind, therefore, your best bet is probably in the Ten Thousand Islands off the Southwest coast of Florida *during the winter only.* These sandy cays are paradisical during the months from October-April inclusive but during the summer they're rendered almost uninhabitable by hordes of Glades mosquitos. Down there you shouldn't have any trouble living off fruits and fish, birds and mammals, shellfish and seaweeds which can be found in abundance. The only cost here would be for a boat and for camping gear. However, I'd carry a week's provisions just in case of trouble. You'd also need fishing tackle and a gun.



Besides Florida, there are many places in Mexico where you could go native at practically no cost. There's a vast wilderness area in northern Mexico which contains the deepest canyon in the world and which is inhabited by friendly though primitive Indians. To reach it you have to call at the Pemex Office in the Chamber of Commerce Building at El Paso, Texas. They will route you in. Then, too, there are numerous little villages on the Pacific Coast of Mexico where you could stay in a boarding house with all meals for $2 a day. If you wanted to sleep in a hammock on the beach and buy fish or food, you could do it on less than $1 a day. If you caught the fish yourself and just bought bread and beans you might do it on 35c a day. To locate these villages just get a road map of Mexico and rule out anywhere within twenty-five miles of Guaymas, Mazatlan, Acapulco, and Manzanillo. Everywhere else you can live for next to nothing.

NORMAN D. FORD

HUNK OF SOURDOUGH, ANYONE?

Could you please give me any information you may have on making or starting sourdough bread?

LESTER GILLASPEY

Erhard, Minnesota

Start your sourdough by mixing four cups flour, two teaspoons salt, three tablespoons sugar with about four cups warm water, to make a thick batter. Pour into an open vessel, with ample room to expand, and set away in some warm place—in the sun, behind the stove, etc. In about forty-eight hours it will be "working" actively and smelling to high heaven. Don't let the odor bother you—it simply means that the mess is ready for use.

Stir into the batter one tablespoon of melted fat (lard, Crisco, bacon grease, etc.), one cup flour mixed with one teaspoon baking soda, then add enough extra flour to make a smooth dough. Shape into small loaves and set in a warm place to rise. In an hour or so it should double in size and be ready to bake. This takes from forty-five minutes to an hour.

If you want to keep going, hold out a cupful of "sourings" before mixing in new ingredients, and add to them the same things as at the start. With the running start it had acquired, this should be ready by the next day. The process can be continued indefinitely, and it will work about as well in cold weather as warm.

PAUL M. FINK

SHAGGY DOG STORY?

I am informed that no dog can survive on Captiva Island, Florida, on the Gulf Coast, due to the raccoons ganging up on him, forcing him into the water, holding him under, and drowning him.

As the owner of a large Airedale terrier, I look askance at this tale—yet would not like to risk my good friend at such odds if they exist.

Would you inform me if this is merely a local legend or if it is true?

FRANCIS X. HENNESSY

Riverdale, N. Y.

In all the time of my residence in Florida —some thirty-five years—I've never heard of the Captiva Island dog-raccoon thing, and I used to hunt a good deal below Captiva on the mainland. We used the dogs for deer, never hunting coons; but didn't have any trouble with coons "ganging up" on a dog. I do know, though, that a coon on a floating log will always put out a paw and push under the water the head of any dog that swims within reach. And two coons on land will usually lick the very socks off the average dog.

I'm not sure about two coons licking your Airedale, a dog with much spirit, I am sure, but I wouldn't let any prized dog of mine tackle a coon. Although the fox is supposed to be the really cunning animal, a coon beats him easily.

HAPSBURG LIEBE

USE OF CONVICTS

Could you give me any information on the use of former convicts in the Canadian Army? I am particularly interested in any special units of the Canadian Army which are made up entirely of ex-convicts. I understand there is at least one regiment—the "Princess Pat," I believe.

DAVID R. SAUNDERS

Menard, Ill.

Since the Canadian Army is a voluntary force, not too much stress is laid upon a man's past, as long as at the time of enlistment he is not being sought for some crime.

During the war, under the volunteer system of recruiting, unsullied virtue could not be used as a gauge for courage, and with the great demand for men, it follows that a substantial percentage were former convicts. They turned out to be very fine fighting men on the whole, except, of course, for the few who ran off with half the QM stores as soon as they got in.

Those already in prison at the time, and who were being considered for "ticket-of-leave" or parole, were given more favorable consideration, if upon their release they agreed to enter the Forces. Or in many instances, men found guilty of less serious crimes, were given the alternative of going into the Army instead of going to prison.

But, I should like to point out, there has never been an attempt in Canada's military history to recruit convicts or former convicts into regiments made up of men solely with these qualifications. If there are more present in one unit than in another, it is because that regiment has a fine military history and anyone will show preference toward it.

In the matter of The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, when it was first formed in 1914, the requisite for enlistment was that a man be a veteran, either of the British Army or the Canadian Contingent to South Africa, and his past other than that was left to him.

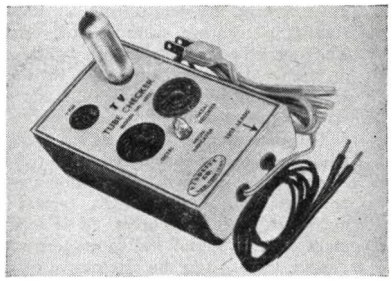
This regiment has a very fine fighting history; they were the first Canadian Battalion to engage the enemy in the 1914-18 effort, a part of the first division that went overseas in 1939, and the first Canadian unit to go into action in Korea. They are the only Canadian unit to hold the US Presidential unit citation, which they earned for their stand at Kapyong in Korea.

The last portion of this letter breaks my heart, for my Regiment is always brigaded with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and there is a constant rivalry in force.

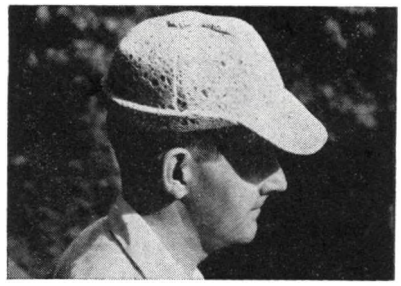
To get even, I believe I'll send your letter on to them.

L. H. CARTER

Men's Mart

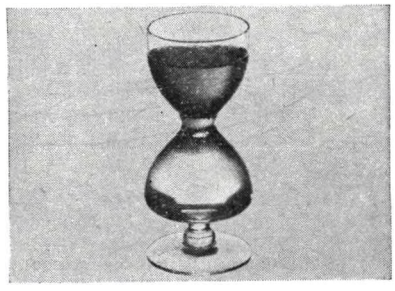


When a TV or radio repairman makes a home call to check your set, the first thing he'll do is test the tubes—and most times that'll be the trouble. With this tube checker (for picture tubes on down) you can do the same thing, save enough coin the first time to pay for the $4.95 ppd. it costs. Will also check electrical circuits. Chalbon Scientific Co., 60 East 42nd St., N.Y.

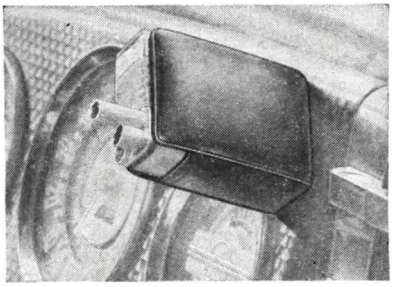


Yes, you're right. The man is wearing a sponge-rubber cap—and he's not ready for a strait jacket, either. Du Pont came up with this idea, and it works this way: wet down the hat and it will retain its coolness and moisture for hours, make it cooler and more comfortable when you go fishing on a hot day. Specify size. $1.95 ppd. Lewis & Conger, 45th St. & 6th Ave., N.Y.

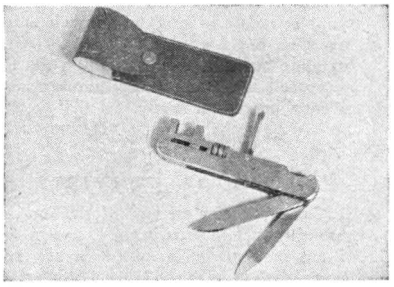
Pair of boots you're looking at are made specially for anybody who spends a good part of the day on his feet. They have cushion foot construction with built-in arch support, special neo-cord non-slip heels and soles. Made of top quality reverse cowhide, they're scuff-proof, don't need polishing. Tan, sizes 7-12, A to E. $14.75 ppd. Thompson, 5095 S. W. Barnes, Portland, Ore.



This little gizmo takes the prize for being the most ridiculous thing we've seen in a long while. It's a combination whiskey and chaser goblet, no less, that keeps chaser at bottom from mixing with hooch in top part. Capillary action, the manufacturer says, causes this remarkable thing. $1 each; 6 for $5; 12 for $9 ppd. Gibson & Chase, 315 Fifth, New York.



Why bother fumbling around for a cigarette while you're driving when this case will hold your favorite butts within easy reach on your dash? Magnet in bottom does the trick. Case is made in Germany of top-grade calfskin, comes in two sizes—for regular or king size cigarettes. Specify your choice. $1.95 ppd. from Hoffritz, 49 East 34th St., New York, N.Y.



These wrench-knife tools have been around before, but the price of this one makes it a good buy. Wrench head opens to $\frac{5}{8}$", unit is $4\frac{1}{2}$" long. Includes regular and split-head type screwdrivers and a file in addition to knife. All are chrome-plated steel. Comes with leather case for $5 ppd. from Colen Cutlery, 209 West 7th St., Wilmington 1, Del.

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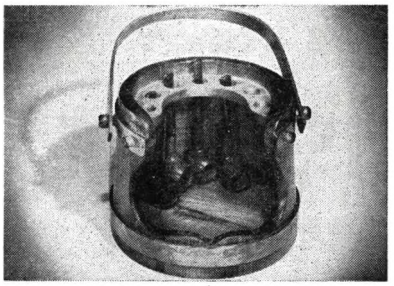
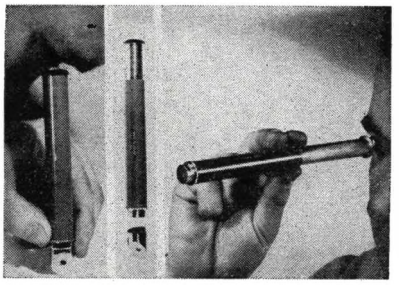
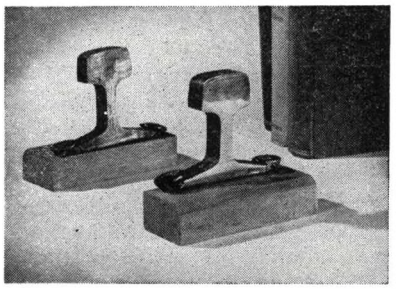


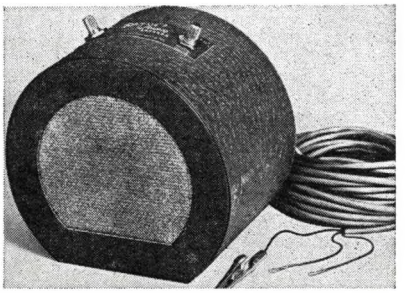
If you smoke a pipe, here's an unusual rack for your collection that Korey's, Box 52, Jackson Heights, New York, N.Y., will send your way for $5.95 ppd. A copy of the sturdy Vermont pine maple sugar buckets, it's been cut down to hold seven of your favorite briars, and a half-pound humidor. The bucket has an antique brown hand-rubbed finish.



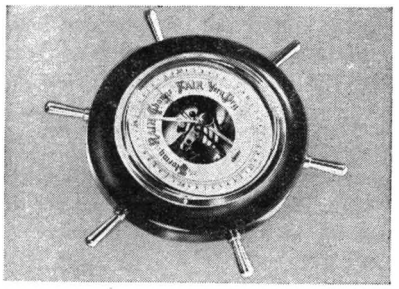
No bigger than a fountain pen, but plenty powerful is this new precision-made pocket microscope-telescope. Handy for sports, looking at rare objects, just plain snooping. Telescope magnifies 10-power with a wide, brilliant field. Microscope is 50-power. Focus sharp at any range; a real optical instrument, not a toy. $4.95 ppd. Prince Enterprises, 103 Park Ave., N.Y.



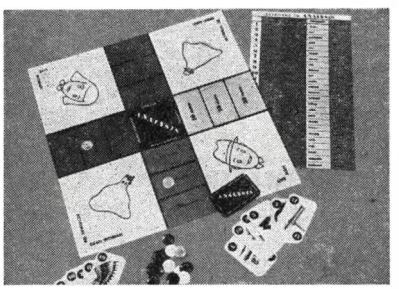
For railroad fans—a unique set of bookends made from 2 slices of narrow-gauge rail from the old Colorado South Park Railroad. Nicely mounted on finished oak blocks (which resemble ties), outside of rails are highly polished. The original spikes are welded on to the rail, then the unit is mounted. A mighty nice bit of nostalgia. $3.95 ppd. KZ Ranch, Pine, Colo.



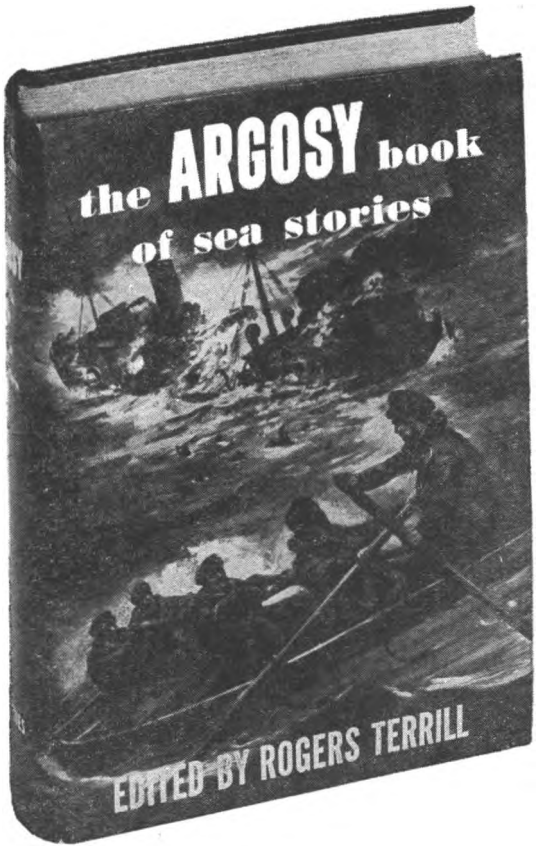
New "Private Sound" remote speaker is a handy unit for any TV, radio or phonograph fan to have. Beauty of this speaker is that it has dual volume controls—one for speaker at set, another for it. Has a 25-ft. cord and can be used by your chair, bed, in the workshop, etc. Gives a stereophonic effect; easy to hook up. $9.95 ppd. from Zephyr Prod., 419 Oak, Kansas City, Mo.



A good buy in a barometer for your desk or den, this precision-made German import is shaped like a ship's wheel, has outside recording dial, open face that shows sensitive movement. Measures 8" across, has chrome spokes and bezel, mahogany-finished case with back stand and wall hole. $8.95 ppd. from Johnathan Pike, Y.D. Highway, Peabody 12, Mass.



One of the better new quiz games, this one is called Analysis, and it works thusly: One player has 25 cards, with 'em has to outline a personality by placing cards on different categories on the board. The longer it takes the other people playing (any number) to guess who it is, the more points the player earns. $2.95 ppd. Stuart Hoover Co., Rowayton, Conn.



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BOOTS IN THE FACE

A land of trackless murder . . . a man whose business was death . . . a day when strange vengeance trails met and crossed

WHEN Piet Cronje, leader of a small band of half-caste Rheoboth Bastaards, killed Ishak Sanhaj one hot Southwest African afternoon, he thought he'd committed another of his perfect murders, for he'd seen the flesh of the corpse devoured by vultures, and had heard powerful-jawed hyenas crunch and swallow the bones.

Africa is a land of perfect murders, for almost always the *corpus delicti* is either left for land scavengers to consume, or tossed to crocodiles which, like hyenas, are bone-eaters.

Cronje and his gang—three other Dutch-speaking half-breeds, Stoeffel Jorrisen, Klaas Marais, and Hans Kotze—had always been careful to dispose of their victims by one means or the other. Heretofore, they'd killed only lone Ovampos, robbing them of as little as one shilling. But Sanhaj had been a wealthy French Somali, who'd been gathering seeds of the desert grasses in the Kalahari with the hope that he could improve pasturage conditions in the wastes of his own country. I'd known him well, and had liked him.

I'd been resting up between hunts, at Gobabis, not far from the Bechuanaland border, and had let my two Bushmen trackers—brothers, Gwy and Twak—go for a visit to their Kalahari homes. On their way back, they'd run across the spoor of several men, one of whose tracks indicated illness or injury. Curious, they'd followed the spoor to the Bastaard camp where, from behind nearby bushes, they'd seen Cronje step behind Sanhaj, whose arms were bound to his sides, and brain him with a club.

Hot-headed Twak, to whom Sanhaj had once been

by NICOBAR JAMES as told to **ALEXANDER LAKE**

"Water, Bass!" He pointed to a flight of grouse flashing from nowhere toward a cluster of acacia trees.

kind, had rushed in among the Bastaards, slashing with his knife. He'd been quickly subdued and tied hand and foot. Gwy had taken to his heels, hidden until after dark, then returned to watch for an opportunity to rescue his brother. While lying on his belly beneath a thorn bush, Gwy had heard hyenas making merry over Sanhaj's body. By a series of night-bird calls, he informed Twak that he was near.

Evidently thinking that Gwy had somehow got word to me, Twak had screeched to the gang of Bastaards, "I am Nicobar Jones's boy. Jones is coming to jump down your throats and gallop your guts out!"

That did it.

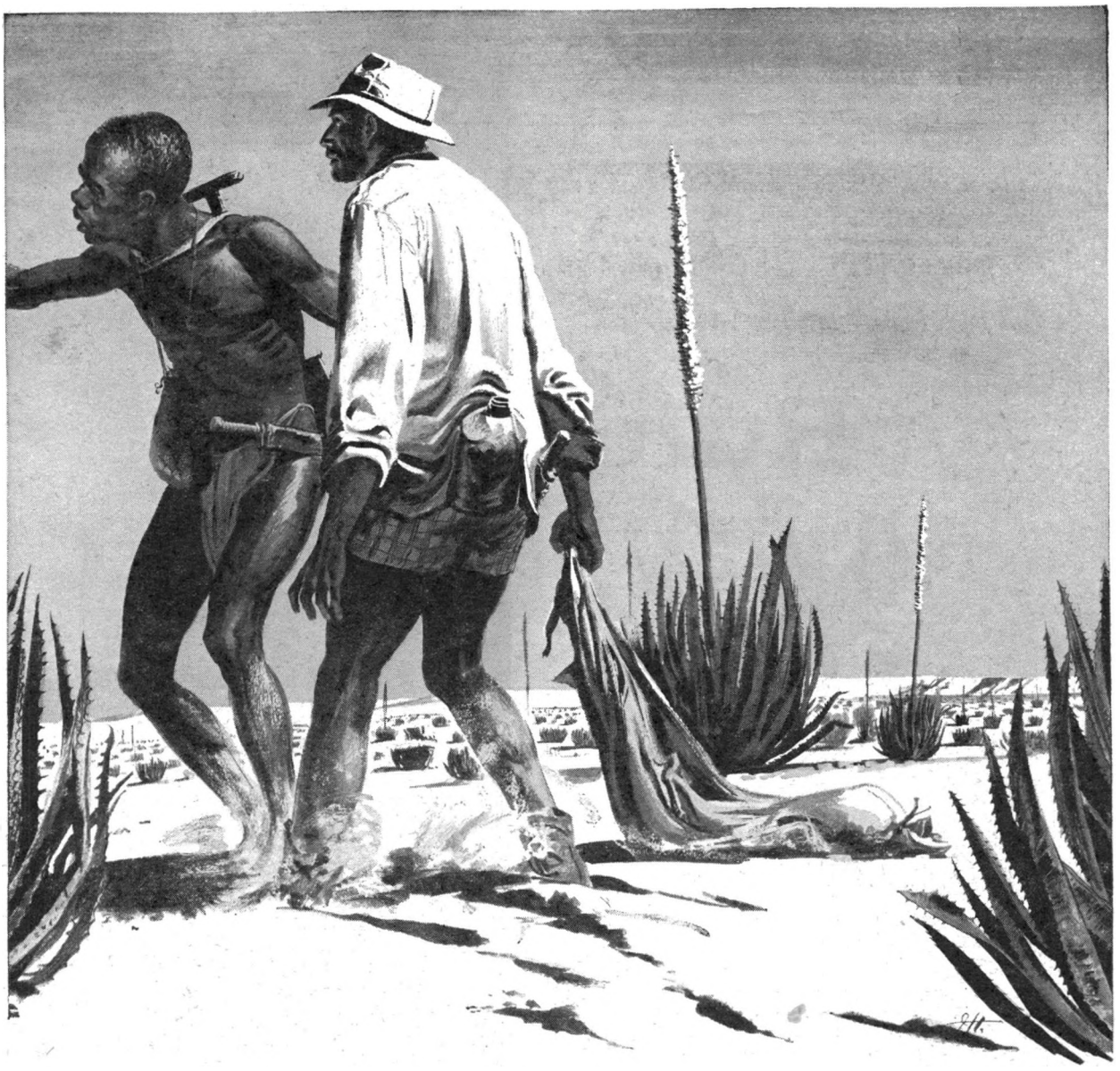
Cronje and his pals knew I'd do that—or something like that—so in panic, they broke camp and took off into the Kalahari Desert, leading Twak by a leather thong.

At sundown next day, Gwy showed up at Gobabis and gave me the bad news.

Bad news it was. The desert was the driest it had been in twelve years. Brackish pools in dry river beds had evaporated. In dry years like that one, only Bushmen could locate water—that's why Cronje had taken Twak along. They'd use him to find water until they'd done the 250 miles to Lake Ngami, then they'd kill him because he'd witnessed Sanhaj's murder.

Gwy and I would have about ten days in which to rescue him—and I'd rather have spent three months toasting in Hades than to make a dry-year Kalahari safari.

Twelve years before, I'd set out to find the ill-fated Soares party, long overdue at Chukudu Kraal. I found all of them dead, including their Kaffirs—tongues swollen, nostrils and lips split from dryness, carrion mauled. Water



ILLUSTRATED BY JACK HEARNE

in the Kalahari usually lies atop a thin, brittle layer of packed sand about six feet down. These people had dug a hole with their hands, and water had begun seeping onto the brittle layer—but too slowly for thirst-cursed humans. Hoping to get a faster flow, they'd broken through the water-holding crust, and the water had drained off into the sands below. I'd have died, myself, on that trip except that I met a Bushman woman who carried an ostrich egg filled with water. She gave it to me, then frightened at the croaking thanks from my burning throat, ran like hell.

I now shrank from undertaking another such thirst-tormented trip, but there was nothing else to do. Sanhaj had been my friend, and Twak, the little slant-eyed rascal, was as loyal as a dog to me.

As usual when I took off on a mission from which I might not return, I wrote a short note to the authorities concerning my plans. Then I dug up two army canteens, filled one with water, the other with tea. I wrapped a handful of salt in a bit of waterproof cloth, and shoved it in my tobacco pouch. I loaded my rifle, dropped twenty cartridges into my pockets, hung a chunk of *biltong* around Gwy's neck with a string, and fastened a short-handled shovel to his belt. "We go to Lake Ngami, Gwy," I told him.

Gwy grinned like a gargoyle, said a brief prayer to the moon, and shuffled westward toward the dry course of the Kung River. As I plodded behind, I wondered why Fate so frequently seemed to pick me for ominous adventures.

The Kalahari soil is almost pure red or white sand. During even the dryest years *(Continued on page 45)*

Once to every man it may come, one last taut fistful of seconds when he can be a hero—and very dead—or

Run Away From Murder

by JIM SCHROEDER

JOE SODALIS awakened when enough sunlight pressed past the drawn blinds of his bedroom. He sat up, recalling from the night before an official assurance from the police department that he was entitled to be scared. He was a young American of Greek descent —tall, stringy and very strong, who resembled Abraham Lincoln, at least in the imagination of one remarkable girl. "Abraham Lincoln-onis," she liked to call him, "the self-made pride of the Greeks," because she was Irish, he supposed, or crazy. Yet the way Joe loved her, Irish or not, was like a roller-coaster ride that never slowed down.

In the kitchen, he started the coffee, never seeing the man on the fire escape. He walked lazily back to the living room and sat down, the fuzz of the sofa feeling funny on his naked arms. He couldn't smell the coffee yet, so he just sat there. He had very pale skin and a vicious beard that could *(Continued on page 63)*

ILLUSTRATED BY BILL GRAVELINE

Mary went through the open space as Joe moved to block the gunman's rush toward her.


BILL
BRAVELINE

FIRST BATTLE PHOTOS EVER TAKEN

Down this sunken road the Light Brigade charged to certain death. Note cannon balls.

The Valley of Death

Balaclava . . . the Alma River . . . the charge of the Light Brigade . . . lots of people, particularly the English, would like to forget the Crimean War. But they can't, because Roger Fenton got what you see here—the first, on-the-spot war pictures ever taken by man!

by ROBERT BRIDGEPORT WITH PHOTOS FROM CAMERA CLIX

THE pictures you see on these pages, strange looking and lost deep in some other time, as if they were taken on another planet, are among the most extraordinary and important photographs in the history of the camera.

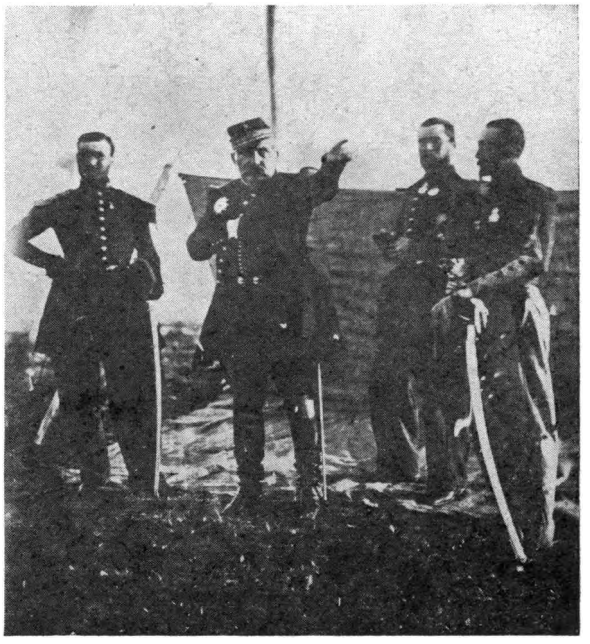
They were taken by a young British lawyer named Roger Fenton, exactly one hundred years ago on the barren and well-blooded hills of Russia's Crimean peninsula. Lost for nearly a century and only recently uncovered by the photo-historian, Tim Giddl, some of these plates are presented here for the first time.

They are important because these are the first, on-the-spot photographs of war ever taken by man. They are also important because they were taken at a time when the concept of the camera was to pose great men and noble ladies in flowing Grecian robes. Roger Fenton

A British mortar battery stands by, awaiting orders to fire. Lookout watches exploding shell in background.

Enemy fortifications guarding Redan, 1855. The British had stormed these walls but were quickly driven back.

Fenton's van, hit by a cannon ball during the siege.



General Bosquet: "This is splendid, but it is not war!"

Troops of the 8th Hussars answer mess call. One of Roger Fenton's finest Crimean battle photographs.

went straight to harsh and brutal life for his inspiration.

They are extraordinary because they are the last pictures of a kind of world that died forever a few years later and, even more important, they are a flash back into a world that existed a century before the camera was invented.

These are not just pictures of the men who fought in the Crimea. These are also pictures of the kind of men and kind of armies that fought at Waterloo forty years before, and, before that, right here in the forests of America. Nothing had changed in the British Army in over a hundred years. The uniforms and the equipment you see here are almost exactly the same as that seen by our ancestors at Lexington and Saratoga, Valley Forge and Yorktown.

Never again was a photographer to get such an amazing chance to capture a part of history, he himself had never seen. Because the Crimean War was an end to a phase in history. Out of the brutal lessons learned so bitterly there, the old idea of an army died and the modern concept of an army was born. The old now lives only in Roger Fenton's pictures.

The story of the fighting in the Crimea is a fantastic, terrible and frightening one. From the day of its inception, the Crimean campaign was fated to go down in history as one of the most heroically fought and stupidly planned campaigns that man has ever undertaken. Although the complete story is complex, the big one, before narrowing down to the fighting, can be told simply.

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, Russia, just as she is today, was a restless, hungry giant eager to devour more land. Under Czar Nicholas I, she set her sights on Turkey's port of Constantinople (Istanbul, today), a strategically located city which controls the passage from the Black Sea (in which Russia's fleet was bottled up) out into the free waters of the Mediterranean.

This was too much for the French and British who feared that someday the Russians might try to cut off their trade routes to the East. They liked the idea of the Russian fleet sailing harmlessly around in the Black Sea. In answer they hastily formed an alliance and sent out a big force of engineers to fortify the small port of Gallipoli, a place south of Constantinople but from which they could still stop the Russian navy if Constantinople fell. With a great fury, and a cost of millions of dollars, they set up their battlements, brought in *(Continued on page 60)*

British ships at Balaklava. Cholera and dysentery killed more thousands of men here than enemy bullets.

The Water

"I reckon you're the law, mister. So

Hole

by FLOYD MAHANNAH

this is it. You're not riding out alive!"

THE nearer we came to the spring the uneasier the buckskin mare got, until finally I reined in and sat there, trying to figure what was spooking her.

It looked empty—a desert canyon bare as a bone except for the clump of mesquite and a patch of salt grass below a spring that flowed from the foot of the canyon wall. I turned in the saddle, and behind me was only my pack mule and the desert, empty to the horizon where the sun had already set. But I still didn't like it. It had been a long day of blazing heat, and the mare was too tired to spook just for the fun of it. Maybe she'd only scented a coyote, but that didn't satisfy me, either.

You see, I had nearly seventy-five pounds of gold packed on the mule, and the weeks of living with it had wound my nerves tight.

Finally I rode on in to the spring—and now I could see something that had been hidden by the mesquite. It was a mound of newly turned sand, maybe six feet by three, with a cross made of two sticks tied together at one end of it. A grave. As I looked at it, the jumpy feeling in me got worse by the second. I swept the canyon with my eyes, and the shadows gathering in it might be hiding a lot of things. The mare was moving nervously, and by now this wrong feeling was so strong in me that if I'd had enough water to make the next hole, I'd have wheeled the mare and ridden out of there fast.

Then the corner of my eye caught a flicker of movement in the mesquite. I pulled my gun.

"Come out of there!"

Nothing moved. There was no sound in the canyon but the uneasy snort of my mare.

"Come on out—or I'll start shooting!"

And still nothing moved—for about five seconds. Then, slowly, a figure stepped into the open, and it took me another five seconds to believe what I was seeing. A woman.

Listen, I was way to hell and gone out in the desert; it was late July with the temperature hitting upward of a hundred and twenty daytimes. No prospector in his right mind would be out here. Even the Indians had long since headed for higher country. Me, I had a special reason for risking it, but to run onto a woman—well, it was almost too much to believe.

"Who you hiding from?"

"I wasn't hiding." Her voice was tight and breathless. "And stop pointing that gun at me."

"Who else is hiding in there?"

"Nobody."

She was young, with a lot of red hair, and she wore shirt, pants, and boots like a man, but you didn't have to look twice to see there was the shapely figure of a woman under them. After the length of time I'd been alone on the desert the sight of any woman, pretty or not, would *(Continued on page 50)*

ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY BARTON

Something exploded in my brain, and the next thing I knew I had her pinned to the ground.

I Lived With the World's Fiercest Bandits

The writer tried every trick he knew to get close to Sicilian bandits. But even now he doesn't know whether luck or fate finally got him away from them alive

by D. GORDON MAC KAY

WIDE WORLD

A woman . . . a gun . . . a raid in which men will die . . .

I SPENT several harrowing days and nights with the world's fiercest bandits.

I shared their dangers, and had the authorities caught them, I would have been executed, too. But my situation was even riskier than that of my companions, for they mistrusted me, and were afraid I might give them away. And so they repeatedly threatened to kill me.

I spent one entire night with a knife at my throat while I was questioned by a gang of hard-bitten men—and an incredible woman. One false reply, one suspicious move, and I would have been dead.

Then, only a few days later, I accompanied my villainous hosts on a carefully planned, brilliantly executed raid. I thought for sure that I'd never live through it. Bullets whistled past me, and a man less than arm's reach from me was mortally wounded. But luck was with me, and I somehow escaped with my life—and with what is to me one of the most incredible true stories of our day.

During the two years I had been living in Naples and Rome, I had read occasional accounts in the Italian newspapers of the activities of bandit gangs who infested the Sicilian interior. As every press correspondent knows, Sicily is the headquarters stronghold of the Mafia, the famous secret group that has for many years been so powerful in various parts of Italy.

The story of the Mafia has no place here, except that I must make two things clear. The bandit groups that are such a menace in the Sicilian mountains are not a part of the Mafia. Of that I am convinced. On the other hand, I believe the Mafia tolerates them and permits them to exist.

I finally determined to go to Sicily in hopes of getting an interview with one of these bandits. One in particular interested me. Every now and then I read a small

newspaper account of a robbery staged by a gang headed by a woman. La Bella Morte, the newspaper called her—"The Beautiful Death." I wasn't certain that any such person existed, but I thought I'd use my vacation trying to find out.

Let's take what happened one step at a time. I flew from Rome to Palermo in a spacious modern air liner, and my hotel room in the Sicilian capital was comfortable, even luxurious. Then, after making careful inquiries for several days, I stepped, or rather I rode into another world, a rugged world. After traveling by rented car to the village of Riazi, where the roads end rather abruptly, I went on to the even smaller hamlet of Frenia by muleback. And let me just say here that, although there are few regions on earth more picturesque than the hilly Sicilian countryside, I don't recommend transport across dusty trails by recalcitrant mule.

There are no hotels in Frenia, but I had been told that a certain family, who must remain nameless here, occasionally took in boarders. I had also been told that the brother of the lady of the household was a member of La Bella Morte's band, and that through her I might be able to establish contact with the people I was seeking.

The good *signora* contrived to look blank when I explained my mission, and flatly denied ever having heard of the Bella Morte gang, much less being related to someone in it. I had no better luck with anyone else in the community. I think I must have spoken to at least half of the approximately 120 residents of the village, but none of them could tell me anything. After three days of intensive inquiries, I came to the conclusion that there is nothing as eloquently expressive as the shrug of a pair of Sicilian shoulders.

I reluctantly decided that I had been chasing a phantom, and made up my mind to head back to Palermo in the morning. I was annoyed with myself, and it was rather late when I finally went to bed.

It could have been only an hour later that I was awakened. Someone was shaking me, and I sat up to find three men armed with carbines standing in my room. There was no moon, and no lights were on in the room. I couldn't make out the men's faces, and for a moment or two thought I was dreaming. Then one of them spoke to me, and I knew it was no dream.

INP

Similar to those described by Mr. MacKay are these hardy Corsican guerrillas, photographed firing at an unseen enemy.

WIDE WORLD

In the man hunt for Salvatore Giuliano, notorious bandit, the Italian police blow up a cave where the outlaw lived.

"Get up!" he said to me in Italian. "Get up and get dressed. And make no sound or we'll kill you here and now."

I did as I was told. They shoved me through the door and down the stairs. The house was silent, and the entire village, when we reached the road outside, seemed deserted. Four horses were waiting, and my silent captors tied my hands behind me, blindfolded me and someone helped me to mount. We rode for what seemed like hours, climbing constantly. Although I could see nothing through my blindfold, I could still tell daylight from darkness, and finally was aware of the breaking of dawn.

After an interminable ride, we drew to a halt and my blindfold was removed. I looked around with as much curiosity as fear before I was hauled to the ground. I was surprised to see half a dozen large tents. Two of them reminded me of the fancy canvas structures that German staff officers had used in the field during World War II. And the largest was reminiscent of the United States Army's supply tents. I was later to learn *(Continued on page 76)*

AN ADVENTURE CLASSIC

THE GOLDEN EMBLEM

She steered ill. She waddled like a washerwoman. She was a ship of disaster and death. But she had a fine name and a crew who called her a lady, worth fighting for against any hazard

SHE was bluff in the bow. She was square-sterned. She was flat-bottomed. Her sides were like walls. She steered ill. She rolled drunkenly. She waddled like an old washerwoman who has borne very many children. There was no grace in her. Having completed her, her builder fuddled his brain with rum. He named her while in his cups.

"I don't like her name," said the merchant who bought her for a song after she had sailed the seas for many years. "I'll change it.

"No, I'll leave it stand," said the merchant, staring at the faded lettering. "To change a ship's name brings her bad luck, they say." The captain of a clipper, passing, overheard him.

"Leave her name stand," said the clipper captain. "It's a fine name and it's all that looks well about the old hooker."

The merchant let it stand.

by BILL ADAMS

ILLUSTRATED BY ANTON OTTO FISCHER

Masts splintered and crashed down as they hit the overhanging ice cliff.

For forty-five years ADVENTURE has been publishing stories.
From time to time, certain fiction pieces have won particular praise from readers and critics.
"The Golden Emblem," first published in 1935, has always ranked high among these.
It's a story about a killer ship and a crew who loved her not wisely but too well.
We hope you like it.

She carried a captain, two mates, a carpenter, a steward, cook, and a dozen able seamen—simple men with furrowed sea-tanned faces and windy eyes. Some were old, some young. Some bearded, some smooth-faced.

She left the Chincha islands on a blazing day, overloaded because of the greed of her owner; her holds filled with guano—with the dry droppings of ten hundred million seafowl. Her decks were deep in guano dust. Her masts, spars, rigging, rails were heavily coated with it. The faces of her people, their hands, their clothing, were thick with the dry dust.

Trying to break her anchor from the sea bottom, her seamen grunted.

"It's stuck in bird dung," said one.

"She's a stinkin' ship," said another.

"Wi' a stinkin' crew," said a third.

Everyone laughed.

"Heave! Heave, and get that anchor in!" said the mate.

"I sailed in a ship as carried spices once," said one of the crew.

"I sailed in the tea clippers," said another.

"Quit talking. Save your breath. Heave and break that anchor away!" said the mate. "Sing! Sing a chantey, someone!"

"Ow's a man to sing wi' his throat full of guano, sir?" asked a sailor, and again everyone laughed.

Clank, clank, clank, went the windlass pawls, the windlass revolving slowly as they heaved. The anchor lifted clear of the sea bottom.

"Run her up now, sons!" the mate said. "Let's get her away!"

They ran, trotting slowly round and round the windlass.

"Who gives this here ship her name, sir?" asked a sailor.

"Wot's a emblem, sir?" asked another.

"A golden emblem! Aye—wot's that, sir?" asked still another.

"Never mind what her name means. Let's get her started home," said the mate.

"Where's she bound for, sir?" asked one.

"Falmouth," said the mate.

"Wait till we gets to Falmouth. There's good beer in Falmouth," said one.

"We ain't there yet," said another.

"Haw, haw, haw!" wheezed an old fellow, laughing with a throaty cackle.

"Run! Run her up, son!" said the mate. They ran, faster, their feet kicking up dust. *Clank, clank, clank,* went the windlass pawls.

"Loose the topsails! A man to the wheel!" ordered the mate when the anchor was up.

"Homeward bound in the *Golden Emblem,*" shouted a young fellow, leaping into the rigging to go up and loose a topsail. "Cripey, but she's a dirty old tub," he said to himself, his hands and feet scattering thick dust from the rigging.

"Look at the dust fall from that there topsail!" said a man on deck.

"There's bird dung down my neck," said another.

"Go below for breakfast," said the mate when the topsails were set, the old bark just moving in the faint hot air.

They sat in the dusty fo'c's'le, munching hardtack, drinking bitter coffee from a dirty, dented old tin pot.

"It's most blasted hot," said one.

"It's always blasted hot at them there Chinchas," said another. "We have been here nigh seven weeks a-loadin' of her. Y'ought to be used to it."

"My cawfee tastes o' guano," said one.

"So does the hardtack," said another.

"It's an old story, ain't it? Wot ye kickin' about?" asked a third.

"Who's kickin'? D'you like the taste of guano?" asked the other.

"Lots o' good beer i' Falmouth, boys."

"We ain't there yet," said another.

"Haw, haw, haw! Not by a sight we ain't," laughed an old fellow.

Breakfast done, they lit their pipes. A young fellow spat.

"Coffee, hardtack, baccy—all tastes alike," said he.

"Turn to! Loose all sail and let's get her away!" cried the mate at the fo'c's'le door.

"If a man could raise a sweat, 'e'd not feel so 'ot," said one.

"We're all dried out," said another. "Seven weeks at the Chinchas loadin' guano!"

"What are you men kicking about all the time?" asked the mate.

"We ain't kickin', sir. We was just sayin' as we're tired o' bird dung," said one.

"We'll wash her down as soon as sail's on her," said the mate.

"It'd take old Noah's flood to wash her clean, sir," said one.

"Wait till we gets to the Horn! That'll wash her," said another.

"I wisht as we was there," said a young fellow with a smooth face.

"You wait till we gets there! Haw, haw, haw!" laughed an old fellow.

"Quit talking. Never mind the Horn!" said the mate.

"The mate says to never mind the Horn, boys," laughed one.

"There'll be wind enough there wi'out ours, I'll wager," said one of the men. *(Continued on page 72)*

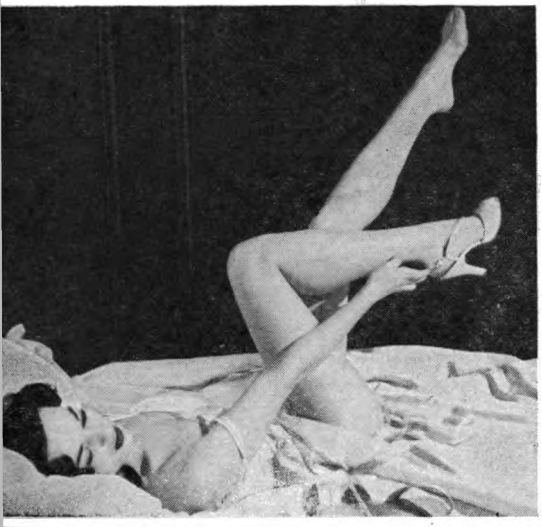
Here June models for June, and it would be difficult to find more pleasant work.

HER BEST MODEL

JUNE RANDY is a most unusual young lady. She happens to be a models' artist. That is, an artists' model. What we mean is, ardels' modest. Well, you won't blame us too much for being confused when we tell you more about June. She is, as you can plainly see, a stunning model, and poses for many top-notch illustrators and photographers. But she happens to be an artist herself, and a good one, too. June is singularly fortunate in that, a long time ago, someone invented the mirror. Her *modus operandi* is relatively simple. First she sets up the mirror, then she sets up June in any attractive pose she might require. From there on she paints her own reflection, and in her case this can be nothing but fine fun. One virtue of this method of

This is a fine way to start the day. Get up.

This seems an awkward way of putting on a shoe, but we're not arguing.



working is that the artist is seldom distracted by the beauty of the model. The model, too, is seldom bothered by the artist. Another feature is the lack of expense. Who pays mirrors? This is a very happy arrangement, but the closest we can come to it is shaving, and every morning reminds us that we look not at all like June. Or even July.

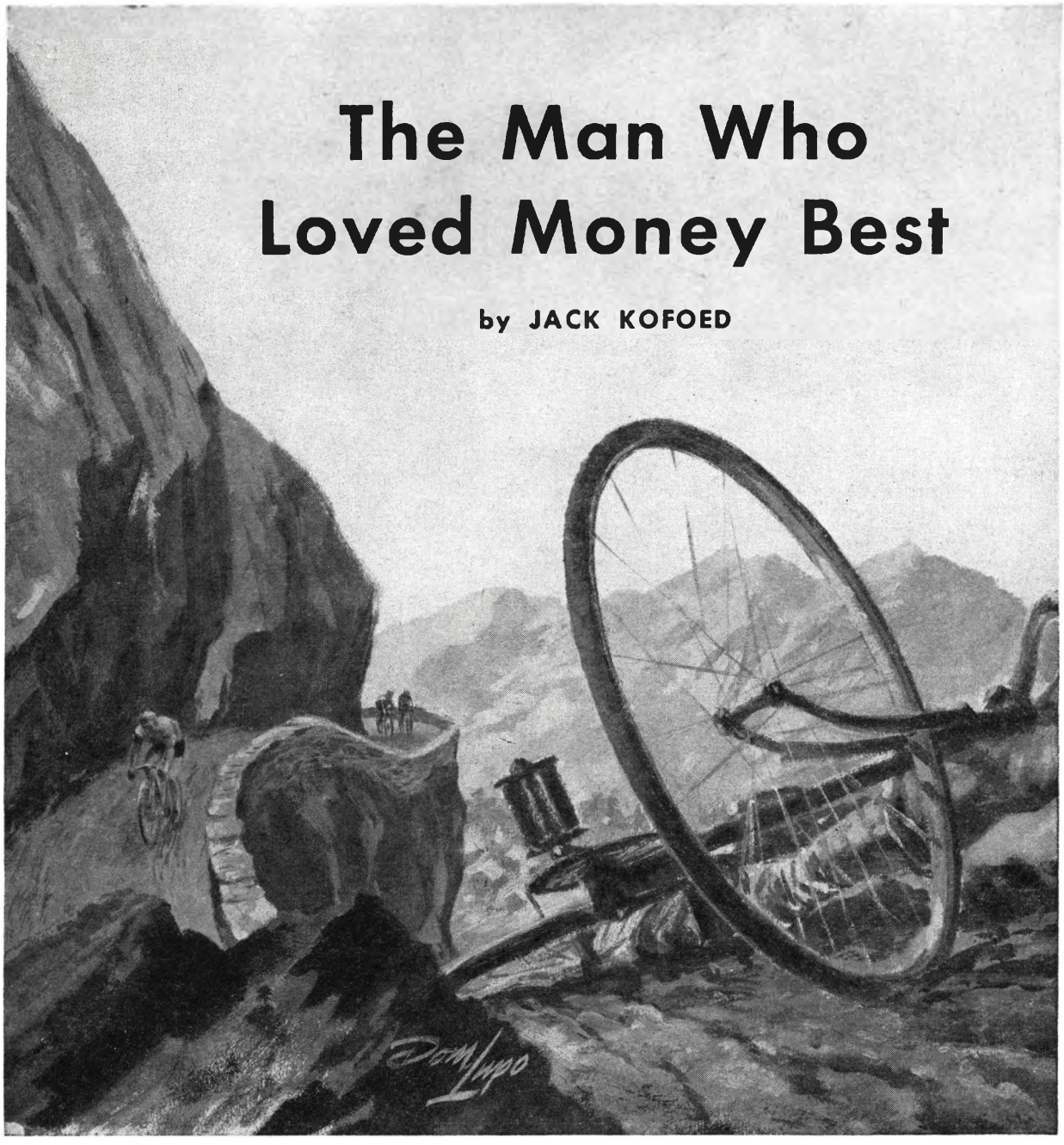
Miss Randy takes her lessons by correspondence from Art Instruction, Incorporated of Minneapolis, is twenty-two years old, and comes in the Adventure standard beauty package, size 35 by 24 by 35. For further details, just look around. ■ ■

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS GRUNDY OF CAMERA CLIX

This girl even looks good dressed in white tile.

The Man Who Loved Money Best

by JACK KOFOED



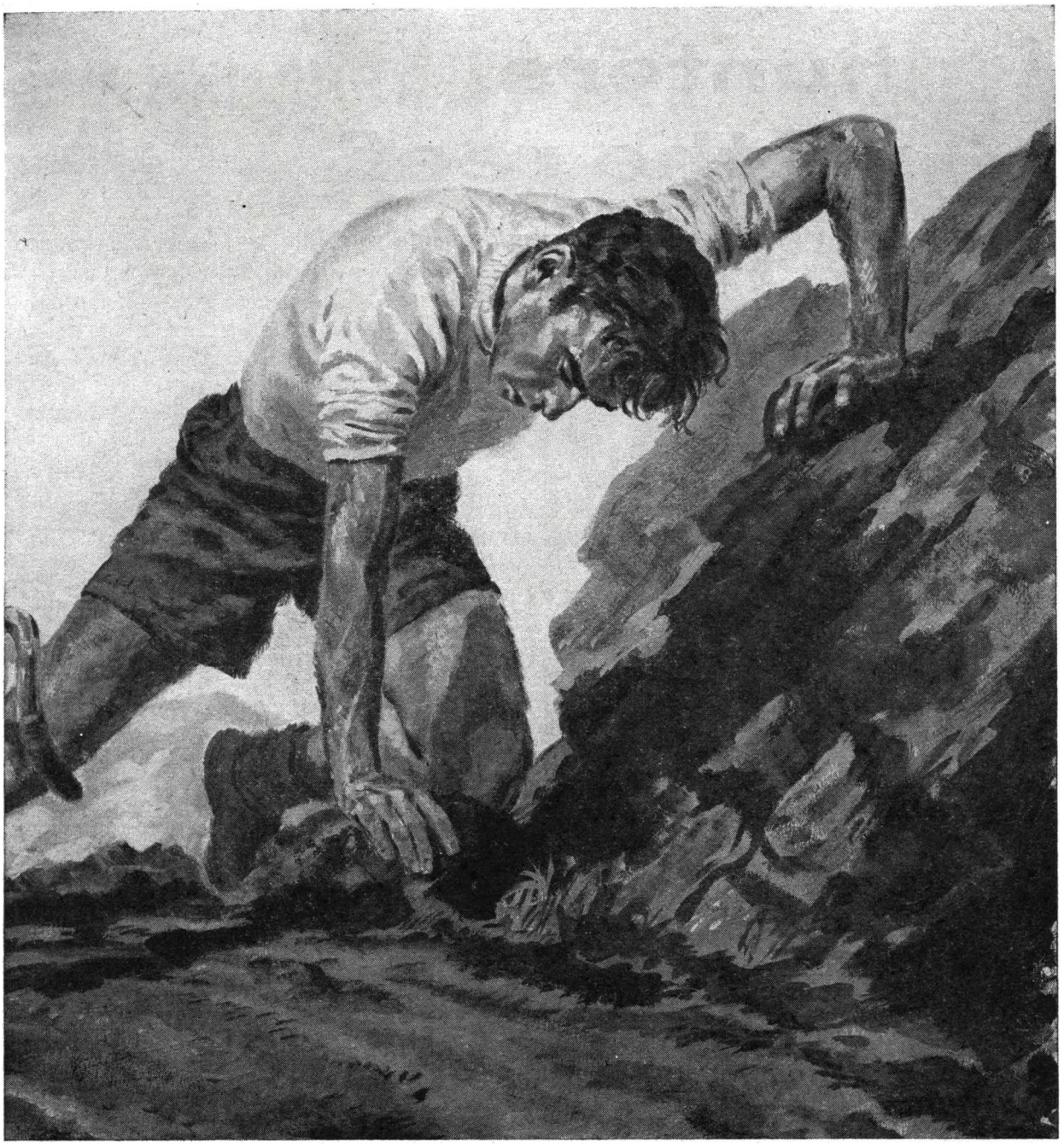
As he came closer to the edge of physical prostration, young Bottechia fell more frequently.

Impossible, yet true, is this story of the gaunt scarecrow

THE villagers of Frioul boast of two distinctions that set them apart from the rest of Italy. They have a dialect unknown elsewhere in the nation . . . and they have Ottavio Bottechia.

Ottavio was a stone-mason, a moody uncommunicative man, who worked hard at his trade and kept to himself. When he laid aside his tools in the evening, he never drank wine, nor sang or played *bocchi* with his fellow townsmen. This was because even these simple pleasures cost a few lire, and Bottechia loved money—and nothing but money.

The mason was tall and thin as an old hag who has been worn to the bones by time. His eyes were gimlets, his nose a pickaxe. He had no other ambition than to accumulate a fortune. His singleness of purpose, his frugality, seemed wasted, for, scrimp though he might, his hoard



ILLUSTRATED BY DOM LUPO

who swore to win the world's most dangerous prize

grew slowly. He wracked his brain for an idea that might bring him a large lump sum, but his country wits came upon nothing feasible.

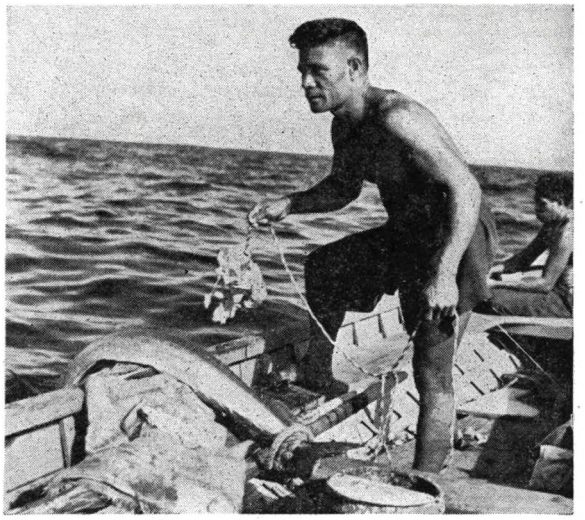
Some years ago, as he huddled one night by a lamp reading a week-old newspaper, he came across a story about the Tour de France. Cycling has long been a great sport in Europe, and the Tour is its *Iliad*. Each July for decades the best professionals have set out from Paris, pedaled round the borders of France, and back into the capital, in the world's longest road race. It is a wearing test, not only of speed, but of endurance, and the winner is acclaimed an athletic idol.

Squinting in the poor light, Bottechia discounted the newspaper headlines and applause, but was staggered by the fact that the winner would receive a prize of 60,000 francs—then worth close to ten *(Continued on page 68)*

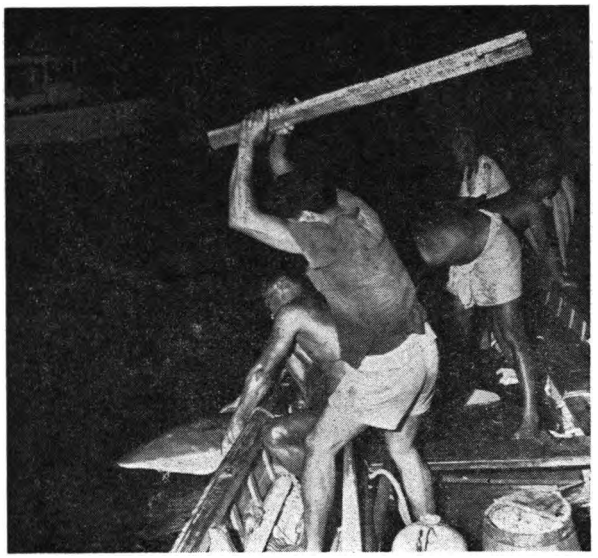
hunters of the reef

It's a lot of sport, lassoing a shark—while you still have all your fingers and arms!

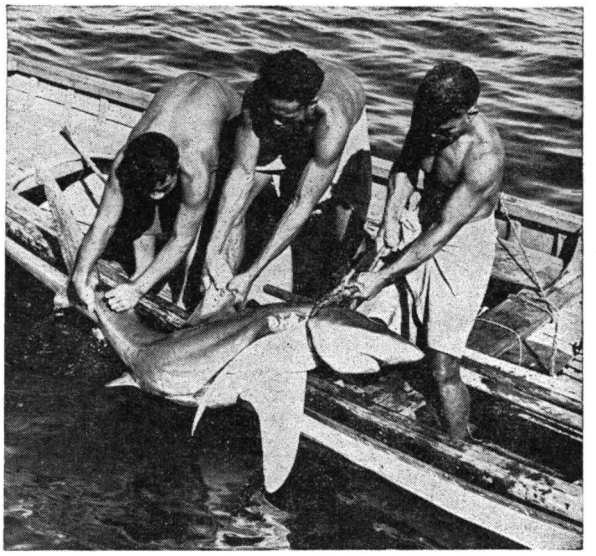
Tua's assistant points to the reef that hides their prey.



It was time to cast the lure for a man-eater's doom.



A shark is trapped and Tua slips a noose over his head.

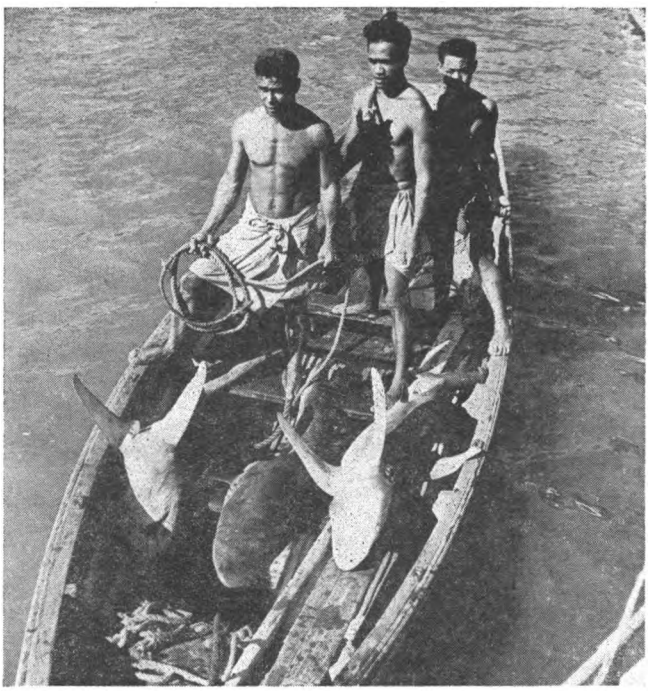


Just within the reef, they manage to snare another shark.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DON ORNITZ OF GLOBE

There is a tense struggle as the victim fights to escape. Here a false, careless move may mean serious injury.

THOSE ingenious South Sea Islanders, the Samoans, have a unique method of catching sharks that demands both skill and daring. Their longboat filled with rotten meat, they head for the open waters outside the barrier reef, dropping chunks of the meat overboard as they row. Meantime, fishing with a conventional line, they hook a number of members of the tuna family and tie them to the sides of the boat. Then they tie a chunk of pork to a float and tow it behind the boat. The rotten meat lures the sharks to the surface. As they appear, the fishermen shake coconut rattles. The sharks' curiosity is aroused and one is certain to notice the pork bait. When he does, the fishermen slowly haul in the towline and the silver-gray monster follows the pork toward the boat—and the tempting tuna. While the shark investigates his favorite food, a fisherman slips a noose over his head. This is the critical moment when bad timing can mean the loss of a limb, and a fall into the water probable death. But the Samoans are agile and expert. The fisherman tightens the noose, another hits the monster on the head with a club—and a new victory is chalked up for the shark cowboy. ■ ■



One day's trophies—three sharks. Off this bleak island reef, man-eaters are many and dangerous.

THE DEVIL'S

The challenge was hurled and the wagers laid and Shaitani Beta — the Devil's Son — came back to the jungle to claim the death that was his heritage

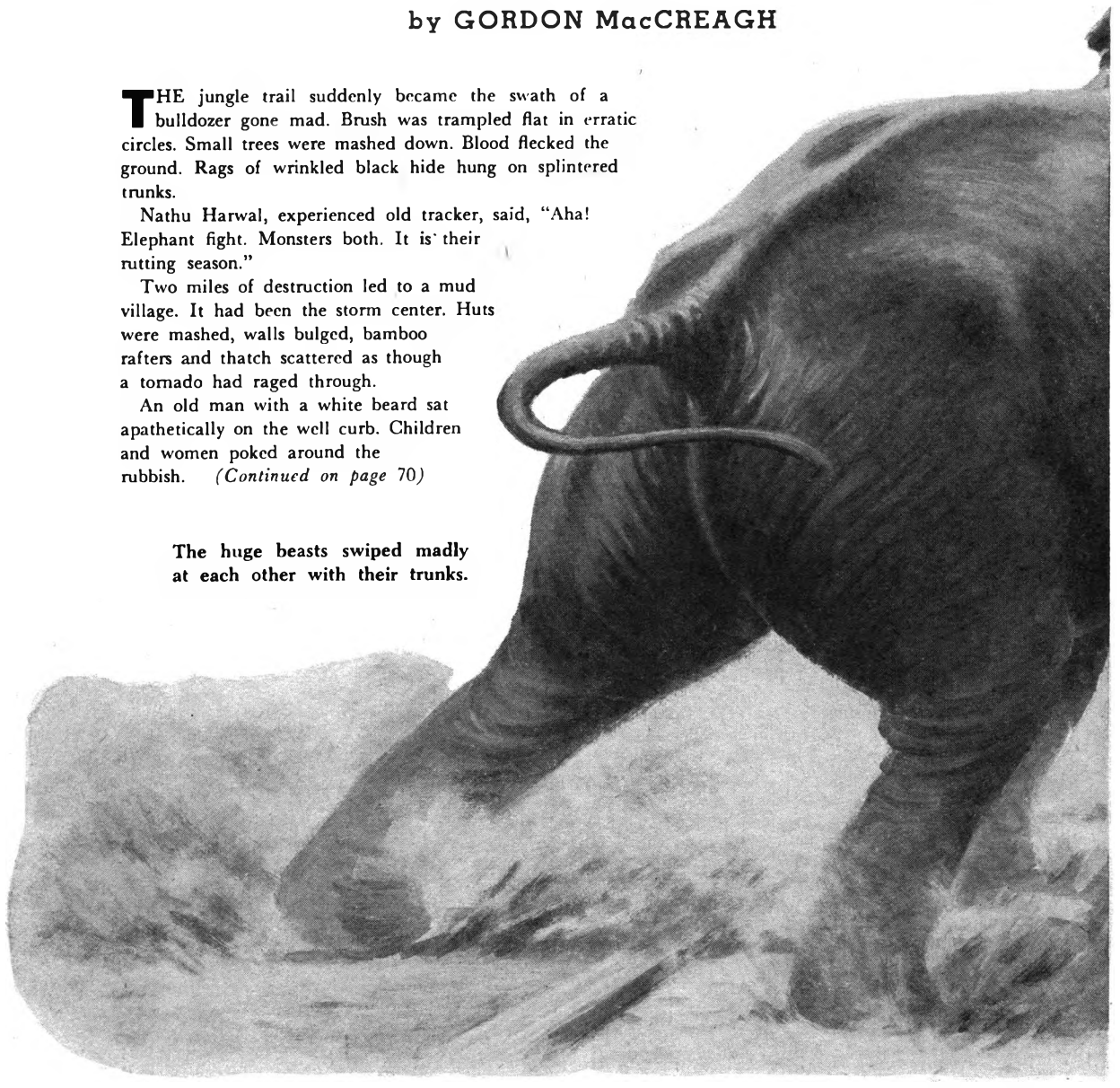
by GORDON MacCREAGH

THE jungle trail suddenly became the swath of a bulldozer gone mad. Brush was trampled flat in erratic circles. Small trees were mashed down. Blood flecked the ground. Rags of wrinkled black hide hung on splintered trunks.

Nathu Harwal, experienced old tracker, said, "Aha! Elephant fight. Monsters both. It is their rutting season."

Two miles of destruction led to a mud village. It had been the storm center. Huts were mashed, walls bulged, bamboo rafters and thatch scattered as though a tornado had raged through.

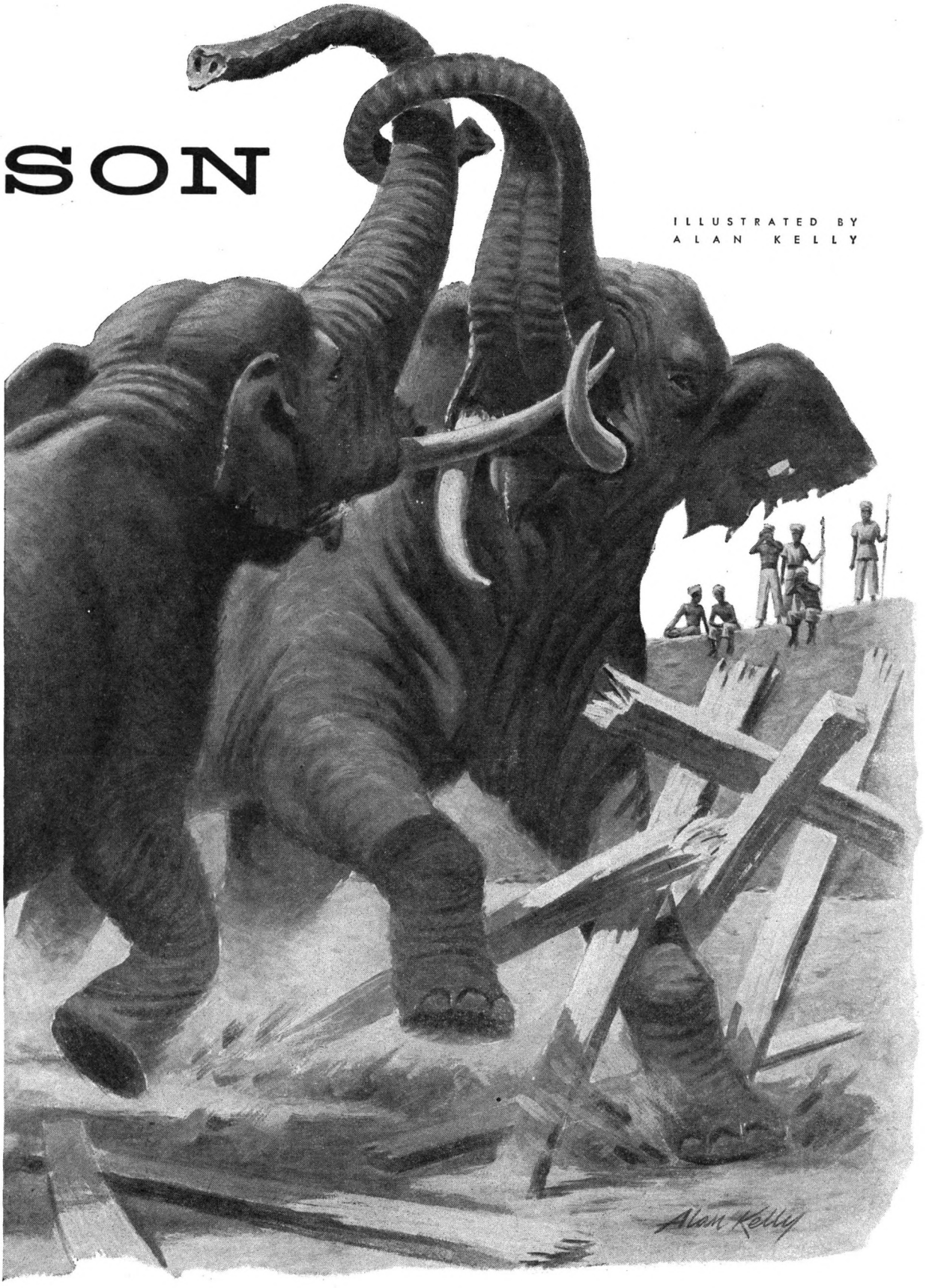
An old man with a white beard sat apathetically on the well curb. Children and women poked around the rubbish. *(Continued on page 70)*

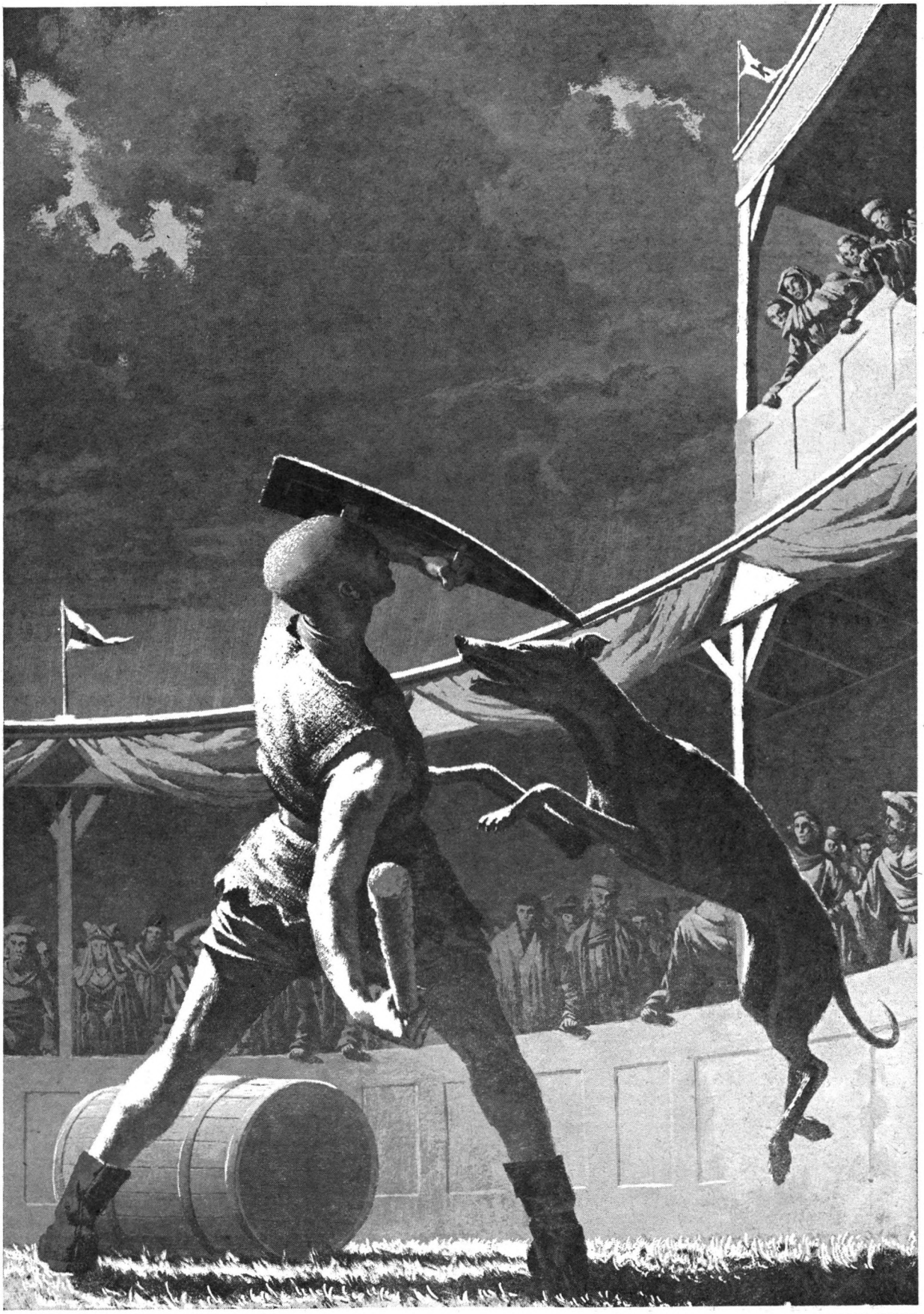


The huge beasts swiped madly at each other with their trunks.

SON

ILLUSTRATED BY
ALAN KELLY





THE DUELLING DOG OF MONTARGIS

Here, surely, is one of the strangest trials by arms in history: A royal knight—against a hound in a barrel!

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

Statue at Montargis commemorates famous duel.

THIS is one of the strangest, weirdest and most terrifying stories ever told in France. And the strangest thing about it is that it really happened.

One afternoon in the year 1371, a woodcutter in the forest of Bondy, south of Paris, heard the baying of a hound. Tracing the sound to its source, he found a huge greyhound standing guard over the corpse of a young man who, by his appearance, had been killed by a swordsman. The hound was the largest the woodcutter had ever seen, and as the man started forward, the beast bared its fangs in a ferocious snarl and crouched to spring. The woodsman abandoned his attempt to reach the body.

The next morning he tried to approach the dog again. And the following day. And the day after that. The animal's ribs were beginning to stick out and his bark was as hoarse as if his vocal chords had been shredded with a paring knife.

"That dog is starving to death," thought the peasant. The next day he came back with a chunk of raw meat. At first, the greyhound wouldn't even get up. But as the man drew near he made a supreme effort and sprang. Taking to his heels, the woodcutter hurled the meat at the dog, who pounced on it ravenously.

The man came back later that day. The dog was gone. He examined the corpse and found no marks of identification. But a short sword lay nearby, and there was a coat of arms emblazoned on the hilt. It meant nothing to him, but he dragged the body into a nearby thicket as a concession to decency.

"Not a word of this, or we will be accused of the murder," he told his wife that night.

That same evening Charles V and his knights were dining in the great hall at the Castle of Montargis, near the forest.

"Where's your son?" Charles asked, turning to the Duke de Montdidier on his left.

Before the battle-scarred *(Continued on page 78)*

by JOHN V. GROMBACH

ILLUSTRATED BY H. R. VON DONGEN

Hurling himself through the air, the dog aimed for the knight's bloody face.

A huge saw log was bearing directly down on the boy, ready to sweep him to his death.

THE CROSSING OF

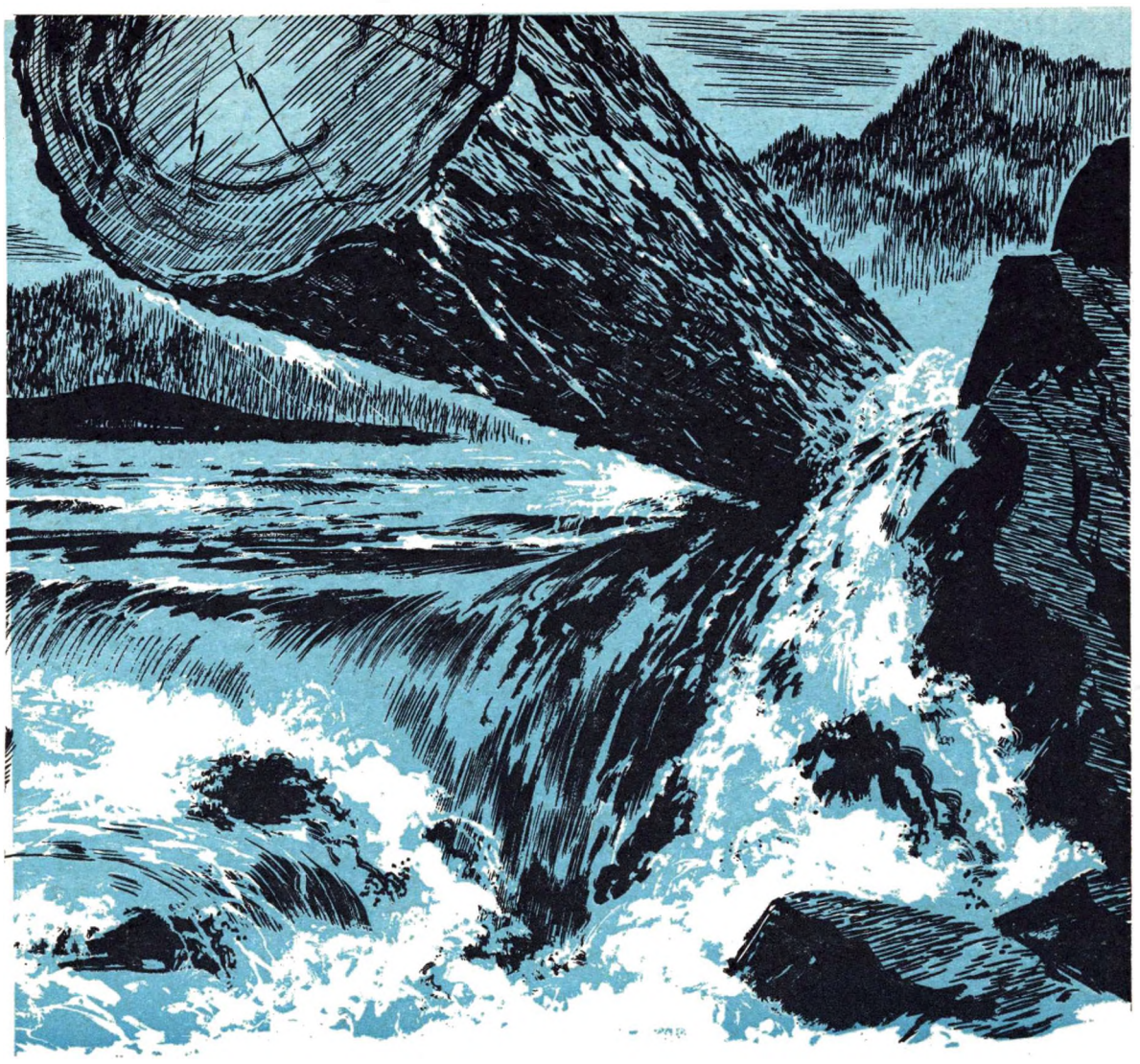
Three sins Jimmy must atone for. Then

MY GRANDSON, Jimmy, was still wet from the river as he stood across the table from his father. The china mantel lamp cast an orange glow over the faces of the men and glistened on the wet hair of the boy whose face was set like a piece of granite to seal back the tears.

The face of my old comrade, LeClaron, was like that of a scowling prophet. I knew that scowl well. He had looked like that fifty-two years ago when he was a great black hulk of a man. He'd carried me then, an orphan and eleven years younger than he, down here to the States from the woods around the *Rive Cartier*. We had worked together, cutting and driving the saw logs. Always, LeClaron had been my friend.

I married and established my home high in this Adirondack town that history has passed by. We live far from the lake resorts, and mountains are all around us. We look down from our windows and see far below us the silver snake of the river slipping beneath the blue mountains on its way to the sea. The river is always in our minds: its solemn voice speaks through our dreams.

Sometimes others come down, too, and then the old language sounds as briefly sweet as LeClaron's violin on a summer evening, sweet but oddly alien now. My sons



ILLUSTRATED BY DOM LUPO

THE SEVEN ROCKS

he'd be a mountain man—at thirteen!

by FRANK P. JAY

have been soldiers here. We are known, and all good men are our friends.

The young priest, Thibadeaux, looked pale as he sat there across from LeClaron. His long hands were folded and his eyes were stern. The closeness of the boy's escape had shocked us all.

We were sitting in judgment it seemed. My son loomed over his boy forbiddingly, tall as a thundercloud.

Outside, the icy rains of March ripped bitterly across the slates. From far upstairs in the old farmhouse, we could hear the still-hysterical crying as Anna tried to soothe the little sister who had so recently looked at the face of death, there just above the white waters of the Seven Rocks.

True, it was a man's work Jimmy had done to paddle the heavy *baddo* across the wild current as close as he had to the right bank of the river. LeClaron was waiting there, one arm wrapped around a leaning hemlock, and had caught first Angelique and then her brother in the bear hug of his great arm. He hauled them to safety before the boat was swept away. It *had* been a man's work the boy had done.

But only a boy would be foolish enough to be on the river at all at a time of high water and raging rapids.

And to take his six-year-old sister along with him.

His father's voice was like a heavy club.

"You're a lucky boy to be standing in your father's house. If LeClaron hadn't snatched you from the river, you'd be there now."

Jimmy stared hard at the glowing lamp and swallowed slowly. The other men seated around the table were motionless and without expression. Little pity he would have from us.

The winters touch mountain people with a hard hand. The cold and the wind and the snow-fed rivers. The fool does not survive, because so often his first wild act is his last. Therefore, we look seriously on rash behavior in children and punish it quickly before rashness becomes a habit.

MY SON raised three fingers and shook them slowly in Jimmy's face.

"You've done three bad things. Most wicked of all, you almost drowned your sister, not to mention your own foolish self.

"Then you lost the *baddo,* because, even if it wasn't smashed going over the rapids, it's on the east bank now, and when the river rises, as it will tonight because it's raining, it will go downstream and be surely lost over the falls.

"And you lost the rifle, since you had it in the *baddo.* It was your grandfather's for years. Then he gave it to me. It was a good, powerful weapon and no child's plaything. Now it, too, will be lost. What do you say about this, boy?"

Still the silent faces. The boy's face was pale and beside his tight mouth a small nerve quivered.

His voice was strained when he spoke, his eyes going from face to face. "I saw a bear take one of our sheep and I wanted to go across to kill him. But that's no matter. It was wrong to go." His gaze fell.

The faces were inscrutable.

"I'm sorry I frightened Angelique. She wanted to come. I shouldn't have taken her."

"That's true," his father grunted harshly. "You should not have." He wasn't making the apology any easier.

I could see that the boy was close to tears. But he didn't cry. His eyes swung up. His voice began firm and even, then cracked in the middle as a thirteen-year-old's voice would do.

"As for your rifle and the *baddo,* I'll get them back."

"How? It's raining now. The river is rising. By tomorrow this time, the *baddo* will be gone."

"I'll walk across at the Seven Rocks."

There were five seconds of dead silence as we all stared at him, our mouths gaping.

And then we laughed.

It was like the gust of a storm, that laughter. Or a cedar branch that stings, suddenly, the face of the runner.

The Seven Rocks are giant stepping-stones that lie across the river above the white waters. Each rock is as big as a house, flat on top but with deep chasms between them. Eons ago, they must have been joined in a flat ledge which, cracking or being torn in eight places, had let the water through.

At low water the Seven Rocks stand above water and anyone can very easily cross the river on them.

When the water is higher the rocks are covered. A man may still cross, even though he cannot see the rocks themselves, by keeping his eye on the dead spruce, the guide tree, on the edge of the east bank, and by bracing himself downstream by means of a strong pole.

But at flood time a man may cross, only if he is a man of courage, for it takes much courage to take those blind steps into the furious waters.

In the times of flood the river is two feet and more above the rocks. The water curls wickedly over them with a sweep and a sigh, to hurl itself into the white teeth of the rapids below.

At such times prudent men cross in sturdy boats and only at the stillwaters, or travel twenty miles to the south to cross on a bridge. Stories are told of a few strong men who have crossed the rocks at such times and lived. In fact, LeClaron in his youth had done it. Once only. Nor does he talk much about it. His eyes grow dark and distant at the sound of the river in the flood.

Our laughter didn't last long.

"You will not cross at the Seven Rocks because you are only a child," my son said at last. And every man at the table grunted assent.

But in that instant I saw a wild light flame suddenly in the boy's eyes and I was not sure.

He said no word but turned and walked to the doorway, bowed to us all and went out. For him the night was to be long and his dreams heavy with the sound of the flood-full river.

The night was long for me, too, for I knew that my grandson was going to try the crossing.

Long before dawn I knew what I would do. I would be there, and if the current took the boy I would be at a point of rocks downstream where I could go quickly into the river with a weighted snubbing rope and a pike pole. Perhaps I could get him before he was swept into the white waters. In years past, LeClaron and I had walked the bobbing timber together as loggers. The terrible river and its ways were familiar to me. It had not claimed me then; it might not get me now.

THE rope was new. And the pike pole was strong. I did not have long to wait there in the mist and the roaring river spray.

When dawn came, I could see that the *baddo* was still there. From where I knelt behind two great boulders, I saw the boy already in the water.

He was slim as an otter and his face was white and small against the blackness of the cold waters. He had not yet begun to use the strong cedar pole, but as he edged his way across the second hidden stone the waters were already curling swiftly past his knees.

The boat was bobbing against a flat-sided ledge in a foam-filled eddy on the east bank and as I looked downstream I caught a flicker of motion on the bank behind me. It was a raft in a cove on my side of the river, above the rapids. And on it, hidden from the boy, were his father and Joe LeClaron.

They had a snubbing rope, too, attached to a ring, heavily stapled into one of the three huge logs. One strong push of LeClaron's peavey and the raft would go flying out into the current and down the river.

They couldn't see me. I stared and suddenly felt a surging impulse to laugh as I remembered those two pitiless faces across the lamplit table. *(Continued on page 67)*

• A FACT ARTICLE

DIG MY GRAVE DEEP

Planes fly over Greenland today because young August Courtauld buried himself alive in an icy shroud—and stayed there for five incredible months!

OF MANY famous explorers to dare the Arctic's icy wastes, one of the most remarkable expeditions was Gino Watkins' British party of 1930-31. To begin with, it was composed entirely of young men, only one of whom had even experienced handling a dog team. Watkins himself was only twenty-three.

Although Peary, Rasmussen, Kock, DeQuervain and several others had crossed the Greenland icecap, Watkins' party was the first to winter there. Upon the basis of observations recorded during the expedition rests much of the credit for what we know of a Northern Greenland-Iceland air route.

Beyond that, the observations were made by *one* man. August Courtauld was *the first man* to dare wintering alone under such conditions.

His camp was an utterly desolate, lifeless snow waste at 8,600 feet altitude. He had only a snow igloo for shelter, and from the outset was short of fuel and food.

The gathering of year-round data was vital to any Greenland-Iceland air route. In 1930, half the civilized world was jockeying for the exclusive rights for air mail, passenger traffic and bases, and for that sole purpose, the expedition had been projected.

Establishment of a base on the coast was a routine matter, and, at that time, in August of 1930, the decision to establish a winter station 130 miles inland, on Greenland's highest point, also seemed routine. A party of eleven with four sledges started out, laboring up through the incredibly rough, crevassed edge of the icecap. On August 27th, they reached 8,600 feet altitude and established their *"station."*

They built an Eskimo snow house, lined with a tent inside, two other igloos for supplies, and connected the three with tunnels. They erected their meteorological instruments, stocked the camp with supplies, left two men there and returned to base.

A month later they were relieved by D'Aeth and Bingham with fresh supplies. Immediately upon the first party's return to base, a new relief party started out. Gales reaching 100 mph tore at their tents at night, their trail of marker flags was partially drifted over and the dogs grew weak. *They made only fifteen miles in fifteen days.*

But two men were out there with insufficient food to last the winter, and the party struggled on.

On December 3rd, the relief party walked in on Bingham and D'Aeth, their faces so covered with ice that the men at the station didn't recognize them. Their journey had taken so long and they had eaten so much and jettisoned so much food en route that they couldn't leave two men there. Food supplies were insufficient. Allowing the most meager margin, there would be scarcely enough to last one man until April.

August Courtauld volunteered to stay alone. Either one man stayed alone, or the major part of the expedition came to nought. So they left him on December 5th, in fine weather. The mercury registered only 46 below zero.

Courtauld's personal account of the months, published as a chapter in Spencer Chapman's "Northern Lights," is an epic of understatement. The winds blew so steadily and the cold grew so intense that he was barely able to step outside for exercise to relieve the monotony. He had no radio or gramaphone. He ran short of food. Much of the time he was without light because the *"squeeze"* of the ice houses crushed in his kerosene supply and it leaked away, to such an extent that finally he could not cook more than one warmed-over meal a day, which he performed in darkness. His primus stove went faulty. He was unable to melt water for drinking. The ice inside the tunnels and igloos kept *"growing"* from condensing body and cooking moisture, and he encountered extreme difficulty in keeping the tunnels to his supply houses sufficiently free of ice to crawl through.

Except for meteorological observations, ice-chipping and his meager cooking, he was able to do nothing but lie in his sleeping bag, whistling and singing to pass the time, and to keep from the crazying effects of the whining winds and grating snows. In literal fact, *(Continued on page 80)*

by J. STANWELL-FLETCHER

HUMAN BLOWTORCHES

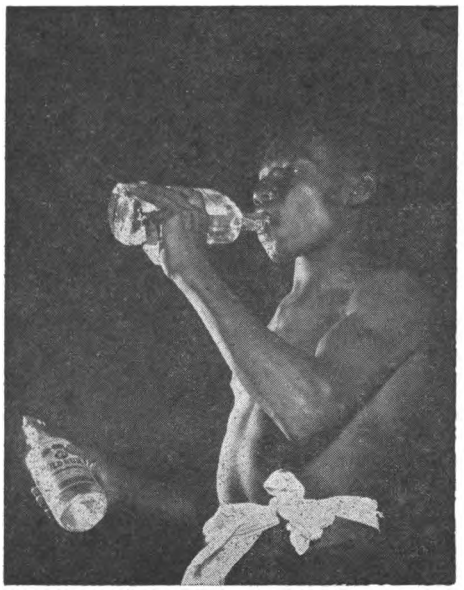
by CURT GUNTHER
HOUSE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

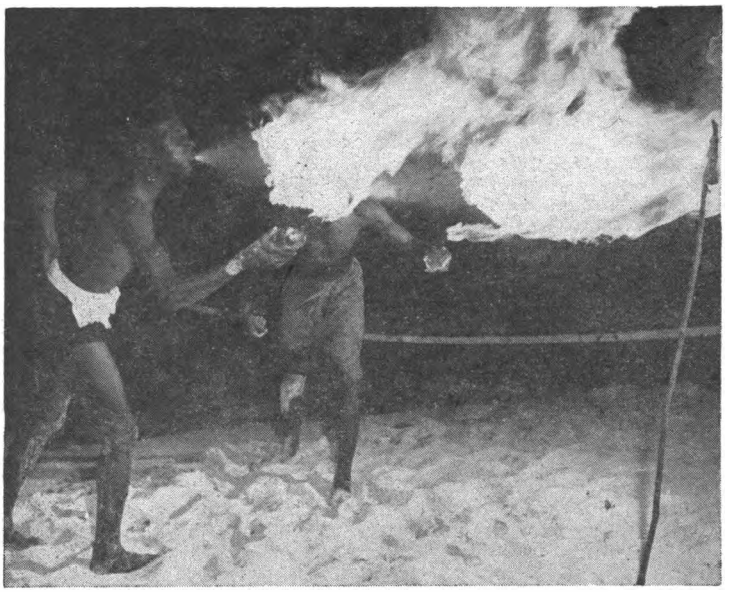
FIRE has played a symbolic part in many primitive creeds and religions, but the fight of fire on the island of Jamaica is certainly one of the strangest manifestations to survive to modern times.

I stumbled on it quite by accident. I had gone to Jamaica to hunt crocodiles. One of my guides, a handsome young man in his late teens, had part of his face swathed in bandages. Walking back to camp one night, I asked him what had happened. He was very cagey, but slowly, bit by bit, he told me the story: how he had come of age in the last week and had undergone a fire fight, blowing gasoline and alcohol at another teen-age boy; how they had both been badly burned about the face. It reminded me of tales I had heard of German university students dueling with heavy sabers and slashing one another's cheeks to produce horrible scars. Of course, I immediately wanted to take pictures of this ritual which had never been recorded by a camera—but it was easier said than done. At last, however, a small fee passed hands and my guide arranged for me to attend a fire fight.

It took place on a moonlit beach. Each contestant held two bottles, one with a lighted kerosene-drenched wick in the neck, the other containing alcohol. One of the young men drank from the alcohol bottle. Then he put the lighted wick to his lips and, as I took my picture, he blew a stream of flame at a stick driven into the ground. The other did the same. Then they began their grisly duel. Accompanied by clouds of smoke and the smell of burning gas and scorching flesh, they blew and spat flaming death at one another until one collapsed, groaning with pain.

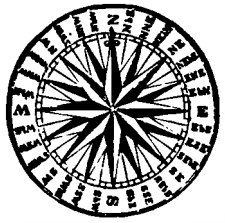
Two more Jamaicans were now of age. And two more burned faces testified to the price of manhood. ■ ■





With the unforgettable smell of scorching flesh in my nostrils, I watched them blow flaming death at one another.

Hardly ten paces apart, they began the grisly duel of fire—the dread ritual-testing of a man in Jamaica.



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the Bushmen find water, but in such small quantities that a whole day is sometimes required to fill a canteen. In some areas during unusually dry years, only the water-impregnated roots of deep-lying gourds and tubers make life possible.

The Kalahari is covered with knee-high grass tufts which get so dry that the leaves crumble to tinder at a touch. In the northwest—the area through which Gwy and I were traveling—the Kalahari is also covered with bushes, each just like the other. Mile after mile, no bush is outstanding enough to be used as a landmark. It's not unusual for even Bushmen hunters to get lost in that ocean of monotony.

The going for the first fifteen miles wasn't bad, for the sand was firm, the night cool. About midnight, a bright moon rose swiftly, painting the scattered bushes with silver. Gwy, like most Bushmen, was a moon worshiper, and upon seeing a small shadow slink into darkness beneath a bush, he paused, raised his hands, and sang a weird prayer to his Moon Goddess. As he finished, a snake wriggled between us. A moment later, a mouse squealed in death agony. Gwy immediately squatted on his haunches, and laid his face on his knees.

"Now what?" I asked.

"The moon," he moaned, "sent the snake to tell me one of us must die."

"Well, Gwy, if one must die, one must die," I said. "Don't chitter about it like a scared monkey."

"The serpent came between us, *Baas*, and because you were behind, it is not I who will die, but you."

"Well, well, Gwy. If I should go before you to the Country-Beyond-the-Thunders, I'll wait for you and Twak under a palmyra tree beside the trail."

GWY got slowly to his feet, moved forward, but after a few steps, paused and stated solemnly, "Know, O Hunter, that if you should take the journey into the Land-of-Much-Water, Twak and I will send the carcass of Cronje—that spawn of a crocodile—to follow close behind you."

That was the longest speech I'd ever heard Gwy make. No doubt about it—the little fellow liked me.

"Thanks, Gwy," I said.

Soon the sand became soft and dragged at my feet. I began to sweat and felt the first urgings of thirst. However, I had no intention of drinking until we hit the first water hole, which should be shortly after dawn. It was a permanent hole, and always held some water, even in very dry years.

We arrived there as the sun, after shooting up advance streamers of violent pink, hurled itself hot and angry above the horizon. The sky instantly became a washed-out blue, and heat haze rose from the sand. A mirage formed in the sky—pale blue water with trees at its edge. My thirst was urgent as I stepped to the water hole.

Cronje and his gang had contaminated it with filth!

There was nothing to do but drink sparingly from a canteen, rest a little, and move on. I could have dug down several feet away from the contaminated well and waited until water filtered through the sand, but even after filtering, that water would have had to be boiled. There was no time for delay—Cronje's party was moving fast. They'd undoubtedly kill Twak when they were within one day's journey of Lake Ngami. They'd probably be doing at least twenty miles every twenty-four hours. That meant that Gwy and I must do thirty miles between rest periods. And I now knew that the Bastaards would purposely make undrinkable whatever water they found.

We'd keep going while we still had water in canteens—keep going until thirst made it impossible to go further. Then we'd stop, dig, wait, drink and go on.

SHUTTING my mind to misery, I plodded on, eyes half-closed against glare from the sand so hot that the sweat soaking through the tough leather of my boots dried instantly in white streaks. As midday approached, my whole body cried for water, and I knew that if I thirsted much longer, hallucinations would be added to the mirages already playing continuously across the sands. I let a cupful of sun-heated tea trickle down my throat, then called to Gwy, who was coursing about like a dog, to come and drink. He tipped a small quantity into his mouth, gargled it, handed back the canteen, and resumed his shuffling to and fro as he searched for moisture-impregnated *mokuri* gourds, which would be our last resort should there be no other water.

It was good to move on again, for the moment I stopped to take a breather, sweat poured from every pore. It soaked my pants and my shirt. It ran into my eyes, adding the sting of salt to the stabbing needles of glare. Walking, I sweated less.

Gwy, weary at last of thumping the ground in vain efforts to detect *mokuris* by sound, said, "Gourds all gone. Duiker eat."

Bad news. Gwy meant that little forty-pound, sharp-hooved duikerbok, famished for water, had dug up the area's few water-impregnated tubers, then migrated to moister ranges. This left us without our ace-in-the-hole. With Cronje leaving ruptured holes, or contaminated water, we'd have to dig seepage wells of our own. If that delayed us long, Twak's life wasn't worth a shilling.

Like Gwy, Twak was a dwarfed, slant-eyed, yellow-skinned heathen with the morals of a baboon, the temper of a cobra, and the courage and loyalty of a dog. Both brothers had bulging foreheads and shiny, brown pates sparsely dotted with tight balls of black wool. Both were smart enough to act dumb in front of white folks, particularly the whip-wielding Boers and Bastaards.

As I slogged through heavy sand, I pictured Twak digging six-foot wells with his hands, driven to speed by kicks and blows. With heat already cooking my brains, it wasn't difficult to drop any quixotic ideas I'd had about capturing the Bastaards alive. Now I meant to shoot them on sight.

We came upon the second water hole unexpectedly that evening at sunset. Before looking into it, I noticed bloodstains on the sand piled around the brink, and hoped Cronje's gang had been fighting among themselves. Gwy, however, who could read a sign as well as I can read a book, said the blood was from Twak's fingers. This seemed likely, for the Rheoboth Bastaards would never have done any digging or other physical work as long as there was a black man who could be forced to do it for them.

The well was dry, its crusty bottom pushed through. There was slight seepage, though, around the break. To harvest it, I cut one of my trousers legs off at the knee, ripped it open and had a piece of strong duck about twenty inches square. I laid it across the break in the bottom of the hole, packed sand on its edges, patted the cloth down in the center until it formed a shallow bowl—and waited.

For fifteen or twenty minutes, nothing happened. Then the khaki-colored cloth began to darken. More waiting, and a single drop of clear water formed suddenly on the side of the "bowl," paused, and like a droplet of mercury, rolled to the bottom where it collapsed into a silvery disk. Other drops followed, and I knew we were safe—for the present.

BY THIS time, both canteens were half-empty, so I poured tea from one canteen in with the water in the other, leaving one empty canteen to be filled—maybe. I got out my package of salt, dropped about half a teaspoonful into Gwy's eager palm, and a similar amount into my own. I handed Gwy the canteen, and said, "Drink."

Gwy took a mouthful, rolled it around in his mouth, swallowed, then with the expression of a monkey eating peanuts, popped the salt into his mouth, washed it down with a big draft, and said, "I can now breed like a zebra."

I licked up my own salt, drank, and within minutes, felt strength pulsing through my muscles. I thought of the men who'd died on the Kalahari, not of thirst, but of salt starvation. A human depleted of salt through excessive, prolonged sweating, gets weak. Hands and feet grow cold, the body is wracked with chills. The weakness increases, internal organs seems to quiver, and the forehead feels like ice. The victim sinks to the sand, his mind tortured with visions of steaming meat, and rivers of water that he cannot reach. The fantasies fade quickly as coma develops. The man dies.

Salt would have saved him—the mineral salts in any kind of meat. Or if he'd taken half a teaspoonful of salt each day, he'd have lived.

When suffering from prolonged thirst, a man finds eating almost impossible. He can walk through the desert for days with surprisingly little food, but twenty-four hours without water is his limit.

Gwy and I had eaten nothing but a pound or so of sun-dried meat since we'd started. I was so anxious to rescue Twak as quickly as possible that I felt no great need of food. Even so, our *biltong* wouldn't last many more days, and I knew the time was approaching when we'd have to find fresh meat. Although the antelopes had left the area, cats, mice, lizards and snakes could be captured at water holes if one had time. But time was running out for Twak. We must push on.

I looked into our well, estimated that at least six hours would be required for sufficient water to accumulate to see us to the next hole, and said to Gwy, "Let's eat, boy."

HE DIDN'T answer. I turned to look. He was curled up on the sand fast asleep. I took the *biltong* from around his neck, cut off a piece and chewed diligently. I must have still been chewing when I, too, fell asleep, for when I wakened around midnight, the meat was still in my mouth.

I went to the hole, and using the screw cap of the canteen, carefully dipped out about four cups of water into the empty canteen. I turned to waken Gwy. He was hunched beside a grass clump, one hand poised like an adder. The hand struck. A mouse squeaked, and seconds later, stripped of skin, but not disemboweled, it was sliding down Gwy's gullet. I offered him water, but he shook his head, reached into the well, grabbed up the empty, water-soaked piece of cloth, and sucking it happily, stalked off through the moonlight toward the next water hole.

Eighteen hours, and thirty-five miles later, there was still no water hole. Both canteens were almost empty, and thirst was upon us. All that long day, mirages had waxed and waned on shimmering sands, or had hung inverted in the sky. Mostly, they were lakes with reed-lined shores, or pans of flat, white water. Once a herd of antelope stood against a background of hazy acacia trees. Slowly the animals lifted and swelled until they appeared taller than trees. Abruptly, they'd shrunk in size, become a blur, and vanished. Once during mid-afternoon, a waterfall poured down the distant sky. We paused to rest, and I tried to chew some *biltong*. I gagged as it stuck in my too-dry throat. I took a big mouthful of water in an effort to wash the meat down, and fell to my knees, choking. Gwy kicked me between the shoulders, and meat and water exploded through my lips. Gwy grabbed up the partially chewed *biltong,* gulped it, then sat on his haunches watching me.

It's easy for a man to show good judgment in desert travel when talking about it while sitting on a grassy bank beside a rippling stream, but common sense flees when brains have sun-simmered for days, and miseries of a heat-cursed body have become a blanket of torture. After my attack of retching, I sat motionless a long time. Almost every part of my body had its special torment. The insides of my thighs were chafed raw from trousers soggy with sweat, or raspy and stiff when dry. My right leg, from which I'd cut the trouser at the knee, was sunburned so badly that an occasional ground-breeze seemed to set it on fire. My belly kept cramping as though trying to eject a cold rock, and waves of nausea swept me. My lips were split, my tongue and throat seemed covered with prickly hairs. My eyes ached.

I blamed Cronje for it all, and finally got to my meet, determined to brew a hell broth for the Bastaard.

As I started out again, with Gwy trotting around me like a spaniel, I decided to go without water and food until nightfall—a decision that no sane man would have made. I began paying for that mistake within an hour when I started thinking that the mirages were real. This frightened me, so I walked with head down, eyes on the sand in front of my feet. I bumped into bushes from time to time. My rifle, slung across my back, became heavier and heavier. I unslung it, stumbled against another bush, tripped and went to my knees within three feet of a brownish-purple Gaboon viper that lay half-buried in the sand.

For moments the viper stared at me, then lifted its loathsome lump of a head, shrugged its bloated body into a half-loop, opened its mouth a good four inches, unfolded long, deadly fangs, and prepared to strike. I smashed it with my rifle, and the butt broke off just back of the bolt. In a frenzy, I beat the writhing body to a pulp with the rifle barrel. For a time I continued to kneel, only half-aware that Gwy was picking up pieces of bruised snake flesh and stuffing them into his mouth.

I remember wondering if, after I'd killed Cronje, Gwy'd eat that body too. The thought upset me, and I stumbled to my feet to take up the weary trek again.

ONCE more I walked with eyes focused at my feet, but this time my head was filled with delightful visions—a gourd of ice-cold beer so large that both hands were required to lift it . . . a wide river of blue water which, submerged to my lips, I was swallowing in huge gulps . . . a rainstorm in which I stood naked, wonderfully cool.

Suddenly water lapped at my feet, and I lifted my eyes to see nearby bushes standing in a copper-specked lake. "This is real," I said, and bent to drink. The water vanished . . .

When I came to, I was on my back, with what I thought was fresh milk filling my mouth. I opened my eyes. Gwy was holding a canteen to my lips. I drank avidly, then cursed as Gwy jerked the canteen away, handed me a large, skinned and gutted lizard, and said, "Now you eat, *Baas.* Drink more bye-'m-bye."

I chewed at the raw flesh without interest, and after a few swallows, felt less fuzzy. I reached for the canteen. It held only a scant mouthful.

"What the hell happened to the water?" I snapped.

"You sick. You take him."

"I drank it all?"

"Drink little—spill big," Gwy said, and pointed to a moist circle on the sand.

"Good Lord! Didn't you get any?"

"I drink water from lizard's belly, O Hunter."

I felt too wobbly to get to my feet, so I lay back and closed my eyes. I didn't rest for long, because ants got to me, and fleas attacked my sunburned calf. I knew we'd left Gobabis less than forty-eight hours ago, but that seemed far in the past. In fact, almost everything that had happened before this journey seemed distant and hazy. Forty-eight hours! For a guy ordinarily able to take care of himself, it hadn't taken me long to botch up this trip.

"Gwy," I said, "when did you first notice I'd gone nuts?"

He looked at me blankly, pretending not to understand.

"Answer, you damned heathen."

"Master," he said, "the hyena with no milk cannot nurse pups."

I thought that over, didn't get it, and said, "The ass that moos like a cow is still an ass. Speak straight."

"You feed your head no meat, *Baas,* so it must fill itself with wind."

I REALIZED then that during the last forty hours, I'd eaten a total of no more than a pound of *biltong.* I couldn't have eaten much food during the heat of the days had I wanted to, but neglecting to eat at night is madness. The strangest thing about desert delirium is that when you're sane again, you remember everything—delusions, hallucinations, imbecilities, hysteria. And you remember the physical agonies, living them over and over in memory. Always the wonder remains that during the sickness, truths seemed lies, aberrations seemed realities.

"Gwy," I said, "that lizard I ate has pushed the wind from my head. It can't be far to the next water. We'll make the well clean when we find it, and you can catch mice and snakes. We'll eat hearty."

"Better we eat soon, *Baas.* Now I hunt. You sleep." Gwy grinned and cut out into the desert, his small short-handled shovel hanging from the back of his belt like a beaver's tail.

The late afternoon sun burned its way across the colorless heavens, and the whitish sands seemed almost at melting point. On all sides, hot air rose in weaving, wavering sheets. Gwy had left the chunk of *biltong,* but I didn't dare eat any, for without water, it would have created thirst. For a time I just sat and watched the sea of bushes dance, swell and shrink in the heat mirage. Then once more, physical miseries engrossed me.

The pain in my sunburned leg had diminished, but my feet tortured me. I took off my boots and groaned as pieces of skin came off with my socks. I dug a deep hole with my hands, put my feet in it and covered them with the comparatively cool sand. At first the pain set up a buzzing in my head, but it subsided, and for the first time in many hours, I felt comfortable and relaxed. When I suddenly realized that I'd not be able to get my boots back on again, my sense of well-being vanished.

The next half-hour was a low point of my life. I, who'd always been able to handle any emergency, was being defeated by the desert as easily as if I'd been a greenhorn. I tried to figure out why I'd violated the rules I'd known. The only answer was: "The sun—the damned sun." But there was more to it than that, I decided. I'd allowed my anger at Cronje, and my urgency to rescue Twak, to take possession of me to the exclusion of good sense. Well, I was learning the hard way.

No water. No food. No rifle. And probably unable to walk, even if I could have put on the boots that were drying and shrinking beside me. I came close to crying.

THEN I thought of Twak. I knew that in his savage heart there was no doubt that *Baas* Jones would rescue him. He might be beaten and starved, but nothing would lessen his faith in me. Self-pity vanished in a surge of disgust with myself.

I urinated on my socks, wrung them out, laid them on the sand, and in five minutes they were dry. I brushed my feet clean, put on the socks, tried the boots, but the pain was too much. I put the boots aside, got up and tried walking in my socks. After a few faltering steps, I knew I could do it.

I looked around for Gwy and spotted him on hands and knees about a hundred yards away. We must get started again. I tied my boots to my belt with their laces, and deciding that in a fight, the broken rifle might come in handy as a club, I picked up the barrel, but dropped it quickly as the sun-heated metal scorched the base of my thumb and forefinger. I let the rifle lay, picked up the empty canteens, the hunk of *biltong,* and set out after Gwy.

Because I was wearing wool socks in soft sand, Gwy didn't hear me. As I approached, I heard him saying, "You are made of water, O Moon, and I have here another of your children."

He drew a circle in the sand with his toe, crawled about on his knees, paused, got up and drew another circle, then said, "You breed like a spotted cat, O Moon Mother."

"Gwy, let's get . . ." My words were cut off as Gwy whirled, and threw something. I ducked just as his knife flashed past my face. When he saw it was I who'd startled him, he made fast clicking noises in his cheek, cursing me. Then he smiled abruptly and said, "I find Moon babies, Baas."

"*Loroshuas?*"

"It is so," and he pointed to five or six circles he'd made in the sand.

Near the center of each circle was a dried, broken stem about the size of a thin pencil. I'd never seen *loroshuas* before, but had heard of them, and knew that buried about eighteen inches below these stems were the Moon babies of the Bushmen—single tubers the size of small pumpkins with flesh that was ninety per cent water. *Loroshuas*—salvation in the desert!

Gwy didn't bother with his shovel, but dug with his hands, throwing sand back between his legs like a terrier. He lifted out a big, round fruit, handed it to me and said, "Now, O Father, you need no more break wind with your head."

I broke the *loroshua* open, and with Gwy, shared the most satisfying meal I'd ever eaten—food and drink in one package.

For a while I just sat, growing wearier by the minute, thinking only of the hot sand under me, wishing I had the energy to dig down a few inches for a cooler seat for my fanny. But movement required too much effort.

A few yards away, Gwy was trying to catch a snake that had twisted itself around a branch near the top of a low bush. I wondered idly why he didn't hit it with the shovel still hanging against his rear, but interest flagged, and I closed my eyes. Almost immediately, every part of my body was stabbed simultaneously with red-hot needles. Thinking I'd been attacked by an army of ants, I stripped off my clothes in nothing flat. There was not one ant on me. I rubbed, scratched and slapped. The needles kept stabbing, stabbing.

Beside me, Gwy, with a limp, headless serpent dangling from his hand, said, "Good, *Baas.* Soon you sweat."

He'd hardly spoken before the stabbing needles ceased, and the fire in my body was replaced by coolness. I was sweating! With sudden surprise, I realized I'd not been perceptibly sweating for some time.

Death had been close, and I'd not even guessed it.

When a man stops sweating, his temperature rises, slowly at first, then more rapidly, until coma comes and he literally cooks. Gwy and his "Moon babies" had saved me. Even as I'd eaten, blood had already begun withdrawing from my capillaries. It was *loroshua* water that had started normal functioning again. I learned later that the stabbing needles had been the capillaries protesting as blood again surged through them.

I put my shirt and shorts on, and was about to step into my pants, but paused. I'd been looking at the five *loroshua* tubers Gwy'd dug, wondering how we'd carry them. Now I knew what to do.

I used half a bootlace to tie the bottoms of my trousers together, then pushed the *loroshuas* into them—four into the long leg, my boots and one *loroshua* into the cut-off leg. Then I buttoned the fly, tied the top of the pants with the other bootlace, and with bare shanks, stood in the dying daylight, feeling like a fool.

When I'd decided to use my pants to carry the *loroshuas,* I'd emptied the pockets, putting my knife and package of wax Vestas (matches) in a shirt pocket. The cartridges, of no use to me, I'd thrown on the sand. On impulse, I now picked up four of them and put them in the other shirt pocket.

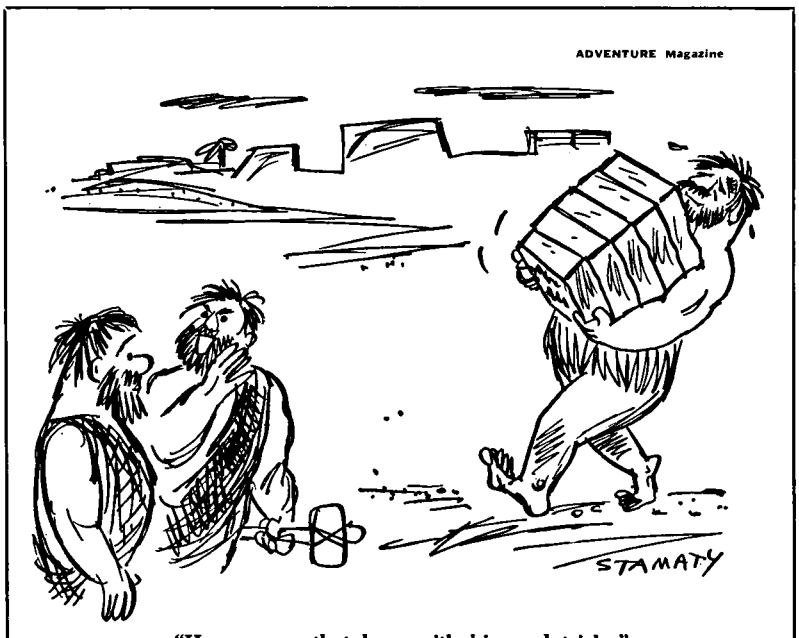
Gwy, who'd watched me convert my trousers into a bag, stepped near and admiringly touched the white skin of my thigh. By discarding pants, I'd gone up in his estimation. White men wearing clothes are soft touches for the desert. Bushmen, wearing nothing but thong belts around waists and leather bags between legs, thrive.

As I gathered up the makeshift pack, I paused to watch the ruby-copper sun touch the western horizon and begin to melt like a ball of butter. It sank quickly in its own fiery juices until there was nothing left but a spreading molten strip on the edge of the world. As red faded from the sky, the air became cooler and the sea of bushes shaded from gray to lavender, then purple, and finally black.

"We'll walk in the darkness, Gwy," I said. "My legs are afraid of the sun."

"Truly, O *Baas,*" he answered, "your legs are flowers of the Moon, that bloom only at night."

I don't think two more peculiar characters ever contended with the Kalahari.



"Here comes that bore with his card tricks."

Gwy acted all dressed up as he walked with trenching shovel patting his posterior, the flitch of *biltong* a grotesque pendant against his little round belly. As for myself, even in the darkness, I was embarrassed by knobby knees faintly flashing in and out below my shirttail. After several experiments in carrying the tuber-stuffed trousers, I'd settled on a comfortable method—astride my neck.

With canteens thumping emptily against hipbones, I followed Gwy for about three hours, my feet comparatively easy in my socks, my body free of chafing. There was little in the meat of *loroshuas* that stuck to the ribs, however, and long before midnight, ravenously hungry, we stopped and alternately chewed *loroshua* and *biltong*.

So far, there'd been no sign of a well, so I assumed Cronje had made a double march. That meant we'd probably not hit a well until after sunrise. Its water, of course, would be undrinkable, but we were making good time, so could afford a short delay to clean it up.

My hours of desert madness had taken their toll, though, and shortly after midnight I was beset by growing weariness. *Biltong* and tuber water revived me from time to time, and I went on and on, my mind practically blank, my feet doing their job montonously and endlessly.

WITH the first hint of dawn, we stopped to devour the next-to-the-last *loroshua*. I saw that the chunk of *biltong* had dwindled to less than a pound. We'd really been tucking it in. Nearby bushes began creeping out of blackness, and fingers of fire ran along the eastern horizon before us. Almost at once the sun boiled into view, making the morning a furnace. As I stood, about to put on my trousers again, Gwy said, "Water, *Baas!*"

He pointed to a small flight of grouse flashing from nowhere toward a cluster of stunted acacia trees. Over the treetops the grouse jerked suddenly upward, breaking formation in all directions. They'd been slanting in for a drink—which meant a pan nearby. They'd scattered wildly—which meant men were there—for grouse wouldn't panic at sight of animals.

Men! Probably wandering Bushmen, or Bechuanas. They could hardly be Cronje and his gang—not so soon. Still, they might be, so I threw my pants aside and followed Gwy on hands and knees as he crept forward from bush to bush. There were ten trees, the ground beneath them covered with small, dry, thorny branches. By the time we'd reached a fallen tree, whose dead branches hung down over a twelve-foot bank at the dry river's edge, my palms and knees were thoroughly gouged. In wriggling over a bone-dry snag, my shorts caught and ripped up the back so they hung from my waist like an apron. And then I heard voices—white men's voices.

A foot or two ahead of me, Gwy held up a hand in warning. I crawled to his side and peered through the twisted limbs of the fallen tree. About forty feet out on the river bed was a shallow pan of water, and beside the pan sat Kotze, staring at his feet. Cronje, a .303 Lee-Enfield grasped in a hairy hand, stood back a little, eyeing Marais and Jorrisen, seated side by side, directly below us. Twak, looking like a skeleton covered with yellow skin, sat on the sand back of Kotze, hands tied behind him, head resting on hunched knees.

All were gaunt, the skin of their faces stretched tight across cheekbones, eyes sunken like holes in a skull. Beards were ragged and dusty, mouths hung loose. I recalled that I'd seen no evidence of their having eaten at any water holes we'd passed. They were starving.

Gwy twittered suddenly like a frantic bird, and after a pause, Twak twittered in reply. Instantly, the four Bastaards turned toward Twak and stared at him broodingly.

Kotze licked his lips, then said hoarsely, "*Fleisch!* Meat! I must have meat!" His voice rose hysterically.

Cronje twitched his rifle toward Kotze's belly, then indicating a pile of grass and dried brush, said, "When the water bags are filled, we'll eat. Four days to Ngami. Without the Bushman, remember, we'll find no more water. Four men—four days." He tossed four empty canvas water bags toward Kotze and ordered him to fill them.

Kotze knelt and began dipping water with a spoon-shaped piece of bark.

We had only our knives, and Gwy's little shovel. Gwy's knife could be counted on for at least one Bastaard, if we rushed them, but getting the other three, I figured, would be up to me. At best I was no superman, and now that the big moment had come, I felt drained of energy.

Gwy, eyes like a cobra's, whispered, "They eat Twak, *Baas.*"

"I know," I said.

We were no match for four knife-wielding Bastaards, plus a .303. It wouldn't do Twak any good for us to end up dead. With odds as they were, we'd have to wait for an opportunity to steal Cronje's rifle. Of course, if they decided to kill Twak before I could arm myself, we'd do the best we could.

FLAT on our bellies behind the fallen tree, we watched Kotze approach and hang a filled water bag on a large, twisted root protruding from the sandbank. It hung a bit above Marais's head, about five feet below us. Dark moisture gathering on the bag's surface set my thirst raging, and I was tempted to try to reach it with a hooked stick. And then I got my big idea—to wait until all four bags were hanging, then steal them. Without the bags, the Bastaards wouldn't dare leave the little pan.

We'd eaten the last of the *loroshua* and *biltong*, so I sent Gwy to hunt for more tubers, and lay itching and sweating. Kotze dipped water monotonously into a bag. Cronje sat at a little distance, rifle across lap, eyes shifting continuously from Kotze to Jorrisen and Marais. He sat with open mouth, yellow teeth bared. Below me, Jorrisen and Marais mumbled together like a pair of baboons. I paid little attention to what they were saying until I heard my own name. Then cupping hands to my ears, I listened intently for a long time. I couldn't get all they said, but gathered enough to figure out their situation.

Evidently Marais, Jorrisen and Kotze had agreed they'd kill Cronje if they got a chance. None except Cronje believed that I was on their trail. Cronje had fired all but one cartridge of his ammunition at small night prowlers without bagging even one cat. With that lone cartridge, he'd held the others in line, threatening to shoot the first one who refused to obey. An attempt to kill Cronje would take place after they'd eaten and had regained strength enough to fight.

AT DUSK Gwy returned with a small turtle and one *mokuri* gourd. I chewed on raw turtle leg, ate half the *mokuri*, and felt stronger. Kotze filled the fourth water bag and hung it with the others. As he returned to the pan, Marais and Jorrisen joined him there.

It was still too light to risk stealing the water bags, so I trimmed a thorn branch, tied my open knife to it, pushed it down through the tree-branch screen and punctured all four.

The water dripped silently, and it wasn't until the bags were almost empty that Cronje noticed the moist spot growing on the sand. Herding the others before him, he came over and stared aghast at the four collapsed bags.

Kotze screamed, "*Fleisch! Wil fleisch krij!* Meat! I'll have meat!" as he drew his knife and rushed Cronje.

Cronje shot him through the head.

Running, Jorrisen and Marais seemed to realize suddenly that Cronje now had no more bullets, and turning, drew their knives as they came back. Kneeling near Kotze's body as if examining it, Cronje shallowly covered the dead man's fallen knife with sand. Then he stood erect, drew his own knife and faced Marais and Jorrisen.

Jorrisen gave Marais a push and said, "Get behind him. Make quick."

Marais circled like a wary dog.

Cronje, holding his knife by its point, hilt out to Marais, said, "Take the knife, Klaas. I cannot defeat two. Take my knife, and we can talk, *ja?*"

Marais looked at Jorrisen. Jorrisen said, "Take his knife."

Marais reached for the knife. Cronje dropped it. As Marais stooped to pick it up, Cronje scooped up Kotze's blade and buried it in Marais's back. Jorrisen laughed aloud.

"We are two now, Jorrisen," Cronje declared. "Four were too many. Knock the Bushman on the head while I light the fire."

Jorrisen said to Twak, "Stand up."

Twak didn't move.

Jorrisen took two quick steps and kicked him in the face. Blood spurted as Twak crumpled.

Gwy, only a shadow in the light of the mounting flames, leaped over the bank. Two seconds later, his knife, driven up through the stomach, was deep in Jorrisen's chest. Jorrisen staggered a few steps, went to his knees, then fell. Gwy knelt beside his brother, making clucking noises.

I don't remember dropping from the

bank, but as Jorrisen fell, I picked up Cronje's discarded rifle, took a cartridge from my shirt pocket, slipped it into the chamber, shoved the bolt home and said, "Turn around, Cronje, and put your hands behind you."

Cronje jumped for me.

I shot him through the chest.

Twak was too weak from hunger to stand, but Gwy helped him sit up, and watched him spit out teeth and clots of blood. Then he helped Twak crawl to the pan and supported his head as Twak sucked up water. Twak turned on his back and lay panting. Gwy slipped over to Cronje, pulled his knife and sliced some flesh from the dead man's forearm.

"What the hell you doing?" I asked.

"Twak hungry," Gwy said.

I blew my top, I guess, for I kicked Gwy all around the fire. He threw the "meat" into the blaze and darted into the darkness. In less than half an hour, he was back with another turtle. He tore it into small pieces, chewed them, then pushed them into Twak's bleeding mouth. Within a couple of hours, Twak and Gwy were sitting by the fire chattering like monkeys.

At dawn I shot a spotted cat, and we cooked and ate. After a hearty drink of water, I took Gwy's trenching shovel and dug into the bank below the fallen tree. I had trouble with tree roots, but finally excavated a cave big enough to hold the four bodies. Gwy refused to help drag the bodies for burial, and Twak was still too weak. I got Kotze and Jorrisen in side by side, putting them on their backs. Then I pushed Cronje in on top of Kotze, and Marais on top of Jorrisen. All lay with heads in the same direction.

I covered them as well as I could with sand, and set Gwy to work at mending the water bags by bunching the holes and tying them closed with string. Then I walked out into the desert with Cronje's rifle and my two remaining cartridges.

Six hours later I gave up the hunt, having seen nothing but small birds. As I neared camp, a forty-pound duikerbok raced out from behind a bush—leaping like a rabbit and going like hell. I fired, and missed. The duiker stopped and looked back. I prayed, and pulled the trigger. He fell, and lay kicking feebly.

I felt pretty good, for there was enough meat on the duiker to get us back to civilization. As I carried it into camp, I saw Twak sitting on his haunches, watching Gwy, who was digging into the newly made grave. I thought they were after a snack or two from a corpse, and stood watching, to make sure.

But they weren't after meat. Gwy uncovered Marais, tugged him out of the grave and began trying to turn him, end for end. Marais was too heavy, and Twak got up to help.

They finally got Marais's feet where his head had been, and pushed and tugged him back again on top of Jorrisen. Twak arranged Marais's feet so they rested on Jorrisen's head. Then Gwy re-covered the bodies with sand.

"What the hell was the idea of that?" I asked as I walked up.

Gwy grinned. Through swollen lips, Twak said, "Jorrisen, the offal of a sick jackal, put his boot in my face, *Baas*. Now he journeys to the Land-of-Fat-Zebras with Marais' boot in *his* face."

"A nice thought, boys," I said. ■ ■

have hit me hard. This one, under the sunburn and lumpy clothes, was pretty. All I could do for a time was stare.

She looked scared, ready to run, but that could be the gun I still held on her. So far as I could see, she was unarmed, so I holstered my gun, dismounted, shooed the mare and mule toward the pool below the spring, then walked over to the grave where the girl stood.

"Who died?"

"My brother."

"What did he die of?"

SHE didn't get to answer that one. There was a small sound back of me, a click of metal on metal that is the coldest sound in the world—the sound of a gun being cocked.

I spun around, and I never drew a gun faster, but there was nothing I could see to shoot at. For a moment I thought I might have mistaken a clink of the mare's shoe against rock, then a rifle cracked from the rocks back of the spring, something socked my gun hard, and the gun just disappeared from it. For another second I stared stupidly at the graze across my thumb and forefinger, then I whirled toward my rifle on the mare fifteen feet away. But a warning bullet plowed the sand in front of me, and then I pulled up short.

"Don't be a damned fool, mistuh." It was a man's voice from the rocks back of the spring.

"Don't try it," the girl begged from behind me. "Bragan will kill you."

If he was good enough to shoot the gun out of my hand, he could sure make a sieve out of me before I got to the mare. I didn't try a thing.

"Get your hands up."

I put them up.

The man—Bragan she'd called him—came from behind the rocks. He was limping painfully like his left leg hurt him a lot. The pants leg was slit, and I could see the bloody bandage under it. He stopped ten feet from me, his rifle held carelessly but pointed at my stomach.

"I reckon you're the law." His voice was soft and southern, and he was smiling a little, but not like he was amused.

That question took the last ray of hope from me. He was on the run from the law. I thought about all that gold packed on the mule, and I got a sick feeling inside me.

"Well, are you?" he asked.

"No."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Prospecting."

"Kind of late in the season, ain't it?"

Bragan was fully as tall as me, but so lean that at first glance he looked gaunt. His face was a narrow wedge broken by a wide yellow mustache, and his faint smile showed teeth that were strong and discolored. He had a big blade of a nose, and above it his eyes were pale gray, somehow flat, and the cold unblinking look of them turned his smile into nothing at all.

"What you got in the way of grub?"

"Beans, flour, bacon. Not much."

"It'll do." The pale eyes watched me, and the smile widened a little like he could guess what was going on inside me, and he was enjoying it. "What's your name, stranger?"

"Miller. Roy Miller."

"Well, rest easy, Miller. All we want is your grub. And your animals."

Behind me the girl let out a little sigh. Maybe she was relieved, but I sure wasn't. Being set down in the desert thirty-five miles from the next water hole, with no horse and no food is serious enough; but that wasn't the real cause of the sick feeling I had. It was the gold. Maybe he didn't intend to kill me now, but when he found all that gold, things were going to be different. He'd know I'd follow him a long ways to get that back. Unless I was dead.

"Kate, you rustle up a fire. I'll get his grub." Bragan limped over to the mule, his eyes never off me more than a split second and the rifle steady. He dug into the mule's pack.

I said quickly, "All the grub is on the mare." Which was the truth.

But I was too late. He was already interested in what he saw in the mule's pack, his eyes flicking up at me and back to the pack, the rifle unwavering across the mule's neck. My muscles tightened.

Beside me the girl Kate spoke in a low, scared voice. "Please don't try anything. He promised me he wouldn't kill you unless he had to."

I looked at her in the fading light, and she was so scared the whites of her eyes showed all around.

I didn't get a chance to try anything, because by now Bragan had hobbled painfully back until he was six feet from us. He was still smiling but he was breathing hard through his mouth now, and his pale eyes were squeezed to slits.

"Where'd you get all the gold?"

"A long way from here."

"How much you got?"

"About seventy-five pounds."

Beside me Kate sucked in her breath sharply.

Bragan said, "Any more where that came from?"

"No. It was a small placer and I worked it all."

He nodded like that was all he wanted to know. "Stand away from him, Kate."

"No!" She stepped in front of me. "You promised—"

"Stand aside!"

I had nothing to lose now. I grabbed Kate under the arms, and I didn't just shove her—I threw her at him. Then I dug out for the shelter of the rocks back of the spring. Behind me I could hear Kate scream something, then Bragan's yell that could have been the pain of her crashing into his wounded leg; but there were no shots yet, and I didn't stop at the rocks at the foot of the canyon wall. I started up the steep slope like a scalded dog. I figured if I could get far enough up before he started to shoot, I'd be safe, because he couldn't climb with that bad leg, and he sure couldn't get a horse up there.

I was a good thirty feet up before the first shot cracked. It was a wide miss that smacked off the rocks to my left. Below me the girl was screaming something that sounded like *"Run! Run!"* so I kept going. The second shot was even wider, and I knew then that the girl must be knocking the barrel aside every time he tried to shoot. I kept climbing, and after what seemed like a hundred years, I was over the top, flat on my face on the other side of the ridge, trying to get my breath back.

Then I heard some more yells from Bragan; I peeked over the top, and I got a surprise. Kate was scrambling up the slope toward where I was; and below her Bragan was waving the rifle and yelling, "Come back, Kate! I ain't mad at you!"

Kate kept right on climbing.

"Don't be crazy, Kate! It's thirty-five miles to water, and more like seventy-five to supplies. If you go, you'll die."

Kate kept climbing.

I called, "Over here, Kate," and Bragan winged a shot barely a foot to the left of my head. I ducked and stayed down.

Finally Kate was over the top and beside me, breathing hard.

"Much obliged for what you did down there," I said.

She nodded. "Can you get us out of the desert?" she asked breathlessly.

"Maybe."

"That's what I hoped. That's why I made him promise not to kill you. I hoped he'd leave you here alive, then later I could escape from him to you, and you could get us out of this horrible—"

"Look, maybe you better start over at the beginning. What's Bragan done to have the law after him?"

"He and my—my brother tried to rob a stagecoach up near Lancha. You know where that is?"

"Yes." It was a silver boom town up in Nevada.

"Bragan killed the driver, but the Wells Fargo messenger stood them off. He wounded them both. They rode into Lancha where I—well, where I worked. They said the law was right behind them and they were going to hit for the desert to shake them off. Oliver—my brother—was badly hurt. I begged him not to try it, but he figured it was his only chance, so—" She broke off, still trying to get her breath back.

Below us Bragan yelled, "Honest, I ain't mad, Kate! You come on down. Look, I'll leave that fella some grub and a canteen, and you and me'll ride out."

He sure wanted her back bad.

"My brother was determined to go," Kate went on. "Somebody had to go along and take care of him. I knew that cold-blooded killer Bragan would leave him to die if he became too much of a drag on him. So I went along."

"That sure wasn't smart."

"He was my brother."

Well, that's women for you. If it's somebody they love, that seems to be reason enough to do almost anything for them. I could guess the rest of it: The horses pushed until they died in the heat, her brother dead of his wounds, and then me riding into the mess without sense enough to listen to what the buckskin mare had tried to tell me.

CHAPTER TWO

THERE wasn't much light left in the west now, but in the east a big moon was rising back of the mountains, and I could

see Bragan plainly by the light of it. He was filling my canteens at the spring, keeping a wary eye on the mule.

I looked at Kate, and I thought about thirty-five miles of blazing desert and us with no food and no way to carry water. It'd be at least two nights of murderous hiking, in soft sand most of the way. I knew how fast the heat and bone-dry air sucked the moisture out of you, and how fast your strength fades once you're out of water. It was no sure thing that I could do it alone. And with her to hold me back . . .

"Listen," I said, "he isn't joking about how far it is to water and supplies."

"You think I couldn't make it?"

"Depends on how tough you are. What kind of work did you do in Lancha?"

"I—I"—she stalled a second, then raised her chin—"I worked in a dance hall."

"A dance hall?"

"Yes." And now with her chin up that way and her eyes half shut watching me, I could see something of that sharp, half-hidden wariness they all get if they stay in the business long enough.

"I see." But I guess I said it in the wrong tone of voice.

"And all I did was dance," she said in an oddly hard voice.

"All right. Did I say anything different?"

"Don't think anything different, either."

"All right." She sure could get mad quick.

FROM the canyon Bragan yelled, "This is your last chance, Kate. If you don't come down, I ain't leaving you and that fella a thing. No canteen, no grub, no nothing. Your only chance is to come with me."

I looked at Kate and she was watching me with the same expression on her face.

I said, "Your best bet is with him."

"You won't take me with you?"

"You'd be taking an awful chance. Might be your funeral."

"I'll risk it."

Bragan had already climbed on my buckskin mare, and was leading the mule out of the canyon.

Up to then I'd been thinking more about how good it felt to be alive than anything else. But now, seeing all that gold ride out of the canyon, I suddenly felt sick again. That gold was five years of my life I'd spent sweating, starving, dodging Indians, always hoping for the one big strike. Me, I never had the knack or instinct or whatever it takes to make a good prospector. I guess my instinct is all for growing things. It wasn't seventy-five pounds of gold I was losing; it was green fields and fat cattle and all the other things I'd lain awake a thousand nights thinking about. I'd carried that dream with me so long that seeing it vanish down the canyon now was almost like dying.

Maybe your mind works better when you're backed up against a hard place. I don't know. But I do know I watched that mule disappearing into the moonlit desert, and suddenly an idea hit me so hard I grunted out loud.

"The mule!"

"What?"

"Listen, you stay here. Give me three or four minutes, then start screaming bloody murder."

"But what—"

"No time to explain. Do what I say. Maybe I can get us a canteen." That would mean more to her than gold. "You scream your lungs out. I want him coming back at a gallop. Talk to him, dicker with him about taking up his offer, keep him here as long as you can."

"But—"

I was already on my way. I headed down the slope of the ravine that paralleled the canyon Bragan had left, and the way I was running, it's a wonder I didn't break my neck. You see, I'd had five years of that ornery mule, and one thing I knew about him for sure—nobody in God's world could lead him at anything better than a good walk. Not Bragan or anybody. And if Bragan galloped back to Kate . . .

I crouched at the mouth of the canyon in the shadow of the steep rocks and searched the moonlit desert for the spot of gray-white that would be the mule's pack cover.

And that's when Kate started screaming.

She did a good job of it. The sound raised the hair on your neck. And now, between screams, I could hear another sound—a horse galloping. I crouched farther into the shadows, watched Bragan sweep past and into the next canyon. And, looking back in the direction from which he'd come, I spotted the mule.

I never ran a faster quarter mile in my life.

I was winded when I got there, but there was no time to blow. The mule wasn't broken to ride; I knew if I tried to climb on top of the load, he'd buck himself inside out. So there was nothing to do but grab the lead rope and yank him into the best speed he'd do.

Which wasn't nearly fast enough.

I wasn't much more than half way to the safety of the steep rocks before I heard the sound of a horse galloping again. Bragan was no fool. He'd tumbled mighty quick to what we were trying to pull, and now he was coming back at top speed. I looked at the rocks, and I knew the mule would never make it.

I whipped out my knife and slashed at the pack ropes. The gold was in sixteen small buckskin pokes that were packed in two flour sacks tied together with a length of rope, so they could be slung over the pack to balance the load. I got the sacks slung around my neck, hooked up the big canteen—and ran.

Don't ask me how I did it. With the gold and the canteen, I had close to a hundred pounds hanging on me. But I ran every step of the way.

Behind me I could hear Bragan slow at the place where he'd left the mule, then do a fast circle looking for it, stop when he found it, and finally come straight on at a gallop—which meant he'd spotted me. He fired as I started up the rocks. Shooting by moonlight is tricky, but I guess I really owed my life to the galloping buckskin, for the bullet screamed off the rocks to my right.

I was so tired it was like a dream. The canteen got tangled in my legs, I slipped,

almost fell, and I could hear the canteen go down banging over the rocks below me. There wasn't a chance of going back for it. Another bullet winged off the rocks. I kept climbing. A third shot slapped rock dust in my face. Then he must have gotten off the mare, because his next bullet made a whipping sound through the slack in my shirt. Then at last I was over the top and out of his sight.

I dropped. I had to blow a while or pass out.

Peering through a notch, I could see Bragan trying to climb the rocks below me. His leg was giving him a bad time, but the thought of losing all that gold was giving him a worse one, because he kept at it until he fell with the leg under him. He lay there cussing at the top of his lungs. He winged a shot at where he thought I was, but I wasn't there. And I knew then that I was going to make it.

When I had some of my wind back, I climbed, ducking from one shelter to the next, and the shots missed farther every time until finally they stopped altogether.

I climbed, rested, climbed again, then took a good rest. I was almost ready to start again, when I heard something that nearly scared the wits out of me—the sound of somebody climbing and blowing hard. Then I realized it must be Kate. With Bragan's shots to guide her, she'd spotted the angle of my climb and had followed it. A moment later she came into view in the moonlight.

"Up here, Kate."

"Thank God!" She caved in then, lying on the rocks, fighting to get her breath back.

Maybe she thought we were out of trouble now, but she couldn't have been farther from the truth. Besides the gold, I had a knife, some matches, and that was all. Except Kate. And I needed her the least of any. I knew how it'd be: She'd walk until her strength gave out, then I'd have to carry her or leave her to die. Looking at it one way, it would be more merciful just to leave her here so she'd have to go back to Bragan.

I climbed down to where she was. "You all right?"

"Just winded."

"Rest a while. We're safe up here."

"Did you get the canteen?"

"No."

She looked at the sacks which held the gold. "Food?"

"The gold."

"What happened to the canteen?"

"I lost it."

"Because you tried to get the gold." Her voice was sharply critical. "What good is the gold to us?"

"It's mine."

Hope sprang into her face as she thought of something. "We can make a deal with him—the gold for food and water."

"And he'd double cross us the minute he had his hands on the gold."

"That's a risk we have to take."

"Not me. The gold is mine and I'm keeping it."

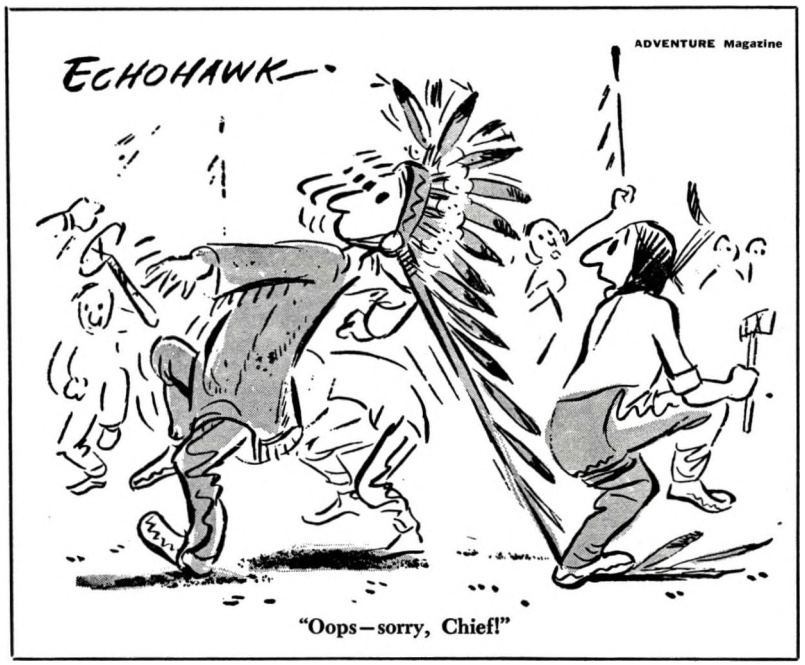
Is it worth more than your life?" she flared.

"I risked my life plenty of times looking for it. I guess I can do it once more."

Her look was bitterly angry now, and for some reason I was suddenly sore myself—maybe because I knew she was nearer right than I wanted to admit. Anyway, I tried to explain it to her—what the gold meant—the years with nothing but the hope of finding it to keep me going. I even told her about the ranch in California. Then it finally occurred to me to wonder what was so important about a dance-hall girl understanding how I felt, and I cut it off.

While I'd harangued her, her face had turned more interested than angry, but now the anger came back into it. A detached part of my mind wasn't too sore to notice how pretty she was all fired up this way.

"All right," she said, "you won't give it up. And where does that leave us now?"



"Oops—sorry, Chief!"

I didn't answer that one. I knew exactly where it left us, but I hadn't decided just how to break it to her yet.

She said, "If you think Bragan will ride away and leave us with the gold you're crazy. If we try to get water at the spring, he'll ambush us. And if we try to walk to the next water, he can easily run us down on horseback in the open desert."

SHE was calling it straight so far. I'd been planning ahead while I climbed, and I thought I could see a fifty-fifty chance of getting myself out of this mess. But not if I had to drag her along with me. No use stalling; she might as well know it now as later.

"You've got no problem," I told her. "Bragan will take you back."

"You've seen the kind of man he is. If you were a woman, would you go back to him? He kept his hands off me as long as my brother was alive but—" She broke off, understanding coming into her face. "I see what you're getting at. You figure you have a better chance alone."

"That's the only way there's any chance at all."

"Well, I won't go back to him."

"Listen, you trail along with me and you'll have a damned good chance of winding up dead with your tongue swollen up until your mouth can't hold it. And with you to hold me back, I might wind up that way myself. That'll suit the buzzards fine, but you sure won't like it."

"I won't go back to him."

"Get some sense." I was getting sore again. "With Bragan you'll at least get out alive. And I wouldn't think a dance-hall girl would have any illusions about there being a fate worse than death."

Her face was dead-white in the moonlight, and for a second she looked ready to cry. Then her slap rocked me so hard I almost went backward off the rock. It hurt, but it knocked a little sense into me. Whether she was a dance hall girl or not, it had certainly been a hell of a thing to say to her.

"I shouldn't have said that," I mumbled. "I apologize. But if you had any idea of the odds against your getting out with me, you wouldn't think twice about choosing Bragan."

"What do you plan to do?"

I hesitated. I was wasting time when I ought to be traveling. But, hell, maybe if I explained what she was up against, she'd stop arguing.

"Here's the fix we'd be in. It's a cinch Bragan will sit tight at the spring—for a while anyway. We could hide up here waiting for him to leave. Without food and water we might last three days. But if he stayed longer, that'd be the end of us. So we couldn't risk staying here."

"What could we do?"

"We could cut across these mountains—it's a low range ten or twelve miles across—and there's a chance I might locate water on the other side. Nothing sure, just some natural rock tanks where water sometimes collects in a wet year—although this year hasn't been a very wet one. And even if I do find water, we're up against the same proposition: We still have only the choice of the two nearest water holes—one about thirty-five miles south, and the other a little

farther north. But even that's not the worst of it."

"What's the worst part?" she said. "Tell me. I want to know."

"Bragan. He's not stupid, and he appears to know this desert. He may sit here a couple of days, then realize we must have pulled out for one of those two water holes. He wouldn't know which one, but the flip of a coin would give him a fifty-fifty chance of picking the right one."

"It works both ways. Our chances would be fifty-fifty, too."

"Nothing like it. It'd be the odds against us finding water on the other side of the mountains, piled on top of the odds against reaching the next water hole alive, piled on top of the odds against choosing the right water hole."

She thought about that, her face very still.

"And you think you can make it alone?" she asked.

"All I can do is try."

She looked at me a long time, her eyes half closed, like she was studying me and remembering everything she'd ever learned about men. And whether that's what she was doing or not, what she hit me with next was the one thing I couldn't argue against.

"I know," she said slowly, "that having me along will cut down your chances. Maybe you can't even get me out alive. But you've got to try. I saved your life when Bragan wanted to kill you. Remember? You owe me something for that. So you've got to try."

Well, that was it.

"All right," I said, and my voice sounded thick. "Then we're stuck with each other. Come on."

CHAPTER THREE

WE CLIMBED steadily for an hour, and by then the gold weighed more like two hundred pounds than seventy-five. I figured here was as good a place as any to dump it. I cached it under a big outcrop of granite that looked like a ship's prow, and I built three monuments of smaller rocks to help me find it again. I had taken it out of the flour sacks, and now I put these in my pockets because we'd need them later. Then I spent a long time memorizing the landmarks in the bright moonlight. When I was absolutely sure I wouldn't forget any of it, we pushed on again.

I wasn't setting too hard a pace, because she was going to need her strength for what was to come tomorrow and the next day. I watched her, and she was taking it better than I'd hoped for, but I'd know better what our chances were after I saw how she stood the heat tomorrow.

I noticed some other things about her. She didn't like me to touch her. I'd offer her a hand over the worst places, but she wouldn't take it if there was any other way. She had a small hand, but it was strong, and touching it affected me the way you'd expect after all this time without the sight of a woman. Maybe she sensed that.

By daylight we were at the foot of the range on the other side, with the desert stretching wide and empty to the east of us. This was the coolest part of the day, but still so warm it was barely comfortable. It would be like this for about half an hour, then that blazing sun would be on the job again, and we'd have to hunt shelter.

But first we had to find water.

It had been years since I'd passed this way, and I had only the haziest memory of it. I figured we'd pulled a little north of the place I was looking for, so I decided to turn south and travel parallel to the range, checking every canyon and ravine we passed. I explained it to Kate.

"The Indians usually mark water. So do the prospectors, but generally the Indians do a better job of it. At the mouth of a canyon they'll build a mound of rocks with a white one on top. You look up the canyon and there's another mound with a white rock. You follow the white rocks to water."

"I see."

"Or sometimes they'll paint pictures of deer on a big rock. The way the deer face is the way to water. A prospector, sometimes he'll build a pile of rocks, and sometimes he'll just leave an empty tin can on a stick."

"You mean you don't know where these tanks are?"

"All I know is we're close. You'll have to keep your eyes open."

It was dry desert, mostly greasewood, cactus, several kinds of weed, and an occasional screwbean mesquite—all plants that go God knows how far down for their water. I broke a limb off a mesquite, and as we walked I took a swipe at every bush we passed. There's less life than you think on these low, dry deserts; and we'd walked a long ways before I hit a creosote bush that gave me a rattle back.

I hit it some hard licks then, and out of it came fifteen inches of concentrated meanness—a sidewinder. They don't have to coil to strike, and this one took a lightning shot at my foot that fell an inch short. Then I killed him. I cut off his head and put him in one of the flour sacks.

Kate looked at it, and I said, "Breakfast."

"You're going to eat that?"

"You, too."

She looked like she didn't intend to.

We went on walking, checking the ravines, getting no sign of water. I found a beaver-tail cactus; I cut off the new growth, scrubbed off the spines with weed and sand, and put it into the sack with the rattlesnake.

But no water.

BY now the sun was up and flaming, and I was getting a sinky feeling in my stomach. If we didn't find water, our only chance would be to sit out the day here, then hike back over the mountains tonight. And if Bragan was still there—well, it was better to not think about that.

"Is that a water sign?" Kate said suddenly.

"Where?"

She pointed. It was a single big rock with a smaller white one on top. I looked up the canyon and there was another white rock. Then I spotted a couple of rusted tin cans some prospector had thrown away, and I knew we'd hit it. I

put the tin cans in the flour sack, and we headed up the canyon.

It wouldn't be good water. It'd be water that had filled the rock tanks in the last rain and had been evaporating ever since, maybe to nothing. As we walked, the canyon narrowed to a gorge of solid rock, deeply shaded at the bottom. Then we rounded a turn and there were the tanks, several shallow basins. I looked at them and my heart went down into my socks. There was nothing in them but a thin skim of salt.

Kate looked at me. "Is this it?"

"This is it."

I stood looking at them, thinking what our chances were now. Then suddenly, out of the hazy recollection I had of the place, I remembered something. "Come on."

The gorge narrowed until you could touch both sides with your outstretched hands, a couple of places it was so steep we had to climb, pushing and pulling each other up. Then we rounded another turn and there it was—a big pothole with about ten gallons of cloudy water in the bottom.

I tasted it and it was warm and so bitter I wanted to spit it out, but it was drinkable, and I drained the can. I filled it and passed it to Kate. After the first gagging she drank it all without a word.

The cactus, cut up and boiled in a tin can, tasted no worse than I remembered. It helped to kill the empty ache and that's about all. The rattlesnake, skinned, cut up, and broiled over greasewood colas was good. After the first doubtful taste, Kate ate it willingly.

"Now get some sleep," I told her. "It'll be too hot for it later."

"All right."

After she'd walked out of sight around the next turn, I stretched out beside the tank, but sleep wouldn't come. I kept thinking about the choice I had to make —which water hole to head for next. The one to the north was a little farther, so Bragan would probably figure we'd head for the south one. Or maybe he'd figure we'd head north to fool him, so he'd head that way himself. I kicked it back and forth until my head ached. Finally I sat up and flipped a coin. It came up tails, and that meant south to Windler's Well. I went to sleep then.

It was after noon when I woke up. The bottom of the canyon where we were was still in deep shade, but the heat was suffocating. I drank a can of water from the tank and it tasted awful. Then I filled another can, and walked up the canyon to where Kate was.

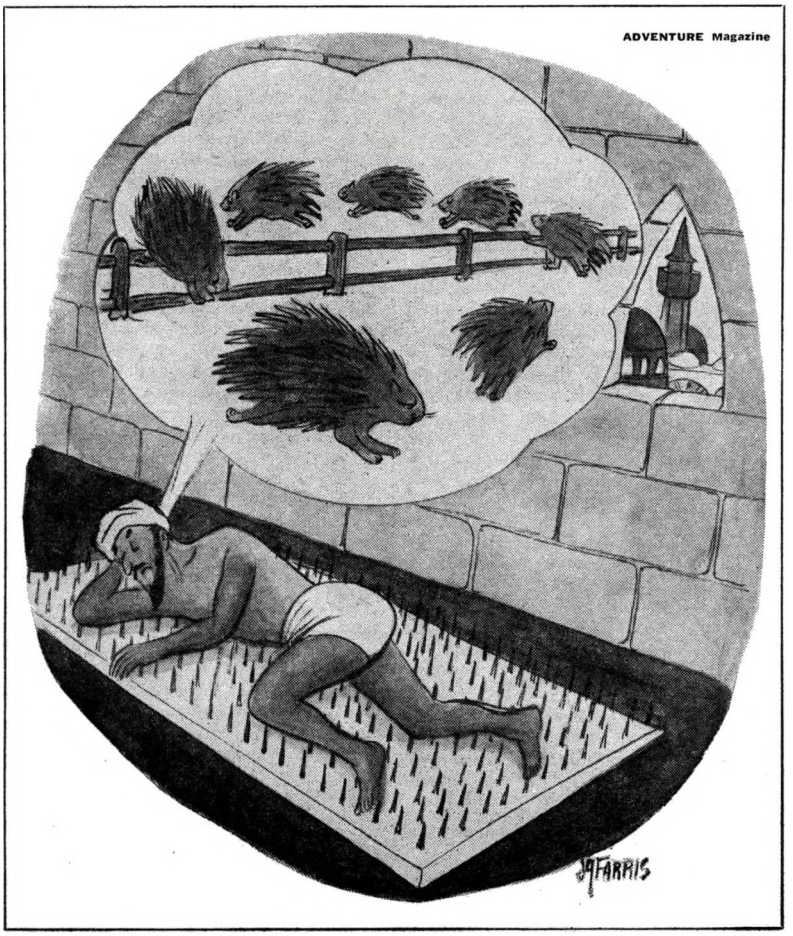
She was still asleep.

Like me, she'd taken off her boots to use for a pillow, her shirtsleeves were rolled up and her shirt open at the neck. And you'd be surprised, there was nothing hard about her face now; it was softly relaxed, unlined, the lips full and gentle. Sure, she was badly sunburned, lips dry and cracked like mine; but you could picture her in a pretty dress, all that shiny hair put up, her complexion smooth and white the way her arms were now where the sun hadn't got to them, and it was a fine thing to think about.

She'd said she worked in a dance hall, but it was hard to believe. She looked too young, too unmarked, too—well, innocent.

I sat down beside her, setting down the can of water. I told you how it is to be alone so long on the desert; it makes you hungry for the sight of a woman just like you're hungry for the sight of running water and green, growing things. It was enough just to sit there quietly and look at her.

Finally her eyes opened.



THEY were clear, dark blue and for the moment they were unfocussed, still half dreaming. Then they snapped wide, and her whole face tightened up, and as quickly as that she looked older and not as pretty.

I said, "You look pretty when you're asleep."

She didn't say a word. She made a quick move, and from some place she drew a little knife.

I looked at it and I could feel my own face tighten up. "I brought you some water."

"Thank you." She didn't put away the knife, and there was no softness in her voice.

Her jumping to such a quick conclusion about the way I was looking at her didn't exactly make me mad, but it did irritate me. I remembered how soft and gentle her face had been, asleep, and I looked at how wary it was now, and for some reason that irritated me, too. And that knife—what did she think I was? If I'd thought about it a moment longer, I'd probably have gotten up and walked away. But what I did was grab her wrist, dig my thumb into the back of her hand, and when she dropped the knife I flipped it away.

She started to scramble after it, but I grabbed her. She fought me like a wildcat. All I'd meant to do was take the knife away from her. But the feel of her in my arms, the wild struggle of her body against mine seemed to explode something in my brain. The next thing I knew I had her pinned to the ground, helpless, my face inches from hers. I don't know what would have happened next if I hadn't seen the look on her face. There was pure terror there, and more than that. There was something of what I'd seen when she was asleep—the young, somehow defenseless look—the look of terrified innocence. And it cut through me sharper than any knife.

I released her.

I stood up, breathing hard, walked to where her knife was, and picked it up. I turned around and she was sitting up now, her face in her hands. I walked back and dropped the knife beside her.

"I don't suppose it does any good to say I'm sorry."

"Go away," she said dully.

"You had no call to pull the knife."

"Go away."

"All right."

I turned and walked down the canyon. It took me a while to get some of the dry clay I'd spotted down there this morning; and when I got back to the water, Kate was sitting beside it looking almost as if nothing had happened. I tried to act that way myself, as I used some of the water to soften the clay. But something had happened, all right, and it would take a lot of thinking about.

I laid the soft clay aside. "Give me your boots."

SHE hesitated, then without a word shucked them and passed them over. I used my knife to cut off the top eight inches of them, and gave the shortened boots back to her.

"What was the idea of that?" Her voice sounded natural.

"You'll see in a minute."

I cut the back seams on the pieces I'd kept, and flattened them out. First I cut some thin strips for thongs, then I used the rest of the leather to make a pair of crude moccasins that would fit me. Then I filled both the tin cans with water, shucked my own boots and put them in the pothole to soak.

Any other time, the look on Kate's face would have made me laugh.

I let them soak the rest of the afternoon. The heat was bad and got worse as the afternoon wore on, but at least we had the deep shade to be thankful for. Several times I glanced up and caught Kate looking at me with an oddly intent expression; and each time she looked away quickly without saying anything.

Finally I said, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You keep looking at me. If you're worried about any more of what happened this afternoon—"

"I'm not worried."

I let the silence run a while, then I said, "One thing puzzles me."

"What is that?"

"How'd you happen to wind up in a dance hall?"

Her smile was small and weary. "That's the question they all get around to asking sooner or later."

"Any reason not to answer it?"

She shrugged. "Every dance-hall girl has a story. Do you want the one about a girl who was born rich but the family fell on evil times? Or the poor but honest girl who is working in a dance hall temporarily because she has a sick father who needs medicine?"

"Whichever one you want to tell."

"Well, I wasn't born rich," she said after a while, in a different voice. "And my father has been dead a long time. I'm from Virginia, and the Civil War left nothing of my family but my brother and me. So we decided to take what little money we had, and go to California. We got as far as the Nevada mines where my brother lost all our money buying silver shares. Then he got mixed up with Bragan and the Wells Fargo robbery. You know the rest."

"But why a dance hall?"

"Why not? I studied dancing and singing when I was a little girl." A wry smile touched her lips and went away. "And you don't have to be much of a performer to get by in a mining town. It paid more than other jobs. As soon as I had a stake, I was going on to California."

"Then you were a performer, not a dance-hall girl."

"There's not much difference." Her face had relaxed while she talked. Now she seemed to notice the interested way I was watching her, and that half wary look tightened it again. "You like that story, or shall I try again?"

"That one will do."

You'd be surprised, after the soaking and with the wet clay inside to help seal them, my boots held water pretty well. I figured to fill the two cans with water and sink them inside the boots; so if all the water leaked out of the boots, there'd still be what was in the cans. I tied the length of rope to the bootstraps so I could sling them around my neck.

But I'd hate to tell what the water in those boots tasted like.

And the moccasins they were crude and thin, and it was going to be hell crossing the rocky places, but with luck they'd do.

Supper was boiled cactus and nothing else. And after we'd eaten, we started out.

The moonlight was bright enough for me to follow the mountains on my right. The range got smaller as we walked, and finally sank completely into the desert floor. But by that time I could see the range twenty miles ahead where the water was, so there was no risk of getting off our course.

The moccasins were no better than I'd expected. By midnight I was limping.

And by midnight Kate was pretty tired, but we couldn't spend much time resting because we had a long way to go before sunup. Before she got too tired we talked a little, mostly about California and the ranch I was going to have there. That last was my favorite subject.

But after midnight she was too tired to talk. She walked when I said walk, and she rested when I said to. And she never complained. She drank what little water I doled out, and didn't ask for more, but by daybreak she was so tired she was starting to wobble.

And already I was starting to worry about how she'd do tomorrow.

But more than that, I was worrying about that flip-of-the-coin chance that we'd find Bragan waiting at the water hole. It was too late to change my mind now. It was up to the flip of that coin to decide our fate.

CHAPTER FOUR

WE MADE about twenty miles that night, and when day broke we were in open desert, miles from the nearest mountains. What we had to find now was some sort of shelter against that broiling sun.

I was walking through a low outcrop of boulders when I caught a flicker of movement to my right, then the fast run of a chuckwalla lizard headed for shelter under the boulders. I dived for the chuckwalla—a big one, easily a foot and a half long—but I just missed his tail and he went under the boulder.

I jammed my arm right in after him. Claws raked the back of my hand and teeth sank into my thumb so hard that I yelled, but we needed that lizard, and I'd have hung on if I could have got any kind of a grip on him. But I couldn't. I

flopped on my belly, peered under the boulder, and I could see him. He'd swelled himself up with air the way they do, and now he was wedged under there, dying but still wiggling.

A chuckwalla is a hell of a looking thing, an undersized dragon with a broad black body and a meaty, lighter tail. At last I managed to get him out, and I plunked him down on the rock beside Kate. She was too tired even to shrink away.

"Is it fit to eat?"

"It beats sidewinder."

"It looks awful."

"You rest. I'll cook it."

I cleaned it, cut it up, and broiled it. It was as good as I said, but Kate was too tired to more than nibble at her share. There was no use trying to force her to eat—that would only make her sick. There was bone-weariness in every line of her, and I wondered if it wasn't the bad water that she wasn't used to that was making her sick. One thing sure—she'd have to go on drinking it, because without it she'd die.

I LOOKED at how tired she was, and I thought about the fifteen miles she had to do tonight and how little water there'd be to do it on. I was plenty worried.

There was no shade big enough to cover us in the boulders, but I found an undercut bank in a nearby dry wash that might throw enough shade to do the trick. And while it was still cool enough to move around, I tried to grind up some mesquite beans I'd collected. The Indians grind a sort of flour out of them that is edible, but I couldn't seem to get the trick of it. All I came out with was a lot of trash with a thin sifting of flour mixed through it, so finally I gave up. There hadn't been enough beans to make much difference anyway.

I dug holes in the sand and put the boots in them with stones over them to cut down the evaporation and keep the water cooler. Then I got some sleep.

By midafternoon it was no longer possible to sleep in the narrow band of shade under the bank. The sunlight was a white-hot shimmer that even blotted out the mountains ahead. The heat smothered you, clogging your lungs like it was too thick to breath, and it was a misery to move because anything you touched burned you. I kept doling out the water, because it was better to drink it than let it leak out into the sand, but the oven heat seemed to suck it out of you almost as soon as you'd drunk it. All you could do was lie there and pant like a dog.

"Roy."

"Yes?"

"Tell me about your ranch."

Funny, that's what I'd been thinking about when she spoke. I'd been lying there with my eyes shut against the glare, my mind full of this picture I knew so well.

"It's level land. Up in the Sacramento Valley in California. It's got these big oaks spaced across it so it looks almost like a park, and in spring the grass grows there belly-high to a tall horse. And wildflowers—you never saw anything like it in your life."

"That ranch means a lot to you, doesn't it."

"It's all I've lived for for a long time now."

"It sounds beautiful."

"You never saw another one like it. There's a clear stream running through it that never goes dry. This stream makes a sort of wide loop with three big oak trees inside it. That's where I figure to put up the house. I know the land is still for sale, because—"

"Is there a girl waiting for you in California?"

"No girl in her right mind waits for a prospector to make his big strike. Besides, I'll have plenty of time to think about marrying after I've got the ranch going. I don't figure to try to start too big. That's the mistake a lot of ranchers make. What I want is a comfortable herd of good stock . . ."

I went right on spinning this dream I knew so well, and when I opened my eyes to look at her, her face had a relaxed, faraway look like she could see the dream, too, and it pleased her. I talked a long time because I liked to see her face that way.

Supper was cactus again for me; and Kate managed to get down the rest of her share of the chuckwalla.

I STUDIED her in the light, and she didn't look at all well. The heat had given her almost no sleep, and she looked hardly more rested than she had this morning. She caught the way I was looking at her and she straightened a little. "How far do we have to go tonight?"

"Only fifteen miles. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. You'll make out."

"Yes."

"There's sweet water at Windler's Well. You'll get your appetite back when you get there."

If Bragan wasn't there. If she could do fifteen miles on not much more than a pint of water in this blistering heat that wouldn't begin to be bearable for hours yet. That was a lot of ifs. I flipped that coin again in my mind, and wondered if it had gone against us.

"It's dark enough now. We may as well step out."

We were running into softer sand than we'd had up until now, and that made the going all the harder. By midnight I was having to stop every twenty minutes or so to let Kate rest. And shortly after midnight I gave her the last of the water. I cleaned the clay out of my boots and put them on, a hard struggle, because my feet were badly swollen from the beating they'd taken in the moccasins. Then I took a look at where the moon was in the sky.

"Hook your hand inside my belt," I told her. "We got to make better time."

She held onto my belt and I towed her along that way, the sand getting softer and the drag of her getting heavier by the minute. She was stumbling now—so far gone that the rests weren't doing her much good—but she didn't complain. Twice she fell down, and the second time she stayed there.

"Gotta rest," she mumbled. It was the first time she'd asked for rest, and it scared me how weak and completely weary her voice was.

I gave her a couple of minutes while I looked at how far down in the west the moon was now, and how far away the mountains still were. You see, to get there at or shortly after daylight wasn't going to be enough. Not if Bragan was there. We had to get there while it was still dark, so I'd have the cover of darkness to scout ahead. If Bragan was there, then we were all but finished. But you can't quit that easily. For two days now I'd been working on a plan—if you wanted to call it that.

But right now the important thing was to keep moving.

"All right, let's go."

"Gotta rest."

"Gotta walk, you mean." I picked her up and set her on her feet. I hooked her hand in my belt in back, and we started walking.

In the next hour she fell four more times, and the last time I picked her up her legs wouldn't hold her. She lay there on the sand crying weakly. "Can't . . . do it . . . can't . . ."

Well, that was it.

I thought about going ahead and coming back with water for her, which would be the thing to do unless Bragan was at the water hole. But if he was, we'd be sunk; because the plan—a lame thing at best—just crumbled away to nothing without her there to help make it work.

Finally I bent down, picked Kate up and managed to get her across my shoulders. The astonishing weight of her told me how far gone I was myself, but I made several hundred feet that way before she began to stir on my shoulder.

"Put me down," she said weakly.

"I might not be able to get you back up again."

"Put me down."

"Stop wiggling."

"Put me down!" She hit at me with her fist, but there was no force to it. "Damn you! Put me down. I can walk."

I put her down.

Then I sat down beside her to snatch a few moments rest.

"How much farther?" she asked.

"Those mountains dead ahead. Water and all the rest you want."

If Bragan wasn't there.

And those mountains only looked close. They looked half a mile, and they were more like two. If she could stay on her feet, we might make it in two hours. And that would be shaving the time thin.

AFTER a while she stood, and with my arm around her she could walk. After that it was a long nightmare. It was walk and rest and walk again; and every time the walk was shorter and the rest longer. It got to where I was coaxing every step out of her. Then she went down again, and this time she was out like a light.

I rested a minute.

She still hadn't come around, but her breathing was all right. I didn't try to revive her. Getting her onto my shoulders again was like trying to lift the whole world, but I finally did, and I started out. I lost track of time. The sand caught at my feet like glue, and the weight of Kate was like a giant hand shoving me deeper into it. By now I was coaxing every step out of myself. Kate had revived again—she kept mumbling something over and over—but I didn't dare take a chance on setting her down.

Then I looked up and we were at the foot of the mountains. The moon had set and the sky burned with a million stars, but no light of day showed in the east. We'd made it.

Later, lying flat on my back, feeling the strength run back into me, I studied the shape of the mountains against the stars, and I could see I'd hit the water hole almost squarely. That sharp outcrop of rock a hundred yards away was on the lip of the shallow valley where the well was. I'd passed this wall only four days ago, and I had the picture of it clearly in my mind.

Beside me, Kate sat up. "I feel better now." Her voice sounded a little stronger.

"See that outcrop?" I pointed. "The well is only a couple of hundred yards the other side of that."

"Then why don't we—" She broke off, remembering why we couldn't just walk over there.

"Not too loud. Your voice might carry that far. You stay here for the time being. I'll scout ahead. If Bragan isn't there, I'll come back with water."

"And if he is?"

"I've got a plan—a long shot, but we're down to long shots now. If there's time before daylight I'll come back here. If not, I'll head for that outcrop there. See the one I mean?"

"Yes, I see."

"It's straight up and down, about fifteen feet high with a flat ledge on top. What you do is wait for broad daylight, then you go as far as the outcrop—it's in plain view of the well and Bragan, if he's there—then you pretend to collapse right under it. I'll be hidden above on the ledge. When Bragan comes to revive you, I'll jump him from above."

Kate didn't speak for a while, but I could feel the weight of her silent doubt. And she was right. It was more of a forlorn hope than a plan; but I'd been working on it for three days now without coming up with anything better, so all we could do was try it.

I looked at the stars. "You'll have twenty or thirty minutes rest before it starts to get daylight. Do you think you can make it to the outcrop all right?"

"I'm stronger now." Her voice did sound a little stronger. "I'll make it."

"Kate, if this scheme doesn't pan out—"

"It will work out," she said quietly. "Everything you've done so far has been right."

"Except not letting him keep the gold in the first place." That was the thing that had been weighing more heavily on me every mile I'd watched her struggle toward this final flip of the coin. "I blame myself for that."

"It wasn't just the gold. It was what you dreamed of doing with it." Her voice turned soft, a little shy. "I know what it's like to dream."

I reached for her hand in the darkness, but she moved it away.

She said, "Don't blame yourself Roy. A man has a right to fight for what belongs to him."

I'd have said a lot of things then, but I looked at the sky and what I saw there knocked all the words right out of me. It was the faintest smudge of coming daylight in the eastern sky. I jumped to my feet.

"I've got to get going. But if—when I get back, I've got some things to say to you." I hesitated, waiting for her to say something; but she didn't, and time was running out fast now. I turned and started for the well.

CHAPTER FIVE

I WORKED in a wide circle to approach the well with the faint breeze in my face, so my buckskin mare wouldn't pick up my scent. And I'd have to work fast, because I'd slipped up on my time somwhere, and daylight wouldn't be long coming now.

The little valley around the well was a pretty lush spot—for the desert, any-

way. There was a grove of mesquite, ironwood, and willows, and a good stand of grass. The well itself was just an open hole in the ground, maybe three feet across and five deep, with the water standing two to four feet deep in it, depending on the season. The water was sweet and the well had never been known to run dry. It was named after a man, Lex Windler, who'd once tried to homestead the valley, but the Indians had burned him out about ten years ago, and he never came back.

There were rabbits in the valley, and doves, snakes, and several kinds of rats. I knew how to make the snares and deadfalls the Indians used to catch them; so if Bragan wasn't there, we wouldn't starve.

If Bragan wasn't here.

I slipped into the first of the mesquite thickets, and froze as I thought I heard something move. The smudge of light in the east was nothing you could see by. Down here in the valley it was black as pitch. I waited and listened, and there was only the faintest rustle like some small animal in the grass. I heard the rustle again, and I was almost certain now that it was only a rat or a lizard. But still I hesitated, because inside me was this strong feeling of something being wrong—the same feeling I'd had when I rode up to the spring three days ago.

And that's when I heard this other low sound, the soft nicker of a horse that I knew as well as the sound of my own voice. My buckskin mare.

Bragan was here.

The flip of the coin had gone against us.

For a time it was like all the strength had run out of me. I couldn't have moved if I'd wanted to. Then, slowly, my brain began to work again. What would be my chances of sneaking up on Bragan in the dark with my knife? None at all—not with the mare to tip him off. The low sound she'd made a minute ago hadn't meant she'd scented me; it had been the tone of voice she used talking to the mule. But any sound I made would really spook her, and she'd warn Bragan.

That left only the plan. I thought about that, and I knew something more surely than I ever knew anything in my life. It wasn't going to work.

I'd have to figure something else. But what?

I lay there while the light ran into the sky. I tried to make my brain work, but it was like a piece of wood. I lay there until it was too late to get to the ledge and even try the plan. It was broad daylight, and Kate had appeared below the outcrop of rock. The mesquites screened me from the well and Bragan, but I could see the rocks; and as I watched, Kate swayed and fell.

And in that instant my mind caught at the edge of an idea, but it slipped away before I could pin it down.

Bragan wasn't long in riding out to where Kate was. He must have kept the mare saddled all night; and he wasn't taking any chances, because he was leading the mule out with him. He was carrying his rifle at the ready, and he had a six gun belted to his waist. And that rifle—it never stopped pointing at that outcrop of rock. He reined in ten feet from Kate, and tossed a canteen to her, but he never once stopped watching those rocks.

If I'd followed through on the plan, I'd be lying dead up there this minute.

And as quickly as that, my brain caught the idea it had been flirting with. That's what had been wrong with the plan—that outcrop of rock was exactly the place where he would expect me to be.

And almost in the same instant I knew the place.

I moved fast, crawling, using all the shelter I could. It seemed a mile but it was only a hundred feet or so. I crossed the clearing around the well on my belly, throwing one glance to see what Bragan was doing—he was watching that outcrop of rock while Kate drank from the canteen—then I went head first into the well.

I got straightened around, and I was crouched in about three feet of water. I hooked half a dozen handfuls of water into my mouth, and nothing ever tasted sweeter. Then I drew my knife. My head was two feet below the rim of the well, and the side of the well was undercut a little, which helped to hide me. But the main thing was that I was the last thing in the world he'd expect to find when he bent over the well for water. It might work.

It had to work.

I SCOOPED up more water while I waited. Then I heard the horses returning. I crouched lower, my face tipped to the sky.

"Where's that gold cached, Kate?"

"I don't know."

"Where's Miller?"

"I told you. A snake bit him and he died."

"Don't lie to me." There was the sound of a blow and her low cry of pain. Then Bragan's harsh voice: "And don't think you won't tell me where the gold is. It may take a while, but you will."

There was the sound of hard slaps, one after the other, then her cries suddenly cut off. I gripped the knife until my knuckles cracked.

"Where's that—" then he broke off, muttering, "Hell, she's fainted."

His footsteps came toward the well. I crouched, tight against the wall. Then a bucket almost hit me in the face, and he was above it, framed against the sky, his face full of the sudden, hard shock of finding me there.

I came up at him like a snake striking.

The knife was meant to take him in the throat, but my legs weren't strong enough to get me that high. The sweep of the blade caught in his shirt, and I could feel the edge of it skate along his ribs, but the point didn't go in. He was cut, but not where it'd do much damage. He backed hard, clawing for his pistol, and if I hadn't hooked his bad leg with my free hand, he'd have gotten it.

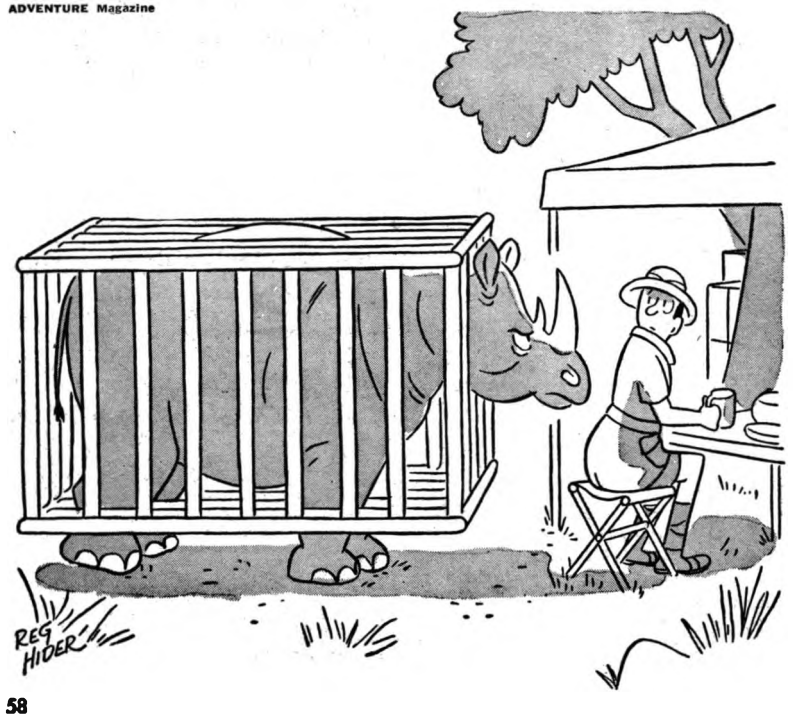
He yelled, falling, and the yank of that helped drag me out of the well.

When he fell he lost the pistol. He didn't waste any time fumbling for it—it was somewhere under him—but rolled for his rifle leaning against a rock. He got it, too, but he didn't get it pointed at me before I piled into him again with every ounce of strength I had.

What he did do was get it between him and that knife, and my forearm hit the barrel so hard I thought it was broken.

And I lost the knife.

Now I was hanging onto the rifle with the only hand that had any feeling left in it, and his twisted face with its pale, bloodshot eyes was only inches from mine. The rifle went off, pointed at the sky. Then Bragan rolled me under him, and was straddling me, wrenching and twisting the rifle to shake my hold on it. I



held on some way because my hold on that rifle was my only hold on life.

For a split second he had the muzzle jammed full in my face, but I jerked my head aside, as the rifle went off again. The muzzle blast burned the side of my face. I slammed my heel down hard on the back of his wounded leg. The first time he grunted, and the third time he yelled, but he had the rifle almost free now.

Strength was leaving me fast. I was seeing everything double through a bloody haze. He had one knee on my chest, he was pulling on the rifle and in another second he'd have it free.

Dimly I realized I was lying on something that must be the revolver he'd lost. I managed to get one foot up against his chest, and in the same instant I let go my hold on the rifle, kicked with all my strength, and Bragan went over backward half into the well. I fumbled for the revolver, got it, and by that time Bragan had scrambled around so he had the rifle pointed at me.

I don't know who shot first, how close his shot came to me. All I knew was that the gun was bucking in my left fist; and every time it bucked the muzzle would fly up, and I'd pull it down, and squeeze off again. I did this until the gun was empty.

And Bragan was dead.

Dazedly I looked around. Kate had been crawling toward Bragan with that little knife in her hand, but now she stopped. Her voice was barely more than a whisper. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." I was more than just all right. I was alive, I was safe, and the future I'd planned was ahead of me again. Only something had been added to that future. Looking at Kate, seeing very clearly now how much had been added to it, I suddenly felt so good I had a crazy impulse to laugh out loud.

I GUESS I was still a little groggy from the fight, or I wouldn't have said what I said next—this was not the time nor the place for it, and there are a lot of other things that are supposed to be said before you get around to that kind of talk—but the words seemed to come out of their own accord.

"Kate, when we get to California—" No, that wasn't the way to say it.

"We?" Kate asked in a wondering voice. "California?"

I started over again. "What I'm trying to say is—" Then something in her face stopped me cold.

She knew now what I was trying to say, and it had tightened her face up into the expression I hated. She didn't speak for what seemed a long time. She just looked at me—a long, searching, almost critical look—like she was seeing everything about me, and some of it for the first time. And suddenly I was as scared as I'd been while I'd waited in the well for my try at Bragan. Then slowly, like the sun coming out from behind a cloud, everything changed in her face. Everything hard and wary went out of it, and there was nothing left that didn't belong there.

And she gave me the strangest, sweetest smile you ever saw. ■ ■

STREAMLINED PIRATES

BY BEN PRESTON

ON THE morning of October 3, 1952, the *Combinatie*, a 500-ton freighter under Captain Van Delft, pulled out of Tangier with a cargo of 2,700 cases of American cigarettes, destination Malta. There being no restriction on tobacco trading in Tangier, the ship had no trouble in clearing port. The skipper, Captain Van Delft, anticipated no trouble anywhere along the line.

All went well until the ship was about 120 miles out to sea. Then, in the middle of the night, she was hailed by a smaller vessel. The Dutch captain halted the freighter because the smaller ship seemed to be in some kind of trouble.

What followed, as the two ships came alongside each other, was a scene right out of a swashbuckling Errol Flynn movie. As the *Combinatie's* surprised crew stood by helplessly, five masked men, all carrying submachine guns, jumped from the small ship to the freighter's deck and snapped orders to the sailors to raise their hands.

The pirates then herded the entire crew into the captain's quarters, where one of the masked men proceeded to paint over the portholes. Then, locking the door behind them, they went away.

During the next 10 days the *Combinatie's* crew lived in the cramped quarters of the captain. They managed to find out a few things about their movements. Their next stop was Marseilles. Some of the cigarettes went ashore there, and a new gang of armed bandits came aboard, replacing the original group. In October the rest of the cargo was removed and shortly after that the pirates dropped anchor along the coast of Sardinia, released the *Combinatie's* captain and crew, and took themselves off in a small boat, heading toward Corsica. With the pirates went the owner of the cargo, Senor Pedemento.

Captain Van Delft returned his freighter to Tangier and reported the incident. The port police took into tow a speedboat called *Esmée*, which was known to have left port shortly before the *Combinatie* started out. After further investigation, the story unfolded:

At the end of World War II many of the surplus freighters sold by the U. S. and England went into the hands of smugglers and pirates who proceeded to build up a lucrative business in the Mediterranean area. It was an open secret that they were financed by Lucky Luciano and his American dollars, and it was rumored that Frank Costello was his partner. There was little opposition to their venture until the story of the *Combinatie* hit newspapers all over the world.

At that point, an American named Sidney Paley was arrested by International Police in Madrid. Mr. Paley was known as 'Nylon Sid'. It was discovered that he worked his rackets with the aid of two partners. Police began a search of Southern Europe for the other two men.

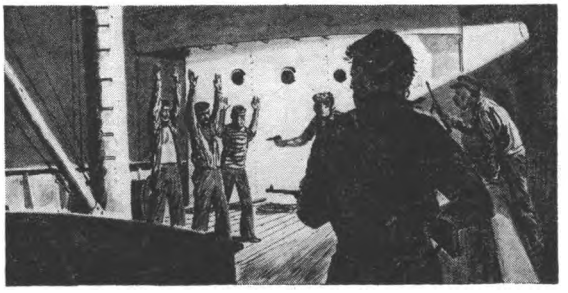
When the police arrested the *Esmée's* crew of five and put them in prison in Tangier, the men began to talk. They were British seamen, they told police, and they had been forced by pirates armed with submachine guns to take the *Esmée* out to sea and handle her while the gangsters pirated the Dutch vessel.

When the final roundup was made of the gang mixed up in the *Combinatie* piracy, it was quite an assortment of nationalities—a Dutchman, a Swede, several Frenchmen, Americans and Italians. They were arrested all over Europe by the International Police.

The trade in American cigarettes still flourishes in the Mediterranean area, due to the high French import and excise duties on tobacco. To the pirates, the profit on a cargo is well worth the risk. There is also a high value on cigarette lighters, sugar and soap, as well as ammunition and arms.

But the demand for such contraband grows less each day now, due to the increase in production and supply of these items. And as the market for them lessens the gangs in France and Italy fight harder against each other for the market that remains. Constantly now the gangs squeal on each other to the customs and the police. There are kidnappings, gang fights and pirates sometimes even hijack the ships of the other pirates.

Until recently the big shots of the gangs were, apparently, untouchables. But now the International Police are beginning to put the finger on the high-living bosses in their luxurious apartments in Paris and Italy.



By now the police will report the "situation well in hand." But it will probably never be completely eradicated, for piracy on the high seas is as old as ships and men. It flourishes more in times of scarcities than in periods of plenty. But it never stops completely. ■ ■

their big guns and troops, and then sat back to wait for the attack.

Nothing happened.

Weeks passed and then months and not a sign or scent of the Russian Bear was to be found. Ships sailed from distant England and France with costly supplies and came back loaded only with the bodies of men who died from malaria, cholera and dysentery.

Finally, however, there was sign of action to the north. Instead of attacking Constantinople, Russian forces drove over the Danube into northern Bulgaria. This had to be stopped.

It would have been playing into Russian hands to pull the troops out of Gallipoli and leave it undefended and so it was decided that a new expeditionary force would have to be marshaled and leave from England. The force would sail through the Mediterranean, past Constantinople and up the Black Sea to a small town called Varna.

"A new expeditionary force is going out, headed by Lord Ragland." The word swept through the streets and lanes of London and then out across the country. All over the British Isles the people were roused to a fever of fighting pitch. Now the humiliation of waiting for the sneaky Russians would be at an end. The enemy would taste the hot lead of the British rifleman and the keen blade of Britain's cavalry.

From all over England the noble and illustrious and fantastically uniformed regiments began to gather. They paraded through the towns and villages and cities as they came and the people turned out by the millions along the roads to cheer them on. Down through the streets of London they came with their aristocratic officers riding ahead, tipping the blades of their swords in acknowledgement to the roars of the crowds.

There were the 4th Light Dragoons and the 11th Hussars, Prince Albert's Own, and the foot soldiers of the First Division under the young Duke of Cambridge. Behind them came the heavily armored battle horses of the Heavy Dragoons and the sleek 17th Lancers. From the border country came the 93rd, the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders.

Each outfit had its own uniform and for the past thirty years the great battle had been to find more room on a man's body to put more lace and gold filagree, more spit and more polish, more sparkling leather and gold buttons. They came in flaming crimsons and brilliant blues, in the kilts of Scotland and the bearskin hats of the Guard. Quite frankly, they looked magnificent.

Could any such army as this ever be stopped? Who in the world could resist such a bold, daring, dashing bunch of swashbuckling soldiers?

On the docks, while the regiments were loading, was a sight to surpass even what had gone before. Champagne parties went on for days and nights and entire families sat at massive feasts, served by liveried servants. And then came the luggage. The private soldier carried his equipment on his back, but it was a shoddy officer who thought he could get by with less than three or four trunks loaded with the brilliant array that was so necessary for one to be decent in war. After the luggage came the wives of many of the officers and those who could arrange it made sure to bring along their maids. After all, the officers had their valets. It was a splendid way to go to war.

In such a dream world, and in such a delightful, lighthearted way, did Lord Ragland's Expeditionary Force set forth for fame and glory in Russia.

The dream lasted for almost one whole day. When the convoy had slipped down into the Bay of Biscay, a strong breeze blew up and then became a storm. Below decks, unseen by the officers, was that weird managerie of the common soldier and the horses of the cavalry. Someone had forgotten to supply the men with equipment for tying and securing the horses in case of a storm. The poor animals were dashed from side to side and then some broke loose and crashed into each other. They smashed their heads against bulkheads and fell screaming and thrashing on the floor with their legs broken. All that night, while the storm raged outside, the soldiers fired the shots that put the broken beasts out of their misery.

Varna, on the Black Sea, sounds like a beach resort. It was something else, however. Varna, then, as it probably still is today, was a savage, primitive cluster of stone and mud-hut cabins. With the arrival of 60,000 soldiers, and no sanitation facilities, Varna first began to smell funny, then to stink, and finally became a festering pool of disease. Within a week or two the first soldiers began to die from cholera and dysentery and before many months at least a quarter of that splendid force that paraded through London was either dead, badly sick or barely able to crawl around on the scorching parade grounds.

WHEN things became too dreadful at Varna, it was decided to move the troops to Devna. The officers might have wondered why no one seemed to want to live in the greenness of the Devna Valley. They soon found out. Devna was the original stamping grounds of cholera. It was the first Valley of Death the British soldiers were to face.

It is at Devna that the incredible strengths and unbelievable weaknesses of the British military system began to be revealed in all their varying and grotesque patterns.

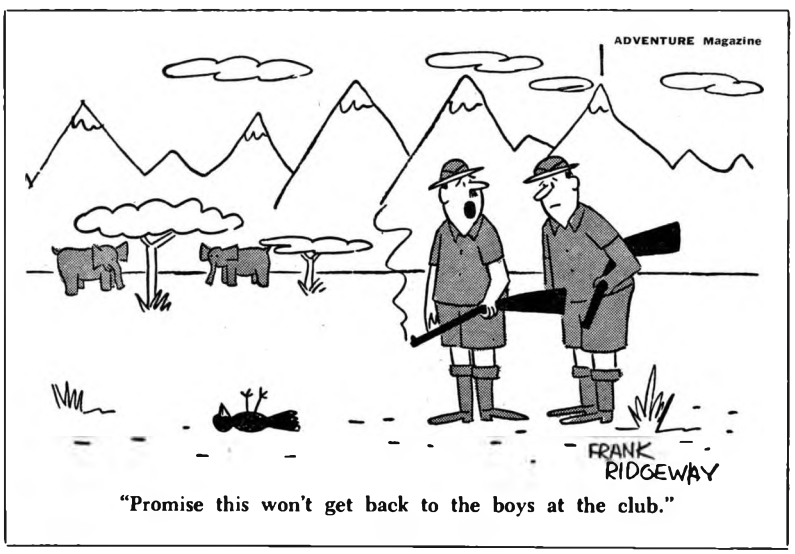
The British Officer Corps was first, above all things, not soldiers, but gentlemen. Not just any gentlemen—they were the swanks of the western world.

They numbered among themselves the great rakes, the great sports, the great drinkers and the great snobs. In order to keep undesirables out, they had even perfected their own language, a business which consisted of slurring their "r's" so they came out like "w's," a business of dropping the *ing* in certain words and emphasising it in others. Unless one was to the proper manor born he could never hope to learn the secret tongue and wore his unhappy background like a badge on his tongue.

To add to this system was the business of buying commissions and rank. A wealthy young man could, by spending enough (possibly half a million dollars) find himself at the age of twenty-five at the head of a regiment with only a few weeks actual training behind him. Often the boy would be put in charge of seasoned officers with as much as thirty and forty years of service behind them. This system hardly made for devout loyalty to the commanding officer.

The only chance to rise in grade was to go to India and actually fight. Unlike any other army in the world, those poor dogs who had to go out and fight to earn their ranks were looked down upon as some lowly breed of peasant. In the British Army the more actual combat you had seen, the lower was your status back home—where it counted.

The theory was, that the more noble a person was in station, the more courage and leadership he *must* have inherited. The system it set up was not as bad as it looks on the surface. The officers who held this theory never for a moment believed they could be guilty of such a crime as



"Promise this won't get back to the boys at the club."

fear or cowardice. This belief bred some of the most dogged, courageous, bull-headed and obstinate fighters the world has ever seen.

Their type is best described by the actions of Lord Ragland, who was leading the force. At Waterloo, when his shattered arm was amputated on the field without anesthesia, he called to the man carrying his arm away: "See here, my good fellow. Bring that arm back. It has my family ring on one finger and I don't intend to lose it."

This, then, was the type of men who were leading the troops and praying for battle. While bug-eyed Bulgar peasants stared in astonishment, the soldiers were put through parade drill after parade drill and spent hours each day on "essentials" —oiling their leather till it shone, polishing their brass, pipe-claying the whites of their uniforms. These were English soldiers and wherever they were in the world they were going to be a gleaming tribute to the Crown.

While the glory-bound troops spent their days at Devna, drilling and dying, a somewhat more incredible scene was going on in London and Paris. It is one thing to declare war, but another to get a nation roused and then to find no one to fight.

To the British it was embarrassing and to the tottering government of Napoleon III it was dangerous. It was finally decided that if the sneaky bear wouldn't come out of his lair they would go in after him.

After a look at the map the joint chiefs of staff selected the Crimea as the place to attack. Sebastopol was the home port of the Russian Navy and if it were taken, the threat in the Black Sea was ended.

This was fine, Prince Albert agreed, but then added in his stubborn German way that not one single scrap of information was available on the Crimea. This minor drawback did not deter the thinkers. It was finally seen that the Crimea was a peninsula which jutted out from the belly of Russia surrounded by the Sea of Azov on one side and the Black Sea on the west. The ideal scheme was simply to send the British fleet up to the neck of the peninsula, the isthmus, where it was narrow, and choke off the rest of the Crimea. The plan was accepted and arrangements went ahead until some die-hard reported that the water level of the Black Sea in the region of the isthmus was two to three feet.

A famous strategist of the day, one General Jomini, was consulted. Jomini was a brilliant but disillusioned man who liked to spend all the time he could sipping good brandy in his favorite haunt, the *Café Anglais* in Paris. After a week of making plans Jomini finally predicted that with the nincompoops then commanding armies, plans were of no use. Disaster could be the only result. They, disgusted with Jomini, and he with them, mutually parted, they to war and he back to his beloved bottle.

At this same time, Napoleon III was actually consulting a mystic who wrote and answered questions on a blackboard while in a trance. The soothsayer encouraged him to go ahead with plans for an attack on Sebastopol. As this seemed the only thing to do anyway, a French artist named Raffet was dug up who, years before, had made some sketches of Sebastopol and Balaclava. As art they were tasty, but as strategical maps we suggest they left something to be desired.

On the basis of such planning and information Lord Ragland, at Devna, received the order to attack, take and destroy Sebastopol. It is understandable then that his orders to the French part of the expedition must stand as a military high mark in brevity. They were: "Act as circumstances might require."

On this note, on Sept. 7, 1854, 57,000 officers, troopers and men (and one disguised wife of an officer) set sail for glory and victory in the Crimea.

On September 9th the main force steamed past Sebastopol and so close were the warships to the shore that, when the British officers espied the Russian officers peering at them with amazement through their telescopes, they proceeded to doff their plumed hats and bow to their fellow officers.

A landing was made some fifty miles north of Sebastopol. It was here that the total lack of realistic training began to make itself felt. For two days supplies were loaded and unloaded and sent to the wrong places while the soliders lined up like the file on the beach at Dunkirk, all day long, to fill their water bottles from the one clear spring that was discovered. If that small spring had not been discovered, there would have been no choice but to load up the boats and start all over again somewhere else.

Why the men weren't wiped out during this display can only be explained by the fact that the Russians, if believable, were even more confused and inept. In that army, the regiment belonged to the colonel and when a colonel didn't like the sound of some of the orders he received, it was likely that he might just pack up his regiment and go home for a day or so. After all, they were his men and no one likes to throw personal property away on a risky venture.

ON the morning of the 19th the British and French finally managed to untangle themselves enough to advance against the Russian hordes. While the order was given at six, it was not until nine that they finally stepped out. Bugles were sounded, the men lined up by regiments in two huge, fat columns stretching two miles wide and many miles deep—and the great adventure was on.

With all banners raised and flags unfurled the regimental bands began to play stirring marches that reached right to the martial souls of the men. Fifty thousand began parading across the deserted, grassless, barren slopes of the Crimean peninsula. Within an hour the glory began to diminish, however. More and more little holes opened in the ranks as men fell, sickened and weak from the ravages of disease. True to form they were left behind on the prairie, little knots or bumps in the dirt, moaning for help. This was the British Empire on parade.

By noon, the sun was directly overhead and the men were maddened by thirst. Here and there a trumpet tried to sound but the parade was over.

A small stream was seen ahead and the

troops, like mad dogs, screamed and bellowed and broke ranks. They ran into the stream until it reached their lips and pushed and crushed and drank so deep that quite a few drowned in the process. It should be said here as a tribute to one man, who must have been an unbelievable leader, that at this time not one single member of his Highland Brigade broke formation.

After this, one might have expected that the army was in desperate condition, but once having drunk their fill, the men fell back into ranks, crossed the river, and went on to face their greatest challenge, the crossing of the Alma River ahead.

When the men reached the near shore of the river the cannons began and, at last, the war with the Russians was on. Even as the men were blown to pieces in the ranks the officers and the noncoms went up and down the files, lining up their men and dressing up their ranks. It was better to be dead than to enter into the glory of battle in an undignified way.

Across the river and up the long, rolling, sprawling slopes, the regiments paraded. The famous French general, Cranrobert, who had seen many an attack in his lifetime, had never seen anything like this before. "My God," he said, "they are going under fire as if they were drilling in Hyde Park."

THEY never should have made it. It was impossible and hopeless, but the never-flinching line finally broke the morale of the Russian defenders—they had been told this couldn't happen—and they fled. The British had won one of the most one-sided, preposterous battles in military history. Once more their incredible courage had won victory in a situation where wise soldiers never would have ventured. But how long could monumental courage cover up for the crimes of monumental stupidity and monumental inefficiency?

The answer was not too long in coming. The war was far from over and the routed Russians had holed up in the strong fortress of Sebastopol. A siege was tried but found futile, and while the British staff was floundering about for a plan, the Russians made a surprise counter-attack. It was only partially successful, but in the course of it the Russians captured a battery of British Naval guns which were manned by Turks.

This, according to the romantic folklore of the day, simply wouldn't do. Lord Ragland, like most British officers and in direct contradiction to historical fact, went by the maxim that the great Duke of Wellington had never lost a gun. Many times Wellington had left guns behind to save his men, but in the Victorian age this was ignored. The great gentlemen soldiers preferred to live by myths—even though someone always had to pay for those myths with arms, legs and lives. The guns must be gotten back no matter what the cost.

The situation was this. To the front of the British position, defending the little port of Balaklava, was North Valley. It was about two miles long. On the right was a high, treeless hill called the Causeway Heights. The Heights were loaded with thousands of Russian riflemen and batteries of artillery and huge mortars. On the left, ringing the length of the valley, are the Fedioukine Heights. They, that day, were likewise primed and loaded for bear. At the head of the valley was an unnamed hill on which the Russians had crammed every gun, cavalryman and rifleman they could get there. There was not one square foot of the valley that was not under observation and capable of being struck by every weapon in the Russian arsenal. For a man to walk into that valley was to commit suicide.

On October 25th, Lord Ragland issued his fourth order of the day:

"Lord Ragland wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front—follow the enemy and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Troop Horse Artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate. (Sgd) R. Airey."

The order was given to a wild, hot-headed young Irish officer named Nolan who had little respect for any of his superior officers. He felt that they had wrecked the glorious cavalry by their stupidity and their lack of guts.

Nolan rode up to Lord Lucan and thrust the message under his nose. Lucan tried to read the message and make some sense out of it. After minutes of studying the cryptogram, Lucan, in charge of the Heavy Brigade, rode up to Lord Cardigan, his brother-in-law and eternal enemy, and handed *him* the order, saying it meant to attack at once. The facts are that no one down below knew exactly where the guns were. Ragland didn't seem to feel that was necessary. He, on top of a high hill, could see the guns perfectly well. The guns were to the right, on top of the Causeway Heights. In attacking the Heights the cavalry might draw fire from the opposite hills and some from the end of the valley, but at least an attack in this direction was believable.

While Cardigan pondered the order, young Nolan, mad with impatience, kept insisting they attack at once. Pointing down at the mouth of the valley, to the hill at the end of it bristling with batteries and thousands of men, he said, "There, my lord, is your enemy; there are the guns."

The rest has been made so famous by Tennyson's poem that the story almost doesn't need re-telling.

LORD CARDIGAN lined up his Light Brigade. In the first rank he put the 13th Light Dragoons and the 17th Lancers. In the second rank he put his own 11th Hussars, resplendent in their tight little coats and cherry-colored pants, topped with gold trim and filigree. In the third rank went the 4th Light Dragoons and the 8th Hussars.

At the head of the whole force went Lord Cardigan himself; alone, five lengths ahead of anyone. Someone had blundered. He knew that. He must have been thinking about it and was probably already composing in his head a scathing letter to send to Lord Ragland about the whole business.

But now it was his duty to advance. He was an officer and gentleman first, not a petty squabbler.

He lifted his sword, dropped it, a trumpet sounded, and in almost a hush the seven hundred troopers of the Light Brigade trotted, in perfect order, out onto the floor of the valley. From the first moment, they were greeted by a deadly storm of everything the Russians could throw at them. They could not have been more amazed than was Ragland from his hill top. The Light Brigade failed to wheel toward the Causeway. They were going straight down the valley.

"Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them . . .
Into the jaws of death,
Into the mouth of hell
Rode the six hundred."

The horses and their riders began dropping by ones and threes and fives. Maddened and wounded horses tried to smash the tight ranks of horses around them and get away from this booming, seering, pounding hell. From a cliff above, the French general Bosquet cried out, "This is magnificent, but it isn't war."

And still Cardigan rode on, refusing to let anyone ride up to him and pass him although the press was tremendous from behind. Anything would have been better, but they continued to *trot*. Never in history had there been such a display of incredible self-control and discipline.

All was lost from sight then, but a few moments later those who could see were greeted with an unbelievable sight. Out of that bloody, horrible morass appeared Cardigan, trotting down the center of the valley alone. The entire might of the Russian army trained its fire on one lone rider and still he continued to jog along, ignoring the wounded, scattered all around him and utterly ignoring the thousands of rounds of artillery and rifle fire that screamed around his head and body.

That was the end of the glorious, brilliant Light Brigade. The 13th Light Dragoons came out of the valley with two officers and eight men and the lead 17th Lancers had less than forty troopers left. Out of the 700 brave men who rode down into the jaws of death less than two hundred ever came out.

It was glorious, yes, but the British people and government finally saw that it was impossible, also. Out of all this tragedy finally did come good. Investigations were held, the system of recruiting officers changed. Henceforth, officers were to be soldiers first, gentlemen second.

It is this world of transition, the old breaking with the new, that Roger Fenton has captured with his camera for us to see today. All the stress of that struggle is mirrored in the eyes of Captain Dames. One senses the courage this man must possess, but one can also read the sudden and deep disillusionment mirrored in his eyes. He, too, had to tear off the mask of romance and myth and face the harsh realities of life. His uniform speaks of the reckless, gallant past and his eyes tell the story of the new, real world.

Here is the end of a world and the start of a new one, all thanks to the work of one young lawyer who saw life the way it really was. Roger Fenton belonged to the new. ■ ■

sprout to blackness in half a day. The room he was sitting in, a deluxe ensemble, made him wonder if it was not too fancy for a plain man like himself.

When the coffee began to smell sturdy, he went to the front door of the apartment to see if the milkman had left any cream. There was a big cop sitting just beyond the door, in a wooden chair, as though assigned to mind the bottles. He said, "Good morning, Joey," and Joe remembered him from the previous night's commotion. He was a detective named Finley. "The inspector told us to ease into your life," Finley said, "but not to disturb your sleep. You figure it adds up, don't you?"

JOE said, rather thoughtfully, "I guess it does." Finley, he supposed, had borrowed the chair from the superintendent. "Well, come in, anyhow. You might as well have coffee."

"I'm supposed to hang around like a marine on a mountain, watchin' for the enemy," Finley said. "The D.A.'s orders. You get the twenty-four hour treatment. We don't want a dead Greek."

"But I've got things to do," Joe said. "I've got a date tonight. Theater tickets, dinner, the works."

"I'll tell the inspector, Joey. He may let you out with a bodyguard. I haven't seen a show in a long time. Here's the cream. I like about a spoon and a half of sugar in my coffee."

They went inside and Finley sat down. Joe entered the kitchen and for the first time he saw the other cop on the fire escape. This was a slightly older, thinner man than Finley, and he was holding, of all unexpected things, a rifle in his lap. Joe pushed up the window. "How much sugar in *your* coffee, Mac?"

"About three spoons, Mr. Sodalis. My name is Levins. Morris Levins, the Sixth Precinct. Leave the coffee on the window here and don't stick your head out again so someone can shoot a hole in it. Personally I think they will come up with a more subtle solution, but you can't depend on that."

It was nine o'clock in the morning. As Joe had already observed, half the kids of the neighborhood were gathered below, looking up at Levins and the dramatic actuality of the rifle in his lap. Joe sipped his coffee, and being fresh out of breakfast goodies, presented Officer Levins with a section of stale cake. Finley came in, then wandered off.

"This is all nice and social," Joe said. "Except you fellows don't realize I've got a business to take care of."

"So has the D.A., Mr. Sodalis. He wants to put Whitey Dramarkis in that warm chair at the penitentiary and you're his only witness." Levins bit into the cake. "We've been instructed to make one thing plain to you—that this is the third time we've tried to indict one of the Dramarkises for murder. The last time it was Nick; the time before, it was Whitey. Now, very frankly—do you know what happened to those other witnesses?"

"I read the papers," Joe said, "and I know both Whitey and Nick."

"One witness was shot," Levins said, restating the grim, already known details. "The other man disappeared. You don't have to be a lawyer to understand that in most situations where there's no witness, there's no case. Suspicions don't count."

"Was Whitey arrested last night?" Joe asked.

"At his brother's place. He swore he was there all night with Nick. Right now he is out on bail, Mr. Sodalis, and I would say that he's a freer man than you."

"What will the grand jury do?"

"I think a first-rate grand jury will indict the bum, and you can bet your eyeballs they'll do it if the case is presented right. What Whitey needs is you dead and gone, like this coffee cake, so you can't testify. For a man in the food business, Mr. Sodalis, you put up a lousy breakfast."

Joe left the kitchen. As a man in the food supply business, he'd had a great bellyfull of the Dramarkis brothers and the emotional fatigue of opposing them in Vulcan City, the sprawling, prosperous, tempestuous town of his birth. He shaved his stubborn beard, then put on his clothes, delaying his telephone call to Mary until he felt more capable of telling her convincingly that everything was all right. Now, more strongly than at first awakening, the business of the night before was in his mind. He found Finley in the foyer, examining an eight-quart jug of mustard.

"That's a lot of mustard, Joey."

"It's only a smear, left on approval. Yesterday I had three thousand frankfurter rolls."

He found himself sitting down with Finley, with a picture of Mary on a table between them. For some self-conscious reason he edged it half out of sight, in back of a lamp, then realized with some embarrassment that Finley had been watching him.

"For myself," the cop said, "I always stayed single. Lived with my sister till she died and the house was all paid for." Finley looked serenely comfortable in the wing-backed chair he occupied. "Some things I've got to ask you, Joey. It's sort of a doublecheck for the D.A. First, I want you to start with the raceway—about the time I left your girl friend's house to drive out here last night. Gimme the blow-by-blow."

"All right," Joe said. "Just let me think."

It was simple enough, the Lord knew. The posture of deep thought wouldn't add very much. It was as simple as one man hitting another man on the head with a baseball bat. But he thought he knew what Finley wanted—details. The law is precise, and the D.A.'s office liked that same precision when they were tailoring a case. Last night, as he repeated to Finley, he had driven out to the Vulcan City Raceway at the invitation of a man named Eddie Carpis, the general manager of the track. The VCR, as it was called locally, was a handsome, flood-lit plant for harness racing. It operated only at night and it had prospered through its initial season on a formula with which the fans of the vicinity were not accustomed: the place was honest. Carpis had located him at Mary's house, at about eleven-thirty. It was midnight when he reached the track.

"How much did Carpis tell you on the phone?" Finley asked.

"He told me enough. He said he was

"Don't spatter any blood on my new curtains."

throwing the Dramarkises out on their haircuts with the approval of the Racing Commission. Then he asked me could I handle the food concession—not the clubhouse restaurant, but the hot dogs, peanuts, soft drinks, things like that. I said I'd get a crew out there the minute he gave the word. It might not have been a big contract for Whitey and Nick, but for me—well, that's something else."

"When you got out there last night, Joey—who saw you get out of your car?"

"I told you. There were about six guys sweeping up near the grandstand, and there was this Pinkerton cop you saw last night. I asked him where Carpis's office was. I told him I was expected, so he took me in there, under the clubhouse, kind of a tricky way. This Pinkerton—his name is Delaney—was with me every step, except that he walked slow. That guy is fat. I could see the light at the top of the door. 'General Manager,' it said. I was maybe ten yards ahead of Delaney; I was right on top of the place when I saw Whitey come out of Carpis's office. But that's it. Far as testimony goes, I can't improve on what I've told you."

"All right," said Finley. "Hold it there. About identification. You know for sure it was Whitey Dramarkis?"

"Look, Mac," Joe said. "This is murder. The D.A. can add what he wants, about motives and things, and whatever bag of magic he says he has prepared. When I say it was Whitey, I'm not giving myself the right to guess. The light was right over his head. I was as close to him then as I am to you now."

"Tell me more."

"Well, I've known Whitey all my life, that's all. His brother, too. In the sixth grade Whitey beat me up. By the eighth grade I was doing better. A few months ago, at the age of twenty-nine, I had the honor of hitting Whitey right in the nose with beautiful results."

Joe grinned at the memory.

"You hate him, don't you?" Finley asked. He was watching Joe shrewdly. "How about that? You hate him. Admit it now."

"No, I really don't," Joe said, and he thought about it, trying to be honest. He asked himself: *Who am I, with all the breaks I've had, with Mary and the years ahead of us, to hate a madman with a twist in his head?*

"I don't hate anybody."

"You're a nice good-natured slob, I suppose?"

"Oh, shut up," Joe snapped. "You asked me a question."

OFFICER Levins had climbed in from the fire escape. He said, "I think I've looked menacin' out there long enough. The whole neighborhood knows there's a cop up here with a rifle." Levins walked stiffly, rubbing his back. "Cold out there for a man my age."

"Take yourself a nip," Joe said. He pointed to the liquor cabinet. "Go ahead; the Scotch is older than the coffee cake. You'll like it better."

Levins poured himself a short one, then declared it was truly fine. A drop like that could renew a man, he said.

"I could hear you boys talkin', Mr. Sodalis, about who hates who and who is in love with who. I can tell you right now the Dramarkises are not that delicate. They hate you all over and they will stamp you out like a ladybug before there is any trial, if there's a convenient way. You should wake up and get scared."

"I'm scared," Joe admitted. "I'm scared enough now. But what the hell do you want me to do?"

Sharp as a sandwich of new pins was his memory of Whitey's face the night before—the man's eyes big and glossy as a pair of peeled eggs, his mouth all twisted, like a length of lemon skin fetched from a drink—a madman, as he had said, standing under that light before he disappeared.

Finley was talking again.

"Why didn't I do what?" Joe said. "Chase Whitey? But I didn't know what he had done until we stepped into Carpis's office. The Pinkerton, Delaney, never got a fair look at him."

"Let's take it from where you went into the office then," Finley said. "There was Carpis, fresh killed like a chicken." The detective sighed, moistening the tip of his pencil.

"You were there yourselves," Joe said, "in fifteen minutes. You saw it. Carpis's head was all spongy where he got whomped. I don't know how many times."

"Two whomps," said Finley, bemusedly, "but nice ones. You fellows didn't touch anything, did you?"

"I told you the Pinkerton took care of that. 'Hands off,' he said, then he phoned you guys. Look, I've got to phone my girl. There were no prints on that baseball bat?"

"No prints of anything," Finley said, "except Carpis's head. You're the D.A.'s big prop, Joey; you're his summer, winter, spring, his everything."

He closed the book.

MARY SULLIVAN was not too frightened, although she wondered, briefly, whether this was a deficiency in herself. In any event, looking out the window, she thought it was the best and brightest of October Saturdays. It was a dazzling day that flooded the neighborhood for all the Greeks, Italians and dwindling Irish.

Mary was in her own room, stretched out on the flowered bedspread, wishing the hours would hasten, wondering how it would be to go to dinner with a double bodyguard named Levins and Finley. She was glad Joe had phoned this morning before her father, returning from the corner stationer's, had brought the papers. Soon after that both her married sisters phoned.

"You're not excited, Mary? You're not scared?"

"I know he'll be all right," was all she said.

It was an act of faith, she knew, but faith, to Mary, was the fabric of survival. She kept turning her left hand idly, watching the sunlight play against the facets of the solitaire Joe had given her. "It's a rock you can hock," he had told her. "They don't make these at the glass works."

He's a tough Greek, she was thinking proudly, and a lucky one. Tender as he was, he still was tougher, luckier, braver than his enemies. "Lincoln-onis, the Self-Made Peanut Prince," as she sometimes liked to call him, always sounded like a broken sound track on the phone. All the hawking of edibles he had done at movies and ball games as a boy had left him with a peanut vendor's larynx. When he said "I love you," however softly, it came over the wire like fingernails scraped on slate. It made her twang all over.

In the afternoon her father said he was going to have his hair cut. "What's left of it," Mr. Sullivan said. "Over the ears and in my nose. You won't be here for supper?"

"No, angel," Mary said. "Would you want to bring back something you like? A nice pig's foot?"

"A pig's foot in a pig's eye," Mr. Sullivan said. "All they do in these local markets is cater to the Greeks. I'll bring back some beer, and maybe some liverwurst."

"And a nice Greek salami," Mary said.

SHE watched him descend the first of three flights leading to the street. "A loaf of bread, too, Pop," she called. Through a window, opening on the stairwell, she could see the tower of the big church on Acropolis Street. She was thinking of her hair, and of what she might do to make it different without growing another head. A tall man, nicely dressed, was coming down from the floor above. He was smiling, waving back over one shoulder to someone. He was holding a small, framed photograph. He said in a neighborly way, "Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," said Mary.

But the man didn't make the turn at the base of the stairs. He just kept coming toward Mary, a matter of two quick strides. He said very softly, unexcitedly to her, "Don't scream, miss, and you won't get hurt."

Behind this first man, moving quickly, soundlessly, there came another.

It had not occurred to Mary to scream. Through these first strange moments it was like something to which she was merely a witness—as Joe, the night before, had been a witness. When she did attempt to scream she found herself unable to utter a sound because of the hand that covered her mouth. . . .

Around five in the afternoon, Joe Sodalis's precocious beard had attained an eight o'clock shadow. A patient man, he shaved again, meditating on the things a man will do for love.

"Hey, Finley," he called from the bathroom, "be a nice fellow. Make us a drink?"

"I had it in mind," said Finley. "What'll you have?"

"An old-fashioned, on the sweet side," Joe said. "I'm only a growing boy. Use the good whiskey, Finley." Joe had worked the lather into his jaws. "All the junk's there. Do you think you can handle it?"

"I just mixed a little specialty of mine for Morris," Finley said.

Joe was inclined to let brotherhood prosper where it would and he did not think one or two drinks before dinner would peel the silver plate from any cop's badge. He continued dressing, aware that by the standards of the neighborhood sports, he would never be a dude. Even

so, he wished his eyebrows didn't resemble a double order of Groucho Marx's mustache. He thought of putting some sticky stuff on his naturally vertical hair-do, but he decided it wasn't fair for one man to smell up a theatre by himself. When he walked outside, he said to Finley, "Where's the drink?"

"I didn't make you one, Joey; I thought it might be wiser to keep you calm tonight."

"This is a gag?" Joe said. "Where's Levins?"

"Why, he's lying down in the other bedroom, Joey. Not that Morris was feeling sick. It's more like he don't feel a thing." Now Finley smiled, his upper lip protruding, strange and unreal, like the flap of an envelope. He kept turning a small whiskey glass in his hand. "Just to coin an expression, it was sort of a 'Mickey Finley' I gave to Morris. You know what I mean?"

"I'm not real sure—not yet," Joe said.

"I mean there was nothing violent about this Mickey. Fact is, I'll be taking one myself, so if they pump me out, or make other tests—it'll look like your idea, not mine." Finley lowered his glance for an instant, sighing heavily. Joe always remembered how he sagged with the weight of a shame he could not laugh off. "I've done a lot of things for money," he said, "but tonight I guess I broke my own record. There's people to see you, Joey."

"Over here, sir," somebody said.

THEY were standing in the foyer, these two men Joe had never seen before. He would not have expected the Dramarkises to come themselves; the "sir" was the funny note.

"These boys are imported talent," Finley explained. "You fly them in from St. Louis or Chicago and they give you three-hour service, like a dry cleanin' place."

"Please sit down, sir," the same one said. He was very young and as polite as a shoe clerk holding a queen's leg. He was slender and blond, his eyes the shade of yellow custard, depraved and terrible; yet his hands were so soft, and he held the revolver as loosely as a chicken head. Joe didn't sit down.

"These fellows won't hurt you if you don't make any trouble," Finley said.

"I expect to make trouble."

The other man, who had not yet spoken, pursed his lips. He was far taller and heavier than his partner, faultlessly dressed and, clearly enough, the one in charge. "We get all kinds," he said. "A certain percentage have to be heroes. But I don't think you'll be any trouble. We're taking you to see Nick Dramarkis."

"Take me," Joe said defiantly. "Take me now. Wrap yourselves a five-pound cat in a one-pound paper bag. Let me heave this chair so the neighbors'll hear it, and if it isn't your skin, it's Finley's." He moved one step closer. "Let a gun go off, for instance. Try me now." His voice was rising, but they failed to look impressed.

"There's no need to try you, mister," the big man said. "You'll come along." Joe saw him flip something sparkling into the air. He tossed it a second and third time, catching it deftly.

"You should know that about an hour ago, mister, we brought your girl to see Nick. This is your receipt. Here—catch it; we don't want it."

Joe's heart fell like a stone. There was no flush of spirit to fortify him. He just went dead. The ring, having struck his fingers, lay on the carpet. He watched it there, the stone agleam, half the size of a dime. He knelt to retrieve it, but the sweat of his fingers made it slip from his grasp. He got hold of it, finally, blinking his eyes to read the inscription he knew would be there: "Love—Lincoln-onis."

"Well—how about it?"

Joe looked at them both, even to Finley. "Where is she?" he said. "What do you want me to do?" He felt viscerated, gone inside, like a Sunday chicken ready to be dressed.

"You can see there's no point throwin' fits or furniture," the tall man's quiet voice advised him. "The girl's all right. One hundred percent. But we can guarantee she won't be, if you get cute."

So Joe didn't get cute. At this moment he was ready to beg or to crawl on his chest and he was not worried how plainly his readiness showed. He asked again: "Where is she?"

"We're taking you there—to where Nick's waiting. There was no percentage in hurting the girl. Just like you, she was tough for a minute. She kept biting my hand till I showed her a picture I had. Love," the big man said, "is the greatest invention since money. Tell him where I got the picture, Finley."

Finley didn't look at Joe.

"Off the table there, Joey. The autographed one you pushed back of the lamp this mornin'. I passed it to them so they could show the lady we were in touch with you. I'm a nice fellow, huh?"

When Joe failed to answer, Finley shrugged. "I'd go with these boys, Joey. I think Nick has a proposition you can swallow. After all, he's not as crazy as Whitey." The policeman had settled back in the chair, holding the same small whiskey glass. "Maybe easier than I can swallow this," he said, reflectively. "Well, here's to everybody's health—especially the little lady's."

IT WAS a small two-door sedan they led him to, unchallenged by neighbors or passers-by. The big man drove. In the settled darkness it wasn't possible to see the other one's eyes or his soft hand on the gun. The October night had fallen like a mask. The hands of a clock glowed richly in a tower: *ten after six.* They drove for a good while, beyond the crowded areas of the city to a modest residential fringe. Twice the tall man slowed the car to check the names of streets.

"This one," the other said. "This one on the right." It was a neighborhood of small homes built in the '30s. "Bonnie Grove" the section had been fancily called when it was newer, brighter and a problem to realtors. Joe could recall hawking ice-cream sticks in this vicinity when he was a kid. But it was certainly not the Dramarkises' end of town. They stopped.

"Get out now," he was told. There was a chestnut tree, high-standing and massive, frisked by the wind. The leaves were like

cornflakes underfoot. At the end of a stone walk there was a narrow, shingled house, lights showing in two of the windows. They went in, the big man using a key.

"Hello, Joey," Nick Dramarkis said. "Don't let it get you, boy. The girl's in the parlor, lookin' real nice."

Mary was there. As Nick had said, she looked real nice. The places where the tears had been were dry. Her lips moved in a nervous smile, then she clung to him, holding hard, and she was all right in a minute.

"I didn't even have a chance to fix my hair. I look awful, don't I, Joe?"

He didn't think she looked awful at all. Being so tall, he could rub his own chin in the crown of her hair. "To me," he said, "you look kind of wholesome, like three thousand frankfurter rolls in one package. Did these bums hurt you? Did anyone touch you?"

She shook her head. "Not that way, Joe. That much was all right. Here, let me blow my nose."

"You're better off if you don't get all excited, you two kids," Nick Dramarkis said.

Joe turned then to this reigning Dramarkis whom he knew to be a dozen years older and smarter than his violent brother. This was an aristocrat among hoodlums, Joe knew, powerful, wealthy and unchallenged by the local thieves who served him. He was not a big man, yet it was likely that in all of Nick's prosperous adult years he had never been punched in the nose.

"Siddown, Joey, let's not waste my time."

Joe remained standing, searching in his pockets for cigarettes. The small living room was furnished with practical, orthodox pieces that were beginning to show their age. As though scornful of any attempt to conceal the owner of the house, there was a group photograph of a policeman's picnic clearly displayed on the piano.

"You're perfectly right," Nick said. "The courtesy of Officer Finley. The last place anyone would expect you and me to be meeting. This Finley is the kind of cop that when you buy him, Joey, he comes complete with attachments, like a vacuum cleaner. He is very original and he recommends we don't kill you. He says that's the hard way to get rid of a witness."

"I know. He's a sweet boy," Joe said. "He wouldn't blow up an orphanage unless he got paid." But he felt more like himself again. Having Mary beside him, intact and undamaged, chased a lot of goblins from his mind. His courage prospered. He was thinking that even if she were a less compact package than a case of three thousand frankfurter rolls, he could probably toss her just as far. Even through a window, if the hard necessity arose.

"What are your ideas?" he said to Nick.

"Well, I'm devoted to my stupid brother, Joey, but I can tell you this. He had rougher plans for you. That's why he's not here. I agree with Finley that we don't have to kill you to louse up the D.A.'s case. My idea is you and the girl take a plane to New York—not from here, understand, but from where the boys will deliver you on their way home. The fact is they've got your reservations. You think you should complain?"

Joe didn't reply, but the question occurred to him: *Why has nobody ever slugged this bum?*

"The way I see it," Nick Dramarkis continued, "no grand jury will indict my brilliant brother. Not on the word of a guy who gives a double-Mickey to the cops protecting him, then blows town with his girl. Leave that to Finley. The guy is a helluva actor and the worst he can get is a long suspension for takin' a drink on duty. Meantime, he's the best-paid cop in the state. And it won't help you to get tough on the way to the airport, Joey, because, like I explained to the lady, there's still her old man. We can fix him real good, if you make us. We can get right back to Whitey's way of doing things—crude, but permanent."

The professionals whom Finley had described as "imported talent," were seated, the big man on the piano bench, his back to the keyboard, the slender one astride one arm of a heavily upholstered chair. The revolver was discouragingly present.

"Let's get on with it then," Nick said. "Let's save my time and your neck and Whitey, like I suggested."

Joe said, "I dunno." But there were many sound reasons for agreeing with the older and wiser Dramarkis. First of all, Joe was sure he loved the district attorney a lot less than he did Mary, or, for that matter, his own unpunctured skin. Why should any man ask to get killed? The biggest trouble was that Mary chose this moment to say, perhaps insanely, but with a flood of pride, "You're tougher than they are, Joe. You're tougher and braver and luckier. Don't trust them now. Don't believe what they say."

IT WAS not a whisper. It was plainly spoken. The big man at the piano altered his position; his elbow slipped, raising a discord from the keys. The slender man, with soundless caution, rose from the arm of the chair.

"Now—wait a minute. He's not that lucky," Nick cautioned Mary. "Nobody is." Nick dragged deeply on his cigarette. "You got talents we don't know about, Joey?"

Joe glared at him. "Yeah. I can shout 'peanuts!' as loud as any man alive." He demonstrated, at about quarter power, leaving a buzz in his own ears.

"Shut up!" he was told.

"I also look like Abraham Lincoln," Joe said modestly. He did not specify whether dead or alive.

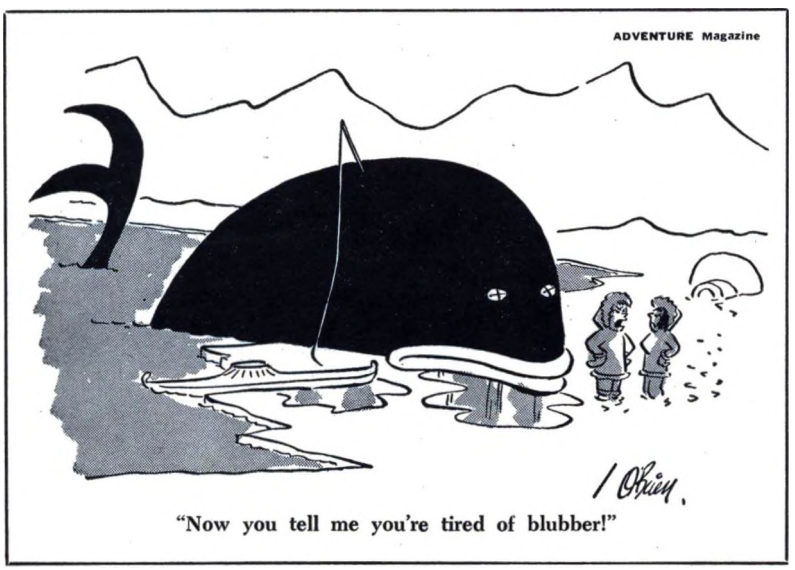
The man at the piano was standing now. "You'd better quiet this boy down," Nick said. The big man displayed a kind of homemade blackjack, but he was not quite ready to use it. From the street they could hear the sounds of people—walking and talking, as people will, on a fine October night. A kid went by on a rasping, noisy scooter, the kind where you use the halves of one roller skate to make your wheels.

The big man turned to Nick. "Did you have to pick a place where there's a block party going on? You think this is cozy?"

Joe grinned, as scared as he was. "You heard the girl, Nick. I'm luckier than anybody."

His voice was controlled and his hands had stopped sweating. He could be wrong, but he did not believe that Nick was ready at this moment to share with his brother what Levins had called the warm seat at the penitentiary. With a sudden motion, Joe heaved a large book through the pane of glass that filled the bottom half of a window at the front of the house. The crash made mouths spring open. It made Joe's own hair sting at the roots. The tinkling glass kept falling and the cool of the night walked in. Joe remained still, watching the others. The voices in the street had stopped, then, after a moment, resumed, as though in agreement that household accidents will happen. Nick's face was cadaver-pale, his jaws clamped tight.

They could hear the grating sound of the boy's return trip on the scooter. In the glow of a street light, filtering through the great tree at the front of the house, they could see him go by. The blond, slender man, with the revolver in his hand, looked first at his partner, then at



"Now you tell me you're tired of blubber!"

Nick—far more disapprovingly at Nick.

"That kid out there's in a rut," Joe said. "He'll keep pushin' back and forth until his mother calls him. Tell this pretty-faced clown to use his gun now, Nick."

"There's no hurry," Dramarkis said.

"The hell there's no hurry."

It was the big man who spoke, while Nick chewed his lips. Then Nick screamed back at him, "What did you expect to find here, anyhow—a ten thousand-acre farm?"

"The whole thing stinks," the big man said to Nick. "And with this maniac thrown in?" He gestured to Joe. "Why, it's a bad proposition all around."

Looking about him, Joe figured it this way: either the blond man with the custard eyes would use the gun, or he would not. But it was not a riddle you could solve by standing there chewing your nails. Mary's glance met his and he said, "The window!" He threw a remarkable punch at the big man's jaw, but he missed.

The big man swung the blackjack as Joe moved to block the other one's rush for Mary. He absorbed the whipping weight of the blow on the hunched meat of his shoulder, but he had succeeded in knocking the small man down. He saw Mary go through the open space and he prayed she'd escape any jagged glass. The blackjack swung again—this time against the arm Joe raised to protect his skull. The pain of the blow possessed him like fire. It made him scream aloud and smash wildly with his other arm to drive the big man back. He then felt the choking arms of Nick Dramarkis around his neck, Nick shouting obscenely and dragging him back until the two of them fell heavily. He could hear Mary howling—somewhere—at this highly emotional time.

"Now!" Nick shouted from underneath him. "Now!" The lights of the living room, undimmed and pitiless, glared above them. Joe waited for the shot that would kill him, or the blow that would scramble his brains.

"Now!" Nick shouted again. "Now, dammit, now!"

But Nick was only shouting to himself, Joe began to realize. Clearly enough he heard a car start off from the curb, departing a "bad proposition," and he could still hear Mary's voice, high-pitched as a scorched canary's, shrieking in the wide, wide out-of-doors. His left arm was dead, if the rest of him was not, and it was a problem to turn around with Nick's hands clawing him. It was a problem and a chore, with one good hand, to slug this Dramarkis brother free of his wits.

Joe got up slowly, not feeling his healthiest. After a moment he could see Mary and some of the people standing in the entrance to the living room. The boy with the homemade scooter was there —scooter and all. Mary's dress was torn and her hair looked like yarn spilled from a basket; there was blood on her left leg and a scratch on her nose; she had never looked more beautiful.

"What were you scr'amin' out there like a crazy woman?" he demanded.

"Peanuts!" she said. "What else would I scream?"

She walked toward him slowly and her hands were tender when they touched his face. She kissed him once and the people who watched appeared to be pleased with the scene. After a while, two local precinct cops arrived. They found no lifeless bodies, but the prone form of Nick Dramarkis was an engaging dividend. They asked logical questions, but not in logical order. It did get a little confusing.

"In Finley's own house," one of them said. He produced a notebook then in the Finley manner and there was a pencil stuck in his cap.

"I guess you'll have to start from the beginning," this cop said soberly. "Think about it, Mac—then try to give it to me straight."

Joe sat in a chair and admired his own feet. He felt unhurried, unworried and greatly at ease in Officer Finley's house. He said, "Why don't you fellows wait until Nick wakes up? I'd rather talk to my girl." ■ ■

THE CROSSING OF THE SEVEN ROCKS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

Jimmy was in deep water now at the end of the third rock. He was not yet halfway over. He had the cedar pole braced strongly downstream and the water was hissing around his waist when he took the step. I could feel inside me everything he must have been feeling: the icy, dragging pressure of the water, and the foot feeling its way over the slippery granite to the point where the rock ends, the hesitation, the checking of his position with the dead spruce on the east bank, the blind step into the dark waters, and the awful doubt that the next rock might, somehow, not be there.

On he went. My hands ached, so tightly was I holding the pike, and in spite of the cold March air perspiration formed on my forehead.

Then I saw the third of them! He must have been there all the time. The young priest, Thibadeaux, drenched with spray, as we all were, was stretched motionless, like a lynx, on a high ledge at the foot of the deep eddy, his clothing piled beside him. His way was the most direct of all; he was prepared to dive and swim! He didn't see me and couldn't, from where he lay, see the others. His mouth was tightly clamped together and his eye never left the painful progress of the boy in the river.

At the halfway point the current was strong, but not as it would be on the east bank. There was a white sucking froth around the boy and his cedar pole.

Then, just as he made the painfully labored step on the fourth of the rocks, the priest on his ledge snapped tensely alert. I looked to see the cause. There, tossed like a leaf on the boiling flood, was a huge log, three feet in diameter!

It was broadside to the current as it came down on the boy, and if it had stayed so would have swept him before its two-ton bulk as if he had been a frog on a lily pad. But, as it approached the Seven Rocks, the slick caught and turned it and so it passed the boy by no more than three feet, and he never knew how close he had been to death.

The young priest eased back from the edge of his rock shelf again, and I, kneeling concealed behind my boulders, spat out the dead pipe stem which I had bitten off in that tense passage.

A layer of fog moved across the river and when it passed, the boy was on the sixth rock. The step to the last rock was the longest of all and it was the deepest and fastest current. Suddenly he stopped. Perhaps it was in that moment that he grew up. No one will ever know what his thoughts were then. He flung a wild and panicky look back across the raging river. He realized that he was all alone, and could never return. His wet face looked very small to me, very white, very young.

FOUR men were there, wiser than Jimmy and stronger, and all mentally taking that final awful step for him. But we were on the bank and he was in the water. And a broad and deadly river flowed between us.

The boy had to take the step for himself. If he fell then, none of us could get to him in time to save him from the white waters. His strength must have been almost gone. If he fell then . . .

But he did not fall!

Instead he turned again to the east bank as a man must do, and took a final resolute grip on his bracing pole. There is great hope for Adam's breed as long as they do brave and foolish things and triumph over the world.

He took the last long step and almost vanished in the seething current. The foam was above his shoulders.

I thought he was gone! Then I saw his head, steady as a rock against which the current was cleaving itself in churning showers. His shoulders appeared. The pole was shifted. Bit by bit, he edged across that last great stone toward the guide tree's dead white roots which stretched from the bank like arms of welcome. And then he was safe!

The weight of my years was heavily upon me and I remained kneeling for a long time, my forehead resting on the solid boulder. I gave thanks that my grandson was still alive and had dragged himself through that baptism of violent water to manhood. A strong cold wind had sprung up, but I hardly noticed it at all.

When I looked up at last the others were gone. From the woods I watched Jimmy bail the *baddo* and tie the rifle to the seat. I stayed only long enough to watch him begin to paddle across the eddy below the white waters.

When I got back to the house LeClaron and my son were drinking coffee with the priest, Thibadeaux, who had come so early, he said, to inquire about the health of Angelique. They were all drenched to the skin, these stern-faced men, and were steaming in the heat of the kitchen stove behind which a box of baby chicks were being kept away from the March wind.

They said nothing to me as I came in, but solemnly regarded my wet clothing.

"The brush is very wet this morning," I said.

As one man they agreed. We looked solemnly at one another.

Just then the door from the woodshed opened. Jimmy walked straight to his father and handed him the rifle.

My son passed his hand over the oily barrel which had not yet had time to rust, the stock, the sights. He worked the action and, satisfied that the magazine was empty, placed a piece of white paper in the chamber. He stared through the barrel, looking there for rust. Finally he said, "And the *baddo?*"

"Tied to the mooring in the eddy."

The father looked from one face to another, and then he turned to his son.

"Go and put dry clothing on."

There was no surprise in Jimmy's face as he started obediently to go out. He didn't expect praise. He looked very tired, but there was a new cast to his face, a new bearing, a new set to his shoulders. It was the look of manhood. But before he got to the door his father spoke again.

"Jimmy." The boy stopped. "You might as well take your rifle with you." There was a heavy emphasis on the word "your." Jimmy stared at his father and at us all. His father went on.

"It was your grandfather's and he gave it to me when I was a man grown. Now I give it to you."

Jimmy took the rifle gently, stared at it as if he was seeing it for the first time, caressed the stock as a man might touch his sweetheart's hand, then mumbling in proud, wild confusion he backed out of the room.

Anna and Angelique came back from the milking then and the chicks began peeping. The kitchen was suddenly sweet with odors of warm new milk and crushed wild thyme. Jimmy's mother, nodding to the men around the stove, asked pleasantly, "Have you noticed, after all that rain the wind has blown so, that the brush is hardly wet at all?"

Joe LeClaron and Father Thibadeaux both rose at the same instant as if they had been pinched, started to speak, then both sat down together.

And we all began to smile as Anna set the breakfast table for five men. ■ ■

THE MAN WHO LOVED MONEY BEST CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

thousand of today's dollars. To the mason that represented all that life could offer.

He stretched his long legs, ridged with muscle, and regarded them speculatively. Ever since he was a little boy he had ridden a cycle. He was strong and seldom tired. Sitting there, he calmly decided to win the Tour de France. It did not occur to him that the idea was fantastic, as if he had set out to run a four-minute mile. He had never competed in a race, and this would be against the best cyclists in the world. He knew nothing of the course and its problems. He simply had an iron will.

Bottechia was no idealist or dreamer. A peasant-minded workingman, he approached the problem in a practical way. First, he read all he could find about the stars of the wheel, drank in every word they let drop about their techniques and tricks. He studied weather and temperature figures. He listed the best times made under varying conditions, and worked out a schedule that should be good enough to win against any opposition. Then, saying nothing to anyone, he drew his savings from the bank, and went to France.

IN THE golden autumn weather he started over the Tour's course all alone. His gimlet eyes noted everything, and he wrote down details in a grimy little notebook. For the first time he began to understand the hugeness of the task he had set himself.

As he pedaled along the lonely roads of Brittany, white-coifed peasant women stared at him. There were shrines where a pious man might stop to pray, but Bottechia had no time for devotions. He observed only what might be of use in the actual race.

He rode out of Brittany and down the Atlantic coast, and over the humped shoulders of the Basque country. White coifs and bovine faces were replaced by the tanned visages of woodchoppers, bandannas wound pirate-style around their heads. They waved, but Ottavio did not notice.

Up those hills even automobiles crawled in second gear. There was rough country round Frioul, but nothing like this. His legs ached and his eyes gorged with blood as he forced his bike upward at a snail's pace. He counted the painful miles, checked them against his watch, and thought always of the money.

The Basque country was left behind, and Bottechia rode through the dusty Midi, over the rise and slide of the Crau, the roller-coaster hills of Savoy and the lower Alps, through Alsace-Lorraine, and along the black roads of the North Country. And so, at last, into Paris.

Though he had made no effort to keep a racing schedule, he was a very tired man. Now that he knew the course, and what it called for, he must train diligently. He spent no time on the cafes or pretty women of the French capital, but hastened back to Frioul. Having spent most of his savings, he had to work extra hours to make up for the loss, then ride endless miles to toughen muscles and strengthen wind.

The townspeople had no idea of what was in Bottechia's mind. If they had, they would have howled with laughter. That scarecrow win the Tour? Why, he had as much chance as he would of becoming the world's heavyweight champion, they would have said. So, the mason kept his own counsel. He had not a single friend to whom he might be tempted to tell his secret.

An intense singleness of purpose is not always sparked by ideals or love or hope of fame. All Bottechia was interested in was money. Lying on his straw mattress, staring at the darkened ceiling, his skin chilled with clammy sweat when he thought of the great stars, Alavoine and Brunero and Stockelynch, and how easily they might make his success impossible.

On a blistering, cloudless July day, the next year, the field of riders started on what they called "the convict's job." Once the starting gun sounded, each man was on his own. He bandaged and iodined wounds when he fell, changed tires and made repairs to his bike. If he accepted help in any way, he was disqualified. There was no chance to cheat. Officials in high-powered cars scurried up and down the roads to check infraction of rules.

Otherwise the race was go-as-you-please each day. A man ate when he chose, rested when and if he dared. Food did not digest, for it was crammed down in a hurry, each snack followed by hard riding to make up for the minutes wasted. And for Bottechia, it was worse, for he was all alone. No handlers, driving ahead by car, waited for him in the town fixed for the sleep-over, ready to massage his exhausted muscles, see he was properly fed, bring him the official report of that day's elapsed times, and advise him about the peculiarities of the next day's route.

No one conceded this crazy amateur a chance to finish the race, to say nothing of winning a prize. Somehow or other, through nothing but inflexible resolve, he hung on. There were times when he fell into a coma, and tumbled off his bike to suffer cuts and bruises, times when his stomach revolted and he vomited as he rode, times when his nerves shrieked against the monotony and torture. Whenever he felt he could not go another mile, he refreshed himself with the thought of those 60,000 francs, and he went on.

One by one the professionals dropped out. Only a few rode into Paris, gaunt caricatures of the athletes who had started. Bottechia finished in second place. His achievement was hailed as one of the most incredible any sport had ever known; he was the sensation of the year. But he himself was unhappy and bitterly disappointed.

He went home a sick and exhausted man. Months elapsed before he was able to work again. The people of Frioul regarded him with surprised awe. They had not dreamed that so great an athlete lived among them. Second prize gave the mason more money than he'd ever had before, but he was just as loath to spend a lira. Where that miserly trait had been sniffed at in the past, it was now excused on the ground that a great man was entitled to idiosyncrasies. Finally he went into training again. He had no pride in winning, no craving for applause or newspaper headlines. But he wanted that money.

THE months rolled by. Again the heat of July settled on France, and the cyclists gathered for the Tour. Bottechia straddled his bike at the starting line, wearing a yellow jersey and black trunks. His gimlet eyes were narrowed to slits. His rivals thought him a freak, but a dangerous freak, and he felt their opposition to

him like a physical thing. Each one felt that if he could not win himself, it did not matter who won as long as it was not Ottavio Bottechia.

And nobody really believed in him. His miraculously finishing second the previous year was no guarantee he would place this time. In the heavy betting, usually along nationalist lines, that always accompanies the Tour, even Bottechia's fellow townsmen were chary of wagering on him.

The mason, however, did not give a thought to what people said; he did not even read the newspapers. He was thus insulated against outside influences. He had brooded over those 60,000 francs so long that they blacked out everything else.

THE pace was murderous from the start, because the riders were in a cabal against Ottavio. They took turns at the hardest riding, hoping he would seize the bait and wear himself out chasing them. The mason was too shrewd for that. He had set himself a schedule. If he could keep to it he would win. Nothing could tempt him away from it. The money was to him what the bottle is to a drunkard, or a mistress to a jealous lover. The others could do what they wanted. He would grimly follow his own plan.

Pellitier was the first of the great old-timers to collapse. He was one of the cycling immortals, but the years had finally caught up with him. He quit on the forbidding hills of the Basque country, and took the train back to Paris where he sat in the cafes and boasted of happier times. Alavoine crumpled in the Pyrenees, destroying the hopes of many who had bet their last franc on him.

The stone-mason had planned his great effort for those savage slopes. It was here, if his heart and legs held out, that he would ride the others into exhaustion. He counted the miles sliding by under the rubber of his wheels. He conserved himself as much as possible. The question as to who would win the Tour would be decided in the Pyrenees. When they rose before Ottavio he was mentally and psychologically conditioned for them.

It seemed at times as though the mountain roads took an almost vertical tilt toward the sky. Though driving on the pedals with every ounce of strength, one moved at a snail's pace, fighting off the pull of gravity. Rules did not permit a man to dismount and push his bike over almost impassable spots. He had to ride every yard of the way.

So, gasping for breath, aching in every muscle, drenched with sweat, the athletes would reach the top of each upgrade just when it seemed beyond endurance to move at all. There would be a brief, effortless coast down the opposite face, relaxation, a chance to draw breath, then the old horror all over again. Peasants gathered along the road to wave, and cry, *"Hardi, coco,"* but it is doubtful if Ottavio heard them. He was sunk too deep within the shell of his misery.

Always thin, he had become a skeleton. In spite of the sun, his face seemed more sallow than ever, and his eyes sank deep in his skull. As he came closer to the edge of prostration, Bottechia fell more frequently. Skin on knees and elbows, cut and bruised, split into the flesh, and sweat turned the wounds to fire. He was so saddle-sore, he could hardly bear to set his buttocks to the leather seat. His lungs hurt as though a knife had been plunged into them, but he hunched over the handlebars and rode all the harder.

As his lead built up, many professionals gave in. They might have been stronger and more experienced riders, but they lacked the consuming ambition of the man from Frioul. Even the rugged Belginas fell hopelessly behind. Only Brunero held on as they rode through the little villages of the Alps. But even Brunero was no fanatic, offering his life on the altar of money. Before Strasbourg was reached, he consoled himself with the thought that second money was better than nothing. He fell farther and farther back in the ratings.

Bottechia, with victory assured, could have taken things easy, but he clung to his schedule obsessively. At last he rode into Paris, far ahead. His face was beard-stubbled, dirty, a mask of agony, running with sweat. His legs moved automatically. Pain and fatigue had become as much a part of him as his sticky yellow jersey.

Those last few miles through the city streets, preceded and followed by automobiles bearing officials and dignitaries, was a deafening triumph. The people cramming the sidewalks overwhelmed him with a delirium of applause. Though an Italian, Ottavio was, for that moment, the idol of France. Pretty girls smiled and threw flowers.

Such was the triumph, that even the heroic scarecrow should have reacted. But he did not. The single thought in his mind was still those 60,000 francs for which he had endured all this torment. The applause would die away. In later years other men would win the Tour, and he would be forgotten. That was all right. He'd have the money.

EVEN at the moment of accepting the check and trophy, he was unchanged. As flash bulbs banged and people shouted themselves hoarse, Bottechia, scrubbed, and with a clean jersey over his protruding ribs, still could not rise to the occasion, as a professional would have. He was just an awkward Italian peasant with gimlet eyes and a pickaxe nose, too embarrassed to say anything.

He returned at once to Frioul. He was the same as when he had left, close-mouthed, tight-fisted, the antithesis of everything a champion should be. But the attitude of the townsfolk toward him was changed. No more sneers at his ungainliness or miserly habits. A great man has a right to peculiarities. They bragged about him to visitors, tried to be friendly. He scarcely noticed.

Once rested enough to overcome his sickness, Ottavio simply went back to work. He considered it would be foolish to spend what he had toiled so hard to gain. He had wanted 60,000 francs. He had earned them, and that was that.

The professionals had nothing more to fear from him. Except for going back and forth to work, Ottavio Bottechia never rode a bicycle again. ■ ■

"All the rest have gone with the rajah's army after him," the old man said. "They will catch him in a day or two."

"To shoot him?"

"Rama preserve us, no. He is Kala Naga, the Black Cobra. The rajah's fighter. They will match him now with Gwalior's Shaitani Beta, the champion. He is in the mood now and will fight."

The old man blinked weakly in reminiscence. "Nobody has dared to match the champion in four years. He has killed them all. In the old days we of Kathiawar would have found a contender within a week. But nowadays—" The ancient spat in the dust to express modern decadence. "This Black Cobra was just passing through, on his way to the Mailabari fair, when some careless cultivator's young male smelled him and rushed in to attack. His *mahout* tried to restrain him, but he was trampled like a beetle. The Cobra pulled his picket stake and the two of them crashed off into the jungle. Yes, he will now fight. Aie-aie! If I could but go to see it. This will be a one to the death."

Bleary in his age, the old man still spoke the language of his country's most stupendous "sport." To the death, was the culminating thrill for him—and to more than a few jaded, if more civilized, "sportsmen."

When animals fight freely, following the decent natural law of the survival of the fittest, it is a lusty contest for the stronger to run the weaker off the lot, the victor to procreate the herd. It is when Man, the superior animal, stages a fight that you have hysterical crowds, bets and hell's savagery demanding that the loser must die.

DOG fights, ram fights and tiger fights have a sufficient share of blood to attract fans. But it is no piking gamble to match your elephant against a neighbor's. This must be literally a "sport of kings." So now the Maharajah of Kathiawar would match his Black Cobra against the Maharajah of Gwalior's Shaitani Beta, the Devil's Son.

Here some bright highbrow will up and say, "But there aren't any rajahs any more. Both Hindustan and Pakistan have taken over the fabulous estates and have pensioned off the royalty."

True enough. But they've been royally pensioned. You won't find any ex-rajahs, unlike European nobility, lending their glamor to the business of making fancy hats or waiting tables in Hollywood night clubs. There's still money enough around the elephant stables to bet a couple of emerald necklaces and a few dancing girls against anybody who thinks he can put up a contender worthy of a show.

This particular one was hurriedly arranged—while the Cobra would still be in his fighting rage—in his home town. Shaitani Beta, the Devil's Son, came by special train in a padded box car. It had to be padded because a rutty elephant isn't sane enough to know what he is smashing through. Seven train loads of his own fans came with him. The maharajah with a splendid retinue, tradesmen with money in their sashes, pauper coolies with a few rupees dug from under their hearthstones. "Sportsmen" all.

An Indian train load doesn't mean standing room only. It means sitting, lying, being-stood-upon and clinging-to-the-foot-boards room. This crowd would jam the arena and squat like apes on the wall.

The ring was an oval corral with a stout six-foot barrier across its middle and a high wall all around. The barrier was no more than a bluff to drag the deadlines out a little and whet betting fervor. The fourteen-foot wall was a dire necessity. The rajahs and their guests sat on thrones four feet higher; for an angry elephant has been known to reach up and pick a couple of coolies off the wall top and step on them just to let the blood smell heat up his fighting spirit.

Is it permissable to digress a wee mite here to tell about the Burmese execution elephant? It was the method used to put criminals to death under the savage, pre-British kings. Tickets would be sold so that the people could see some poor wretch thrust into the corral with the elephant. The beast would chase the man around till he could catch him and step on his head. The populace would bet on whether it would crack like a coconut or squash like a pumpkin. When the last King, Thibaw, came to power he turned his seventy brothers into the corral all at once—just so there'd be no pretenders to the throne. The seventy ganged up on the elephant and tried to tear it apart with their bare hands. But the elephant won.

This, my masters, is history. It's dragged in by way of showing that a mean elephant is really mean.

THIS Cobra-Devil's Son match was, of course, a matinee show. It began with drums—for the fans. Since they're not a people to whoop up their temperaments to the proper betting pitch with a few nips of the bottle, they've got to have a substitute. What they respond to is drums. A ceaseless pounding of the same repeated rhythm that beats its way into your blood. Till you pulse with it. Till you're hot and then cold and then ready to run amuck. You don't think drums can do that? Then think for a moment on the origin of war drums.

So the drums pounded endlessly in a gradually increasing tempo. The crowd woke from Oriental apathy to uneasy shifting on their seats, to wordy quarreling about nothing.

A *muckna*, a tuskless female elephant, was let into the arena. The crowd didn't cheer or whistle or stamp feet. It just went off BANG in one piece. The jammed-in thousands were on their feet at once, neck veins thick, eyes fanatical.

The *muckna* behaved as witlessly foolish as any coy old maid. She ambled out into the hot sun and stood sucking dust from the ground and blowing it nonchalantly over her back. She managed to look positively demure.

A smashing thud shook another thick door. The *muckna* pretended she didn't know what it meant. From behind another green door on the other side of the barrier a trumpet scream blasted. The crowd began to make bets based on nothing more than the power of the unseen noises.

The thrashing behind the rival pens swelled to a screaming crescendo. Ring attendants came in with spears to herd the female out. Spears, because the demure dame didn't want to go. The attendants yelled ribald Oriental crudities to encourage her.

"Go on. He's behind this door. The magnificent one. He awaits you. The he-male of all time." And they promised elephantine delights with obscene details.

SHE must have believed them. She let herself be shoved into her own pen.

A mere servant—in embroidered clothes at least five times as expensive as this scribe's—stood before the rival maharajahs, holding a silver tray. They took turns depositing bets upon it, raising the ante with jeweled rings and necklaces.

The crowd sucked in its breath. This was a preliminary bout of the show and the people loved it. The maharajahs laid down each bet with proper deliberation and showy gestures. It was only proper for a king to show his greatness before the pauper mob.

The clamor from the rival bull pens caused demands for the main bout. The rajahs went through a courteous ceremony of offering each other first entry for his fighter. But everybody knew the tradition that the champion would have the honor. His owner gave the sign.

The great door ground up like a portcullis, and out he came!

It was like a thunder blast. A gray-black magnificence of rage. Ears like sails. Trunk out, questing the air. Little eyes red with the *musth* madness. Letting out a pig grunt with each thump of his hassock-sized feet that roiled up the dust to add bulk around his own gray mass. As was proper to a thunder cloud, his long tusks flashed out white from the pall.

The out-of-town fans howled their delight. *"Jai, Shaitani! Rama! Mahadeo!"* They gave their champion names of their gods.

A cracked cornet blared foolishly. An announcer intoned the titles and exploits.

"Shaitani Beta! The Royal One. The Undefeated One. Killer of Seven. Eleven feet and an inch high. Five and one half tons weight—"

He droned on. But from the other side of the barrier the home-town adherents applauded the entry of another dust cloud —Kala Naga, the Black Cobra, in all his fury! He rushed across the arena and smashed his head blindly into the six-foot barrier. For the *muckna*, of course, had left her scent on the other side.

The contender gave an impression of being not so tall, but chunkier. His tusks not so long, but as thick as a man's thigh. He drove them savagely into the barrier of heavy boards and twisted rope. The

whole line of it shook. You could feel the crash in the air.

Champion Devil's Son felt it. His trunk stretched, questing. You could hear the swoosh of his sniffing.

The crowd's howling was cut off as by a sword. Breaths held tense. Hands twisted at garment fringes.

Elephants don't see very well. But they are compensated by a super-keenness of scent and hearing. That's why a musk-smeared Lao hunter can, with his frightful courage, creep in amongst a herd in the underbrush and hack at some towering tusker's ham strings with a cleaver. The elephants take the scent to be that of some scuffling deer.

So the tusked champion listened and sniffed. And the crowd crouched tense, frozen silent. Then the champ caught the new scent. He began to move toward it, lifting his barrel feet high. If an elephant could tiptoe, this one was doing it, hoping to catch that other aggressive rutting scent unaware.

THEN he saw the bulk looming behind the barrier. All finesse and caution left him. He went entirely mad. *Musth.* He trumpet-screamed rage and charged. Just as the Cobra had done, the Devil's Son smashed headon into the barrier. The whole thing rocked. Wood splinters flew. Dust swirled thick. Out of it trunks waved high, intertwined like giant snakes, heaving, dragging.

The crowd's held breath let go. First gasps, then in the roar of blood-hungry men and women.

The fight management did a crafty thing. Hoses had been laid along the barrier. At the meeting point of the giants one was turned on to kill the dust. You could see at last.

Both brutes, trunks twined high, had their tusks through the barrier, wrenching at it. Everybody knew the thing would go down. Its only purpose was to separate the fighters for just long enough to let them see each other, smell each other's rutting scent, insensately wish to kill each other.

You've seen pictures of elephants charging, trunks always held high. The reason, of course, is that the trunk is their most sensitive organ, their feeler, their hand with which to pick up food, and thus must be protected. Elephants bite when they can. And when an elephant chews on anything it is mashed through.

So these vast beasts, heads together over the barrier, swiped at each other with their trunks, tugged and gnawed at each other. The word, comical, would here be a gross misapplication. Yet you've heard the comical advice shouted to an elephantine wrestler in the ring to "chew his ear off." And that is exactly what these monsters did. Their mouths are, comparatively, not very big. The most they can do is gnaw at flapping ears and sometimes a lower lip. The Devil's Son got a mouthful of the Cobra's ear and tore it off in rags. Blood splattered in red arcs. The Cobra trumpeted furiously and drove his thick tusks down on the other's, hoping to break one short. The Devil's Son screamed in pain and rage. The crowd screamed hysterically.

The champion heaved up on his hind legs, even as stallions do, and brought both tremendous forefeet down on the Cobra's head. Their weight smashed the head down onto the barrier top so you'd think everything in that wrinkled hide must be mashed like eggs. It jarred a grunting bellow out of the Cobra. But he was able to rise groggily and batter in turn at the champ with his piston feet. Titans standing chest to chest and boxing. Slugging it out, each tremendous blow peeling a strip of hide.

Their combined weight caused the barrier to go down. Its woodwork and rope crumpled beneath them. The Cobra shoved his way through the wreckage. And there the two of them were together in the ring. The crowd's breath strangled tight again. Death was not too far away.

Both beasts circled, looking for body blows. Tusk to tusk—as horn to horn or tooth to tooth—is not deadly enough. The idea is to get at the unprotected side.

The Devil's Son thought he saw his chance. He plowed his bulk forward. The Cobra wheeled to meet him. The smash brought frenzied yells from the crowd. The two beasts stood straining mightily, head to head, the dust billowing again. You could hear the clatter of tusks as they wrenched apart.

The maharajahs sat as kings should, Orientally impassive. Such dignitaries must never scream and jump up and down with the uncultured mob.

It was the champion who broke out of the dust. He was bleeding from the mouth and one tusk seemed to hang a little lower than the other.

The mob yelled, "Mar! Mar!" The word for death.

The Cobra lumbered out after the champ. The Devil's Son met him head on again. And this time you could hear the splintering crack. The tusk dropped.

The Devil's Son shrieked in anguish and wheeled away. A tusk, just as any tooth, has a nerve core. You could see the thing hanging limp like a fat white worm. If its hurt was in proportion to its size, hell's worst would be better.

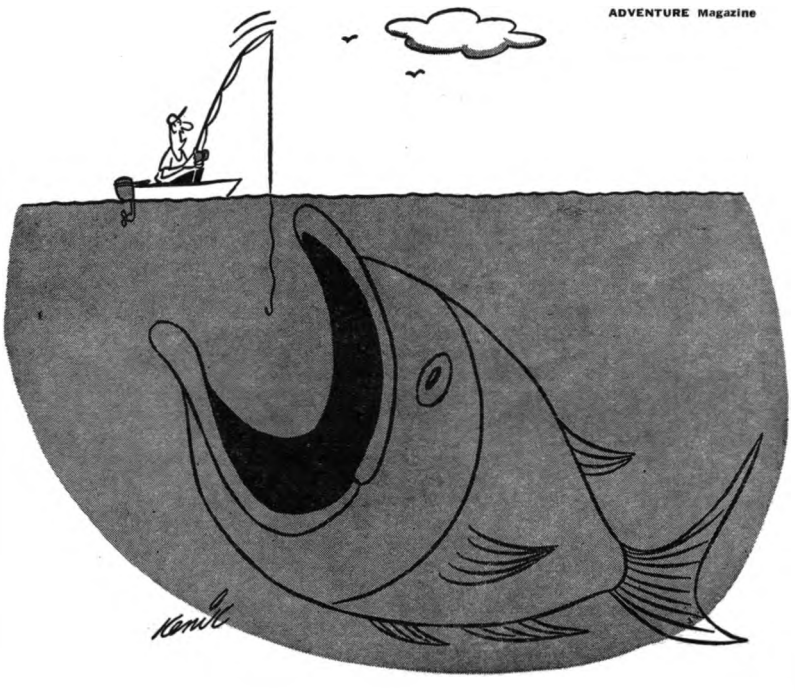
The Cobra seemed to understand. He charged in. The Devil's Son tried to meet him, but that awful nerve made him shrink. He was sideswiped. Your own nerves convulsed to see a Cobra tusk mash the soft quivering thing against the champ's washboard neck. The champ screamed, the jarring metallic shriek of a locomotive in agony. Not the blow but the dreadful nerve shock of it buckled his knees. The Cobra trumpeted fierce recognition of the hurt, trunk high in blaring triumph. The crowd rose to its feet and howled for the coming kill.

The Cobra kept shoving in, lashing his great trunk across the wretched champion's face, smashing his head from left to right, clubbing his thick tusks against neck and nerve.

Perhaps he was aware of what he was doing. Perhaps it was just the deadly instinct of the jungle.

Every time trunk or tusk grazed that fat lolling white thing the Devil's Son screamed and fearfully cringed away. Each time the Cobra trumpeted fierce triumph. There was a steamy roaring note in it now. The champion was battered, buffeted, bludgeoned. He was staggering with hellish pain, his side now exposed. The Cobra bored in.

Literally bored. With so much bulk there was no impression of rush, hit, stab. Rather, it was like ships colliding. Slowly. Inexorably shoving in to crush timbers. The thick tusks met the side. Kept shoving in with an awful deliberation. All the way in. Three feet of white tusk, a deadly pair of them, each as thick as a



"C'mon fish . . . Bite!"

man's thigh. Up to their hilts through the wide timbers of ribs deep into the opponent's vitals.

A great sobbing windy groan came from the Devil's Son. His bulk sagged, the great knees slowly buckling. His weight dragged the Cobra's head down with him.

The crowd gasped and then sat silent.

The Cobra backed away, jerking his tusks free. They were red now to their hilts. He flung up his trunk and screamed high to the world. A giant blaring victory for all the jungle to hear. Then he knelt on his enemy, to crush the body, to break in the rib case, to make absolutely sure.

The crowd's frightened hush choked and whispered and broke to the puny screaming of men quarreling over bets.

The kings smiled and bowed ceremoniously to one another. Nobody knew how great the fortunes won and lost.

Nobody rushed into that arena to acclaim the new champion, to slap his back, to figuratively hoist him to their shoulders. That fighting rage would take two or three days to subside.

The bizarre indignity of Oriental humor closed the show. Men scrambled down bamboo ladders to attach ropes to the dead champion's hind leg, scrambled quickly up again before the victor's charge. In fury he smashed the ladders into tooth picks. Through a hurriedly opened great green door the female cause of the fight was permitted to haul the body of her champion from sight. Men jeered.

"Now you've got him. He's all yours. The almost mightiest he-male. But," they promised her, "have patience."

The drums softly muttered again, releasing shaky laughter from too tight throats. The drama of death was over. ■ ■

THE GOLDEN EMBLEM CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

"Haw, haw, haw! That's a good one!" laughed an old gray-bearded man. Another laughed. Laughter, mocking laughter, came from a dozen pairs of lips.

The mate went up to the poop, where the skipper stood. "We've got a good crew, mister," said the skipper.

"Yes, sir. They can always raise a laugh," said the mate.

The skipper, his eyes on the bark's name on a life buoy, thought, "I wish she was in Falmouth."

Having set sail, they washed the decks down. As they put away the brooms and buckets, there came a puff of wind; it flapped the sails full and died instantly. From the sails, a cloud of guano dust drifted to the deck, covering it with a reeking gray film. Astern lay the Chinchas, fading very slowly from view. Ahead, a glazed horizon glimmered; beyond, a glazed, hot sea. The bells struck for midday. A sailor went to the cook's galley for dinner.

"I 'opes there ain't no guano in the pea soup, doctor. We're tired o' guano soup," he said to the cook.

"You'll 'ave to be tired then," said the cook.

"You could keep your door shut, and keep the dust out, doctor," said the sailor.

"An' get roasted alive in 'ere, eh?" said the cook.

FOR twenty degrees of latitude, for twelve hundred miles, the bark sailed slowly over a glazed sea toward a glazed horizon. Sails, ropes, riggings, masts, spars, all were thick with gray dust that fell in a cloud to the decks each time the braces and halliards were tightened. Day by day the pitch bubbled from her deck seams. Morning, noon, night, they flung sea water on her decks to swell the seams.

After more than three weeks the sky grew cloudy. A drizzle fell. A brisk wind rose. The bark rolled, her bows squatting heavily down on the seas. Losing his footing on the slimy deck, a sailor fell. Rising, he said, "I don't want to never see no more sea birds. Look at the slime a' flowin' from the riggin' an' drippin' on the deck. Ugh!"

"You'll be a sea bird yourself w'en yer dead," said another.

"Aye. We'll all be sea birds w'en we're dead," said another. "That's wot 'appens to dead sailors."

"We ain't dead yet," said another.

"Mister mate, how many mugs o' Falmouth beer could ye drink, sir?" asked one.

"Quit thinking of beer. Get on with your work," said the mate. "Get her gear in good shape for the Horn."

The breeze freshened. The bark wallowed on, her crew all busy in her slippery rigging.

It was morning. The sun hung low and black above the rolling mastheads. Under topsails and course, her topgallants and royals furled, the bark staggered southward, pushing the sea from her bluff bows, rolling so that the water gurgled in at her scupper holes and flowed to and fro on her deck. Presently rain fell. A drowning torrent that ran down her rigging, washing away the last of the guano dust.

"It's coming cold," said a sailor.

"It'll be cold, you bet," said another. "This ain't nothing yet. She's steering east by south, for the Horn."

"It wasn't no fun in them Chinchas," said one, "but it'll be fun in Falmouth."

"Haw, haw, haw! We ain't there yet," laughed an old fellow, with a throaty cackle.

"I wish I was mate in a tea clipper. They don't overload the tea clippers," said the mate to himself.

"What are the men laughing about, mister?" asked the skipper.

"God knows, sir. They're always laughing at something or other," said the mate.

"Laughter's good. Let them laugh," murmured the skipper, his eyes on the bark's name on a life buoy.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. The bark had all sail furled but her four topsails. An inky sky closed above her rolling mastheads. Her bulwarks dipped, first on one, then on the other side, till they dipped under the sea; her decks were aswirl with foamy white water.

"First you roasts and then you freezes," said a sailor, munching hardtack and sipping bitter coffee from a dirty old tin pot in the fo'c's'le. "I'd sooner be a dog."

"All sailors is dogs. Wot ye kickin' about?" said another.

"Fore topsail downhaul!" shouted the mate at their door.

"Hi-lee-oh! Haul-away-oh!" cried a sailor, singing out that all might pull together on the topsail downhaul.

"Aloft and make it fast!" ordered the mate when the sail was down. They swarmed into the rigging, in oilskins and sea boots. A few snowflakes fell.

"We must be off the Horn, sir," said a young fellow to the second mate beside him on the foot rope.

"Two more days yet," said the second mate.

"Cripey! It ain't goin' to get no colder, is it?" asked the young fellow. An old gray man laughed.

"That's the way we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots!" they sang, clawing at the snow-covered canvas with bare, cold hands.

TWO days were gone. It was evening. Sea and sky were black and thunderous. Ice covered the rigging, the sails, the spars. Snow and spray had frozen on the quivering shrouds. They sat in the fo'c's'le, smoking black baccy, while outside the sea raged, the wind roaring in a steady, ceaseless monotone.

A sailor rose, drew on his mittens, and left to go to the wheel. In a minute the man he had relieved entered the fo'c's'le.

"How is it on deck?" asked one, as he beat his cold hands on his sides.

"Hark to that? D'ye hear *that?*" said another.

"Ice about?" asked another, looking up at the man from the wheel.

"Pancake ice all round her. We come into it a few minutes back," said the man from the wheel. "That's the cakes a-clinkin' against each other."

"Cripey, I 'opes as there ain't goin' to be no bergs," said another.

"I seed one berg, a bit ago. A big un," said the man from the wheel.

"Ow's she steerin'?" asked one.

"Like an old cow whale wot's had a fin cut off on one side. I couldn't hardly hold her. Me arms and me shoulders aches," said the man from the wheel.

"Another man to the wheel!" shouted the mate, looking in on them.

"If it was beer, now, I'd want mine hot, sir," said a sailor, looking up at the mate.

"Hot beer! Haw, haw, haw!" laughed an old fellow.

"Keep handy, all of you. Don't take your oilskins or sea boots off," said the mate. "When she gets to Falmouth you can have all the hot beer you want."

"Ha, ha, ha!" they laughed. "The mate says we can have all the hot beer we want."

"How're the men, mister?" asked the skipper when the mate came up to the poop.

"They're laughing about hot beer, sir," said the mate.

"Good. As long as they can laugh the ship's all right," thought the skipper.

At the wheel two helmsmen strained, holding the wallowing bark to her course in fast-gathering darkness.

IT WAS midnight. The mate's watch, on duty since eight o'clock, were turning into their bunks, their oilskins and sea boots on. The second mate's men were lighting their pipes, on duty now till four of the morning.

"Keep handy, boys!" said the second mate, looking in on them.

"We're all handy, sir," said one.

"And colder'n hell, sir," said another.

"There's bergs about," said the second mate, and was gone.

The moon rose, giving a faint light through the dense clouds. The wind, fallen a little now, moaned. The sea moaned. Water gurgled to and fro on the deck as the bark rolled. Icicles glimmered dimly on the rigging.

The lookout man's voice rang, high and sudden, from the fo'c's'le head. *"Ice right ahead, sir!"*

The second mate's men, hearing that cry, ran to the deck. Wakened by that cry, the mate's men leaped from their bunks and followed.

"Hard up the helm!" came the skipper's loud shout to the helmsmen. "Up with the braces! Look alive!" he shouted to the mate.

"Hawl-away—oh! Hi-leee—oh! Hi-lee—oh!" cried a sailor, singing out that all might pull together.

Sluggishly, her bluff bows slatting heavily down upon the tumbled seas, the bark paid off, her wall sides rolling, the water gurgling all across her decks.

"Watch out for yourselves! It's going to foul the yards!" shouted the mate, as the moon, breaking through a cloud rift, gleamed on a great berg close down on the bow.

Its yard fouling a huge, overhanging ice cliff that projected from the berg, the fore topgallant mast crashed down. The main followed instantly, carrying away the topsail and the lower braces. Smashing a great gap in the bulwarks to starboard, a mass of ice fell and slipped overboard through the gap as the bark rolled. Hiding the berg, hiding the hanging wreckage, the moon went in.

"Get that wreckage cleared away! All hands!" shouted the skipper.

"Now how'd you like a mug o' hot beer?" came a voice from the murk.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came throaty laughter from the murk.

"Quit your laughing! Look alive with that wreckage!" shouted the mate.

"We're lookin' alive, sir," came a reply from the murk. "We was only sayin' as we'd like a mug o' hot beer, sir!"

In the darkness on his poop, the skipper smiled.

"She'll be all right," he murmured.

Till dawn all hands—men, mates, cook, steward, carpenter—toiled at clearing the wreckage, at reeving off new topsail and new course braces.

With dawn snow began to fall, great flakes that drifted slowly on the fallen wind and hid the sea.

"Doctor, go make coffee," said the mate to the cook at dawn.

Gathered in the fo'c's'le, the men sipped bitter coffee from tin pannikins.

"Here's how, sir!" said an old fellow, lifting his pannikin to the mate.

"Drink hearty, son!" said the mate, grinning, drinking from the dirty dented tin pot himself, and passing it on to the second mate, who passed it to the carpenter, who drank and passed it to the steward.

The skipper looked in.

"Everyone all right?" he asked, gazing from one to another.

"We're pretendin' as we're 'avin' a drink o' Falmouth beer, sir," said an old fellow, grinning up at the skipper from under shaggy brows.

A young man asked, "Will you take her to the Falklands for repair, sir?"

The skipper beckoned the mate out to the deck. "What do you think, mister?" he asked. "If we go to the Falklands for repair we'll have to be there a long time. If we take her on as she is, crippled aloft, we shall make a very long voyage. Whichever we do, I think we shall reach Falmouth at much the same time."

"Whatever you say suits me, sir," said the mate.

"What about the crew, mister?" the skipper asked.

"And that's the way we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots" came, in a sudden burst of uproarious song and laughter, from the fo'c's'le. The mate looked, smiling, at the skipper, implying that the skipper had his answer.

VERY well, mister," said the skipper, a look of relief on his face. "As soon as they've had breakfast and some rest set the foresail and mainsail. We'll go to Falmouth."

The mate looked into the fo'c's'le. "When you've had enough rest, loose the foresail and mainsail, son!" said he.

"Are we goin' to them Falklands, sir?" asked a sailor.

"We're going to Falmouth," replied the mate.

The men leaped to their feet, cheering, and started out to set the sails.

"Take your rest, son! Take your rest!" said the mate.

"Falmouth beer, my bullies!" cried a young fellow, leaping into the shrouds, paying no heed to the mate.

Stamping cold feet, beating their hands on their sides, the crew talked of Falmouth and of beer.

"Oh, do, my Johnnie Boker! Come, rock and roll me over!" they sang, sheeting the sails home.

All morning it snowed—huge flakes that hid the sea. All morning the crippled bark crept on, her crew building a makeshift bulwark to take the place of the one the ice had wrecked. At noon they rested and ate salt pork.

"It tastes kind of queer," said one. "I never knew it to taste so queer."

"It's tasted kind of queer a long time," said another.

"We was seven weeks under the sun in them Chinchas, and we was a long time a'crawlin' down the tropics. The pork's got spoiled," said another.

"If we'd gone to them Falklands we'd

ha' got some fresh stores," said another.

"Wot ye kickin' about?" asked another.

"Who's kickin'? I ain't a-kickin'," retorted the other.

THE bark was rolling slowly up a light southeast trade wind, her sails barely filled. Since the loss of the topgallant masts two full months had dragged by. Only once had the wind amounted to more than a light air. That once it had blown hard from dead ahead for two full weeks, driving her off her course, her clumsy old hull making little else but leeway because she lacked enough sail for driving her into the wind.

"It's gettin' warmer every day," said a sailor.

"An' the pork's a' getting ranker every day," said another.

"Wait till she's well up in the tropics," said another.

"Rye! S'pose as we gets becalmed on the line, eh?" said another.

It was evening. The last of the southeast trade had died away the previous night. All day the bark had lain in a flat calm, with the sun overhead, on the line. The pitch bubbled up from her deck seams. Morning, noon and evening they had slapped sea water on her decks to swell the seams. Now they were eating hardtack with a smear of marmalade on it, drinking bitter coffee from a dented, dirty old tin pot. At noon they had eaten spoiled pork and salty pea soup. Over a hundred and twenty days were gone since they had left the Chinchas. They were lean as staves. The mates, the steward, carpenter, and skipper were lean as staves.

"'Ow'd a good swig o' beer go now, eh?" asked a sailor.

The mate, having sounded the freshwater tank, went to the skipper on the poop.

"We'll have to cut down the water allowance still more, sir," he said. "The tank's almost empty."

"Maybe it'll rain and we shall be able to fill it," said the skipper, a frown on his face, his eyes perplexed and well-nigh desperate.

"Yes, sir—maybe," said the mate.

For twelve days the bark lay in a flat calm. Water enough to keep her people alive. No more. All day they chewed buttons cut from their dungarees, to keep the saliva flowing a little; they watched the glazed horizon for a cloud.

"If we'd gone to them Falklands, we'd not be 'arf dead now," said a thirsty sailor.

"We're only 'arf dead. Wot ye kickin' about?" said another.

"Who's kickin'? I ain't kickin'!" said the other.

"Beer! A mug o' cold beer!" exclaimed another. Every one laughed, a dry throaty cackle.

At dawn a black cloud appeared on the sea rim. They stretched the rainsail, made it fast to both sides of the main rigging, led its canvas spout down into the water tank. While the black cloud crept slowly over the glazed sky they stripped their dungarees from their lean shoulders. Naked, they watched the oncoming cloud.

"Hark at the rain a'hissin'," said one.

"It's a solid wall, ain't it?" said another.

"I wisht as it was beer," said another. Every one laughed, a dry throaty cackle.

They lay on their backs on the deck, their mouths wide open to catch the cool rain. They rolled over and over, stretched their refreshed limbs. They played leapfrog in the torrent, slapping each other's bare buttocks, and shouting with laughter.

The rain passed on. The tank was full. A little breeze ruffled the glazed tropic sea. They put on their dungarees. For a few moments their dungarees, the sails, the decks steamed; they were dry.

"Take off the hatch, mister," said the skipper. "We'll lighten her. We'll dump some of the cargo to the sea."

Working in a blazing sun, in a cloud of dense gray dust, they threw guano into the sea all day. Dust settled thick on the sails, the spars, the deck, the rigging.

At dinner time the cook said, "I can't 'elp 'ow the grub tastes. It's that there guano dust."

A sailor eating dinner in the fo'c's'le said, "The pork don't taste no wuss than yesterday. Blame me if it don't taste maybe a bit better, eh?" Every one laughed.

For two days they dumped guano into the sea. The skipper and mate, looking over the side, watched the bubbles that drifted lazily by the bark's sides.

The skipper said, "Look at the length of the seaweed on her sides below the water line! Look at the barnacles! Her bottom's so foul she couldn't make more than four miles an hour with a gale at her tail!"

A sailor entering the fo'c's'le said, "Poor old lady. She's got a dirty bottom, me byes!"

"That ain't no way to talk about no lady," said another. Everyone laughed.

"Cripey!" exclaimed a young fellow, looking from the fo'c's'le, "here's a school o' porpoises comin' to play under the bow."

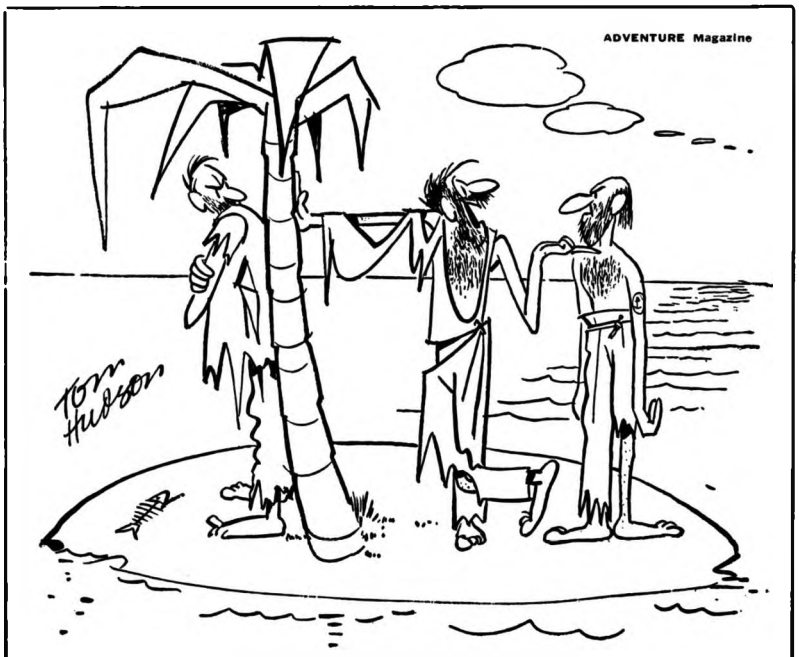
"Sir," said an old gray man to the mate, "If the carpenter was to make a harpoon I could harpoon one o' them porpus. I was in a whaler once."

"Chips, can you make a harpoon?" the mate asked the carpenter.

"I can make anything, sir," said Chips. And soon the old gray fellow sat astride the boom, a harpoon poised in his wrinkled hand.

For a week all hands ate their fill of porpoise meat—dark red flesh tasting not unlike beefsteak.

Said the old gray man, "We ain't a' goin' to git scurvy for a time leastways, boys!"



"Who do you think I ran into today?"

THE bark was wallowing up the western ocean, making four miles an hour in a stiff quartering wind. Leaning on her rail, all hands watched a tall, three-skysail yarder coming up astern, white water breaking in great clouds of spray from her driving bows, her lee rail lying down to the sea.

"What's she signaling, mister?" asked the skipper.

"She wants to know if we need any assistance, sir," said the mate.

"Ask her if she can spare us a couple of barrels of fresh pork," said the skipper.

The mate said, presently, "She's almost out of stores, sir. She can't spare any at all."

The skipper called the crew to the quarterdeck.

"Her bottom's getting fouler every day, men," he said. "We may be sixty days getting to Falmouth. You may get scurvy. Do any of you want to abandon ship? Speak up if you do."

An old gray fellow looked up and replied, "We ain't got scurvy yet, sir."

The skipper said, "Thank you, men.

I'd like to take her in if we can possibly make it."

"We'll take her in, and then we'll all 'ave a good swig o' Falmouth beer, sir," said the other gray fellow.

A cheer rose from the crew, and loud rollicking laughter.

"Think it over while you have the chance, men," said the skipper. "There may be no other chance. We may meet no other ship."

"To hell wid other ships, sir!" cried a young fellow. "We stays wid th' old *Golden Emblem,* sir!"

THE bark was tacking to and fro in a stiff wind from dead ahead, from northeast, making little but leeway because of her foul bottom and crippled top hamper. She had been tacking to and fro for nigh a full month. They had seen no more porpoises, no other ship. The mate came to the skipper on the poop.

"Two of them have scurvy, sir," he said.

"Look 'ere, sons," said a sailor in the fo'c's'le, and poked a finger into his forearm. When he took it away, the hole it had made remained.

"Look at me gums, byes," said another. Raising his upper lip, he showed a black gum.

"We could 'ave abandoned her," said one. "Then we'd not be 'avin no scurvy now."

"Wot ye kickin' about?" asked another.

"Who's kickin'? I ain't kickin'!" said the other.

Night set in, bringing a thick mist that hid all things a few feet from the wallowing bark. A vessel could have passed a hundred feet away and not been seen. For three days the wet mist hid the sea. Late in the fourth night the lookout man shouted clear and high, "Ship two points on the port bow, sir!"

All hands ran to the deck to see a red and green light coming out of the mist.

"Down helm!" shouted the skipper to the man at the wheel.

"Down helm it is, sir!" said the man at the wheel. And then, "She's steerin' like a washtub, sir. She don't pay off!"

"Stand clear, all hands!" shouted the mate. There was a loud splintering crash forward. The other ship had struck the bark a glancing blow, brought her fore topmast down, and gone clear.

"She's holed forward, sir," said the mate.

"Man the pumps, mister!" said the skipper.

Clank, clank, clank, came the creak of the pumps. All night the watch on deck pumped, the water flowing in as fast as they could pump it out.

"If it wasn't for the scurvy—if they weren't so weak—they could keep the water down, sir," said the mate. "We can't spare any one to clear the wrecked topmast."

"Lash it so it can't roll about, and leave it hang, mister. She'll crawl like a snail now, more than ever."

At dawn the skipper called all hands to the quarter-deck.

"If we take to the boats some ship's sure to pick us up. We're in the track of ships," he told them.

"Does *you* want to abandon her, sir?" asked a voice from the mist below him.

The skipper made no answer. From the thick mist there came the sound of a low laugh.

"Lots o' good beer in Falmouth, sir!" a voice called. The laugh spread from man to man, a hoarse ripple of amused defiance. The watch on deck returned to the pumps.

Twenty-four hours dragged on. The mate said, "The water's gaining on them, sir. They're too weak."

A squall whined over the mist-hid sea. The bark began to roll heavily.

"It's going to blow. We can't leave her now. The boats couldn't live. We must stay till she sinks beneath us. Order all hands to the pumps, mister!" said the skipper.

"They're all at the pumps, sir. They didn't wait for orders," said the mate.

All day all hands pumped. The bark rolled drunkenly, creeping along like a crippled snail, the water gaining inch by inch. Two men were at the wheel; no one man was strong enough to hold her now.

"We're all goin' to git drownded, boys!" said a voice from the murk.

"We ain't drownded yet. Wot ye kickin' about?" came instant reply.

"All the way from the Chinchas to get a bottle o' Falmouth beer!" called a hoarse voice. Someone laughed.

"They can still laugh. I wish I could," thought the skipper.

All night, all day, all night again, they pumped. Next dawn the mist thinned. Just visible in the dim light, land lay ahead. The bark was far below her Plimsoll mark, the water gaining.

A ship came driving up from astern, flew a hurried signal.

"She's asking if we want to abandon her, men!" called the skipper.

From the pumps, a sailor called huskily, "Tell her to go to hell, sir!"

The other ship drove on, cheering as she passed. Scarce heard by those upon her decks, a feeble cheer replied.

The sun rose. The wind ceased.

Clank, clank, clank, on and on, unceasing, from the creaking pumps, the old bark crawling like a crippled snail.

In Falmouth harbor the mate lowered her topsails, let her fore and main sheets go and dropped anchor, while the men still pumped. Tugs came speeding toward her. Men leaped lightly over her low rails and ran to her pumps.

The old bark's sailors fell, lay and sat, exhausted, on her decks.

A bumboatman came aboard, his arms filled with fresh meat and vegetables. The bark's sailors munched, lying and sitting, exhausted, on her deck.

Another bumboatman came aboard, his arms full of bottles.

"Beer!" cried an old gray-headed sailor. "Falmouth beer, boys!" Weak, eager laughter rose from man to man.

"All the way from them Chinchas, boys! Here's how, Captain!" cried the old gray-bearded man, lifting his bottle in salute.

"Here's how, sir!" they all cried, tipping their bottles high.

The skipper glanced at the old bark's name on a life buoy.

"Courage," murmured the skipper. "Courage—and with it, laughter. That's the *Golden Emblem!*" ■ ■

that these tents had been precisely what I'd guessed them to be.

I was taken unceremoniously past a group of four or five men who were frying eggs and chunks of ham over a wood fire. They fell silent as they watched me, and I was struck by their strange expressions. I was expecting hostility, but their eyes and faces showed neither unfriendliness nor friendliness. In fact, they were observing me with complete dead pans, almost as though I were something less than human. I didn't feel precisely encouraged.

A word here about the men themselves. All of them had a healthy, outdoor look, but otherwise they seemed quite ordinary in size, appearance and dress. A stranger seeing a couple of them would assume they were typical Sicilian farmers. Certainly no one would have taken them for bandits.

They took me to a place past the last of the tents, and there two men stood guard over me. I tried a couple of times to make conversation with them, but it quickly became obvious that they were under instructions not to talk to me, so I kept quiet. I spent a lonely and very dull day. No one mistreated me in any way; actually, the little contact I had with my guards was surprisingly pleasant. They gave me a huge portion of ham chunks and eggs for my breakfast, a thick slab of coarse Sicilian peasant bread and a half bottle of wine for my lunch, and a steaming bowl filled with a meat and vegetable stew for my dinner.

By dusk, I was beginning to feel pretty nervous. No one had said anything to me, and although I suspected that this was the band of La Bella Morte, I couldn't be sure. And I had absolutely no idea of what fate might be in store for me. There had been very little activity in the camp throughout the day, and judging from what I had seen of the comings and goings of individuals, I estimated that the group numbered twelve or fifteen. All were men.

Then, almost immediately after I had finished my evening meal, a man with a .45 hanging from his belt came out of the early evening gloom and beckoned to me. I followed him into one of the German-made tents, not knowing what to expect. A couple of opened blanket rolls were on one side, and at the rear was a rough-hewn wooden table on which stood two candles. My first reaction was that although it was cool outside, the interior of the tent was stuffy, airless.

Suddenly I saw the woman sitting on a three-legged stool behind the table. Her black hair was cut short like a man's, and she wore a man's shirt, open at the throat, and trousers. Very prominently displayed was a shoulder holster with an automatic peering out, ready for business.

The woman studied me silently for several minutes. She was attractive, with large eyes and good bone structure. And although she was considerably heavier than the typical American glamour girl, her figure was all right. I guessed that she was about thirty-two years old.

The guards had left, but the man with the .45 was still there, standing slightly to my left. Without warning, he produced a long, bone-handled knife, seemingly from nowhere, and held it close to my throat.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Why have you been seeking us? Are you a police spy? How did you know where to locate us?"

I explained carefully, in my broken Italian, that I was a Scottish-born American citizen, a novelist who wrote an occasional magazine story, and that my interest in La Bella Morte had been aroused by newspaper stories of her exploits.

The woman spoke for the first time. "That is a stupid name," she said scornfully. "It is typical of the press. The press always exaggerates and lies."

THIS, I thought, was my opportunity, and I immediately urged her to tell me her true story, which I would then write. That, I said emphatically, was why I was here. But neither the woman nor her husky companion was ready to accept me. They began to cross-examine me; they scrutinized my passport, my credentials, every scrap of paper in my wallet. They called in two men, who studied every document carefully, holding some papers up to candlelight. Then the questioning started all over again.

And through it all the knife hovered near my throat. At last the men seemed satisfied, but then the woman took over, and her questions were the sharpest, the most direct and penetrating of all. Again and again she tried to trip me up; again and again she worded her queries in such a way that the slightest slip would make a liar out of me, with my life as forfeit.

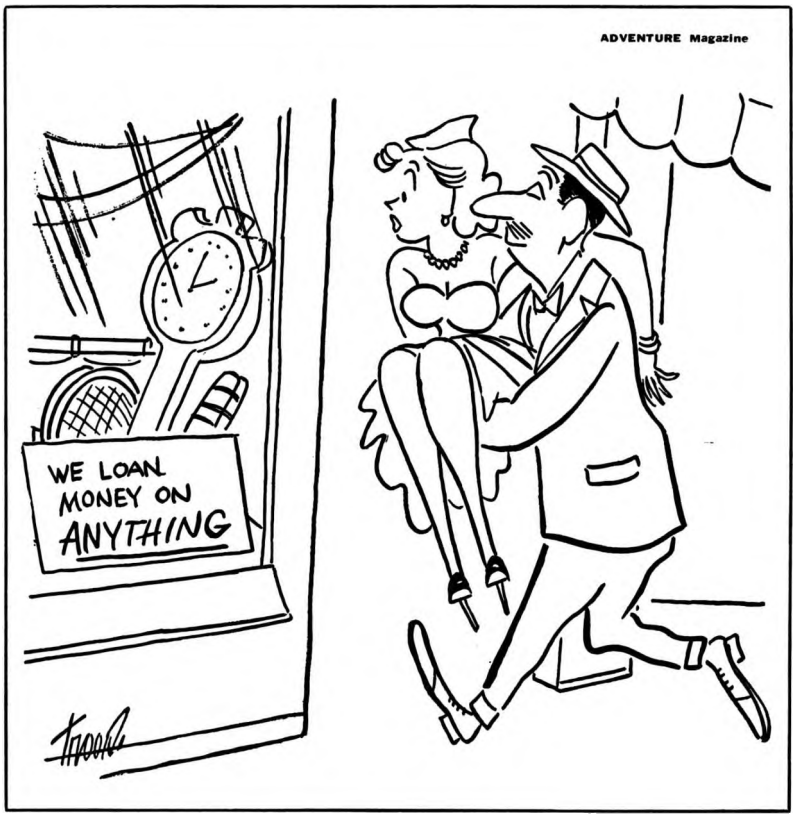
It was almost dawn when they finally stopped, and it was the woman who called a halt. "I am satisfied that he is all right," she said. "We will take a chance on him."

I was taken to one of the tents and given a blanket. I curled up in it and slept until noon. Then, after a hearty peasant breakfast, I was finally granted my interview with La Bella Morte. We sat near some stunted pines as we talked, and I soon noticed that the man who had conducted my interrogation on the night before hovered constantly within sight.

Her real name, she told me, was Elena Marguerita Rosponi. She was a native of the Sicilian interior and had grown up on a farm. As a young girl in the early days of the war she had become a Communist and a member of a Partisan guerrilla unit. At the war's end she and a number of other Partisans had become disillusioned and had quit the Communist Party. By this time they had become accustomed to the free life of roaming through the mountains, and as none of them wanted to settle down as farmers or storekeepers, they drifted into their life of banditry.

Most of the men were married now, and their families lived in various communities scattered about the countryside. I gathered that these men spent about half their time with the gang, the rest with their wives and children. Elena herself had never married. However, she lived openly with her husky lieutenant, whom I came to know only by the name of Benvenuto.

She was undisputed leader of the organization and planned all of the raids on banks, wealthy merchants, supply cara-



vans and the like. And no one, not even Benvenuto, disputed her commands. I noticed, however, during my time with them, that their relationship definitely changed after sundown. It was Elena who cooked Benvenuto's dinner and who meekly obeyed his orders. She may have been head of the band, but she was also "his woman," and after working hours he seemed to be very much the master of his own house.

Well, after I had what I thought was my story, I thanked Elena and indicated that I was ready to leave. To my surprise —and consternation—she said I was not permitted to go. My first thought was that I was going to be held for ransom, and I told her that people who write for a living aren't wealthy. But it seems I misjudged her motives.

The gang was about to engage in a major operation which had been in the planning stage for many weeks. The valleys and many of the villages were crawling with police and government informers, so she could take no chances on my departing now. Even though I had no intention of giving her and her men away, I might inadvertently drop some information that would lead the authorities to their hideout. She had decided, therefore, that I would have to accompany them on the operation.

In time I learned the major outlines of the scheme, and it seemed to me to be as harebrained as it was daring. The band was running low on ammunition, and several carbines and pistols were in less than perfect working condition. It was next to impossible to buy ammunition in any considerable quantity without arousing suspicion, and anyone trying to buy new parts for an armload of weapons might lay himself open to official scrutiny, too. So Elena's band had decided to rob an arsenal—a police arsenal, at that!

I thought they were insane, and told them so. But their plans were all set, and they were going to make their raid in four days' time. The time element explained why they had been so suspicious of me when I had shown up in Frenia, asking to see them.

And so, for the next four days, I was the "guest" of some of Europe's most notorious cutthroats. In a strange way, it was one of the most pleasant experiences I have ever known. The men—there were eighteen of them, as every member of the group had been called in to lend a hand — were an easygoing and convivial lot. They sang, told jokes, fished in the mountain streams and generally conducted themselves like any genial bunch off together on a holiday.

But through this whole period I had the constant knowledge that they were going to risk their lives—and mine—in a stunt which no sane person would attempt. The tension grew gradually, and on the evening before the actual raid Elena ordered that no one drink any wine. Around midnight we set out along a mountain trail, Elena and Benvenuto in the lead.

All the men were heavily armed, and Elena carried two pistols, but I was not permitted to have even a knife on my person. They still didn't trust me, and were afraid of what I might do when the going got rough. However, as Elena had been careful to point out to me, should the venture turn out to be a fiasco, and should all of us be captured, I could claim immunity by stating that I was a noncombatant.

Nevertheless I knew I was going to be under fire, and it was no fun to contemplate taking part in a pitched battle absolutely helpless, without any means of defending myself.

We arrived at a point near the arsenal about an hour before dawn, and everyone ate bread and cheese. I had no appetite, but Elena's band had experienced this sort of thing so often that neither their nerves nor their imaginations bothered them, and they ate heartily.

The arsenal was small but complete. It was heavily guarded; three watchtowers, each armed by a pair of officers with machine guns, were laid out in a triangular shape, with the main building of the depot in the center of the triangle. The principal approach was along a paved road, which was in open country. To the rear a series of wooded hills rose sharply. The arsenal itself sat in a little hollow.

Elena's strategy was simple. Three of the men would detach themselves from the party, ride toward the arsenal along the main road, and open fire, from horseback, on the watchtower which stood above the entrance. Naturally, the police would return their fire, and the men were then to retreat, though not too rapidly. They were to lead the inevitable party of pursuers along the highway for as long as they could, and then scatter, make their way into the woods and go to their homes. Their mission was dangerous, but when their function as decoys was finished, they would have no more to do.

MEANTIME the gang would come out of the hills, as silently as possible. With the diversion taking place at the opposite end of the triangle. Elena hoped that some of her men could get into the arsenal, steal ammunition and weapons, and get out again. If the police in the watchtower guarding that approach caused trouble, half of the party was to take care of them.

The entire operation was timed to take place shortly after dawn, for Elena figured that the officials on duty would be ending a long night, and would be comparatively careless, since they were due to be relieved in about an hour.

I don't mind admitting that I was frightened as we moved quietly down through the trees toward the rear of the arsenal. We were no more than 150 feet from the watchtower when we halted and waited for the sound of gunfire from our decoys. We didn't have long to wait. We heard Elena's trio firing their carbines, and within a few seconds the police machine guns set up a furious din. There were shouts from within the building, and I could imagine the bedlam as the remainder of the garrison hurried up to see what was the matter. In a few minutes we heard jeeps starting, and waited until the little task force roared off toward the highway and our decoys. Then Elena gave the signal to advance.

She and Benvenuto were in the lead as we came charging out of the woods. It was a beautiful morning; the sun's rays were just beginning to streak the sky, and I thought, incongruously, that this was a

bad time to die. Then I had no time to think.

Four or five of our riders had reached the base of the watchtower before the men inside the concrete blockhouse quite realized what was happening. Then, suddenly, bullets seemed to be everywhere. The man to my left screamed, grabbed his stomach and toppled from his mount. The rest of us fell back, somehow maintaining a semblance of order.

Unexpectedly, the machine guns fell silent. Benvenuto and two others had climbed the steel ladder at the rear of the tower and had taken care of the team of guards inside. I never did learn whether the poor devils had been killed or merely put out of commission. All I know is that Elena was standing up in the saddle, cursing loudly and beckoning to us to come on.

We rode back down to the arsenal, this time without opposition. And the robbery moved into high gear. The gang had studied maps of the place, and each man knew precisely where he was to go, what he was to take. I stood with Benvenuto and Elena at the rear door of the building, from where they directed the whole fantastic operation. In five minutes—it was certainly no longer, although every minute seemed like an hour—the gang reassembled under the watchtower, and we headed back up to the cover of the hilly forests.

Our progress was fairly slow, for our horses had truly become beasts of burden. They were laden with cases of ammunition, with carbines and pistols and a new type of submachine gun. The raid had been a success, but there was no jubilation—two members of the gang had been killed, and no one knew the fate of the decoys.

After a silent ride of perhaps thirty minutes we emerged into a little clearing, where a young boy drowsed near a cart to which a team of mules was hitched. The boy jumped to his feet, grinning and shouting. And the thoroughness of Elena's planning immediately became evident.

Naturally, the authorities would be searching for mounted men carrying arms and ammunition. But Elena was prepared for that. From beneath a jumble of vegetable-filled crates in the cart, she quickly pulled a peasant dress, which she donned, and a shawl, which she tied over her head. The men, meanwhile, loaded the stolen weapons and ammo boxes onto the cart and covered them with the vegetables. Elena and Benvenuto took their seats on the cart, looking for all the world like a typical Sicilian peasant couple.

The other men scattered, taking the spare horses with them. I presume that each member of the band was going to his own home, intending to stay there until things quieted down. I don't know for certain, as no one bothered to tell me. In fact, I was mostly concerned by the fact that the horse I had been riding was taken away. Elena called to me, and when I approached the cart, she was succinct.

We had come to the parting of the ways, she said. It was now all right for me to go back to my own world. If I would cut north through the woods for about a mile, I would come to a road. About four miles to the east I would find a village, and presumably some means of transportation other than my own feet. She and Benvenuto then shook hands with me, and the donkey cart creaked off.

That was the last time I saw La Bella Morte or any member of her band. My mind was filled with the story I would tell the police if they accosted me on the road. I was afraid I'd be up to my neck in trouble—perhaps literally—if they discovered my part in the raid, inactive though it had been. But I saw no sign of the authorities, and when I reached the village I was finally able to arrange for a car to take me back to Palermo.

From there I flew to Rome at once. I'd had enough of the world's fiercest bandits to last me a lifetime. ■ ■

THE DUELLING DOG OF MONTARGIS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

old warrior could answer, a knight in black, seated on the king's right, replied hurriedly, "Your Majesty has no doubt forgotten that young Aubry was entrusted with a message for the Barons of Courances."

"My son," the duke declared, "could have reached Courances in twenty-four hours and he has been gone four days."

AT THIS moment there was a commotion at the far end of the hall. There was a scuffle as the guards tried to prevent someone—something—from entering, but it streaked under their pikes and halted, panting.

"That's Verbaux, Aubry de Montdidier's greyhound!" a courtier cried.

The dog was already halfway down the hall. Skirting the great round fire in its center, he jumped up on the royal table. Two guards thrust their shields before Charles, but the beast had no interest in the king; he had seen the knight in black. He leaped for the man's throat, missed, and buried his fangs in his shoulder. For a second no one moved. Then there was a great outcry, and several men rushed forward to tear the animal from the knight.

A serf grabbed the hound's collar and wrenched him free. Meanwhile the knight fell back, clutching his shoulder. Snatching a slab of meat from the table, the greyhound streaked to the nearest window, slithered through the bars, jumped ten feet to the ground and disappeared through the dark streets of the town.

The black knight rose groggily from his bench and with two friends supporting him staggered out of the hall, followed by the surprised stares of the guests. The Chevalier Macaire was a strong man and a good fighter. What was most important, the king trusted him.

But not all the knights shared their king's opinion. Born in Mainz on the Rhine, Macaire spoke with the harsh accent of the North, and the powerful clan of which he was the leader including many Teutonic barons, who hated the French. As for the white-haired Duke de Montdidier, too old to be ambitious, he was the king's most trusted counselor. His son Aubry, a brave youth who had not yet taken the orders of knighthood, was also fanatically devoted to the king. As the courtiers heatedly discussed the implications of the incident, the king rose abruptly and left the hall.

Back in his own house, where his wounds were dressed by his barber, Macaire gave an order to the members of his clan.

"That beast may come back to the palace. If he does, chop him down!"

A few days later the dog did return to the palace. Macaire, despite his wounds, had been careful to take his usual place at the king's right, his shoulder still heavily bandaged. Again the hound hurled himself at the chevalier, but this time his followers were expecting the attack and warded off the beast.

"Your Majesty," said the old Duke de Montdidier, "we must be prepared to follow the dog the next time he appears. I am sure he will lead us to my son."

A third time the dog showed up, then fled.

The king and his knights hastily mounted their horses and the wild chase began. Night was coming on, and it was difficult to follow the racing dog up hills, across meadows and through the brush and watercourses of the forest of Bondy.

The greyhound led the men to a clearing, paused uncertainly, and then plunged into a thicket. The knights lifted high their flaming torches: the clearing was empty. Macaire, at the king's elbow, grinned with satisfaction.

But branches moved deep in the thicket where the dog had gone, and the courtiers spurred their horses into the brush. The duke paled. Before them lay the body of a young man. A servant bent down, picked up the emblazoned sword and handed it to the king.

"It's Aubry's sword," said Charles.

The dog, who had seen Macaire, bounded out of the bush, leaped up and bit the chevalier in the leg.

"Down, Verbaux!" cried the duke unexpectedly. To the surprise of all, the greyhound released his grip and dropped to the ground. "Your Majesty," said the duke, turning to King Charles, "I ask for justice. I believe that the dog is acting as an instrument of Divine Will. Seize Macaire and you will learn the truth."

At a signal from the king, two yeomen stationed themselves on either side of the chevalier.

"But first, my friend," said Charles, laying his hand on the old duke's arm, "we must bring back the body of your son and bury him with full honors."

COVERED with sweet-smelling herbs, the body of Aubry de Montdidier was carried back to the town and preparations were made for the funeral. Meanwhile, outside the palace, a growing crowd began to call for justice.

"Question Macaire," the old duke requested, and the chevalier was brought in.

"Why," demanded Charles, "does everyone accuse you of the death of

Aubry? Why does even his dog point you out as the murderer?"

"I don't know, for I am not guilty, good King," answered Macaire, "neither in act nor in intent, and I am prepared to prove my innocence by force of arms against anyone who accuses me."

The knights were assembled in the courtyard, and the heralds proclaimed the challenge as the king, the duke, and the Chevalier Macaire waited on the parapet. No one stepped forward. "Maybe you are wrong about this Montdidier," said the king.

NO! answered the duke. "It seems," he added scornfully in a voice loud enough to be heard by those below, "that no French knight is bold enough to enter the lists against Macaire."

"This ends the matter, I'm afraid," the king said.

"No, Your Majesty. I suggest a trial by combat between Macaire and the only one who dares to fight him. If Macaire wins, let him be set free, but if he loses, let him be hanged as a murderer and a traitor."

"But no one dares to fight him," said the king.

"*One* does," answered Montdidier.

There was a silence.

"You mean a duel between Macaire and the dog, Verbaux?"

The chevalier laughed derisively. "I was prepared for a battle to the death with a brave knight. I certainly do not fear a mere dog."

The rules of the combat were strictly prescribed. Macaire, with his head shaved and wearing a sleeveless shirt, would enter the arena armed only with a shield and a cudgel the length of a man's arm. The dog's sole protection would be a large barrel open at both ends.

The townspeople watched the arena being built just outside the palace gates with double-decked pavilions for the king and his retinue. From the surrounding countryside the peasants flocked as if to a fair.

On the appointed day, at two o'clock in the afternoon, trumpets blared and the roll of drums proclaimed that the combat was about to begin. Assembled on a rise overlooking the amphitheater, the people cheered as the king rode up. Behind him rode the Duke de Montdidier, followed by the rest of the court. The king took his seat. A hush fell over the crowd as the heralds announced the rules of the match. No spectator was allowed to carry sword or dagger. No man could attend the combat on horseback. Everyone was to remain in his seat and it was forbidden, under strict penalty, to utter a word or cry, or give signals to the participants. Anyone climbing down into the arena would immediately be hanged.

To a flourish of trumpets, Macaire, head shaved and wearing his black shirt, strode grimly across the arena. A herald called, "Do your duty."

Then the marshal stepped forward, crying, "Let him go!" and flung down his gauntlet. The spectators surged forward in an expectant and hushed wave.

A low door opened and the greyhound shot into the ring.

His chin arrogantly thrust forward, his stick raised menacingly, Macaire held his ground. As Verbaux leaped, the knight brought him down with a terrific blow of his cudgel. Then he struck again. The greyhound cringed, fell back, and crawled into the barrel. A mutter of approval swept the pavilion of the Teutonic knights, and Macaire flashed a triumphant smile at the king.

In so doing he lost a second. And in that second Verbaux streaked out of his barrel and clamped his jaws on the chevalier's thigh. Macaire hammered desperately at the beast, but to no avail, and the look of confidence left his face. In an instant the greyhound released his grip and leaped at Macaire's throat. Reeling, the knight beat him off, but not for long. Attacking again, Verbaux sank his teeth into Macaire's free arm.

As the fight wore on, the odds changed. The dog was gaining and Macaire's relatives grew apprehensive. One of them, able to control himself no longer, started to climb into the ring.

"Hang him! Hang him!" shouted the crowd.

Turning back, the culprit ran for his life.

"A thousand pounds to the man who catches him!" shouted the king.

At the edge of the crowd, Macaire's impetuous relative was brought down by a swift stroke from a peasant's staff and was led off to the dungeons.

Attention returned to the duel, where the contestants were out to kill each other. Both fighters sensed they must close in for a decision. Hurling himself through the air with a fluid effort, the dog aimed for the knight's bloody face, and one of its fangs pierced the chevalier's eye.

Macaire fell to the ground, screaming in pain, and in an instant the beast was at his throat.

"Help me, my brothers!" the knight gasped.

The Macaire clan sprang to their feet, but the king waved them down.

And the old Duke de Montdidier called, "Are you ready to confess the murder of my son?"

"I will tell everything," the chevalier replied in a barely audible voice.

"Verbaux! Enough!" cried the duke. The greyhound opened his jaws and fell back, trembling with exhaustion.

AT a sign from the king, Bishop Anselm descended into the ring, and bent his head close to the wounded man's lips. In scarcely distinguishable tones Macaire told how Aubry de Montdidier had obtained proof that the Teutonic clan was conspiring against the king, and how he, Macaire, had arranged to send the youth on the mission through the forest, and had then waylaid and killed him, hiding the body in the underbrush.

"Macaire has been proved guilty in trial by combat," said the old duke.

"Let him be hanged," said Charles. And the sentence was carried out.

A few days later, Verbaux, the Duelling Dog of Montargis died of his wounds and was buried near his master's grave. But the murder of Aubry de Montdidier had been avenged. ■ ■

THE TUMBLEWEED WAGONS

By ROD LENGEL

IT WAS a moment for drastic action against lawlessness, and Judge Parker of the Federal Court of Western District of Arkansas was the man to take it. Already known as the 'Hanging Judge' because of his quick and ruthless dealing out of justice to outlaws, he made further history by originating the Black Maria of the West, known locally as the "tumbleweed wagons."

Because the outlaws so greatly outnumbered the lawmen, and were able to scatter out over such a wide territory when the law was out to get them, the bandits had a great advantage. So Judge Parker dreamed up the tumbleweed wagons, named after the prairie weed that blows over the dry desert lands.

Judge Parker's Black Maria was a large, caboose-type cabin set on wheels. It was equipped with a cook stove, cooking and eating utensils and a stock of food. It was large enough to accommodate a dozen or more men, who could be locked inside during the day as the wagon roved the prairie in wake of the marshals on horseback who went ahead of it, rounding up law-breakers. At night the prisoners were chained to trees or to the wagon's wheels.

Each of the tumble-weed wagons carried a crew of four men—a driver, a cook and two marshals. The marshals' daily catch might include horse thieves, cattle rustlers, killers or just plain rowdies. All would be taken before Judge Parker and dealt swift and hard justice.

Bank robber Jim Reed, Jesse James and Cole Younger were some of the illustrious names hunted by the tumbleweed wagons. And Belle Starr was taken for a ride in the desert Black Maria by the last living member of Judge Parker's 200 rangers, Elias Rector of Fort Smith, who helped him clean out the outlaws in Arkansas. Rector picked Belle up on a charge of horse-stealing, her specialty.

Rector's account of the taking of Belle Starr is a hilarious one. She fought like a wildcat and then, once in the wagon, a leg chain holding her down, she threw blankets, pots, knives, forks and food out the back of the wagon as the driver and cook, unaware of what was happening, rode atop the box on the trip back to town.

Belle gave another tumbleweed wagon crew a hard time at a later date when they showed up at her Younger's Bend House, a well-known hangout for outlaws, in search of Jim Reed.

Belle, tipped off by her husband, Sam Starr, was waiting for the wagon when it arrived. Neither she nor Sam had been stealing any horses lately so they didn't fear the law.

Belle greeted the lawmen graciously and invited them to stay for dinner.

The lawmen accepted. They welcomed a home-cooked meal, and also, it gave them an excuse to stick around Younger's Bend for a few hours to spot any roving outlaw who might show up.

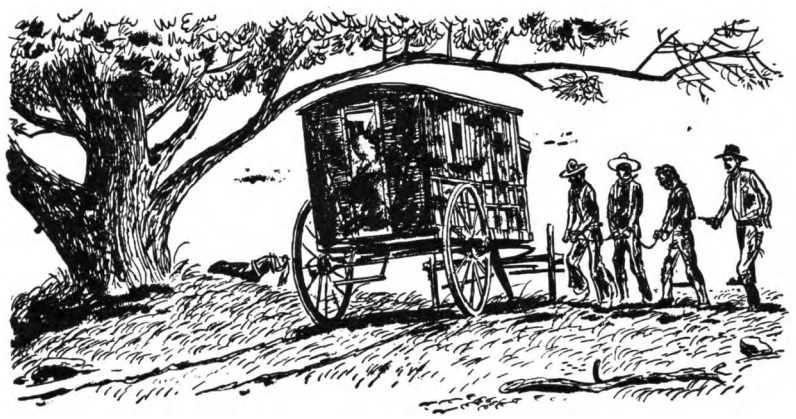
Belle retired to fix the meal. In a little while she called the boys into the kitchen, motioned them to seats at the rough wood table, and served them up a hot stew, fresh-baked biscuits and coffee. The grub smelled and tasted good and all hands took a second serving. Sam and Belle didn't eat because, they insisted, they'd had theirs before the lawmen arrived.

When they'd finished eating and were settling back to roll smokes for themselves, Belle smiled broadly and asked them if they'd liked the meal. When they politely complimented her stew she said, "Well, boys, maybe you'd like to know what was in that stew?"

The three lawmen stared uneasily at the smiling faces of Belle and Sam, wondering if they had been poisoned. Belle relieved their anxiety.

"It was just an old rattlesnake I killed yesterday," she said sweetly. "Just old rattlesnake stew, boys, that's all it was."

And, according to Orrington Lucas of Wagoner, Oklahoma, the "boys" didn't lose any time getting outside the house, where they didn't lose any time losing the rattlesnake stew. ■ ■



DIG MY GRAVE DEEP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

he was a captive of the icecap, and held in an ice dungeon.

We can picture something of his feelings as the winter began to recede while he eked out a bare meal over his failing fuel. What if the spring relief party was held back by weather? How long could he last with no heat or food?

Something worse than a delay took place. On March 9th, the relief party left the base, and fared reasonably well until it reached the flat plateau. But here, the winter storms had knocked down or drifted over the tops of the line of flags that was their only true trail to Courtauld!

For three weeks, the party zigzagged back and forth in the vicinity of the icecap station, weathering gale after gale, but finding no trace of the snowhouse.

Risking starvation themselves, the party finally gave up hope of relieving Courtauld and returned to the base by a series of forced marches. It was now mid-April.

On April 21st, another party left the base for a fresh try . . . a fine indication of the expedition's spirit after the first grueling and apparently useless search.

ON MAY 3RD, they reached Courtauld's vicinity. After two days of exhaustive searching against the flat snow glare, a small, dark object was finally spotted. It turned out to be the station's flag, in rags, and only cleared from the drift by a vagary of wind. Then they found the two-inch ventilator of the main house, barely projecting above the snow.

They shouted down and at first got no answer, but then heard his call. Courtauld told the story with modest humor. "On May fifth," he wrote, "the primus gave its last gasp. A few minutes later an extraordinary scraping and scratching sound was heard overhead, which turned out to be the relief party. On being extricated, I found I was perfectly all right, except for a slight weakness due to lack of exercise."

His conclusions of his five months beneath the snow are as important today as they were then and have particular meaning for men whose vocations may offer the choice of being in company or alone as civilization crawls across the Arctic.

Courtauld said: "A) It seems to me that there is no objection to leaving a man alone, providing that: 1) he volunteers for the post himself; 2) he is certain of the strength of his house, of his food supply, and of his ultimate relief; 3) he has plenty to occupy his mind.

"B) I consider that a man for this purpose should have an active, imaginative mind, but not be of a nervous disposition.

"C) It should be remembered that the remotest risks become, by brooding on them, grave dangers; so that every element of doubt should be eliminated by providing alternative plans for any emergency. If this is done, there is no reason why any normal person should not live in perfect peace of mind for an indefinite period."

Brief words. But that was Courtauld—first man ever to voluntarily take such a risk, and never seeing anything very unusual in the fact that he did it, or that he came out of his diggings humming. ■ ■

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