LAGOON OF LOST COMMAND by R. H. WATKINS

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## DEPARTMENTS



*Cover painted for Adventure by Maurice Bower*

*Kenneth S. White, Editor*

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# THE CAMP-FIRE

*Where readers, writers and adventurers meet*

ONLY three recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month—and a far from garrulous trio they make.

D. L. Champion, whose anything but conventional Western yarn gave us a powerful kick, introduces himself briefly thuswise—

Since I was born in Melbourne, Australia, I suppose some stickler may ask by what right I feel competent to turn out a story of the old West. I could argue, speciously, that Australia is indeed West. So far West that it eventually becomes the southernmost section of the Far East. However, I have better reasons than that.

First, although it isn't generally known, Australia is quite a cattle raising country. During World War I a tremendous beef boom got under way. Probably history is repeating itself at this moment.

Anyway, I haven't been back there for thirty years. During my long residence in the United States I have soaked in Western atmosphere in two places. One, a broad rolling Wyoming ranch, owned by a huge genial gentleman I met at a Mexico City bar and who, with the proverbial hospitality of the West, asked me to come and stay with him; two, in Yuma, Arizona and its environs. Yuma, according to the old timers, was, in her day, as tough, rough and lawless as the famed Pecos River district in Texas.

For several years, I have been intending to write a Western yarn. Somehow I never quite made it until now, having concentrated on detective fiction to the exclusion of other types. However, since the ice has been broken, I shall not hesitate to make myself right at home beside the *Campfire*. And provided the editor sees eye to eye with me, you can look for another Western story in an early issue of *Adventure*.

We're agreeable. How's about it, you readers? Or is an unromanticized and glamorless treatment of the West too hard to swallow?

MURRAY MORGAN has crammed a lot of action into his one score and seven and covered more territory than a lot of octogenarians. The author of "Forty for Fare" didn't get all his knowledge of the fight game outside the ropes, apparently. He writes—

I was born in Tacoma, Wash., in February, 1916, and grew up there. Freddie Steele, the ex-middleweight champ, was a schoolmate of mine and got me interested in boxing. The first time I put on the gloves with Freddie, I became disinterested. In fact, I became unconscious. After that I decided not to be champion.

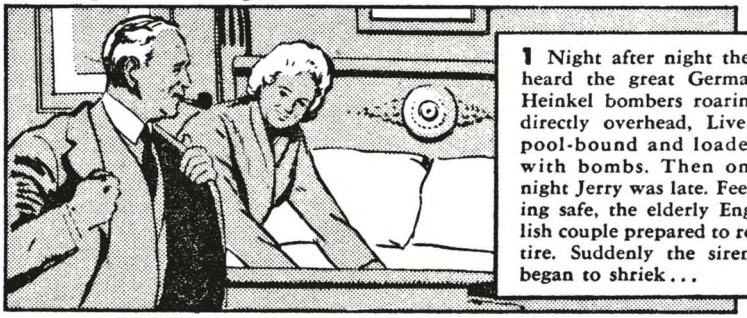
During my college days at the University of Washington, I unexpectedly discovered that my roommate, in addition to writing poetry and playing Chopin, fought professionally under an assumed name. I sometimes seconded him, but he won anyway.

After college, I worked on the Grays Harbor *Washingtonian* in Hoquiam, Wash., as reporter and sports editor; and later I edited a Good Government weekly in Seattle. From this I escaped in 1939 by going to Europe. My wife and I spent six months going eleven hundred miles down the Danube in a kayak. When the war started the Ru-

*(Continued on page 8)*

# SECONDS LATER THE BIG ONE CAME!

A true experience of Mr. and Mrs. James Sproston, of Cheshire, during the big air blitz over England.



**1** Night after night they heard the great German Heinkel bombers roaring directly overhead, Liverpool-bound and loaded with bombs. Then one night Jerry was late. Feeling safe, the elderly English couple prepared to retire. Suddenly the sirens began to shriek . . .

**2** Came the rumble of jettisoned bombs. Sproston grabbed up his flashlight. He and his wife hurried downstairs to black out the windows. The next moment an explosion shook the house. Seconds later the big one came . . .

**3** . . . Half demolished the house and threw its stunned occupants violently to the floor... Some time after, two passing air wardens saw a light shining out of the wreckage. It was the beam from Sproston's faithful flashlight—a beam that directed the rescue of two more victims of the Luftwaffe's ruthlessness.

## SPARE YOUR FLASHLIGHT BATTERIES!

For your own emergency protection (witness the Sproston's experience) as well as to conserve critical war materials, use your flashlight normally as little as possible. Make a habit of flashing it *intermittently*, not *continuously*. Also:

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**FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER...**
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*(Continued from page 6)*

manian government wouldn't let us finish the last 200 miles to the Black Sea. We were three years ahead of the U. S. government in declaring war on Rumania.

Back in the States, I spent four months writing an unpublished account of our trip and then, getting hungry, took a job editing country correspondence for the Spokane *Chronicle*. I switched from this back to the Grays Harbor *Washingtonian*, where I was managing editor, sports editor and the entire copy desk—simultaneously. In 1941 I went to Columbia for my Masters and earned my way through school working for CBS World News (writing the New York end of the world roundup) and the *Herald Tribune*, again simultaneously. Later I became editor of the radio section of *Time*, and since September have been in Mexico on a Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship.

AND HAROLD B. RUSTEN, who adds, with "The Ride of Louis Remme," still another lap to the sequence of historic horse races we've been running through these pages from time to time, has had, like Murry Morgan, a journalistic career. He writes—

I'm a former newspaper man. At present I'm on the publicity staff of a large industrial war plant by day and hover over my free-lance typewriter by night.

I graduated from college and a school of journalism course in the "hard days" and did a bit of farming and detective work before landing a job on the feature staff of a Philadelphia daily. There I did movie, book and theatre reviews, and even some radio columning and photography. (The photo-taking occurred the year the Republican convention came to town. The city editor welcomed with open arms any and all of the staff members who could even hold a camera.) It was during my newspaper days that I wrote a "kid" serial which was purchased and broadcast by a local radio station. I appeared on the air just once, as a sound effect. I had written a steam sequence and on that particular evening the sound effects dept. was shorthanded and I was asked to help. For five minutes or so, I emulated steam escaping from a pipe. Truthfully, then, my first and only appearance on radio was accompanied by loud "hisses".

I started collecting odd, unknown and forgotten historical bits as a hobby while in college. The collection was well in the thousands before I started writing the items up. I sold the first one I wrote to the Saturday Evening Post and many more subsequently. I prefer articles to fiction because I find the research stimulating and fascinating.

WE RECEIVED the following communication the other day from New Zealand and thought it interesting enough to pass along to you here despite the fact that several months have elapsed since the Buckley story that prompted it appeared—

I was very much interested where in Feb. Campfire Mr. Buckley wrote of witchcraft. The old-time Maoris here in New Zealand held strong beliefs on the matter of magic *(makutu)*. By *makutu* enemies at a distance could be killed though since it could work both ways it was seldom used. Some bloody wars resulted from the belief by a tribe that one of its members had been the victim of the magic of another tribe's wizard. But *makutu* could be used in other ways. Bishop Selwyn visited the celebrated chief Te Heuheu, purposing to convert him. Finally Te Heuheu turned to a native priest *(tohunga)* standing by. "Show the stranger a sign," he said. The *tohunga* moved forward and picking up a large brown leaf that had fallen from a tree overhead, challenged the bishop to make it green again. "No living man can do so," replied the bishop. "No!" said the priest. "See!" and he tossed the brown leaf high in the air. It wavered downwards to the earth green as grass. "Can you do as much?" asked the chief, continuing that the gods of the bishop were weaker than his and he would not listen. The bishop had to leave with Te Heuheu unconverted. The incident is told by E. Tregear in his great work "The Maori Race."

Another well-known author tells of a *tohunga* making a dead tree become (apparently) clothed with green leaves (probably a variation of the Hindoo rope trick). But the chief feature in magic was "*tapu*". All sacred things—and many things not sacred—were *tapu*. To touch anything that was *tapu* caused certain death. John Marmon, one of the earliest Pakeha-Maoris (squaw men) tells in the story of his life of an occasion when this law of *tapu* worked. A noted

*(Continued on page 153)*

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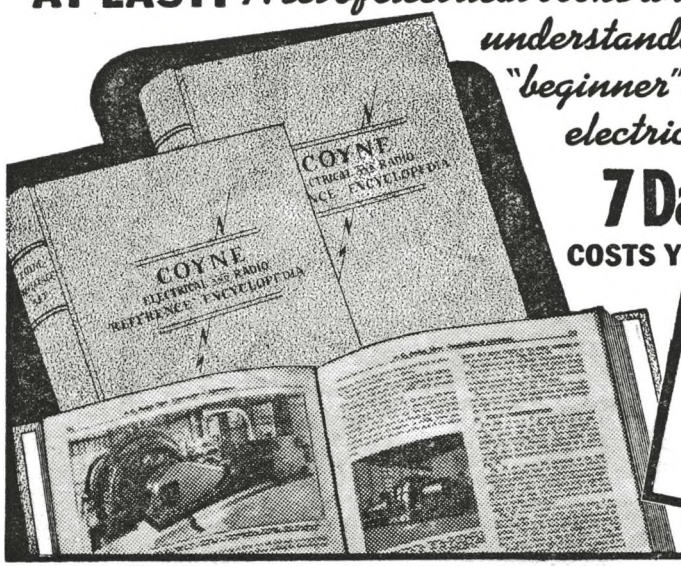


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# LAGOON OF LOST COMMAND

BY RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

*Then, abandoning caution, the raider opened fire with bigger guns. Tracers cut red lines through the air.*

STEVE BURNS quit trying to climb up on the flat bottom of the overturned rowboat so that he could watch. He squinted against the low, blazing sun.

"She's coming closer, Pop," he said. "She's heading to pass right through the oil and wreckage."

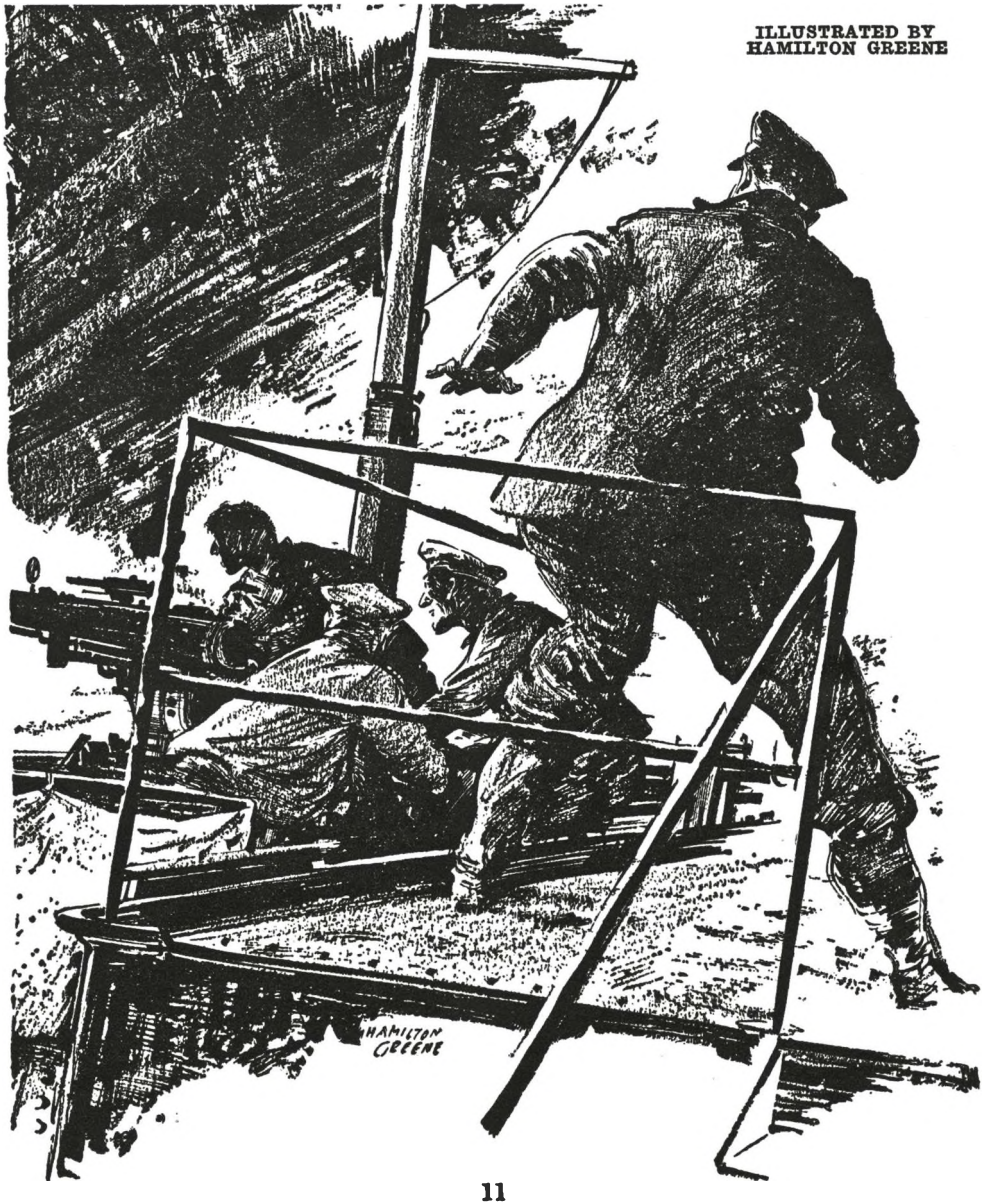
Pop Ennis didn't answer. He hadn't said much since the raider had dropped her false bulwarks and blasted them

with her guns. But he'd done all right. He hadn't got excited. To see him working as first loader you wouldn't figure he knew he was in a fight. He hadn't moved any faster than at practice. But he hadn't made any wrong moves, either.

And Steve Burns, handling the breech as captain of the gun, wasn't sure yet that he'd done all right himself. He hoped so. He'd been excited. But after that hard luck shell had burst on the slanting poop of the holed and sinking *Northern Shore* he and Pop had done four jobs apiece and got off a couple more. That wasn't so bad, serving the gun for the ensign and the men underfoot who wouldn't be serving any more guns. But Steve wasn't so sure that they'd scored with those last defiant shots. He held on with one hand and shielded his eyes with the other. She was coming, all right. He watched.

The Nazi, a no-account freight ship, by the look of her, came cruising along at an easy gait. It looked as if she was mighty sure she'd gutted bridge and

ILLUSTRATED BY
HAMILTON GREENE



radio room before the old *Shore* had got off a radio call. She was heading for the nearer lifeboat, one of the two that had gotten away when the second mate had passed the word to abandon. Her course brought her close to the capsized workboat. A lucky break for Steve and Pop, finding it after their lifebelts kept them safe afloat during the ship's final flurry and sinking.

"It ain't the ship going so much as the gun," Steve said to Pop. "That gun down there—cold, wet and finished—I put in plenty of hours on that gun. That gets me, Pop."

Pop grunted. He pointed a finger at his ear. "Can't hear much yet," he said loudly. "Maybe she'll scare away those three sharks."

Steve Burns peered at the raider. She looked mighty big, nearly bow on like that. As the angle changed and she nosed past within a few hundred feet he could see the men in her busy on the guns and with the phony bulwarks that had concealed them so well. Nobody had gotten excited when they had sighted her. It's no naval secret that not all ships in the Pacific are convoyed.

"You'd sort of expect a Jap, not a Nazi," Steve muttered, staring at the ensign at the jackstaff and the white men working on deck. "I s'pose the pickings are easier in this ocean. Or maybe she's here to encourage the Japs."

He looked up at the high bridge. The old gun hadn't touched her superstructure, that was plain.

THERE was a short, stocky man on the bridge who was tramping back and forth mighty lively with his hands clasped behind his back and his head slanted up as if he was watching the sky. From the way the other men gave him plenty of gangway he must be the skipper. He was throwing quite a bow wave, that guy. Of a sudden, before anybody else, he was looking toward Steve, Pop and their overturned workboat. He stopped, lifted something and stuck it in his eye. Steve caught a flash from it.

"Look at that!" he said to Pop. "Their skipper's got a monocle. And he's spotted us."

He stared back at this man who had tricked and beaten them. Was he going to rescue them now? That sun was pretty close to setting. And the two lifeboats were a long way off—Steve could just see them when a lazy swell heaved them high. The boats were searching for more survivors down where the fuel oil was thickest but they weren't headed right to do Steve and Pop any good. What would Three Eyes, up there on his undamaged bridge, do about it? He wouldn't be interested in letting the sharks get them, would he? Steve felt a stir of hope. The excitement had died down enough so that the thought of the sharks and stars rising on ar empty ocean was beginning to nag annoyingly at his mind.

He looked again at the German captain, who had now planted his glass firmly in his eye. His survey, after a moment's intensity, had become casual, disinterested, as if a peculiar bit of wreckage that had caught his eye had now been explained. It was nothing. Just two men clinging to the bottom of a boat. Cold, quite dispassionate. As if he were glancing at dull scenery.

Pop Ennis was looking, too. "Makes you feel like a cockroach, don't he?" he muttered.

"Yeah, and since we ain't cockroaches, but just a couple of men, what kind of an animal is he thinking he is?" Steve whispered to himself. "Something special, with three heads?"

Another man, a guy with a stoop whose watch cap, oversize, was jammed down on his head, came hurrying up to the raider's captain. He pointed toward Steve and Pop.

The captain rounded on him. He jerked the monocle out of his eye and waved him away with it. At the same time he spoke. His voice, though high rather than loud, carried to Steve's ears. A queer voice, like something out of a steel horn. He only said about three words but it sounded unpleasant.

Watch Cap blew. Fast. The captain folded his arms behind his back and resumed pacing, with his head held at that upward slant.

A heavy, oldish guy in dungarees came slowly up the ladder. He stood at the

*"Three Eyes."*

top, waiting for Three Eyes to notice him.

The ship slid on past. Men looked down at Steve and Pop. They didn't point; they didn't even seem to speak to one another. They just looked. Every man in her—even the ones aft on the poop—seemed to know somehow what had happened on the bridge. Three Eyes had made the decision. They just looked, as you'd look at a chuck of yellow seaweed or a school of flying fish. Like a bunch of cows staring over a fence. Only Watch Cap, descending from the bridge, showed feeling. He turned a scowling face toward Steve and Pop, as if bearing them a grudge because he had been bawled out.

IT WASN'T being left that bothered Steve just then. He was too hot with anger to mind. Anger at himself. He felt, because he'd hoped, as if he'd humbled himself to Three Eyes on the bridge. He'd asked him, in his thoughts anyhow, for rescue. And he'd been turned down. No; it wasn't being left that got him. He'd given that three-eyed Kraut a chance to look down on him. Wasn't that what these Fritzies fed on—a chance to look down on somebody? He had let his side down.

Pop coughed. "I don't see a mark on her, anywhere," he said. "The ensign said we'd hit him."

"There are a few guys busy on the poop with lines over the other side," Steve said loudly. "Could they be sticking a collision mat over a hole low down?"

Pop heard him and nodded. "And that might have been the chief engineer coming up to talk to the captain. Maybe we did score one."

Steve looked at Pop. Pop didn't seem troubled about Three Eyes. He was just hanging on, waiting for his hearing to come back after the slamming of the gun. You could learn things from Pop. That went, even though Pop was just a seaman, first class, instead of a gunner's mate, third class, and captain of a gun, even if it was sunk in the sea, like Steve Burns.

"If he tried to rescue me I'd feed him his monocle," Steve said to himself. "And ram it down with my fist."

"The thing to do is turn this workboat over and keep rocking her, while we're strong enough," Pop said. "You can sometimes slosh enough water out of a boat in a calm sea like this so she'll float with her gunwales above the surface. Then you start scooping the water out with your hands. What say?"

"I'll try anything often, right now," Steve yelled at him.

"We can use that one oar for sculling," Pop said. "We make the lifeboats—or—" He looked at the sun for direction and pointed northwest. "They're some islands up there—little coral islands—the Tuamotus. The trade wind will help."

Steve stared at Pop's face, strained and wrinkled some but not excited. Pop wasn't wondering how he'd done in the scrap; he wasn't sore at himself or Three Eyes; probably he wasn't scared at the notion of having the sun go down and maybe the sharks come up.

"I'd rather be feeling hot about Three Eyes," Steve thought, but he wasn't sure.

"I've got to do something about that guy to make up for hoping he'd pick us up," Steve muttered to himself. "He makes me feel dirty, somehow."

Judging by the noises he was making, Pop was sleeping fine.

## CHAPTER II

### PACIFIC CASTAWAYS

THE fire of a hundred cuts inflicted by reaching coral made movement painful. Grimly Steve Burns staggered to his feet on the white beach. It was up to him to get up before Pop did. The twenty-four hours in the boat hadn't gotten him down. Showers had made that easy enough. But the shellacking that reef had given them was something else.

As he dragged himself up off the warm, dry, soothing sand, he thought again of his gun sunk in a couple of hundred fathoms somewhere off to eastward on the shell shattered after deck of the freighter *Northern Shore*.

He did not know that in his immediate life his gun would still be carrying on. He looked back across rippling green water to where the big swells thrashed and thundered at the reef. They pounded themselves to frothy white lace on that reef and they nearly made Hamburger of him. He sat down on the sand.

"What a ride that turned out to be," he said to Pop Ennis. He examined with some anxiety the flattened body. Pop certainly looked plenty dead. "Like going down Niagara Falls without a barrel, huh, Pop?"

Pop Ennis groaned. He did not open his eyes. He just lay there, soaking up life warmth from the westering sun and the sand. He needed it. After all, the poor guy was in his forties and heavier than young Steve Burns. Twenty years and forty pounds more had added up to a harder socking coming through that reef. It didn't look as if he had broken anything and there was only a little blood on his head from scratches along the cheekbone. His singlet and white pants were plenty ripped.

Steve let him lie and looked around. There was nobody here. This place was just like what Pop had told him it would be when they sighted it—a bunch of little islands, like different sized beads on a string, around a big central lake. The whole works was an atoll, the islands were motus and the lake was a lagoon. You could count on what Pop told you about ships, the sea, islands and all like that. Steve looked intently at the trees back of the beach and saw what he supposed were Pop's coconuts, clusters of them, hanging suspended under the tall and curving palm trees. Right now he could stand busting one of those coconuts open and drinking the milk. He glanced again at Pop. This was Steve's first independent command and Pop was his force. He ought to do something. But maybe Pop should be the boss.

"Come on, Pop," he coaxed. "Before it gets dark on us."

Rather like a collapsed horse Pop floundered awkwardly with arms and legs all mixed up. Finally he heaved himself up onto his feet, groaning. He looked at the *Northern Shore's* dirty little workboat. It had come through the teeth of the reef in better shape than the two men. The one oar that they had found amidst the flotsam of the freighter's sinking lay grounded further along the beach. Grunting, Pop tottered along to it and dragged it up onto the dry sand. Then he laid a couple of books of matches to dry. A careful fellow, Pop Ennis.

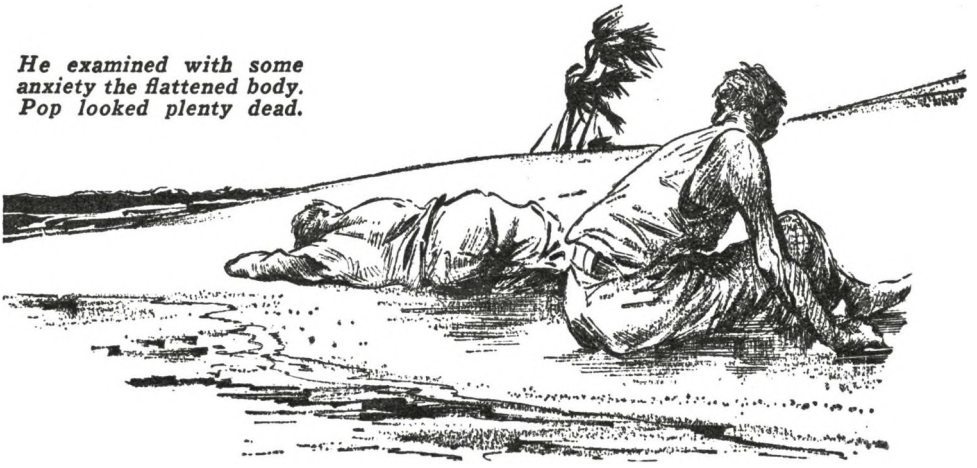
"Well, kid," he said, gazing at the atoll. "Looks like we're through with the war." He didn't seem sore about it.

STEVE scowled. Three Eyes had made the war a lot more vivid to him. You couldn't let guys like Three Eyes go stalking around loose. He bent and picked up a handful of sand. Scattered among the white and gray grains of sand were numberless little shells and bits of shells. They'd look finer, more cleverly devised, under a microscope. You couldn't let mugs like Three Eyes run a world as delicate and wonderful as this one. The whole beach was made of these little shells. Intricate. That was the word.

Pop was waiting for him to come out of it.

"Much tide here, Pop?" Steve asked, looking at the stranded boat.

"Never is much rise an' fall in open water near the equator," Pop said. He knew everything. Pop did, and he knew



*He examined with some anxiety the flattened body. Pop looked plenty dead.*

it right. Not for the first time, Steve looked curiously at Pop's mild, regular features. Sometimes he wished Pop was a drunk. It would help explain why a salty old guy who knew that much was only a seaman, first class, in a war where college and ninety days' training got you a commission and young fellows like Steve Burns were gunner's mates, third class.

"The salt's burning my throat," Steve said.

A few coconuts lay under the trees. Steve still had a claspknife. Pop operated on the husks with it. The milk was undiluted heaven.

"Well, look, Pop," Steve Burns said. "We got chucked up on one of the little islands. This next island—I mean motu—is lots bigger and the cocopalms are a lot thicker."

Pop nodded. "That would be where anybody that lived here would live," he said. "Land's a little higher, too. That's important. These Tuamotu islands are right in the hurricane belt."

"Never heard of 'em," Steve said. He jerked a hand at the palms. "But I've seen 'em in the movies often. There ought to be some girls in grass skirts around here."

Pop grunted. "I'm betting those two lifeboats didn't make this one," he said. "They'd have spotted us by now."

"You're forgetting the grass skirts," Steve said.

Grinning, Pop led the way along to the edge of the motu. He splashed through the sandy shallows toward the broad expanse of the big island. There was a lot more to the big island than the narrow little motu they were leaving. But at that it was only more cocopalms and coarse grass. Nevertheless, there was plainly a path, though overgrown, right about where you'd expect one.

"Come on," said Steve.

They moved in among the leaning, restless palms. In spots the trees seemed to grow out of the bare coral bones of the island, without the need of dirt. For perhaps half a mile they walked on. Then they came out, toward the lagoon, where the palms grew more thinly, or had been cut down.

"Civilization!" said Steve. "But it ain't Bayonne." He pointed. He had sighted a shack built of paintless boards. The corrugated iron roof now was completely red-brown rust. There were a few smaller buildings near it. One or two were crowned with five gallon oil cans beaten flat, for roof shingles. The others had a rude thatching of bleached straw. No smoke above this settlement.

Closer, Pop Ennis stopped with a muttered word. But Steve walked up to the larger shack. The door complained when he opened it. Inside was dust, spiders and desolation.

"NOBODY home," he said over his shoulder. "Why, do you 'spose?"

"It'll be the war," Pop said, coming up. "All there is to be had in

these islands is copra from the coconuts an' pearls from oysters in some of the lagoons. Lack of gas an' lack of trade would sweep the smaller atolls bare of people like a hurricane would, I'd say. But—"

He cocked his head.

Steve was listening, too. Through the distant thunder of the seas on the reef and the clash and sigh of the wind-stirred palms he caught the measured beat of a motor. They looked at each other.

"That's from outside," Steve said. He ran, with Pop behind him, putting their backs to the lagoon and cutting across the island.

"We'll be back—in the war—sooner than you figured," Steve panted. "I knew this private island stuff—couldn't last long!"

As they approached the outer beach Pop Ennis grabbed Steve. He dragged him back behind a palm.

"Don't show yourself like that!" he said. "How do we know—"

"What's eating you?" Steve asked impatiently.

But he stood behind the tree as he peered out across the twirling spume above the reef.

A motorboat was cruising along outside the coral barrier. A biggish gray boat, decked over forward, with eight or nine men showing aft.

Pop gave vent to one of his grunts.

"When the false sides of that raider dropped I was looking at her through the glasses," Pop said. "I saw her guns and I saw a sizable power boat she carried down on her well deck. It could be that boat. And that would mean the guys in her are Germans."

"You're crazy," Steve said. Three Eyes here? What damage could he do here? "What would that raider's boat be doing here? That Nazi would be making knots away from where she sank us."

"Should be," Pop agreed. He listened. His ears were keen enough now.

"Sounds heavy, like a Diesel, not a gas motor," he said. "I've made it my business to know 'em."

Steve jerked up his head. "Pop!" he said. "You don't suppose the raider sank after she left us? We got in a couple of hits."

Pop shook his head. He never gave you a break. "There'd be more survivors in that boat," he said. "And she'd be towing lifeboats." He kept on looking.

The power boat was too far to the north to spot their abandoned boat on the beach of the smaller motu. It was cruising back and forth, outside the reef, at a spot where, though the seas humped up threateningly, they did not break into charging white water.

"Most o' these barrier reefs have a sizable break or two in 'em somewheres," Pop muttered. "And I saw a place between a couple o' motus across the atoll where it looked like there was a pass into the lagoon."

"THE way they act, they're strangers here, too," Steve said.

The power boat abruptly turned shoreward. It followed a big sea, riding its shoulder, keeping pace with it so the sea that threatened aft could not reach it. The boat had real power.

"We could use that boat ourselves," Steve said with appreciation. Without the slightest trouble the boat had crossed the gap in the barrier reef that shielded the atoll from the huge seas.

"If they cruise along southward outside the islands and inside the reef they'll see our boat," Pop Ennis said. "It's too late to hide it. You want to quit imaginin' nice things, son, like inheriting a boat. an' get set for trouble."

Steve scowled. Pop surely never did give anybody a break. But he was no coward. He had fought that gun, steady as a rock, even after the ensign and the others had been dropped and the stern was almost under. But he ought to quit glooming up his leader's ideas.

"It'll soon be dark," Steve said. "Then we can hide our scow."

"It'll be like hiding on top of a billiard ball," Pop muttered. "They're having a look around the other side first."

Cautiously, still in the shadow of the cocopalms, they circled the northern end of the island for a closer view. This brought them near the shacks again. The boat found the pass leading into the

lagoon between this big island and the next in the ring of islets. It moved slowly through the narrow passage with a man perched motionless on the top of the thick stub of a mast. Once in the calm blue and green waters of the lagoon the boat made a couple of slow, tight turns while all the men in her stared intently at the islands, coral bars and shallows that surrounded them. Next instant its bows swung toward the two watchers.

"They've spotted us!" Pop muttered. He flattened out on the sand and started to inch backward.

"Maybe!" Steve said, retreating with him. "It could be they've just seen the huts here. This is the only island big enough to have people."

That was it. The boat put her nose aground abreast of the shacks. Two men waded ashore, barehanded. The other six stood in the cockpit, somewhat tensely.

The two men repeated their own search of the settlement. And to cap it one cupped hands to his mouth.

"Iss anybody here?" he called. Then he shouted out something in another tongue.

"That was French," Pop muttered.

The men on the boat relaxed. One man whose hands had been below the level of the cockpit combing laid down a sub machine gun on the cabin top. All but two clambered ashore, talking.

"Krauts, all right," Steve said. "You can hear 'em trying to swallow their own tonsils." He glowered at them, seeing his ensign and the gun crew splattered on the after deck of the sinking ship. And then, of a sudden, he recognized one of two men in the launch. Watch Cap, the bent, saturnine satellite of Three Eyes! "It's them, Pop," he said.

The war was on again. And though his arms were bare he could feel on his right arm, as if it were really there, the eagle, crossed cannon and single red chevrons of a gunner's mate, third class. He was in command around here. He'd better start thinking. Maybe Pop, who knew so much more, should be in command, but he wasn't. And you can't surrender command.

FOR a few minutes the Nazis wandered around the huts. The sand was too dry and loose to reveal footprints. It was already less than full daylight under the lazy spreading fronds of the cocopalms.

Shortly all but two were recalled to the boat by Watch Cap. The boat backed off the beach. It spent a few minutes circling while Watch Cap examined other possible entrances to the lagoon. Then the boat slipped out of the lagoon with a running current speeding it along. Outside, in the narrow strip of calm water between reef and atoll, it moved along, dead slow. Near the broad break in the outer reef a man got busy with a lead line.

"Soundings," said Pop Ennis. The word had a dreary sound.

Steve was watching the two men left ashore. He saw now that each packed a gun in his hip pocket, gangster style. They kept widening their exploration. And the quick tropic dusk he had read about was hanging on a lot longer than it should.

"We got to edge out of here before one of them mugs steps on us," he muttered. "Come on, Pop."

He moved before Pop could object. It worked. Pop squirmed back, too. It was tough going for coral-scratched men, that belly work. But finally they slipped to their feet in the shelter of the palms and ghosted along through them toward their own motu. They waded the shallows in a hurry and plunged in among the bending trunks. The shelter was scantier but at least they were on their own island.

Pop was looking to southward where, beyond a couple of bare white coral islets another motu, small but wooded, showed.

"We ain't retreating any further," Steve said with quick emphasis. He planted his feet in the sand. These were Three Eyes' men and he wasn't giving Three Eyes more ground than he had to. "I want to watch these guys." He lowered his voice to get Pop interested. "If they spend the night here I'm going to grab their boat."

Pop looked at him; then didn't speak. But after a while he did speak. "What they call a mission of information," he said. "That should be our job. Information. Find out about them. But if we try to jump that boat we'll both be killed. And there won't be any information."

"Yeah? Well, what do we do with our information?" Steve asked roughly. "Put it in the paper?"

"We've still got our boat," Pop said. "We could whittle another oar out of driftwood and get away tonight. The trade winds are southeast. That means we'll get pushed along, even without sail, to bigger atolls in this group that will have people on them."

Maybe it was sense. Steve didn't know. He should know.

"We'll collect a little more information before we start taking it anywhere," he said firmly. "What we've got so far don't mean much." He stuck his finger out at Pop. "You don't know what it means yourself."

Pop didn't answer.

They sat down facing the bigger island. While they waited for dark they worked o a couple of coconuts. Their shirts had dried but their pants were still damp. A comforting fire would have gone good just then.

"I can see where this could get monotonous," Steve said.

Before the gray blacked off into night they heard the boat coming back into the lagoon. A while after that Steve stood up.

"Let's get our boat up among the trees, just in case anybody goes beachcombing," he said.

Pop followed him in silence. But beside the boat he stopped dead. "Look!" Pop said. "Blinker."

Somebody on the larger island was winking a light. It wasn't faced toward them and it wasn't strong. But the irregular point of white light stood out like a lighthouse.

Steve caught his breath. Out there to eastward, far at sea, he saw another light gleam briefly. An interval—then it came again. Someone at sea was acknowledging this message from the power-boat Nazis. After minutes had passed the island sender stopped. From seaward

came a reply sent by a fast, skilled signal man.

"I can read it but it don't make sense to me," Pop said.

"Me, too," Steve complained.

The reply was brief. Then the light on the beach winked once. That was all.

"Do you suppose that raider is out there?" Steve said.

Pop nodded. "Don't ask me why," he said.

In silence they dragged the old workboat up through the coarse sand. Years of usage and the water it had soaked up made it as heavy as an iron boat but they managed to manhandle it in among the trees. They were warm enough when they had finished.

"Time to go scouting," Steve said. "I guess a couple o' chunks o' coral and the knife are all we'll need for weapons."

## CHAPTER III

### RETURN OF THE NAZI RAIDER

POP'S pressure for caution, though silent, was strong. Steve could feel it as he moved foot by foot across the shallows. Well, the old man had a right to expect him to be careful. With Pop never leading but always close behind they stalked the little group of shacks.

There was nobody there. Not a man. Nor was the power boat where it had once been grounded. But they heard voices. Coming closer, they located the men who were gabbling so matter-of-factly in their unpleasant lingo. The power boat, with its crew of eight on board, was anchored in the lagoon well off the shore.

"Not taking any chance of getting jumped," Pop said. He was relieved.

Steve felt foolish. He dropped his chunk of coral. "They'd ha' been more comfortable ashore," he growled.

He looked at the black water of the lagoon, the water that had been such a beautiful light green, with blue in the deep spots. Of course he could swim out there. But what would he get out of that? And any dumb, show-off play like that wouldn't make Pop think he was so hot as a leader.

"If those jerks talked English they might be worth listening to," he said. "Our mission has flopped for the night. Let's go home. We ought to have a busy day tomorrow."

Pop was all for going home. They made for their motu and settled down for the night on the leeward side of their boat. The coral scratches itched and the palm trees rattled as if they were being pelted with rain. He was worried. By rights, Pop ought to be boss. He knew ten times what a lubber like him, less than a year in the navy, knew. But he was a petty officer. Pop, for some reason, wasn't. Around here he was in command. Just as Three Eyes was in command on that raider. How was he going to get a crack at Three Eyes' Krauts? Couldn't a guy get to sleep around here? He could. . . .

Pop was up and groaning with the dawn. Well, he had a right to groan, Steve decided, when he had moved his own scraped arms and legs. The cuts were worse. Red and swollen. And Three Eyes, in a vague, nightmarish way, had ridden him all night.

"Them corals bite like rattlesnakes," he said.

But Pop was doing war business. "Look!" he said between groans, and pointed seaward among the bending palm trunks.

Steve got to his feet. He stared with silent hatred.

Three Eyes' Nazi raider was out there, just beyond the reef, plain enough in the gray light. Steve would never forget the look of her, as she had steamed through the floating wreckage of her victory. With that guy on the bridge. Just an ordinary cargo-carrying tramper like the *Northern Shore*, she had appeared, until she unmasked her guns and let them have it. And her commander, an ordinary skipper, till he had looked at men through his monocle and not noticed that they were men.

"What woke me was the Diesel in that launch," Pop said. "They're goin' out through the break in the reef to meet her. More to the left, there."

Steve nodded. The motorboat wasn't important now.

The Nazi ship, lying off there without

way on, swung slowly and they saw her more clearly, at a new angle.

"She's down by the stern," Pop said. His voice was exultant. "We got a good one in on her."

Again Steve nodded, studying the low level of the ship's after end. He didn't feel exultant, not over a little damage like that. Only the bottom for Three Eyes' ship would make him feel good. But what was she doing here? Besides pulling him back in the war.

The launch, close to the raider, lost way. He could see one man with a megaphone on the bridge talking to Watch Cap. Standing on the forward deck of the launch Watch Cap did some vigorous, explanatory pointing. And then Three Eyes came into sight. You could see sort of an uneasy move and stir among the men. That was how Steve could tell that tiny figure was Three Eyes.

Steve started toward the beach but Pop grabbed his arm. Snarling at the pain from his cuts he shook off Pop's fingers. But Pop persisted.

"Look!" Pop said. "We ought to be lugging this boat across into the lagoon and trying to get through the other islets to leeward. Right now!"

"DON'T bother me!" Steve said harshly. The raider held his eyes. The raider and Three Eyes. Run? Not Steve Burns.

"You want to listen to me," Pop said. "All that sounding they done yesterday! That must mean they're going to bring the big ship inside the reef, maybe into the lagoon, to repair her. We must ha' done some real damage to her an' her engines."

"In here?" Steve said slowly. He took his eyes off the raider and turned them on Pop.

Pop waggled his head emphatically. "In here!" he said. "They must ha' been scouting around ever since the fight to find the right atoll to hide in for the work."

"Here," Steve said again.

"That's all we want to know," Pop said. "We ought to sneak out o' here while all hands are busy getting her in through that break in the reef. They won't notice us. It's our one chance."

He grabbed again at Steve's arm.

"They'll catch us sure if we don't," he said. "And I figure we could make it across the reef in the lee of the atoll."

"Run, huh? Run where?"

"This here is a group," Pop said patiently. "You can't see 'em but I'm telling you there's more islands to the northwest—bunches of them, with people on some. It's Free French territory. A cruiser or destroyer is what we need. We might find an atoll with a radio transmitter that could raise Tahiti."

Steve Burns' eyes had gone back to the raider. All this sounded like applesauce to him.

"She'll be fixed an' gone before we sight a white man," he said. "Don't give me that."

"What'll you get by staying here?"

"I don't know," Steve said slowly. "But I'm—we're stayin'."

Maybe Pop was right. But Steve couldn't drag himself away from Three Eyes, not while there was a chance of a crack at him. What chance? He didn't know. Maybe Pop was right. Maybe staying was just kid stuff—Lone Ranger business. He couldn't tell. Pop was no coward. And Pop was hot for moving out. But when a guy was a gunner's mate, third class, he had to go on what his brain produced for him. That was what this command stuff meant. You were on your own.

"We got to stay, Pop."

Pop shrugged his shoulders and winced. "All right," he said dully. "It's your funeral, not mine."

"You mean you'd give up to 'em?" Steve asked.

Pop's mild face darkened. "I didn't say that," he said. "You're calling the tune, not me. Your funeral, not mine."

"You mean I may be the undertaker for both of us," Steve said. "O. K. I'll play it that way."

That didn't seem to him so important. Not compared to watching that raider.

They were lowering a couple of lifeboats. Plenty of men in her. Though it looked like a straight run in through the reef a lot more cruising and sounding went on, with three boats working. Occasionally you could see Three Eyes,

with his head upraised, bossing things on the bridge.

"We ought to cover this boat with sand," Pop said. He sounded as if he was feeling better.

"Sure, sure," Steve said, without shifting his eyes. "You do it, Pop. An' open me one of them coconuts, will you?"

Willingly Pop did both those things. After getting off that line about funerals Pop was plainly going a lot easier. Steve wasn't. Pop knew plenty. But Steve's gun had got the raider into trouble. He was going to stick around on the chance of getting her into some more. He watched the raider while he drank the milk and ate the meat of the coconut. He could see where a guy could get tired of them.

"Maybe we could spear some fish," Pop said.

"We're getting by," Steve answered.

He led the way across to the big island for a closer view of what was going on. Pop came without being told.

THE Nazi ship, flanked by her boats, started into the gap in the outer reef where the seas humped up but did not break. She made the crossing easily enough. The seas that flung her boats skyward moved her little. She was sluggish, all right, sort of dead in the water. The tide had ceased to run into the lagoon. When they tried to stop her inside the reef and get her head around to avoid a few jutting coral heads they had trouble. Her propeller didn't kick up much white water when they reversed her screw.

"She's got engine trouble, sure," Pop said. "Could be we burst one in her boiler room."

To keep her from ramming the coral they let go both her anchors. She brought up on those, as the anchors got a hold on the bottom. Her bow stopped knifing toward the white rocks. Steve swore.

"Not much more than swingin' room," Pop said. "But she'll stay there even in a gale. They can blow off steam an' take time to do a real job on her insides now."

The two lifeboats pulled toward the beach.

"We better be going," Pop said nervously. "They're sure to make this place their headquarters ashore."

"We'll back up a bit, but not too far," Steve said. "I got to see what goes on."

"What good'll it do you?"

"Mission of information, like you said." Steve retorted. Among the last trees on the edge of the island toward their own motu he halted stubbornly. They took cover down on their stomachs behind the swollen boles of a couple of trees.

For a while it looked as if the Nazis had come to wreck the island. They could hear the sound of axes and catch occasional glimpses of the Germans attacking the cocopalms. They toiled at it. They cut them down by the score; then cut them again just under the crown, and dragged off the tops toward the ship. Others were loading sand into barrels and cases and loading these into the boats. There were armed guards ashore, too.

Meanwhile, Three Eyes, bossing on the bridge, was working his ship slowly

into a queer position. The men in her, with lines and kedges, laboriously maneuvered her until her bow thrust into the wide but shallowish pass leading into the lagoon. Her stern tailed off seaward. They dropped two anchors to hold her there against the current now beginning to flood out of the lagoon. They ran a couple of lines from her stern to big cocopalms on either side of the pass to steady her. The engine room crew got busy below decks. The flow of water from her pumps continued and in fact increased but some heavy bits of machinery that Pop identified as part of her main engines were hoisted up through the fiddley and dumped on deck. Meanwhile boats laden with palm fronds and sand came alongside.

"I get it," Steve said. "Camouflage."

Pop stared.

"They're going to make her look from the air like part o' the islands. They'll spread that sand on deck an' stick the cocopalm tops over the bridge, funnel and stuff. They got her nearly hidden from seaward, too. Must be figuring on long repairs."

"See? They're afraid of air patrols around here," Pop said. "It's hopeless to try for a getaway in the light but we ought to go for help tonight."

Steve grunted. He turned on his side and ate a chunk of coconut meat. Observation got tiresome. At intervals he sifted white sand through his fingers and picked out tiny little shells. Pop was staring at the intricate design of a big chunk of brain coral, poking at it with his strong, thick fingers. But neither of them ceased for long at a time to peer through the trees at the toiling Germans.

"Those Krauts will work their heads off just trying to make it tough for somebody else," Steve said. "Funny people."

"No, that ain't quite it," Pop whispered. "They'll do nearly anything, fight, work, kill, torture, nearly anything, if they can only get some guy to tell them to do it. Thinking hurts 'em. Not being sure about what to do and how to act gets them down."

He nodded sagely. "Give 'em a guy willing to think for them and tell them just what to do loudly enough, beating the drum and all, and they'll obey him every time. Like this hard-boiled captain o' theirs with his monocle."

"He ain't hard-boiled," Steve said. "He just don't know he's human."

"Only thing is," Pop went on, "the guy has to raise a hell of a row about how he knows what's good for 'em and how terrific they are, and sell 'em promises before they start moving. And it's harder to stop 'em than to start 'em. That's how they are."

"Dumb bunnies, huh?"

Pop nodded. "Dumb bunnies is about as close as you can get to—" He stopped talking. His sun scorched face went gray underneath. Steve opened his mouth to ask him what was wrong. And then he saw that Pop's eyes were staring at a shadow that had fallen on him. It wasn't the shadow of one of the waving palm fronds.

STEVE, flat on his belly, twisted head and shoulders around. He saw a man standing over them, one of the Nazi sailors. He was gripping a rifle with fixed bayonet. His broad face was made broader by his triumphant grin. He planted a heavy foot on Steve's back and stabbed playfully at Pop, letting his bayonet pierce the sand close to his ribs.

Convulsively, quite without thinking, Steve reached up and grabbed the barrel of the gun. With all his strength he reinforced the sailor's thrust, forcing the bayonet deep into the sand. The man lifted his foot and kicked hard at Steve's head. Twisting, Steve took the force of it on his shoulder but it knocked him sprawling, away from the rifle.

Pop was scrambling up. But before he was off his knees the Nazi had jerked his rifle out of the sand. The bayonet point came up toward his throat. The German drew it back for a lunge. In one move Pop caught up the chunk of coral and flung it into his face. It hit with a crunch.

Steve was rolling to his feet and coming back. He crashed into the Nazi and went over, flat on top of him. The rifle flew from his hands. The man under Steve on the sand did not move. Steve planted a hand across his mouth. Already Pop was diving for the fallen gun.

*He crashed into the Nazi and went over, flat on top of him.*

Steve took his hand away from the man's mouth and stared into his face. Pop's flying chunk of coral had done a job on his forehead. The man was dead.

Pop stared down at him. "See what I mean?" Pop panted. "That guy thought he was terrific, standing over us poking with his bayonet when he should ha' been twenty feet off with his rifle pointed. But it's your funeral, like I said."

He nodded, his eyes already roving among the trees.

"A dumb bunny, all right, but dead he ain't going to stay dumb," Steve said. "Him not coming back is going to tell on us—unless—"

He glanced toward the beach—an inviting beach with nice green little waves breaking on it.

"Help me get his clothes off," he said

harshly, bending over the dead man. "Maybe this won't work but maybe it'll stall 'em off and let us stay secret a while longer."

"How d'you mean?"

Steve was already stripping the dead man.

"Pile his clothes on the beach," he said. "He's been sneaking a quick swim, see, and the current or the sharks got him."

He heaved the body up on his shoulders and carried it into the water. The sound of axes and the voices of the Nazis rang loud in his ears but nobody shouted at him. The sea took the German and the current between islands and barrier reef swept him away.

Steve wiped the sweat off his face.

"We've got to leave his rifle beside his clothes," he said reluctantly. "Only way to make this gag stick. But I'll be back for it after dark—if they don't find it."

## CHAPTER IV

### KRAUT SEARCHING PARTY

THEY retreated fast across the shallows to their own motu. The cover there seemed skimpier than ever to Steve as they crouched down in the sand close to the lagoon. They could look across the water and see the ship, port bow on to them.

"Tonight we ought to be moving along," Pop said. "If they don't get us before."

"If we're still here tonight we'll stay here," Steve said stubbornly. "There ought to be some way for us to take a good poke at them and you knowing all about ships can dope what it is. Get going on that, Pop."

But Pop, like a mule laying back his ears, balked. He twisted around in the sand to face Steve.

"No!" he said. "I don't work out any plan about sticking our necks into a noose." In flaming rage he shook his fist in Steve's face.

"Easy, Pop!" Steve said, surprised at these sudden fireworks.

"I did that in the last war!" Pop snapped. "I figured out a bright way for ten of us, stuck down in the hold of a raider like that ship, to get away. But none of us did get free—except the four that got killed."

He dropped his fist but his eyes were sullen as he kept on staring at Steve. "I'm through taking responsibility for other people's lives," he said. "Ever since then I been through."

"Well, I'll have to dope one myself, then," Steve said. "It'll be my scheme and my neck—so hold your horses. I just thought, you knowing a lot more about ships than I do, you might bear a hand."

Pop didn't answer. They lay flat again and watched the German's decorating their ship with palm fronds.

"Just like Christmas, huh, Pop?" Steve said cheerfully.

"I don't trust my luck," Pop said in a monotone. He wasn't looking at Steve.

"It would be my luck," Steve said. "And that's good, Pop."

He got to his knees. "Meanwhile, these Krauts have given me an idea," he said. "If they're so afraid of a sea or air patrol we better get set with a pile of fronds and stuff to light a good big smudge the minute anything shows up."

He waited for Pop to put up a roar about how they'd be caught if they did it. But Pop didn't kick. He got up and they stole back away from the lagoon.

Together, with eyes and ears wary for wandering Nazis, they gathered a big pile of dry stuff and dumped it in the thickest part of the palms. No more Nazis were wandering. They were still working, as Steve made sure by a trip to the lagoon. Three Eyes had two gangs of painters overside, breaking up the outline of the ship's freeboard with camouflage strips. Thorough.

He walked back to the outer beach and sneaked along it till he found a likely piece of driftwood. With some profanity and rising blisters, he whittled doggedly until he had something that would pass as a second oar for their boat. In silence Pop had collected coconuts and stowed them close to the boat.

"We better be getting back to the Krauts," Steve said, as he closed his knife.

"I'll join you later," Pop said. "I'm going to have a look around, leeward."

He limped away abruptly, heading, as Steve had, for the outer beach. Frowning, Steve followed far enough to watch him for a while working his way cautiously from islet to islet around the circle of the atoll. There wasn't much chance of anybody on the busy ship sighting him that far off. Not the way Pop crawled in the open spots.

"THERE'S a guy," he said to himself, rubbing his jaw. "He catches plenty in the last war —he must ha' if he was a prisoner on a raider—and he comes back for more in this one. But when he gets into it he doesn't want it. But at that he's game enough when you stick his nose into trouble for him. He takes figuring, he does."

He rubbed his jaw harder. "And maybe I'm not the guy to figure him—or to lead him, either. What do I know about leading?"

A dozen times that day he had started and whirled when a voice or a sound seemed nearer than usual. But this time it was the real McCoy. Somebody was coming—plenty of them. He could hear the splash of their wading in the shallows. They were obviously coming to this motu.

He looked around for quick cover. He saw a slanting palm and went impulsively up, arms and legs, like a monkey. At the top the waving palm fronds didn't give him the shelter he had expected. Too many gaps. He felt naked. He clung and listened.

The Krauts coming were either a working party or about a squad of the armed men. They came along in a sort of organized bunch, by the noise. Steve tried to think of something bright. He couldn't.

They might miss the boat, under its mound of sand, but that pile of brush was a giveaway. Or was it? It was dead stuff. It could look as if it had been there for months. There had been people on this place once.

He edged around, flat against the palm fronds, into what he hoped was better concealment. They were spreading out, sort of like a line of skirmishers, to cover the whole motu. Frozen motionless, he caught a glimpse or two of them, one a fellow with a gun and the other, who might be the leader, a hard looking mug, who had a gun holstered on his hip. Something jiggled at this man's step. Moving only his eyes, Steve watched. The jingling was caused by a pair of handcuffs fastened to his belt, like a cop. He might be the ship's master at arms, at that. He went on through the trees.

Steve tried to dope it. Handcuffs? One pair. Maybe they were just out looking for that guard. If he hadn't showed up the cuffs could be for him. Three Eyes would be keeping a tight grip on his men. But could they have missed seeing those clothes on the outer beach of the larger island?

"Sure they could," he reasoned. "At that corner they'd be closing up together, aiming to cross at the shallowest part of the cut."

They were going on. The sounds of their passage died out. Pop had been in the back of his mind but now Pop became the big spot in his anxiety. Pop, going around that string of islands, would be keeping out of sight of the ship. He wouldn't figure on anybody following him up.

Steve thought of ways to warn him—showing himself to pull the Nazis back, getting that rifle by the pile of clothes and letting go a shot, other stunts. They were all cockeyed. They made things worse instead of better. This was war. Spilling the beans to warn a man was out. That kind of thing would suit Three Eyes' book too well. Pop would have to take his chances.

He slid down the cocopalm. He stood uncertainly, looking two ways. He felt as jittery as a canary bird's song. Pop was a good steady guy to have around.

He waited, with ears keen for a sound that would tell him something. Would that big mug and his Nazis make a complete swing around the atoll? Or would they be coming back this way? He strained his eyes across the lagoon. It was hard to tell how closely those isles way over there were joined up. There could be channels too deep and swift to be forded.

"Come on, Pop!" he muttered.

Even by the slow swing of the sun it was a couple of hours before he heard anything. Then it was somebody shouting out an order. The Krauts were coming back. By the way they had gone. Was that good—or bad? Anyhow, they were close.

He dived into the midst of the pile of dead palm fronds and pulled some stuff over him. The seeing wouldn't be so good on his side—or on theirs.

卐 HE LISTENED. By the noise and occasional calls they were coming along as they had before—spread out. That was a good sign, wasn't it? If they had a prisoner they'd be closed up around him. But was it a good sign? They had rifles. But he hadn't heard a shot. Of course a bayonet or a clubbed rifle—

He quit worrying about Pop fast. Somebody was close to that pile of brush. He heard a hiss from the dead fronds and a bayonet went in past his ear. Close. The man jabbed a couple of times more. Then he went on. Steve's body was suddenly wet with sweat.

"Pop's right," he told himeslf. "We ought to fan out of here."

He listened carefully to the departing Nazis. He wanted them off this motu. A sudden sharp cry made him duck back into the brush. Then he realized that it came from the larger island. He crept out and slid on among the trees till he could look across the shallows. He saw the Nazis bunched on the outer beach. They had found the clothes and rifle of their bayonet juggler. After some palaver they picked them up. Bunched, now, they headed back to the ship.

It was a tough hour that came after that. Then Pop turned up, noiseless as a ghost. He grinned lop-sidedly.

"I was wondering how you were doing," he said. "For a while there I was up to my nose in the lagoon with fish nibbling my legs and nothing but a couple of rocks between me and a Nazi."

"You can quit not trusting your luck, then," Steve said. He was feeling better. He put his hand to the ear that the bayonet had missed. "We're both crawling with luck."

"For how long?" Pop asked.

"For as long as we keep crowding it," Steve said. "That's how luck runs." He jerked a hand toward the raider. "I got an idea that Three Eyes, over there, is slowing down."

Pop just looked at him. He listened while Steve told about the Nazis finding the clothes. Then he pointed his thick finger.

"There's a good big break in the outer reef over there, with no white water kicking up," he said. "And plenty of places to get the boat through from the lagoon."

"I'm not interested, Pop," Steve said. "How about doing some skull work on a way to dent Three Eyes and his ship?"

Pop frowned.

Steve didn't talk much to Pop the rest of that draggy afternoon. It seemed to him that Pop had something on the fire. Steve could tell by the way Pop was crinkling up his skull. And sometimes Pop argued with himself. But Pop didn't miss anything the Germans were doing, either. They were working at lightening the ship when darkness came down on the atoll.

"Getting ready to move her onto the sand and heave her down far enough to work on some damaged plates," Pop said.

He hesitated; then scowled at the silent Steve.

"There's no way for one man to do 'em any real damage," he burst out. "I don't say you couldn't surprise and kill a couple more of 'em but what good would that do? It wouldn't stop the ship."

He shook his head. "If the anchor windlass was released at the height of the outrushing tide she might do herself some harm," he said, half to himself. "But what's the use of talking about that? It would take a boarding party with machine guns to fight the way to that windlass. She's jammed full of men. Maybe some of 'em are to run prizes into ports the Germans and Japs still hold."

"Yeah," said Steve slowly. "Jammed with men. Jammed."

Pop put his hand on Steve's shoulder. "Come on, kid, let's pull out," he said.

"I'm telling you, you couldn't stand months living down under that raider's hatch. And that's all that's coming to us, barring death, if we hang around here and let 'em catch us."

STEVE didn't answer but he got up and led the way through the dark grove of palms. As they made out the loom of the boat under the rounded mound of sand Pop jerked a hand toward the pile of brush. "If it'll make you feel any better we can start that burning before we shove off," he said.

"Let's haul the boat to the lagoon," Steve said. "It's plenty dark enough."

"D'you mean it?" Pop's voice lifted.

"Sure I mean it," Steve said.

They did that job. When they stood panting, up to their knees in the blackening waters, Steve spoke curtly:

"I'm onto myself, Pop. I don't know enough to have the right to order you around. I'm a gunner's mate, third class, but I don't rate more than a one man command—me. O.K. Here's the boat all set to go."

"But—how about you?"

"I got a date with those anchors," Steve said. "A guy can stick out his own neck even if there isn't much head on the end of it."

"It isn't the head, kid; it's the experience," Pop said. "You—"

"I hope the fairy stories you been telling yourself about finding help in time to stop Three Eyes' ship come true," Steve said. "Luck to you, Pop."

Steve walked away rapidly. He was feeling lonely before he reached the big motu and went sneaking in among the palms. He knew how he had to make his play. Screwy, maybe. But possible.

The island was silent. Three Eyes had brought his Nazis back aboard his ship. She stood up high and forbidding and completely black in the middle of the wide channel that led into the lagoon. From her came the voices of men at ease and harsher sounds from black-gang men who were still at work.

With great caution Steve approached the edge of the water. He walked along it with arms upraised, feeling for the hawser that he knew led from the after deck of the ship to the butt of one of the thickest of the cocopalms. But before he found it he quickly jerked down his hands. He stared intently.

Just about where that line came swinging down from the ship to the black shadows of the palms something that could only be a man was moving. The Nazis had left a guard stationed beside the mooring. More than one, maybe?

Steve scooped up a coconut and crept closer. He listened long, watching the man beside the hawser. That sentry was alone and taking it easy. Steve figured the island spell had lulled his training in alertness to do some damage to somebody. When he moved he dragged his gun, butt trailing in the sand. Steve made out that he wore a cap, not a helmet.

Steve wriggled nearer, uncomfortably conscious of the revealing whiteness of his singlet and trousers. The man turned toward him. Steve froze, flat on the sand. The man strolled past.

Soundlessly Steve sprang to his feet. He took two quick steps. With the might of his two upraised arms he brought the coconut down on the back of the sentry's head. The crack of the impact sounded loud in Steve's ears. But it was the only sound. The man dropped as if his bones had turned to water.

Steve knelt beside him, spread him out and searched him. No pistol. No knife. A box of matches. Poor loot. He detached the bayonet from the barrel of the rifle and stuck it in his belt. He dragged the man a few feet, dumped him under a cocopalm and placed the coconut close to his head.

"It might fool 'em for a while," he told himself. "Unless they miss that bayonet right away or decide there're too many accidents around here."

He walked to the hawser. He frowned as he placed his hand on it and felt its thickness. There was no strain on it now. The tide was again running out of the lagoon. The anchors up forward were holding the ship. She sure was black. And big.

With a decision he lifted the splice off the palm stump that served as a bollard and dropped it to the ground. It

began to creep along the ground like a crippled snake. He followed the heavy line down the beach and into the water of the pass.

THE tidal current rippled strongly against his legs. That was what was dragging at the rope. Steve waded deeper, holding the heavy Manila. At breast height the sweep of the water lifted him from his feet. Clutching the hawser he pulled himself out toward the ship. Where the rope curved up from the water toward the stern of the darkened ship he paused to stare. Forward, on the well deck, somebody was playing a mouth organ. This was the time of day in a ship when even the discipline of a Three Eyes had to be eased a bit. As well as Steve could make out a bunch of the crew were lined up along the rail of the ship. But they would be facing in, toward the musician.

"I've got to hope they are," he muttered. He studied the stern of the ship, toward which this rope was lifting, with greater care. There was nobody along the rail. He could hear no sounds of life. He looked at the power boat. It was trailing astern of the ship, tugging at its line. No sign of life in it. He looked at it harder. He caught the guarded glow of a lighted cigarette. With some reluctance he turned his eyes back to the ship.

He gripped the hawser more tightly and began to climb. It was thick enough to give his legs something to twine about and hold. That helped. He went up quickly hand over hand. His coral cuts gave him hell. So did the shoulder the Nazi had kicked. He got a grip on a rail and pulled his head up to the level of the deck. His view was curtailed by what looked like an innocent steering engine house. It wasn't, he knew; the structure masked a five inch gun. But now it also made a shield for him. He hauled himself up, stepped over the rail and stood still. Nobody. No sound. He paused to squeeze out the legs of his trousers to prevent drip. Gingerly he tucked the long bayonet inside his pants.

"The ship's jammed with men," he told himself. "One more won't show up big. What they're figuring is their strong point could be my in. Sure!"

## CHAPTER V

### ONE-MAN BOARDING PARTY

HE STROLLED forward out beyond the end of the house. It was queer, unpleasant to tread Three Eyes' layer of camouflage sand underfoot on the deck of a ship. But this ship had a crawly feel to him, anyhow.

It was all he could do to keep his movements casual. A small group of men were sitting and lying about on the after hatch. They were talking earnestly. Sounded like an argument. He measured the distance to the rail and idled on past them. Five of them. Two of them had on white pants, like his; all wore singlets. A sixth man, fully dressed, apparently on watch, was standing near the rail.

When Steve had almost gained the shelter of the alleyway one of the men called out to him. The tone told him it was a question. The guard? Steve gave vent to a guttural grunt and walked on. His nerves were screaming warnings at him.

"Slowly, you!" he told himself savagely.

"Nothing happened. From an open door to the engine room came up the clink of tools. Men working hard down there. He came out on the forward well deck. It was a gun deck now, with high false bulwarks that dropped to unmask guns. They were down now. This was where the harmonica concert was going on. The place swarmed with men. They sat or sprawled on top of No. One hatch or leaned against the rails. Palm fronds on cargo gear and guns gave it a sort of festive look. He stopped a moment, resting his rigid back against the bridge-house, not too close to anybody else.

A few of the Fritzies were moving about, changing groups. Some were talking loudly. The harmonica artist was not particularly good but a few were singing with him. Steve didn't know the tune.

He started moving again, still fighting an impulse to run. He got to the port ladder leading to the forecastle head. The rail along the break of the house was well lined with men. Two more were leaning against the bottom of the ladder, one on either side. Another was sitting at the head of it with his legs dangling. Steve felt the breeze cold on his sweating chest. If he brushed against one of these Krauts and the guy felt his wet clothes— He kept on going.

At the last minute one of the two below moved aside. Steve climbed the ladder. The man above started reluctantly to shift his legs. Steve swung past him. The man looked around. Had his wet trouserleg touched? He paused. He might be able to knock him out with a quiet foot to the chin before he could squawk.

The man turned back to the musician. Steve stopped to breathe and to look. Nobody was watching him. But he stared uneasily at the bunch leaning on the rail at the break of the forecastle. Their backs were to the windlass but they were uncomfortably close to it.

He lifted his eyes to the bridge stretching high above the well deck. No festivities up there. It was black and quiet. Nobody there. Nobody? He caught the grayish blur of a moving figure, a figure that moved at a certain regular gait from wing to wing, alone, given full gangway on that sacred stretch of command.

Steve knew that gait even in the dark. He had studied it long enough that day. That man, alone above the crowded deck, was Three Eyes himself. Maybe that glass eye of his was fixed now on him, Steve Burns, up here in the bows where there wasn't much reason for a man to be. Maybe that eyeglass was a night glass, capable of piercing darkness like a cat's eye.

"Cut it out!" Steve commanded himself harshly. "Lay off the shivers! That's what you want— Three Eyes up there on his bridge to see what happens to his raider. Maybe this'll make him act human, even."

HE TURNED his back on Three Eyes and walked the few steps to the windlass. He rested a hand on one of the niggerheads. Nobody up here in the eyes of the ship. That helped. But how much? He began a cautious examination of the anchor windlass. He wished that he knew more about windlasses. But the brakes were like those on the *Northern Shore*. Let both go and the chain attached to the two anchors at the bottom of the lagoon would leap roaring out through the hawsepipes. The ship would be released from the grip of the anchors. The current would sweep her back on the ugly coral heads a few hundred feet astern. Judging by the time they'd taken to work her into this position there were plenty of dangers under that swirling water aft.

He began to ease off a brake. The trick would be to let go both brakes at the same time. Once the ship lunged backward in the grip of the rushing water no brake would stop that chain till it ran to the bitter end. The windlass would be ripped off its bedplates first. Sure.

Flinching in anticipation of the roar

of the massive chains he let go both brakes. Now!

Nothing happened. Not a thing. Not a sound, even. The two chains remained tight in the grip of the wildcats.

Quick sweat spurted on Steve's forehead. He ran his forearm up across his face. He must think. Be calm. The wildcats must still be hooked up with the steam engine that drove this windlass. They wouldn't let the chain run out any more than the wheels of a stopped car will turn when locked in gear with a dead motor. There must be a clutch somewhere. He got to his knees, feeling around. He touched a lever. Triumphantly he moved it. Nothing happened. He was stopped. His hand shook on the iron handle.

"I got to keep calm!" he warned himself. He set to work feeling out this windlass carefully. Resting on his knees he made every movement slow, unhurried. He had time. He must use it. He unscrambled this windlass—but he could not find out why the chain did not run out. His meager store of seamanship was not enough.

Of a sudden he stopped moving altogether. He caught his breath. For minutes on end he had forgotten there were other men in this ship. But now he knew, with cold fear. He turned his head slightly. A man was there, behind him, outlined vaguely against the starlit sky. He was breathing heavily. Steve could hear him. And he was watching Steve.

Steve sprang up from his knees, pivoting toward this man. His fingers darted to his throat.

"It's Pop!" Those urgent words came in a quick gasp before Steve could tighten his throttling grip. He dropped to the deck, and Pop with him. Pop was still panting; his chest was rising and falling. Steve's heart was drumming. He was glad he had forgotten that bayonet. He stared at the other man.

"Pop!" he said. "What— You didn't go?"

"Later," Pop panted. "I climbed that rope—from the power boat. Thought—I wouldn't make it. Ship—ship crawling with guns an' Nazis. Walked right through 'em."

"From the power boat?" Steve asked.

Pop's head nodded. "We c'n—use it, can't we?"

"How'd you get to it? You've got guts."

"A man gets to wondering—about his luck," Pop said. "I came slidin' down current by the other side of the pass—in our boat. A fellow in the power boat started asking me questions. He—fell overside. I busted that new oar."

HE PAUSED to pant. "I been waiting to pick you up—after you let go the anchors. I figured you'd jump. But—what's happened? It's your funeral, kid."

"I can't start these blasted anchors!" Steve muttered.

Pop grunted contemptuously. "I nearly blew a lung—climbing that painter," he complained. He crept closer to the windlass and his arms moved over it.

Finally he turned to Steve.

"Ever hear o' devil's claws?" he muttered. "They must have the chain stopped forra'd o' the windlass. All you got to do—"

He halted his movement around the windlass and froze dead. Sailor-like, he had glanced aft, up at the high bridge.

"Somethin' goin' on up there," he said. "Watch!"

Steve could see a couple of vague white figures moving swiftly to the port side of the bridge. Not one—two! Suddenly one of them stopped, facing forward, and barked out a command. It was Three Eyes' metallic voice.

The player of the mouth organ cut off his tune. The well deck gaieties were abruptly stilled. Nothing but the rattle of a palm frond disturbed the quiet in the ship.

Steve heard it—the distant mutter of a plane. Three Eyes spat out another word. Instantly gongs clanged aft and under them—half a dozen gongs.

"Battle stations!" Steve muttered. He sensed the rush of men on the crowded well deck though he could not see them. The line of figures along the break of the forecastle head melted away.

"One of our patrol planes," Pop whispered.

"Standin' to their guns," Steve said. "Pop, remember our gun?"

"Every man in the ship's on his toes," Pop warned.

Steve came to.

"Unhook your devil's claws fast before we get Kraut claws in us," he said. "Go on, Pop! Get 'em!"

Pop crept forward of the windlass. Steve heard the clink of metal above the ordered rush of men to their battle stations. He crouched down beside by the brakes.

Next instant Pop was beside him. Pop grabbed a brake release wheel.

"Ready to run," he reported. "All—somebody coming!"

A head appeared at the port ladder. A man leaped up. Another Kraut was right behind him.

"Turn 'em loose!" Steve muttered and let go his brake. Sudden thunder! Sparks leaping and dancing as steel clashed against steel above the windlass wildcats. Man, it spoke!

The men on the forecastle head recoiled at the tremendous roar. The massive anchor chains were wrenched down the hawsepipes as the ship was shoved back by the sweep of the current.

Pop broke nimbly for the port rail. The startled Nazis ran to intercept him Pop swerved.

Steve dug his feet into the sand on deck and got going fast. There wasn't any time for a fight. He spread his arms wide, ducked his head and hit both the Nazis hard, going places. They had hardly time to shift their eyes from Pop.

"Over, Pop!" Steve yelped. His arms felt broken off.

The two men he had charged into, off balance, were toppled backward by his plunge. They crashed against the low rail and went over the side of the ship. Their voices shrieked; their hands clawed the air.

Steve, entangled with them, managed a sort of dive into the black water. Still under, he felt a hand clutch at him. He kicked out hard, with both feet, and got clear of a relaxing grip. Then he broke the surface. Good air!

He swam down current, along the side of the ship, with all the speed in his chunky, powerful body. The current was swift, far faster than the increasing movement of the ship. A voice in the water growled at him. Somebody was swimming close behind him. It wasn't Pop. He passed under the dragging hawser by which he had climbed aboard. Next instant he saw the power boat looming up. The bow line to the ship's stern was almost within his reach. He resisted the temptation to grab for it. He swam on past the power boat, past the stern. Beyond the current was rushing toward coral heads, the reef and the open sea. Nobody could buck that current. If he was wrong—

HE HAD guessed right. Pop had tied their old boat astern. He grabbed at the gunwale and heaved himself aboard in a quick lift and twist of his body. He pulled the boat up to the stern of the power boat and scrambled aboard the enemy craft. He pelted forward.

The man who had pursued him so strongly had tried for the painter and made it. He was already hauling himself up lithely in the bow.

Steve bent, located the Kraut's jaw in the dark and hit it a short, hard jolt. The man let go his holds and slipped gently back into the water. The current took him.

Steve crouched over the mooring bit of the power boat. He cupped his hands.

"Pop!" he called anxiously.

"Grab me! I can't—climb nothin' more!"

The voice was close ahead.

Steve grabbed the coiled end of the bow line and flipped it toward the sound. Next instant he made out Pop's drifting head. He felt Pop's grip on the line.

Paying out line he drew Pop swiftly aft and to the gunwale of the rowboat. Pop was breathless, far gone. Steve had to scramble into the boat and drag him in over the side.

"We got to—Great Peter! What's—"

Steve heard, too, and was whirling to meet this new menace, whatever it was. The thing announced itself with a grinding crunch. The sound seemed to reach Steve's feet first, through the water. He stopped dead. His eyes bulged at a scene of dim disaster.

The raider, with chains still thundering out, had yielded to the full sweep of the current. Moving ever faster, her stern had been arrested by the tautening of the one stern line that remained. This line had swung her broadside as she shot out of the pass into the coral-studded water inside the reef. That ominous crunch was the teeth of a coral head cutting into her vitals underwater. That hard stuff made nothing of thin steel plates. She must be gutted.

A moment later, in an instant of breathless silence, he heard Three Eyes' unmistakable voice. It was a cry, not a command. There was nothing Three Eyes could do, nothing he could command to be done, about that coral then.

"Maybe the guy's just found out he's human, too," Steve said aloud.

"Cut us—loose!" Pop gasped.

The power boat rose and dropped suddenly. A sheet of white water, like a ghost from the sea, rose up over Steve's head as he raced forward again. He dived for the bow line that held this boat to the raider. The boat plunged ungovernably as he worked. He knew what had happened. They had gone down current with the raider. This rough water was right over the reef. Any instant now the coral might bite into their underbody, too. He let the raider's line whip away from him, gripped the bitt and hung on. Her bow slammed down on the seas, jarring the teeth in his head.

Of a sudden the sea smoothed out. Clear water! Their slight draft had slid unharmed across that underwater peril. As he crept shakily aft he saw Pop climbing up from the half sunken rowboat.

"Whoo!" Pop gasped. "Great Peter! Say! Look at 'em! Hard on the coral!"

Steve went scrambling around in the cockpit; then plunged down into the cabin, feeling about. It was pitch black. He seemed to feel for ever. But at last he touched a light bulb no bigger than his thumb. It showed him the motor, the galley, other things.

"You better turn that out!" Pop warned. "They still got guns!"

"We ain't through, yet," Steve said. He caught up a life preserver, emptied a can of engine oil on it, and then found the galley matchbox. He dragged the oily life jacket up on deck. They were still being swept seaward from the raider on the coral. Judging by the sounds aboard her several officers were giving orders. But at any minute they might work out what had happened.

"Get below and try to start that motor, Pop!" Steve commanded. "Keep the light on unless they start firing. We've got to make knots!"

He stared up at the sky with hands cupped to his ears. He could still hear it—that distant plane. And he could hear something else. Somebody with a megaphone was shouting at them from the raider.

"I can't let that plane get away!" he muttered. He scratched a match, touched it to the oil-soaked lifejacket and hurled it overside. It made a blazing arc in the blackness. Pop, below, yelped dismally at the sudden flare. Then, with a lot of pep, he bent over the motor.

Steve crouched in the cockpit, listening. The jacket was a big red flare in that moonless night. Risky—but it might be worth it.

FROM the raider came a voice with an unpleasant finality in its tones. It was Three Eyes. He was making up his mind. But, at least, the voice was fainter. Also the high sided boat was drifting down wind faster than the flare. "It's hard to see across a bonfire," Steve told himself hopefully.

"You better hope!" said Pop fiercely. He bent closer to the motor. The motor ground over—and broke into gruff rhythm. Pop snapped off the light.

Steve jumped to the wheel. Pop stuck his head up, then emerged.

"I found a flashlight," he said.

"Why don't they shoot?" Steve muttered, turning the wheel. He headed to the left, to put the cocopalms on the nearest motu between them and the stranded ship.

"They figger a fire may be just a fire to that plane, but the streak of gunfire'll be a dead giveaway," Pop explained.

A bullet screamed past them. Pop ducked agilely.

"Risking—rifle fire," Pop went on explaining. "That ain't so visible. They heard our motor. We better go."

They went, with full power turning their propeller. Bullets sang near and far; bullets thudded into the hull and a bullet neatly drilled the windscreen. Then the bullets wandered away to starboard of them.

"Better!" said Pop. But then, abandoning caution, the raider opened with bigger guns. Tracers cut red lines through the air. Pop groaned. "Desperation," he said. "Me, too!"

But still they weren't firing starshells or parachute flares. That would mean complete confession to the plane.

Some of the stuff was close. But most of it was further away—spread out in a giant pattern, covering the sea.

"Gi' me that flashlight!" Steve commanded.

He crouched in the cockpit, screening the light from the raider with his body. He pointed the lens skyward to the northeast, in the direction in which he had last heard the plane. With his thumb on the button, not too skillfully, he began flicking out in Morse: "*N-A-Z-I R-A-I-D-E-R. N-A-Z-I R-A-I-D-E-R.*"

"We're behind the island," Pop reported. "If they hit us now it ain't our fault. It's just bad luck. I don't trust my luck but—"

"You trusted it tonight—and it worked out for both of us," Steve said. "Your coming along and saving my bacon like that—I didn't expect it, Pop. I had no right to lead you."

Pop changed course to head away from the atoll again behind the screen of the cocopalms. The expanse of the sea was too great for the guns of the raider to cover.

"Let me tell you, kid," Pop said. "And you want to remember it, too. It'll be handier for you to know than me, because I don't trust my luck."

"What is it, Pop?"

"It's this, kid." Pop's voice was earnest. "A man can't be followed till he leads. Get it? And when he does lead he'll be followed."

"I get it," Steve said slowly. "Yes, I get it. And he ought to know enough when he does slip out front."

He kept on pressing the button of the flashlight.

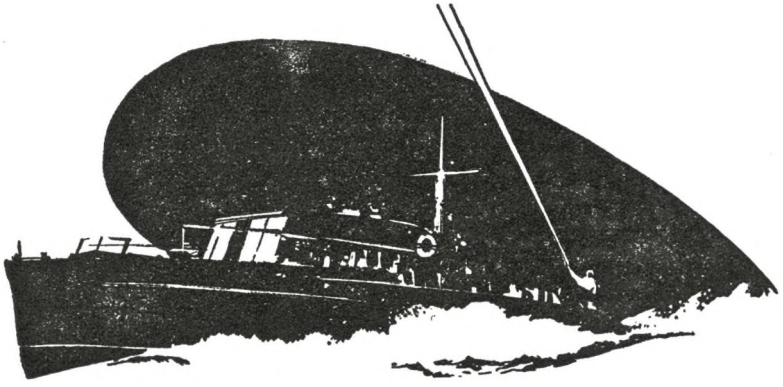
"Of course when you lead it's your funer—"

"Leave my funeral out of this, Pop," Steve said, eyes fixed on the northeastern sky. "I just got a blink from that guy up there."

Pop looked, too. The blink was repeated. Three Eyes' guns roared in fury.

"It's going to be their funeral—on that raider," Pop said. "The plane'll have a destroyer here by morning. Their funeral."

"Three Eyes' funeral," Steve said. "By now I figure he's human enough to rate a funeral. With the compliments of the gun crew of the *Northern Shore*—all of 'em."



# DEAD MAN'S DEAL

BY D. L. CHAMPION

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

SINCE the stage had left Saint Louis, I had devoutly wished myself back in the foggy environs of Boston. Nevada was dry, hot and lonely. So was I.

I stepped from the creaking coach before Al Mapes' Gilded Lily Saloon in Silver Springs. My eyes ached from the glare of the sun upon the sand and there was a thick coating of dust spread evenly over my larynx.

I clutched my carpet bag in one hand, my transit in the other and swung down into the street. I felt as if I were treading on a particularly arenose beach. Sand trickled down my shoe tops; my clothes stuck to me like a bathing suit plastered with glue. I was acutely aware that I had never been so physically uncomfortable in all my life.

The first thing I saw in the Gilded Lily was the prostrate figure of a man. He lay upon the floor, his face in the sawdust, on the spot where a welcome mat should have been. His hair, black as a raven's wing, was matted with sweat and dirt. His faded overalls were torn in the back disclosing a portion of his anatomy better left concealed.

I pushed my way wearily to the bar, dropped my luggage on the floor and ordered beer.

The bartender regarded me hostilely, put a bottle and a glass before me and said, "You'll drink whiskey. It's all we got."

I drank the whiskey. In my condition I would have drunk carbolic acid. Some one down at the far end of the bar said, "Give the bum a drink, Ernie."

A huge, barrel-chested individual lifted a bottle from the bar. As he walked past me, I saw an ugly glint in his little porcine eyes. He stood over the prostrate form on the floor and kicked it viciously. The figure stirred in the sawdust. It lifted its head and it struck me that the face was somehow vaguely familiar.

"Here, Sturdevant," said Ernie, holding out the bottle. "You want a drink?"

Sturdevant reached trembling hands out toward the whiskey. The huge man snatched it away.

"Not that way," he said, grinning. "Beg for it."

Sturdevant, sawdust clinging to his eyebrows, grime rubbed into his cheeks, smiled weakly, servilely. Slowly he got to his knees. He threw his head back and barked in grotesque imitation of a dog. Then he opened his mouth, waited impatiently.

The barrel-chested man tilted the bottle slowly over Sturdevant's upturned face. A thin brown stream of liquor flowed from the bottle. Some of it Sturdevant caught in his mouth, some of it ran down his cheeks, some stung into his eyes.

Laughter rose from the rear of the bar. To me the spectacle was more sickening than funny. Ernie suddenly stopped the flow of whiskey. Sturdevant barked again and my stomach turned over.

Then I saw Al Mapes. He emerged from his office beyond the card room at the back. He yelled out, "For God's sake let him alone, Ernie Kling! Lena,

you get that bum the hell out of here!"

From the shadows at the back of the room an incredibly fat Piute Indian came forward. She was short, thick and her bosom was as vast as a mother's love. She shuffled across the floor to Sturdevant's side. She touched his shoulder.

She said, "You come home, now?"

Sturdevant shook his head. He looked appealingly up at Ernie who still had the bottle in his hand. The Piute woman sighed loudly, asthmatically. She turned to the bar and I heard a coin clink on the wood. The bartender handed her a bottle.

She turned again and took Sturdevant's hand. She held the bottle before his eyes. She said, "Now you come home?"

Sturdevant, his eyes fixed on the bottle, slowly stood up. He leaned heavily on the Piute's shoulder. Shufflingly, she escorted both Sturdevant and the bottle into the blazing sunlight of the street.

I stared after them, a churning nausea at the pit of my stomach. Then I said to Mapes, "Mapes, I'm here. Harry Winthrop."

Mapes stared at me and grinned. He put out his hand. "Harry," he said, "it's been a long time. Come on back to the office."

AL MAPES was tall, stringy, and his hair was graying at the edges. His jaw was strong and his eyes were hard. You could feel a certain ruthlessness about him; he was a man of honor and integrity, according to his lights, which were not my lights at all.

Mapes was an old friend of my father. I had met him when he visited the East several years ago. Recently, my father had written him, mentioning casually that I was out of college and had expressed a desire to see the West. Mapes, a heavy landowner, needed some surveying done and promptly offered the job to me.

"I'm mighty glad to see you again, son," he said. "I've got one hell of a lot of property around here. Will you be ready to start work in the morning? I'll get a couple of Mexicans to help you."

I nodded. I wasn't thinking of the work, particularly. My mind dwelt on the servile drunk with the familiar face.

"That guy, Sturdevant," I said, "who is he? It seems I've seen him somewhere before."

"You've seen his picture, anyway," said Mapes. "It's Bob Sturdevant."

It came to me then. "The gambler?"

"The damnedest gambler in the country," said Mapes. "Mississippi River boats, Saratoga Springs back in York State, and everywhere else. Hell, some one wrote a book about him once."

"I remember," I said. "But why in the name of God is he lying out there on your barroom floor?"

"Booze," said Mapes.

"I still don't get it. Why should he suddenly take to booze?"

"Several reasons," said Mapes. "First, he got in a jam in Saint Louis. Sturdevant is an honest gambler. It's the one thing he's always prided himself upon. These Mississippi steamboat tinhorns tried to get him to throw in with their crooked dealings. Sturdevant told them to go to hell. They framed him with a crooked deck. He served a term for cheating at cards. Of course, he was completely innocent and I guess that's why he took it so hard."

"Even so," I said, "to become reduced to—" I thought of the beaten creature being dragged off by the fat Piute and shuddered.

"There was more to it than that," said Mapes. "Something about a girl he was going to marry back East. He heard she'd thrown him down while he was in jail. Though the postmaster here tells me he still gets mail in fancy envelopes addressed in a woman's handwriting. Sturdevant came in here on his way to Frisco, started hitting the bottle and never left. If it wasn't for that damned old Piute, he'd probably be dead by now."

"He'd be better off," I said. "What's the Indian to him?"

Mapes shrugged. "She mothers him. Maybe she loves him. I don't know."

"Well," I said, rising, "I better get along to the hotel. I want to wash up and get to bed early. I'll get to work at sunrise."

We shook hands again. I picked up my bag and transit and set out for the dubious luxuries of Silver Springs' only hotel.

I plodded along the dusty main street which was a brown strand running wearily through the town, disappearing indifferently in the dry hills to the south. There was another saloon beside that of Mapes, a feed store and half a dozen blistered frame houses. Theoretically, it was dusk but the sun seemed unaware of it. The heat still blazed down from the western rim of the world and my throat felt as if I had been eating salt for twenty-four hours.

A little group of punchers idled before the hotel as I approached. They parted suddenly and the man called Ernie Kling pushed his way toward me, barring my path to the hotel. His breath, hitting me full in the face, was like a hot wind blowing over an open barrel of whiskey.

HIS eyes fixed themselves with interest upon the canvas covering of my transit. He said thickly, "What's that thing?"

"A transit."

He grunted. "What's it for? What do you do with it?"

"You look through it," I told him. "There's a telescope mounted on it and you look through that."

He grunted again. He said very seriously, "I want to look through it. I always was interested in stars."

I checked the laugh in my throat. Ernie Kling looked like the sort of man who would resent laughter. Someone, however, was not as tactful as I.

At my side stood a little man. The skin of his cheeks had been desiccated by the wind and sun. He looked as if it would have required a geologist to determine his age. He opened his mouth suddenly, revealing toothless gums. He uttered a dry crackling cackle.

"Kling," he said, "you're an ignorant mule. A transit's for surveying. Not for staring at the moon."

He cackled again in hearty enjoyment. Ernie Kling withdrew his attention from me. His little eyes blazed suddenly. His fist swung through the air like a hurtling ham. It crashed against the side of the wizened little man's jaw. It lifted him from his feet, spun him through the air and crashed him against the unpainted porch of the Palace Hotel.

Anger consumed my discretion. I thought suddenly of Sturdevant begging like a dog. I took a step forward. I said, "You yellow bully, put up your fists," then felt the muzzle of a six gun pressing gently into my stomach.

I remembered with a pounding heart that I was a surveyor, not a hero. That this was Nevada, not Back Bay. I stood, an immobile fool, wondering if this was my last moment on earth. Then I caught sight of something metallic gleaming in the sun and my sigh of relief came all the way up from my ankles.

The sheriff put a hand on Kling's shoulder and said wearily, "What's the trouble this time, Ernie?"

"Self defence," said Kling. "He was going to jump me."

"I'm unarmed," I said quickly.

The sheriff sighed again. "Put your gun up, Ernie," he said. "How old are you?"

"Thirty-two," said Kling.

"Eighteen years of it's borrowed time," said the sheriff. "Someone take care of old Abe there. You, stranger, get inside."

I got inside. I had bathed and was in bed before the last vestige of the fear I had felt emptied itself from the pit of my stomach.

Darkness was coming down when I got back to the Gilded Lily after my first day's work. Every muscle in my body ached. Every inch of my skin was dried and baked as if I'd been sitting in a kiln. I pushed into the saloon. Sturdevant again lay in the sawdust. I stepped over him carefully.

A few moment's later I was emptying a bottle with Mapes in his office. It took a good half pint to get enough dust from my throat to render me articulate.

"That's good land you've got," I said. "It should be worth a fortune some day. But the best piece—that ranch in the bottom of the valley—apparently isn't yours."

Mapes' face darkened. "It isn't," he said shortly. "Possession of that spread would pick up the value of my land fifty per cent. Besides, it'd save forty miles of driving my stock around it to winter pasture."

"Ever try to buy it?"

Mapes grunted. "I've offered twenty thousand dollars for it. It's worth that to me. It certainly isn't worth half that to the Wallaces."

"You mean they won't sell?"

Maples shook his head. "Young Wallace runs it. His father's dead. Mother and two sisters live with him. They don't want money. They want that land. The women folk'd sooner work that spread than live in Frisco on my cash."

I GRINNED, remembering something my father had told me about Mapes.

"I've heard you're a tough hombre, Mapes. That you get what you want by hook or crook. If Wallace won't sell, maybe you should try other methods. Hasn't he any vices?"

Mapes poured himself a stiff drink and downed it. "One," said Mapes. "He loves to gamble. Unfortunately, he's the best poker player in Nevada. He doesn't lose. If I played with him I'd probably lose this saloon."

"Well," I said, jokingly, "why not get Sturdevant?"

Mapes' gaze focused on me. "Sturdevant?"

"Why not? He's the best gambler in the country. Straighten him out. Stake him in a game with this Wallace. The chances are, you'd win that spread."

Al Mapes lit his pipe thoughtfully. I watched him in some surprise. I had not expected him to take me seriously. I opened my mouth to say so, when I heard a roar of rage from the bar.

Mapes sprang up. "Damn that Kling," he said and raced into the bar.

He returned a few minutes later. "Ernie Kling," he explained. "Picking a fight again. I had him thrown out."

"I had a run-in with him last night," I said. "What's wrong with him?"

"He's living on borrowed time," said Mapes. "And the loan is due to be called."

"That's what the sheriff said," I told him. "Is everyone scared of him?"

"He's a big man, Harry."

"So what? You fight with guns out here. Is he a better shot than anyone else?"

"As good," said Mapes. "He's a better drinker."

"Meaning?"

"Well," said Mapes, "it's like this. In this God-forsaken country there's nothing to do but drink. Everyone who comes to town to get rid of his pay gets drunk. Filled up with my rotgut they slow down. They don't draw so fast. They don't shoot so straight. Except Ernie Kling. Liquor seems to steady him. He's faster and truer when he's ory-eyed than when he's sober. But some day he's going to take one drink too many and then—"

He left the sentence eloquently unfinished. I took one more drink and went back to the hotel. As I left the bar I saw Lena, the Piute, trying futilely to arouse Bob Sturdevant.

For a week I stuck pretty close to my transit. I sweat in the blazing sun and walked a hundred miles with half the desert at the bottom of my shoes. Returning to town at night I was too exhausted to do anything, save gulp down four fingers of Mapes' redeye and fall into bed.

It came to me one Saturday night that for a week I had seen nothing of Sturdevant. No longer did he lie sodden in the sawdust. I was curious enough to wander into Mapes' office and inquire about it.

Mapes eyed me quizzically. "I'm glad you asked," he said. "Sturdevant's down at my house. I've been straightening him out. I'm putting him a proposition tonight. You better come along and listen. After all, it was your idea."

Puzzled, I accompanied Mapes to his sprawling frame house on the north edge of town. He led me at once to the bedroom. On the edge of the bed sat an old Mexican woman, a steaming cup of coffee in her hand. Pale, emaciated, lying limply against the pillow was Bob Sturdevant.

Sturdevant glared at Mapes with

rheumy, glittering eyes. He lifted a hand that trembled like a captured jackrabbit's heart. He said in a croaking voice, "For God's sake, Mapes, give me a drink. Why have you brought me here? Give me a drink quickly."

MAPES gestured to the Mexican woman who held up the coffee cup. "There's a tablespoonful of whiskey in that coffee," he said. "Drink it."

"A spoonful," sneered Sturdevant. "Am I the Epworth League?"

"Drink it," said Mapes again. "Listen to what I have to say. Then if you like you can go back to Lena or the barroom floor."

Sturdevant looked at him oddly for a moment. He took the cup in a trembling hand and gulped it down. Mapes signaled the woman from the room. Sturdevant put the cup back in the saucer. The crockery rattled.

"What do you want with me, Mapes? Why have you kept me here all week?"

"I've been sobering you up," said Mapes.

"Why?"

Mapes lit his pipe. "Now," he said softly, "we're getting to the point. Maybe you're going to get sore at what I say, Sturdevant. But I ask you to listen until I've finished, anyway."

Sturdevant half sat up. Breathing hard he fell back on the pillow. "Have I any other choice?" Sturdevant asked bitterly.

"Look," said Mapes. "I have something to offer you."

"What can anyone offer me—except free whiskey."

"There's a doctor," said Mapes. "In Frisco. He does wonderful things with drunks. He cured two guys I know. I saw a story about him in the Sacramento paper. He works on their minds as well as their bodies. It's something newfangled. But it seems to work. His fee is fifteen hundred dollars."

"That is most interesting," said Sturdevant. "In the meantime, I'd like a pint of whiskey, Mapes."

Mapes ignored that. "You could go and see that Doc, Sturdevant. I'd send one of my men with you to stop you from boozing on the way, by force if necessary. You could take that cure. I'll also give you a new outfit and a stake. You'll be a new man, Sturdevant."

"Why the hell should I be a new man?" snapped Sturdevant. "Mapes, for God's sake give me a drink!"

"Yes," said Mapes, "you could leave that stinking Piute. You could quit acting the hound dog for Ernie Kling. You could have your self respect back again,

Sturdevant." He paused for a moment and fixed Sturdevant with his gray eyes. He added very softly, "You could marry Florence McGee."

Sturdevant sat up in bed again. His eyes blazed. A flush crawled into his pallid cheeks. "Damn you," he said, "what do you know of Florence McGee? By what right—"

"Easy," said Mapes. "I knew you were still getting letters from some lady. I sent a man over to Lena's to go through your trunk. I found her letters. I read them. I learned that she quit you when you went to jail. But later, she found she loved you so much she was convinced that you were framed. She asked your forgiveness and begged you to come back East and marry her. You probably had your own reasons for not doing it."

"Reasons?" said Sturdevant, with an odd, hopeless laugh. "Me? Broke. A boozing bum. A squaw man. And I should go back to marry Florence McGee!"

"I thought so," said Mapes. "But you can still do it. Sturdevant, here's my offer. I want you to sober up, completely. Then I want you to play stud poker with young Wallace. Win me his ranch. I'll give you a brand new outfit to wear. I'll give you fifteen hundred for that doctor in Frisco. I'll give you another thousand for yourself. Of course, I'll stake you in the game."

STURDEVANT was back on the pillow now. His eyes staring unwinking at the ceiling.

"Why not, Sturdevant?" I said impulsively. "You can do it. You're too good a man to rot out here. Take him up, Sturdevant."

Sturdevant took his gaze from the ceiling. There was a tiny flush at the top of each cheekbone. There was a glimmer of hope in his black eyes. "Yes," said Sturdevant. "Why not?"

"You'll do it?" said Mapes eagerly.

Sturdevant ran his tremulous fingers through his ebon hair. "I'll do it," he said. "I lay down one condition."

"Any condition," said Mapes. "What is it?"

"The game is straight," said Sturdevant. "You've got to take that gamble, Mapes. Maybe I'll lose. But I won't cheat."

Mapes shrugged. "All right. But your scruples are peculiar. You're a drunken squaw man who's stolen more than once for the price of a quart. You're a jail bird and—"

"Damn you," snapped Sturdevant, "shut up!" He broke off for a moment and continued quietly. "Of course, you're right, Mapes. I'm everything you say. But—well—a man's got to be true to one single thing. No matter what it is. Once the orneriest rustler I ever knew got himself killed because he saw someone abusing a horse. A man's got to have one thing he keeps clean and never betrays. I never cheated a man at cards in all my life. Maybe it's the only decent law of my life."

Mapes shrugged. "All right," he said. "You're good enough to take Wallace honestly. I'll keep you here for another week until you're in perfect shape. And no liquor. It's a deal."

Sturdevant turned his head around and looked at us. It seemed to me his head was held a little higher than it had been a moment ago. His eyes were shining and there was a tiny break in his voice as he spoke.

"It's a deal," he said and put out a trembling hand.

Mapes took it, and behind the swift bright hope in Sturdevant's eyes I thought I saw a tear.


I DID not see Bob Sturdevant until six days later. In the back room of the Gilded Lily that night the game began casually enough. Young Wallace, tall, lean and about twenty-five years old, came in about nine o'clock. Three punchers sat in the back room playing stud without much interest. I noted that there was never more than thirty dollars stacked before any one of them.

Wallace grinned and waved at the mob at the bar. He refused several offers of drinks and made his way to the table at the rear. He sat down, said, "It looks like a quiet game. But it's the only one in town. Deal me in."

The game continued in desultory fash-

ion for about a half hour. Then Sturdevant made his entrance. He emerged from the door of Mapes' private office. He stood for an instant on the threshold of the bar, quite conscious of the astounded glances cast in his direction.

Even I, who had more or less known what to expect, was startled. Sturdevant was a changed man. The hangdog sheepishness had left him. His head was erect and there was a black arrogance in his eyes. His dark frock coat was immaculate. Underneath it the butt of his gun protruding from its holster seemed to give notice that once more Bob Sturdevant was a man to be reckoned with.

He was shaved clean and his face, among the burned visages at the bar, was startlingly pale. He strode through the room, looking neither to the right nor left. The crowd stared at him with something like awe.

Lem Sales, the feed store clerk, giggled suddenly. "Why," he said in a loud carrying voice, "give the son of a bitch a bath, dress him up and he looks almost like a man, don't he?"

Sturdevant halted. Sturdevant, who for eight months had responded to any insult with servility, smiled bleakly. His eyes bored into those of Sales. He said in a low penetrating tone, "If you really mean that, Sales, say it again."

In ten seconds, Sales' eyes fell. He did not say it again. He buried his nose in his glass and did not look up until Sturdevant had passed.

Mapes brushed by me as Sturdevant put his hand on the back of a vacant chair at the card table. "Look at him," whispered Mapes. "One week on the wagon and look at him. He's as dry as the desert inside. I bet he's choking for a drink."

I didn't answer. I was too interested in watching Sturdevant. The man had guts. Every ounce of self control he possessed was holding him in an iron grip. He was tense as a spring. Yet outwardly he appeared casual; not like a man who was about to lay down the biggest bet of his life.

He pulled the chair out. He lifted his eyebrows as he caught young Wallace's eye. "May I sit in?"

Wallace looked at him curiously for a moment. He said, "Sure, sit in. It's a piker's game so far. They tell me you're good, Sturdevant."

"I used to be," said Sturdevant, picking up the deck. "No limit?"

Wallace hesitated for an instant. "No limit," he said, and cut the cards.

By ten-thirty the three punchers had lost their pay. Their chairs had scraped back across the floor and they had gone to the bar to drown the memory of their losses in whatever liquor their credit ran to.

Young Wallace and Sturdevant continued in utter and grim silence. The pots were larger now—much larger. The stacks of silver, the pile of bills traveled back and forth across the table indecisively.

Mapes stood between the rectangular barroom and the card tables, permitting no one to cross the threshold. Somehow the crowd sensed the tension. They felt inexplicably that the play was for something greater than money. The electricity in the cardroom spread out and enveloped the bar.

THERE was little conversation, little of the usual ribaldry, heard against the crisp flicking of the cards, the sprightly clink of the silver. Occasionally, I heard the taurine voice of Ernie Kling lifted drunkenly. He appeared to have swallowed more whiskey than usual. His quarrelsome tone rose spasmodically above every other sound.

Watching Sturdevant I thought of a dam—a dam fighting desperately and with all its strength to hold back the might of the flood waters pounding against it. His control still held. Externally, he was expressionless.

Yet under it all, I knew, every nerve of his body was screaming for alcohol. And over all was the terrible strain of the knowledge that he was gambling for his very life. He was betting and the stakes were high as a man's hope.

If he won, he would win everything. He would be a person once more. He would be a part of society. He would have position, decent circumstances, a wife. He would attain the goal of every man in the Mapes barroom.

If he lost he would fall down on his face in the sawdust again. He would drink deep of the cup of humility, servility. He would be the slavish butt of every cruel jester in Nevada. He would be the squaw man of a fat Piute who would drag him home with one hand while carrying a quart of red eye for his breakfast in the other. He would return to oblivion and filth.

He dealt and I remarked that his fingers were steadier than the beating of my own heart. Something dark moved in the far corner of the room. I raised my eyes. Lena, the Piute, stood against the back wall. She stared at Sturdevant's back with dark and trouble eyes, uncomprehending.

She must have slipped in through the back door. Her hands were clasped over her huge bosom and her fingers moved restlessly like brown snakes. The taut atmosphere of the room had seeped into her phlegmatic brain. She watched Sturdevant's back in bewilderment. It was a pathetic sight.

Once she shuffled forward and touched his shoulder uncertainly. She said in an odd, dubious voice, "You come home now? Eh?"

Sturdevant brushed her hand away. He shook his head and waved her back. She retired to the corner again, hurt and puzzlement in her eyes. I felt a little tug of pity for her at that moment. It was more than likely that Sturdevant would never go home again.

By now young Wallace's easy air had left him. It was beginning to dawn on him that he had never played poker like this before. Possibly it was also dawning on him that he stood to lose and to lose a great deal. When he spoke, which was seldom, his voice was clipped. He dealt rapidly as if afraid to waste a single moment.

Wallace flicked the cards across the table. From the bar, I heard Ernie Kling's great voice bellow, "Don't do it again, then. I tell you it was my drink you drunk."

Sturdevant glanced down at his first card. It was the king of clubs. He turned up the edge of his hole card, then put his hand over it. He looked across the table at Wallace's pile. It was much lower than it had been only twenty minutes before.

"Five hundred," he said and pushed a thick pile of bills to the center of the table.

Wallace stared down at his face card which was a five. He picked up his closed card, studied it. He said, "Raise you five hundred," and did so with one fast motion.

STURDEVANT hesitated a fraction of a second. It probably seemed to him as if Wallace was raising on a card as small as a five he doubtless had another five in the hole.

Sturdevant said, "Call." Wallace dealt the second card. Sturdevant drew a queen, Wallace a six. Sturdevant checked. Wallace bet five hundred. Sturdevant, to my surprise, raised two thousand. Now Wallace hesitated. If Sturdevant had caught a second queen his pair of fives weren't worth much. After a thoughtful thirty seconds, Wallace saw the raise.

The third cards were a nine and a ten respectively. Sturdevant eyed Wallace's pile of bills appraisingly. He said, very quietly, "I shall bet four thousand dollars."

It cost Wallace everything but his last hundred dollars to stay in the pot. I observed his hand trembled slightly as he picked up the deck.

Wallace took a deep breath.

I glanced toward the bar. With the exception of Ernie Kling, who had his nose in a glass, every eye was upon the card table. The silence was such that I could hear Lena's asthmatic breathing from the rear of the room.

Wallace dealt. The first card paired Sturdevant's showing king. Wallace's card was a six. For a long moment neither of them moved. Then Sturdevant counted out his wad of bills. He pushed them to the middle of the table with deliberation.

At this point the hands seemed clear enough to me.

Sturdevant had a pair of kings showing and it was quite likely that his closed card was a queen, giving him two pairs altogether—kings and queens. Wallace

had sixes on the board. Since he had raised on the first card it was likely he had fives wired. That would give him fives and sixes.

I was aware of Mapes' voice in my ear. "I think," he said without moving his lips, "I think this is it."

"Fifteen thousand dollars," said Sturdevant and there was a tiny break in his voice.

This was his moment. His entire life depended on Wallace's next move. Wallace blinked his eyes quickly. He said, harshly, "I have nothing to call that with."

Sturdevant leaned across the table slightly.

"Do you want to call it?"

"Yes."

"You have a spread," said Sturdevant.

Wallace hesitated. Now the burden was upon him. Heretofore it had been Sturdevant who had been gambling for terrific stakes. Now Wallace was called upon to make an equally vital bet. That valley land was Wallace's future as surely as Sturdevant's stakes were his.

"Yes," said Wallace in a strained voice, "I have a spread."

He took a wallet from his pocket. He fumbled in its depths. He produced a dog-eared deed.

"This," he said, "this against your fifteen thousand. Is that it?"

Sturdevant nodded slightly. "If you will indorse it," he said. "Indorse it over to me. Just in case—"

"Give me a pen," said young Wallace.

Mapes thrust one into his hand. Wallace scrawled his name on the back of the deed and tossed it into the pot. In a hoarse whisper he said, "Call."

Sturdevant drew a deep breath. He turned over his hole card. It was the queen of spades.

He said, "Kings on queens. I believe that beats your two small pair. I—"

THERE was a sudden roar of rage from Ernie King at the bar. I twisted my head around in time to see a tall dusty cowman lift a whiskey glass. Angrily, he yelled at Kling, "All right, damn you, if it's your drink again, take it!"

He hurled the fiery liquid and the glass along with it full in Kling's face.

They went for their holsters simultaneously. Their Colts roared in unison. I saw at once from the position of Ernie Kling's gun muzzle that the borrowed time on which he had lived so long had at last come due for collection.

A bullet had smashed through Kling's heart while his own shot had been two feet wide of the mark. I figured it had whistled somewhere three feet to the left of my head into the card room.

Kling's knees buckled and his gun

dropped from nerveless fingers. He opened his mouth and as he fell to the sawdust floor there was an expression of incredulity in his eyes. Mapes ran into the bar. For the first time in two hours Sturdevant lifted his eyes from the cards, looked beyond Wallace to the other room. Wallace did not move. His head was bent and his eyes stared unblinkingly at the queen of spades which Sturdevant had exposed.

The sheriff and his deputy raced in from the street. Someone said, "It's Kling, sheriff. He had it coming. Grannick done it. Self defence. There's twenty witnesses."

The sheriff nodded. Grannick handed over his gun, butt first. "You better come with me and make a statement," said the sheriff. "You," he said to his deputy. "Get the body out of here. And Mapes! Close the place for the night. Everybody out now. Break up that card game, too."

Sturdevant stood up. His brow was suddenly lined and he looked very tired, very old.

"The card game's over anyway," he said. "Isn't it, Wallace? You've had enough, haven't you?"

Wallace didn't answer. His eyes were fixed upon Sturdevant's cards as if he were hypnotized. I moved toward him, to offer some absurd words of consolation. Then I saw the blood.

"My God," I said, "look."

On the left side of Wallace's back was a widening stain of red. I seized his shoulder, shook him. Sturdevant lifted his head and stared into his face.

"Dead!" he said. "He's dead!"

The sheriff was at my side, then Mapes. "Good God," said Mapes. "That wild slug of Kling's. One chance in a thousand and it got him right through the heart. Poor kid."

They took young Wallace's body out with the corpse of the man who had killed him. The sheriff and the deputy cleared out the saloon. Lena still stood in the corner breathing wheezily. Mapes reached down, picked up the cash and the deed to Wallace's spread.

"Tough," he said. "Tough on the kid. But what the hell. Sturdevant, you did a beautiful job."

Lena, the Piute, came forward. She touched Sturdevant's shoulder. Beneath frowning puzzled brows she looked at him appealingly. "Now?" she said. "You come home now?"

Sturdevant drew a deep breath and there was a sort of an insane triumph shining in his eyes. He spoke in a high lilting voice, not too far on the right side of hysteria.

"No," he said. "No, Lena. I'm never coming home again. Never! Never! Give her a couple of hundred, Mapes. And give me the rest. And get me off on the morning stage and don't let me take a drink."

Mapes counted out twenty-three hundred dollars. This he gave to Sturdevant. He pushed two hundred across the table to Lena who stared at it wonderingly.

"I'll keep my part of the bargain," he said. "I've got the deed. You've got your cash and I'll see you get to that Doc in Frisco. I—"

He stopped dead and stared at me. Idly I had turned over Wallace's hole card. It was the six of diamonds. Three sixes lay face up upon the table.

STURDEVANT looked down. "My God," he said. "He bluffed on that first bet. He had a six in the hole, not a five. He—"

His voice died away. His eyes were suddenly dead. His face was as gray as a desert rock. His hands shook as if he had palsy.

"He beat me," he said in a hollow breaking voice. "He beat me."

Mapes looked at him anxiously. "So what?" he asked. "Who knows about it but us? We—"

"He beat me," said Sturdevant hopelessly. "Three sixes. He—"

"Listen," said Mapes, "listen, Sturdevant—"

Sturdevant didn't hear him. He beat his fist desperately, monotonously on the table. He said desperately, more to himself than to us, "There's got to be one thing. There's got to be one thing a man believes in. There's got to be something that he'll stick to. One decent steadfast rule he'll never break."

"Sturdevant," said Mapes. "Are you crazy? Are you—"

"Never," said Sturdevant, like a man about to die, which indeed he was, "never have I robbed a man at cards."

"Now listen," began Mapes again. And again Sturdevant didn't hear him.

"Mapes," he said, "give me that cash. All of it. And the deed. Give it to me quickly, before I crack up. Quickly."

"No," said Mapes. "Who will ever know? Think what it means to you, Sturdevant. Think of that girl. Think of that stinking Piute hut where—"

Sturdevant's trembling right hand moved up and down. He held a gun and it was pointed at Mapes' stomach.

"Give it to me!" he shrieked. "I'll kill you if you don't. I'll—"

Mapes put the cash and the deed on the table. Sturdevant's upper teeth bit deep into his lip. He said to me, "Can I trust you?"

I nodded.

"Then see that this money, that deed gets to Wallace's family. Tonight."

I promised. Sturdevant dropped his gun to the floor. He sank into his seat and his eyes were wet with tears. He spoke in a trembling, dead tone.

"A drink," he said. "For God's sake give me a drink."

"Can you pay for it?" Mapes asked bitterly.

"Give him a drink," I said, tossing a dollar on the table. "Give him a bottle."

Sullenly Mapes went to the bar. He returned with a bottle. Sturdevant snatched it from his hand. He lifted it to his mouth and gulped a half pint without stopping.

From the shadows at the rear of the room, Lena came forward again. She said. "You come home now?" And this time there was certainty in her voice.

Sturdevant nodded. He stood up and leaned on her arm. She took the bottle from him and led him to the door. His back was bent and his head was bowed.

Mapes, with twisted lips, said, "The dirty little rat. I never should have trusted a boozed-up squaw man. I never—"

For a reason I have never quite understood I swung with all my strength to the point of his jaw.

# DEPOT DOG

## BY PAUL ANNIXTER

LATE Saturday afternoon Quartermaster Blount stepped out of his khaki-colored peep patrol in front of Supply Depot 10, on River Street.

"Has the night watch showed up yet?" he inquired of Sergeant Kelleher, on duty at the delivery door.

"No, sir, but he's due any minute."

"Send him back to the office as soon as he comes," Blount said.

This was the day on which the River Street warehouse of the Northern Transport Company officially became Army Supply Depot 10, and Quartermaster Blount was on hand to take over. But a most distasteful job went with the formality and Blount had been dreading it all week.

*They found Dinkel reared up on his hind legs, barking at something high on the stack.*

ILLUSTRATED BY CARL PFEUFER

Old Axel Bjorenson, the Transport Company's night watchman for the past fifteen years, had stayed on the job during the two weeks in which the warehouse was being disgorged of its old goods and refilled with the Army's supplies. He was past sixty-five and no longer of practical account in these high-pressure, defense-driven days. Technically he was already fired by the Transport Company, as Blount knew, but it had been expedient that he remain ignorant of the fact until the Army took over; otherwise he might have walked out on the job and gummed up proceedings, which would never do. It had fallen the lot of Quartermaster Blount to inform the old man that he was out on his ear, as of the 30th of the month, and that unhappy day was already less than two weeks off.

Blount sat down in the watchman's cubbyhole of an office to wait. What he saw about him made him hate his task the more. A table, an old chair made comfortable with leather cushions, a shelf with tobacco and two blackened pipes on it, and a heavy old clock ticking methodically on the wall, ancient enough by the look to have been brought over from Norway, Blount thought. The peace of stolid routine was in the air here.

A few minutes and Blount heard the old Norwegian coming. Into the little office burst Axel's dog, Dinkel. He was a nondescript mixture of several breeds in which Airdale predominated and a sort of humorous cleverness set the pace. He was of the one-track, shock troop sort and loved nothing but Axel, outside of a clash with three times his weight in pampered dog flesh. He had a funny way of camping on an old mat by the door with one eye shut and the other blinking at Axel if he stirred so much as a finger. And if anyone with an out-of-the-way thought in his head so much as set foot on the premises Dinkel was on to him. He seemed able to smell thoughts and motives a lot better than most people convey them via alleged mental communion. He and Blount had O.K.'d each other from the first in the wordless way of seasoned old campaigners.

DINKEL made a hurried check-up on everything in the little office, including Blount, cocked an eye up at the clock on the wall—old Axel had taught him long ago to tell when it was six o'clock—and seemed to find everything to his satisfaction. "Wurrff!" he remarked and scurried out to go sniffing up and down the long aisles that ran between the mountains of stacked goods, his hard-packed body as a-snap with vim and life as a boss-riveter trying to break his last week's schedule. Dinkel had reported for duty. All the four years of his life he had been on night watch and it was plain to Blount he was nuts over his job.

Axel Bjorenson came in and set his lunch pail on the shelf. As soon as the old man sat down Blount came out with what he had to say. His voice was almost gruff with pent-up feeling and he took it out on the system that made such things necessary.

Old Axel took it as Blount had expected, stricken, silent, like a pole-axed animal.

"Two weeks they wish to give me," he said at last. "I do not want any two weeks. All I want is job. I give them back the weeks. So I will go—tomorrow. By tomorrow night they can get new man."

"It's tough, Axel, but that's the way it is. There's nothing I can do about it," said Blount.

They sat for a minute in silence, a silence that seemed thunderous all at once. Then Dinkel came rushing in and began whimpering. He barked; twice, three times. Blount saw his eye was cocked on the clock. Both men looked up. The clock had stopped as they talked.

Bjorenson got up and climbed stiffly onto a chair.

"My clock must have overhear the bad news," he said. "The first time in five years she quit on me like this. Well, I will wind her once more for the sake of the dog. Dinkel, he must go by the clock. He knows when it is six at night and when it is six in the morning. Always he tells me, right on the minute."

When the clock was ticking again Dinkel subsided on the mat. Blount got

up and said good night, leaving the envelope containing Axel's pay-check on the table.

Next day all of Axel's belongings were taken away and by night two regular army men had been detailed as Depot guards. Axel did not come down that evening, nor the next night, to stand about or look things over as everyone had thought he would. But Dinkel did. He showed up about the usual time, out of habit, ran into the little back office, looked up at the place where the clock had hung, whimpered a bit, and ran up and down the aisles, sniffing. He was perplexed, miserable.

It got so he would appear two or three times in the course of an evening. The new guards came to know him and like him. The men on graveyard came to set aside a bit of their lunch for him, for almost nightly he would show up around one o'clock, the hour when Axel and he had been wont to eat their midnight lunch.

But he was a creature in torment. He could not re-orient himself. He was a dog who had had a definite job for four years. Now he had none. For four years his gears had been nicely meshed in habit and duty. Now he was like a car standing still with racing motor and no one to turn off the key. He was a dog in hell.

"It's a damned shame," said Quartermaster Blount, when he heard about Dinkel's unflagging schedule. "It was tough enough on the old man, but it's plain hell on the dog."

THAT was about eleven o'clock one night and Blount had dropped in for a chat with his friend Sergeant Kelleher before turning in. As they sat talking Dinkel came scurrying in. He looked the place over swiftly, cocked an eye up on the wall in search of the non-existent clock, looked in both chairs for Bjorenson and found strangers. "Wurrff!" he said and skittered away down the darkened aisle between the stacks for a further check-up on the joint. He was still trying to fill the old groove. He looked thin and worn and worried and there was a starey look in his eyes. Life had gone on and left him going through the motions.

"I had a dog like that once," said Sergeant Kellcher. "There was only one job and one guy for him and I was both of them. And I went away to sea for a year. So they told me when I got back what this dog had been doing while I'm away. He'd spent all his time hunting for me. So when I got back he never knew it, see? He'd got in the habit of being miserable and hunting for me and nothing was going to stop him. He'd forgot what he was looking for. They put a name to it, I remember—abscess on the mind, or some such thing—"

"Obsession. Mental fixation," grunted the quartermaster. "It's what a pooch takes on instead of staring at the wall like a human—"

"Hunh?"

"Skip it. It's just something that'll kill a dog in time. One of these days I'm going over the head of the C. O. and get to some Brass Hat at the top about old Axel and his pooch—"

From a distant corridor came a sudden outburst of excited yelps and barking, mounting each second to a higher pitch.

"What d'you s'pose that's about?" Kelleher got up and looked into the dim main corridor.

The yapping continued. And Dinkel was no pushover pooch to back-talk at his own echo.

Suddenly an idea hit Blount. He ducked past the other and sped down the aisle. Kelleher followed.

They found Dinkel reared up on his hind legs against a pile of packing cases, barking at something high up on the stack. Blount stood looking over the boxes, straining his ears, a hand raised for silence.

No sound.

Then, as Dinkel fell silent for a moment, a faint click came to his ears, and he had it.

"Grab the dog and get out of the way," he yelled to Kelleher, clambering swiftly up the mountainous stack of cases. A minute later, with a small square box in his arms, he was speeding down the corridor in a soft-footed rush. In the alley he plunged the box into

the big metal tank of water where the army trucks filled their radiators.

TOWARD noon next day a khaki-colored M. P. car drove up to Depot 10 and Major Territon—"Old Holy Territon," to his junior staff officers—got out.

"Your hunch was right, Quartermaster," he barked through his gray seal-like mustaches as Blount came out. "That final check-up man from Northern Transport was a phony. They never sent an inspector out. This fellow stole one of their trucks and came down here with a cooked-up story. They got him dead to rights; his fingerprints were all over the cab of the truck. We sweated a confession out of him this morning. There was enough stuff in that box to have blown half the depot through the roof and left you in flames. The thing was set for 11:30. Your water stopped it at 11:22. Close thing. My congratulations, sir. This calls for citations, you know. But what I want to know is how the devil did you find the thing?"

"The dog found it, sir—"

"Eh? What dog?"

"The depot dog, that's been around here for years. Belongs to the Transport Company's night watchman. The clock on this machine had a dry click to it that was a dead ringer to the tick of the old clock that used to hang in the watchman's office. I've figured it out. The dog thought he'd found the clock again. We heard him barking out among the stacks and there the thing was. We'd never have come onto it without Dinkel. He warned us about that check-up man, too. I was here when that truck drove up yesterday, sir. Dinkel went after the fellow so that we had to hold him while the man made his phony inspection. He was telling us plainer than any words, if we'd had any sense, that the guy was a no good fake and a killer—"

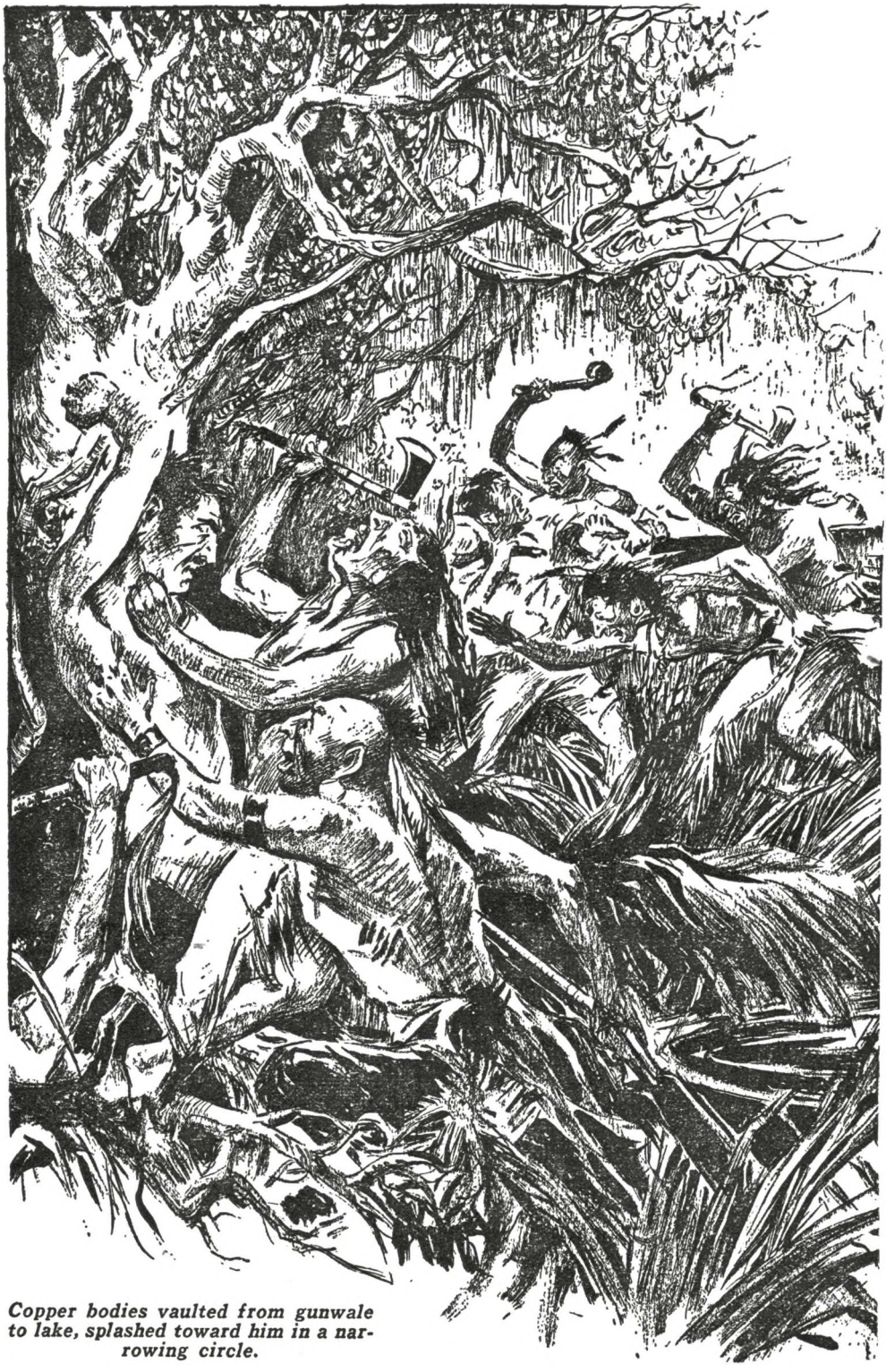
"Indeed. A most remarkable dog, I should judge," said the major, clearing his throat.

"That dog is worth three good men as depot watch, sir," said Blount. "What I'm getting at is that if any privileges go with citation, sir, I want mention made of the dog and what he did." And Blount launched heatedly into the story of Dinkel and his master.

"I take it you haven't heard that there's talk at the top about enlisting smart dogs like that for supply guard duty. They're on the lookout for good dog trainers, too. It's a new ruling, by the way."

"Does that mean that Dinkel can stay on at the depot?"

The Major chuckled in his throat. "He can. In fact, he'll have a devil of a time if he tries to get away from here now. I'm recommending him today for guard duty—under pay, too, if this old Norwegian of yours is as good a dog man as you say he is."

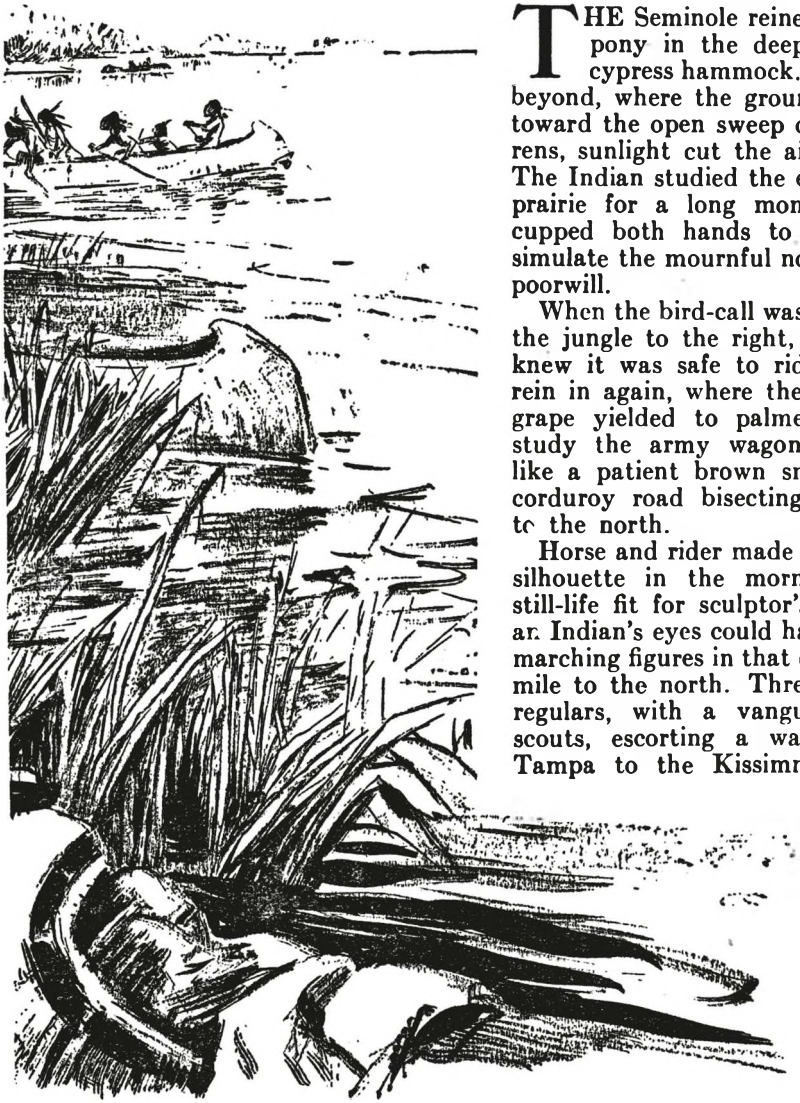


*Copper bodies vaulted from gunwale to lake, splashed toward him in a narrowing circle.*

# OKEECHOBEE OUTLAW

*A Captain Carter Novelette*

BY WILLIAM DU BOIS



THE Seminole reined in his shaggy pony in the deep gloom of the cypress hammock. A hundred feet beyond, where the ground rose sharply toward the open sweep of the pine barrens, sunlight cut the air like a sword. The Indian studied the expanse of open prairie for a long moment before he cupped both hands to his mouth, to simulate the mournful note of the whip-poorwill.

When the bird-call was answered from the jungle to the right, Willy Emathla knew it was safe to ride forward. To rein in again, where the tangle of wild grape yielded to palmetto scrub. To study the army wagon-train winding, like a patient brown snake, down the corduroy road bisecting the savannah to the north.

Horse and rider made a frozen copper silhouette in the morning. A heroic still-life fit for sculptor's bronze. Only an Indian's eyes could have counted the marching figures in that column, a dusty mile to the north. Three companies of regulars, with a vanguard of militia scouts, escorting a wagon-train from Tampa to the Kissimmee ford. . . .

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL STAHR

Willy Emathla was a chief, for all his incongruous name. A symbol of another America that would never die, indomitable and eternally proud. His forehead furrowed as his hand dropped automatically to the rifle slung at his rude saddle-bow. For an instant there was the glint of cold murder in his eyes.

He knew the wagons would swing north, after they had crossed the river. Toward the Lakes, and Fort King. On to the St. John's, where the main army was still in bivouac, though the last treaty with the Big Cypress braves was months old now. On to St. Augustine, the secure farms, the thronging white faces. . . .

WILLY EMATHLA was young for a chieftain, but he could remember when white faces had not dared to show themselves west of Picoalta, or south of the Ocala prairie. When the Seminole had ranged the Floridas at will, from Cape Sable to the Apalachicola.

Remembering, his frown deepened; the taut copper finger tightened on the trigger-guard. Another signal would bring a hundred of his scouts out of the cypress on his heels. Together, they could tether their ponies, creep through the scrub to the edge of the savannah, well within rifle-range.

And yet, experience had taught him that it was only wisdom to respect a treaty. With his own eyes, he had watched the deportation of Coacoochee and Osceola. . . . Hate could not blind Emathla to justice; and these white invaders—so far, at least—had observed their agreement with scrupulous care.

The Cypress treaty was simple enough. Signed last spring in Tampa, it had provided certain subsidies for the hundreds of Seminoles still inhabiting the swamp—on condition that they hunt strictly within its borders. On the other hand, the Army of the White Father had promised to leave the Indian unmolested in his domain. To follow that same wilderness road in the savannah, when moving supplies between the coasts of the peninsula. Above all, never to explore south of the Kissimmee ford.

Emathla had fixed his mark to the document last fall, on the parade-ground in Tampa, along with Coacoochee and Bowlegs. A few weeks later, he had stood by in silence, as a kind of unofficial hostage, to watch Coacoochee deported to the Arkansas country for violating the pledge—along with his council, their wives and families. Returned to the swamp in the early summer, he had offered no reprisal when Bowlegs died with a sentry's bullet between his eyes, after a pitiful attempt to pilfer stores at the Coquina stockade.

Willy Emathla came out of his unhappy reverie with a jolt; he rose high in his stirrups, shading his eyes to stare out across the heat-shimmer of the plain. Five figures had detached from that marching column, to swing south into the palmetto scrub. Only an Indian's eyes could tell that they were following a trail that led straight to this hammock, and the cypress bottoms beyond. Only a chief could call the next move, if a unit of the Army broke its promise in the full light of day.

The Seminole lifted the gun to his shoulder in one fluent motion. Without turning his eyes from the marching quintet, he knew that a hundred other muzzles had snapped to attention down the line of cypress jungle. . . . And then, Willy Emathla smiled a most un-Indian smile, dropped his gun to the pommel again, and pursed his lips for another long-drawn bird-call.

If this was a prelude to invasion of the Seminole's last sanctuary, he had another way to handle it. A better way.

The surface of the swamp was powder-dry, thirsty for the spring rains. A brown mattress of prehistoric bog, springy under the pony's hoofs. A little acrid dust swirled, as Willy Emathla and his scouts galloped south again. The dust had settled long before the five marching men could gain the shade of the first tree. The silence was complete among the sad yellow cypress—an inhuman quiet.

AN hour later, the five marchers paused on the lip of a prehistoric bog fit only for a dinousaur's bath. A black slough ringed by the ghosts of dead trees. It

was as though they were the first humans to disturb the peace since the dawn of time.

Brevet Captain John Carter had been an amateur botanist once. He knelt on a patch of apparently dry mud, to spread the petals of a monstrous purple flower —and snapped back his hand as the leaves whispered under his exploring fingers. . . . The snake, a darker shadow in the slough's heart, glided smoothly across the veined lily-pads and vanished in the depths.

"Water moccasin," said Sergeant Grady easily. "Lucky he saw you first, Captain. Worse than diamond-backs any day, when they're feeling mean. Worse than anything in this heathen country, unless it's chiggers and coral snakes."

Captain Carter cursed his schoolboy blush as he rose to his feet. The mud flat was not so dry after all, now that the sergeant had added his bulk. Glutinous ooze rose half-way to his boot-tops when he turned to face the others. To search their faces, for any let-down in discipline.

Brevet Captain Carter was a stickler for discipline, even though his own appearance was far from military at the moment. In fact, the palm-leaf hat suggested a planter rather than a martinet; the tattered fatigue uniform, sweat-stained after three days' march from Tampa, did nothing to advertise its owner's origin. But John Carter was a West Pointer and a gentleman; the level gray eyes and fighting chin challenged all comers to question that. So did the zig-zag of scar across one cheek bone—a startling badge of service in the Captain's mahogany tan. He had won that scar last spring, in the bitter fighting across the wet prairies of the Ocklawaha —when the menace of the scalping knife had been lifted from Central Florida, once and for all. Captain John Carter was a veteran of a ruinous Indian war, even though he still took advice from his sergeant on matters of botany. . . . His crisp voice recaptured authority as he turned to the poker-faced guide at his elbow.

"You said the canoe was hidden here, Hospetarkee."

The Seminole snapped to attention in an earnest travesty of a salute—a scarecrow of a man, in the nankeen dress pantaloons of a dragoon, the bandoliers of an infantryman of the line still crossed on his copper chest. Hospetarkee Emathla had been an Army guide since the massacre of '36. These bits of discarded equipment were his own badges of service.

"If the Captain will follow the bank to those mangrove roots—"

"Bring out the dugout yourself," said Grady. "The Captain will stay here and watch."

From the green depths of the far shore, a twig cracked in the hush. The quintet vanished in a twinkling, as Carter hissed an order—a precision that underlined both prowess and nerves. The Seminole burrowed among the gnarled roots of the mangrove. Sergeant Grady was already one with the primeval ooze, like a contented porker—a picture that went with the mud-caked whiskers, the hopeful grunt as he sighted down the bore of his squirrel rifle. . . . From his own ambush in the saw-grass, Carter saw

that the Canova twins had already faded like ghosts among the cypress boles.

In their way, these twins were the strangest members of his party. Hawk-faced Spaniards, with a blood-line that traced back to Menendez. Swart hidalgos, born two centuries beyond their time. Members of the St. Augustine militia, they had volunteered as one for this foray in a Spanish liquid with the sibilants of Castile.

DESPITE his bulk, Grady was the first to bounce to his feet as the wild hog nuzzled down to the water's edge across the slough—squealed once at the apparition on the other bank, and crashed from sight among the saw-grass. A chuckle united the group again as the half-naked guide paddled the dugout into open water, though no one spoke as they eased guns and duffle into the unwieldy bottom.

The craft rode easily on the chocolate water, in spite of their combined weights. Grady took the bow at his Captain's nod, with the cocked rifle still on his knees; Carter lowered himself against the thwart behind him. The Canova twins sat amidships as Hospetarkee handed each of them a paddle. Their dark eyes snapped with excitement now; muscles rippled in unison as they sent the canoe skimming down the stagnant reach.

"One hour to Okeechobee," said Hospetarkee Emathla.

Okeechobee. . . .

Brevet Captain John Carter leaned forward eagerly. For the moment, the youthful enthusiasm of the naturalist conquered his hard-shelled reserve. He could never even forget the hard task he had come here to perform, in his eagerness to glimpse the weird inland sea of which Audubon had written. Perhaps this was why he had offered himself so readily, when the commanding general had asked for an officer volunteer. Why he had listened to Hospetarkee when the latter assured him that the whole Nation would be hunting egrets along the Gulf in this season.

Surely this minor odyssey meant more to him than venturing upon forbidden ground to bring a renegade back to justice. He understood his motives completely as he sat immobile in the dugout bow, watching the sun-pattern change on the dark water ahead as a blue heron boomed into space from a mudbank in midstream. This hot spring afternoon he was an explorer on his own. What if that ruffian Perelli was the reason?

It had begun two months ago in St. Augustine, when Perelli had ambushed the mail-coach on the Tocoi road. Crimes of this order had grown rare of late, as the territory groped its way back to stable government again, after years of terror and martial law. . . . Perelli was known in St. Augustine: a thoroughgoing Sardinian rogue, whose parents had come to the colony in the great Minorcan migration of Spanish times. Now he was an unrepentant scalawag at seventy-odd, a confirmed poacher whose usual abode was the gaol of Fort San Marco. No one had suspected that he was also the leader of a cutthroat gang, until the episode of the stage-coach.

It was Perelli's first and last participation in a major robbery. The guards aboard the coach had handled their assignment well: most of the gang was dead in the palmettos when the smoke cleared. Though Perelli made a clean getaway with the money sacks intended for the garrison, it was evident that this was the climax to his misspent career, as well as the *finis*. By the same token, it was impossible to track either the money sacks or Perelli—until he was all but cornered a week later on the Canova farm just outside the city gates.

The Canovas were not Minorcans; thier blood was Castilian, not Balearic. When that ill-fated horde had descended upon the old town, in the years before the American revolution, there had been Canovas in the colony for more than two hundred years. When the Spanish flag had been lowered at last on the Governor's House on the Plaza of the Constitution, a Canova had closed his books and prepared to emigrate to Cuba. The twins had stayed to prepare the farm for auction; later they had put business aside to take part in the Seminole war. Now they were faced with the need of proving that they had *not* harbored

*Hospetarkee walked forward to meet the bearded fugitive, one arm extended palm upward in the gesture of peace.*

Perelli—though the empty money-bags were found buried in their patio. Obviously, there was no quicker method of silencing gossip than to bring the renegade to justice.

For this reason, the proud Canova twins sat behind John Carter now, driving the dugout down the saffron reach that led through the heart of Big Cypress to the as-yet uncharted inland sea.

## CHAPTER II

### HERO IN REVERSE

HOSPETARKEE entered the picture at this point, and Hospetarkee Emathla's advice was too successful to be ignored by a commanding general intent on restoring law to a troubled land. . . . Perelli had escaped from the Canova farm, with seconds to spare. At various times in the following fortnight, he had been seen in a sloop on the St. John's—in the sutler's store at Fort King—on the corduroy road that skirted the great swamp on its way to Tampa. Rumor had it that he was heading South to join the pirates of the keys; but Hospetarkee gave these rumors the lie. Hospetarkee was sure that the hardy criminal was lurking on the shore of Okeechobee itself. Waiting for the excitement to subside before he parted with his whiskers, walked into the open like any good citizen, and set sail for Charleston with seventy thousand dollars of government gold.

Hospetarkee, like all good hunters, had proved his theory in the flesh. Casting aside his own trappings of civilization, he had slipped back into the Cypress on his own, like a copper ghost on the prowl. When he had spotted a lonely campfire on high ground far down the western shore, he had grounded his dugout and walked forward to meet the bearded fugitive, one arm extended palm upward in the wordless gesture of peace. Hospetarkee had talked a long time with the renegade that day—mostly across the cold muzzle of a rifle. It was a talk that did much to dispel Perelli's suspicions. When Hospetarkee had returned, weeks later, with meal and a side of bacon, Perelli was certain that the Indian was his friend. So certain, that he had paid for the stores with a Washington gold piece. Convincing proof to the commanding General that Hospetarkee Emathla was a valuable addition to any intelligence staff, when the Indian had asked for a small detachment to accompany his next journey to forbidden ground.

AS night fell on the lake, that same detachment lay bivouaced in the dubious shelter of palmetto boughs, lashed by the fury of spring rain.

The storm had caught them unexpectedly, just as the dugout nosed its cautious way from the slough to the lake itself. They had brought their stores ashore, to a bank mercifully free of mud, one of those hunch-back mounds of earth that distinguish the true Everglades so far to the south. Now, as Grady and the Canovas cut more palmettos to reinforce their impromptu house for the night, John Carter stood naked as Adam in the lake, rejoicing in the sting of rain upon bare flesh.

The water, veiled in driving scud, was dove-gray in the twilight, and endless as the sea itself. For one moment Carter could smell home again in the clean whip of rain, the scent of New England lilacs on a gate in spring; the all-but-forgotten memory of the girl he had put behind him, to take the hard road of heroes. . . . Then, as the wind veered, his lungs drank in the rank jungle smell again. His mind spun painlessly back to the present, while he doused his head in the clean, root-stained water, washing the muck from face and body. Hospetarkee, who had stood discreetly aside while this mad Christian ritual of bathing progressed, splashed nearer at a sign from Carter.

"You're sure we can reach his camp by moonrise?"

"Sooner, Captain, if this rain dies down."

"Suppose he's moved on?"

"He would hardly dare, with the spring storms so near. Besides, he depends on me for his food now. For life itself. He will wait for me at the place we agreed on."

From the dusky shore-line, like muted violin notes in the dark, the call of a whippoorwill. . . . To Carter's ears, there was nothing odd in the sound; he continued his ablutions while he weighed the guide's last remarks. He did not even turn when Hospetarkee dropped chin-deep in the water, with primal terror in his eyes.

"Perhaps we should push on, without resting—"

"*Hide yourself, Captain, quickly—!*"

But Captain John Carter needed no warning now. The sudden nightmare of rifle-cracks along the shore-line was shock enough. . . . He was stumbling through the shallows before the volley died. The rain had dropped like a white curtain between him and his command. Through it, he heard Grady's more than adequate cursing, the ominous crash of palmettos trampled flat under feet that could ignore concealment now. Then the sudden phantom of the war canoe glided between him and the shore; the rain-lashed air was full of copper bodies vaulting from gunwale to lake, splashing toward him in a narrowing circle.

It had happened too fast for conscious thought. As he went down into the mud again in a melee of thrashing limbs, John Carter saw them lift Hospetarkee bodily from the water, like a muskrat from its burrow; he saw the tomahawk crash down on the guide's skull like doom itself. . . . He steeled his nerves for a similar blow as they pinioned his arms and legs in the murky water. But no blow fell as they lifted him high on their shoulders— as they marched into shore with their burden, a hero in reverse.

GRADY and the Canova twins were trussed up in a neat row on the beach. But Carter could see that none of them was so much as scratched, as his captors tumbled him into their midst. Beyond, a half-dozen canoes floated in a half-moon, just outside the glitter of the smudge-fire they had built inside their shelter an aeon or so ago. . . . The Indians were everywhere, swarming in the shallows, hacking with busy machetes through the underbrush. Carter tried to speak as his shoulder brushed Grady's, but his voice emerged in a dismal croak.

"Easy does it, Captain," said the sergeant. "Too bad they caught you in your bath. I hope you won't catch cold." Even in that crazy moment, Grady's chuckle had lost none of its heart-warming volume. "Next time, you'll probably clean up at the *end* of a campaign, not at the beginning."

"Don't waste time cheering me up, Sergeant." Carter's vioce had acquired its crispness again. "Tell me if you're hurt."

"Not even clipped, Captain. I was jumped from three sides at once. No time to fight back."

Carter glanced toward the Canova twins. The air about their heads was almost visibly blue with Spanish poetry, though Carter would never know if the words were curses or prayers. Grady followed his gaze, and smiled broadly. . . .

"Jaime knocked a brave galley-west, and got a clout for his pains. As you see, he's come 'round nicely. Enrique was frying bacon over that smudge when they jumped him. *He* didn't even have time to yell."

Carter dropped his voice to a whisper. "Why aren't we dead—all of us?"

"Because they don't want it that way, Captain. Maybe they'll take their time about killing us, back at the council fire. Maybe they'll trade us in for rum." Grady's chuckle robbed these word-pictures of their sting. "Be that as it may, they lost no time on Hospetarkee."

He nodded briefly toward the cypress fork above them. John Carter shivered, despite the drowsy warmth. . . . The Indian had been lashed to the tree-fork, like a scarecrow in a nightmare. A lolling copper scarecrow with a pulped red mass where the head should have been.

"Leave it to them to make their own laws," said Grady. "Specially when a member of the tribe deserts. Hospetarkee was one of the Emathlas when he came over to us, you know. . . . Give the buzzards a few weeks; they'll pick those bones cleaner than any skeleton in a museum. It'll make a nice warning to his relatives when *they* paddle by this beach and think about moving north—" Grady swallowed the rest as a tall silhouette loomed above them, screening the faint

glow of the fire. "Speaking of the Emathla boys, here's Willy himself. I don't know whether to be glad or sorry—"

Willy Emathla addressed John Carter in an English whose purity would have startled the captain a year ago. Since then, he had heard of the chief's half-Spanish father. Of Willy's education at the hands of the Franciscans in St. Augustine. Of his futile efforts to carve a kingdom for his people, until an expanding white economy had driven him into this final refuge. . . .

"Are you captain here?"

"Yes, Chief Emathla. We come in peace. To arrest the renegade Perelli."

"You come into my country under arms, without my permission. How can I believe you?"

"Why won't you give me a chance to prove myself?"

"If we came into *your* country under arms, is it possible you would give us that chance?"

JOHN CARTER dropped his eyes; once again he waited for the blow that did not come. Footsteps scuffed the sand beside him. He looked up in time to see two braves toss his sergeant into a canoe like a sack of corn. The Canova twins were already hunched against the thwarts of another dugout swimming away into darkness. Carter closed his eyes again as strong hands fastened on his neck and ankles. Dark water whispered beneath him now as the canoe swam up to receive him. Chief Emathla's whisper was part of the darkness, though it was clear enough.

"My own son will ferry you across the lake to our council fire, Captain. Perhaps you will think of reasons why you should live, on the way. I will listen to them, of course. Do not make me listen too long—"

The canoe was piled deep in furs and Carter wallowed in the unexpected softness of his berth. He saw the young Indian settle against the thwart and pick up a paddle, saw the magnificent sweep of his shoulders blot out the stars that had begun to show again behind the fading skirts of the rain-squall. And then, as the canoe bolted into deep water like a released torpedo, John Carter lay very still indeed. His fingers had closed around the bone handle of a Cuban machete, nestled deep in the furs. He turned the blade slowly upward until the razored edge was touching the thong that bound his wrists.

Chief Emathla's son spoke, in the barest of whispers. "Are you free now, Captain?"

Carter froze where he lay, the machete hard against the veins of one wrist. The Seminole spoke again, just as softly, bending forward briefly between paddle strokes:

"Lie quietly, Captain. I'll drop behind."

The paddle made a dark whorl beside the gunwale, braking their progress sharply. Chief Emathla's son feathered the water in the travesty of a full-armed stroke, then rested his elbows on the thwart to watch the last canoe glide by, a vague presence in the cottonwool blackness. Carter held his breath in wonder as the Seminole spun his own dugout on its stern with a casual backhand slap of the paddle, and sent it streaking for the shore again. Then he eased up to one elbow, his fingers hard on the handle of the machete.

"Don't move," said the Indian, easily. "Remember, you have lost Hospetarkee. Only I can lead you out of this swamp alive."

Carter spoke at random, astounded that his own voice could sound so natural. "Where did you learn English?"

"With my father, at the mission school in St. Augustine—when the Floridas were still a part of Spain. He wanted me to be ready, when the Americans came. To talk their language in peace, not in war." It is always a shock to a white man when an Indian smiles. Even when the smile is a bitter one.

Carter thought swiftly, *He means to take his revenge on me alone, in the dark. That's why he let the others go on ahead. No, that doesn't make sense, either. If he meant to cut my throat, why did he put this cane-knife under my hand? Maybe he has a knife of his own, up there in the stern. Maybe he wants to see which of us can handle it better.*

## CHAPTER III

### ESCAPE INTO NIGHTMARE

HE braced his knees against the splintery gunwales, feeling a dark cord snap in his brain. Raising his shoulders in a gargantuan heave, he sent the craft violently on its port bow. The dugout did not quite capsize, but Captain John Carter had rolled overside before it could right itself, to plummet for the bottom.

The paddle slapped above him as the Seminole steadied his canoe in the sudden wallow. Carter could hear the keel course above him, knew that the Indian was circling the spot where he had dived. . . . The bottom was nearer than he had thought; in fact, he plunged shoulder deep in mud before he could slow his progress. With the machete between his teeth, he leveled away on the slimy bottom, and swam under water toward the shore—naked as he had entered this world, and quite as uncertain of his future.

The water lightened before he broke surface a good hundred yards away. He found he was standing chin-deep in the shadow of a giant cypress, that there was no way to telling where land ended and shore began. The bottom underfoot quivered like jelly; he kicked free in sudden panic as the liquid bog fastened about his calves like a hungry mouth and all but sucked him under.

Carter glanced out across the lake again. The canoe still floated tranquilly a hundred yards away. The Seminole sat immobile at the stern, raking the shore-line with his eyes. Carter took the machete from between his teeth and sank it deep in the cypress bole above him. It balanced his weight, after a fashion, while his toes fumbled in the ooze, searching for the blessed solidity of the spreading roots. The trunk itself was smooth as peeled willow and murky with the lichens left from old high-water marks. The captain's toes curled around the slimy bulk of a cypress "knee," slipped with nightmare quickness along the steep pitch of the root as the nails clawed in vain for purchase. Once again he was ankle-deep in ooze—knee-deep now, as the bog began to suck him into its heart. . . .

He freed his limbs with a fearful effort, feeling the sweat run down his arm pits as he slapped face-down into the tepid water again. This time, he swam cautiously a hundred feet off shore, breathing hard with the effort it cost to keep afloat in the treacherous shallows, marking the spot where he had left the machete by the faint gleam of starlight on the blade. . . . The canoe still floated beyond, motionless as a painted decoration in some primitive water-color. Carter opened his mouth to shout, thought better of the impulse; and swam gingerly back to retrieve the machete.

For the next hour he explored the fluid shore-line with all the thoroughness of a map-maker, searching for an inch of solid earth to orient himself; and all the while, though he did not dare to look, he knew that the Indian in the dugout was paralleling his moves, whether he ventured into the maze of cypress knees again, or swam back in panic to the comparative safety of the open lake.

Twice he swam eagerly toward what looked like innocent sandbanks, until his cautious touch told him that they were quicksand too—bottomless as his growing despair. His teeth ached from the weight of the cane-knife, yet there was no other way to keep it close; he could not swim with the blade in his hand, and all but lost it when he tried to clutch it between elbow and rib. The machete was his only insurance, now; more than once he had heard vague stirrings in the heart of the swamp and knew that eyes wilder than the Seminole's were observing him in the dark. Then he could almost nerve himself to swim back to that waiting challenge in the canoe. But even now something urged him on to seek out a hidingplace.

At last, when he felt sure that he was only swimming in a hopeless circle, a dark reach of water opened on his left. He saw a ghostly outline of sawgrass against the stars, a great mud-flat gleaming with unholy iridescence, like the back of a slumbering dinosaur. Yet an instinct that went beyond thought

told him that here was solid ground at last. He forced his leaden limbs into a final effort and swam grimly on, downing the temptation to crawl out on the mud-flat in full view. He burrowed instead on the far bank of the reach, where the saw grass was thickest. The knife-edged stalks slashed at his legs, but he was beyond such minor irritants as he lay deep in his refuge, scarcely daring to breathe as the canoe glided by, circled once on the wide black mirror of the reach, and slipped back into the lake and darkness again.

FOR a moment the silence was absolute. Then it was broken by a rasping, sub-human cough—so near that Carter flattened into his hiding-place in sheer animal terorr as a heavy body wallowed into the water a bare hundred feet away, to cruise the reach in a long, lazy semicircle. A ten-foot bull 'gator, the monarch of all he surveyed. Only a dark triangle of snout and the hooded eyes were visible as he swung toward the bank again. Eyes that glowed like green flame in the starlight. Carter's fingers tightened on the machete—and relaxed again when a second 'gator coughed from the darkness beyond. The reptile monarch swung toward the sound. As his eyes swung away from the bank, his cruising snout was only a darker ripple on the black face of tl.e reach. Carter breathed again only when even the ripple had vanished into darkness.

He did not stir when he heard a devil's commotion among the sawgrass far up the reach. Not even the deep-throated bellow of contending champions could break in on his weariness now. Sergeant Grady had lectured him on the habits of bull-gators years ago. How the males fought for supremacy in their own domain, especially when the season turned toward spring. How their battle bellow and their love song were one, to untrained ears. Carter knew that that war-call had saved him for a while. Probably he was safe until morning, if those two slits of hellfire did not return to probe his hiding-place. Chief Emathla's son would never find him here—though he did not doubt that the Seminole was waiting in his dugout where the reach widened into the lake again.

Marooned like a mud-daubed Crusoe on this sawgrass island, he was faced with a clear-cut choice. To proceed upstream with the morning, until he stumbled on a 'gator wallow. To swim into Okeechobee again and accept that Indian's bizarre offer.

He remembered another hour of decision—years ago, when he had yet to win his spurs as an Indian hunter. When he had hidden among the reeds on a sandbank in the Kissimmee, waiting for death to find him out. Only the dusk had come instead, and Grady had swum out to rescue him.

And he thought: *Now it is my turn to rescue Grady. Instead, I am running away. I am afraid to face that young Indian in the dark. Afraid to explore his offer to help me.*

He could picture Grady quite clearly at this moment, blinking in the smoke of Emathla's council-fire, ignoring the menacing circle of braves with his Irish nerve intact. And he thought, not without bitterness: *In a way, both Grady and the Canovas are better off without me. Trust him to strike some kind of a bargain that keeps his hair until morning. Trust my temper to bring the pack of them howling on our necks, if I were there at this moment. And yet, what will happen to them if morning comes with no sign of Chief Emathla's son?*

He pondered the strange dialogue in the dugout. Perhaps the young brave was tired of his swamp-bound life. Perhaps he hoped to quit the Cypress for good, to find work in Tampa, with Carter's help. Obviously, he was willing to risk the fate of his uncle, Hospetarkee, if it meant escape to that other world....

But what right had he, John Carter, to consider an offer of escape?

He had come into this swamp to bring back an outlaw. Until that mission was completed, he had no right to consider his own safety.

Obviously, he owed it to Emathla to return his renegade son to him for whatever punishment a stern father might devise. Just as obviously, he must ask the Nation's pardon for violating the terms of the treaty. Even though that

violation had taken place on a superior's orders, in the name of justice. . . . Captain Carter had fought Indians long enough to know that *their* notion of justice was unchanging as any tribal custom. Captain Carter was a New Englander. He could understand that attitude quite well.

At the moment he crouched naked in a swamp, ringed round by quicksands and the hungry mouths of saurians. He could still last till morning, if his spirit willed it. Seek out Emathla's son again and convince him that duty to his father came first. With the boy as a peace-offering, he would have a compelling argument at any council fire.

Now that his resolve had taken form, John Carter's Puritan soul was lulled at last. Enough to let him drop into an uneasy slumber, despite the love-and-battle song ringing through the swamp behind him.

CARTER wakened with the sun in his eyes. He reached automatically for his kit, until he remembered how he had parted company with both equipment and command. The sun, which had burned through the tattered cypress barrier to the East, was sucking the cottonwool mist from the swamp like a bellows in reverse. He saw that he had swum perhaps a quarter-mile into another slough, banked on both sides by a tangle of wild grape and water oak. The ground was fairly high on this side; across the black water a vast mud-flat steamed in the sun like gingerbread in a cook's nightmare.

The crash of saw-grass on his right was part of that crazy moment of recognition, though Carter was scarcely conscious of the fact when he found himself on his feet, waist-high in the bristling thicket, the machete raised high to meet the expected menace.

*Of course he'd smell the blood,* he thought wildly. *Probably he lives under the bank, in one of those shallow caves Grady was talking about.*

The 'gator snaked through the grass in a short-legged waddle, his snout low to the mud, his hideous jaws clamped tight on the crooked grimace that Carter had observed with such amusement before—from a safe distance. The beady eyes watched Carter slyly, as though the creature's approach were the most natural thing in the world. For all its ungainly bulk the 'gator moved with amazing speed. Carter had no time to brace himself when the head snapped up, showing the soft white under-throat for a moment. Then the jaws gaped wide as the 'gator swiveled to launch itself at Carter's wounded leg like a torpedo on the loose.

Carter rolled to one side under the impact as the machete went in under the beast's foreleg. Bracing both elbows in the muck, he drove the point deep, heaved with all his strength; a stab-and-spin that sent the 'gator crashing on its back among the reeds.

Carter did not wait to see if the blow was fatal. The machete had gone in too deep for retrieving. Obeying an impulse that transcended thought, he leveled away into the water in a long, hard dive and dug for the mud-flat on the far side with all the speed he had.

HE heard a crash in the reeds behind him, a flat, wallowing splash like the signal of doom itself. And he knew that the enraged beast was on his trail now, though the 'gator swam without sound. . . . He had watched them swim before, in the Ocklawaha. Even if he were equipped with fins, he knew that he must be overtaken before he could cross the mud-flat.

He swarmed ashore in an amphibious rush, sprinting before he had cleared the water. The 'gator's rush from slough to land was almost one with his. *At a time like this,* he thought blindly, *I should be remembering my childhood. All I can think of is the ulcer to the right of the creature's snout. The dank stink of its breath as its jaws missed me by inches, back there in the sawgrass. . . .*

He heard the jaw crack again behind him and turned to meet their impact with both fists clenched—a pitiful David facing this monster. The 'gator reared on its haunches, its livid belly exposed . . . and John Carter drove in with a punch that would have floored a heavy-

*He scarcely heard the rifle crack from the jungle as he struggled to rise.*

weight—reeling below those jaws to lock bodily with the creature, to roll once in the mud before he kicked free and sprinted again for higher ground.

His foot slipped in the ooze and he went down on one knee, turning instinctively to face his enemy's next charge. This time, the 'gator came in on the bias, his belly writhing in the mud. Carter was unprepared for the next maneuver. The tail had lashed through the air like a monster whip before he saw it coming. He took the full force of the blow in chest and solar plexus, somersaulting back-

ward in the mud, too groggy to rise again as the 'gator bore down upon him a second time with jaws wide. . . .

He scarcely heard the rifle crack from the jungle as he struggled to rise again. His strength was not quite equal to the effort. In fact, he could not even wrench aside when the 'gator tumbled across him with blood bubbling from its nostrils. But he knew that the creature was stone dead before the underbrush crackled under an advancing footstep. He even summoned a ghost of a smile, and Chief Emathla's son knelt beside him to cradle his head in his arms.

Emathla's son said, "I could afford to wait, Captain. I knew where you were hiding every moment."

He parted the sawgrass to push the dugout into the water again. John Carter sat with his chin in a cupped hand, feeling his strength return with returning breath. The young Indian stepped out of the canoe and smiled down at him easily. A Seminole from a painter's sketch-book—tall and aquiline and faintly grave, despite that smile. Only the easy comradeship was out of place; John Carter had been taught that Indians are not friendly, no matter how great the inducement. . . . He watched narrowly as the boy tossed his rifle against a thwart.

Emathla's son said, "That 'gator-skin would bring a good price at the sutler's, Captain. But we must leave it for my father's people. They will be searching the lake-shore for us now. The shot will bring them upon us if we wait."

John Carter heaved to his feet. Mud-daubed and shaking, he made a bizarre contrast to the Indian's aplomb. But his voice was in control as it cut through:

"Why?"

"Why did I save you just now? There was no other way."

"And last night?"

"Perhaps it was my grandfather's blood," said Chief Emathla's son. "Perhaps I wish to explore another world than this. . . . You see, Captain, it is not necessary to thank me. Last night I turned back for my sake as well as yours."

"Do you think I'd take you away from your father?"

"This slough cuts through the jungle for two miles," said Emathla's son. "There are 'gator-wallows, when we go deeper into the swamp; but we will be safe in this dugout. At the slough's end, there is a trail to high ground. We could be on the Tampa road by noon—"

"How old are you?" asked John Carter.

"Sixteen with this spring. Among my people, that is old enough to be a man."

"And old enough to know the meaning of honor."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CAPTAIN SURRENDERS

EMATHLA'S son rose up in the canoe and set one foot on the spongy bank. "You will give up life so easily?"

"If it must be purchased at that price," said Carter . . . and jumped with both feet on the gunwale just as the young Indian stepped to the land.

Emathla's son pitched head-foremost into the muck with Brevet Captain John Carter on his back. It was a trick he had learned in boyhood, while playing among his uncle's fishing dories in Nantucket Sound. Now he followed it to its logical finish as he brought the rifle-butt down upon the Seminole's skull. Gently, it is true, but with force enough to tap out for some time the will to resist.

Chief Emathla's son was inert as a meal-sack when he dumped him into the fur-lined bottom of the dugout, seized the paddle and sent the canoe skimming down the slough for open water. Almost as an afterthought, he raised one hand to the rifle on the thwart and touched off the second barrel, letting the gun jump overboard with the recoil. *Maybe I'll still have a chance,* he thought, *if they see both hands working the paddle. If only they'll understand I'm unarmed.*

A curtain of egret wings swept up from the cypress ring, veiling the lake in white as Carter sent his canoe skimming into the open water. Okeechobee burst upon his eyes in a blinding mirage of blue, though the great half-moon of war canoes was real enough. At first glance, all of them seemed to be con-

verging on the slough. The chunk of paddles was rhythmic as a tom-tom beat, though the rhythm stopped dead as Carter's dugout came into view. And then, at the far end of the file, he heard a musket cock, and then another. Already, he could see Chief Emathla, alone in a canoe at the center of the half-moon. He saw the leader cross his paddle and brace both arms against the gunwale; he could feel the chief's eyes burn into him across the narrowing strip of blue water.

*Keep paddling, you fool,* he told himself. *If you lose way, you're lost. If they think you're frightened, ditto. . . .*

The egrets made a great puff of white against the sky. He raised his eyes briefly to admire their beauty—and wondered if this was the last beauty his eyes would see.

And then he drove the canoe into the closing circle, praying that Emathla would see the precious burden he carried before it was too late. He was looking into twenty rifle barrels now, most of them point-blank, as the other canoes scrambled for place. When Emathla raised his hand at last, Carter almost dropped the paddle as he forced himself to give one last stroke, to grind his bow against the chief's canoe. Then he rose to his full height, cursing the weakness in his knees, as he raised both arms in token of surrender . . . just as Chief Emathla's son sat bolt upright in the dugout and stared into his father's eyes with all the naïvete of the truant who has come home at last.

FAR TO the north—where the lake shore curved through cypress to skirt the pine barrens again—the Indian village stood tranquil in the blaze of noon.

The high-stilted dwellings opened to the four winds under their steep palm-thatch roofs. A hard-packed common was swept clean by squaws' brooms for this assembly of the warriors.

The braves stood in semicircle now, about the ashes of last night's council fire. All hands swept up in unison as Brevet Captain John Carter descended the ladder with an assist from too willing arms. A clean-scrubbed officer, now, in new, fringed buckskins and polished army boots—his insignia pinned carefully to the stitching at each shoulder.

CHIEF EMATHLA rose from the assembly to address his departing guest, as usage demanded.

"You have broken our bread, white captain. You have sat at our council fire. We wish you a good journey to your people."

And John Carter answered as his conscience prompted. "I am glad we could make a bargain with justice."

The chief came forward and spoke for the captain's ear alone. "Do not speak of bargains. Could you do more than give me back my son?"

"I would have come back here without him, if I could have found my way. Will you believe that too?"

"My son spoke to me in the punishment pen," said Emathla. "He has convinced me of that, as well."

John Carter bowed his head, remembering the enclosure of cypress palings in the jungle behind the village—where a chief's son sat alone now, repenting a hasty urge so common to the young. For a moment Carter all but yielded to an impulse of his own: to ask permission to take the boy back, after all. Back to St. Augustine and the next Charleston packet. Carter suppressed the impulse firmly. Perhaps, if he came to know Emathla better, he might suggest this useful bridge between white and red worlds.

Carter spoke at last, keeping his voice unhurried. "So you believe that we came in peace?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Hoping to bring a criminal to justice, while you were in another hunting ground?"

"That also, Captain. And do *you* see now that *I* am justice here?"

"Yes, Chief Emathla."

"That my men were watching Perelli from the beginning? And Hospetarkee too, when he visited Perelli's camp the first time? We thought then that Perelli was a scout in the Army's pay. We were waiting for the Army to play its game out—" Emathla's eyes glowed with somber conviction as they met Carter's.

"As for Hospetarkee, he was a traitor to his people. He died for that, though he was my brother. I would have killed my own son, too, had he joined your side—"

Silence fell between them; the chief broke it with obvious effort as he touched Carter's arm with an odd, ceremonial bow and led him to the lakeside. "Last night at the council fire your sergeant told me you were an honest man. I was willing to wait a while for the proof."

Emathla raised one hand in an imperious signal. The half-circle of canoes parted on the water and a long dugout swept in to the shore. Grady leaped out to the beach to drive the bow onto the sand. Behind him, the Canova twins sat at their paddles, the Iberian masks broken for once in identical grins of anticipation.

Carter stared round-eyed as the ranks of Indians parted. A stalwart brave came first, bearing a pile of canvas sacks in a palm-leaf sling—dusty sacks, with the government mail-stamp intact on most of them. The gnarled figure who stumbled after them was almost an anticlimax. A weasel of a man, ambushed to the eyes in a blizzard of beard. A spry scarecrow who managed a courtly bow, despite his bonds.

*"Buon' giorno, signor Capitano!"*

Emathla ignored the impertinence as he weighed a mail-sack between his hands. "Thirty five thousand Washington eagles, Captain. Will you stop to count them?"

But Captain John Carter had already lifted Perelli by the scruff and dropped him into the waiting dugout. His poise was intact as he turned back to face the assembly; his gesture lacked none of Emathla's grace when he ripped open a mail sack, snatched out a fat handful of gold pieces and laid fifty of them in a gleaming row on the ground.

"One thousand American dollars, Chief Emathla. The Army's reward for capturing a robber and a murderer. In the name of our commanding general, may I thank you for keeping the peace in the Cypress?"

He hesitated on that, wondering if he should offer to shake hands with the tall copper silhouette that faced him so impassively now, on the shore of this inland sea. Instead, he raised his hand, palm outward.

The cheer that rose from the shore almost shook Carter's composure as the dugout darted into the lake. After all, he had read deeply in the history of Indian lore; he knew that the red man is not supposed to surrender to emotion, no matter how spontaneous. But he knew without turning that Chief Emathla at least was true to tradition, even now. That he would still be staring after them as the canoe dwindled to a speck on Okeechobee—ignoring the gold at his feet, as he would ignore all white overtures to the end of his days.

# DESK JOB

## BY HAL G. EVARTS

ILLUSTRATED BY NEIL O'KEEFFE

*A rifle bolt clicked. "Who are you?" the Jap sentry demanded.*

A KIND of bitterness was on him as he studied the Jap formation. Day after day they pounded the field with insolent deliberation, and just as regularly he watched, crouched in a cave that served as operations room for the Twenty-Third Pursuit.

They flew with escort now that a few P-40's had arrived in South China, but still secure—as secure, Lieutenant Mark Richards thought bitterly, as he was himself.

He had come to know the pattern of these raids so well that after each one

it seemed as though he could no longer endure his own futility. For the others it was different; they were fliers and he was—well, a desk man. A desk man like the major. The difference was that the major had flown, earned his wings. And that, Mark had learned, was a big difference.

A geyser of dirt shot up as the first stick fell. On a pad he jotted: "32 Kawasakis, 50 lb. demo. & fragmentation bombs." That was his work—paper work. While the rest of them were fighting.

When the explosions had ended Mark lifted his telephone. "One Curtiss smashed to hell," a voice reported after a pause. "And maybe another damaged."

Mark groaned. Even dispersed among the rocks and hidden, the 40's were vulnerable. Somehow the Japs always knew. Each time they got a peashooter or two, whittling down the group. It was this helplessness that hurt; Mark Richards told himself he was tired of sitting out the war.

High above a speck flashed in the morning sun. Grimly Mark scribbled: "One of our fighters attacked 12 Zeros altit. 4000."

THROUGH the dust he followed the lone 40 down. It slashed through the Zeros and pulled out low over the bare red hills, twisting and dodging as the Japs swarmed at its tail. Mark frowned. The only man who could fly like that—the only man crazy enough to tackle those odds—was Hapgood. And Hapgood he'd ordered somewhere else.

The scramble had strung out and the 40 was climbing steeply, with two Japs trailing. It flipped into a roll and leveled off above them. One Zero, spouting smoke, fell away, and the 40 dove, skimming the ground. The others started to follow, then fanned out after the bombers.

The personnel was pouring from cover as the fighter swept in. Mark turned to his desk. He was Air Intelligence, which on this front included everything from censorship to interviewing prisoners—everything, that is, unpleasant. But now and then a halfway decent job would turn up. This enemy base, for instance.

For a longer time than he liked to admit Mark had been trying to locate it. It had to be near and it had to be big, but so far he'd failed. He leaned over an enlargement, squinting through a magnifying glass. He had one aerial camera and nobody trained to handle it. If he could fly himself, just once, Mark thought. If he hadn't washed out. . .

A short, wiry lieutenant, escorted by several others, was crossing the field. When he was sure Hapgood had no intention of reporting, Mark called out.

Hapgood pulled up with an elaborate wink. "What d'ya know?" he demanded. "I darn near forgot."

Mark waited self-consciously. Jack Hapgood happened to be about everything Mark would have liked to be. Hapgood took to Japs like a cat takes to mice. An A.V.G. veteran from Burma, he had twelve to his credit when he transferred to the Army, and Army routine still fretted him.

He slung one leg over Mark's desk. Mark reminded himself that Hapgood wasn't cocky, but merely self-confident. "Did you get any pictures?" he said.

"Oh, those." Hapgood grinned. "I'll tell you. I sneaked over Linshan."

"Over the tombs?"

"Sure, like you said. But the Nippies jumped me and I had to beat it."

Mark sighed. He had never hated his job as much as he hated it now. "Your tank is a third full," he said slowly. "You couldn't have gone there and back."

"What of it?" Hapgood slapped his leg. "I got one, didn't I?"

Hapgood, he knew, had been cruising back and forth in the high overcast, laying for them. It was a good stunt, the kind he longed to do himself, but it wasn't in the books. "Hapgood," he said, "I picked you because you're the best pilot in this outfit. But remember, it *is* an outfit. It's not a one-man show."

"Listen." Hapgood stood up, coloring. "Listen, mister," he said, "I'm holding up my end. You hold up yours."

MARK stared wearily at his retreating back. The whole group resented him, not obviously as Hapgood did, but with a studied evasion that set him

apart. They didn't altogether trust an outsider telling them what to do.

He thought back to the California field where he'd done his basic. He had known from the start that for a small man he lacked the coordination fliers must have. The instructor hadn't said that in so many words, not exactly. What the instructor had said amounted to: "Fliers are a dime a dozen but guys who speak Jap are scarce." So instead of a cockpit, here he was in a swivel chair.

He looked up as the major walked in with an operations order for the following day. Absently Mark read it through. It called for an attack on Linshan.

"Do you remember those Ming tombs, sir?" His voice rose excitedly.

The Major scratched his chin. "The ones I ruled out?"

"You did, sir, but look." Mark pointed at the photograph of countryside. A rectangular shaped field, somewhat lighter in color, he had indicated in white ink. On one boundary was a tiny but unmistakable circle, surrounded by dots —a Ming Dynasty burial ground.

"You know how the Chinese feel," the major said.

"Yes, sir; Mings are buried all over the region. But *these* tombstones face east. It's only a detail, but I think—"

"You think?" the major snorted. "I can't risk what you think!"

Mark hesitated, sensing the major's impatience. Like his command the major was beginning to chafe under the restraint and endless holding back. He had only a handful of patched-up fighters and he wanted to slam them in where he thought they would do the most damage.

"That's just my point, sir," Mark said cautiously. "We can't keep on trading with the Japs, even one for five. They have too many. If we don't clean out that base soon, as I see it, we won't be able to put a ship in the air."

"Dammit, man!" the major snapped. He left off, drumming his fingers. He paced across the room and sat down again. Then he said quietly, "All right. I'll give you one more chance."

"Thank you, sir," Mark moistened his lips. "I'd like you to detail me a plane today."

That afternoon Mark squatted in the shade of a juniper and watched the coolies fill in craters. Their singsong came to him soft and plaintive across the muggy air. Back under the trees ground crews were strapping medium bombs to the peashooters' wings in preparation for tomorrow's mission. Everywhere the blended smell of sweat and lubricating oil was strong.

Mark heard a burst of laughter from officers' mess. In disgust he slammed the book on his lap. If they suspected—if they had the faintest notion—they'd laugh him off the post.

It was fantastic, all right. Just fantastic enough for the Japs to try.

Mark straightened and walked toward the plane. He rounded the wing tip and stopped abruptly. Hapgood was pulling on his suit.

"Hello." Hapgood's grin was wooden. "You my passenger?"

Mark wiped a sleeve across his face. "I guess so," he said.

"So you turned me in to the skipper," Hapgood said. "Nice going."

Mark hadn't. Neither had he requested a particular pilot. He devoutly wished he'd drawn anyone but Hapgood, but the major had decided and it was too late to change.

Hapgood spun around and climbed aboard. Mark squeezed in behind him and tested the camera installation. The big Allison thundered into life, shaking with a full-throttled roar. Hapgood checked the two Brownings and then he raised his hand. The chocks were kicked away and he horsed around and taxied down the runway. The plane shuddered, gathering power, and Mark felt the rushing exhilaration of the take-off.

THEY circled in smooth easy spirals until the field dwindled. Below, a patchwork of lush paddies unrolled toward the mountains, purple now in the mellowing light. Occasional brown splotches of walled villages crept by on either side. Mark leaned back, reassured by the engine's steady, rhythmic drone. He glanced at Hapgood.

Hapgood was peering ahead, glumly intent.

'Heart fighters,' they called guys like Hapgood back at the school where Mark had won his bar. "There's the kind who goes in swinging," they'd told the class. "And there's the kind who feels out the opponent and wears him down. It applies in the ring and on the battlefield." Well, that's what *he* was supposed to be —a 'head fighter.' Mark grimaced at the thought.

He eyed the air-speed indicator. They had crossed into Jap-held territory and soon would approach Linshan. He stiffened as a shadow raced across the cloud bank underneath. Hapgood already had yanked back his stick and they were climbing. A Jap reconnaissance flashed by below and to the right. Mark followed it out of sight, then took a deep breath.

Hapgood called him. Mark peered down on what resembled a faintly defined rectangle, merging from the blue-green of wooded hills to the paler shade of farm land. Minute figures were laid out along one edge, clustered about a distinct circle of stones. No definite design but it matched, more or less, the picture back on his desk.

"Come in low out of the sun," Mark said. His mouth was dry.

Hapgood grunted.

Mark looked up uneasily. Hapgood's eyes shone with a curious, almost fierce intensity. The motor's snore had risen to a vicious whine.

Hapgood tilted nose-over, hurling Mark against his belt as the 40 shot into a howling dive. The earth swam up in a blur and Mark choked back his sinking sensation. Anger gripped and held him. Hapgood was giving him the works.

He opened his mouth but there was no sound above the screaming motor. Gray specks danced before his eyes, growing larger, until they became planes. Furiously he signalled Hapgood to bear off. The planes seemed to hurtle by but Mark managed to identify three Zeros. There was a sickening snap as they pulled out, jerking Mark so violently he bit his tongue. He lurched against the wall and then he saw, as through a sight ring, Hapgood's purpose. Half a dozen unsuspecting Kawasaki 97's lumbered just ahead.

In that split second Mark wondered if the man intended to crash them headlong. He realized Hapgood had planned this trap too, deliberately.

Hapgood pressed the button. His guns hammered the fuselage, squirting tracers. Mark saw them pass over the leader as Hapgood closed in. The bomber wobbled, slewing like a sick bird, and the others broke formation.

Mark wrenched around. The Zeros were streaking down. More tracers flew across the windshield. The 40 staggered and went into a swooping spin. A second fighter zoomed from below, riveted a line of holes across the radiator. Hapgood pulled savagely at the controls.

The engine coughed. Outside, the wind's shriek was startlingly loud. Hapgood fought the plane into a shaky glide, easing their speed. Another Jap swept back, raking them with a burst, and banked around for the kill. Mark forced himself to watch the crippled bomber flutter down, down out of sight.

There was no time for chutes. They dipped over a hill. Hapgood switched off the ignition. The plane coasted lower and with a terrific crash plowed into a tangle of trees and brush. It sheared a swath of branches and nosed over.

Mark uncradled his head, shook it and shoved back the cover. Hapgood was moaning. Mark shook him. "My arm!" Hapgood gasped.

Mark pulled him clear and helped him over the side. Together they tottered toward the nearest gully. As they tumbled over the edge a fighter roared in to strafe.

Hapgood winced. "Take it easy," Mark advised. "Looks broken to me."

"Help me dismount one of the guns!" Hapgood panted. "We can still take a crack at those monkeys!"

"And get killed?"

Hapgood looked at him queerly.

MARK ducked as the Japs swung over again, burrowing in the dirt. Bullets pinged off the plane and ricocheted in sprays. Infuriated, Mark understood why the Japs took so few prisoners. He had a wild desire to jump up and throw rocks, shake his fist, do anything. Then

he remembered: he was supposed to use his head.

When the Zero had gone he sat up. He looked around, trying to get his bearings before dusk. "Can you walk?" he said.

Hapgood gritted his teeth. "Anywhere you can!"

Mark took the lead, moving carefully. He doubted if Jap patrols had reached the area yet but it was just possible. He came out on a slope and worked his way through shoulder-high scrub, pausing every few yards to listen. Artillery rumbled in the distance.

"You're headed east," Hapgood objected. "You're headed right for Japan."

Mark halted. "East," he repeated. "East to the rising sun." He snapped his fingers.

"Our lines are back that way."

Mark chose the nearest tall tree and shinned up. From the top he could see foothills spilling to the valley, and far below, what might have been a rectangular clearing. Beyond the next rise something gleamed. Hurriedly he rejoined Hapgood. "We'd better split," he said. "With luck you'll make it."

"What are you gonna do?" Hapgood's tone was suspicious.

"I have a hunch."

"Nuts to that."

Mark shrugged. Probably Hapgood thought he was planning to surrender. He left the undergrowth and dropped over the ridge. On the opposite side they eased down a step at a time. It was nearly dark before he found the Kawasaki.

What remained lay on its back, the undercarriage thrust up like claws. The tail was smashed and an odor of hot metal clung to the two-place cockpit. They waited several minutes, looking for some sign of life. Then Mark slipped forward. The gunner was crumpled on the floor, riddled with Hapgood's bullets. The pilot, otherwise unwounded, apparently had snapped his neck in landing.

Thoughtfully Mark examined the bodies, and a thin smile came to his mouth. Unfastening their belts he lifted the two men down and dragged them one at a time into deep cover. With a switch he was obliterating the last of his tracks when Hapgood grabbed his arm.

A light flickered. Mark pressed flat between the dead Japanese. The light multiplied to a string. Advancing through the woods a whistle blew at intervals, followed by shouts. They grew nearer and nearer until he could distinguish the shrill nervous chatter. Then a soldier stumbled across the wreck and the rest rushed up.

For what seemed an endless length of time they swarmed over the plane, calling and beating through the grass. An officer, plainly puzzled, circled around and around. Finally he barked a command. They strung out once more and moved up the ridge.

Mark sagged limply. "They'll be back!" Hapgood whispered.

Mark nodded, too weak to talk. As soon as his hands steadied he stripped off the Jap pilot's clothes. "See if you can squeeze into that other monkey suit," he said.

"I don't get it." Hapgood met Mark's eyes. With his good hand he unbuttoned the gunner's jumper. "But it's a good thing we're both shrimps," he growled.

Mark flexed his knees. The uniform, a cheap khaki, was tight, and the shoes pinched. In a pocket he found a pair of fur-lined gloves to cover his hands. He pulled the leather helmet low over his forehead and buckled on the big goggles. In the dark, he thought, he might possibly pass for one of Hirohito's fliers.

Hapgood was less fortunate. The jumper was so tattered they had to pin it with thorns. The other helmet and goggles had been ruined altogether. Mark scowled at Hapgood's fair skin. Then he ripped his shirt and wound it around Hapgood's head, bandage-wise, until only the eyes and mouth showed.

He stood off to inspect his work, shaking his head. "There isn't a chance of getting away with this, you know," he said.

Hapgood gave his mask a final pat. "Maybe. But we'll have fun trying."

LONG after midnight they sighted the first bivouac. Floundering cross country, they had been able to avoid patrols, but now a row of campfires

blocked further progress. Considering Hapgood's arm they had made good time but Mark knew that it had to be tonight or not at all. If he failed this time he wouldn't be around to hear the Twenty-Third's wisecracks. He stopped to size up the approach.

"Stay back from the light," he warned, "and let me do the talking."

"Brother, will I!"

Mark rubbed his palms on his trousers. "At least they're looking for two of their own fliers."

"Unless," Hapgood reminded him soberly, "they already found 'em." He sighed. "Let's go."

A broad trail led down. They walked with affected carelessness, crunching noisily. An occasional whistle shrilled from the direction they had come. When they were within a few hundred feet Mark made out the outline of tents and a sentry.

"*Tomeru!*" a voice challenged.

Mark raised his hands. "*Sore are yoroshii desu, eihei,*" he called.

A rifle bolt clicked. "Who are you?" the sentry demanded. Sounds of activity came from the tents.

"*Watukushi wa babu geki pairotto desu,*" Mark said. "I'm a bomber pilot. Do we have to stand here all night?"

The guard gestured with his gun and they marched in. Sullen-eyed little soldiers were stretching on their mats. A sergeant came up yawning and swinging a flashlight. Mark heard Hapgood gulp. He turned his back to the fire, keeping his face in shadow. "We lost our way," he said. "How do we get to the airfield from here?"

The sergeant saluted. He was annoyed at this interruption of his sleep but also he was pleased that he should be first to report the missing crew. "Airfield?" he said. "Why, just over there." He pointed. "I will notify them to send a truck."

Mark supressed a grin. "We walked this far. We can walk the rest."

The sergeant's eyes narrowed.

Sensing the man's suspicion, Mark added hastily, "They are busy with other matters now."

Not entirely satisfied, the sergeant indicated Hapgood. "This one?" he asked curtly. "He is injured?"

Mark nodded. The sergeant directed his flashlight at Hapgood's cloth-covered face.

"*Baka!*" Mark raged. He leaped forward and struck the sergeant's wrist down. "His eyes!"

There was a murmur from the soldiers who had gathered around. Mark felt the sweat break out under his goggles. "I was instructed to watch for an escaped American, *chui,*" the sergeant grumbled.

"Do I look like an American, you lout?"

A titter ran through the crowd. The sergeant shifted from one foot to the other. "*Yuke,*" he muttered. "Go on."

As they passed through the camp Mark was conscious of hundreds of pairs of eyes trained on him, and he tried not to hurry. His legs were trembling. He had been undeservedly lucky, he knew, thanks to the Japanese habit of thoroughness, plus a certain lack of imagination, but it was a combination on which he could no longer count. The sergeant's error must be discovered soon.

He swallowed, musing on the fact that he should happen to have been born a missionary boy in Tokyo. It was about the only thing he'd done right so far in this war.

He quit the road and picked his way across a rocky, meadowed hillock that sloped from the trees. The campfires still winked behind them and there was no sign of alarm, but Mark imagined he detected a faint, indefinable sound that seemed to issue from somewhere under his feet. He took off his shoes and tied them around his neck.

HE STARTED as a figure loomed up. Then he recognized one of the Ming tombstones. The statue faced east, a grotesque, gray shape with arms folded across a round belly. Hapgood was on his knees scratching at the base. A piece crumbled away, showing white underneath.

Hapgood whistled. "Phony!"

Mark fingered the chunk. It was a kind of plaster and chicken wire, hollow inside and expertly aged—the whole tombstone, all the tombstones. He motioned for silence and groped ahead,

scarcely breathing. He tested several more statues and came at last to the circle of stones.

This—the heart of the cemetery, this Dragon Sun emblem of eternal life—was fake too. He could hardly believe the Japs had taken such pains to make a perfect replica. Perfect, except for one detail.

The sound had become distinct and now a dim glow filtered upward. On his stomach Mark inched forward until the ground under him sagged slightly. He felt the grass. It was artificial—strips of dyed rag. Puzzled, he loosened a handful. With a shock he realized he was lying, not on the earth, but on a net suspended high above it.

By enlarging the hole he could see into a sort of cavernous hangar. Light bombers and fighters in rows were silhouetted between rock walls by the gleam of lanterns. Mechanics were servicing the engines and trundling up bombs and fuel. He rubbed his eyes, a grudging admiration stirring in him. To himself he tried to explain, logically and calmly, what the Japs had done here.

The hill dropped off sheer into an ancient stone quarry. They had covered the top with hundreds of yards of heavy netting, supported by bamboo poles, and camouflaged it with artificial growth; this was the off-color rectangle. Only the far end was open and that could be concealed with green construction mats. The runway, he supposed, was a lightweight perforated steel mesh assembled overnight and rendered invisible in the grass. The layout was as simple as it was effective.

"That graveyard?" Hapgood whispered. "How come?"

"Tell you later." Mark backed away and stood up. The first pale streaks of dawn were spreading over the east. At most he had an hour before sunrise.

From above the burial ground looked harmless; nobody knew it better. Thoughtfully Mark eyed the low ring of imitation stones, emblem of the Dragon Sun. Small, but visible, and close to the quarry lip. Like the hub of a wheel, he thought. A design flashed into his mind.

"Rocks," he said. "Stones, boulders. Pile up anything big enough to see!"

He bent over, pried loose a boulder and rolled it into position. Hapgood's eyes widened.

The next few minutes were unreal and disjointed to Mark. He worked feverishly, tearing stones from Hapgood and piling them up, heedless of the noise. When piles accumulated he bent over them, straightening and filling in gaps. He kept looking up. He was afraid, desperately afraid, that he might be too late. Even now he felt useless, like a boy playing at war.

Hapgood was hauling at him, pulling him away. The horizon had turned a rosy gold and bugles were trilling all around them. For the first time Mark noticed his hands were bloody. He took a last look and they ran for the timber.

A thin vibration drummed the sky. Mark huddled behind a log and fixed his eyes to the west. He picked up a V of dots, and a second. They grew rapidly, boring toward their Linshan target. Fascinated, Mark watched the sun glint off their propellors.

A CLUSTER of AA shells burst like thistle puffs and the flight swerved. Hapgood swore. Mark wanted to shut his eyes. The tension in him was almost unbearable. The first wedge roared up the valley. The second was passing when the leader's wing waggled. One 40 wheeled sharply and came back. A white egg streak down. Mark braced himself. It missed the tombstones by feet, shearing into the quarry's camouflage, and went off with a dull concussion that rattled his teeth.

There was a long moment of bright orange flame. A column of debris erupted, followed by black smoke. The plane banked and dove through the cloud and blasted again. A terrific explosion billowed up the canopy, ripping the entire length, and laid bare the hangar below. Streams of lurid color flared out, blanketing the quarry.

The 40 had touched off a bomb rack. Hapgood was pounding his back and screaming. The Jap AA had thrown up a tremendous barrage but the first wing turned back, and then the second, shut-

tling between the tracers and shells in a fast, loose formation to finish the job. Bomb detonations and the crackle of burning gas and ammunition rocked Mark deafeningly. The base was gone, smashed with its planes. The speed and awful completeness of its destruction left him numb.

He rolled over and blinked. Hapgood had peeled off his wrappings and was waving frantically at the disappearing peashooters. Hapgood broke into a wild yell. "Man, did we fix 'em! Did we ever fix 'em today!"

He beamed at Mark. Mark suddenly was tired. It was all he could do to stay awake. Soldiers and trucks were streaming along the road now and he realized that the really tough part lay ahead. "Caught 'em flatfooted!" Hapgood crowed. "So damn cocky they didn't even post sentries. But how did *you* know?"

Mark gave a feeble grin. "Those fake tombstones; they were too cute. The Japs set 'em up facing east. I read that the Mings had 'em facing north instead, toward the old Manchu capital in Peking."

Hapgood's mouth opened slowly. "You mean—" He jerked a thumb at the huge, angry cloud that hovered above the quarry. "How'd you tip the outfit then?"

Mark relaxed, feeling the sun's warmth on his back. "The Japs knew we wouldn't touch a Chinese burial ground, and they're good copyists."

He paused to draw a circle in the dirt. "A standard Ming motif; Chinese call it Dragon Sun, but we'll call it a wheel hub. All you and I did was add a dozen spokes with those straight lines of rock." Mark illustrated. "And made—a Jap rising sun."

"Rising sun, huh?" Hapgood studied the diagram a moment. Then he chuckled. "Double play. Dragon Sun to Rising Sun—to setting sun. Wow!"

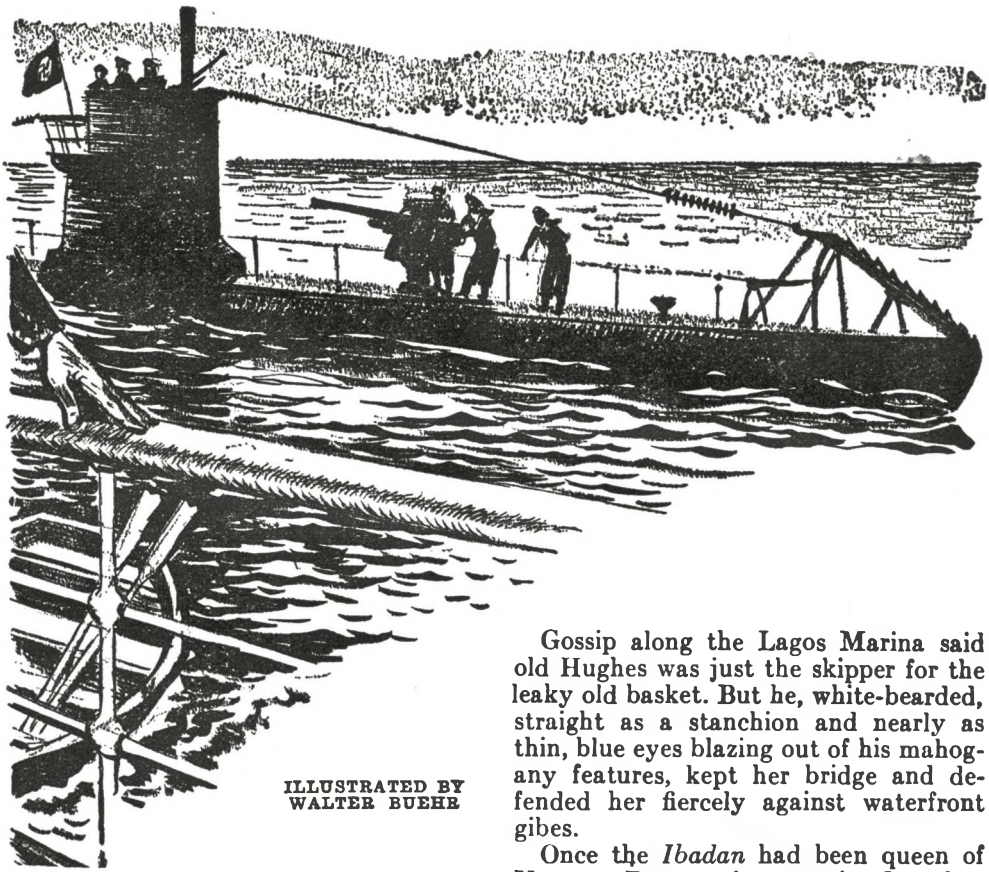
Hapgood's tempered respect embarrassed him. But if they got back, and Mark believed they might, he knew that never again would he be ashamed to sit at a desk and direct men like Hapgood. One job was pretty much like another, as long as you pulled your weight; it took both kinds to win a war. "That's nothing," he said. "Wait till we go to work on my old home town."

*An officer and three sailors with tommy guns climbed aboard the* Ibadan. *"Good afternoon, Captain." The German saluted. "What iss good about it?" Evan snapped back.*

# LAGOS ROADS

BY

BRIAN O'BRIEN



ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER BUEHR

THE *Ibadan*, 1500 tons, Lagos to Port Harcourt, curtesied timidly through the Bight of Benin, keeping close to the gray-green coast of British Nigeria. She looked like a neat old lady in her drab war paint creeping along under the shelter of a protecting wall away from the dangers of the wide street. But her single funnel raked jauntily and her old-fashioned high bow and squat stern gave her the appearance of speed she no longer possessed.

Gossip along the Lagos Marina said old Hughes was just the skipper for the leaky old basket. But he, white-bearded, straight as a stanchion and nearly as thin, blue eyes blazing out of his mahogany features, kept her bridge and defended her fiercely against waterfront gibes.

Once the *Ibadan* had been queen of Younger Dempsey's coastwise fleet, but that was forty years ago. David Hughes, hot-tempered young Welshman was her skipper then. He'd been her master from the launching. In fact, if a man can be said to love a ship, David Hughes loved the *Ibadan* with the love a lonely man has for the one thing close to him. She carried mail and passengers to Nigerian coast stations and returned with palm oil, cocoa and ivory.

Hughes ran her like a millionaire's yacht. Her four cabins in the stern were

immaculate, her deck holystoned like the bridge of a battleship; white upperworks and black hull; she was a picture!

She was expensive to operate though; ate the soft Udi coal like candy; and, under the penny-pinching restrictions of the ex-purser who was Nigerian agent for the company, grew shabby. Lack of refitting cut down her speed and cargoes grew less. Hughes stopped going to the Eldorado bar and was seldom seen in the Lagos clubs. He was a proud man; his hair grayed and his manner became brusque; he suffered with his ship, lived aboard her and avoided the sneers of luckier men.

But when the First World War broke out things looked up a bit. Freights were high and bottoms scarce, so the *Ibadan* was painted up a bit and shoved off to sea again. Hughes, commissioned to the Naval Reserve, mounted a gun in her stern and ran the coast as fast as he could get cargoes.

ONE day outside Lagos Mole a collision with a marine tug started several plates. But the agent, instead of putting her into Ikoye for repair, lined her bottom with concrete and sent her out to earn more freight. She bumped badly on Forcados Bar one dirty night and again concrete caulked her leaking bilge. She was dragged through the war unpainted, unserviced, driven like an old carthorse for the few extra pounds that agent hoped to make before she sank.

She did just that in 1918. One morning Captain Hughes awoke at Iddo wharf to find his deck awash and the *Ibadan* sitting in eighteen feet of water.

Younger Dempsey, after firing the agent, put her up for auction, hoping some Syrian trader would pay ready cash for her.

"I'll not allow it!" stormed David Hughes. "I'll not let the *Ibadan* be turned into a Got-damned bumboat, whateffer. She's been home and wife to me for twenty years, look you. By damn I'll buy her myself."

And he scraped together every penny he could raise, pumped her out, borrowed paint and dressed her like a lady again.

But a shipwright looked at her bottom, at sheared rivets and rusted plates and shook his head.

"Not much we can do, Hughes," he said. "She's loaded with concrete now. If we knock that out there'll be nothing left. All you can do is to line her with more cement and hope for the best."

The *Ibadan* looked fine riding at anchor in Lagos lagoon. But the knowing ones laughed loud and long at the proud shipowner who owned a ship but no crew and no cargo.

"She'll drop her bottom out first time you take her to sea," yelled a passing marine tugmaster.

"She'll be sailin' the Bight of Benin, you Tyneside coal-passer, long after you're dead in your favorite gutter, whateffer."

She was too.

David Hughes found a Welch engineer, sick with malaria and who could no longer stand the gaff up at the Udi colliery, who agreed to tend her worn but solid engines in exchange for a cabin aboard and a share of her earnings. So they scraped together ten Kru boys, six for the black gang and four for the deck. And the *Ibadan* again carried freight between Lagos and coast ports.

Evan Morgan, the engineer, did his best, but the *Ibadan* had been badly used. She was slow, even in good weather, for Captain Hughes dared not risk her in the tornado season. She needed things that only money could buy; bearings, tubes and a general refit. But she earned barely enough to pay for paint, coal and wages; Hughes and Morgan scraped along on the edge of poverty.

Friendly traders gave all the cargo they dared until insurance rates grew so high that the *Ibadan*, still spruce, sat neglected at Iddo wharf while her captain and engineer occupied two of her cabins, cooked their own food and spent their days tinkering with her engines, spreading thin paint over her blemishes and patrolling the agencies begging vainly for cargo.

But they had no luck. Even when war broke out again and American ships began discharging quick, bronzed men and fabulous machines in Lagos, the *Ibadan* was still idle.

CAPTAIN HUGHES haunted the Marine Department offering himself with his ship until even the native clerks grinned when they saw his spare, upright figure in scrubbed whites walking with careful jauntiness.

"It's no use, Captain Hughes," said Ball, Director of Marine. "The *Ibadan* is unseaworthy and you, I'm sorry to say, are a bit too old for government service."

"But I know the coast like me own pocket," Hughes insisted. "Better than any of the youngsters you now haff sailing it. The *Ibadan* is still good in fair weather. Can ye find nothing for me whateffer?"

Ball studied the anxious face across his table. There was haggard entreaty in the faded blue eyes; gnarled, powerful hands knotted themselves in dumb appeal.

"There are U-boats outside," he said weakly. "The *Ibadan* wouldn't have a chance—"

"Giff me a gun on her stern and we'll blow the damned U-boat out of the water, look you."

"We have no guns to spare. Haven't enough replacements as it is. No, you see, the *Ibadan*—"

"Look you, sir," David pleaded. "The *Ibadan* iss a proud ship. She hass had her ups and downs, but she cannot sit like a scow doing nothing, whateffer. She must work, go to sea. I don't care for the freight. We will go to sea for just enough to feed us and find coal and paint for my ship."

"But—"

"I know the coast, sir. I can sail the *Ibadan* in twenty foot of water, right under the beach, where no U-boat dare come; they must haff depth to dive and the *Ibadan* can carry her cargo as safe as if she iss in Got's pocket, whateffer."

"Well"—Ball drew a deep breath—"I'll give you a cargo of railway supplies for P. H. and you can bring back a load of coal."

"Coal! The *Ibadan!*" Captain Hughes' beard began to bristle.

"All I can offer."

"I will take it."

So the *Ibadan* coaled—on credit—and took aboard a quantity of cased goods, ties and building material.

Outside the bar, Captain Hughes dipped his ensign gravely to the patrol and scuttled due east for the shelter of the shoal water near the beach. He stood the bridge watching everything that moved on the smooth sea. A sharp-eyed Kru boy stood in the foremast shrouds keeping lookout. Evan Morgan clattered about his steam-filled engine room cursing the soft Udi coal and his sweating stokers.

That night, in spite of Evan's protests, Hughes remained on the bridge.

"Go below to sleep, look you," stormed the engineer. "There iss nothing you can do up there like a monkey on a stick, look you."

"I will catnap in a deck chair, for I must see her to Port Harcourt," said Hughes. "This trip we must make; it iss our first. If we get back in good time, whateffer, we shall have better cargoes. We must show these brass-bound marine matelots that the *Ibadan* iss ass good as any of their vessels."

Twice during the night Captain Hughes changed course to avoid rocks ahead.

"Keep sharp lookout," he warned the Kru boy in the shrouds. "We are in deep water, here. Sing out if you see anything."

He gripped the rail, straining his old eyes into the darkness until he could take his ship back under the coast. And only then did he agree to lie down for a few hours.

IT WAS just after dawn. The sea was pallid green under a mist that meant blistering heat later. To port, not half a mile away, the forest was a green belt above yellow spray-flecked sand. A native in the forechains swung a lead.

Ahead, rocks broke the surface marking the long, narrow channel to the Bonny River, entrance to Port Harcourt, thirty odd miles upstream. Captain Hughes listened to the pounding of the ancient engines, scanned the seaward horizon through an old fashioned telescope and changed course to the south.

He was jumpy with fatigue and strain,

and watched the rocks for the first chance to run inland to safety.

Suddenly his throat went dry as something gleamed on the southern horizon. With trembling hands he put a glass on it but could see nothing. In half an hour he changed course to enter the channel and ran half speed. The broad bow of the *Ibadan* veered slowly between the half submerged rocks.

With a crackling of joints Hughes stretched with relief. Then glared severely at Mammy Palavar the steersman who grinned, gap-toothed.

"Keep her on the cottonwood inside that sandbar," he ordered gruffly, then bent over the engine-roon grating.

"We haff made it, Evan," he called. "We are inside the channel. Come to breakfast, my man—"

Out of the morning quiet came a piercing whistle that grew to a vicious, splitting scream and ended in a brassy report. A dirty tower of water lifted astern and the *Ibadan* squatted like a duck as fragments of metal roared past her funnel.

"By damn!" yelled Hughes, dashing inside the wheelhouse. "Full ahead, Evan. Full ahead, man!"

A tousled white head glared up through the grating and an angry, grease-streaked face squinted against the light.

"What's amiss, look you, David Hughes? Are you crazy at all? Why the deffil do you yell Full Ahead and we only just in the—"

There was another ear splitting shriek and a fearful clang. The *Ibadan* lurched and tons of mud and water dropped aboard.

The face disappeared howling outraged curses. The steersman clung to the wheel his face mottled, eyes rolling like those of a panicked horse.

"What t'ing?" he mumbled.

The little steamer shook as if a giant flogged her with a sledge. Something clanged below decks. Spits of steam plumed from the engine-room grating. Two more shells screamed overhead and burst in the trees. Captain Hughes grabbed the wheel from the palsied Kruman and nursed the shivering vessel down the winding channel.

"There, there, my dearie," he crooned. "The dogs haff hurtit you, lady. Gently, gently now, the land iss not far ahead. Come away now. There—there—" Slowly he pressed the wheel over and the *Ibadan* lurched behind a wooded bar. Then he rang the engine to Stop.

"What the deffil is up, at all?" roared the engineer hopping on deck. "Who iss firing and what for?"

"Get below, you greasy trimmer," barked Hughes. "That wass a submarine, a blutty U-boat, look you, and it wass shelling us. We wass hit. Go below, for Got's sake and see what the hell iss the damage."

"Hearken, David Hughes, poor excuse for a sea captain, I know what iss the damage, for the engine is damn near off its bedplates. The screw iss broke, that iss what."

The two old men dropped overside in a boat. The captain fumbled under the stern muttering anxious blasphemy.

"She iss hurtit."

"Lucky we are not sunk, whateffer," snorted the engineer. "A piece of shell has knocked a propellor blade to hell, look you. Send down Two Dollar. That big Kru can slap the edge off with a sledge."

BOTH men watched while the enormous native whanged at the ragged bent blade just visible below the surface.

It was two hours before the little ship was chugging across a wide lagoon toward a narrow opening between luxuriant trees. It was late afternoon when they rounded a mangrove swamp and took position at the end of Port Harcourt wharf.

"Blime! The *Ibadan!*" yelled a foreman of works. "Thought ye'd sold her for scrap long ago, Taffy."

"Captain Hughes to you, you Stepney deal runner," called David.

"Go easy with him, David," cautioned Evan Morgan. "We got to wait at his blasted wharf for repairs, whateffer."

"We will not," snapped the captain. "Come you away below, Evan." He ushered the engineer into the tiny saloon aft. "Hearen, Evan," he whispered, glancing out of the port, "we must say nothing of that blasted U-boat that tried

to sink the *Ibadan*. Neither will we talk of damage done, for they will hold us here until Domesday waiting for those priorities or what before we can ship a new screw. We will take our coal and get back to Lagos, we will. And I will go to the Marine office and ask them again for a gun. We will blow the dog's father who hurtit our ship out of the water, dammim. Fighters, we are, Evan. Men of Harlech, whateffer. You will keep your big mouth shut."

"What if the U-boat iss waiting for us at Bonny?"

"Aye, what?" mumbled David. His face went old for a moment. "But we must not think of that. Maybe the sea beast will be away by then. Maybe a corvette will have sent her to the bottom in the slime where she belongs."

"Maybe. But I would feel better if we had a gun. Let us go to the Marine office here and try again."

So the old men, smart in white ducks with wide, old-fashioned helmets, climbed the steps to the P. H. road, saluting punctiliously as they passed whirring jeeps with their American officers.

"Now listen, Captain Hughes," said a weary Marine superintendent. "We've got enough worry without the *Ibadan*. I know all about her. There's three feet of concrete in her bilge; she's only held together with paint and rust, dammit. Why if you fired off a gun aboard that old tub she'd fall to pieces. Sorry, we have no guns to spare. You'll have to take your chances."

"Got-tammed brass-bound sea flunkey," Evan growled as they walked back to the wharf. "Blattering idiot, he iss, whateffer."

NEXT day they watched the *Ibadan* discharged. American soldiers in scrubbed overalls walked the wharf. Smart launches with the Stars and Stripes flicking from their sterns, whirled in the tricky current of the river. A gray-painted freighter unloaded machine parts which were swiftly put aboard railroad cars for the long haul to the Benue River far to the north.

"Under the tip for coal," said the foreman late that afternoon. "Fust thing in the mornin'."

David looked anxiously at the towering construction fifty feet above the river. It had a tip platform that tilted coal cars to pour their contents direct into holds.

"I cannot do it," he protested. "The *Ibadan* iss too small, look you. Can you not load me by hand? My hatches are too narrow for the tip."

"Scared yer bleedin' keel will fall off if a knob o' coal drops on it?" sneered the foreman.

"My man," David breathed, pink face mottled with passion. "My mannie, my gentleman—I'll not argue with you, you—! Will you please for the love of Got load me by hand, for I cannot take my ship under that tip."

"You gotcher orders," snapped the foreman and sheered off.

But next morning David was vastly cheered at the sight of a long, low Government collier standing in for the tip.

"Yer cawn't git the tip now," shouted the foreman. "The *Enugu's* got priority. Ye'll 'ave to be loaded be 'and."

"No thanks to you, you dockside slob."

David went below for breakfast.

"Go to the *Enugu*, Evan," he ordered, "and find out if that damned sub iss offshore."

Late that afternoon Evan Morgan reported.

"They haff seen nothing whateffer. The coast is patrolled, the mate says, for a convoy is expected in Lagos; a convoy of American soldiers, look you, and tanks and guns and airplanes."

"Good. Then we haff a good chance of getting back."

But it was three days before the *Ibadan* stood down-river. David stood nervous watch while they followed the channel far out to sea, skirted the rocks and headed back toward the coast.

"More speed, Evan, man," he shouted. "We are crawling, look you."

"I cannot get more speed than six and a haff knots with that broken screw," complained the engineer. "Steer close in shore then you can step off if you are frightened whateffer."

"I am not frightened, you black-faced

greaser. Get below to your engines, you make me nervous."

"By damn, I am below and you are topside, look you."

And they both kept the deck watching every movement of the uneasy sea. It was dark before they changed course to parallel the coast which loomed black less than a mile to starboard.

All that night the *Ibadan* waddled along the coast, a Kruman taking soundings. It was three before David Hughes could be persuaded to take a cat nap in a deck chair beside the wheelhouse.

"I cannot sleep, look you," he protested. "I must con my ship to her wharf." He patted the scrubbed rail with trembling fingers.

"She iss my home too, look you, David Hughes," Evan Morgan said quietly. "I'll keep watch while you take a sleep."

AT DAWN the sea was empty and the two red-eyed men stared wearily across the pearly water. The Bight of Benin was oily and opalescent beneath the pallid sky. To starboard surf broke lazily against the tree-lined shore.

"Ramos River ahead." called Mammy Palavar from the bow.

"Two points to port," David ordered and took station at the port rail to scan the sea ahead. "More steam, Evan, we're in deep water, whateffer, we must get inshore fast."

"Yeh! What t'ing!" yelled Mammy Palavar pointing to the southwest.

"By damn, it is!" David fumbled with his glass.

But all he could see was a piece of flotsam black against the sea glare.

"Keep your eyes open, fool!" he raged, mopping his sweating face. "You fear small piece wood?"

The Kruman hung a shamed head, scowling at his giggling mates.

Slowly the *Ibadan* weathered the Ramos estuary. Evan stood in the engine-room doorway mopping his head and staring to port. He started, gazed and stopped mopping.

"David," he stuttered. "For the love of Got will you look where I'm looking."

Not sixty yards away an unmistakable periscope studied them leisurely.

"The sub!" raged the engineer. "If we had a gun, just. With speed we could ram him to hell whateffer, the undersea serpent."

David collapsed against the rail, popping eyes watching the periscope. It made a slow circle of the ship and took up a position on the starboard quarter.

"He's looking us over for a gun."

The silence was deadly but for the slow, heart-like beat of engines. The crew watched the sinister dripping column, the two white men gripped the rail.

"He'll blow us to hell, look you," said Evan.

Then his voice rose to a sudden panicky yell.

"Ahoy, Fritzie! Come up and sink us, you pirate scum! We ain't frightened, look you, you flat-headed steward's mates! Come topside and I'll let you have a knob o' coal in the head, whateffer."

"Shut your head," David barked. "It will not help. Where the deffil is that patrol? Why does he not do something?"

But the periscope kept station moving at the pace of the *Ibadan*.

"This will drive me to madness," Evan faltered, chewing his mustache.

"Wait, he iss gone."

The sea was empty.

David slapped his engineer on the back, laughing foolishly.

"Oh, fools we are. Damn, scared old gaffers, indeed. It wass one of ours."

But two hundred yards astern a glistening gray shape burst out of the water. Spray broke against a gun and a conning tower rolled a little then steadied. Men came from it and clustered about the gun. There was a puff of smoke and the screech of a shell overhead.

"Ram him, dammim," yelled Evan. "Ride the barstid under."

"Below with you," said David quietly. "It iss no use."

"Stop your engines," called someone from the U-boat. "Stop your engines or I will sink you."

The gun seemed pointed directly at David.

Suddenly he felt old, helpless. He started wildly about him. But there was no sign of aid. He rang the telegraph to Stop.

EVAN climbed to the wheelhouse, glaring across the narrowing gulf between the vessels.

"Well, David," he said, gnawing his mustache, "this is it, indeed. Those swine will sink us, look you. We haff no chance against them and they know it. Ah well, you haff been a good skipper except for a bit pigheadness—"

"Wait." David watched the sub his eyes alight with hope. "They didn't sink us yet. Maybe there iss a chance. Maybe they will not waste a torpedo on the old *Ibadan*."

The U-boat, crew grinning, slid alongside a few yards to starboard.

"Send a boat!" called the officer on the conning bridge.

They watched Two Dollar, muscles gleaming in the sun, row to the rounded bilge of the sub. An officer and three sailors with tommy guns climbed aboard the *Ibadan*.

"Good afternoon, Captain," the German saluted.

"What iss good about it?"

"Put your crew on deck."

The ten Krumen shambled to the bow under the tommy guns.

"What is your cargo?"

"Look and see, you blasted squarehead!" snapped Evan.

The officer grinned nastily and two sallow sailors went below and returned to report.

"Any provisions?"

"Send your thieves to find them!" snapped Evan again.

The officer snatched a pistol from his belt.

"Silence, Englander. You do as you are told, or—"

"Do not call me Englander, I am Welch, look you," stormed the engineer.

"Quiet, Evan," pleaded David Hughes. "Do not anger him."

The sailors searched the cabins and returned with cases of provisions and bottles which they loaded in the boat. Then they rolled the few drums of oil from the engine room.

"They take my oil, damn their eyes—"

"Let them. Keep your mouth shut."

"That is good intelligence," said the officer and went into the wheelhouse to study the chart. He beckoned David inside, sniffing haughtily at the smell of Mammy Palavar the steersman.

"You will get under way for Lagos, now," he ordered. "But farther out. You will keep to deep water. We will maintain station alongside, so." He pointed to where the U-boat rolled alongside. "Keep going until I give you orders. But try no funny things or you will be blown to pieces."

"What are you about, at all?"

"Silence, pig! Do what you are ordered."

Evan went below and David rang Slow Ahead. The *Ibadan* ceased her slow rocking and, pistons clanking, moved slowly ahead. In half an hour she was making her best speed, the U-boat twenty yards abeam. It was growing dark and the sub's deck was crowded with sailors, gratefully breathing the damp but fresh air. The German officer sat in the wheelhouse, pistol on the table beside him, while one sailor stood guard at the engine-room door. The deck crew huddled together in the bow, and below, the stokers, sweat beading their shaven heads, rolled frightened eyes at the bull-necked Nazi who glared down at them.

All that night the *Ibadan* rolled westward and at dawn the land was a low smear to the north. There was a hail from the U-boat and the officer and sailor went aboard her.

"Keep your course, in deep water," the officer cautioned. "We know the route and will watch you." He made a gesture to the periscope. "Any wrong act and you will be sunk."

"Aye, aye," David mumbled.

THE U-boat submerged but two stubby columns cut the surface a little astern of the *Ibadan*.

"What'll we do?" Evan whispered from the shelter of the funnel. "What the deffil do they want of us?"

"Mind yourself," David chided. "That sub iss watching with its deffil's eyes of periscopes."

"Listen, David Hughes, I have a full head of steam, whateffer. Ram her, David Hughes, man. Put the helm over

and ram her into the slime where she belongs, blast her to hell."

"Keep your engines and mind your own business," snapped the captain. "She iss longer than the *Ibadan,* you fool, and fast as light too, look you. We can do nothing. Better we do as that Nazi says and maybe we can still get to port."

"Man of Harlech," sneered the engineer. "A fine fighter, whateffer."

"There iss a time to fight and a time to keep still," said David weakly. "Go below, Evan. I'm tired, look you."

"Aye, I'll go below, David Hughes. And if you reach dry land you'll be sorry. You'll mourn this day, my man."

All that day the twin periscopes cut the oily swell astern.

At nightfall the sub surfaced again and the officer and sailor boarded the *Ibadan.* David noted a machine gun on the conning bridge and a hulking gunner grinning behind it. Later, lights winked on the black coast and David began to shake for they were due off Lagos Mole at dawn.

There was activity aboard the U-boat. David heard the piping of whistles and the moan of exhausts. Sailors busied themselves at a torpedo hatch.

When you arrive off the mole," the officer said, pointing to the chart, "you will give your recognition signal and drop anchor until the submarine boom is opened. Do not make other signals, for we shall be close abeam."

It was still dark when a whistle blew and the U-boat's crew went below. The officer and sailor left the *Ibadan* and disappeared into the conning tower. Its deck tilted a little and water broke against the gun, covered it and sloshed over the conning tower.

Victoria Light blinked red and white far ahead and to its left twin red sparks marked the mole.

DAVID hung out of the wheelhouse until he could see faint phosphorescent plumes where the periscopes cut water.

"A point to starboard, Mammy Palavar," he said quietly. "Steady, keep to the channel. Keep her on the light."

"David."

"What iss it?"

"Lights ahead, there, out to sea."

They made out vague shapes against the graying sky. A blue light flicked on and off.

"By damn! It iss the convoy standing in."

"Aye," David said quietly. "And we are the decoy, look you, that will sink them all."

"What the deffil—"

"You see man? This stinking sea scum iss inshore from us, Evan. He knows, somehow, of the convoy, the dirty spy. He iss creeping along in our lee so they won't see him until he iss close enough to send his torpedoes into our ships. He iss close to us so that the Navy instruments will not hear his engines above our own."

"But we dare not signal, David—"

"Get below to your engines. I am in command on this bridge, Evan Morgan."

Evan stared at him, eyes gleaming in the half light.

"Starboard, a little," David ordered again.

The light swung a little beyond the black outline of the *Ibadan's* bow.

"Steady, David," Evan said suddenly. "You'll be off the Channel. That blutty U-boat will—"

"Silence, Evan."

"See, man, there iss our signal. Answer, man." Evan pointed to a stutter of light on the land.

"There will be no signal."

"But they will fire on us."

"Let them," said David calmly. "Half a point starboard," he said again.

It was getting lighter and ships were clearly visible. The mole stretched like a black finger over the graying water. Then they could see a corvette shoving a great bone of spray toward them.

"A corvette, David. We are safe, look you!" Evan yelled. "Now that sea-pig will know what iss—"

"Below man, the sub iss diving. She hass seen the corvette. Below man and giff me all the steam you got, whateffer!"

Evan stumbled down the ladder even as the periscopes shortened in the water.

"Full ahead, Evan!" yelled David,

jumping for the wheel. "Out of the road, Mammy Palavar. Full ahead, damn you."

He spun the wheel hard over and the engines clattered as the *Ibadan* heeled, turning slowly to the right.

"Full ahead, for the love of Got. Give me speed," he prayed, clinging to the wheel.

Then he saw the periscopes right below him. They seemed to lift a little, then backed. But there was a muffled, grinding crash and the bow of the *Ibadan* reared. Torn metal screeched and the stern dipped under. The conning tower of the U-boat heaved above the surface, there was a muffled explosion and the sub rolled under. A sharp, choking stench came from the water and great gouts of oil bubbles broke about the straining *Ibadan*. Her engines pounded and there were teeth-jarring crashes of splitting plates. The Krumen yelled, clinging to the rails. Then the cargo shifted and coal spewed from the hatches.

A BLINDING light covered them and a gun fired. The bow lifted higher and David, clinging to the kicking wheel, prayed as he heard her keel grinding against the grounded sub. Then there was a sickening wrench a tearing screech and the *Ibadan* broke her back.

"My Got, you've sat on her!" yelled Evan hanging to the wheelhouse door.

A searchlight bathed them and the corvette surged by.

"Steamer ahoy!" shouted the skipper. "What the hell's up?"

"Help!" yelled Evan. "We're sinking, look you. We're sitting on a got-tammed submarine."

David, eyes tight closed, clung to the wheel. There was coal everywhere and yelling Krumen. The bow dropped from sight and the stern part of the *Ibadan* started a sickening slide.

The sky was bright now and black-faced Germans struggled in the oil-thick water, choking and spluttering as they clung to lines thrown from the corvette.

A boat smacked into the water just as the stern of the *Ibadan* rolled and slid below the surface. Blue jackets dragged Evan and David from the undertow. The Krumen, swimming like ducks, were already climbing the rail of the corvette. Then she circled the spot and dropped several depth charges that shattered what was left of the U-boat and brought millions of fish to the muddied surface.

By the time oil had been swabbed from David and Evan, the corvette was station at the mouth of the mole while a long file of gray-painted ships, many flying the Stars and Stripes entered.

"Come on the bridge, sir," invited the youthful skipper. "Those cheers are for you; you saved some of those ships."

"Aye, we did that." But David looked astern to where part of the *Ibadan's* funnel still showed above water.

"Rammed her, hey?"

"No, sir, he did not." barked Evan. "Captain Hughes led that U-boat inshore to the edge of the navigation channel so she would not haff room to dive, look you. Then he sat on her like a hen on a blutty egg, whateffer. He is a hero, indeed. A true Man of Harlech."

Late that afternoon, stiff in starched whites, they rode from Government House covered with blushes after having been congratulated by a very great man.

"So," Evan said slyly to Ball of the Marine, "the *Ibadan* iss too old for Government service?"

"You were carrying government coal, were you not?"

"We were that."

"Then the Government takes responsibility for the loss of your ship. She will be replaced."

"Glory be," said Evan fervently.

David said quietly: "But the *Ibadan* iss gone."

"She went in a good cause, Captain Hughes," said the Director of Marine. "Meanwhile, I am instructed to offer you temporary commissions as Commander and Chief Engineer of the *Enugu*."

"She hass a gun, David Hughes!" Evan shouted gleefully.

The Director grinned. "My God, if you two fire-eaters can sink a sub with a leaky old basket like the *Ibadan*, you'll sink the whole Nazi Navy with a gun."

Captain David Hughes pursed his lips.

"I'll have no ill spoke of the dead, look you," he said severely.

# THE FLEET IN THE FOREST

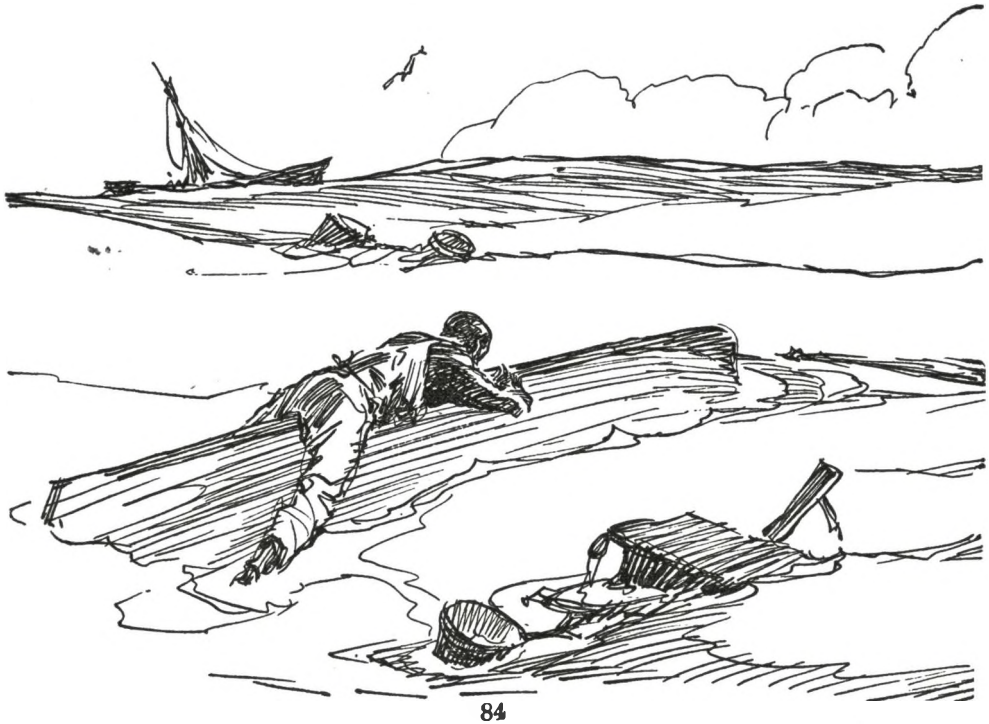
BY

CARL D. LANE

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

THE STORY THUS FAR:

CHID ALWYN found it difficult to keep his eyes on his prayer book the bleak day in 1813 that Old Man Tatum was buried, for the spars of the *Blessed Cause* were just visible down at the wharf. The privateer filled all of his dreams and hopes—hopes that he could get out of serving the rest of his apprenticeship at the Tatum yards and sign aboard the ship. MOSES LEET, at whose house CHID had eased many lonely hours since his father's death, teasing young MARY, Leet's daughter, cautioned him against any rash actions. But CHID, thinking longingly of the easy prize money and loot to be had aboard a privateer, determined to try to buy his freedom from NOAH BROWN, the new owner of the shipyards. BROWN refused to accept the lad's money, urging him to remain and help build the ships so sorely needed by America in the great sea war with England. CHID distrusted the flag-waving and grand sounding speeches by the recruiters, and so looked forward with



*Captain Farlow hove to at once, put the quarter boat over and brought the poor half-drowned fellow on board.*

little anticipation to the arrival of CAPTAIN PERRY who had come to recruit shipbuilders for the new construction at Presque Isle. However, he soon succumbed to PERRY'S straight talk and quiet assurance and the desire to serve under the man grew strong, as it did with the other shipwrights, several of whom immediately signed up. Even MOSES LEET, long retired, offered his services. CHID was badly tempted, but at the constant urging of one of his more disreputable friends, NEZ NOTT, he agreed to go along with him and sign on the *Blessed Cause*. Just then a fire broke out in a neighboring barn and CHID with the rest of the party rushed to put it out. As he groped through the blazing building to find old BEEMIS, the carriage driver, who was trapped there, CHID found CAPTAIN PERRY beside him aiding in the rescue. CHID pushed the Captain to safety and dragged out the coachman himself. Then in the confusion, he and NEZ escaped and signed aboard the *Blessed Cause*.

## PART II

A SULLEN winter dawn fell on the *Blessed Cause*. She was running free, on the starboard tack, riding the long breaking swells that rolled down the Atlantic from the Arctic, skirting the unseen sandy south shore of Long Island. There were two men on wheel watch to fight the constant threat of yawing. Her plain sail was set now, each sail full-bellied and comfortably sleeping but showing an inclination to collapse as the vessel slid into the deeper of the calm waters.

There had been no trouble making the sea turn off Montauk. Neither British nor Yankee ships attempted a close inshore patrol in storm, and Preserved Fish, threading the shoals by lead, had raised nothing all the long night.

Dawn had been an anxious moment, but the gray curtain had lifted only slightly, leaving visibility less than a cable's length, and remained there. The snow had stopped now, and the wind failed to pick up with the daylight. The sea was bitterly cold and tremendously disturbed, but no sail appeared on any quarter. The *Blessed Cause* was like a lonely star in outer space, dipping and rolling in her sweep to the southward.

Chid, being a carpenter rate, had not been required to stand deck watch. He was glad of that, for he was utterly tired and weary. Mr. Tinker, who, in warm lantern light, and shed of his shaggy great coat, seemed a kind man, had roused out some pork grease from the galley for Chid's leg burns. They were forming into blisters, becoming baggy with water, and Chid was glad that he had no breeches legs left to chaff them into raw wounds.

The grease was simmer-warm but hard enough to stick to his legs. In places there were patches of his small drawers stuck into the flesh. Mr. Tinker drew them out with kindness; then swathed both legs from ankle to above the knee in soft picked gun wadding over a clean linen cloth which, Mr. Tinker explained, his wife had made him take to tear into rags. He bound outside, spiral-wise, making the warmest pants Chid had ever known, long strips of light stuns'l canvas.

"There you be, youngster," Mr. Tinker had said when he had finished. "Wormed, parcelled and served, like a blasted pair o' lower shrouds. A man can't work or fight when he's bothered by ailments, sez I."

Chid had simply crumbled backwards from the berth edge upon which he'd been sitting, falling into a heavy sleep at once. Nez and the pea-souper, whose name was Antoine Paul Marestiere, had gone forward to make certain of the hawse hole and spill pipe plugs, caulking between the wooden stoppers and the entering chain links. When Mr. Bolt, the second mate, could think of no more sailing chores for a carpenter to do, they came to sleep in the same berthing space with Chid. It was the room which Chid had seen from the after companionway, not a forecastle but a steerage, like the berthing space of the boat-steers of a whaler. Drake, the master gunner, and Mr. Lefferts, who was the same captain of Marines who had come looking for stragglers at the Wagon's and Seamen's, berthed there too. Chid didn't hear them roll into the nar-

row storm-railed berths, or the constant thumping on deck as the watch kept the ice spades scraping at the freezing spray which threatened to get lumpy and log the ship down. His weariness was almost a form of drunkenness, poisoning him.

But he felt all right when the captain of Marines roused them all at dawn, pulling the shuck-filled bags from under each and rolling them onto the cold bare board slats, from between which came the dank festering smell of bilge.

Chid, dressing, didn't mind the motion. He hadn't been to sea very often and, by right, should have felt the sickness. But it was Nez Nott who was sick. He lay on the berth boards, breathing in the bilge smells, not caring about anything. Chid tried to rouse him, but Nez only groaned and formed himself into a tight huddled ball.

"Let him be," Antoine told Chid. "Bym by, oops he comes. Den you' fran', she feel better, wasn't? Hall good sailors catch it. Dat's how day t'ink, 'Ah'll sail de ship fast lak anyt'ing so's Ah come back home queeck, hein?' Ever'tam Ah gets sick, mebbe one-two hour when she sail, me."

"He's been to sea more than I have," Chid said. "It must be awful."

"Non, non!" Antoine grinned. "She don't work when she lak dat. Is lucky, dat fran'."

CHID borrowed Nez's wool stocking cap. Nez's shoes were too small by far. The Marine captain, who was pulling on white dress pants, offered Chid a pair of Marine's boots, taking them from a wooden sea chest which stood, lined with others, inboard of each berth. They fitted, and Chid said his thanks.

"Hold on, sonny," Lefferts said. "I don't pass out practically new English-captured boots for the sport of hearing them squeak on strangers. You got any cash?"

Chid said yes, some. He needed sea clothing, but had figured that what he had might do if they were to continue to the south or if, as he hoped, the voyage would be short. But boots were a necessary expense. Chid put his hand into his stern pocket, feeling for his wad of eighty dollars. It was gone. Yet he recalled, after Noah Brown had refused it, lashing it with a rawhide whang and tucking it securely into that very pocket. The pocket hadn't burned through, and that struck Chid as odd. "I guess," he said, slipping off the boots, "I don't have money anyway."

The captain eyed him keenly, his fat pig face puckering around the deepset pinkish eyes.

"What lay you got?"

"One thirty-second," Chid said.

"You cute little bastid!" Lefferts said without humor. "Damn near as good as my own, and you don't have to stand watch or fight. Tell you what I'll do. You make over a twentieth of it and the boots are yours, we take prizes or no."

Chid considered it. He needed the boots. But was a bad trade, for he had no doubt that they'd take prizes. The boots might, with a few good captures, cost him a hundred dollars or more. "Nope," said Chid, "I'll make out without 'em for a while."

Lefferts snatched the boots angrily and threw them into his chest then strode aft and up the ladder to the deck. Chid didn't miss the look of active enmity the captain gave him.

"Is good t'ing you didn't was," Antoine told him, nodding his approval of what Chid had done. "Hall tam hims make dat. Ever'body on de goddamn ship owes hims from de lay. Fo' what? Nozzing! Well, mebbe somezing—boots, de shirt, de knife, hall t'ing him steal from de Eenglish when we take de prize ship. But not me; non! You want dunder, Cheed, you mus' spik nice on Leffert an' mak hims part o' de lay. Is bad feller; ver' bad, by Gar!"

Chid said he'd be damned if he would. But he really needed those boots. Even here below decks and out of the wind he was bitterly cold. The unpainted deck was saturated with salt wetness and felt like raw lake-ice under his bare feet. Antoine looked at him in sympathy, then suddenly brightened.

"Have it, me!" he chirped. He was, Chid thought, like a child, eager and anxious to please and incapable of hiding from his face or manner any emotion.

Antoine slipped into Nez's shoes; then gave Chid his own heavy moccasins, unlacing the babeesh cords to make them large enough to fit Chid's big feet. Without stockings, which Chid did not have anyway, they just fitted, feeling warm at once.

Chid grinning, said his thanks. Antoine wouldn't hear. He walked the two-berth length in testings steps, as if wearing Nez's shoes, once excellent cordwainer's handiwork, was reward far too much. Chid felt that he had found a friend.

Mr. Tinker looked in, asking about Chid's burns. "A hatch cover come adrift last night," he said. "You better batten her down again."

"Yes, sir," Chid said. "Look, I had some money stolen from me last night. What do you reckon I ought to do about it?"

Mr. Tinker took on a sober look. "How much?" he asked.

"Eighty dollars."

"Why," Mr. Tinker grinned, "that ain't money, Chid. Not on a privateer, it ain't. Couple-three weeks from now you'll have so much you wouldn't even miss eighty dollars."

"Well, that's good," Chid said, "but I don't like to be taken in. The point is, the money's mine."

" 'Course 'tis," Mr. Tinker conceded, "and I'm goin' to mention it to the captain, Chid. You just belay the matter till then. He'll catch the scallywag, Fish will."

It seemed to Chid that the mate was being too eager to hush him, to retain his trust. He couldn't believe that the captain would mix into such a matter. But he didn't think about it then. Antoine was urging him forward, through the hold, to the carpenters' storeroom in the eyes of the vessel.

The tools weren't much, and they were in fearful shape. Every cutting edge needed both grinding and honing. The only bright tool in the lot was a double-bitted ax of a pattern which Chid had never seen before. Antoine swung it proudly after testing the edges with his horny thumb. "Hims b'long to me," he told Chid. "Logger on de Big Otter, me."

IT wasn't much of a job repairing the loose hatch cover. Antoine, with an exactness unreasonable to expect from such a heavy field tool as the double-bitted ax, shaped out new pine wedges, driving them with the flat of the shiny steel head. Chid caulked the hatch seam, using oakum from the storeroom cask.

Just before the change of the watch the cook banged his spider, and Chid got in line, filing aft. He had borrowed Nez's kid and pannikin, and his sheath knife. Nez was still curled miserably on his damp, evil-smelling berth, not interested in anything.

Chid took the ladle of mush only, not caring for the black tarry molasses which he could have had. He took two hard-tack biscuits from the barrel under the watchful eyes of Mr. Lefferts, then held out his pannikin for his rum dot. The food wasn't much nor was it appetizing, but, oddly, Chid ate with relish, sopping the biscuits, which were not nearly as hard as they would be later, into the rum.

He sat on the cold deck with Antoine and the master gunner, Alec Drake. Drake was from Monmouth, in New Jersey, a quiet sober man of nearly fifty whose legs were completely laced with distended blue veins. Drake looked perpetually sad, as certain breeds of hound dogs do. He was stoop-shouldered, his hair was iron-gray, and he moved slowly and painfully, Chid guessed, because of those horrible blue legs.

Chid's mates were a strange assortment of men and boys. Beside the coastal men there were a few Canucks, like Antoine, two Negroes, and a morose, bleary-eyed Mohican Indian from Groton. The coastal men were obviously used to the sea, for they set the shipboard habits for the others, Chid included. The gunners seemed to be navy-trained men. They alone wore any semblance of a uniform—the stiff canvas breeks and double-wool striped shirt and stocking caps of the frigate men.

He felt an odd faith in the gunners, and in their master, Drake; more than he felt in either Mr. Tinker or Mr. Bolt, the mates, though Mr. Tinker, Chid

reckoned, was a man you couldn't be sure about. There was something sly about him, and Chid suspected that he made it a point to create the feeling that he was a true friend as well as a man's superior officer. Captain Lefferts, Chid felt, was an openly dangerous man, who took no pains at all to conceal his disdain for all on board save his six uniformed constantly-watching Marines.

Marky, the hand who had hailed them aboard last night, was a Liverpool Britisher, a small wiry man with a perpetually ingratiating manner. "I'm all that's left of the Cutbarb," he told Chid, talking without encouragement. "Fish he sunk her uncommon fast, he being under chase by our convoy sloop at the time. But when his boat pulled back to this here vessel, why there was Marky, stowed neat under the foresheets. It seemed a good way to get to America, Mr. Alwyn."

"Hims ver' good hand," Antoine said. "First, Cap she want for to cut de throat," —and Antoine demonstrated, drawing his belt knife across Marky's prominent Adam's apple—"but Mark' she smart feller an' say how she know de English signal. Is come in handy, dat, eh, Marky?"

Marky admitted it had. On the last voyage Fish had penetrated into the very center of the Christmas merchant fleet under the British secret code hoist supplied by Marky, and taken five prizes before the fleet had scattered.

Marky said the voyage, though short, had been a handsome one. Being a stowaway, he hadn't shared in the prize money, but Fish had presented him with a voluntary gift of five hundred dollars if he'd agree to sail again. He hinted that he held the speedy success of this voyage in his hands, though he was quick to say that Captain Fish's undeniable cuteness was needed also. Marky said that heavy guns were all right and necessary for defense, but for offensive work against merchantmen there was nothing like the captain's cuteness and Mr. Lefferts' deadly Marines. Nothing could defeat them, save an armed ship, and Fish, Marky guessed, wouldn't be foolish enough to tangle with one if he could avoid it.


"He sees straight, does the capting," said Marky. "Gi' him the spoils an' leave the glory to the navy an' damn fools. Mr. Alwyn, d'you ever witness seven men capture a prize single-handed? Well, you attach your blinkers onto Mr. Lefferts an' his lads."

Chid didn't think much of the Marines. They messed alone, grouped about the pump forward of the mainmast, and took pains to show their hatred of the seamen. They were in dress uniform of peculiar style, British looking and flashy, which Antoine, recounting the prizes which had provided the various parts, said they were in fact. Each Marine always carried his musket with bayonet fixed, like a militiaman on parade, and the deck was never innocent of at least half the command.

THERE was little conscious discipline among the seamen. They were easy-going and docile, and had no snap whatsoever. Even Mr. Tinker, for an officer, seemed almighty free and easy. He sel-

dom raised his voice except to pass an order aloft, which, on the *Blessed Cause,* wasn't often. She was a fore-and-after, with but two pair of yards, and sail handling was done almost entirely from deck, making an easily worked vessel not to be improved upon for privateering purposes.

Mr. Tinker put Chid to fox-wedging the locust trunnels of the gun carriages. "There's other work a-plenty," Mr. Tinker said reasonably, "but I don't believe in just making work for a man. So long as we can fight the ship. It's what we're all here for—and there's no commodores or owners to come nagging about the last splinter in sight. How's Nez?"

"Still motion sick. He'll soon come out of it."

" 'Course he will—and he'll have to take a ragging, too. Chid, we're soon in the way of the Jamaica Line. You do one carriage to once only. 'Tain't smart to tie up more'n one gun at a time in these parts."

Chid went to work with enthusiasm. The gun captains were civil, joking with him about his friend Nez but approving his careful, quick work. The gun crews were at handling practice, striving for smartness. Alec Drake, when Chid came to him with his mallet and rock-elm wedges, laid off and lighted his iron pipe. Drake and his crew, Chid noted, were, like the others, excited.

"We're likely out first, lad," Drake said. "Nobody but Fish would clear in a blitherin' snow-gale, and anythin' at sea is more'n probable patchin' gear 'stead o' spoilin' fer prizes. We got every chance to fetch up suthin' interestin', lad."

"What's the Jamaica Line?" Chid asked.

"Well," Drake said, searching for the words that always seemed to come hard for him, "it's sort o' a path in the water, say. The British send up their stores from Jamaica on it, to Canady an' the North Atlantic fleet. Marky, like he was hintin', reckons some paymaster boats is due. You got a prime chance to see how good your wedgin' is before many glasses, lad."

"Marky said the Marines do the fighting."

"Well, we'll see," Drake said and became quiet.

Chid felt a joyous pride in the schooner. He had worked on many like her from keel up, and no part of her was strange to him. But he had never before sailed on one, and he felt, as does every man who sails, that intangible something which a living ship gives forth.

She swept southward and westward now under every last sail, sheets started and halyards and weather stays thrumming like the plucked strings of a parlor harp, their songs prolonged into infinity. The seas had become long and flat and green-topped. The ice in the rigging had tinkled to the deck and gone, and in the strengthening steady breeze there was the first hint of more moderate weather.

The mate wasn't one to make the vessel shine, nor was there need to, her usefulness to him and his company being but a matter of a few months. But the *Blessed Cause* was ready for action and her people were united in the common cause of taking all the prizes possible. Captain Fish hadn't appeared on deck. Mr. Tinker or Mr. Bolt worked the ship, and Mr. Lefferts and his sour Marines policed her.

Just before noon Mr. Tinker asked Chid to sound the well. There was under seven inches in it. When Chid reported, the mate noted it on a shingle which was nailed to the binnacle and said there was no need to pump yet. Then Chid, feeling very useful, held the big log reel over his head, a hand on each axle, while Mr. Tinker ran the stray line out into the creamy turbulent wake. When the first knot had passed through his fingers, he called sharply for one of the wheel watch to capsize the glass. Sand and line ran out and when the glass was empty Mr. Tinker stopped the line smartly and, while Chid hauled in the line and the capsized chip at the bitter end, made some calculations.

"Some better'n I reckoned," he said, his mouth not so smiling. "We're gettin' up into the Delaware current an' like to raise somethin' any time. Lad, if Marky's correct, this'll be a famous voyage indeed. You keep a sharp watch. First to spy rates double rum for a week if he's alive to take it."

Chid felt good. The leg burns were not hurting, just itching slightly and pleasantly beneath the warm dressings. Yesterday and last night were ages away, and he didn't even think about them.

But the theft of his money had left him sore. And it gave reason for his instinctive hatred of Lefferts and the porky moon face over the sweeping blond mustaches. Chid could imagine no one of his bunk mates being a thief save Lefferts.

But it was another matter for him or for Captain Fish to prove it. Lefferts, whatever else he might be, certainly was no fool.

## CHAPTER VII

### BATTLE STATIONS!

THE afternoon watch was just drawing to a close when Antoine, from forward, raised the cry of, "Ship! Ship!"

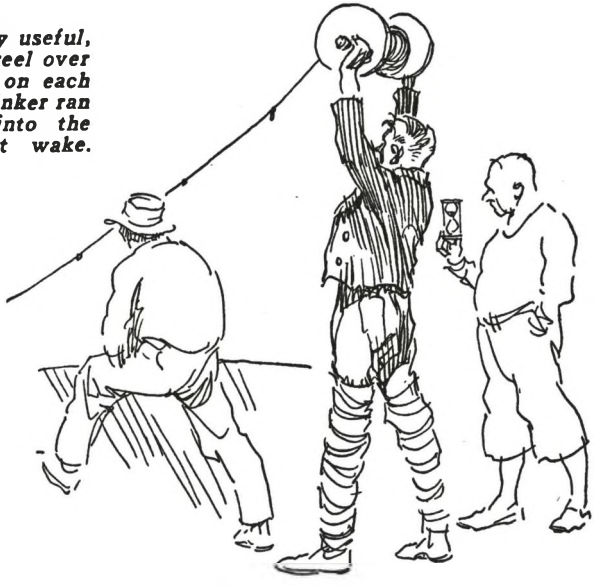
"Where away?" Mr. Tinker demanded with startling alertness.

"Dar! Dar! Ees ship!" Antoine yelled. "Ah spy hims, dar, me!"

Chid couldn't see it at once, not even by following Antoine's excited pointing. The Canuck, Chid reckoned, must have eyes like a forest beast to pick up a tiny triangle of sail against the heaving gray horizon and recognize it as a ship before the old experienced hands even knew it was there.

The stranger, it could be seen a few moments later, was almost downwind, beating northward, some miles south and east. On deck there was orderly activity at once. Each gun was readied, canvas gasket stripped off and the serving tools laid out on the deck. From overside came buckets of sea water for the sponge tubs, shot racks were rigged, and Mr. Bolt, calling Chid and Antoine, dropped below and unlocked the magazine. Chid helped fill the descending rope-net slings with round and bar shot, sending it aloft to unseen hands when filled. The powder boys came down, their clothing soaked in cold sea water. They filled the fire buckets, then shooed Chid and Antoine away.

When they reached the deck, Chid saw that four beef barrels had been sent to the cross-trees and lashed there. From each extended a musket manned by one of Mr. Lefferts' Marines. Antoine said that he had personally made the shields; that each was a small cask within a larger one, and the space between was filled with beach rubble. Captain Fish was on his quarterdeck now, holding the high weather side, looking, oddly, in spite of his diminutive stature, every inch an able commander. Mr. Tinker



*Chid, feeling very useful, held the big log reel over his head, a hand on each axle, while Mr. Tinker ran the stray line into the creamy turbulent wake.*

was forward of him, a cutlass swung from a leather bellyband buckled over his great coat and two pistol handles appeared in his pockets. Mr. Lefferts had his sword bared for no apparent reason, and he alone, Chid thought, looked somehow ridiculous.

The stranger wasn't large. She was ketch rigged, in the Bermudian style, having jib-headed sails. It was the first such rig that Chid had ever seen, though he had heard often of their swiftness. Antoine signaled him, breaking into his study of the prettiness of the vessel. They laid out clearing axes and hung a wrecking saw from the trunk bulkhead; then sifted sand over the entire deck. "For de blood," the Canuck said. "Lak ice, whoop! Down de man is!"

Chid had no taste to arm himself. It had never occurred to him that there might be hand-to-hand fighting, with a personal individual enemy lusting for his blood. In the sea yarns, engagements had always been fought with the guns at reasonably long range. The enemy was the ship. But he suddenly remembered the dried blood and the human hand on that brig which had brought Bob Crown's brother home to die.

There seemed nothing murderous about putting a match to the touch hole of a huge impersonal gun. But Antoine's lethal ax, which he could use with such accuracy, or Mr. Lefferts' Marines hidden in their safe shields like long-tongued serpents for cool deliberate killing—Chid tried not to think of these things.

The stranger made signs of running off, a maneuver that Marky hailed with delight, for it proved her an enemy and probably valuable. She showed no colors or signals, nor did Captain Fish.

The matter turned into a stern chase shortly, both vessels scudding to the southwest on a fast reach. But the *Blessed Cause* was by far the more powerful, and easily outfooted the small islander. Studying her through the glass, Mr. Tinker announced with satisfaction that she carried but two insignificant swivel guns, one on each quarter-break, nothing to bother them.

When they were about a thousand yards off, the mate had Drake touch off a gun. The boom of it sounded flat and somehow disappointing. It caused the stranger to send up the English ensign, but she continued to sail on with annoying swiftness for all her diminutive size.

"Watch out she don't jettison ballast for speed," Mr. Tinker said to Captain Lefferts. "A little feller like that's likely one of Marky's paymaster boats; or dispatches."

"Damn dispatches," Lefferts growled. "There's no money in them. But first one comes near the rail I'll have drilled."

"Do," said Mr. Tinker sweetly.

It struck Chid that even dispatches, provided they could be taken before being sunk, might prove useful to the navy. But nobody mentioned the possibility, and he said nothing.

IT was obvious now that the little vessel would be overhauled within the next quarter glass. Evidently the stranger realized it as well. She suddenly luffed into the wind and lay a dead thing, facing her bow into the seas and plunging it deep into the attacking crests. On her deck men hastily handed in her sheets and, dropping the halyards a few feet, killed the drive of the sails. She waited, obviously, for a hail and demand, and had no intention of fighting the heavily armed privateer.

Mr. Tinker looked relieved. "Don't light no matches," he said. "Mr. Lefferts can handle this, I reckon."

The gun crews began securing. Above him, Chid suddenly heard the crack of scattered musket fire from the crosstrees. The Marines were firing, the ragged deliberate fire of sharp-shooters. On the ketch two men fell. The rest dove for the hatches. One man, risking the fire, remained to cut the ensign halyards before disappearing. One of the fallen men struggled to a sitting position, then fell backwards and tried again. Mr. Lefferts pointed with his naked sword; a crack sounded from above and after that the figure lay still.

No sign came from the ketch. Save for the two bodies rolling on the deck like lumps of jelly, she seemed utterly deserted. At best there could have been

but seven or eight on her. It made Chid mad, the elaborate shamming caution of Mr. Tinker did. The *Blessed Cause* circled the tiny vessel four times, her topsails now doused, Mr. Lefferts alert and aquiver, like a coon dog with the coon treed but wanting the real courage to close in.

It was almost dark before Mr. Tinker finally hove to and ordered a boat over. He had, so far, neither shown a flag nor hailed the stranger. It was, Chid thought in disgust, like a great armed bully turning on a small boy without warning or decency, lashing and stabbing even after there was no possible chance of resistance. Fish hadn't said a word since taking the deck. But as the quarterboat was lowered, he said to Mr. Tinker, "Take a carpenter. I don't want her."

Mr. Tinker looked forward with purpose, but Antoine was already sliding eagerly down a boat fall, his ax hanging from his belt like the tail of some nimble tree animal. Chid, though he'd stepped forward, was glad that his name hadn't been spoken. There was something shameful and criminal in taking part in the capture. Those two dead men had been entirely unnecessary; so had Fish's extreme caution, circling the harmless little vessel so often and throwing musket fire into her.

Mr. Bolt said that the two dead men were probably whites. Mr. Lefferts, he said, had urged that it was easier than making prisoners of them, and if white men were left alive, they could lead a pretty good fight against the boarding boat. The rest of the crew were likely Niggers, with no heart for fighting and sometimes useful on a privateer, being, if they were Jamaica men, excellent seamen and not sharing in the prizes.

The boarding party was in possession of the ketch. Antoine's ready ax had cut the halyards, sending the sails tumbling downward in billowing white folds. They trailed overside entwined in the severed bowsprit rigging, quieting the seas alongside. The boat shortly put back, and Chid could see that she was now pulled by four buck blacks, naked to their waists. Mr. Tinker in the stern sheets and a seaman in the foresheets each had a pistol trained on the rowers.

The blacks climbed to the schooner's deck, looking neither happy nor distressed. Without orders they went forward and to windward, and squatted docilely on the deck there. The boat picked up two men to pull her again to the prize. Mr. Tinker, passing alongside, make jokes to the men hanging over the rail. "Full of gals," he called jovially, "nice full-modeled gals, just a-pinin' for a boarding party. Hah! And likker! Lord Harry, wait'll you see!"

They were back again before total night had settled upon the sea. They brought nothing with them but four curious tubs, extremely heavy and requiring the handy-billy to bring them on deck. The ketch had been dismasted and stove, and she wallowed in the darkness a swamped wreck, the seas washing her from bow to taff rail. Chid guessed that Mr. Tinker hadn't wanted to burn her for fear of raising an inquiring sail.

Somebody had cast the two bodies overside, an eloquent rite which raised a dead human slightly above a dead ship. It made Chid wonder about Old Beemis. His body was gone at dawn; nobody had mentioned him, and Chid himself hadn't thought of him until this moment.

THE *Blessed Cause* was put on the wind, and she reached away on her former course under reduced night sail. Mr. Tinker and Captain Fish went below immediately, following the tubs. After a while Mr. Bolt and Alec Drake, too, were invited down. They, the cabin boy said, were to represent the crew in the matter of the division of the prize. Chid lounged with the hands in the midship, sharing their expectancy. " 'Twas hard money, I reckon," one of the men who had boarded said. "Otherwise, she was bare save for stores an' stun ballast. Not even a bottle or a cask, damn them penurious Jamaica skippers."

The tubs had contained a gold coin shipment. Captain Fish had reckoned it. It came to one hundred and thirty-one dollars the sixty-fourth lay. "Provided," said Mr. Tinker, who spoke for the captain, "provided, we don't put it through

*The boarding party was in possession of the ketch, Antoine's ready ax had cut the halyards, sending the sails tumbling down.*

the prize court and have the gov'mint and the brokers and the owners and every other son of a bitch in creation helping theirselves to it."

"It's just a matter of keeping mum," he told them. "No trace of the ketch, and a storm to make foundering a reaable guess. Mr. Bolt, whyn't you take a vote?"

Mr. Bolt didn't bother to make it for-

mal. It was apparently a cut and dried matter. "Don't hear no deacons singin'," he said without hesitation. "I'd say we favored."

"Well, good," Mr. Tinker nodded. "Line up the hands. Every man-jack gets his money, here and now. That's the kind of dealings Cap'n Fish stands for. Fair and square to all. Alwyn, take care of Nott's lay, seeing's you're friendly-like."

The actual feel of the cold hard coins gave Chid a peculiar sensation. It was somehow disappointing; there wasn't the free joy in them that he had imagined; rather, in an un-understood way, they seemed like a burden. But he took them eagerly enough, however, making a poke for them of his shirt front.

"Just a minute, Alwyn," Mr. Tinker said, drawing him away from the others. "Cap'n Fish found your eighty dollars, lad. You ain't to mention it, boy; the cap'n requests you don't. Here 'tis."

"My money was in paper," Chid said, taking the coins.

"Well, the captain got it back for you in gold. That ain't no cause to holler, is it?"

"Nope. Reckon 'tain't," said Chid. "Say my thanks, sir."

"I've done it. The Cap'n don't want no enemies, Chid. He was glad to get it back, but you better keep it hid after this."

"I will; don't you fret."

He had two hundred and sixty-two dollars, his one thirty-second lay. He had more money than he had ever seen at one time, and it was, even to his returned eighty dollars, all in British gold. Chid couldn't, thinking about that small fortune, let himself become depressed.

The off watch made the proper overtures to Mr. Lefferts and brought rum flasks from some secret place below, and somebody in the darkness forward sang a sober song about an idiot girl on October Mountain, not melodious save in its accompaniment of wave music at the run and the thin regular complaining of a fatigued throat block aloft as the schooner ran with the long flattening seas. It became a genial hour, very pleasant indeed. Mr. Tinker, who was quite inclined to good-fellowship, told some indecent stories. Chid didn't understand every point, but he laughed along with his mates. He had himself a good drink of somebody's kill-care, feeling the liquor lighten him, and it wasn't, after that, very hard to make himself forget about those two murdered men.

Marky reckoned that a whole fleet of paymaster boats might be at hand. They sailed in small squadrons, he said, dividing their cargo and depending upon their speed to slip by Yankee ships. Sometimes they had a convoy, but the storm had likely scattered the fleet and it was making the best way it could to the British fleet off American waters. Or possibly, Mr. Bolt offered, the *President* frigate, which he heard was cruising on the Jamaica Line, had caught the convoy ship.

NEZ came on deck, stepping from the steerage hatch with a sheepish grin on his face, saying he was all right again and had been just too lazy to get up that day. To prove that he was feeling good, he cuffed Antoine playfully and the two tumbled on deck, kicking and biting in the best of humor. "Ho!" Antoine puffed. "Hims do de knee, hunh! Nez, you watch out Antoine, she get de ax!" Nez quit then, laughing, and came to sit with Chid.

Chid mentioned that he had his lay, all counted and waiting for him.

"Keep it," Nez said. "I'd never hang onto it, even in the middle of the damned ocean. But for Hannah's sake, Chid, hide it or suthin'. That Lefferts would have picked you like a turkey biddy picks lice. Here's your money roll," and he passed Chid his eighty-dollar wad, still tied with its rawhide whang.

"Where'd you get it?"

"Why, I tuk it off's you last night, a'fore I turned in," Nez said. "Great airth an' seas, didn't you have that bastardly Marine figured out?"

"No. But I'm getting on to him. He tried to trade me a pair of boots for a share in my lay. I'd be paying hundreds for 'em if this easy picking keeps up."

Nez didn't answer. Chid, following his eyes, saw why. On Nez's feet were a new pair of boots of exactly the same pattern

as those which Lefferts had offered Chid that morning.

"What did they cost you?"

"I signed a writin'."

"Tarnation, Nez! Ain't you got more sense than that? Did you read the writing?"

"Well, not exactly. The letters curl around sort o' confusin' an' mostly I don't bother. Lefferts he read it to me, Chid."

"Nez, we got to get hold of that laywriting. He wanted a twentieth of my lay for those boots. Gosh knows how much you signed for. This is all my fault for taking your boots, Nez."

"No it ain't," Nez said. "Hell, I don't begrudge my friends anything they're a mind to take o' mine. But it gets me mighty sore to be taken like a trapped varmint."

Nez was all for dropping below on Lefferts at once and settling the matter, and he reached his hand to his shoulder knife significantly. Chid held him back. There was nothing to be gained by seeing the porky captain now. He'd laugh at Nez and reckon one more enemy, a matter probably completely untroubling to him.

"We can't do it that way," Chid said. "Don't you see the odds? What do you guess those Marines tromp about armed for all the time? Lefferts does this all the time, Nez. He runs a business of looting the hands, and he needs his men to save him from some of the hating he must get."

Nez grinned and admitted that seven was more than he wanted to tackle at once. "Well," he said, "I got plenty of time. Someday I'll catch him just right."

"Look at it square," Chid said. "All you want is a look at the writing to see that it's fair. Taking it out of Lefferts' hide won't help none."

"Oh, yes, it will!" Nez said. "Chid, you an' me never see eye to eye about what we're fightin' for nohow. But I always know jest where you stand. You jest won't stir 'cept where there's money involved."

Before he turned in, Chid hid all the money, over six hundred dollars. He hid it in the bottom of the oakum cask in the carpenter's storeroom forward, then locked the door. He reckoned it would let him sleep better, knowing the money was safe. It was curious and, thinking about it, troubling, about that eighty dollars he'd lost. It had been returned to him twice, and Tinker had given him the false sum. Chid hadn't the least idea why, but he could imagine it was for no good purpose. It was hard for him to even try to think of the whole significance of it.

BUT he was certain now that Fish and his officers were evil-hearted men. He could feel their evil about him, like a sudden night wind from some corrupt place. It was shocking to find himself a part of it. Two men had been wantonly murdered. Every man-jack of them had accepted his share of the prize money, becoming party to what Chid supposed was piracy. And the schooner was rotten with a system of filthy exploitation apparently condoned by the officers, the hatred it aroused controlled by armed men in the guise of a Marine complement.

The schooner was making easy way of it. Drake, coming off wheel watch just as Chid rolled himself into his coarse damp quilt, said that Fish had come on deck at four bells. He was drunk, but sober enough to order the *Blessed Cause* laid on and off in the vicinity until dawn. He hoped, he had hiccoughed to Tinker, to fetch another paymaster boat.

Chid was almost asleep when he heard an unearthly scream from the deck. It was quiet after it, with only the small-noises of the working vessel audible. Lefferts came down the ladder shortly afterward, treading with decent quiet but puffing slightly.

"All done?" Mr. Bolt whispered down the hatch.

"Aye, all done. One of them broke from his lashings and I had to stick him. But he's over with the rest. No court'll ever know about the prize."

Chid almost retched, feeling sick. Not two, but six men had been murdered in cold blood. Not even remembering the handsome stride he had made toward making his dreams come true this day could sweeten his troubled restless sleep.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BLOOD SHIP

THE *Blessed Cause* cruised for two days without sighting a sail of any kind. The sea had become warm and gentle, its ripple laughing against the smooth black hull as if to make amends for its black destructive mood just past, and the continuing northerly winds brought the day up bright and sparkling. It was grand effortless sailing and gave the crew welcome muscle-easing hours on deck.

Antoine and Nez had evolved a kill-time game on the gear-cluttered foredeck which they pursued by the hour.

They had lashed a hard-board to the after face of the wooden knightheads and in its center they stuck a small chip of pinewood with spit. The game was to split the chip. Antoine, standing eight paces aft of the target, used his double bitted ax, throwing it with an easy lightning-quick swing. Nez used a common bone-handled skinning knife, starting his cast each time from the leather sheath which he carried, on a neck thong.

They were both experts and their mutual respect had expressed itself in constant gentle ragging of each other. Chid enjoyed their quick banter as much as he did their beautiful dramatic skills. It was, as always, a source of wonderment to him how Nez so easily and naturally became one of whatever group he happened to join. Chid was aware of the real liking that the men had for Nez. He himself, he knew, did not enjoy their friendship in the same open unquestioning way. He supposed it was because of his natural caution and uncommunicativeness. He hadn't talked much to any man. He was civil when spoken to and had made conversation only with Alec Drake and Antoine, both of whom had seemed to like him. But he had listened—an attribute that he had always laid more store by than talking.

Antoine now stuck a tiny chip to the target, a bit of whittling difficult to see from a few fathoms away. With utter carelessness he took his casting position, maintaining a belittling tirade against Nez the while, then stiffening suddenly, flashed his ax in a cold keen arc and buried the blade a full two inches in the hard-board. The chip fell to the deck in two specks.

"Hah, by gar, Nez!" Antoine chanted, "do dat, you. Fo' Antoine is nozzing, nozzing, my fran'. Hup in de bush Ah t'row mah ax an' Ah cut de flyin' bee in two leetle piece, an' you know what? Bot' pieces is weight exact de same!"

Amidst the applause and laughter Nez threw his knife. It quivered in the deck after an unseen flight and beside it lay two halves of an already halved chip.

"That cost you a hundred dollars," Nez said, "Don't you know when you meet up with a good man, Antwine? Give the money to Chid sometime. Or you want to settle all you owe me for a good dallop o' kill-care right now?"

It was all very pleasant; but behind the good-fellowship of the lazy days on deck Chid was aware of a strange growing unrest. He had heard whisperings, suddenly silenced when he drew near, and once, passing a group which was stranding rope ends for chaffing gear, he heard his own name mentioned. Alec Drake, too, in a cautious obtuse way had been trying to tell him something for the last day but had never come to the exact point.

On the evening of the second day an American sixteen-gun brig appeared, making mast-head signals. Captain Fish hove to and made his identifying signal of two red swallow-tails below the rattlesnake flag and sent the ensign to the main gaff peak. When the two vessels were alongside, the man-of-war hailed from over the calm sea between. Mr. Tinker without batting an eye reported them as the Salem privateer *Diligence*, five days out of Boston with no prizes seen or taken.

"At sun up," Mr. Tinker informed the officer who had mounted the mizzen sheer pole with his speaking trumpet, "we was chased by a Britisher, a forty-four likely, by the looks of her, but sailed lubberly and we shook him."

"Where away?"

"Why, up to north'ard, I guess. You lookin' for a scrap she'd make you a dandy."

"She'd be suicide for us, I'm afraid.

But we're on patrol and better look into her, though it's a frigate job to settle her. Obliged to you, sir—and fair hunting."

Chid heard the shrill of her boson's whistles, then watched the smart orderly bracing of her yards as she made off on the westward board for the upwind beat. Mr. Tinker smirked behind his smiling report to the captain, up with his rum bottle for the balmy evening air. "It kind of clears the sea for us," Chid heard him say. "If Marky's right we ought to fetch up another of those paymaster boats right soon. We like missed a couple, I reckon."

"There's supposed to be eight of them according to the dispatches Marky stole," said Fish drawing on a long clay pipe, Dutchman style. "Tinker, don't take any more prisoners. I don't like 'em in this business."

"Aye, sir," the mate agreed, "they leave a trail like a whaler on boilin' day. I'll mention it to Lefferts."

THE Marine captain had made no effort to collect his share of the prize money which Nez had received. Chid felt keenly his responsibility for getting Nez into the scrape, though he knew that, had it happened to anybody but a friend, he would have felt in no way obliged. Nez, as he had stated, didn't care about the money but, in the right humor, which would probably occur the moment Lefferts tried to collect, Nez might forcibly resent being hoodwinked. For Chid had no doubt that the assignment upon which Nez had placed his mark would contain a damning provision of one-way benefit. Antoine had hinted at such a possibility.

But as yet Chid had no notion of how he might get a look at the writing or get the writing if it did assign Nez's entire lay to the Marine captain. Lefferts seldom left the quarterdeck. He took his meals with Fish and when he made his nightly inspection of the ship he was always accompanied by a file of his outlandish Marines.

It was another beautiful mild night, prime for drinking, but not many of the hands imbibed. The discipline of the ship would not have stopped them, and Chid, reasoning it out, expected that it was unrest which was keeping them sober and on the alert. Without it being obvious, Chid thought he could see a division in the crew; could detect small signs which showed them dividing into two groups.

Alec Drake was slow, as usual, when Mr. Bolt, who had the deck, called for rolling tackles on the main and fore booms. His legs were a livid disgusting blue and he had been rubbing them with turpentine and cayenne, on Antoine's advice, to get the aching tiredness out of them. A Marine pricked his stern with a bayonet point, watching the old man hump with relish.

Drake showed no fight and Chid thought that in itself a dangerous sign. But a hand named Reefer turned on the Marine and cursed him with bitter venom, East Boston style, and punctuated with spitting which Chid couldn't rightly say was deliberate or the result of the tumbling fury of his cursing. But Reefer earned only a sharp jab of a gunbutt in his groin for his pains for Drake.

Lefferts, oddly, slept aft in the quarterdeck trunk that night and had taken his chest with him. Whatever plans Chid had for rifling it to see Nez's assignment were now destroyed. But the steerage seemed a vastly improved and cleaner place.

Shortly after meridian the next day the *Blessed Cause* took the second paymaster boat. Like the first she was a Jamaica ketch; a poor ship with patched sails and fished spars that waved like willow wands in the ocean roll as the privateer made her cautious preliminary circling. She struck immediately but Fish, the third time around her and with a man on the main truck to watch out for a protecting ship of the line upwind, nodded to Lefferts, and his deadly sharpshooting commenced from the barrel edges in the crosstrees. Four men were down in two minutes. The rest, all husky blacks, threw a small yawl boat into the sea and followed it in wild dives from the deck.

Mr. Tinker put about to run down the frantically rowing blacks, so the Marine fire could bring to bear, but before a

shot had found the range the crew went overside, keeping the boat between themselves and the schooner. Fish, cackling like a small angry bird, reminded Tinker of his orders; then himself put the *Blessed Cause* a cable's length to windward of the drifting boat and the black figures clinging desperately to it.

Mr. Tinker understood at once. Grinning his blandest, he jibed the schooner and ran, full and by, down on the yawl boat. With a shudder of horror Chid heard the crunching and grinding of the yawl as it passed beneath the schooner. He didn't look overside. Those blacks who swam away, flinging themselves clear with the aid of the marbling bow wave, died under Lefferts' murderous fire before they reached the quarters.

Chid was ordered over with the boarding party this time. He followed Mr. Tinker and a roll-gaited seaman named Griswold, axing the lockers and bins they indicated. The money was in a small iron-bound sea chest under what had been the skipper's berth in the small crowded cabin. Tinker looked no further when he had found it but bid Chid to cut its deck lashings and give a hand lowering it into the boat.

The mate wanted the sticks cut out and the hull stove so she'd sink quickly but Chid, listening to the ominous gurgling under the floors, opined that the Jamaican would not last ten miuntes. She had seemingly taken a terrific beating in the gale and was leaking badly. Probably only constant pumping had kept her afloat this long and her condition had been the reason for her failure to attempt an escape. The news pleased Mr. Tinker.

"Well, good," he smiled. "I reckon was she in convoy, they'd have shifted to and abandoned before this. Cap'll be pleased to know. With no convoy to worry about maybe we can search about a mite more open now."

"Look," Chid said, "I didn't ship for this sort of thing."

"What did you ship for?"

"Why, profits," Chid said, "but not trouble."

"Well, I'd say you was doing right handsome with the profits, boy. And Cap'll take care of the trouble; he's no damn fool. Don't tell me you've got one of them blasted consciences?"

"No, it ain't that; not altogether. I wouldn't kill men for money myself, but if others kill 'em and I can't stop it there's no sense letting their money go by me."

"Look at it this way," Tinker said. "Cap's doing a patriotic turn for his country; he's clearing the seas of these plagued devils."

"He ought to be regular about it, bound to his Letter."

"You ever hear of a privateer bound to his Letter? You ever hear of a soldier or a sailor, bound to his articles? No, boy, you ain't. They're all out for Number One unless they're pure ninnies or fools. Cap didn't take you for one when you signed on. I wouldn't want to tell him you've gone softy on him. He was counting on you, in a way."

"Well, he can. I'm under his orders," Chid said. "But I'd sure like to know how all this is coming out."

CHID could heartily wish for no conscience at all now. In the past, when he had been cute or smart and could count it in profit, no conscience had ever come to bother him. He had merely met an opponent on equal footing, in no way dishonorably, and either out-smarted him or been outsmarted himself. There was no reproach in a thing like that. It was life itself, life and survival and, in a way, a man's duty to himself and his aims. But this deliberate and criminal cunning sickened Chid; it rasped harshly on what he supposed was conscience though he named it to himself as fear and disgust and shame. Mostly fear.

Drake had found two kegs of black powder, which he sent to the boat by a sling. The others had all taken some small momento. One man had the whale-oil binnacle lamp and another had a curious conch horn. Reefer had found a pair of flint-lock pistols, rather nicely tooled in the English fashion, but Tinker, with that sudden hard twist to his mouth, dropped them overside without a word. It meant nothing at the time to Chid.

Before he returned to the boat Chid covered two of the slain men with the bunt of the fallen mizzen sail, keeping his eyes averted and not wanting to see the wound from which had come the congealing red pool on the white deck. It was almost an involuntary act; he had no idea why he did it. But in a curious way it seemed to excuse his own participation in the attack and looting.

His act had not gone unnoticed. That evening after the *Blessed Cause* had been put miles away from the scene and the sun was dipping into the western sea, Drake, with studied casualness, sought him out. They hung over the weather rail, feeling the lift of the vessel as she reached gently eastward for another crossing of the Jamaica Line.

"It's the end of pleasant weather," Drake said, chumping on a new piece of twist. "You take fog like that out there, what ain't made up its mind; it can mean anythin'. Easterly winds for certain; mebbe one o' them lashin' gales again. Boy, I seen you cover them two bodies this afternoon. It was a human thing to do."

"I couldn't help it. There was no need to kill those men."

"No need at all. No need for lots o' things," Drake said quietly. "I covered the other two. Mebbe you seen me do it."

"No." Chid said. "I didn't."

Drake chewed, spitting into the ripple of the run and watching the brown juice mingle with the green seas and pass aft, not saying anything. It was Drake's way; this clumsy hesitation and cautious weighing of his words and his attitude. He had tried it on Chid before.

"There's others on board," the gunner said, "as might consider such a deed human, too. Back in your town, there was four on 'em I know would have been proud to call it so. Three carpenters an' a hand, I recollect, seems if."

"They were planning to take the ship and pirate," Chid said. "That's why they were beat ashore."

Drake looked cautiously about, then glanced aloft. When he saw that they were utterly alone he studied Chid, then, with a sudden resolve, talked as freely as he had talked guardedly before.

"That was a cock an' bull yarn the mate told you an' Nott to get you signed on. Them men wasn't going on that account; they was plannin' to keep the hull ship from doin' jest that. Fish, through Lefferts, long ago wanted for all of us to do jest what we're doin' now. We was again' it an' said so and figured, bein' half the ship an' more, we was strong enough to stay again' piratin'; make the rest behave. But he had us in a nice situation, boy; signed on, Lefferts creditor to half the hands for advance money and tucked away in your remote little swamp o' a town without liberty, save by two's o' a evening hour. He tuk us complete by surprise, maroonin' them four hands and shippin' o' you two. It sort o' upset the balance—though I'll admit free we never tuk the hull matter serious 'till what happened. Well, boy, this here way o' taking prizes an' dividin' don't set good wit' some on us. It'll lead but to a hangin' an' disgrace for a man's fambly. D' you ship for a hangin', boy?"

IT MADE Chid think what he had shipped for. Money; yes . . . and something beyond money. His share of the second prize had been rich, over six hundred dollars, and he now had all the money he had ever dreamed a man might use up in a lifetime, much more than he needed to get his ambitions rolling. And there was Nez's share, too. Nez, in his careless manner, had told Chid to keep it until he needed it, which, he said, might be never. Mr. Bolt, after the reckoning, had lined them up, not bothering to call for a vote. The staggering amount was safely hidden with the rest of his prize money in the storeroom.

"No," Chid said, "I didn't ship for . . . hanging. I got what I shipped for now. I ain't too proud of the way I got it but it's right spendable."

"Aye, boy. An' you got piracy an' murder, too. Them ain't things you can spend away. You ever think on that?"

"Lots. I already got trouble ashore."

"Well, some on us might never get ashore. Don't worry none about your trouble there till you get by what you got here. Look, this Fish an' Lefferts an'

them ain't fools, boy. They know jest where they're goin'. You an' me don't, do we?"

"Nope."

"I figure that arter the last prize has been took some on us is bound to jine them poor niggers. 'Twouldn't take much more'n a gun crew to work this schooner to some lonesome coast, say Africy or mebbe some Carib island where a man could be forgotten for a spell. You take good prize money like we been takin', divided amongst say ten an' a man could live a famous life for hisself for a danged long time."

"We can't take paymaster boats forever."

"I'd say no. What we got is luck an' the figurin' o' that cute Marky. 'Course there's reg'lar prizes. The Franch'll buy 'em. A mite o' British blood on the cargo don't count as spoilage to the French. But Fish don't even need more prizes. What's been tuk is sufficient, boy, an' don't you fret but he'll get back all he can o' what's been divided. What I'm fearful o' is the way he'll do it. Boy, where do you stand in all this, to put the matter direct?"

"Why," Chid said, "I guess I'm with whoever'll get me an' my share safe ashore. What d'you want of me?"

"Nuthin'. Nuthin' yet. Jest you stay bowsed down ontil I speak with some o' me mates for'ard. Trouble is, you come from the wrong town an' we ain't sure o' you an' Nott. We need you, I'll admit, for you'd ekalize that there balance I was sayin' about. We sort o' got some plans, boy."

"Look," said Chid, "you better speak plain or hush up."

"I can't speak plain. I'm doin' this on my own, kind of."

"Why?"

"Well, a fondness, we'll call it, lad. I know about what you did in that there fire what burned that poor sot up. Perry reckoned you about saved his life, he was that tuckered out. He was right grateful but he couldn't find you to say you so."

"I don't know why I did it," Chid said. "He's a spellbinder, ain't he?"

"No," Drake said soberly, "he's only a human man. What fetches you about him is what he stands for. Mebbe you don't know it right off but that's what it is. It sort of shines through him. It ain't what he makes o' the things he loves but what them things made o' him, that a man admires. I know, boy. I see him grow up on the *Constellation* an' I learnt him what he knows about burnin' powder in the long guns. We fought together, we did—in the *Nautilus* gunboat before the Bey o' Tripoli's hellions an' we bled some an' we starved some; but we never scairt good because Perry don't know the word. Them things make sta'nch shipmates. Personal, I d'ruther follow Perry than any officer in this hull un-i-verse."

"Well, boy, like I was comin' to say, Master Perry's kind o' in your debt an' Alec Drake is proud to pay the debt for him. It's why I mentioned this hull matter."

"You must rate me in danger."

"Packs o' it; you an' Nott. Y' see, you're in the middle. We don't know which way you'd jump was there trouble. You shipped from that backwash town what'll take its profit anywhere it can get it regardless, an' you're under the wings o' the quarterdeck, so to speak. But like I say, I'll speak with me mates for'ard. They need you—an' you need them, I'd say—but they got to be allfired sure o' you both before they even broach the matter to you. An', lad, you better stay aft till you're invited for'ard. Some has got notions you might be spyin' an' I ain't sayin' there ain't hotheads amidst us."

"I got to go for'ard to get at the carpenter's stores."

"Damn seldom, you do, the work Tinker makes for carpenter rates. It makes some o' the hands feel mebbe you wasn't shipped for carpenterin'. Well, you do have to come for'ard, step open an' don't get caught listenin'."

"You better tell me the plan."

"Oh, no; that I won't."

"Mutiny?"

"I ain't sayin'. Boy, even now you could have me keelhauled by jest whisperin' the word aft."

"Rest easy," Chid said, "I won't tattle. If there's trouble comin', I want to be where there's the least of it."

## CHAPTER IX

### WHISPERS OF MUTINY

DRAKE shuffled off, stoop shouldered and terribly old looking. Chid remained for a long time in the gently moving shadows of the shrouds where Drake had left him.

He thought that he could detect in the pattern that Fish and the officers wanted him and Nez on their side. It explained the return of the eighty dollars by Fish. That money had come out of Fish's own pocket to keep Chid's good will and to make him suspicious of Drake's men. And there was Tinker's jettisoning of the pistols which Reefer had looted from the prize. Chid, thinking about it, reasoned that Fish must be on the alert and fearful of having arms of any kind outside of the armory, the key for which he himself kept always.

He had not the least doubt of what Drake's mates planned. It was mutiny, or whatever a man chose to call it, and they waited only for a reasonable chance of success to take the *Blessed Cause* from their murdering officers and sail her into some port, there to tell their story to the Prize Court. Chid had small doubt but that they would be believed for the story was easily proved. And privateers, turned pirate, were not uncommon.

He put it up to Nez, in whispers, before turning in. Nez was amazed and said so, scratching his head ruefully. "If they was on'y things 'stead o' people," he grumbled, "I wouldn't have no trouble understandin' them. I don't never have no trouble understandin' things, Chid."

"Things stay put," Chid agreed. "You can count on them. People don't. They say one thing and mean another and they'd knife you all the while smiling like a parson come to dinner."

"What do you reckon we ought to do, Chid?"

"I don't think it's time to say yet," Chid said, feeling proud that Nez, usually so self-sufficient and able, had asked him. "I'm fair sick of this voyage and I'd as lief quit as not if I could. But I don't figure to loose my profits; or yours either. Someway, we got to get our money aft under our own eyes again and keep it there."

"You got any ideas how?"

"Nope. That coin must weigh a hundred-weight; we can't just hide it in our pockets. I'd make a move to join them forward, they'd let me. Trouble is, Nez, it seems they ain't got a chance of winning. Fish is on to them, I'll lay. Even with us they like couldn't count on more than half the hands; say twenty against twenty-two or so. But the twenty have the weapons, Nez. 'Course, a man on the winning side might come in for a right good share of additional prize money when noses are counted after a scrap."

"Chid, you wouldn't figure like that, would you?"

"Well, no. Not deliberate. But a man's got to look at all sides of a question; he kind of owes it to himself. I suppose if we went aft and told the captain he'd take us with him quick."

"They'd cut Alec Drake to ribbons on the triangle."

"I know," Chid admitted. "I wouldn't want that on my head, profit or no profit, Nez. I think we ought to stay in the middle till we have to jump."

"You're a funny feller, Chid," Nez said, not smiling. "You ain't all bad but you ain't all good either; just on a eternal steel-yard ready to gallop to the tipped end whichever. It comes from bein' raised in civilization, where you're surrounded by people 'stead o' things. It makes you onreliable, like them. I reckon, Chid, you don't know which way to jump 'cause you don't know what you want."

"I KNOW what I want," Chid said. "Right now it's to save my neck an' my money. If I had our money right here with me I could see clearer. Right now, you and I are the balance of power. I don't reckon anything will happen till they settle about us for'ard."

"With Drake and Antwine, win or loose, you'd have a clean bill with the gov'mint, Chid."

"A-yep, I been considering. Trouble is the Court and the owners and the

lawyer people and the rest would bite fearful into our prize money, saying we got in all right."

"Let 'em." Nez said. "You'd be alive for packs o' sport an' doin's yet. That's somethin', Chid."

Chid saw that he, himself, had been thinking along obvious lines, trying to get in step with the plans of others. Trouble was, both sides were dangerous and, for Chid, wrong.

Drake and his friends whatever their motives, whether fear or honesty, hadn't a chance. They did not even have, as they seemed to believe, the weapon of surprise in their meager, bare war bag. Lefferts' Marines could quell any uprising in minutes. Chid couldn't believe that the crew's plans were brilliant or even carefully charted.

Fish's plans had been crafty. It would suit him perfectly to be rid of all but enough to work his ship to escape and limbo; then find their prize money and re-divide it. It had been cute, distributing the money, lulling the hands into security, and clever too, for it made them all, in a sense, fellows to the piratical captures. It was all hard to believe possible but Chid had the evidence before him. Oddly, he was not much surprised. The whole situation proved again what he had seen back in the States; that war was a time of opportunity for smart men. Only the method surprised him. It had never occurred to him that men could be so cruel and wanton and false, not even for selfish gainful purposes.

He could see now why Lefferts had made no effort to collect the sums Nez and the others owed him, or deduct it from the prize money as it was handed to his debtors. Lefferts knew that he would some day get it without asking for it. The final reckoning would be made between himself and Fish, and Chid had no doubt that the agreements gave him far more of the lay than he had verbally agreed to.

HE TOSSED in his berth long into the sultry restless night. The *Blessed Cause* creaked and groaned in the roll. Her gear slatted aloft in the windless night to the wails of the complaining blocks and cordage, and the foul bilge smells became warm and strong and pervaded the hot steerage. Lefferts, for a reason that Chid could now surmise, still slept aft. Drake and his bunk mates snored in nerve-racking disharmony about him, and Nez, still fearing the seasickness, chumped his quid wetly and noisily in his sleep.

There was, Chid made himself understand toward morning, only one smart thing to do: play a lone hand founded upon plans which were his own and could not go wrong. But he saw, reaching a decision at last, that for a while at least, his course must lie parallel to the course of Drake and his friends. At all cost he must be accepted by them. In no other way would he have free access to the carpenter's stores in the bow and his hidden money—almost two thousand dollars in coin. A bit at a time it must be smuggled out. Nobody forward or aft must be allowed the smallest suspicion that a third plot existed.

For Chid had decided that his best course, which meant the safest and most profitable one, was to make his escape from the *Blessed Cause*.

IT DID not strike Chid as particularly odd when Mr. Bolt the following morning ordered him to sheath the opening which gave forward from the steerage into the midship hold and the forecastle. He recognized the barricade as a good protection from a below-deck attack from forward.

Now that he was alert to what was breeding, he could see many additional signs of intrigue about him. He had, apparently, been hopelessly dull not to have perceived them before. Seemingly, this brewing revolt was no news to the officers; they expected trouble and were preparing for it. Nez and Antoine, at the crack of dawn, had skidded the water butt aft to the break of the poop under Lefferts' own eyes. It was an old trick; control the water butt and you control the ship. Nez had heard Lefferts mention it in just those words to Bolt when the job was finished.

It was shocking to Chid, remembering those pleasant evening hours with his

mates and the convincing kindness of Tinker, to find that behind it these desperate plans had been forming. Chid could not know the details of the captain's earlier efforts to sway the hands to free-booting. It had all been done quietly and under cover, and the little bird-like man, working through his officers and that part of the crew which he had managed to gather to him by his own devious devices, had never actually proposed anything irregular. He had weeded and tested and when he had achieved a majority in favor, he had boldly proceeded with his plans. Almost before the hands had realized it, his trap had been sprung; each had been given a share of the prize money so temptingly displayed and was enmeshed.

Chid had guessed Fish's strength: Lefferts' armed pacing Marines; rowdy bruisers parading in military uniforms. He could find no strength on the side of Drake's band. They were simple men, not used to intrigue or very much forethought, and their arms were nothing but right and truth and decency; mighty poor weapons against serpentine powder and cold steel and cunning long-prepared plans. He felt sorry for them . . . though he needed them for only a very short time and for but one thing.

Chid cut the boards from some flitch-sawn pine dunnage which he found atop the beach-rubble ballast. He boarded the forward side of the narrow opening horizontally, then spiked a vertical sheathing on the after side, making a solid bulkhead almost four inches thick. It looked strong. But Chid, or any man knowing about it, could smash it down with a hand hook plied from the forward side in two minutes. The anchoring fastenings were moored into a set of false jambs, overlooked by Mr. Bolt, who, when Chid had finished, pronounced the barricade secure.

Chid was glad the second mate hadn't taken the inspection as an opportunity to sound him out, using the purpose of the barricade as an excuse. It proved that he and Nez were considered of the captain's party, an important matter if his plans for escape were to succeed.

During the morning Chid had a chance to check the position of the *Blessed Cause*. He had been French polishing the Captain's writing case; smoothing it with pumice and then applying a new-fangled oil said to be extracted from the earth near Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania. The sailing track, marked with a quill scratch on the battered hand-drawn ocean chart, showed the schooner approaching the end of her westerly board; not too far away from the Capes of the Delaware but that a small boat under oars and sail could make it handily. Chid rubbed the case, feeling a warm satisfaction as he always did when wood grew useful or beautiful under his hands, impressing the details of the chart upon his mind.

When Chid was able to tell him, Nez was for the escape, rising to immediate enthusiasm. "It'll be more adventure'n I see so far on this trip; even with a scrap comin'. All that way in a mite o' a boat—an' stole, too! No more seasickness for Gramp Nott's fav'rite. But, Chid, you recollect what I told you. I jumped. I'm with Drake's boys."

"They haven't asked you, have they?"

"No. But that don't bile no sap, Chid. Alec an' Antwine, too, would ask if their mates'ud let 'em an' that's what counts. We got to take them two with us. Otherwise, I ain't for it."

"I'll go, if it's alone. But we can take them. Don't you mention it till we're ready, though. First, we get the money aft; then we invite. Nez, we got to head west of north, about two hundred miles; you better lift a boat compass some place."

"SHUCKS a'mighty! We don't need no compass. When you're homin', there's on'y one course on the North Atlantic. You got to stay sober enough to make out which is sunset an' which is sunrise; then you head into the sunset till you raise a large chunk o' continent. That's Ameriky. It works every time, Chid."

"Well, it's better for us. I got the money wrapped in small packets; all tucked back in the oakum cask. They were watching me pretty close and I reckon, like Alec says, some of 'em don't like us prowling about forward. Whenever you got a good reasonable excuse

to go to the storeroom, you better sneak a packet aft. We'll get it into the boat at night."

Nez decided for the stern boat, when asked. It was a heavy launch, with sailing gear lashed to the thwarts, and it hung over the stern from wooden horns which were extensions of the oak rail caps. The captain's boat rested on skids in the waist and would need man-power and time to swing over the rail and outboard. Chid was satisfied with the easily launched stern boat. His regular duties saw the boat's water cask filled and he could easily lift the stores necessary for a two- or three-day trip.

"All's might stop us is the helmsman, Nez. We'll go at night; but we'll have to settle him."

"Well," Nez said, "I can th'ow my knife good in the dark if I got to. But first, I'll give him a chance to come along."

Chid went to caulking an open covering board over the officer's cabins. He worked slowly, bare-shouldered, letting the sun beat on him and he was careful not to keep his oakum sack too full. He thus had plausible and visible reason to visit the storeroom and managed to do so three times. Each time, concealed in the oakum wad, he brought a small coin packet aft. These he tumbled into his shirt and, just before noon, took the shirt to the steerage and transferred the money to his berth. It wasn't the safest place but it was all he could think of.

The schooner rolled lazily, making less than two knots. Far off on the lee beam a pod of whales sported on the calm sea and to the eastward the fog still hung like a fluff of white cotton wadding.

Drake made no move toward him. Once, when he was forward, Chid definitely felt the hostility of which the gunner had warned. Griswold had dogged his footsteps and lounged purposefully on a rope coil while he rummaged in the carpenter stores. Chid hadn't been able to take a packet that time. He made it his business to stay aft for a while. At all costs the way to the storeroom must be kept open. But he managed, during the afternoon watch, to steal some salt meat and biscuits.

A Marine loafed near the water butt always. Watching, Chid could almost reckon the division of the crew. Drake's mates came aft to the butt with a hesitant shuffle, like men testing new pond ice, eyeing the marine with distrust, then drinking hastily. The captain's men came with swagger and stayed long to relish the drink. But nothing happened all the long warm afternoon. Mr. Tinker stood his watch lazily, sitting on the weather rail with his feet hooked behind a carvel for steadiness. The look-out reported a ship once, hull down and leagues down alee; nothing to bother. Both forward and aft though, Chid, now sensitive to small signs, could detect a tense waiting silence, potent but not yet ominous. Drake, without pattern, circulated among the dozing men on the foredeck but never once looked Chid's way. Chid could guess that the morning's work on the barricade was being counted against him.

Nez finished setting up the cedar wedges between the deck planking and the after timber heads—almost a daily chore since the hot drying weather—then came to sit with Chid.

"That boat's all right," he said, studying the softly rustling idle canvas. "She's tight an' all her gear's in her. I snuck a look-see whilst wedgin'."

"Good. I reckon we better get that money aft fast's we can now an' get off tomorrow night before we wear east'ard again. Griswold and those fellers for'ard were eyeing me awful suspicious. I wouldn't want to chance any more trips to-day."

"I hear'n Tinker say he looks for wind come night, from the east; an' if it comes he'll claw off the land right away. Chid, we better get off tonight."

"I'm not leaving without my money, Nez."

"I got one packet aft."

"You were for'ard more than that."

"Well, yes. But I kinda forgot some o' the other times. Tarnation, Chid, do we have to bother so with that damned money? This is a simple matter o' gettin' away from where we don't want to be; easy's walkin' out o' a prayer meetin' you didn't make it so danged complicated."

"I can't help circumstances, Nez. All I can do is to try and lick 'em. But we can't go tonight; not unless I do something I don't want to do."

"What's that?"

"Why, show Drake and his boys where I stand; prove it and stop the arguing against us. They'd let us for'ard then anytime. Did you ask Antoine and Drake to come, Nez?"

"ON'Y Antwine, Chid. Yes; he's comin', whenever we give the word."

It suited Chid. He liked the French Canadian and his simple straightforwardness. He liked Drake, too, but in a different way. He felt a sharp sympathy for him. He had laid something noble and good on the altar of his ideals when he signed on the *Blessed Cause* and it must have been shocking to him to discover the depths of the deception. Like Nez, Chid could not completely understand men like Drake.

Nez's news was disconcerting. The fog bank was much closer now, though there was still no appreciable wind. At her present rate of sailing, which Chid hoped would remain so for another day at least, the *Blessed Cause* would be within small-boat sailing distance of the coast. He watched the fog with concern, trying to find in it signs of a breeze strong enough to make Fish put away from the lee shore. But he knew little of these signs of the sea and realized that he had to wait upon sailing orders for reliable guidance. And that might very well be too late.

Chid kept himself conspicuous and easy for Drake to find. Chid figured that he had ten minutes. If Drake did not seek him out before, he'd have to force the issue and leave no doubt as to which side he was loyal to. For, as the sun sank into the low horizon haze, the breeze picked up with a faint but portentous force. The lazy booming of the slack canvas ceased and the silky ripple of the reef points quieted; small dark catspaws scurried over the sea and vanished and under the bow a small wave was slowly but steadily building. Chid knew that if he was to make his escape at all, it would have to be tonight.

But at last Drake detached himself from his mates and came shuffling to him, his long sad face set and grim.

"I done the best I could, boy," he said. "The lads was listenin' like school boys till you barricaded that door aft. They don't even like what Nez did an' you both been fo'ard too much to suit 'em."

"But you still need us, don't you?"

"Some, but not so much. You was to supply 'em with carpenter tools for fightin' till we got the armory open. But Reefer, he found a way to get into the storeroom without your key. They figure you ain't worth askin' for, not an' run the risk o' Fish knowin'."

"He does know."

"Mebbe. But he don't know when."

"When?"

"I wouldn't say, boy. When is the only real weapon we got. It's up to you now. I done all I could to pay back what Master Perry owes you. I reckon I failed; which you might say ain't novel for Alexander Drake."

"I been figuring," Chid said, having to say it at last, "to make you a good sign where we stand."

"How?"

"I know how. You want it?"

"Not me, lad. But me mates, I guess they got to have it."

"All right," said Chid, "I'll make it."

"Mind it," Drake suddenly whispered. "Inspection's comin'."

"A-yep. I know it."

He slid to his feet from the rail. Lefferts and Mr. Tinker, paced by two marines turned out to a gouty admiral's fancy, were moving slowly forward through the vessel. Tinker was genial and talkative, pleasantly pointing out the small evening chores to be done. Lefferts was sharp-eyed and alert and he seemed extraordinarily suspicious tonight as he poked into corners with his whale-bone dress cane.

LIKE Chid, the hands all stood at attention, singly and in small groups. Nez and Antoine ceased their endless game of split the chip. Three bells sounded, like a cracked porcelain bowl being struck, for Fish had long ago had the clapper muffled against sound carrying.

From aloft, above the empty cross-tree barrels the lookout hailed softly, "All's well aloft, sir." To Chid it seemed as if all time and motion had ceased to watch him make his sign.

He licked his lips, suddenly gone dry and hard. Lefferts paced slowly toward him, not hiding his scowling dislike. Chid kept his eyes inboard and unmoving but he spoke loudly and clearly, his hands clenched.

"Permission to speak, sir."

"At mast, damn your impudence!" Lefferts growled.

"Now!" Chid said firmly.

"Hear him," Tinker smiled, stopping the captain. "Alwyn's a promising lad." Chid fought for steadiness, driving down the sudden feeling of panic. "I'd like to see Nez Nott's assignment," he said. "I been hearing how you cheat fellers such as him and I reckon it's about time I checked."

"Eh? Tinker, am I hearin' correct?" Lefferts bellowed.

"A-yep; damn right you are," Chid said. "This is a matter between you and Nott, and I'm taking over Nott's side. You knew he couldn't read; so I'll read for him. I want to see that writing. If it's like you told him it was, I'll pay you now. If it ain't; you won't get paid at all. I don't want no truck with cheats and conniving bastards."

"Jesus Christ, boy!" Drake breathed in shocked amazement.

Chid hadn't known what he was going to say; not the exact words. He knew instantly that he had been clumsy; that anger and hatred had flooded into his words. But it made no real difference. He was showing exactly where he stood with the quarterdeck. He stood glaring at Lefferts, feeling the man's hatred, watching the pudgy white hand creep to the sword handle. "Easy, Cap'n," Tinker whispered, suddenly grim, "easy does it. We ain't ready for trouble this minute."

Lefferts nodded sullenly, understanding. He could not risk to let this encounter become the match to the fuse which led to that smouldering trouble forward. He fought down his anger, the blood rushing suddenly into his pasty face, and showed Chid a broad tolerant grin, only the small pigeyes showing craftily from their lairs behind the fat cheek flesh.

"The lad's sick. Mr. Tinker, this poor boy's ravin' sick," Lefferts said loudly. "Damme, he's witless with it. Aft to the captain with him, I say; he needs medicine bad, I d'clare."

"No you don't!" Chid cried. "There's nothing wrong with me. This is man to man. Where's the writing?"

"Writing?" Lefferts said with heavy patience. "Why, there ain't no writin'. Mr. Nott don't owe me a farthing; not a damned farthing. Tinker, let my boys help the poor sick lad."

"Aye," Tinker agreed, "The captain'll mend your ailments, Chid. You got some sun, boy. Come on, lad."

Chid was completely baffled. He stood before them, looking as sick as they said he was, feeling the hot shame of his defeat creep over him. All he had wanted was a good hot argument, man to man with Lefferts; to damn him and say what he could to show that he wasn't one of the captain's men. But they had totally foiled him.

He tried desperately to think; to find something to clutch upon to save himself. Once aft Lefferts' revenge would be savage and complete. But he could find nothing. Two marines moved to his side, guns at present, the solid walnut butts threatening. Drake stood riveted to the deck, a queer trembling at his mouth. Tinker seized Chid's arm, offering support. "Don't be a damn fool," Tinker snarled close to Chid's ear. "Come peaceable . . . all hell's ready to slop over any minute an' you ain't goin' to start it now."

And then Chid saw a hope; a desperate and dangerous chance. He could start the mutiny. He held the key to it in his two fists. Drake would act, so would Nez. Others would follow. It was a long chance. But the afterguard was disorganized and separated, the barrels unmanned; Fish, and now Bolt, too, were below and unaware of the situation on deck. The only strong weapon of the mutineers, which was surprise, was suddenly available to them and Chid could easily place the weapon in their hands.

## CHAPTER X

### MUTINY ON THE HIGH SEAS

CHID took two docile steps to clear his brain; to kill time. There was something changed about the men. That silent waiting tenseness had suddenly become dangerous. Chid could feel it; in Drake's eyes, now suddenly sharp.

*Chid tackled the man's knees, under the swinging hickory capstan bar.*

Chid swung; both arms arced backwards, striking backhanded blows on the faces of the two marines flanking him. They closed immediately, gun butts ramming upwards viciously. Chid stepped suddenly backwards. He heard the two marines collide; the sharp scream of one of them. He butted Lefferts savagely with his lowered head, hitting him in the stomach exactly where his white leather shoulder belts made a cross over the scarlet jacket. And then two steely hands were at Chid's throat, the fingers feeling for the hold of strangulation, and Tinker was on his back. Chid punched blindly, trying to put strength and accuracy into the backward blows. The mate's legs closed around Chid's middle, the feet locked and they rolled over and over on the deck.

Lefferts was shouting orders. From someplace aft issued musket fire. Drake was shouting, leaping into the close confused melee with a belaying pin swinging. Antoine's terrible ax flashed forward and, above the horrible gurgling in his head, Chid could hear the gleeful whoops of Nez Nott nearby. Tinker snarled and clung to him like a forest cat but the awful stabbing pressure at Chid's throat did not relax. He shook Tinker from his back, bucking like a mule and dealt him close hard body

blows but the hands at his throat would not let go.

A pistol cracked from the quarterdeck and a man clutched his belly and puked. Forward there was noisy hand-to-hand fighting, stabbed by savage cursing and screams and from a stand of marines at the water butt came irregular, spitting musket fire. Chid heard it as if from another faraway world. His mind was darkening; his strength ebbing. But he still tumbled and rolled, lashing like a snake in a crotch trap, trying to shake off those horrible pressing fingers.

And then suddenly the terrific hurt stopped and clear sharp air burst into his burning lungs. Blood fell on him in warm disgusting gushes and Tinker's body became heavy on his. Chid pushed it away, in sudden frantic horror, recoiling from the soft lifelessness of it. And he saw, as the mate's limp body slid to the waterways, that a bone-handled knife projected from the forehead, exactly between the eyes.

Chid lay beside the dead mate unable to move; gasping for breath. A foot tread on him, hurting him, but he was powerless to move from under it. Men fought all around him. Lead whistled overhead. The pistol still popped from the quarterdeck. From far aloft came a thin cry: "Sail O!"

"You all right, Chid?"

Chid could only nod to Nez and lie still. The knife was gone from Tinker's forehead and it flashed again in Nez's swinging right hand, keeping the sweating bodies away from Chid. Drake crept on his belly, a long saber gash from his ear to his jaw point flowing hot blood. But he stabbed with almost detached concentration at the moving figures with a cruel steel gun screw.

"Sail O! Ahoy, the deck!"

But no acknowledgement came from the deck; only the panting and cursing of fighting angry hurt men.

A man came at Chid, swinging a hickory capstan bar. Chid lashed to his belly, taking the stinging blow on the rump; then, feeling a curious lust for personal revenge, tackled the man's knees. Chid stayed inside the swinging bar, brought the man to his back on the deck and bit the hand until the bar dropped from it. Grasping it, he swung it savagely from a kneeling position. He felt the bar mush into the man's face, like bashing in a soft melon.

"Ahoy, the deck! It's that damned Yankee brig as spoke us. Come outen the fog bank sudden an' he's close aboard an' hailin'."

Chid could tell nothing of the battle's swing. The *Blessed Cause* sailed on, her wheel in a becket. He could, through a freeing port from which he breathed sweat chilling air, see the man of war. She sailed with purpose, paralleling their own course, and as he watched a gun spit red fire and a ball whirred across the bow. It was almost dark. Chid was suddenly thinking clearly again.

He crept forward, avoiding the fighting groups. At the forepeak hatch, Chid obligingly tripped a man for Griswold, saw with satisfaction that Griswold swung his bloody saber at the prone figure. He dropped quickly below.

The storeroom had been broken open and the heavy tools were gone from their pegs. But the oakum cask was undisturbed. Chid threw the oakum out; then dragged the cask aft. At the barricaded door, he hacked at the few fastenings with a hand hook. The panel fell forward. In the steerage where he had full headroom, he lifted the coin-heavy keg, placing it at the foot of the after companion ladder. Then he crept to the deck.

CAPTAIN FISH crouched in the protection of the trunk house. He was aiming his pistol. Mr. Bolt lay beside him, cursing and clutching a wadded jacket to a spreading red spot in his middle. The body of a marine lay across the water butt. Fish's gun cracked. Off in the gloom Chid could hear the rush of a ship sailing close aboard.

"I managed to get aft to help, sir," Chid said.

"Good," Fish said coldly. "Keep me a pistol loaded, boy. Where's that damned Lefferts?"

"Ain't seen him. Give me your powder horn, sir."

Fish bent, unfastening his belt pouch. Chid took the pistol by the warm bar-

rel, raised it, then cracked it smartly on the captain's head. Fish crumpled with a tired sigh. Mr. Bolt moaned and lay against the wheel stanchion. In his left hand was clutched a curiously curved dagger.

The boat still hung on the stern horns. Quite calmly, Chid brought up the cask and tumbled it into the boat. Then he went to his berth in the steerage. But the packets which he had hidden there were gone. Two hundred dollars. Chid swore. He put the provisions in the boat. His head ached horribly. He could feel a hot burning in his throat as if Tinker's fingers had come away from his body and were still pressed deeply into Chid's flesh.

He crept forward once more, below decks. The man-of-war's gun boomed again, muted by the hull. He had no taste to be on hand when the *Blessed Cause* was finally brought up. Law and the government would be on the navy ship, inquiries and trouble; things which would cut into his dreams and his money and his time.

Nez wriggled his way to the shadow of the rail when Chid called him from the hatchway. "Chid, I thought you was a goner."

"The boat's ready. Where's Drake?"

"He's kilt, Chid."

"Antoine?"

"Right here with me. He's cut bad."

Men still fought and tumbled. It seemed to Chid that they had been fighting so for hours. But it was less than ten minutes ago that he had started this bloody fray. Nez and Antoine came silently down the ladder. Antoine chanted a curse in French, over and over through gritted teeth and he twisted a rope end around his thigh, above the spongy sopping red stain in his breeks. They were at the steerage door when a full broadside from the brig crashed into the schooner. It was navy fire, uniformly fired and heavy metal, and from frightfully close. Chid could hear the tortured timber and plank tear asunder under the iron rain.

"You count twenty between 'em," Nez said. "That's the time a man's got to move."

They crouched in the passage, waiting for the next broadside. It was higher, aimed at rigging and spars, but a solid shot tore into the steerage, only inches above Chid's own berth, showering them with splinters. They stumbled up the ladder. Amidships a heavy lower yard crashed to the deck, covering the midship with slowly collapsing canvas, like a great shroud.

"All right now," Chid cried. "Into the boat!"

Fish was a small unmoving bundle on the deck. Mr. Bolt sagged against the stanchion, breathing with a gurgling sound. In the waist somebody yelled: "Surrender, surrender!" in a feeble almost childish whine. The sea was dark and wind ruffled, just commencing to roll. Nez dashed to the starboard falls. Chid went to larboard, knife ready to cut away. There was still time; and the sea and the night were dark. . .

"Nez!"

"I notice, Chid. Christ!"

"The boat's gone! Nez, she's gone!"

He looked into the darkness astern in numbing disbelief. The falls swayed crazily overside, the shattered wreckage of the bow and stern breast hooks still hanging from them.

"Shot away . . . Nez, the money's gone, too. Come on, the other boat. Maybe we can . . ."

"Hell," Nez said quietly, "Chid, there ain't no other boat. Lefferts got away in her." Then he climbed to the trunk top and stood tall and straight, waving his arms above his head. "Surrender," Nez hailed. "Surrender!"

"Is good," Antoine murmured. "Nez, is good, dat."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NAVY TAKES OVER

THE BRIG that swung her grappling hooks into the lower rigging of the *Blessed Cause* was the United States Sloop of War *Adder*, Captain Josiah Farlow, on patrol and merchant ship protection. She had left New York after a violent gale and snow storm which had at last brought real winter to the Hudson Valley. She had spoken a bold Salem priva-

teer, the *Diligence*, one calm evening; then cruised northward to look into a British 44 which the privateer had reported in the neighborhood. She had seen nothing of the enemy ship but had sighted some wreckage which Captain Farlow thought rather confirmed her proximity.

It was almost dark when the bow lookout reported the wreckage, seemingly of a small coastal vessel, and fog was beginning to roll in from the eastward. It was not until the brig was close aboard the tangled mass of gear and deck furniture that the sailing master discovered a black man clinging to a stove-in yawl boat some yards away. He hove to at once, put the quarter boat over and brought the poor fellow on board. The black's tale, when he was able to speak coherently, brought Captain Farlow himself to the man's pallet in the forecastle.

Farlow was young, like the navy itself, just getting accustomed to the dignity and responsibility of command. But he was no fool. The black's story and the man's horror ridden eyes were convincing. Farlow agreed with him that the vessel which had attacked the Jamaican was a pirate. Every sign pointed to it . . . the cautious cowardly attack itself, the quick disposition of the prize and the attempt to murder the crew to the last man. But the man's description of the vessel puzzled him for a long time. It fitted exactly the description of the *Diligence*. She had seemed an orderly and well-managed ship, making the proper identification, as he had watched while his officer of the deck had spoken her.

But nevertheless Farlow posted orders to keep a special look-out for her. It was highly improbable that a Salem privateer would be sailing on the account, but it was not impossible. He'd heard of several Connecticut vessels that had and one from New Jersey. He felt that there was small chance of meeting her again but he dropped south to her latitude for a half day; then bore west. He struck thin making-fog in the late afternoon watch the next day. Sailing with it under a freshening breeze, he suddenly ran into a clear sunset against which, less than two miles downwind, the privateer he was seeking sailed on a broad reach.

Farlow was navy trained. He immediately cleared for action and lighted his battle lanterns; a precaution which his officers approved. A ten-gun schooner of unknown intentions and suspicious history might require more than a hail from under the United States ensign to bring her to for questioning.

The *Adder*, being to windward, had no trouble heading the black schooner. Farlow made flag signals in the usual manner, wondering at the audacity of the schooner to ignore them and sail on; then, with quick decision, ordered a shot across her bow.

She failed to pay any attention, even after two more warning shots were given and at no time did she show either colors or signals. Through his glass, Farlow could make out a commotion on her decks; she was being handled in anything but a smart manner and his topmen reported that they could hear the sound of musket fire. Farlow braced round on the wind to parallel the schooner's course, noting that the wind was getting livelier and careful to hold the weather gauge. At half-cable's length off he could see and hear her trouble. A giant hand-to-hand fight was going on.

WHATEVER the cause, and whatever the service of the schooner, he was entirely within his duty to interfere. The black, his eyes rolling white and his queer Oxford-English speech trembling with excitement, confirmed the vessel as the one which had attacked and killed his mates. Grimly, Captain Farlow passed the word for the port battery to open, half with solid shot and half with chain and bar into the rigging. It took but two rapid broadsides to sweep her decks and kill her drive. Then the *Adder* rigged for boarding and ran down on the crippled privateer.

Farlow stayed on his quarterdeck where he belonged but the reports of his boarding officers gave him the picture of the bloodshed and murder on the black schooner. First, her name was not

*Diligence,* but *Blessed Cause,* and her Letter gave her port of hail as New London, in Connecticut. Her crew list showed forty-six hands signed on, of which four names had been scratched through with a quill pen; Farlow wondered why. Twenty-six remained alive, eight of them wounded. There were eleven dead and five missing. Her captain and first mate had both been knifed to death and the second mate was horribly wounded, as if by an ax, and likely to die within the glass. The missing men were all marines, their captain among

*Chid claimed that the honest hands had revolted against their officers' career of piracy and murder. But the wounded second mate claimed that it had been quite the opposite.*

the number. The boarding party had met no resistance save from one pain-crazed wretch who had thrown an adze and had been pistoled where he lay. The rest had surrendered with hands upraised.

Farlow herded them forward of his own mainmast under heavy guard and sent his surgeon to care for the bloodiest. He called his officers and then, one by one, a half dozen of the prisoners. It was difficult to make sense of the garbled stories they told. Some were insolent and some sullen. A tall rugged fair-haired boy named Chidsy Alwyn, unhurt, told a straightforward story, not difficult to believe. He claimed that the honest hands had revolted against their officers' career of piracy and murder. But the wounded second mate, to whom Farlow had to go himself, claimed that it had been quite the opposite. Alwyn and about half the crew had mutinied, murdered the captain's loyal hands, thrown the marines overside; then broken into the prize money and divided amongst themselves. Farlow, checking the story, sent a searching detail with flares and axes, proved the story to some extent. Not a cent, nor prize goods of any kind, were found aft. But forward, hidden in berths and seachests and the secret places of the vessel's frame which all sailors know, they found sums, all of approximately equal amounts, which tended to prove the mate's story.

There were many unexplained mysteries about the matter. Farlow wrote out his report, leaning toward the theory that the officers had been plotted against and overcome. Alwyn's story had been clear and plausible but Farlow had been aware of a cold calculation in the boy's eyes as he spoke. He was, the captain considered, of a timbre above the average seaman and mentally quite capable of planning and leading a mutiny. But Farlow had no time for a long inquiry. He could merely take down essential first testimony of the serious affair, as justice and his duty demanded he should. The weather was making up for a gale again and he could not stay lashed to the schooner for very long.

"I'm going to send you all into New York, under arrest," Farlow said. "What you have told me, and what we have seen, will become part of the official report and testimony. Your guilt or innocence is a matter for the Court to decide. I am impounding all captured monies, together with your log and documents. The black will go with you as a vital witness."

"It's fair, sir," Griswold said, breaking his sullen silence. "We're honest men, caught in this damned trap an' we ain't a'feared o' no law trouble. We go in the schooner, sir?"

"Yes."

"She's holed," Griswold said. "Sevril places is makin' water from your fire an' she's a shambles aloft, sir. It ain't hardly fair with weather comin'."

"It's all that I can do for you. But I'll give your carpenters freedom of the ship to mend and patch enough to keep you afloat. Until they start trouble. I warn them not to . . . for Lieutenant Steel and his men will have orders to shoot at the first sign of it. Where are your carpenters, man?"

Griswold ducked his head at Chid. "Him," he said, "an' Nez Nott an' the Canuck. But the Canuck's hurt, sir."

Farlow had Nez brought aft to the ward room, studying him under the swaying candle lamp for a long minute. "Well," he said finally. "Nott will do. Nott, you will make all necessary repairs on the schooner. If you need help, use your Canuck for striker. I can't spare you help. But under no circumstances is Alwyn to be given freedom of the ship. I consider the facts sufficiently damning to regard him as a ringleader and a dangerous man."

"Aye, aye, sir," Nez said, in the best of humor; "but Chid's all right, sir."

"I'm glad that you think so," Farlow said, signing his report. "Nevertheless, the order stands. Now get aboard your vessel, all of you, and remember that you are United States prisoners."

CHID could hear Nez's hammer blows in all parts of the ship, for the familiar steerage in which he was confined with Antoine, Reefer, and Griswold was a quiet place, away from the rushing growl

of the bow wave and the constant creaking of the mast heels as they worked in the steps. Most of the damage caused by the broadsides was high up, near the bulwarks, but several solid balls had hit the hull near the waterline. Nez had stoppered them as best he could. The hole at his berth was large and ragged, with long brittle yellow-pine splinters radiating from the shot hole. Fortunately it was high above the sea. Nez, on the first night of the rolling slant to New York, had battened a double patch of canvas outside it. But occasionally a storm driven wave top seeped through as the *Blessed Cause* swept northward in the wet easterly gale.

Chid hadn't seen Nez since. That was two days ago. He figured that New York was but a few watches distant. Reefer and Griswold had been silent, almost sullen, and not inclined to talk even when Chid tried to tutor them in making a plausible and orderly recital of their story in the trial which Chid knew would come.

"Hell," Reefer growled, "we ain't got a chanct, boy. Why tell 'em anythin'? A man might beat down mutiny or murder or piracy but he can't beat down all three."

"We're right," Chid said. "If we're straight on our stories we'll be cleared."

"Look," Reefer said, chewing a splinter that took the place of his usual quid. "Suppose we admit to mutiny, which was the on'y thing we done. All right. We're still up for piracy, ain't we? An' some of us is up for murder; niggers an' officers both, ain't we? Why'd you commence that trouble anyway?"

"I didn't," Chid said. "I just used it. I just kind of advanced the time a mite and saved you from being slaughtered. Fish knew all about your plans; you didn't have a chance except to take him by surprise."

"The lad's right," Griswold said. "He commenced at the on'y time good for us. I don't hold Chid here no grudge, I don't. It's sarcumstances, wicked unnatchrel sarcumstances an' no mortal can lick me sez I. We need Fish an' Tinker an' Lefferts alive. We'd beat the tale outen 'em, I swear to God we would!"

"Bolt, too," Reefer said.

"He's alive; leastwise the doc sez he'd save him. What we need is him dead. But mostly we need that money aft which Lefferts swiped when he jumped ship on us all. Trouble is, they was a mutiny an' the hands have all the money an' that's all that sticks out for to see."

Chid could obtain no comfort from them, nor, as he pondered his situation, from himself either. He himself was marked as a ringleader. If Bolt lived, he would name him as Fish's murderer, though Chid could not explain the knifing of the captain. He had never felt such black hopeless defeat. It was different from having just his money or his dreams in danger. It was his life, now, and his eternal freedom. In the dark dungeon to which his hopes and spirit had descended there seemed no foothold from which to start anew.

"I KNEW about a feller onct," Reefer said dully, "what got himself snagged into a mess similar to this; only mebbe not even as bad. Well, he was right; allfired right an' 'twas so proved. On'y the feller was dead then."

"Hung?" asked Griswold quietly.

"By the blasted neck o' him," Reefer said, and Chid thought he was going to weep, his voice trembled so. "On Finnie's Wharf to Baltimore, an' the Judge sez he was very sorry. I don't want to mention this thing no more."

Antoine's sunny spirit alone remained unquenched. His wound was painful and had been pastered with hot tar by the surgeon. But the Frenchman picked the hard tar off with a spike and bled the wound freely until, as he said, he got dizzy; then lashed the limb with his bloody rope end and, stretching out on the berth under Chid's, claimed he felt much better.

The rest of the hands were forward under battened hatches and an armed guard. There was no possible way to effect the organization necessary to storm the deck, a possibility with which Chid and Antoine toyed to while away the time.

On the second night the violent working of the schooner eased and Reefer,

breaking a long morose silence, said they were getting under the lee of Sandy Hook off New York. They heard the noises of sail-shortening after a while; then the clicking of lead blocks and the prolonged squeal of the rudder tackles as the schooner lurched over to the port tack for the first time since they had left the man of war. She stayed on that board but a short time, the seas meantime quieting noticeably, then shook her sails for a long run through what Reefer named the Narrows.

The guard hailed for Antoine, demanding to know if he could do some carpentering. There was drift ice coming against them from the North River and Nott was having trouble keeping his patches secure forward.

"Mus' have Antoine, see?" Antoine chirped brightly. "Ah come, sojer."

"Don't be a fool," Chid whispered. "You bust that cut open you'll bleed to death."

"A-rrr, Cheed! De bear can no fight in de trap, *hein?* Why you no fight wit' de brains, lak can do; you?"

"I been kicked too hard in 'em," Chid said sourly. "You show me some way to loose these troubles; I can't figure nothing."

"Shut up," Reefer growled, "there ain't no way. Ain't I been figurin' till I'm half addled? 'Course, you're welcome to go th'ough that shot hole if it so be you can swim amidst salt ice in a black gale."

"No one can," Chid said. "Go on, Antoine. If you and Nez get a chance to spook, go ahead."

Antoine slipped through the door under the guard's cocked navy pistol. He limped to the ladder, babbling of the nice stormy night cheerily.

Chid tried to sleep. But he couldn't. His mind tumbled and turned in vast dizzying confusion, trying to sort and arrange the fantastic events of the last weeks and his apprehension lay on his belly like a colic. It was unbelievable that he, seeking merely what everybody else was seeking, should be caught in this strangling hopeless web. No one in the world could help him. The evidence of plundered ships and murdered men and stolen gold would outweigh any story told. There was no such thing as complete innocence, for to deny one charge was to admit to another.

The only key to the true story was Lefferts. To find him and his stolen gold would clear them. But Chid had small hope that he and his marines had survived the gale in the tiny shingle-built captain's gig. Even supposing that they had run southwest, avoiding the worst of the storm and made a landing, it was hopeless to believe that Lefferts would permit himself to be found. Griswold had claimed that no court would convict them out of hand. There was, for most of them, a reasonable doubt. But he himself would be shown as the man who had killed the captain, of that Chid had no doubt. From that damning fact there was no escape.

## CHAPTER XII

### ESCAPE

THE SCHOONER battered ice regularly, staggering as she bucked the larger unbroken floes. The vessel had made water and her pumps were thumping on the deck above. But the wind held fair and she slowly ploughed a wet cold path through the ice meadows. Griswold snored in stuttering discord. Reefer wheezed heavily and from time to time cried out in his troubled sleep.

Chid had no idea of the time when the anchor was let go. The rattle of the wooden winch forward and the booming of the idled sails awakened him and he supposed that he had slept for a long time. He lay on his bunk, listening to the crunching of the tide-borne ice against the hull and the steady chunk of the pumps. He felt oddly, a curious refreshment. Cold night air was blowing upon him and in some distant far-off place he could see a pale yellow light behind a white smothering curtain of falling snow.

Nez's canvas patch no longer covered the shot hole. Chid pulled his stocking cap over his face and crawled deeply into his one quilt. As Reefer had said, a man couldn't swim in winter-iced water.

"Chid!"

He was alert at once. The voice came from the shot hole.

"It's Nez. Sneak it, Chid; feet first, then drap."

"What to?"

"Do you always got to know, Chid? Jest drap."

He put his feet through the hole, turned on his belly; then hung by his hands. He could feel Nez's fingers guiding his legs. It was bitterly cold and the snow swirled icily about him.

"Now, Chid. Drap!"

Chid let go his hold. He fell, fetched on something solid; then slipped and lay flat. He lay there a long time, feeling the coldness of what he was on seep through him. Nez poled noiselessly. They moved slowly, first with and then sharply across the current; away from the dark blur which was the *Blessed Cause*. The pump still throbbed noisily. Beside him lay another figure. It was Antoine, chuckling quietly, hugging himself close to the ice floe. Frigid water flooded the floe, creeping into Chid's clothing with breath-taking shock. To leeward there were misty shapes; wharves and ships, Chid reckoned.

"Stay flat or we'll capsize her," Nez whispered. "Chid, that there's New York."

"Let me pole. I'm freezing."

"Shucks, you won't die. Rub your hide; but don't do it too rugged."

Rubbing helped some and it stilled the chattering of his teeth. After a long while the floe grounded under a pile wharf. A soft chuffing sound filled the dark dank space under it and beyond where they had landed the tide whispered against a hull. Chid stepped into the water and waded ashore. The snow was almost a foot deep.

"This here's a shipyard," Nez said. "That sailin' master off the *Adder* headed for it when he see we're nigh to founderin'. He thinks I'm fixin' them holes but I ain't and so he'll be pumping for a while yet. He's got to get on the ways quick."

About them lay the sheds and lofts of a large shipyard. The ragged heaps of edge-cuttings and the criss-cross bracing of scaffolds and launching cradles and the several partly framed vessels wavered behind the driving gale, like the stark skeletons of forgotten monsters, their black bones frosted as with a mould of a vast dead eon. The snow fell thick about them and far off a belfry clock struck four times and from the hull beside the wharf the queer chuffing sound continued.

"We ain't out o' the bresh yet," Nez said. "Chid, me an' Antwine figure to leg it up into his country on the Big Otter for a spell. They'll be searchin' us out in these parts for a while."

Chid nodded. They'd have to leave the city. That was obvious. But it would be hopeless to attempt it on foot. The cold was intense and already beginning to still the wind. Chid had on only canvas breeks and an ill-fitting jacket over two cotton shirts. He still wore his stocking cap of black and Antoine's moccasins, now frozen into brittle hurting casings. Nez and Antoine had little more, though both had wrapped themselves beneath their clothing in long spiral strips of topsail canvas.

They picked their way through the yard. Chid reckoned it was a large one, fit to build frigates and packets, and he felt an odd warmth in the familiar sights as they conjured themselves out of the storm. There was a pit-saw and a long keel on blocks, waiting for the adzes, and underfoot was the soft homey feel of woodchips deeply laid. They kept the wind on their backs for direction. But after a while the wind came from the side and then from ahead and there was no turning to get it right because on one side there was always the crunching ice of the river. Chid halted them suddenly. They were treading in new snow tracks made but a short time ago.

"They're ours," Chid said, feeling sudden despair. "Look, we're on an island, Nez. We've come clean around. This is the wharf again."

Chid was certain of it. He heard the chuffing sound again; as if one of the bony monsters snored with a long sad sigh and then blubbered in rapid wet exhalation. Then another sound came to join it, the sharp clang of iron. A dull red stain showed on the snow curtain and watching, Chid could see a man

throwing wood chunks into flame beyond a small door. The sound ceased abruptly and the stain dulled. Antoine cursed with agitation.

"BAR GAR! You know what hims is? *Sacré* . . . we mus' spook, Gardamn, but queeck. Cheed . . . Nez; come!"

"Hell's tootin' " Nez growled. "Tain't nuthin' but a steam mill, you rabbit-gutted froggy!"

"Is no!" Antoine cried. "Is steam boat! Jes' Chris', tam t'ing blow de hell outen we. Ah sees hims on de Lac de Champlain; roar an' mak' fire an' den boom! Is no safe, not t'ousan' mile near."

"I'm going on her," Chid said.

"*Non, non!*"

"Don't be a damn fool, Antoine. How can you get off an island save by boat. Once that navy crowd gets ashore they'll have us rounded off this island in five minutes."

They crept toward the thing that Antoine had named a steamboat. Chid could make out nothing of her detail save a tall shadow that reached into the sky and from which issued an occasional tiny wood spark. They dropped to the thing's deck, feeling their way to a warm spot where, curiously, there was no snow. Chid felt warm brick under his hands; then hot iron trembling with a slow bubbling surge. A huge stack of cord wood filled the space between the rail and the brick boiler foundation. They crawled into the wood pile, pulling over themselves a heavy tarpaulin which had covered the wood. Small red flames played lazily behind air holes in an iron door and, in the night above, a valve blubbered like a tea kettle on a kitchen crane. It was warm and dry, and out of the awful stinging wind. Antoine trembled.

"It ain't nuthin'," Nez growled. "Nuthin' that'll hurt us more'n we been anyways. You see that fire tender open her right up, didn't you? Chid, what do you make o' it?"

"She's the *Firefly*, says so plain, of New York and Albany. Reckon, no matter what, she'll get us off this island."

"Gardamn! She tak' we to de sea. Den . . . boom!"

"Shush yourself, Antwine. These here pots cain't go to sea. Chid, you figure she might be headin' for Albany?"

"Likely she is. It's why her fires are up. I'm staying."

The east grayed with the false dawn. The snow hissed against the hot iron cylinder which rumbled so ominously. Nez passed his tobacco twist and they each took a chew to assuage their hunger and hitched their belts an extra notch. Antoine complained and watched the contraption with apprehension.

It was true dawn, washing the snow with gray and purple when Chid heard the far-off hail from the direction of the river. At first it sounded like a wolf call, muted by the snow, but, listening, Chid could make it out as human.

"Ahoy! Ahoy the shipyard! Send a boat." And in answer a muffled unintelligible reply rang out over the frozen wastes.

It was repeated again and again. Below them there were now stirring noises, as if men moved on the boat, and the fire-tender came again to stoke the iron cylinder. This time he threw twenty wood chunks through the door and the violent rumbling became even more ominous.

Chid could almost touch the pilot's boots as the man climbed to the paddle box. He held a heavy iron-shod cane in his hand and he twice rapped sharply on the cylinder; rap, rap—a signal to the engineer. The clanking and sucking commenced again immediately; the men on deck gave a feeble cheer and scuttled below and the *Firefly* moved away from the schooner and into the bleak river. Ice stabbed at her and the paddles crashed into the white ice floes with deafening booming and crunching. And alongside, giving them warmth and life, the iron cylinder grumbled and snarled and every three seconds a queer yoke-like beam flew into the air and plunged rapidly downward.

"IS ON de way to Albany," Antoine whispered with satisfaction, used to the danger of the dreaded steamboat already. "Tam, Cheed, is one week dar to de Otter."

"I'm not going to the Big Otter," Chid said.

"Chid, you ain't got a chance; even in Albany. The gov'mint 'ud snag onto your trail in no time. On'y the bresh is safe."

"I got a chance where I'm going."

"Where at?"

"Presq'ile."

"Place o' fire, Chid! Are you addled?"

"Nope."

"You hunger-crazy?"

"Nope. But I'm right hungry, Nez. That voice you heard was Noah Brown's."

"Chid, beware; he owes you one."

"He won't pay it," Chid said easily. "I got him where he won't; not if shipbuilders are as scarce as he said they were. I reckon you and Antoine ought to come with me."

"Well, we don't."

"Look," Chid said, "I belong here, kind of. You two don't. You're those two prisoners from the schooner Mr. Brown heard tell about. You are . . . unless I tell 'em you ain't, Nez."

"Blast you, Chid! Don't be so Goddam smart. Me an' Antwine don't admire to have you save your own hide usin' us rotten like this."

"I'm not using you rotten. I don't even need you; though I'll admit free it'll help my case some. Look, they'd ferret us out of the Big Otter country soon's word spread. We'd be always on the jump. Up to Presq'ile we'd have the best protection a man could want."

"Like what?"

"Well, it's remote."

"So's Antwine's crick."

"But look. At Presq'ile we're valuable to Noah Brown, and to Perry. Shucks, they'd make a fight to keep us, I'll bet; though they wouldn't even likely hear about us being wanted. But if it came on to getting crowded, why, Nez, we just got to step into Canada and we're safe."

"Canady!"

"A-yep."

"*Non!*" Antoine exploded sharply. "Is why Ah come to de States; me. Tam, Cheed, is one woman dar, look fo' Antoine wit' de heart lak' de wil' cat. Fin' Antoine; is dead, me—lak nozzing!"

"Chid, you're jest gettin' things complicated again. I'm damn sick o' it; it turns my gut, havin' to live a eternal dodge. Gramp Nott's camp was hellions compared to us but nobody bothered us 'cause we lived peaceable amongst ourselves. We can do the same. I reckon I'd even like it again, way off in the hills an' removed from the botherin' things I've had ever since I fust come down to Portersville five years back."

"Might be," Chid said, "but how can a man make money up in the lonesome hills, Nez? You got to be near where money is to gather it and I reckon Presq'ile might have a heap of it now with shipbuilding and all."

NEZ chumped on a splinter for a long minute, rolled on his belly, studying Chid from propped elbows. The *Firefly* trembled and vibrated and rammed into the ice. She had turned the Battery and entered the North River and the snow and wind drove now from the outboard side, dispelling the heat under the tarpaulin.

"Chid," Nez said, speaking with deadly earnestness, "there ain't nobody in God's creation can make me go to this here Presq'ile if I don't want to. But I want to go. You know why?"

"It's handy to Canada if trouble come too close."

"Don't say that no more. And don't say money no more either. Chid, I got to talk plain an' to hell with you if you like it or not. You shipped privateerin' for money an' I shipped for sport an' we both o' us got skunked and set in the midst o' bad trouble. We was wrong from the beginnin'; mostly 'bout suthin' we scarce knew existed up to home. I mean this here United States business, Chid. But, now we do, both o' us, an' we ain't got no excuse for our doin's no more. Chid, we been like damn spyin' Britishers minglin' with American folks an' stabbin' them in their backs. We don't go to make a good nation; we pull it down. Gramp Nott, I lay, wouldn't 've let us remain in his camp, bad as it was. A man could do anythin' he wanted but he had to be honorable about it. We ain't been; no more'n Fish an' Tinker an' Mr. Lidbody. Chid, this nation's

sick an' beset an' we're a'pickin' on it when she's down complete."

"You been hearing preaching?"

"You might say; on'y not the kind you think I did. I hear'n it from myself mostly. Alec Drake, he died in my arms, Chid. You know what he said a'fore his eyes shet? 'God save Master Perry an' the United States o' Ameriky,' he said, reverent as hell, an' he died."

"I saw Bob Crown's brother die similar to that."

"Well, it should have signified, Chid. When men die they say what's in their hearts; not jest words. Them lad's o' the *Adder* was to sea almost stiddy for nigh seven months; but never a grievin' word did they have at mess. You think Noah Brown has to go traipsin' to that godforsaken Presq'ile to make money with a shipyard like he's got here? Or that Perry, who could likely get any soft job from Congress he'd be minded to? No, sir! Them fellers is pure good inside; givin' what they got to this here sick nation. But, seems if, for one o' them kind there's two o' us'n. We blank 'em out, Chid, and when the goin' gets rocky we talk o' slidin' into the enemy's camp, slick's a weasel."

"I wouldn't be an enemy."

"Oh, yes you would. The minute you saw a loose dollar 'round you'd track it down an' to hell with who pays for it; British, Yankee or Indjun. Yer a leech, Chid; both o' us are. You can't only earn dollars an' fun; you got to earn the right to earn 'em fust. You got to be part an' passel o' folks what make it possible, call it a tribe or a town or a nation. I ain't reformed or nuthin', Chid . . . I jest never been far enough away from Portersville an' that stinkin' Noank to catch on how things really was. Now I see 'em good an' clear an' I wish you would too."

"I do sometimes."

"I expect you're bright enough to. On'y you squelch 'em when they come botherin'. I did for a while too but I ain't peaceful inside no more. I'll bet you ain't either, times."

"You didn't talk like that back home. You even tricked me onto the *Blessed Cause*."

"I didn't know about these things then, Chid. Now I do. Didn't that there shipyard make you feel good this mornin', kind o' homey, like's if you got your hands an' your wits on suthin' understandable?"

"A-yep."

"Well, it did me. I want to catch up with that feelin' again. I want to go to Presq'ile an' work like hell an' feel with the good folks o' this nation. I wisht I could say it better, Chid."

"Is good; dat." Antoine nodded soberly. "Is better to do dan say; but, Chid, how you mak' us go to de Presq'ile?"

"I can do it easy, Antoine."

"With no trouble, Chid?"

"No trouble till it catches up with us, Nez."

"All right; go ahead. But Chid I sure wish you'd be headin' there for the same reason I an' Antwine is."

"I guess I will be, for a while."

CHID crept out from under the cover. The *Firefly* moved in a white whirling world, trembling fearfully, only the hot boiler and stack and the green patches of the river showing dark. The pilot was a white snow man on the larboard paddle box, his trumpet and signal cane poised. At the fire door a man poked four-foot logs into the hungry flames, one every minute. The cross-yoke plunged up and down, up and down and the paddles sucked and crashed into ice. Aft, at the tiller, two men stood, snow-plastered. One smoked a home-whittled alder pipe and the other a thin seegar.

Chid, stretching, strode boldly to them.

"Good morning, Mr. Brown. I'm Chid Alwyn."

"You ought to be in jail," Mr. Brown said, grinning.

"I reckon. I had considerable trouble getting here."

"You ran off after the fire, didn't you?"

"No, sir. Not exactly. I came down the coast a ways to get two friends to go along with me. One's a ship's carpenter and the other's a logger. Thought they might come in handy."

"They will indeed."

"They're forward, sir. We got a little

nipped last night and we came over the ice to the yard and it seemed all-fired warm alongside that hot iron affair amidships."

"You weren't the only ones," Mr. Brown nodded, not smiling, "but you were the last. Chid, bring your friends below. I expect there's still a bite of breakfast handy for you. Moses Leet and I were certain that you had shipped on the *Blessed Cause*."

"My Golly! I had an apprenticeship to serve out, Mr. Brown."

"So you did, boy," Noah Brown said, "so you did."

" 'Til August," Chid said.

"Aye, 'til August."

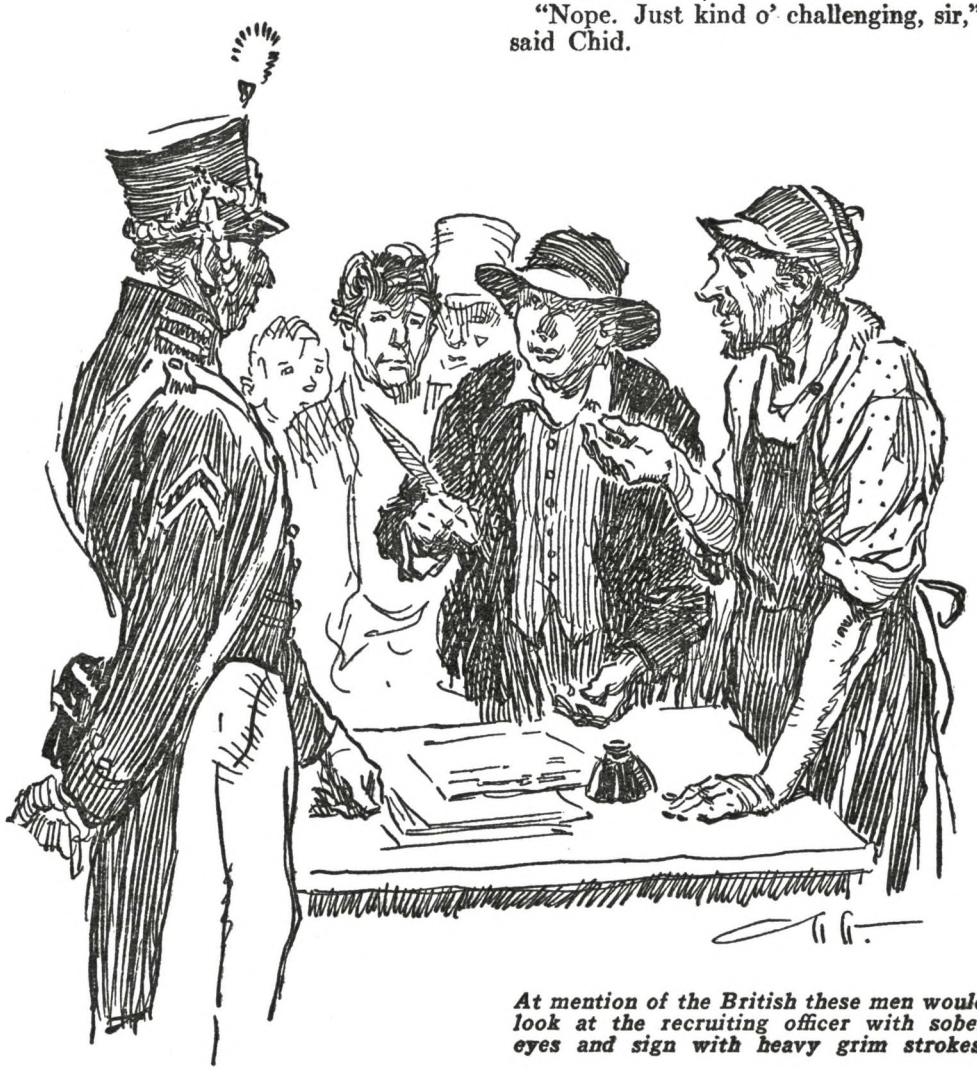
It was a good breakfast; regular tavern food. Moses Leet was tickled to see him and he said he was very much relieved, very much indeed. Nez was showing the company how to split a chip at six yards thirty minutes after he'd said howdy all around. Antoine crawled behind a berth curtain, clutching his wounded leg, explaining that Yankee dunder always hit him in the leg.

"You want to play strap?" a man at the cabin table asked Chid. "A copper a rubber, Mr. Alwyn."

"Nope," said Chid, "I ain't got a cent to my name right this minute."

"Embarrassin', ain't it?"

"Nope. Just kind o' challenging, sir," said Chid.



*At mention of the British these men would look at the recruiting officer with sober eyes and sign with heavy grim strokes.*

## CHAPTER XIII

### TRAVELER'S WAY

THE WAY of the winter traveler from New York City to Lake Erie in the year of 1813 was by the long road; from Albany to Utica to Geneva and then into the wilderness beyond. The Lake Erie turnpike road to the south of it, which extended the new Military Road, was for the most part still a promise of the politicians and the land agents. It wound its muddy log-paved way westward in irregular links of road, Indian trail, surveyor's blazes and rolling virgin forest. Nobody used the Erie Road in winter. From Bath to the lake there wasn't a decent traveler's house nor a village fit to be called such.

The Ontario and Genesee Turnpike Road, which held to its early name of the Great Genesee Road, was the popular and safe one. It shot almost straight westward from Utica, for two hundred and twenty miles, to Buffalo Creek and the lake. The way to the great artery was through Schenectady and along the Mohawk River, by the double well-traveled road that boasted any number of taverns; Bent's, Dewight's, Hudson's Indian Castle, Mr. Aldridge's at German Flats and then a good hotel with an inside wash barrel and a separate ladies' refreshment parlor, at Fort Schuyler in Utica. From here one half the road crawled northward, along Oneida and the Oswego Creek to Lake Ontario and the fighting country. The Great Road continued west; the one reliable road to the Genesee Country. Military stores and settlers' needs and mill machinery and farm tools and bolt goods from far away China went over the road in an endless stream of heavy wagons drawn by matched teams. And settlers and immigrants; always people and more people. And many were now in uniform; uniforms of the militia and of the dandy town brigades and of the regular army and a very few of the navy, for behind Ontario, near Sackett's Harbor, a great force was gathering to whip the British who threatened on the northern shore of the great lake. Folks here had something to defend. The recruiter's fifers didn't blow a note a week; the drinks were on the recruit, not the recruiter. You had just to mention the British and how they were getting ready to invade and these men would look at you with sober eyes and sign with heavy grim strokes.

The land beyond, to the west, was an unsettled wilderness. The great road led, almost straight as a crow's flight, through thick forest and gradually flattening land to lazy Buffalo Creek; thence along the creek to the shores of Lake Erie. On the road, once Batavia was passed, there was not a sizeable village; none that attempted to afford the comforts and luxuries of the eastern state towns. Mr. Peterson, who traded in furs, held open house for the few who traveled the road at Big Spring and, beyond, one Ganson had a rough log tavern with straw-covered puncheon beds and admittedly cut liquor. From there there was nothing much until you reached the tiny hamlets of New Amsterdam and Black Rock on the lake itself.

Renegade Indians prowled along the road here, and British deserters and highwaymen who sometimes relieved travelers of purses and lives in thirty swift seconds. It was flat desolate land, not poor, but not as rich as that farther east near the lakes of Cayuga and Seneca and Canandaigua and Crooked. North of the road here were the mysterious Hepatic and Inflammable Air Holes, treasured for some obscure reason by all of the Six Nations Indians, and near the end of the turnpike, a short haul north of Black Rock, were the Great Falls of the Niagara.

Many families moved eastward during December and January. It was an unusually bitter and severe winter, nothing like the mild ones that the land agents had promised were eternal. The rivers and creeks lay frozen and snow covered. You took an auger even to a deep well if you wanted water. The northern lights flared with mysterious flutterings and flame-like color whenever it came off a clear night, which wasn't often. Bands of wolves roamed the intervales, howling against the biting

winds and the deep hard-packed snow.

The snow came again in early February; heavy large flakes, falling straight and silently, hushing an already hushed and threatened land. The biggest lakes froze over—Oneida and Crooked—and there was ice even on deep Cayuga and the sleds from Utica broke new snow each morning as they toiled slowly westward to Geneva. Beyond Geneva there was but the mail rider's single track to New Hartford. Beyond New Hartford the Great Geneva Turnpike lay unbroken; a dull white serpent writhing over the hills and intervales between frosted green pines and ending at Lake Erie where twenty men had gone to build a navy.

And into this bitter desolate country, the eight heavily laden sleds cutting deeply into the snow came Noah Brown and his thirty-nine shipbuilders.

"ORDINARY," said Moses Leet, downing the rum, "I don't imbibe. But, Chid, I reckon a man's better for it in this weather."

"It's bitter," Chid said. "There ain't no salt in the air to temper it." He downed his rum in one tremendous swallow.

"I never knew you to take more than flip," Moses said, plunging his mittened hands into his pockets and hunching himself against the driving wind. "Chid, you sure you were nipped that night you and your cronies came aboard the *Firefly?*"

"I'm afraid so, Moses. We had a powerful amount against coming down the coast in the snow."

"Well," Moses said, looking at him keenly, "it sure hit you hard. You looked kind o' scairt an' whupped, boy; not just liquored up."

"No," Chid said, "I guess I was nipped all right."

"I'm going to write home tonight, before we jump off," Moses said. "Mary'll be glad you didn't go on the *Blessed Cause*, Chid. You should have spoke with her before you left."

"I didn't have anything to say," Chid said.

"I don't know, boy," the old carpenter

***Into this bitter desolate country came Noah Brown and his little band of thirty-nine shipbuilders.***

said quietly. "Our gal don't want the things you want; they don't count much after a while an' she's got sense enough to see that."

"They count for me."

IT was early afternoon. The sky was lowery and threatened still more snow and the wind blew steadily from the northwest. Batavia, as the Big Plain Station folks wanted their settlement to be called, was at least three hours distant.

The road was easy; not many up-hills. But the men welcomed even a small grade; it gave them an excuse to get out and push and walk to keep warm. There were forty carpenters, only eleven of them from Portersville. Two were from New London and two from Essex, on the Connecticut, and there was a logger from Haddam. The rest were New York and Jersey men. Mr. Brown, so the word went, hadn't been pleased with the way New England had helped but he hadn't been surprised. Even the British regarded New England as still doubtful and, counting on the unpopularity of the war east of Long Island, hadn't extended the blockade to it yet.

Chid did not know all the men. There hadn't been time to during the quick trip of the *Firefly*. Near Albany, with the bow rammed deep into solid ice, the pilot had thrown his signal stick into the wake in defeat and made them walk up the frozen river. Since then the group had broken into small sled parties; five carpenters to the sled plus the hired driver. The tools and the bags and trunks alone made a good pull. Chid rode with Nez and Antoine and two of the Tatum apprentices. Bob Crown traveled with a brooding bitterness, thinking always of the death of his brother and the villainy of Mr. Lidbody. Sylvester Tatro spent the weary miles under all the robes the sled afforded, suffering with a severe cold.

Culver Coon and Tonk Slinker, who were both block-maker's apprentices, were in another sleigh with Epaphras North and the other New Englanders. Mr. Brown wouldn't risk mixing them with York or Jersey men. A short distance beyond Ganson's the lead sled stopped at the call of an Indian who stood with upraised hand in the road between the flanking snow-laden cedars. The man wanted a lift to Black Rock.

"Go back in the sled with the boys," the driver said, clucking to the team. "They ain't so heavy's us."

The Indian sprang into the sled, musket tightly clutched, and nestled beside the carpenters in the box. Chid could smell the rancid grease with which he had protected himself from the winter; a sweet sickish smell that was always to mean Indian to him. But the man was to leeward, for which they were all grateful.

"What you shaved for?" Nez inquired sharply.

"No shaved; haircut, like sojer," the Indian grunted. He was an old man, his leathery face a mass of expressionless wrinkles but his body was lithe as a young buck forest runner.

"You be, too! You're readyin' to paint for war."

"No paint. Friend; ver' good. Damn British. Me, army runner, Captain Brown, York m'litia. From Sackett'."

"You be? How's the ships doin' there?"

"Ver' good, oh, ver' good. Captain, he want more. Have message. Where Elliot boat man?"

"Oh, him. Why, he's to Black Rock, waitin' for Perry to come. Let's see the message."

"No. For Elliot. You sojer?"

"Hell, no! We're carpenters. We got to build the ships on Erie."

"Damn fool," the Indian said. "You got tobac'?"

Nez let him grind off a chew of twist. The Indian spit once, then covered his head with his blanket and subsided into a piece of lifeless freight. They rode on in silence. The snow creaked under the runners and the team ploughed tiredly into the drifts pastern-deep and better. It was dark when the two dim lights of Batavia appeared like red angry stars between the horses' drooped, defeated ears.

The village was one of the newest on the road, built beside a future mill-site on a Tonawanda feeder. There were

already six frame houses, lying unpainted and stark in the smooth, flat snow. The other buildings were log built, single cabins with the end sash long since boarded against the winter. There was no traveler's house, just a tiny store-tavern with a single teamster's dormitory above and piles of stale tangled straw to which a man could help himself if he wanted some padding under him.

In the face of so much unexpected business, Hank Purdy, the boniface, forgot to be genial. He looked the party over doubtfully. They filled his tap room, crowding about his small fire, clothes steaming and heavy boots melting small pools on his sanded floor.

"You ain't Quakers," Hank said. "You sure ain't land agents or missioners. Wait; let Purdy guess."

"The British Army," Nez said.

"OH, no!" Hank said but looked scared nevertheless.

"We're shipbuilders, landlord," Mr. Brown interposed. "We want a good meal and bedding down until daylight. I'll pay for it now, in gold, so you won't get it confused with the liquor scores later."

"Shipbuilders! God in the mountains; in this woods? I d'clare. We need soldiers and they send us shipbuilders. In gold, you say? None o' them damned paper notes?"

"Gold, landlord."

"Why, welcome, damn it! Purdy can pervide, handsome, an' it'll be a dollar a man, without spiruts or extras, you know what I mean. Teams can go inter the shed, free, save you want to pamper 'em with grain. The Injun's got to go there too; this is a decent place."

Mr. Brown counted out forty dollars; then sat down before the fire and lighted a seegar.

"A dozen o' ye in the loft above, pervidin' you boys promise to lay 'cross the beams. You lay with 'em an' ye'll like break th'ough an' get scrambled with them as sleep below here. Some'll have to bed 'round the town houses I can get for you."

"The apprentices can go out," Mr. Brown said.

"Aye. So you'll want liquor, hey? A good tootin' a'fore you jump off; it's nacherel, ain't it? But I want to say fair, we ain't got sufficient wimin. This ain't fancy wenchin' kentry like east. Hell, forty'd tax even Uticy, I 'low. I on'y got th'ee gals to call; an' you gents please let 'em be till they get yer victuals served."

Chid reckoned that Mr. Purdy delayed the meal deliberately. It was almost two hours before the kettles of hard potatoes and indifferent corn mush cakes and gravy-warmed venison came to the long table hastily made by laying rough frost-stippled boards across the few regular tavern tables. He sold a good deal of rum during the wait. Chid would have liked a noggin but he was utterly penniless. The condition depressed him terribly, made him blindly angry at fate. Two thousand dollars had been in his hands within the week. Now he was broke as he hadn't been since he was fifteen.

Three girls waited on them; two of them busy with the bar orders entirely. The one at the table needs was a slight sallow-complexioned girl with long dull black hair falling in two braids over her shoulders and over her high small breasts. She was small, almost tiny, and she took particular care of Chid.

"What's your name, pretty?" Nez demanded, observing.

"Beaumelle."

"God! Beaumelle what?"

"Trask. I'm extra for Hank."

"Well, he's got a eye! But you better don't make such a extry fuss over Chid here. Chid's got a gal."

"Shut up, Nez."

The men were noisy. Somebody started a song after the weak unsugared tea. It was a graver's short drag. In the beating refrain in which they all joined you could almost hear the thud of the graver's mauls as they crashed on the oak wedges, and the creak of the hull as it was griped in the pole shores, like the hub of a wagon wheel, and you could feel the cold dripping of the dank masonry benches of the graving dock. It made Chid homesick for salt water and the smell of ships building and acrid oak chisel chips.

The song ended in a burst of drunken whooping. Nez was asked to split a chip. He sliced one from the board table and stuck it on the log wall sixteen paces away.

"Every split'll cost somebody one drink, boys!"

"Sure! Go ahead, Nez."

Nez earned six drinks, one right after the other. He gave Chid the third one. Antoine tried, bemoaning the loss of his double-bitted ax and earned two drinks. Mr. Brown dozed over his writing portfolio. Moses Leet laboriously wrote his letter with a quill pen and berry ink, thinned with cider vinegar. The two bar girls moved about nimbly, ducking the good-natured experimental slaps that were aimed at them. It was the last night for a toot. Tomorrow, the real wilderness, the jump-off for Black Rock, and then the long unknown road to Presque Isle where a man was cut off from everything, saving, perhaps, more danger than it was pleasant to think about now, and for some the deep inward contentment of unselfish noble service. . .

The sleds pushed on at dawn. The men were quiet and inclined to nod on the long windless stretches. Nez said that it had been quite a party; quite a party. They got into Black Rock just before nightfall. Against the dull sunset Chid saw the spars of a schooner, moored in the naval basin. It was the best place he'd seen on the journey yet.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DIE IS CAST

THE eating place at Black Rock was in the barracks of the militia company which did guard duty at the tiny new navy yard. It was a long low log building at the end of a deep shoveled snowpath which led to the basin in which several small boats were moored so that their guns commanded the narrow entrance to the place. The drifted snow reached almost to the eaves of the mess house and lay soft and deep on the shallow A-roof. The tracks of an animal led over the roof to the stone chimney as if the beast had followed the smell of food to it.

It was warm inside, and crowded with militiamen. Their muskets stood in racks flanking the slab door and innumerable pairs of boots and pieces of woolen clothing dried on a ledge pole before the great fireplace at one end of the room, giving off an odorous effluvium unlike anything Chid had ever smelled —sweat, boot-dressing, cooking food, corn mush and wet wool. It was different from the homey smell of a ship's steerage or forecastle, lacking the sharp tang of oakum or tar to temper the raw smells.

"You boys'll have to eat light," a red-whiskered sergeant grinned, herding them to a long trestle table. "We don't get what we requisition for at this post by a long shot, not gun nor food nor powder nor anythin'. But you'll wish you had even this much where you boys are headed for."

"Shet up an' bring on the grub," Paph North growled. "We'll be under navy requisitions."

"Yeah! You sure will. That's why I was feelin' sorry for you. What navy stuff come through this post damn seldom gets to Presque Isle. It don't even stay here. Ain't you heard about Chauncey's museum?"

"He's way east on Ontario, soljer."

"Oh my! Well, his grubbin' fingers reach clear to here. He collects for his museum at Sacketts' Harbor—shipbuilders, sailors, grub, guns, navy supplies. Cripps! It's a store house! He never uses nuthin' jest collects 'em an' to hell with whoever needs the stuff. Chauncey's boss on all the lakes."

"Perry's commander on Erie—soon's he gets here."

"Mebbe so. But he better outrank Chauncey good an' plenty if he wants supplies way to his camp. Listen, mister, Chauncey's so jealous o' supplies and stores an' reserves he's fretted hisself inter the stomach heaves grabbin' onto 'em. They say he jest sits making rousers at a turrible rate an' counts his supplies. No mortal ever heard o' him fightin' anyway. You ask Elliot or Dobbins, they know. You'll be goin' down the lake with Cap Dobbins."

"When?"

"Why, right off. Soon's you eat. You stay here Chauncey'd have you on his lake by mornin'."

Mr. Brown, Moses Leet, and a foreman, George Carmody, from the New Jersey contingent, were absent, having been invited to mess with the post officers and have a conference at the same time.

Chid didn't think much of the navy base. It was more than a mile removed from the barracks and at least thirty from the main army encampment. Directly across the river, dark against the snow, lay Fort Erie and the British guns. Fort Erie controlled the lake outlet. This was the chief reason that the President had ordered the new naval station to be located at Presque Isle, ninety miles down the lake. Erie could drop mortar shot right into Black Rock, and did so whenever her gunners wanted a little fun with the Americans.

"You should have been here last fall," the sergeant told Chid and his mess neighbors. "Lieutenant Elliot, he snuck over to the British side in a couple o' arks and took a brig from 'em, slick's skinnin' a sarpint. He burnt another; you could see her bones was you to be here by daylight. If the British had them two ships yet they'd never let you get down Erie tonight. You can thank Jesse Elliot. He's all right, boys, an' lots here don't think he's gettin' a square deal, havin' this man Perry come in as head. There's too much politics in this hull frontier."

"I reckon maybe the gov'mint thinks Perry a better man."

"Do you know him, mister?"

"No. I saw him once though; so did Chid here. I'd say your man Elliot had to be powerful good to be better'n Perry."

"Perry ain't done anythin' special in this war, I heard."

"No; we got politics on the seacoast too, soljer. It ain't his fault. Wait'll you see him. He kind o' charms you, you let him."

"Well, no navy man'd charm no army man I ever hear'n tell of. But he better charm somebody right proper if he wants to get some boats built. You want to sign a petition to keep Elliot commander o' the Erie fleet?"

"No."

"Well, it don't matter. The militia all signed an' so did some o' the lads down to Presque Isle. I jest wanted to get you started right, boys. How 'bout you, straw hair?"

"No," Chid said. "I'm started right. I was a couple of times. It's the way I end up that bothers."

"Jesus! You talk like an old man, mister."

AFTER supper, the drivers were called and paid off by a paymaster's clerk. The freight had been loaded into the hold of a small one-gun schooner that lay alongside a log bulkhead at the basin. Some of the men tried to sleep. The cooks scraped their pots and hung them on rafter pegs, in a row of copper suns. The barracks was becoming stifling hot, the stench strong and vile.

There was no rum at the post, and, tonight, no songs.

He recalled, sitting here waiting, the long talks he used to have with Moses Leet. He owed a lot to him. He had kept his two feet firmly on the ground and made his approach to his trade sane and real and proud. He thought that when Moses returned he would talk with him again as he used to. Only not about shipbuilding. Moses and Aunt Leety had made a good life of it. They knew the secret and had always stood for the kind of a family which Chid had wanted and pictured for himself.

Chid wondered if man could really toss over every dream and desire he had and still come out on top. This war, up here, was a close terrible thing. He'd talked with men all along the Great Genesee Road and heard their bitter stories of brothers lost and houses burned, farms rotting and weed-grown because they had gone off to fight. Sometimes he wished that he could answer his question on the basis of right or wrong. He suspected that he was wrong, as Nez had so outspokenly told him. But he couldn't forget other men who used the war and everything else they could to better themselves; Fish and

Lefferts, gouty old Chauncey, perhaps even this young Lieutenant Elliot who permitted a petition of advantage to himself to be circulated. He was confused. Moses Leet could help him. All Chid needed was a reason, a good compelling reason to hold against that instinctive yardstick that he placed against almost everything.

Sylvester Tatro's cold was very bad. He was a lad of sixteen, slight of build and wiry; Nez's type, now a second year apprentice. He hadn't eaten in two days. His eyes were dull and listless and from deep in his chest came a frightening wheeze and rattle.

Chid made a poke of his stocking hat and filled it with hot floor sand which he heated in an iron kettle over the crane. He kept the sand bag on Sylvester's chest and back, as Aunt Leety had so often done for him. The boy slept after a while, quietly, his brow turned damp and cold.

Chid was just rolling him over gently, changing the sand bag when Mr. Brown and the two foremen came in. A militia officer and Lieutenant Elliot, who was a sharp-eyed small man of perhaps twenty-five in an immaculate naval uniform, were with them. There was trouble on the faces of all of them.

"Boys," George Carmody said, "plans have changed. We shouldn't have picked up that Indian; he had a message from Chauncey. It kind of busts things up."

"What now, George?"

"Chauncey has ordered us to Sacketts' Harbor."

"The hell you say! What in nation for?"

"Lieutenant Elliot says he always does, just to look us over an' keep the best for his own yard. Everything clears through him. The lieutenant here's furious but he can't do anything about it."

"Well, damned if I came to this heathen country to go into a museum. I came to help the nation an', by Jesus, I will! My old woman'd be fit to ax; she livin' on her Pap again jest so's I could serve."

"Shut up, Art! You talk independent's a militiaman."

"Well, I'm a freeman, ain't I? I don't have to take no orders from gold braid."

"None o' us do. But, by snum, if we're sincere 'bout helpin' the nation we ought to do what they want us to. No matter what, we got to have a leader, seems if."

The men argued back and forth. Chid thought that it was their right to. After all, considered as a group, the shipbuilders were here as a result of patriotic appeal; they had been told that there was a vital job to be done and that no one in America could do it but themselves. "Museum pieces!" Paph North snorted. "Hah! I don't fancy tellin' my gran'childer 'bout this, I don't."

NOAH BROWN stood by the fire, his face black and clouded. It was not the first time that he had been hampered by petty military authority and he thought often that the military had far too many personal stakes involved in making war decisions. Here was Isaac Chauncey, jealous of his rank, protecting his personal honor and his chances of advancement by robbing a neighboring base. On the other hand, the continued control of Lake Ontario was essential to the large effort. Brown's own loyalties were seriously challenged. By inclination he wanted to build Perry's fleet, to start out fresh and new, to create. To create had always been the greatest lure of his trade. But he could also understand the wisdom of authority and he could understand, too, the rights of his shipbuilders to decide for themselves.

Nez came to Chid, talking close to his ear. "Sackett Harbor's too civilized for us, Chid," he whispered.

Chid nodded. Sometimes he almost forgot about the trouble that hung over their heads. It was remote in miles and, somehow, in time too.

"It would be reserve duty," Nez said. "Easy's sleepin'. Chid, you ain't thinkin' o' goin', are you?"

"No," Chid said, "I don't want to. Nez, Chauncey ain't our boss, is he?"

"Hell, no! Uncle Noah is an' no one else, Chid. I'm with him, so long's it ain't Sacketts'."

"It was what I was thinking, Nez," Chid said. "Come on, we'll put it up to him."

Mr. Brown was appreciative. He said that the men were free citizens and could do as they liked; even go home, as some of the men said they were going to. He didn't wholly blame any man; it was a stupid, hard thing to whip men into a patriotic fervor, cart them four hundred miles into bitter winter and privation and then tell them their sacrifice wasn't wanted after all.

"Nez an' I," Chid said, "are going to Presque Isle anyway. There'll be some others, too, I reckon, sir."

Mr. Brown said nothing. He looked at Chid with a new awareness. "You were such a cocky youngster down in Portersville," he said soberly. "What's come over you, Chidsy?"

"Nothing," Chid said.

But something had; Chid couldn't say what. He knew he wasn't going down to that remote base just to get away from his trouble. It was something more than that; something bigger and finer which he did not understand. "I just want to, I guess," Chid muttered and Nez clapped him on the back and said, "Chid, you're amazin'. Damned if you ain't!"

Chid and Nez went to the fireplace. Oddly, each knew what the other was doing though neither had mentioned it. Chid climbed into his great coat, the same that he had worn in the cemetery on the day Asa Tatum had been buried, still showing the burned patches from the stable fire that had killed Old Beemis.

He had come a long way since then, a long way in thinking and experience. He had tasted of the power of leadership. He put on his fire-warmed mocassins and eased their hardness by pacing the length of the room. His seabag was over his shoulder, his few belongings making a small flabby sack. He could feel the men watching him, feel the crystalization of their resolves flow about him and what he represented. It had been so on the *Blessed Cause* when, by his own declarative act, he had started that mutiny that for both sides was a decision at last.

He stopped in front of Mr. Brown.

"Where's the boat that's to take us, sir?"

"Where you headin', Chid?" a man called.

"To Presque Isle, of course," Chid said easily. "It's where I agreed to go, ain't it? I'm working for Noah Brown, man, no one else."

"Well spoke, by God, Chid Alwyn! I'm with ye."

"Follow the path to the river," Mr. Brown said quietly.

"Aye, aye, sir," Chid said and crossed the room to the door.

NEZ and Antoine were beside him, dressed for the night. Sylvester Tatro cried out from his blanket pallet and started to struggle into his outer clothing. Mr. Brown still stood at the fire. His face was no longer worried. More than half the men joined Chid at the slab door. With sudden determination Mr. Brown put on his fur coat and, taking up his writing folio and a large roll of linen-paper drawings, strode through the door and down the steep path to the boat basin.

Chid followed, Mr. Brown's words ringing in his ears. They were good words, warming and comforting, that Mr. Brown had spoken as he passed. "I could not have done it in the face of that order, Chid; it was up to the men themselves. I'm grateful to you, more than I can say right now." But it wasn't the words alone. It was the look in Mr. Brown's eyes and the sudden sincere pressure of his hand on his arm. It moved Chid strangely.

Twenty-nine men gathered on the snow-covered deck of the little gunboat. The others had elected to go home or take the easy berths at Sacketts' Harbor, though nobody had said so outright, just reckoned they'd better follow orders. The militia officer was profane in his damnation of those with Chid and had threatened Mr. Brown with arrest; things that nobody took seriously. Elliot had been delighted, though he couldn't show it before either shipbuilders or his brother officers.

The sailors were sorting the tool boxes, putting back on shore those not claimed by the men on board. Sylvester Tatro had been carried below, tears streaming

from his eyes when Mr. Brown said he might come. Moses Leet stood suddenly beside Chid, offering his hard, horny hand.

"Good-by, Chid."

"Ain't you with us, Moses?"

"No, I'd like to be. But Noah asked me to take the other gang to Sacketts'. I'm glad to do it; it saves his face somewhat an' God knows, Chid, Noah is needed at Presque Isle more'n any man on earth right now. I'll be seein' you soon again, Chidsy, soon's I can get back where I really belong." Moses hesitated in a curious pondering way, then suddenly looked directly into Chid's face. "Chid," he said, "that was the *Blessed Cause* off in the river that mornin', wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Chid.

"Did you come from her?"

"Yes. She was a disappointment."

"I reckon so. I wasn't sure at first but I'm glad you told me."

"I was meaning to, Moses. I was figuring to have a long talk with you, about a lot of things."

"You in trouble, Chid?"

"Some."

"Bad?"

"It might be. Does Mr. Brown know?"

"No; he don't know the schooner an' so didn't connect you with it. But Livy Bracket from Noank did an' told me so. Them Noank people is malicious gossipmongers, Chid, an' they got minds can make up the wickedest lies with no truth to go by 'tall. I'm takin' Livy to Sacketts' with me where he can't hurt you none."

"YOU'RE good, Moses," Chid said, meaning it sincerely. You always have been . . . well, like my father was."

"I ain't good, Chid. We love you, that's all; me an' Lib an' Mary, too; like you was our blood. I ain't so old I don't recollect when I was young an' full o' ginger. It was times jest like these be; a war on an' all o' us lads still fightin' desperate for our individu'le plans. It got more confusin' all the time till one by one we had to give our private notions up an' combine to lick the thing which was hurtin' us all. Some never come 'round an' we named 'em Tories an' traitors an' worse, an' some got kilt an' some got bitter an' most o' us never did catch up with our own matters but we created suthin' good an' beautiful, Chid. Liberty an' freedom; they ain't idle words. Not to us. They're real as rocks an' irun spikes an' life in your body. You couldn't figure on no future 'tall without 'em. Your aims ain't no different than anybody else's, Chid, it's on'y that you're more stubborn than most in pursuin' 'em. That's why you got into trouble; that's why you'll get into more if you don't modify. But, boy, it 'pears to me you got yourself set in the right trace now."

"I aim to serve my apprenticeship."

"It's a good start, Chid. Don't fret about your trouble. I'll keep Livy bowsed down at Sacketts'. That navy man on the schooner hinted you ain't as guilty as might seem an' was it peace times I'd say go an' get it all cleared up legal. But right now, there's a bigger job to do first."

"Up here," Chid said, "what you said about Perry having my heart as well as my labor kind of makes better sense, Moses. I can see where a soldier has to be armed with more than just a musket, and a shipwright with more than his tools. It sort of has me guessing."

"Be proud of it, boy. Don't question it; it's the good in you, like I say you got. Chid, I got to leave now; Dobbins is makin' signs o' sailin'. Good-by, my boy; good-by, Chid."

"'By," Chid said, "an', Moses, come back. Mr. Brown needs you."

"Yes an' no," Moses said slowly. "I got some other ideas an' I told him o' them. Chid, when he speaks with you, listen sharp. I don't know but what it'll set better with you than all this talk o' ours. Chid, good-by."

## CHAPTER XV

### VOYAGE TO DESTINY

A SAILOR made the rounds of the cluttered deck, picking his way with that spring-like tread of the seasoned mariner. A deep water man, thought Chid, and

the only one I've noticed in this country so far.

"No lights or talk, gents," the sailor said as he reached the shipbuilders, standing in a group amidships. "You don't want a farewell broadside from Erie, do you?"

"Godamned if I care," a New York man scowled. "The British might run this country better'n you roosters up here are doin' it."

"Mister," the sailor quietly said, standing very still, "I'm twenty years in this nation's navy. Was I a plain civilian I'd hammer you one for talking like that."

"Just try it!"

Chid felt a sudden desire to hit the New York man. He'd never before wanted to, not for such an offense anyway. He might have, had not Lieutenant Elliot sharply called for silence. The man slunk away in the darkness, dropping below to the cabin.

The warps were drawn on board. The pilot dumped his pipe overside and took his station at the tiller. Captain Dobbins ordered his men to the low bulwarks, each with a long sweep reaching into the black waters of the basin. Fort Erie was a silent blur against the snow sheeted hills across the Niagara, outlined faintly by the greenish glow which commenced the nightly display of the Borealis.

The gunboat moved silently into the river. Not an oar squeaked; not a man missed stroke. Fort Erie remained a sleeping watchdog only a fair musket shot away.

In the open lake the vessel spread her dark sails and reached down Erie shore to Presque Isle. She wasn't much of a ship; forty tons and jerry-built. But Chid, feeling the life of her trembling through the deck into his own body, smiled with a strange comfort. There would be real ships for Erie now, great proud ships, built by shipbuilders and manned by deep water men, commanded by a navy man and a gentleman. And he'd help to build them.

Through all the confusion of his mind and the staggering experiences of these weeks, that stood out with sudden satisfaction and promise. To build ships; to feel the good feel of smooth ash-handled tools once again, with his own hands to make wood become useful and beautiful . . . to smell all the good smells of a good ship building. It was something real and understandable; a new, fresh start.

His big mistake had been ever to get away from it. It was what had been wrong with that horrible voyage on the *Blessed Cause*. He was a stranger to her kind of a ship and her kind of people. That was what had licked him; not understanding her. A man couldn't be licked by something that he knew.

Chid faced the black night off the bow, the cold wind biting on his right side. Ahead was Presque Isle, about as remote and distant a place as a coastal man could think of. There was danger there, and intrigue, and inefficiency and an almost hopeless job to be done. But that job was shipbuilding; shipbuilding was the foundation of the place, and if a man knew the foundation, loved it and understood it, no framework could ever be built on it that would confuse or baffle him. He could measure and weigh things then, good or bad, because he knew the scale to the measure.

Chid went below feeling a personal new peace and hope. He couldn't help feeling that he had some place along the road gained some freedom. He couldn't define it, or put his finger on it. Everything was the same; he was still an apprentice with time to serve, he was in trouble, his dreams had not been advanced one iota. But, nevertheless, Chid felt better, inside, than he had in weeks.

IT WAS long after ten o'clock but the men still lounged on their seabags under a swaying candle lantern in the low creaking hold. Sylvester alone slept, rolled in blankets, in a hammock triced between the heel of the foremast and a bulkhead that separated the compartment from the rude after trunk cabin.

They were guessing riddles, roaring at the stupid answers of some. The New England men held up well, Chid noticed. They studied the questions soberly and if they answered at all it was to give a smart answer or the right one. Moses

Leet had taken Livy Bracket and five other New England men with him. Four men had gone back over the Great Road, disgusted and sick of their choice. Five of the New England men remaining in the Presque Isle party were apprentices —Sylvester, Bob Crown, Culver, Coons, Tonk Slinker and Chid. The rest were journeymen, big lumbering Paph North —who reminded Chid somewhat of Alec Drake—Honest Huntley, Tatum's best caulker, the five other Connecticut men, and Nez. Nez didn't rate as anything. He had at one time or another done about everything in the Tatum yard, not particularly well unless he wanted to win a bet or have something to boast about. Moses Leet used to call him the best striker he ever knew, though. Put a man with Nez and first thing you knew Nez, the helper, had his teammate working twice as hard just to keep up with him.

Antoine belonged to neither the New York, the Jersey or the Tatum gang. He was a logger, strange to the talk and ways of salt coast shipbuilders. His wound had been painful and Chid could only guess how he had suffered with it in silence. But tonight, like the rest, he was bright and chipper as if this last link in the long journey was for him too a beginning of something new and fresh.

The low door in the after bulkhead opened and George Carmody poked his shaggy head into the hold. "Where's Chid Alwyn?" he asked.

"Here."

"Mr Brown an' me want to see you. Aft here, boy."

Chid went into the cabin. Mr. Brown and Carmody sat at a swinging table, papers strewn before them. Lieutenant Elliot dozed in a quarter berth along the sheathing, his uniform neatly folded on a sea chest. Mr. Brown's seegar gave off thin gray smoke. He smokes a raft of them, Chid thought, waiting for him to speak. I wonder if he's got enough to last him up here in the wilderness?

"This upset has raised hob with our work schedules," Noah Brown said in his direct way. "We've got to lay out some new ones."

"Yes, sir."

"We need at least a hundred shipbuilders," Carmody said. "We round up forty and twenty-nine get where we need 'em."

"What's the matter with the gov'mint anyway?"

"It ain't the gov'mint, Alwyn. It's some of the men that have sworn to serve it. We got to build a fleet in spite of them. Boy, we need a foreman."

"I'm not a foreman," Chid said. "I'm not even a journeyman."

"I wasn't till I tried," Carmody said. "Today I'll build you a forty-four from a half-model and the boss's go-ahead."

"Someday I want to, too," Chid said.

"CHIDSY," Mr. Brown said, "we've got to build ships in a way that they've never been built before; fast, of green wood and with poor and little help. I've told you these things before. Now, I don't want a man that knows how to build ships too well. He'd have too much to unlearn. You've got the fundamentals; I saw your ability to lead an hour ago—and you've got some unique ideas according to Moses Leet. He never approved of them much, Chidsy, but he was fair to say they'd come in handy for this job. We talked it all over back in Portersville, but I wasn't sure about you then. You had some unique ideas about other things, too."

"What ideas?"

"Why, about money and serving out your time and such. And, well, this thing we call patriotism, Chidsy. What you did tonight at Black Rock changed all that. It just took one man with courage and right-thinking like that to sway the rest; I couldn't have ordered it, you understand. It's the kind of thinking, the kind of loyalty and patriotism we need up here even more than shipbuilding talent."

"Won't Chauncey raise ructions?"

"Loud, he will," Carmody nodded grimly, "but it don't matter. The boys all came here as free citizens. Mr. Brown an' me have ships to build; you're here and we hire you, that's all."

"Hire?" Chid asked.

"Yes, Chidsy," Mr. Brown said. "I think you'd be worth pay for the extra work. I'd want you to take over the New

England men and finish off one of the three gunboats now building. You'd be boss of that hull, free to use those short-cuts Moses spoke about."

"What happens in August?"

"In August you're free. If you wish."

"I've looked forward to it for five years," Chid said. "I'll want to be."

"Then it's settled?"

"Well—"

"The pay is, say, ten a month."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Mr. Brown," Chid said, and it felt odd, hearing himself say that. "I was wondering if a man might put together one of those steamboats for fighting. Seems to me—"

"Now, Chidsy," Mr. Brown said, his eyes twinkling, "we don't want our ideas too unique."

"I reckon not, sir. But someday I want to build one."

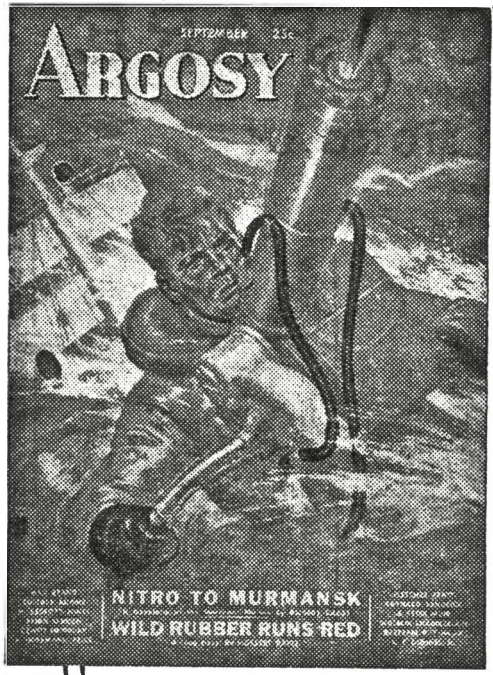
"So do I," Noah Brown said warmly, "but first we've got to win this war. It takes a free country to invent and develop such things, Chidsy. We've got to keep it free right now; there's no time for anything else until that's done."

"I can see it," Chid said, "I can see it more all the time."

George Carmody handed Chid a packet of drawings. They were labeled: *Gunboat Number 3; Lake Erie Fleet.* Chid took them to the lantern in the hold.

He studied them all night long in a small tight pleasant world apart from the snores and tossings of the shipwrights. He reckoned, come launching, she'd be about the best ship a man had ever built. And burned into her stem post, by an ancient right, would be the initials CA—those of her master-builder.

*(End of Part Two)*

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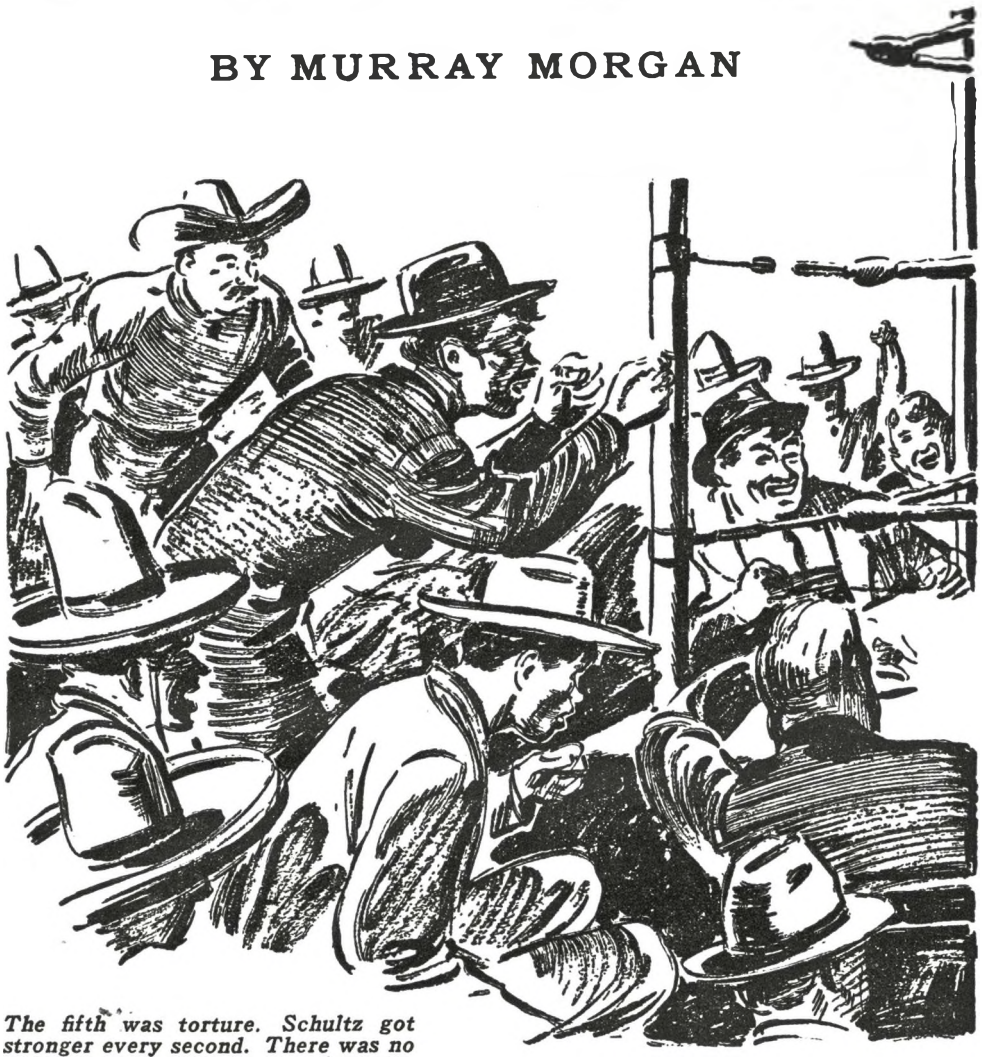
# FORTY FOR FARE

## BY MURRAY MORGAN



*The fifth was torture. Schultz got stronger every second. There was no getting away from the punishment.*

SPEED. That's what they had called him back in the States. Speed Hanford, the welter who buzzed around the ring like an angry wasp, but whose punches packed no more wallop than a fly's wing. "If Hanford could hit half as fast as he moves," Dan Parker had written after his fight with Armstrong, "he'd be the greatest since Gans. But all he has is speed." That was two years ago. Frankie Hanford wasn't even fast now.

Frankie knew he had nothing left as he stood in Jose Sancha's office, shifting from foot to foot and catching the frayed cuff of his coat sleeve between palm and fingertips. The pasty-faced promoter knew it, too. He shuffled needlessly through the paper's on his desk.

*That's right, rub it in,* Frankie thought. *Keep me waiting. Just make me stand here and wait for you to say No. As if I'm not the cocky gringo who said he wouldn't fight on one of your cards for a million bucks. And now I'm*

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN MEOLA

*back asking for a semifinal, a special, anything, for a couple of hundred pesos. From a million bucks down to forty. So rub it in, you ——.*

Sancha shifted his soft body in the big chair and looked up. He was as fat as he was short, and, Frankie had been told, so proud of his pasty skin that he never went out in the midday sun lest he get tanned. His lips were very red against his white face, especially so when, as now, he bared his even white teeth in a formal smile. Unlike most of the men in the pueblo, who smiled only in friendship, Jose Sancha smiled a lot.

"And why does Meester Hanford so weesh to again favor me with hees services?" His voice was thick as curdled cream.

"I told you. I need forty bucks. I want to get back north." *No use saying why,* Frankie thought. *You wouldn't give a dented damn whether I ever got there to enlist, or why I want to enlist.*

"Meester Hanford does not like thees country, is eet not? Meester Hanford does not like Mexicans?"

"I like Mexico fine," said Frankie, meaning it very much. He loved the long yellow plateaus rolling up into the mountains, like the Central Oregon country where he lived until he went east to look for the big purses. And he loved this town, Palacuaro, with its white adobe houses and red tile roofs, this pueblo that was so natural you couldn't imagine the mountain or the lake without it. "I like it fine. And the people, too. They're damn friendly. Of course, there are some skunks in every country. . . ."

He stopped short. He hadn't meant to say that. But he wasn't sorry. Not really. Sancha knew what he thought of him, anyway; had known ever since that day Sancha made Kid Tarasco go in against Schultz when he was running a malarial fever. "That was a hell of a thing to do," Frankie had said when he went to pick up Tarasco's purse for him. "Schultz could have killed that kid." The promoter had shrugged. "He's only an Indian." Frankie called him worse things than a skunk then and stormed out, swearing never to return. But now he was back. It was humiliating, but there was no other way he could get money in a hurry. He had to get home.

The smile left Sancha's face. His black eyes stabbed hatred at the seedy young man with the drawn, thin face and the clothes stained with grease from Espinosa's gas station. The grease wouldn't wash out, not without soap, and Frankie needed all his money for tortillas and milk and quinine.

SANCHA looked from the fighter's hands, rough and broken-nailed, to his own soft ones. His red lips parted in another smile, a personal smile of self-satisfaction which lifted his fat cheeks up toward his pouchy eyes.

"But Meester Hanford is not in shape," he purred, still examining his pink fingernails. "I have heard that Meester Hanford has had malaria. One is not strong after malaria."

Frankie shrugged. No use denying he'd been sick. Everyone in Palacuaro knew he'd been sick. A broke American is a novelty in Mexico, where tourist and millionaire and American all mean the same thing.

"I'm not in the pink, but a couple of weeks' training and I could go six rounds."

Sancha's fat face drooped with an imposed expression of sadness. He shook his head mournfully.

"Ah, Meester Hanford. Two weeks. Thees ees too bad."

Frankie said nothing. If Sancha wanted to play a little game, he had to play solitaire. Frankie was damned if he was going to crawl.

"Meester Hanford could not be ready in six days? For the fiesta? Eet ees too bad."

"I can be ready in six days."

He knew he could not. He was still weak, and though his face was thin and drawn, his belly was soft from a diet of too much starch. Besides, there was the altitude. Even when he'd been well, the thin air had left him gasping for breath before the end of a round. That had been the trouble, the altitude. He just wasn't built to fight at eight thousand feet. He wasn't any Flying Fortress.

He had known it after that first fight in the Arena Mexico, when Tolteca clipped him. Frankie had seen that punch coming, but he was too tired to get out of the way, just so gooned that he couldn't make himself move. That was the tip-off, but Frankie wouldn't admit it. He didn't want to leave Mexico a loser. So he kept fighting and losing, and losing and slipping down on the card, from main events to semi-finals, from semis to specials. Before he could drop down to the first prelims, he left the capital and started fighting the wild-swinging Indian kids in places like Pueblo and Toluca and Morelia and Palacuaro. Then malaria and the job at the gas station. He hadn't wanted to go back to the States until he showed them down here he could fight. But he had to now.

"Sure," he said again. "I'll be ready. Who's my victim?"

Sancha squinted at the young American, his little black eyes shrewd and cruel. He wasn't fooled. The promoter knew a sick man when he saw one.

"*Bueno,* Meester Hanford," he said. "I weel geev you the main event, *amigo.*"

"A main's ten rounds."

"*Si,* Meester Hanford. A main event ees ten rounds and eet pays you two hundred pesos."

"I got five hundred for my last main."

"Yes, Meester Hanford. But that was your *last* fight. Thees time, you weel fight a better man. I weel bring een someone good for you, and I weel pay heem the five hundred pesos."

So that was it. Sancha was going to import someone to punch him around ten rounds, was he. Why didn't he just hire a *pistollero* to really do a job, the squid-faced pig. It would be cheaper and more complete. Frankie's right fist tightened and the muscles in his shoulder ached a little. But he remembered in time. There were not many honest ways a man could get two hundred pesos in a hurry in Mexico, and a beating was only a beating.

"Okay, ten rounds for two hundred," he said, his voice heavy with sarcasm. "Thanks."

"For nothing, Meester Hanford."

Frankie spun on his heel and walked from the room. He closed the door quietly. No use giving Sancha the satisfaction of knowing he felt like slamming it.

Thanks for nothing. That was just about it, he thought, as he started the long walk from the town to Espinosa's station down by the lake. It was early afternoon and the clouds were massing for the daily storm of the rainy season. Frankie heard the rattle of a bus coming along behind him and from long experience knew without looking that it was Don Pedro's yellow *El Canario* and not the big Greyhound-like bus, *El Bolsheviko,* that made the run to Mexico City. One of the things he liked best about Mexico was the way every driver painted a name on his bus or truck.

Reaching into his pocket for the fifteen centavos which would allow him to jounce on a wooden seat the two cobblestoned miles to the station, Frankie remembered he had only six pesos. Señor Espinosa would pay him six more tomorrow for his week's work, but he would need every centavo he had for food during the next six days. Fifteen centavos wasn't much for two miles on a bus, but it would buy thirty tortillas or a half-kilo of stew meat. Perhaps the rain would hold off, and anyway, the walk would be good for him. Ten rounds was a long time.

SEÑOR ESPINOSA, a tall, gaunt, gray man whom Frankie always thought of as Don Quixote, was helping Don Pedro change a tire on *El Canario* when Frankie trudged in, tired but whistling. The buses at Palacuaro averaged more miles to the gallon than to the tire over the sharp cobblestones, but the tourists —when there used to be tourists—had called the streets picturesque and the local merchants didn't want them improved.

"Only one flat?" he asked Don Pedro in his heavily accented Spanish.

"*No mas.*"

"That's too bad. I need a workout," Frankie said.

Señor Espinosa looked up, his brown eyes inquiring under bushy white eyebrows.

"Yes, señor," Frankie said in answer

to the look. "Our friend gave me a fight. Next Friday. I will leave for home Saturday, if it is all right with you."

"Certainly, my son. But why did he, who hates all Americans and especially you, give you—"

"It will be ten rounds against someone good."

"Oh." Señor Espinosa laid his long chin on his chest and tugged thoughtfully at his neat, white mustache. "I don't like it," he said.

"A beating is just a beating."

"No, my son. This is not like our friend, the fascist. He hates Americans, as I have told you many times. He hates them not for old history or for some slight by a tourist but because they are against Hitler and Mussolini and Franco. He hates you because you are an American, and also because you insulted him."

"I don't like it either, señor," Frankie interrupted. "But the worst that can happen is that I'll get knocked out."

Señor Espinosa shook his head.

"I think not. If that were all, he would not have given you the fight. He could see that you valued the 200 pesos more than the beating. Therefore he could hurt you more by not giving you the money. If he wanted you beaten, he could get one of his Sinarquista assassins to do that, and he is not a man to throw about 200 pesos. No, my son, he has something else in mind."

"I don't figure it that way, señor. I think it is worth the money to him to see someone knock the hell out of me up there in the ring."

The old man sighed.

"I'm sorry, my son. I wish that I had the two hundred pesos to give you."

"So do I," Frankie admitted. "I don't particularly like getting hurt. But I know how it is with you since the war ended the tourist business. And thanks for wishing you had it, anyway."

"Maybe things will be better when Mexico goes in the war," Señor Espinosa said hopefully.

"Sure, or anyway after the war."

Frankie hoped Espinosa could last out the war. The old man had been good to him, giving him a job when he didn't have a work permit, and letting him stay in one of the vacant tourist cabins. Once he asked Espinosa why he was being so good to a foreigner, and the old man had looked surprised and said nothing. But hours later, when Frankie was patching one of *El Canario's* tires, Espinosa had came up behind him and, chin on chest and hand on mustache, said, "I was alone in a foreign country once and no one helped me." "What country, señor?" "Yours . . . but that is not what I remember. I know how it is to be alone and sick." Yeah, Frankie told himself, I hope the old man lasts out the war.

The next two days, Frankie did a lot of walking, a little running, and some shadow-boxing. He wanted a real workout, but Sancha ran the only gym. His wind was better than he had expected, and Frankie wondered if he was at last over his altitude trouble. A fine thing, he told himself. Spend two years in a country and get acclimated for your last fight. But then, he couldn't have picked a better one. He wondered who Sancha would hire to do the job on him.

On Tuesday, Señor Espinosa needed some rubber for patching flats. Frankie, who was off duty, volunteered to go to town for it. He ran most of the way up the hill, stopping occasionally to shadow-box. He enjoyed, as he always had, the astonished looks of the Indians whom he passed as they plodded up to the marketplace with huge loads of straw mats, pottery and vegetables on their backs. The local Indian fighters never did roadwork, and the sight of a man running and waving his arms as though attacked by a swarm of bees always baffled the natives. In the plaza, he saw that the huge, red-lettered posters advertising the fight were already up. From a distance, he could recognize his own name, and as he came a step or two closer that of—Siegfried Schultz.

Schultz. The boy who had battered Kid Tarasco. Well, Sancha would get his five hundred peso's worth. Schultz was good, plenty good. A plodding, bruising body puncher. Not the type who got it over with one punch. Schultz scored his knockouts in the late rounds. Frankie gritted his teeth. If only he could move around the way he used to.

He could jab a guy like Schultz silly for ten rounds without working up enough sweat to be worth a shower. But he couldn't move that way anymore. If . . . but then he was near enough to the sign to read the smaller lettering.

*B O X*
SPEED HANFORD
The Pride of the U.S.A.
vs.
SIGFRIED SCHULTZ
Hamburg, Germany
*Five Other Bouts*
Friday In the Bullring

AT FIRST Frankie didn't get it. The Pride of the U.S.A. That was a laugh. But then he saw what Jose Sancha meant, and it wasn't funny. Not a bit.

As realization came that he was not only expected to take a beating but play the stooge for some Axis propaganda, Frankie tightened with anger. The Pride of the U.S.A. to take one hell of a beating from the man from Germany. And Schultz would love it. Not that Schultz was particularly pro-Axis. As far as Frankie knew, the German had been born in Mexico, not Hamburg, and wasn't much interested in the war or politics. But Schultz was a butcher-boy, a belly-busting slugger who liked to hear men grunt and see them fall. Against a sick man, he'd make Germany look good.

Mumbling mad, Frankie crossed the willow-lined plaza, turned down the alley-narrow street beside the cathedral, and strode into Sancha's house. The promoter's office, a long, narrow room opening off the red-tiled patio, was filled with men, most of whom Frankie recognized as local leaders of the Sinarquistas, the Mexican fascists. He shouldered his way through the crowd until he was in front of Sancha's desk. The promoter turned on his formal smile.

"*Buenos dias*, gringo."

Frankie had been in Mexico long enough to know about that word, gringo. Once Mexicans used it only as an insult. But in recent years, it usually meant merely American. But Sancha hadn't used it that way. Frankie leaned across the desk and bunched the promoter's shirt-front in his left hand. He pulled the promoter half-way across the desk toward him.

"Listen, you fat pile of slime, it's no dice. I'm not letting you get away with it."

Sancha's smile was sickening, but it remained on his red lips.

"What ees the matter, Meester Hanford? You don't want to fight Schultz?"

"I don't give two rosy hoots in hell who I fight, but what is the idea of making this international? What is the idea of billing me as the pride of the U.S.?"

"Ees Meester Hanford ashamed of his country? If Meester Hanford does not want to fight the German, eet ees agreeable. I weel merely announce that you were afraid he might hurt you. The people weel understand, *exactamente*. I weel even pay you your two hundred pesos."

Frankie shoved the fat little man back in the seat. He was trapped. It would look bad for the "Pride of the U.S.A." to take a beating from a German in front of all the men in the town. But it would look worse if he ran out. When the war had started, the people in Palacuaro, like most of those in the state of Michoacan and as far as Frankie knew, in all Mexico, were apathetic. But gradually their sympathy had been swinging toward the States. In spite of everything the Axis-loving Sinarquistas could do, the people were getting pro-American. But they were simple people, Frankie knew, and admired the simple virtues. They admired bravery. They despised cowards. It might look bad if Frankie took a beating from a German, but it would look much worse if he were afraid to take it.

"Won't you be unhappy if I take him?" Frankie snarled.

He tried not to hear Sancha's soft laugh or the harsher ones of the Sinarquistas as he walked out of the room. Slowly, he crossed the plaza to the General Popo tire store and asked for some inner tube patches. He kept his eyes on the ground so that he wouldn't see the posters. Frankie didn't feel like the Pride of the U.S.A.

Friday dawned like every other spring morning on the Mexican plateau, clear

and cold. It was market day as well as fiesta day, for the Friday market at Palacuaro was held regardless of fiesta or famine, storm or drought. Señor Espinosa had told Frankie of the time the market had been skipped in 1798 because of pestilence. Two of the neighboring pueblos rose in revolt.

Frankie awoke early after a fitful sleep and knew it would be useless to try to catch another hour. He arose, dressed quickly and walked down to the lakeshore to watch the Indians paddle their square-nosed pine dugouts in from the ten other towns around the lake. When one Tarascan tribeswoman in white blouse and red pleated skirt came by with an especially heavy load of red pottery jars, Frankie could not resist the impulse to offer to carry them. He had done it before and the answer had been the same. The woman looked at him, half-frightened, and hurried away, her bare feet making no sound on the cobblestones.

At eight o'clock he walked to the Hotel El Lago and spent one of his last two pesos on a steak breakfast. His stomach still felt empty after eating. It always did on fight days. Take it easy, kid, Frankie kept telling himself. A beating is only a beating. All you have to do is stand up there and take it. He walked back to the station and to his cottage. For half an hour he lay on the bed and tried to interest himself in an ancient copy of *Selecionnes de Readers' Digest,* but he could not concentrate enough to make the Spanish intelligible.

The bare room with its ceiling of interlaced lathes made him nervous. He went out to see if there was any work to do in the station. Don Pedro was jacking up *El Canario* to remove a flat, and Frankie helped him with the repairs. Fixing his attention on the red rubber, he was able to keep from thinking of the bad half hour he had ahead.

WHEN the tire was back on, Frankie rode up to the town with Don Pedro. Although the day's fiesta was not a great one, the marketplace was crowded and there was the usual collection of portable shooting galleries, lotteries, floss candy vendors, ferris wheels, hand-driven merry-go-rounds and shell games.

Frankie looked at the clock above the jail windows. It was exactly eleven twenty. An hour and forty minutes to go, for the main events of the outdoor shows always began at one in the springtime so they would be over before the afternoon rain. In the jail he could see the prisoners playing their endless game of cards. As usual they were singing, and as usual it was *Que Lindo es Michoacan.* Frankie had always wanted to see the inside of that jail, where the happy prisoners sang and played cards until sundown and then curled up in their serapes and slept until sunup. It occurred to him that if he were to throw a rock through the window of the Presidencia, he would be arrested, and if he were in jail, he couldn't be blamed for not fighting Schultz. He forced the idea aside and walked through the market, looking at the fish and vegetables and piles of pitch as though he might really buy some. This was his last marketday. He didn't like to think of that either.

When the cracked bell of the cathedral tolled twelve thirty, he walked to the Toreo. The bullring was about five minutes from the plaza, in a little valley overlooking the lake. Frankie heard the crowd screaming, hoarse yet high-pitched, and guessed that a couple of prelim boys were slugging it out. He shook his head. Wild-swinging youngsters in the prelims made it tough for scientific boxers to look good in later bouts. The crowd developed a taste for blood.

Kid Tarasco was waiting for him at the gate, and Frankie grinned to see the solemn little Indian.

"Going to second me?"

"*Ho.*" The Kid spoke less Spanish than Frankie. There had been no school in the pueblo where he was raised, and his native tongue was the unwritten Tarascan dialect. He never remembered to use the Spanish affirmative.

"I was sure you would be here, *amigo.* I need a good second."

The Kid's face, stiff with smallpox scars, softened in an answering smile.

"You do this Schultz for me, eh, Fronkie."

"I'll try."

The Kid showed Frankie to his dressing room. It was more often used by bullfighters than boxers, and the walls were covered with outdated calendars showing bullfight scenes. Frankie missed the familiar odor of wintergreen.

He undressed quickly, pulled two benches together and lay down. The Kid came over and without a word began to rub Frankie's back. He was no good at it, and Frankie thought of the time when Ray Arcel had given him a rubdown before the Armstrong bout. From Madison Square to a bullring in central Mexico in two years. He sighed and wondered what his brother would think of that. Jim had always said boxing was a sucker's game. But he mustn't think of Jim now. Time enough for that later.

From outside came the mixed chorus of boos and cheers which meant a decision had been given. Frankie looked at the alarm clock hanging from a nail by the door. Five to one. He was next. He sat up and ground his shoulders back and forth to loosen them. There was a knock and Sancha stuck his head through the door. He gave Frankie a red smile.

"Yeah," said the fighter. "I know."

He stood up and pulled on his protector, then his purple trunks. His robe, the shiny white one he had bought in New York for the Mexico trip, had been sold, so he slung two towels around his neck. He picked up the cup holding his mouthpiece and handed it to the Kid. Then he remembered he had forgotten to bring boiled water. That was funny in Mexico, always boiling the water you used for gargling. But it paid off. He'd been sick, but he hadn't had the stomach trouble which bothered so many American fighters down here.

"Well," he said to the Kid in English, "let's get it over."

The Kid smiled and said, "*Ho*."

Frankie went through the door first. He would probably have to wait for Schultz, but he had never believed in the "last in the ring" ritual which delighted so many fighters. As he walked down the aisle between the benches on the dirt floor of the bull pit, Frankie estimated the crowd at three thousand. Not bad. Sancha would more than get his pesos back.

The fans became lighter in color and darker in dress as Frankie neared the ring. In the back rows he passed only Indians, short and lean, all dressed in white cotton blouses and loose cotton pants with flies which extended into sashes, all with their sombreros tilted against the sun. In the middle rows were the mestizos, their skin no darker than Joe Louis's, many in blue overalls, a few in sweater and pants, almost none with sombreros. And in the straight-backed chairs in the front row were the merchants in western suits and felt hats, all uncomfortable in the midday sun. Palacuaro had no newspaper and there were no reporters.

A FEW fans cheered as Frankie pulled himself up onto the apron of the ring and clambered through the sagging ropes. He noticed a little American flag on one ring post and gritted his teeth. Sancha wasn't missing any bets. He looked at the opposite corner but there was no swastika. Schultz, of course, wasn't in the ring yet.

Frankie went to his corner and sat down. The Kid came over with the gauze, but Frankie shook his head. He wanted the referee or Schultz to watch while his hands were bandaged so that he in turn could inspect the German's tape. They weren't very careful about such things in Mexico and Frankie didn't feel like being blackjacked.

A ripple of applause flowed down from the back of the audience and he knew Schultz was coming down the aisle. The German jumped over the ropes and without a glance at Frankie went to his corner. His hands were already taped.

When the referee, Manuel Valenzuela, the old bull fighter, hoisted himself into the ring, Frankie motioned for him to come over. Then he held up his hands for the Kid to tape. As soon as the gauze was in place, Frankie walked across the ring with the referee and without a word reached down and felt Schultz's bandages. The German jerked his hands away, but not before Frankie

was sure there was not too much tape. He went back to his corner, stopping to resin his shoes on the way.

Sancha made the introductions. He made certain that the most dull-witted man in the audience knew that Hanford was "The Pride of the U.S.A." and Schultz was from Germany. Frankie was mildly pleased that he drew the bigger cheer. He was more pleased to see that the gloves were new and that the referee stood by while they were being pulled on. He wanted his beating to be on the up and up.

Called to the center of the ring for instructions, he kept his eyes off Schultz. The referee, in the tradition of Mexican referees, said little: "Fight hard, break clean." And then the walk back to his corner and the timeless seconds of the wait for the bell. Frankie stood, hands on the ropes, looking down at the Kid, who was pounding his clenched right fist with the heel of his left hand. The bell clanged.

Frankie shuffled out of his corner flat-footed and waited for Schultz. The German moved in, bobbing slightly from the waist, his gloves parallel in front of his chest, his pale eyes steady and unblinking as a snake's, his lips protruding around his black mouthpiece. His hands moved slightly, each hiding the intention of the other. Then Schultz fired a long left and Frankie caught it on his glove and automatically dropped his elbow a little to block the following right to his ribs. His left snaked out and bounced against the German's forehead, and suddenly Frankie was no longer nervous. Hell, it was just another fight.

He came up on his toes and began to move around Schultz to the left, his body turned away from the German's right. Schultz plodded forward, jiggling his hands. He dropped his left heel and pivoted on it as he threw a long right to the ribs which Frankie partially blocked. He wondered if that left heel were a habit. There it went down again, and here came the right. That helps, Frankie told himself, that helps a lot. The next time the heel went down, he poked a stiff left in the German's face and threw a sharp right which landed high on the cheek. The round ended.

In the corner, the Kid tapped his right hand and raised his eyebrows questioningly. Frankie, leaning back against the ropes, his legs stretched and relaxed, the air he gulped feeling like ice in his lungs, shook his head and raised his left slightly. He wasn't going to get mixed up in any slugfest. If his legs held out, he could lefthand this guy from here to breakfast. If his legs held out.

By the fourth round, the crowd was whistling the piercing whistle of the bullring. The Mexican bronx salute. The fans wanted action, and Frankie, back-pedaling, stopping only to jar Schultz off balance with his left, wasn't giving it to them. They wanted blood and rights, and they were getting science and speed and lefts. So they whistled their dissatisfaction.

And then, suddenly, as though someone had snapped off a switch, the spring went out of Frankie's legs.

He moved in close and, tying Schultz up in a clinch, rested his weight on the German's shoulder. He found himself staring down at Jose Sancha. The promoter was smiling his fat red smile of real pleasure. Sancha held up his hands, the fingers on his left hand outspread, the forefinger of his right raised. Six more rounds. Frankie smiled the smile of a hurt boxer around his mouthpiece. He felt a wild urge to thumb his nose at the fat little fascist. Then Schultz butted him off with his shoulder and worked both hands to the body, clubbing blows that thudded against Frankie's ribs like a butcher's cleaver hitting a side of beef. Frankie covered and waited for the bell.

The fifth was torture. Schultz got stronger every second. There was no getting away from him. He plodded forward, absorbing the American's lefts and plugging away relentlessly to the body. Just before the bell, Frankie went down to one knee from a right to the heart. He heard the referee say *Cinco* and then the gong. The crowd stood cheering the German.

SCHULTZ came out to end it in the sixth. He shifted his attack from the body to the head. Frankie, crouching now, bobbed under the first few punches, long

looping blows that Schultz started from back of beyond. But then a left knocked him reeling into the ropes, and he didn't even see the next punch, just felt the shock on his left cheek and saw the red curtain which spun sickeningly before his eyes, and then, over the hoarse roar of the crowd, heard, as from another planet, the referee counting, "*Dos, tres, cuatro . . .*"

He pulled his legs up beneath him. "*Cinco . . . seis . . . .*"

And there was Sancha, leaning on the apron of the ring, his fat face, creased with his red smile, only inches away from Frankie's; and his fat, soft voice seeped through the din like a rotten peach dripping through a screen.

"You are feenished, gringo. Like your Navy. Like your countree. . . ."

Frankie pulled himself to his feet. He was cold with rage, and his teeth clenched hard against the soft rubber of the mouthpiece. He forgot about the four long rounds ahead. He forgot the sag in his knees and the lead in his arms. He forgot everything except the man in front of him and the putrescent voice of Jose Sancha.

Schultz rushed in swinging and Frankie moved inside the punches. In the clinch the German raked Frankie across the eye with the laces of his glove and then shoved him away. Frankie saw the left heel sink as Schultz got set for a right, and he stabbed his left to the mouth, then crossed with a right as Schultz rolled back. The German's pale eyes clouded a little.

But he wasn't hurt. Frankie knew those punches hadn't been hard enough to do more than sting. Schultz was just getting smart. He was going to wait for the opening. He was going to let Frankie use the last of his energy trying to rally, and then clip him. On Schultz's face the American saw the conviction that Schultz was no dummy.

"Okay, Siegfried, old boy, you asked for it," he muttered.

His left snaked out to the face again, and as Schultz pulled away, Frankie threw a long slow right. The German caught it on his left glove and jiggled his own cocked right.

"That's biting, Siegfried."

Another left and another slow right, which Schultz once more picked off. The German's mouth tightened on his black mouthpiece and his left heel settled toward the floor.

"This is it, Siegfried."

Frankie went into a weave and came out with his left. Schultz rolled a little and stood waiting, ready to block the long right he knew would follow, ready to counter-punch.

Frankie threw the right, but not the long, slow punch which had followed his two previous lefts. This one started before the left had reached Schultz's face. Into it went every ounce of energy the American had left. His forearm twisted slightly from the elbow, and at exactly the moment his weight crossed from left foot to right, he threw the extra reach of his shoulder into the blow, like Don Budge stepping into a backhand drive. Schultz, concentrated on his own counterpunch, raised his left a moment too late. He was flatfooted when Frankie's right exploded against the left side of his jaw. The black mouthpiece flew across the ring and Schultz stood for a second, his face blank, his right still cocked, his legs rigid. He started to step forward, stiffly, automatically, and then he fell as a tree falls, all in one piece.

The American stood above him as the referee made the count. He didn't come close to getting up.

Tired and swaying, Frankie shuffled to his corner. He was groggy and sore and the world was out of focus. Vaguely he felt the Kid hugging him and vaguely saw Señor Espinosa climbing into the ring. And at ringside, Jose Sancha sat slumped in his chair, his face white and his mouth a thin red line. Frankie could still hear the promoter's soft voice, "You are feenished . . . like your Navy." He thought of his brother, Jim, and the telegram which had come just a week ago, announcing Jim's death at Pearl Harbor.

Frankie sucked in a deep breath and let it out in a hissing sigh. He was not happy, but he had the two hundred pesos. He could leave for home tomorrow to take Jim's place in the Navy. And he had already smacked the Axis once for Jim.

# The Ride of Louis Remme

*A Fact Story*

BY HAROLD B. RUSTEN

WHEN Louis Remme, California cattleman, deposited his life's savings of $12,500 in the Adams Company branch bank at Sacramento in 1855, he didn't know that within a matter of hours that normal transaction was to start him on one of history's most hectic and adventurous rides and races.

Stockman Remme had just profitably concluded the sale of his cattle and had come to Sacramento to bank his money. That certificate of deposit representing $12,500 was more than just money in the bank, it was the result of years of long and hard work and the first major step toward the realization of a dream of a large ranch in the Imperial Valley. The small, lean but wiry Remme—small as Westerners go—carefully placed the certificate in his wallet and hurried to a near-by restaurant.

He had just finished his meal and was reading the local newspaper when the bubble broke. A group of excited men had entered the restaurant and were loudly discussing some subject at a rear table. Engrossed in his paper, Remme paid no heed to the loud talk until he suddenly caught a snatch of conversation that electrified him. The Page,

ILLUSTRATED BY CARL PFEUFER

*The Indians shifted their guns and waited. Remme and his pony soon galloped into the ambush.*

Bacon & Company bank, largest banking house on the West Coast, had gone up. The boat from San Francisco had just arrived with the news. San Francisco was in a turmoil. Other banks had gone up with Page, Bacon. Adams had toppled!

Adams had toppled! Remme sat there stunned. Adams, with his life's savings of $12,500. The startled Remme came to life in a streak of action. Tossing aside his paper, he bolted through the door and raced madly down the street toward the bank. But as he neared it his heart sank. The milling, noisy mob in front of the bank told the story.

Vigorously, the small Remme shouldered his way through the swelling crowd until he reached the harrassed cashier guarding the entrance. Showing his certificate of deposit, he demanded his money. Wearily, the cashier informed him it was impossible. He would have to wait action by the receivers. Until then, the bank was closed, with all funds frozen.

The stunned Remme realized argument was futile. He groped his way back through the mob. His savings were gone. The years of hard work had been for nothing. That dream of a large ranch was still a dream, for even if the receivers did grant returns on deposits, he could hardly hope for more than a few cents on the dollar.

HE WALKED the Sacramento streets for hours, unable to think, completely lost. But slowly, as the shock slowly wore off, cattleman Remme, who had faced and beaten disaster before on the open range, began to think. Adams had a whole string of branch banks scattered throughout California. The company traveled with the developing country and established branches in every sizable town and settlement as they sprang up. If Remme could reach any one of those branches before the news arrived, he could still cash his certificate of deposit and recover his lost money. Eagerly his mind reeled off the towns. Placerville, 35 miles to the east. Marysville, 80 miles due north. Sonora. Angora. He went through the list, losing hope. They were all too close. Telegraph had warned most of them and undoubtedly bank officials were on the stages already to close the others.

Then suddenly he remembered that Adams had opened a branch bank in Portland, Oregon. Portland, 700 miles overland, was completely isolated except for boat. There were no telegraphic, stage or rail connections. It couldn't possibly have heard of the bank crash. If he could catch a boat to Portland he might be able to beat the bad news to the bank.

Hopefully, Remme investigated. Yes, a boat was leaving San Francisco at dawn for Portland and would arrive in six days—but it was also carrying a bank official with orders to immediately close the branch on arrival. That way was out, Remme realized. He and the Adams man would arrive at Portland at the same time and the bank would close before he got his money.

No, he couldn't take the boat, but there was still one chance. A slim one, but still the only chance to regain his money. It was a six-day trip by boat to Portland. If he could race to Portland on horseback in six days he could beat the boat in and reach the bank before the official arrived to close it.

Today, by smooth concrete highways running on a direct line to the Oregon city, Portland lies just a few days ride away, some 630 miles from Sacramento. But in Remme's day it was more than 700 overland miles, through dense wilderness, over mountains and through winding canyons. In the main it was uncharted, swarming with Indians and outlaws. There were no roads, no trails, and the canyons and mountains were covered with ice and snow. Seven hundred miles through that wilderness was a trying feat even in unlimited time. But with a deadline of 6 days it was almost impossible, even suicidal. Five miles per hour by horse is good speed, but at that rate Remme would have to ride without stop 24 hours of the day to reach Portland in time. And he would have to change horses four and five times a day, for no horse could keep up the 5 miles per hour pace very long. He would have to depend on luck in finding horses in

the California and Oregon wilderness.

Remme also realized that with all the breaks his margin of victory would still be very slim. The mountains, the wilderness, the wild canyons and rivers held danger and death every mile of the way. Any accident or long delay would immediately rule him out of the race. Remme studied it all and decided to take his chances. The race to Portland was his one and only chance to regain his money. He decided to race the boat in, in spite of the odds.

A boat was scheduled to leave Sacramento at midnight for Knight's Landing, a little settlement some 25 miles up the Sacramento River. When it pulled out, cattleman Remme was aboard, on the first leg of the most hectic and dangerous adventure of his life.

As soon as the boat docked, Remme was over the side and racing to the home of the settlement's leading citizen. Knight was a man's man and the prospects of the novel race excited him. He offered Remme the pick of his stables and all the supplies he needed. Taking out maps, he and Remme pored over the best possible route to Portland.

Remme decided his best bet was to stay within reach of fairly large settlements, for only there could he find the fresh horses he would need to continue the race. Also, there would be trails of some kind connecting the various settlements. On the maps it looked fairly easy and possible. Up through the heart of California, through Marysville, then west to Red Bluff. North from Red Bluff through Yreka, Hornbrook and Cole Hilt on the California-Oregon border. West from Cole Hilt through the border wilderness to Jacksonville, up through Roseburg and the sharp veer to the east to Winchester to Eugene. Then, almost directly north to Albany, Salem, Oregon City. He would cross the wide Wilamette River at Milwaukee and ride directly north to Portland, only a few miles beyond the Wilamette ford. Yes, on maps it looked easy. But the maps couldn't show the wilderness and mountains, the snow and rains, the Indians, the hunger and torturing weariness. However, Remme had no illusions about the man-sized race before him.

A few hours after his landing at Knight's, on a fast horse and traveling light, Remme raced out of the settlement, headed east away from the Sacramento River valley on a course for Marysville. The epic ride was on!

Through the dark California night and wilderness he raced. It was clear and the ground hard and his pony made tracks up the slopes leading to Marysville, some 50 miles away. He rode all that night, pausing only to change horses several times. Trading fagged horses for fresh ones was easy in those wild Western days of 1855. There was no need for Remme to explain. As a cattleman, he operated under the tacit cattlemen's code that extended hospitality and help to all brother ranchers. Racing up to a ranch or a trail drive on the range, Remme had only to shout that he was chasing a horse thief and the best horse available was his. Remme had the pick of the ranch stables all along his 700 mile run.

AS DAWN broke over California, the steamer *Columbia* nosed easily out of San Francisco harbor and turned north into the Pacific for her usual run to Portland. Many miles to the north, the hard-riding Remme had passed through Marysville and had cut west to Red Bluff. It was late morning when Remme, on his fifth horse, pounded into the streets of Red Bluff, more than 150 miles from Sacramento. In 11 hours, the boat ride and five horses had given him an excellent start, but the hard driving was immediately ahead and Remme was already fatigued and hungry after 11 hours of steady pounding. But there was no time to stop for food or rest. The trails ahead were becoming fewer and the wilderness more dense. The speed of the Knight's Landing to Red Bluff run could not be duplicated ahead and time was running against him.

Pausing only to trade his blown mount in Red Bluff, Remme was on his way, heading for the Mount Shasta foothills. It was a bright, sunny day, excellent for riding and Remme raced three horses into the ground before the sun set. He was galloping through the Shasta foothills as black night fell. Mountain riding

is dangerous in daylight. At night, along unknown, winding trails with precipitous drops and sharp turns invisible in the blackness, it was suicide. But Remme couldn't afford to wait for morning.

Through the black he raced, guiding his horse on the hairbreadth turns, pulling him up in the face of yawning drops. Shasta City and Redding fell behind and when dawn broke—dawn of the second day—Remme had reached the heights of Clear Creek, with Sacramento 200 miles to the south. Here he paused for his first meal in 30 hours, a hastily-gulped breakfast, and planned the route ahead.

Clear Creek was civilization's jumping off point. The roads and trails behind had been bad enough, ahead there were none, only the unbroken wilderness and mountains. Yreka, 80 miles to the northwest through the dense unknown, was his next goal.

His heartening speed from Sacramento to Clear Creek had encouraged Remme and dissipated the fatigue and weariness. It had been good going so far, but soon after he raced out of Clear Creek he ran into his first serious delay. Higher and higher he climbed into the mountains, into deeper snow and more slippery, icy trails. Speed was impossible and too often Remme had to dismount and lead his terrified pony around an ice-covered turn and through snow-filled passes. He was running behind time now. The thought of the *Columbia* pursuing her easy and steady way to Portland almost drove him wild. He was running too far behind time. Throwing caution to the wind, he dug his spurs in and drove his horse at breakneck speed across the snow and ice. His escapes were many and death rode at his side constantly.

At midnight, beginning his third day, Remme was tearing through the Trinity Mountain range. The long night passed slowly, but the miles fell steadily behind. At dawn he staggered into Scott Valley and paused for his first sleep since Sacramento. Long before noon, however, he was in the saddle again, riding a fresh horse north for Yreka. Fording the Trinity River, he rode steadily all that day and night. Weed and Grenada saw him pass, a blurred figure amid a clatter of hooves, streaking up from the south and roaring through town and out on the north trail like a flash of light.

Shortly after midnight, beginning the fourth day, he reeled into Yreka, exhausted and trail-sick. Behind him lay 300 miles and 75 hours of steady, grinding riding. The wild-riding Remme was a novelty for the lonely, isolated miners of Yreka. Learning his story, they organized to speed him on his way.

While some ran to get whiskey and food, others ran to the Mountain Express office to get Remme a fresh horse for his lathered and blown mount. An hour later, somewhat refreshed, Remme was in the saddle racing for Cole Hilt and the California-Oregon border.

STREAKING through Hornbrook, he hit the slopes leading up to Cole Hilt. The sun was peaking over the mountains as he cut out of Cole Hilt and raced past the marker on Hungry Creek dividing California and Oregon. Eighty hours and 320 miles out of Sacramento, he crossed the border into Oregon. Ahead lay 380 dangerous miles, and he was riding in his fourth day.

Cutting slightly northwest after crossing the border, Remme raced through the Applegate and Rogue River valley toward Jacksonville. He reached the sprawling, sun-baked town before noon and fell into an exhausted sleep for two hours. Shortly after one o'clock, with a fresh horse under him and some sandwiches in his pockets, Remme was on the ride again. Crossing the Rogue River just above Jacksonville, he jerked his horse west for Roseburg, 125 miles away. And it was on this Jacksonville to Roseburg run that the race came closest to a sudden and bloody end.

High in the Baldi mountain region, cold eyes watched the steady progress of the rider far down in the foothills. The Indians shifted their guns and waited. The ambush was set. Farther down trail, Remme was spurring his horse along the rocky trail, riding closer and closer to the waiting Indians. Remme and his pony galloped into the ambush. The Indian rifles blazed but the first shots went wild. Taken by sur-

prise, Remme pulled up his rearing horse, dug his spurs in and cut away with the screaming Indians right behind him, firing all the while. Remme hadn't scheduled this particular race but it was speeding him on his way—if he lived through it. Mile after mile Remme raced for his life, with the Indians hanging on tenaciously. Slowly, Remme pulled ahead and, after splashing across Cow Creek, he plunged into the dense wilderness and threw off the pursuit. His horse was jaded and he was exhausted. A few hours later he reeled into Roseburg, completely played out and almost unable to move. But there was no time to stop for rest or food. So weary and sore that he could hardly stay in the saddle, Remme halted at Roseburg only long enough to trade horses and raced on. It was night when he blazed through Winchester, seven miles out of Roseburg, but he had passed the 500 mile mark in 115 hours out of Sacramento. He had had no sleep since the two hours at Jacksonville, 137 miles behind, but the indomitable Remme, swaying in the saddle, hands tightly clutching the pommel, rode on through the black Oregon night. At midnight, beginning the fifth day, he was well on his way to Eugene, 80 miles slightly northeast of Winchester.

A heavy rain, the first bad weather of the ride, had begun just outside Winchester and continued all that night, making a quagmire of the trail and chilling Remme to the bone. There were ranches and houses along the way, offering shelter from the cold rain, but Remme splashed on, his horse sliding and skidding in the thick mud.

Just before dawn, he clattered into sleeping Eugene. Locating a rancher, Remme traded his mount for a fresh horse, accepted a sandwich, and cut out of Eugene on the northwest trail for the Wilamette River crossing at Peoria, gobbling the sandwich as he rode.

Portland lay 125 miles from Eugene, but Remme was already riding well into his fifth day. For the first time doubt began to assail him. Only 125 more miles to go, but he had only 24 hours in which to cover them. The *Columbia* was due to dock at Portland sometime the following morning. Only 125 more miles to go, but he was sick, played out, completely exhausted. Several times he had fallen into exhausted sleep in the saddle and had saved himself from dangerous falls from the speeding horse only by a last minute clutch at the pommel. He was famished, weak from want of food, but his stomach, battered by the pounding 575 mile ride, needed rest before it could take food. But exhausted and sick, Remme refused to quit. He was running behind time, behind the *Columbia*, but he had come too far to quit now. From here on into Portland it was to be a steady grind to the finish. The 10 hours he had taken for sleep so far were all he could allow. The remaining 24 hours were to go to hard riding, with stops only to switch horses.

DIGGING his spurs deep, Remme raced at breakneck speed for Peoria. The jaded Remme was spurting to the finish line. He rode at blistering speed all that day and way into the night, stopping only to exchange his blown horses. He had long lost count of the number of horses he had ridden. His only thoughts were on the number of miles ahead and the racing time.

Northward he streaked. Peoria, the Wilamette River, Albany, Salem, and Aurora fell behind. Twenty-four hours of steady, torturing riding from Eugene brought him reeling into Oregon City, with Portland just 25 miles away. But it was already dawn of the sixth and last day. The *Columbia* would be docking any time now, with Remme 25 miles away.

Slumped in the saddle, famished and emaciated, the gritty Remme pounded out of Oregon City directly north for Milwaukee. The hours were racing now, in time with the clattering hooves. Just before noon Remme jerked his lathered mount to a halt in Milwaukee, made a quick trade, laboriously crawled into the saddle of his new horse, and galloped out of Milwaukee to the Wilamette Ferry. Seven miles across the river lay the goal, Portland. But it was almost noon, long past the *Columbia* docking time.

He crossed the river above Milwaukee,

clambered up the north bank, and raked his horse in a last desperate spurt for Portland, just 7 miles away.

It was slightly past one o'clock when the lather-spattered horse and his crumpled, swaying rider pounded into Portland, 147 hours and 700 miles out of Sacramento. Halting before the first person he saw, Remme asked the all-important question. Was the *Columbia* in?

No, the *Columbia* hadn't docked yet. She was late, but expected at any minute. Remme had beaten the boat in—now for the money.

Exhausted and drawn, completely covered with mud, dirt and lather, hardly able to walk after 700 miles of the saddle, Remme staggered into the Adams branch bank and handed the cashier his certificate of deposit. The clerk looked at the certificate and then at the wild-looking Remme in front of him.

Cutting short all questions, Remme offered identification and told the clerk he needed the money to cover a cattle deal. He was a cattleman in Oregon on a buying trip and he needed the money fast.

The cashier studied the identification and certificate. They were in good order. Yes, he understood all about those quick cattle deals. He'd hurry the transaction.

Agonizingly, Remme watched as the man began to compute the service charge for honoring the certificate drawn on another branch. Remme listened intently for the signal that would announce the arrival of the *Columbia* and the Adams official.

Slowly, the clerk figured out the charge and disappeared into the vault. The minutes passed rapidly. The wrought up Remme was almost out of his mind with fatigue, excitement and anxiety. But finally the clerk reappeared, carrying the bags of gold. He handed them to Remme, $12,500 in gold, less the slight service charge.

Grabbing the money, Remme staggered from the bank and hastened to the hotel across the street and had his money stowed safely away in the hotel strong box. His money taken care of, Remme staggered out into the Portland street toward the Adams bank—and as he did, a cannon boomed in the distance, announcing the arrival of the *Columbia* from San Francisco.

Remme had beaten the *Columbia* and ruin by less than an hour. In 147 hours, the gritty, indomitable Remme had come 700 miles over the mountains, through the wilderness and dangerous canyons to beat the *Columbia* into Portland by less than an hour. Had he taken more than the 10 hours of sleep, had he stopped for just one more meal, had he halted for rain and snow and ice, had he slackened speed along those precipitous mountain trails and through the ice-filled canyons, he would have lost his race with ruin and one of history's strangest and most adventurous rides.

# TOMORROW

BY HUGH B. CAVE

# IS FOREVER

THE details of his departure from the front were still annoyingly vague, but that he had entered a new and unfamiliar region was now certain, and the strangeness of his surroundings disturbed him. On what mission had he been sent here? Where were his comrades?

He had walked at least a day and a night, yet there was no real day or night in this place by which to measure time. There was silence and a road—and there were dim shadow-shapes who plodded aimlessly on, like himself, to no apparent destination.

Were there no towns, no villages, in this shrouded valley? Must he trudge forever through a changeless twilight, along a road that led to nowhere?

He was tired and walked slowly. And hungry, too, though it was a kind of hunger, he sensed, that food and drink would not appease. "I would give the Iron Cross I won in Poland," he thought glumly, "to be back with Fedor and Karl and Fritz in the mud of the Caucasus. Is there no way *out* of this accursed place?"

Presently, hearing footsteps, he paused again, and out of the twilight another of the plodding people came toward him. This time it was one of his own kind. His hope came alive, and with an arm upflung in greeting he strode forward. "Wait!" he shouted. "I wish to talk!"

But the man was deaf and blind to him, and trudged past without recognition. The road was once more empty.

Shaking with anger, he resumed his journey. It did not occur to him to be afraid—he was a soldier, sheathed in an armor of arrogance through which fear had not yet found an opening. But beneath his anger lay bewilderment and a nagging sense of aloneness. Panic beat its dark wings more insistently, now, against the wall of his calm. What *was* this valley in which he wandered?

ON he went, measuring time by his weariness and the sound of his boots, until at last, ahead, there were lights in the darkness.

It was not a large place—not important—but about it was something old and familiar that puzzled him anew. The shape of its twisting streets tugged at his memory, and a voice within him whispered a warning.

But here were people and houses, and the sound of voices bright against the night. He heard a child's laughter and the warm wonder of a woman singing. With a click of his heels and new stiffness in his shoulders, he confronted the first man who approached.

"What is this place?"

The man was old, with graying hair and a bent body. Beside him skipped a dark-haired child whose hand he clasped. They chatted gaily and laughed at some private joy they shared, and without a glance in his direction, went past.

Embittered, he sullenly watched them. "Because I'm alone," he thought, "they choose to be insulting. Very well, I *am* alone. But not for always. The day has come in hundreds of other miserable villages such as this, and will come here." They would regret their insolence, these people. He would learn the name of the place and report it.

But it was not easy to learn the name. Identifying signs had been removed, and though the pattern of its streets and the shape of its houses told him its nationality, he could not sort it from the scores of similar places he had seen. "They are all alike, these worthless towns," he reflected. "They were built to be destroyed."

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS

His scorn was a good thing. Strengthening his pride, it held in check the beating wings of panic as, one after another, the people he accosted ignored him.

Were they imbeciles, these people? By the church he confronted a slender girl of twenty— "You! Fraulein! Tell me what place this is!"—and she turned instead, with her sweetest smile, to a young man who approached from the opposite direction.

In the square he spoke to children dancing— "Stop it! An end to this nonsense! I have questions to ask!"—and they romped away without hearing.

From street to street, his anger mounting, he sought information. None saw him. None heard. At last, his rage past holding, he rushed at a youth who would not listen, and swung his fist.

Feeling nothing, the youth walked on.

The beating wings broke down his barrier then, and drove him to flight. He wanted no more of this place that would have none of him! He ran back the way he had come, seeking the long road of shadows that had led him here.

But the way was changed. The streets formed and reformed before him, ever different. At every turn were more of the huddled houses, more lights, more people—and no end to his flight. The path of departure had disappeared.

He stopped at last. Running was futile. The wings were thunder-loud and louder. He turned once more to the people who passed—but now tears drenched his face and terror rode his voice. "Speak to me! Look at me! The way out of here—please!" But he was not there. They saw only one another.

AS the lights dimmed and the streets emptied of life, he went on dragging feet from house to house, looking in. Who *were* these people, so warless in a world at war? In this house a golden-haired girl knelt before the fire to play with eager children. In this, four nodding elders ringed a table spread with food. In this, young couples danced to gay music, and a laughing lass lifted her lips for a lover's kiss. In all he found peace. But none found him.

"Are they deaf to the roar of the guns, also?" he wondered. "And the thunder of the bombs?"

On he went. The sound of his voice at their windows did not disturb them, nor the pounding of his fists.

At every door his voice grew shriller, and as the sound of his boots rang hollowly through street after street, terror supplanted his rage. The lights were dimming. Windows darkened one by one, and the sound of voices ceased as the village blinked its eyes for sleep.

At last he gave up. His rage was spent. The wings had beaten all pride from him. Only a great and lasting fear remained, and the thought that he was alone, quite alone, and might be alone forever. Crying, he crouched in a doorway.

The village slept. Through its streets, now, dim shadows moved, plodding aimlessly as he had plodded.

He watched them. Some he recognized. "This one I knew in Kharkov, before he perished from the cold. This one we left behind at Kiev." One by one they passed, without seeing him. Suddenly his hands clawed at the pavement and he was erect, shouting hoarsely in a last, hopeless struggle to be heard.

"Friedrich! Friedrich! In God's name, wait for me! It is Kropp, your friend!"

But the shadow passed. Not even Friedrich could hear. He sank again in the doorway, staring animal-eyed.

It *had* been Friedrich; he was certain. No mistake was possible. When you have marched with a man all those months, fought by his side, shared food and bedding with him . . .

"I was the first to reach him when he fell," he thought dazedly. "It was I who tore the bayonet from his heart and dug the grave in which we buried him. We marched together in Poland, and through half of Russia. We were together at Lidice . . ."

*Lidice!* His eyes grew large and, stumbling to his feet again, he stared anew at the shapes and shadows of the village—this village in which now, forever, he would walk unwanted. *Lidice!*

He knew then the name of the valley, and the meaning of the long, dark road along which he had come. He knew where he was.

*(Continued from page 8)*

*tohunga* of the tribe with which Marmon was associated was away with a war party. Everything of his was, of course, *tapu*. A slave picked up a gourd and drank from it. On being told that the gourd was the priest's drinking dipper the slave dropped dead. Marmon cynically suggests a weak heart.

An amusing story was told by a missionary living at the earliest mission station on the west coast. My home is about 2 miles away and I heard the story at second-hand about 40 years ago. The missionary had made some converts. One morning one of his converts came to him in a very sad frame of mind to bid him good-by. He had broken the law of *tapu* and must die. The missionary argued with him in vain—nothing could shake the Maori's certainty that he was to die. At last the missionary had a brain wave. He fetched a mustard plaster and persuaded the Maori to have it placed on his chest. "I am not sure that it will do the trick," said the missionary, "but we'll give it a try. If it burns it will show that my magic is stronger than the *tapu;* if it does not burn I am afraid nothing can save you." The Maori departed still sad and hopeless but in a short time he came racing back shouting "It burn, it burn, I live, I live," and sure enough he suffered no ill effects from his breach of the *tapu* law. Needless to say the *mana* (prestige) of the missionary was greatly enhanced.

Thanks to a friend at home I am still able to get *Adventure* in spite of wartime dollar exchange. I came out here in 1902 and settled in Hokianga among the Maoris who were then about 10 to 1. When the dairy industry sprang up in this district whites came in until now the population is about 50-50. There is an enormous untouched field for adventure stories in Maori history; I often wonder if it will ever be exploited. I have been a reader (mostly a subscriber) since the first issue of *Adventure* to appear on the bookstalls—may it long reign.

—Rupert Harrison,
Kohukohu,
Hokianga, N. Z.

OF appendectomies, coincidence and maple leaves a reader with a long memory writes as follows—

About eight or nine years ago, (the issue for June 1, 1935, to be exact. Ed.) *Adventure* ran a yarn by James B. Hendryx, about Jase Quill and his somewhat unorthodox appendectomy on Camillo Bill. I'm somewhat hazy on Jase's exact technique except that I recall it was certainly God-awful by modern surgery standards. However, Bill recovered.

It was a swell yarn but could be classed far-fetched, to put it mildly. However, just to prove that *Adventure* is there first with the most (or something) I refer you to the enclosed clipping of Pharmacist's Mate Lipes and his feat in a sub.

We append the UP dispatch referred to above—

Upper Darby, Pa., Jan. 28.—Wheeler B. Lipes, 25-year-old pharmacist's mate who performed an emergency appendectomy, with improvised surgical equipment, in a submerged submarine patrolling Japanese waters, admitted today that he was more nervous than his patient.

Lipes, who is classified as an electrocardiographer, is visiting his wife, Myrtle, while on leave.

The operation was performed on a shipmate, Dean Rector, Chautauqua, Kan., who recovered.

Lipes said that the surgical staff in the sub was—like the equipment "and the surgeon—" amateur. The skipper, Lieut. Com. W. C. Farrall counted the sponges to be sure that they were removed before the incision was closed. The anesthetist was Lieutenant Franz Hoskins, communications officer.

The scalpel had no handle, Lipes said. For muscular retractors, the clamps which hold open the incision, the crew took spoons from the galley, sterilized them and bent them into shape. Sulfamilamide tablets were ground up and placed in the wound to make it sterile. Alcohol for further sterilization came from torpedo tubes. The ether mask was an inverted tea strainer.

When everything was prepared Lipes said that he warned Rector that "I've never done anything like this before. You're in a tough spot and it's a gamble. Do you want to go ahead?"

"Let's go," replied Rector.

Lipes, using oversized rubber gloves, probed and hunted for 20 minutes and then told his assistants "I've got it. Get the sutures ready."

Rector was back on duty 13 days later.

Our correspondent continues—

At least, Jase could walk out into the

cold air and revive himself. As I recall the story, he actually did walk down to the local groggery and revive himself there.

Now, for another one. Years ago I met a Captain Hamilton from New Castle, Pennsylvania, an officer in the French Foreign Legion. Some years ago I heard that he had been home on leave but returned to Africa. I've often wondered what happened to him since France's fall. Now comes the February issue of *Adventure* to tell me.

On page 10 Georges Surdez tells of "Gerard Hamilton, the only American to hold a commission in the pre-war Legion" surrendering to American forces at Arzew.

Surdez can use this to further bolster his position or make you eat your announced favorite dish "coincidence," as he wishes. To me it is further proof that *Adventure* is not only "tops" as a magazine but about as timely as my daily paper.

CARL D. LANE dropped in to chin for a minute a couple of weeks ago and incidentally wangle from the Art Department a couple of the original illustrations Gordon Grant had made for "The Fleet in the Forest." We were sorry Mr. Grant wasn't present to hear some of the enthusiastic things Mr. Lane had to say about his work. The artist had left for his studio in Gloucester, Mass. and couldn't be at the meeting so we're going to relay the author's remarks to him via this column. Here's what Mr. Lane said.

"No better choice of artist could have been made. Few living men know old ships in the detail that Mr. Grant does. His drawings are correct and accurate to the last hitch on a pin. I am most grateful that the story has received the lift of this superb artist and marine historian."

Just to keep the record straight we were glad to be able to report to the author that the illustrator told us he'd had "a hell of a lot of fun" with the "Fleet" and thought it was a swell job of writing.

NOW that the compliments have flown thick and fast for a paragraph or two it's high time to shift into reverse and let the smoke from *Camp-Fire* blow off on another tack—

Gentlemen:—

In your July issue in "Formula For Fear" by William Brandon, I quote from paragraph 6, page 109:

"When he died he left his son a Shorthorn family already famous in the East."

From the above and the contents of the entire story "Shorthorn family" means pure bred Shorthorn beef cattle.

In paragraph 2, page 108, in speaking of brushing the hair of the bull, "T Bar Two," which as one of these Shorthorn cattle, I quote: "The long black hair moved smooth and glossy," etc. Now the trouble with this is that while the hair of pure bred Shorthorn cattle may be red, white, or roan—which is a mixture of red and white—it is never black.

N. W. Broome.
Bridgeton, N. J.

Passing the buck—or should we say bull?—as is our usual wont, we hastened Mr. Broome's note up to Vermont where Author Brandon has his farm and where he reports—just to rub it in—the trout are jumping for joy and would probably even take an editor's fly.

Genially contrite, he rushed back his answer. Here 'tis.

Dear Mr. Broome:

Much obliged for your letter about my story in the July *Adventure*. The error you point out is inexcusable, unsupportable and downright astonishing. I will offer in extemuation that authors, like professors and similar vacant characters, are entitled to an occasional shot of paraphasia.

For a whole army of reasons the mistake is a particularly unhappy one; among these the fact that here in Vermont the other name for Shorthorn is the "red, white and roan breed"; and the fact that I have considered horses and cows my special interest for some twenty-one years, since I owned my first horse and drove my first cow in New Mexico, at the age of seven or so.

It might have been that thinking Shorthorn brought up Durham, suggesting Carolina, suggesting in turn. . . In any case, *Adventure* readers are an alert outfit, and more power to you. I'll shoot myself in the morning.

Sincerely, Wm. Brandon.

We're going to try to get up to Vermont in time to prevent a demise in the Brandon family, and what's really important, maybe get one of those trout!

# ASK ADVENTURE

***Information you can't get elsewhere***

## SEMPER PARATUS—and anything but "hooligans!"

Request:—I'm a student in Timken Vocational High School here in Canton, Ohio, and for some time I have been having arguments with one of my teachers who thinks that he knows everything about the armed services, especially the Coast Guard. Since the Coast Guard is part of the Navy, I would appreciate some information about the former and thought that you could give it to me. Is it true that members of the Coast Guard are looked down on by members of the regular Navy? Are Coast Guardsmen called "Hooligans" by Navy men? What is the meaning of this word? Also, is it true that the Coast Guard does not go over ten miles out from shore on their patrol and convoy duties? Does the Coast Guard ever go to foreign countries such as Iceland, the Solomon Islands or Africa?

—Chester F. Cladesky
1618 Bedford Ave., S.W.
Canton, Ohio

Reply by Lt. Durand Kiefer, U.S.N.:—Members of the Coast Guard are not looked down on by members of the regular Navy who know anything about the Coast Guard, especially that part of it that goes to sea. The Navy occasionally gets a laugh out of pictures of Coast Guard beach patrol members on horseback in Navy uniforms, but we realize that the beaches must be patrolled, that the Coast Guard is the best outfit to do it, and that horses (and dogs, which they use a great deal) are natural tools for the job.

I have never heard a regular Navy man call a Coast Guardsman (especially a Coast Guardsman bigger than he is) a hooligan, but the Coast Guard used to be referred to among Navy oldtimers as "the Hooligan Navy."

This expression "Hooligan Navy" originated, I am told by an oldtimer, because the Coast Guard used to be composed of a large percentage of Swedes and Norwegians who were known in the old Navy as "Hooligans" as well as "Squareheads." In any case, the term is used in a "kidding" manner between two rival services that have profound respect for each other but would never consider it sporting to show it. This rivalry undoubtedly arises out of a sort of competition for excellence and honors between all the services, and of course is well known between the Army and Navy, Navy and Marines, at least in their training phases.

The Coast Guard most certainly does get a long way further from shore on convoy and patrol duties than ten miles. There's no limit to the distance Coast Guard vessels go on these duties and in assigning escort and patrol craft to duty there is no distinction whatsoever made between naval and Coast Guard vessels of the same type. They've gone to Iceland, the Solomons, and Africa, too, where it would be very difficult for any one but an old hand to distinguish them by appearance or actions from regular naval vessels.

## TO catch a lunker.

Request:—In a small pond, which is very shallow, about ½ mile from here, are a mess of large mouth bass. The average about 1 to 1½ pounds each. About the only things they will hit are lamper-eels. I have caught a few on small bugs and flies. Now, here is the

problem. Near the dam of the pond lives the grandpa of them all. Experienced fishermen who have seen him swear he will go 8 pounds or better. As you can imagine he has a college education.

One of your recent articles says to use bugs for big bass. We've used them. No soap.

We've used lampers and have caught some nice ones, up to 8½ pounds, but they are rare, and the big one won't look at them. Worms, minnows, plugs, etc., meet with the same result. We've about given up.

Could you please give us some idea of how to outwit him?

Jack Tilton
25 Kenilworth Rd.
Ridgewood, N. J.

Reply by John Alden Knight.—Thanks for telling me about the pond and the big bass. If you can catch him on artificial bait it would be a triumph. Of course, it might be possible to hook him by floating a large shiner over him but that would not be very much fun and would not get you the credit that a fish like that deserves.

If you feel that you want to catch him on bait, one of the best ways to do it is as follows:—First take soundings in the neighborhood of the dam and find out how deep it is. Use a shiner, either a golden or silver shiner, about six or seven inches long. Pass the hook through his back, just under the dorsal fin, being careful not to injure the backbone. Then place a cork float on your line so that the shiner will be able to swim about a foot or so above the bottom. If you are fishing from a boat, place the shiner in the water on one side of the pool and then row in a semi-circle around the place where the bass lives, paying out line as you go. When you are on the opposite side of the pool, take up the slack line and draw the shiner toward you slowly across the pool until the cork float rests about where the big bass lives. Then sit down and let the shiner go to work for you. If you see that the bass has taken the shiner, don't be in too much of a hurry to set the hook, as he may swim around for a while with the fish in his mouth before he attempts to turn and swallow it. You must remember that you should not get within seventy-five or a hundred feet with a boat because a big bass is smart and your chances of getting him are cut down considerably if you go anywhere near him.

To get him with artificial bait, perhaps your best bet would be to use an underwater lure such as the A1. Foss Shimmy Wiggler with a pork rind strip or one of Fred Arbogast's Hawaiian Wigglers. Remember not to get close to the fish with the boat. Instead, use a long cast and allow your lure to sink fairly close to the bottom before you begin the retrieve. Then vary the speed of the retrieve as you reel, at no time playing the bait very fast.

In the early morning, late evening or during a Solunar period this fish no doubt could be taken with a bass bug or a top-water plug, played slowly and with a long line. One of the important things to remember is that you minimize your chances of taking the fish as soon as you let him know that there is a boat in the vicinity. I fished for one of those big fellows up in Vermont one summer and finally managed to raise him to a top-water bug during a major Solunar period on the third evening that I fished for him. At no time did we allow the boat to get closer than ninety feet from the fish and we finally raised him to a White Mystery bug on the surface. He weighed nine pounds, eight ounces.

## GOLD is where you find it—and water, too. But the two don't always go together.

Request:—Just prior to my induction into the army I had occasion to find some property in central California that seemed very promising as regards gold content. Upon investigation I found that the property had already been surveyed and samples analyzed. Subsequent inquiries revealed that it would produce an average of $3.60 per yard if a method of separation or reclamation could be found. The trouble is that there is only enough water available for camping purposes and no more. The greater bulk of land is sand, a bit of gravel and rocks (no greater in size than 14 inches). The location is in the mountains surrounding Death Valley and is in this case a high level plateau. The road to the property is no more than a trail and the nearest water supply worth consideration is 42 miles distant. Old timers in the district despaired of finding a water supply near enough for use.

Now the problem is to find a proven satisfactory method that does not entail the use of water. Can you give me this information or suggest a means of

*(Continued on page 161)*

**THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE** is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

**Notice:** Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices that have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

# ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

## SPORTS AND HOBBIES

**Archery**—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

**Baseball**—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure*.

**Basketball**—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

**Big Game Hunting in North America:** *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

**Boxing**—LIEUT. COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1619 Mass. Ave. N. W., Wash., D. C.

**Camping**—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

**Canoeing:** *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

**Coins:** *and Medals*—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

**Dogs**—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure*.

**Fencing**—LIEUT. COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1619 Mass. Ave. N.W., Wash., D. C.

**First Aid**—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

**Fishing:** *fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait, camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

**Fishing:** *salt water, bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure*.

**Globe-trotting and vagabonding** — ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

**Health Building Activities, Hiking** — DR CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, *care of Adventure*.

**Motor Boating**—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

**Motorcycling**—*regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, 432 Old Farm Rd., Wyncote, Penna.

**Mountain Climbing**—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

**Old Songs**—ROBERT WHITE, 918 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

**Old-Time Sailoring**—CHAS. H. HALL. 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

**Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers:** *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

**Shotguns, American and Foreign, Wing Shooting and Field Trials:** ROY S. TINNEY, c/o *Adventure*.

**Small Boating:** *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

**Swimming**—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

**Swords:** *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

**Tournament Fly and Bait Casting**—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

**Track**—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1. Doyles town, Pa.

**Woodcraft**—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

**Wrestling**—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., New York City

**Yachting**—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave. Chicago, Ill.

## SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

**Anthropology**—*American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

**Aviation:** *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders* — MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

**Entomology:** *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Pa.

**North American Forestry:** *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

**Tropical Forestry:** *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

**Herpetology:** *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure*.

**Marine Architecture:** *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn N. Y.

**Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones:** *anywhere in No. America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

**The Merchant Marine**—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

**Ornithology:** *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

**Photography:** *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

**Radio:** *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure.*

**Railroads:** *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

**Sawmilling**—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

**Sunken Treasure:** *treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESENBERG, care of *Adventure.*

**Taxidermy**—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

**Wildcrafting and Trapping** — RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

## MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

**Federal Investigation Activities:** *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police**—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edw., H. S., Vancouver, B. C.

**State Police**—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

**U. S. Marine Corps**—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

**U. S. Navy**—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

## GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

**Philippine Islands** — BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

**★New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

**★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

**★Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

**★South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W., Australia.

**Hawaii**—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, Hawaii.

**Madagascar**—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

**Africa, Part 1** ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.* — CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia.*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

**Asia, Part 1** ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon.*—V. B. WINDLE, care of *Adventure.* **2** *French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet, Southern, Eastern and Central China.*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure.* **3** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3, Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **4** *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Palestine.*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

**Europe, Part 1** *Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia.*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

**Central America**—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

**South America, Part 1** *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure.* **2** *Venezuela, The Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

**★West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1833, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

**Iceland**—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure.*

**Baffinland and Greenland** — VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

**Labrador**—WILMOT T. DEBELL, Care of *Adventure.*

**Mexico, Part 1** *Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md.

**Canada, Part 1** ★*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St. Quebec, Canada. **3** ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton, Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern, Ontario, National Parks Camping.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 1261 Ouelette Ave., Windsor, Ont., Canada. **5** *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** *Northern Saskatchewan. Indian life and language, hunting, trapping.*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

**Alaska**—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

**Western U. S., Part 1** *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure.* **3** *New Mexico (Indians, etc.)*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs.*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah.*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Adventure.* **7** *Texas, Oklahoma.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

**Middle Western U. S., Part 2** *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River.*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

**Eastern U. S., Part 1** *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks*, New York.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **4** *New Jersey.*—F. H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.* **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

# LOST TRAILS

**NOTE:** We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to hear from John Rueben Sharp who was in the Marine Corps at Parris Island, S. C. 1919-1923. He used to live in St. Joseph and Kansas City, Mo. Stf. Sgt. Newton Tushoph, U.S.M.C., Navy 107, Fleet P. O., New York City, N.Y.

I should like to get in touch with Curzon P. Howe who used to live at Saranac Lake, N. Y. He is about 32 and at one time studied dentistry at, I believe, either St. Lawrence or Rensselaer Polytech. Please write P. B. Freer, Box 4, Liberty, Ohio.

Persons named Page from Sagrada, Camden Co., Mo., or relatives of William or Sanford Brown or any Nelsons from Seligman, Barry Co., Mo., are requested to write George E. Page, Gen. Del., Brawley, Calif.

Alvin U. Hodgdon, known as "Tex Ranger" was last heard of in Minnesota headed for either Chicago or New York. Age 44, he travels around playing a guitar and singing. Anyone knowing of his whereabouts please communicate with his brother-in-law, Pfc. Lee Kay, c/o *Adventure*.

Everett Ruess, 27, cowboy artist and writer, formerly of Los Angeles, last seen in St. Petersburg, Fla., May 1935. Anyone having information of whereabouts please communicate with Burton Bowen, VAF 2, Bath, N. Y.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Arthur Leo Messier, last seen about ten years ago in New York City and now believed in the West, please write Charles H. Hoffmann, c/o Veterans Hospital, Tucson, Ariz.

Any information concerning Doug Hayward, age 23, last residing in Chambersburg, Pa., will be most welcome and appreciated by Pvt. Peter Dunsky, c/o *Adventure*.

# THE TRAIL AHEAD

To Tokyo in wartime! Sidney Herschel Small takes us there again in another smashing novelette about Lieutenant Llewelyn Davies, the Welshman who spoke Japanese and masqueraded as a pariah Ainu in the heart of Nippon. Friendless, alone, one against millions, he wages his solo campaign of sabotage in—

## "ZERO HOUR"

—a glorious sequel to "Tokyo Drums" which appeared in these pages last February. Next month you'll gather *hotaru-no-abura*—the miraculous firefly oil—on the river near Uji as the insects swarm in the moonlight, and watch with bated breath while Davies brings his buckets to the vats where the Zero brew is steeping and under the bayonets of the sentries touches off the holocaust that proved once more the *Amerika-jin* can bite at Japland from the land as well as from the air.

To the north-Canadian wilderness on a phantom railroad ride! Thomas H. Raddall lets you climb aboard with Saul Barkip and his hand-picket party of million-dollar pirates in as unusual a novelette as you'll come across in many a moon. "Barkip's Railroad" had no trackage, no rolling stock, no personnel but that gold-plated right-of-way made up for all the lacks—and a hell of a good ride was had by all!

It's a mighty span of time and distance from New York Harbor in the summer of 1776 to the South Pacific today. Next month we bridge the gaps by giving you rides in David Bushnell's *Turtle*, the first American sub-sea war vessel, and in a modern unit of our under-ocean navy. Mike Fenno's pigboat pride. Two gripping fact stories that brief the history of our submarine service from its incubation to its present day lethal peak. "The Undersea Rowboat" by Porter Henry and "Garbage to Gold to Glory" by Maxwell Hawkins tell the tale.

Plus short stories by Walter Havighurst, De Witt Newbury, Joe Archibald, Gilbert Wright and others—and the usual departments and features you can't find anywhere else but in—


**On Sale September 11th**

*(Continued from page 156)*

obtaining it? I cannot, of course, take any immediate action on this subject but wish to make all possible preparations for the time when I can develop the property.

Harry A. Chamberland
Morrison Field, Fla.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—You're up against the same old problem that had kept miners and prospectors of the Southwest guessing for the past fifty years: i.e. gold enough to be of value if there's water available, only the region is plumb dry. We know there's gold in the Panamints, also probably in portions of the Funerals and in mts like the Argus, Slate and Black ranges. The rock formations are promising, only there's no water even to mine a gold-bearing vein, especially to work any placer. Same goes for lots of hills in San Bernardino, Riverside and Imperial counties.

In a few spots the placers have been rich enough on surface so that it paid to work by hand methods of dry washing, but most all of those are now worked out, leaving those two low grade to pay and yours (if placer) is in the last class. You don't say whether yours is quartz-gold ore, or placer. However, it makes no difference if the "analysis" you mention yielded only $3.60 in gold. This is true unless you have an immense tonnage available of this types of ore *all averaging* this value. Even then, it's NG lacking water. There is no concentration method for dry ores yet devised that pays a profit on $3.00 ore, you see. Nor will any dry washing method pay on a yardage of this valuation. Dry washing at its best recovers a far less percentage than by wet washing methods.

Your sole recourse would be to drill for water, which will be rather too costly a gamble, all things considered.

This region has long been known to have gold, both quartz and placer, so you can figure that many mining men have been balked by the same barrier that is confronting you now. Sorry, but that's the way it is and nothing can be done about it at the present time. IF we win the war and set gold at $100 per ounce—*maybe* (?)

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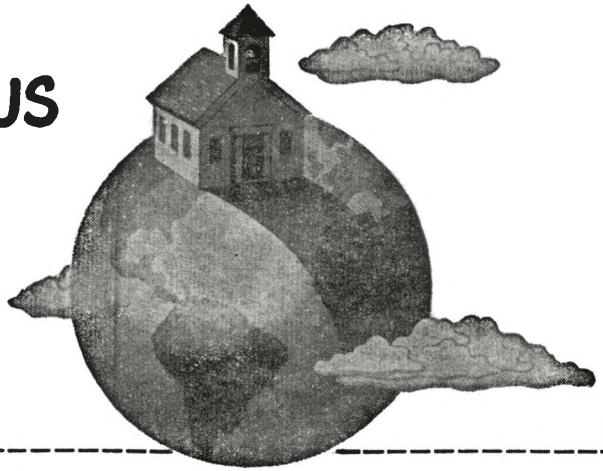

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