All-American Fiction

FEB. 15¢

A RED STAR MAGAZINE

BORDEN CHASE

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THEODORE ROSCOE

★

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

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MAX BRAND

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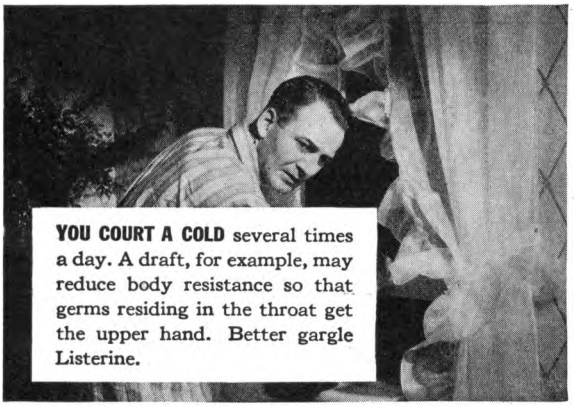
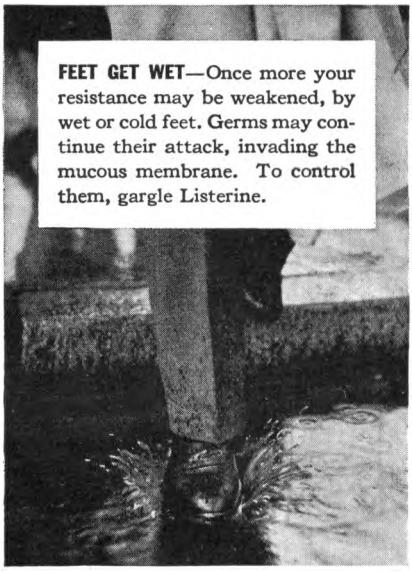
ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

160 PAGES
of Brand New Fiction
All Stories Complete

Every day a Cold Threatens



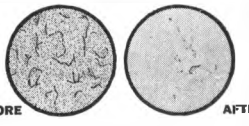
YOU COURT A COLD several times a day. A draft, for example, may reduce body resistance so that germs residing in the throat get the upper hand. Better gargle Listerine.



FEET GET WET—Once more your resistance may be weakened, by wet or cold feet. Germs may continue their attack, invading the mucous membrane. To control them, gargle Listerine.

SOMEONE COUGHS ON YOU—active germs accompanying colds may be carried by droplets through the air, and deposited in your throat to join other dangerous bacteria. Both may attack the tissue. Gargle Listerine.

MOUTH GERMS REDUCED 96.7% IN TESTS 15 MINUTES AFTER GARGLING LISTERINE



The above graphs show the average germ reduction effected by Listerine Antiseptic in repeated tests. Five minutes after gargling, tests showed germs were reduced 94.6% on the average; fifteen minutes after, 96.7%; one hour after, nearly 80% on the average.

THINK what it would mean to you and your family to escape heavy colds and their dangerous after-effects.

And now the delightful Listerine treatment offers you that possibility. Listerine treats a cold for what it is—an acute local infection.

Tests made during a 7-year study of the common cold reveal these remarkable results:

Those who gargled Listerine Antiseptic twice a day had fewer colds and milder colds than non-gargers. Moreover, the colds reached the danger zone of the lungs less frequently than those of non-users.

The secret of Listerine's success, we believe, must be that it reaches the invisible virus (bacteria) that many authorities say starts a cold, and also kills the mouth-residing "secondary invaders" that complicate a cold. Use Listerine this winter and see for yourself what it does for you.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

LISTERINE *for* COLDS

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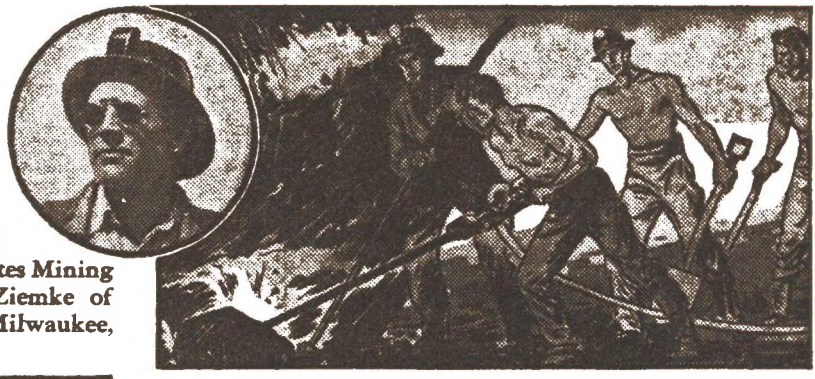
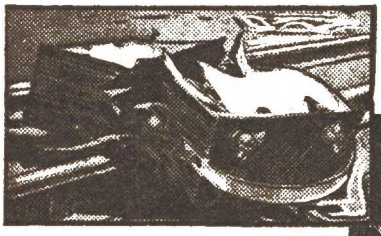
Suffocation Clawed Their Throats

Quick Wits Save Cave-In Victims in Old Gold Mine

"Two miners were entombed by a cave-in at the end of a drift 800 feet under ground," writes Mining Engineer P. Donald Ziemke of 2032 W. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, Wis.



"A huge boulder lay in the path of the rescuers. We had to blast. We worked furiously... minutes might mean life or death. And then, with the blast ready...



"We found the push-down generator (which furnishes spark for the charge) wrecked. In the excitement some one had pushed a mine car over it.

"But the shift boss kept his head. He ran to the dynamite magazine, where we always kept a flashlight, and brought it out on the double. He unscrewed the lens and bulb, flipped on the switch. Then he plunged the ignition wires in... and—

"The blast let go... the boulder was shattered... we got the men out, and not a second too soon. They were up to their armpits in water, with the air so bad their miner's light had gone out. No doubt about it, *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries saved these two lives.

Signed P. Donald Ziemke"

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

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Classified Forms Close Two Months in Advance.

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WANTED COUNTY DISTRIBUTORS. Excellent opportunity for earnings. Nationally advertised product. Large company. Dept. 253 Fyr-Fyter Company, Dayton, Ohio.

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OLD MONEY WANTED. Will pay $100.00 for 1894 Dime, S Mint., $50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head Nickel (not Buffalo). Big premiums paid for all rare coins. Send 4c for Large Coin Folder. May mean much profit to you. B. Max Mehl, 209 Mehl Bldg., Fort Worth, Texas.

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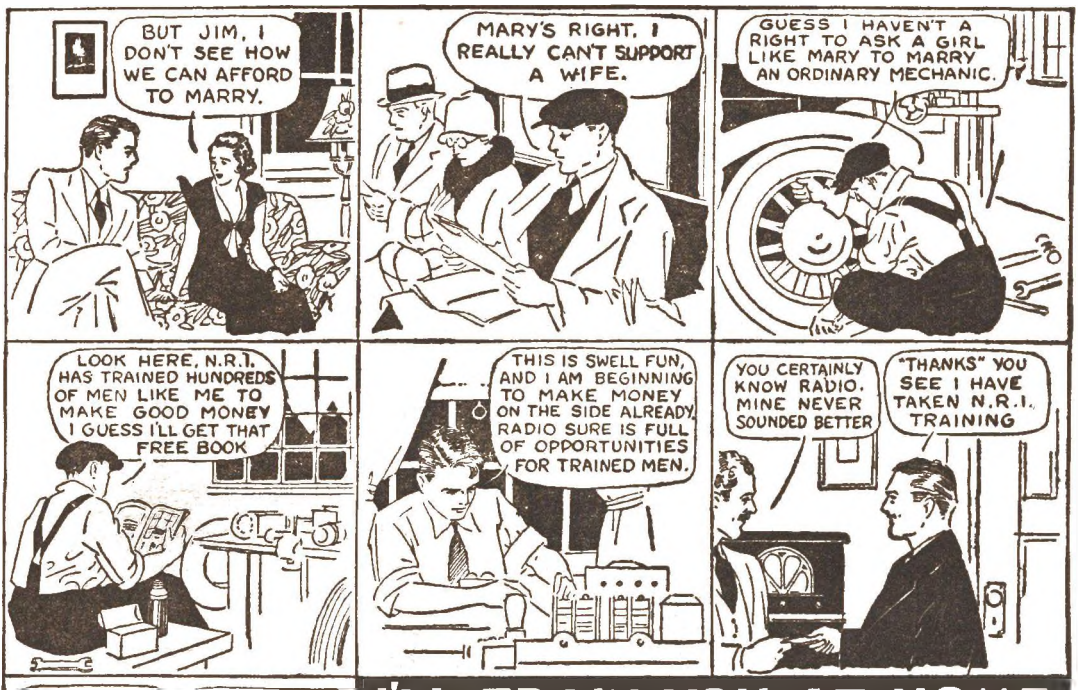

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Your Spare Time For A* GOOD RADIO JOB

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $200 to $500 a year—full time servicing jobs pay as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to $8,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time Radio Technician. The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money for hundreds. I send Special Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I GIVE YOU A COMPLETE, MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL WAVE, ALL PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP SERVICE SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a post card—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8BK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Established 1914

The man who has directed the home study training of more men for the Radio Industry than any other man in America.

HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"When I completed 20 lessons I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined station WMPC, where I am now Chief Operator."—HOLLIS F. HAYES, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

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"Before completing half the N.R.I. Course I was servicing sets, and I made $1,000 to $1,200 before graduating. I am doing Radio service work for myself now." ASHLEY G. ALDRIDGE, 1228 Shepherd St., Petersburg, Va.

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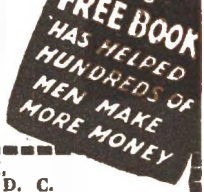
"For the last 18 months I have been in business for myself, making between $200 and $300 a month. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field." ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 224 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8BK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

A Complete Short Novel

by Borden Chase

Where's Red Flanagan?

CHAPTER I

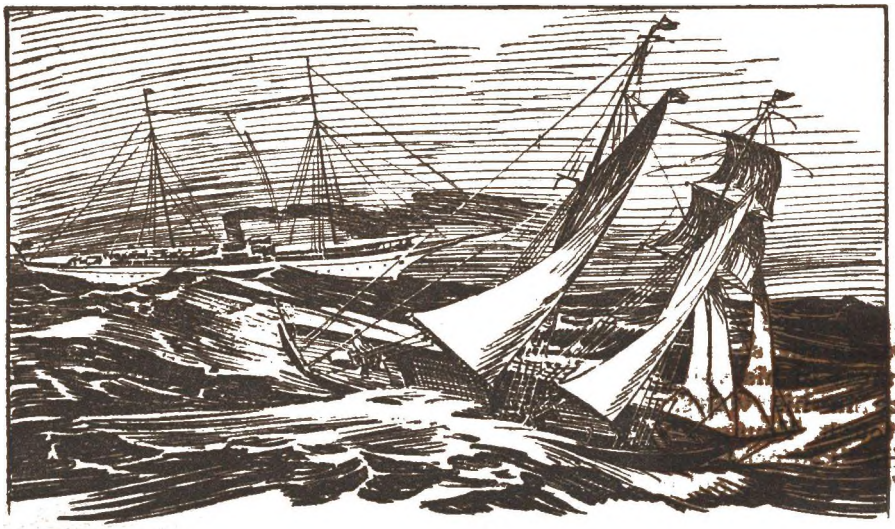
Wedding Present

Such stuff as dreams are made of. Some of us know it to be nonsense. We call it fantasy, and let it go at that. It has no place in the workaday world. No place in a world where sweat makes a dollar and a dollar buys bread. And the men who dream these dreams we call fools. And perhaps we're right.

But such a man was Red Flanagan. He dreamed his dreams and to him they were life itself. Fantasy was his reality. And the world was a pleasant couch where a man might lie beneath a blue sky, cooled by the breath of a soft breeze. All he asked of the workaday world was a case of beer and a boat that would sail in the general direction of Red's latest dream. The beer needn't be cold. And the boat needn't be sound. He didn't care. It didn't make much difference one way or the other. Both were very unimportant. And so we leave him for a moment. . . .

An express cruiser, trim with the lines money can pour into a boat, raced across Long Island Sound toward the dock of the Ahearn estate on King's Point. Young Tom Ahearn sat in an easy chair near a window of the teakwood cabin, thumbed through the sport pages of an evening newspaper and wished his father would stop grumping as he read. Old C. T. Ahearn's grumps had become more pronounced with each of the past five years—"disapproving noises" Tom called them. They started down in the publisher's chest and reached a well rounded "Garrumph!" as they came from his throat.

This evening old C. T. was hitting



The wind howled its maddest and the combers washed the deck . . . and over all the Seven Seas flashed the radio cry—Where's—Red—Flanagan. . . .

an all-time high in grumps. He skimmed the pages of a dozen newspapers that were part of his country-wide chain, tossed them aside and swung to face his son. Young Tom lifted his eyebrows in a polite sign he was attentive and ready to listen to what was wrong with a dozen editors. Old C. T. jabbed a finger in the general direction of the most offending paper.

"That sheet stinks," he said. "Tom—it stinks!"

"Really?" said Tom. He lit a cigarette.

"The layout is putrid."

"Really?"

"And what's more," added old C. T., "the advertising is falling of steadily each week."

"Really?" said Tom again.

His father's left eye closed and the right squinted at Tom as though sighting on a target.

"Really be damned!" said C. T. quickly. "Are you 'yessing' me?"

"I wouldn't call it that," said Tom. "You're telling me something and I'm listening. If you want argument, that's different. I think the paper is doing as well in that city as we can expect. We don't belong there—never did belong there. But you insisted upon starting an opposition sheet. Now you're going to take a licking."

"Oh, I am, eh? Going to take a licking, eh?"

Tom grinned. "Let's put it this way—you *are* taking a licking."

OLD C. T. reached into a nearby humidor, grabbed a cigar, bit through the tip and slammed down the box cover. His actions were strong, forceful, deliberate. C. T. Ahearn was a rough proposition. He'd started from nothing and slugged his way to the top in perhaps the world's roughest business venture—the newspaper game. In a trade where competition thrived like mushrooms in a moldy cellar the old man had outsmarted, outgambled, and outfought the field. Now, and for the past five years, he was the controlling factor in Transcontinental News Service, a syndicate that owned a leading newspaper in practically every large city of the country. He was the boss. If he found someone in his way, he

kicked them out of the way, pronto.

Now he touched a match to his cigar and studied his son through a puff of blue smoke. Young Tom didn't look like his father, particularly. Of course, there were the same wide shoulders and heavy chest, the large Ahearn hand and long jaw—but Tom's eyes were blue instead of the dark brown of his father's. A tinge of red was in his hair and when he laughed there was none of the old man's brittleness in the sound. There was less harshness in his voice and more tolerance in his views. The old man was tough. Young Tom was a regular. He liked people and wanted them to like him. The old man didn't give a damn whether they did or not. He'd argue a point until hell froze if there were the slightest chance of winning. Just now he didn't believe he had a chance. So he dropped the subject and turned to better ground.

"How'd you like the way I skidded Detrich into the ashcan today?" he asked. "Ever have more fun at a directors' meeting?"

"Great fun," said Tom. "It reminded me of a bullfight."

"Bullfight?" said C. T. thoughtfully. "The way I backed him into a corner and made him sell his stock to me?"

"You—and a half dozen picadors."

"What t'hell has a picador got to do with a directors' meeting?"

Tom laughed. "You remember Barcelona—we took in a bullfight and I walked out on the first bull. They didn't give him a chance. Picadors, matadors and a dozen other 'dors' jumped around sticking hooks into the bull until he didn't know what it was all about. Then that skinny fellow with the sword finished the job."

"Wait a minute," said C. T. quickly. "Am I supposed to represent the skinny guy with the sword?"

"Well, you're not exactly skinny, but—"

"And is Detrich the bull?"

"He's dead, isn't he? That is, he's out of Transcontinental News Service."

"Sure he is. Detrich is through."

"And I'm sorry," said Tom. "Detrich is a nice fellow whose only fault was being in the way when C. T. wanted his job for someone else."

Again that left eye closed as the old man squinted at Tom. He turned for a moment to glance from the window and judge the time left on this trip from New York to King's Point. The cruiser had passed Fort Totten, turning a gentle arc toward the landing on the far side of Little Neck Bay. C. T. grumped again and cleared his throat.

"Sure Detrich was in the way," he said. "I wanted his job for Frank Van Pelt—and I got it. Van Pelt needs the money and he'll be grateful for a soft spot in my outfit."

"Van Pelt needs the money?" said Tom in surprise. "Where did you ever get that screwy idea?"

The old man's wink was wise. "Friends of mine take care of his investments. Van Pelt is putting up a very fine front but that Southampton place will be on the market this winter. And his bank refused him another mortgage on the town house. Put it all together and it spells broke."

"That's news to me."

"It shouldn't be. You're engaged to his daughter."

"I know, but—"

The cruiser touched the dock and a gangway was run out. Old C. T. walked with his son along the trimly painted white pier to a walk edged with flower beds. The Ahearn estate was one of Long Island's showplaces. A smooth lawn rolled back from the water like the soft curve of a green velvet gown draped upon a low rack. Century-old oaks towered high to shame the beauty of a half dozen weeping beeches that made tall canopies of green leaves. At the crest of the hill was a white house that sprawled in lazy smugness and looked with wide windows across the entrance to Little Neck Bay. Not far from the dock was a small summer house screened against insects and furnished in chrome and blue leather. Old C. T. usually stopped here for a scotch and soda on the walk to the house. This evening the butler had

noticed young Tom with his father and prepared two drinks. Moisture beaded the glasses and C. T. sipped his drink contentedly.

"One of the reasons I've made a few dollars," said C. T. thoughtfully, "is because I've never kidded myself. It's something worth knowing, Tom. And this is a good time for you to learn."

"Let's have it," said Tom. "And if it takes two drinks in the telling—so much the better."

"Oh, it won't take long. It's about that young Van Pelt girl and her family. Also about young Tom Ahearn and his family. We can start with the supposition you know all about the Van Pelts—oldest family on Long Island, regulars in the Southampton crowd, social-register hokum and so forth. Right?"

"Just about," laughed Tom. "But Sylvia suspects her great-great-grandfather was a Dutch smuggler who left Holland in sixteen hundred and something because he didn't want to be hanged."

"MAYBE she's right," said C. T. agreeably. "But just now the Van Pelts are bluebloods with a capital B. And the Ahearns landed at the Battery forty years ago with ten dollars and a brogue. Your grandfather never made more than a dollar a day to the year of his death. He couldn't—they only paid shovelmen that much."

"I've got a general idea of what's next," grinned Tom.

"Have you?" said his father. "Then stick around and see if you're right." He sipped his drink and stared off across the water. "The Van Pelts took about two hundred years to make the grade financially and socially. The Ahearns are a bunch of tough micks and an impatient crew. In forty years I've made more money than the Van Pelts will ever see. And on the social end, you're marrying right into the Blue Book next winter. Personally, I'd call that good work."

He squinted again at his son. Young Tom nodded but said nothing. C. T. grumped and sipped his drink.

"Thought you'd put up a kick about that remark," he said. "Aren't you going to tell me love and love alone is the reason you're marrying Sylvia?"

"Why argue?" laughed Tom. "I'm satisfied to know Sylvia and I love each other."

"So you don't believe me, eh?"

Tom lifted a hand and grinned. "Don't let me sidetrack you, Skipper. Go on with the advice."

"Oh—you're going to be tough about it, eh?" said C. T. "Well, let's see if you can take it, Tom." He paused as though assembling his thoughts—a trick Tom had seen him use often in directors' meetings. "I won't say the Van Pelts are letting you marry their daughter because they need money. Oh, no—I won't put it that way. But I might say Frank Van Pelt will be very, very grateful when he finds himself a director in my business."

"Nicely put," said Tom. "But I'm marrying Sylvia—not her father."

"Let's hope so," laughted C. T. "And because you are, I kicked Detrich off the board to make room for her father. Are there any objections?"

"Yes," said Tom. "As you said a while ago—I think it stinks."

Old C. T. leaned back in his chair. "Just what would you have done?"

Tom didn't answer immediately. He'd always found the old man pretty fair. Neither of them juggled words, nor for that matter did they juggle thoughts. Money had been in the Ahearn family from the time Tom was ten years of age—plenty of money. He'd accepted it without much thought of from where it came until he was well along in college. When he was graduated he went into his father's business as a matter of course. But Tom didn't like it particularly. Didn't dislike it either. It was part of the business of living and he accepted it just as he accepted his father's occasional lectures.

But he was now faced with something a good bit more serious. He loved Sylvia—at least he thought he did. He was happy when he was with her, they enjoyed the same sports,

they knew the same people. She was exceptionally good looking—blond, tall, filled a low-cut bathing suit nicely and had the best legs Tom had seen on Long Island. When he asked her to marry him Sylvia had agreed without too much enthusiasm. But then, there hadn't been very much enthusiasm in Tom's question. It was simply one of those things people did —they got married and hoped it would take.

Now his father had brought an ugly note into the affair. Tom had known Bill Detrich for ten years. He was a man well along in his fifties and not particularly brilliant. His wife lived a little beyond their income and Bill Detrich was usually one jump ahead of the creditors. Without his directorship in Transcontinental News Service, Detrich would be broke before the year was out. And Tom knew of no other connection he could make.

But because Tom and Sylvia were going to be married, the Skipper had shunted Detrich into the gutter. Paid him off and told him he was through. And in doing it, had made Tom a party to the act. Handed Detrich's job to him as a wedding gift.

"I still think it stinks," said Tom slowly. "And if you don't mind, Skipper—I wish you'd forget about Frank Van Pelt and give Detrich back his directorship."

"Like blazes I will."

Tom shrugged. "Then, that's that," he said. "You're the boss and I can't make you change your mind. But to get the bad taste out of my mouth, I'd like a month or two off for a little fishing up Nova Scotia way."

OLD C. T. threw his cigar in the general direction of an ashtray, stood up and started toward the door. He was plenty mad and Tom knew it. When the old man stamped his feet as he walked, trouble was brewing in large doses for someone. Tom was sorry, but it had happened before and

If his airline should foul now . . . That would be curtains

he knew there wasn't much to do about it. The Skipper would curse and grump and make a dozen threats that might never be kept. At length he'd forget the whole thing and Tom would go fishing. Or at least, that had been the usual routine.

This evening old C. T. acted differently. When he faced Tom at the door he was hard-lipped and quiet. He took his son's arm and walked with him toward a small stone building near the dock. From the roof of this building grew a tall radio-mast—the Skipper's plaything and constant amusement. The newspaper world knew Ahearn to be a radio enthusiast—an amateur wireless-operator whose station was as well equipped as most professional units. But they didn't know, as Tom did, that he allowed no one but mechanics or repair men inside of his station. This station—W2QWA—was Ahearn's sanctuary.

Young Tom had been warned to keep out except on those rare occasions when he was the guest of his father. For instance, when messages had crackled through the air from the flood area—messages sent by amateurs from the upper rooms of wave-swept homes—old C. T. had sat throughout the night listening to the drama with his son at his side. And that had been a night to be remembered.

He paused at the door now and took a key from his pocket, fitted it to the lock and pushed open the door. The room was high-ceilinged with a single window in each wall. The furniture was solid stuff, oak legged and businesslike.

Once inside, Tom felt he had left Long Island and was in the radio room of some ship at sea. A dozen photographs of freighters were spaced at intervals along the walls—old ships that had sailed when radio was new. Near the door was a couch where old C. T. occasionally slept. And a closet that held sweaters, a robe and slippers. The center of the room was given over to a wide table equipped with the latest type sending apparatus. C. T. carefully closed the door behind him and motioned Tom to a chair near the table. He seated himself near the key and grumped loud.

"You're a softy, Tom," he said. "A romantic softy."

Surprise lifted Tom's eyebrows. He'd expected something but hardly that. The old man must have been doing some tall thinking on the walk to the radio building. And this was his answer.

Tom reached for his cigarettes. "Am I?" he said. "Why?"

C. T. shrugged quietly. "And what's more—if you don't toughen up, that gang of wolves in Transcontinental News Service will tear you to pieces the moment I'm dead."

"What brought all this up?"

"The fact that you're a softy." The old man lifted his hands and held them before his son. "See these? I'm holding Transcontinental together with these two hands. It's a one-man proposition and everyone in the newspaper business knows it. When I'm gone someone else with a big pair of hands will have to hold it together. If he doesn't—the whole thing falls apart like a house of cards. The wolves that are holding down directors' chairs now will tear Transcontinental to pieces, each trying to grab the largest share. And if a softy is in charge, he'll wake up some morning and find he hasn't even a pair of pants left."

"What makes you so sure I'm soft?"

"The way you're acting about Detrich," said C. T. The old man's voice was hard but wistfulness touched his eyes. He rested a hand on his son's arm and shook it gently. "I built Transcontinental, Tom. It's mine—my baby. It's the best newspaper syndicate in the country and I don't want it to keel over when I do."

Tightness caught Tom's throat. "But, Skipper—I'm learning. Give me a little time and I'll be able to all right."

"No you won't, Tom," said C. T. "It hit me like a ton of bricks a few minutes ago. You're soft—a dreamer. Instead of putting up a fight for Detrich you wanted to go fishing and

forget it. And the mere fact you wanted to save Detrich's job for him—"

"I still think it was a rotten trick," said Tom firmly. "It may be business, but it's not clean business."

"All business is rotten. It's a rough racket for tough men. There's no room in it for dreamers or pushovers. Perhaps if I prove that to you—"

"You don't have to prove it," said Tom. "I'll admit you're right."

"No," said C. T. thoughtfully. "Let me prove it—let me show you a man who started with the same equipment I had. He's a year older, had the same education and the same chances. In fact, he had a better chance."

"Oh, I know you can show me a hundred failures, but—"

"But this isn't the usual success and failure lecture," said the old man. "This fellow was in the navy with me during the war. Both of us were wireless operators on an ammunition carrier. You were born in New York while he and I were in Brest on our first trip." His fingers touched the wireless key on the table and moved it gently, almost as though the sound of the metal helped him to think. "After the war I wanted him to string along with me. Your mother had died and I was alone—you were with your mother's people until you were ten."

"He couldn't see it your way?" said Tom.

"Not at all—said I was crazy. Told me he'd as soon be in jail as in a newspaper office. Besides—Red Flanagan had decided to look for his treasure."

"His what?" laughed Tom.

"His treasure — Red Flanagan's treasure."

CHAPTER II

Red-Headed Woman

C. T. turned to a switch and threw it. He tested the key and seated himself firmly in the chair. A dozen questions had come to Tom's mind but something in his father's manner stopped them before they were voiced. The old man was bending forward, moving the key easily and surely in steady cadence.

"I want you to meet him, Tom," he said. "I want you to see him, listen to him, figure the man out and judge for yourself."

"Are you sending for him now?"

"Yes. Have you learned to read code? You promised me you would."

"Oh, I read it, but you're sending a bit too fast for me. I didn't know you could rap it out that way."

"I'll slow it down," said C. T. "Listen—"

His hand moved rhythmically and Tom spelled out the metallic letters: "Where's Red Flanagan?"

There was a short pause and again the question rapped into the air waves:

"Where's Red Flanagan?"

"Get it?"

"I think so," said Tom. "You're sending: 'Where's Red Flanagan?' "

"That's right." The hand moved steadily, repeating the question. C. T. looked at his son and smiled. "We'll try voice for a while."

There were adjustments to be made on a wall panel. C. T. moved busily about, then seated himself at the table again. He reached for a small microphone and held it before him.

"Where's Red Flanagan?" he said crisply. "W2QWA calling—where's Red Flanagan?"

A voice came from an overhead loudspeaker. "The Bermuda Princess —that you, C. T.?"

"That's me," said C. T. "Where's Red? Seen him lately?"

"Not in two years. He was on the beach in Australia. Sydney, I think. Waiting for someone to look for his treasure."

"Thanks. Send the word along, will you? I want him."

"Glad to oblige. Stand by in an hour or so."

The voice was gone and Tom looked at his father as though a stranger sat in the chair at the table. A wireless operator on a steamer had spoken to the president of Transcontinental News with the easy familiarity of an equal. There had been no deference,

no respect for the millions that backed C. T. Ahearn's name. It was strange, and Tom said as much to his father.

"Oh, that," laughed C. T. "I'm just W2QWA in here—a ham with a good set. If I'm entitled to any respect it's because I still send with the old navy whip." He grinned a little boy's smile.

"But what about this Red Flanagan?" said Tom. "Where is he, and who is he?"

"Keep your shirt on," said his father. "We'll go back to the key and try some of the ships."

Tom watched while the old man's hand moved easily above the instrument. Constant repetition made it possible for him to decipher the quickly asked question:

"Where's Red Flanagan?"

And soon there was an answer.

"That's the *Gerenda*—bound for Rio," said old C. T.

"So I hear," said Tom. "What's he saying?"

THE Skipper translated the string of dots and dashes that rapped from the receiver. "Haven't seen Red Flanagan in a year. Met him last in Porto Rico looking for his treasure. He was still looking for that red-headed girl with the blue eyes, too."

There was a pause while C. T. answered and thanked the operator on the *Gerenda*. And again his key pounded the question.

"Say, Skipper, who the devil is Flanagan?"

His father grinned but didn't answer. He put a finger to his lips and listened to the harsh voice of the wireless instrument.

"That's Coast Guard," he said at length. "Can you get it?"

"Too fast," said Tom.

C. T. translated again: "Talked with Red last summer. He was on the Weatney yacht *Corsair* bound for the South Seas. Claimed he was looking for his treasure with the Weatneys. Talked with operator in Honolulu some weeks later. Said Red left Honolulu when Anna May Townes tried to marry him. She followed him to Shanghai—lost him there. Haven't seen or heard from him since. Stand by later and I'll try to locate him."

Tom shook his head and grinned at his father. "Would you mind telling me something about this wandering Flanagan?" he asked. "I've heard about Anna May Townes. Some of our papers carried a feature story about her. Rich, beautiful, owns an estate in Hawaii—"

"She's just the type to fall for Red," said the old man. "But do you recall whether or not she had red hair and blue eyes?"

"A blond, I think.

"No wonder Red ran away."

The receiver was chattering again and suddenly old C. T. laughed aloud. He turned to his son and caught his arm—shook it.

"That's the radio man on the *Matsu Maru*—says Red was about to join the Chinese Navy but changed his mind when he met some friends in a Shanghai restaurant. They all went looking for Red's treasure in a rusty freighter that Lloyds refused to insure. He offers twenty to one Red is floating in a lifeboat in the Japan Sea. Offers another twenty that Red has a case of beer with him. Says he'll try to contact Red."

Tom said nothing. As he listened again to the voice of the key he wondered about this mythical Irishman. What sort of man was this whose address was his name and whose home was the world?

Here, in a small radio-station on Long Island, a man sat before a table and asked a single question. Radio waves, like invisible fingers spread across the Seven Seas, reaching always further in quest of a giant redhead. Or was he a giant? There had been no word of description in the Skipper's question. Just the words: "Where's Red Flanagan?" No more than that. But no description seemed necessary.

Each of these guardians of the air waves knew him. From the tone of their answers a knowledge was born of their liking for Red Flanagan. Each finished his report with a re-

quest that old C. T. stand by while they sent the search further along the skies. Relayed it from ships to shore and on to ships again. They knew Red—liked him—laughed with him about some treasure which was an open secret to them all. Joked about his search for a red-headed woman with blue eyes. Repeated a question that swept 'round the world:

"Where's Red Flanagan?"

EACH message that came cut a new facet in the diamond that was Flanagan. He was on the beach in Java; loaned a man his last fifty dollars in Cartagena; broke jail in Mexico and refused to marry a society girl who was visiting Panama. Wild, incredible tales of the night. Stories that had been told and retold over the air waves. Gossip of the chattering keys that grew with the spreading. Yet each operator knew Red Flanagan. And each joined in the search.

A butler had served their meal in the radio station and it was close to midnight when a relayed message brought final word of the missing redhead. Red Flanagan was in jail in the Philippines. Did anyone have a job for him? If so, Red wasn't interested. He wanted to look again for his treasure.

Old C. T. rattled the key. "Tell him to catch the China Clipper, change to a transcontinental plane on the West Coast and come to the Ahearn estate at King's Point. Tell him there's another sucker who wants to stake him to a treasure hunt. I'll cable the amount of his fine along with expense money for the trip. And while you're at it, tell him I've a report on that red-headed woman with the blue eyes. That ought to bring him running."

The old man closed the key. He stood up, stretched his back and started toward the door. Tom joined him, wondering if perhaps his father had reached an age where eccentricities must be expected. To date, the evening had been the most fantastic of Tom's life. There was a single phone call from the house—a nervous butler reminding old C. T. of an appointment with a group of political friends. The Skipper's answer had been loud and long. He didn't want to be annoyed—wouldn't be annoyed—refused to be annoyed—and if the butler called again he could start looking for a new job in the morning. Tom had decided to cancel his appointment with Sylvia but as the hours went past and the quest for Red Flanagan spread, he forgot her completely.

His questions met with a knowing smile when he spoke of the missing Flanagan. It was the old man's secret—some peculiar surprise he wished to keep until the wandering radio-operator could be presented in person. That much Tom had learned—Red Flanagan was a radio man when he worked. A good one. Perhaps the best in the trade. The rest had been a series of disconnected myths.

But as the hours followed each other into the night, Tom was sure this same performance had been staged before in the Skipper's radio room. Some of those evenings when he left the big house on the hill for a solitary visit to his wireless station, old C. T. had sent that same question racing through the night. Tom knew it. Yet he made no mention of his knowledge when they left the station and started up the hill.

A low moon looked over the Sound and the Skipper put an arm across Tom's shoulders. He was tired, and Tom thought he looked older than usual. It would be useless to ask questions now. In the morning there might be an explanation. A sensible conversation in which the Skipper would tell him the reason for the night's madness.

CHAPTER III

Enter the Minstrel

THREE weeks had gone with no word of Red Flanagan. Old C. T. hadn't mentioned him again, nor had he answered when Tom questioned him. Tom had gone for a cruise one weekend in his fifty foot schooner, the *Caravan*. She was a trim little

ship, smoothly lined and curved to take the thrust of tall waves. Her masts were short and her booms heavy. A blue-water schooner that seemed ill at ease here in the waters of Long Island Sound. She was seldom used. Sylvia didn't like her and said so. To her, the *Caravan* was an ungainly duckling fit to work with a fishing fleet but rather incongruous in good company. She sailed once with Tom and called it quits.

Now as Tom sat with his father on the wide veranda of the white house, he watched the *Caravan* tugging gently at her mooring as though eager to be free of the chains that held her. A late sunset dropped gold on the water and colored the sky with the brush of a drunken artist. A feathered cloud built an island with palms where a blue lagoon washed the foot of a mountain peak. Seagulls rode the last whisper of breeze and circled above the masts of the *Caravan*. Tom watched them through a cloud of cigarette smoke.

He heard the soft step of the butler and turned. Old C. T. turned with him. It was as though a common thought was shared between them. Red Flanagan had arrived. The Skipper knew it. And so did Tom.

He wasn't surprised to hear the butler announce that a Mr. Flanagan was here by appointment. He wasn't surprised to see Red had walked right in with the butler. In fact, the meeting was one of those inexplicable things that seemed to have been done before.

When Tom stood up and pushed back his chair he knew Red Flanagan. Knew all about him. The suit of tropic whites and wide Panama-hat were part of the picture. Red's old white shoes—good ones that had been pipe-clayed to whiteness—belonged right there on the floor of the veranda. It was right that Red should be wearing a pongee shirt and brown tie. And that ridge of freckles across Red's nose was just what was needed.

He was a handsome devil, thought Tom. Not good-looking in the ordinary and accepted manner. His jaw was too long and his forehead too high for that. But when he smiled a thousand lights came to his eyes—blue eyes. That same peculiar shade of blue that women liked in young Tom Ahearn's eyes. His teeth were large

"You'll listen to me now!" the old man thundered

and white—like Tom's. His chest was perhaps three inches wider, and Tom knew there would be a mat of dark red hair upon it. There was good muscle in those shoulders and arms. But all these things were as nothing when Tom saw the flaming plume that topped Red Flanagan. Here was hair that was red—a dark, bronzelike red that held the color of half-molten metal. It would have stamped with a nickname any man who wore it.

There was a moment of silence while old C. T. and Flanagan faced each other. Red broke it with a laugh and an outstretched hand.

"'Lo, Cassidy," he said. "Long time, no see. 'Twas sweet of you to take me out of that stinkin' jail in the Philippines. But the plane ride was a nightmare, no less."

IT WAS strange to hear his father's given name. Tom, of course knew the Skipper had been christened Cassidy Thomas Ahearn—knew he had been named after one of the Ahearn family's friends who swung a shovel back in the bad days. But for years the "Cassidy Thomas" had been shortened to the more euphonious and certainly more dignified "C. T." by which the Skipper was known to his intimates.

Tom stepped forward and put out his hand. "I'm Tom Ahearn," he said. "I was with the Skipper the night he sent for you. Glad to know you, Red."

Red's hand was the stronger in the grip that followed. His grin was the wider and the left hand that smacked against Tom's shoulder told in better language than Tom's words that Red was glad to see him.

"Tommy Ahearn," said Red. And he looked long into the blue eyes leveled with his. "'Tis a fine man you've grown to be. Three months old you were when I first set eyes on you. A wizened up thing with red whiskers growing out of your head and a voice that would lift above a blow in the Bay of Biscay."

"He was a darn cute kid," said old C. T. quickly. "Had more sense than any I've seen since."

"Who am I to argue about kids?" laughed Red. "Let's have a cool glass of beer and get to our business."

He walked to the veranda edge and stood looking off to where the *Caravan* danced at her mooring. His eyes stroked the trim lines from bow to stern. And he sighed a long breath that said, "Aaaah!" Nothing more. But his hands tightened on the porch rail and his feet were set wide on the rug. His head went up and his eyes reached into the sunset dream that was splashed across the sky. Then he turned and his wide hands lifted a chair to set it near the table. He dropped into it, stretched his legs and folded his hands behind his head, arms akimbo.

The butler had poured scotch over some ice cubes in a tall thin glass. He was about to add soda when Red's hand touched his wrist.

"Begone with you," said Red. "Fetch me some beer. 'Twould be nice if it were cold. But cold or warm —bring me beer." He turned to old C. T. and grinned. "And now, Cassidy —what's this I hear about you backin' a hunt for me treasure? Is it greedy you are gettin' in your old age? Do you want more of this silly world's gold?"

"'Tis yours and be damned to it," said old C. T. shortly. A trace of a brogue had crept into his speech that brought Tom's head about. The Skipper's left eye squinted and one finger pointed to Tom. "I wanted Tom to know you, Red Flanagan. I've told him we started together from scratch. That much, and nothing more."

"So 'tis a horrible example you'd make of me?" said Red. There was a lift to his eyebrows that might have meant a flare of anger. But a laugh changed that. He pounded a fist on the table. "Faith—there's two ends to that story, my friend. Mind you, it may snap back and nip your fingers."

Tom caught the look that passed between the men. It was long. But what the meaning might be, Tom did not know. Sufficient to see a man who matched stare for stare with his father and was not the first to look

away. But then, there was no doubt Red Flanagan was an unusual man. He dismissed with a shrug all the small talk Tom had expected at this meeting.

There were no questions about his father's health or the state of his business. Red didn't care if old C. T. Ahearn had just declared war on the president and was waging a fierce battle in his newspapers. Red Flanagan had heard the Skipper would back him in a treasure hunt. *That* was important. And Red held the conversation to this angle.

"This treasure, now," he said slowly. "Would you like to hear of it, Cassidy?"

"T' hell with it," said old C. T. "Because I want Tom to know you and listen to your talk, I'll back a cruise to last not more than six months. 'Tis more than enough to pay for a lesson."

"A lesson?"

"JUST that," snapped the Skipper. "The boy has gone soft on me. He'd rather fish than fight. As I recall, you were just such a fool when we were paid off after the war. No doubt you still are. Perhaps a greater fool. At any rate, I want you to talk with the boy. Let him see for himself where dreams end."

"Proud of yourself, aren't you?" asked Red. "So proud that you'll risk a fight with the gods of the far places?"

"Save such talk for Tom's ears," said the old man. He motioned to the butler who carried a tray on which was a tall glass. "Here—drink your beer, Red. I've a long-distance call to make and an appointment with a Congressman from Pennsylvania. If you're up before nine I'll see you in the morning."

He stood up and Red waved an indolent hand.

"A good night to you, Cassidy," he said. "But there was some talk that you'd seen a woman with red gold in her hair and the blue of the sea in her eyes. Was it true, Cassidy—was it true?"

"As true as the tales you tell of your treasure," said old C. T. as he stamped toward the doors that led from the veranda. "It came into my mind as I waggled the key."

Red shook his head slowly and the last rays of the sun danced on the sheen of it. He emptied his glass. Looked at the white froth that lined the sides. Looked at the butler. Put down the glass and pointed a wide finger at the distant *Caravan*.

"Your boat, Tom?" he asked.

"She's mine. A present from the Skipper last year."

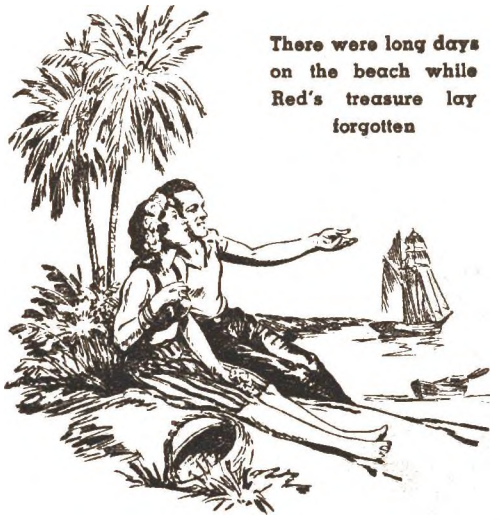
"It would be," said Red softly. "No doubt he scoured the yards of a dozen states to find her." Red's eyes were wide as he looked across the darkening water. That look of the far places had come into them. "A dream ship, that. See you—her hull is built strong like the chest of an ox. Yet her lines are soft as the smile of a beautiful woman. And the grace of her—held by a chain and a ring in her nose to the black mud of a filthy bay. Yet she waves her masts like round white arms and beckons to you through the live-long day."

Tom listened. A minstrel had come to the hall of the Ahearns. A tall red man with a tongue that rang like a silver bell. He carried no harp and his voice was low, yet melody was in it and he sang the song of the wanderer. He spoke of the ship as though she lived. And as he spoke, life flowed into the rounded timbers of the *Caravan*. Red tilted his head and put a great hand to his ear. He smiled.

"Hark to the voice of her," he said quietly. "She's telling of Suva and Mandalay. She knows of a gulf in Mindanao where the wind comes east from Tawi Tawi—a long gulf with a lee shore where a warm sun lifts above the mountains. She remembers a girl in Cartagena—a tall girl with soft breasts and hair the color of ripe pomegranates. A laughing girl with eyes so blue a robin's eggs would seem as drab beside them."

"In Cartagena?" said Tom.

"Cartagena—I think. Though I wouldn't be sure. Not too sure at any rate. Perhaps our lady *Caravan's*



There were long days on the beach while Red's treasure lay forgotten

speech is blurred, for her mouth is sour with the taste of green water—shallow stuff that grows here in Long Island Sound. But if she were free to drink of the rich blue water that covers the ocean deeps, then friend Tom, she'd tell us quite plainly."

"Of the girl with the red hair and blue eyes?"

"That, and more. She'd tell of a treasure that waits for Red Flanagan. A treasure of gold and pearls and colored stones. The price of an empress and the loot of a country ravaged by greedy men. 'Tis there, Tom—waiting the day when I'll come to claim it. Silent and cold it lies deep under water. The gold is dull and the stones save their brilliance for the time when Red Flanagan's hands will set them free. The day when I'll thread them on platinum strings and hang them in clusters about the soft throat of my red-headed girl."

RED tilted his chair and reached for his glass. It was filled to the brim with straw-colored beer. And the great Irishman breathed deep as he set it to his lips. Tom looked away from the *Caravan*. Turned his head as though to break the spell of a master of enchantment. Such tales as Red might tell were not new. Dream tales. Each with a kernel of truth and a shell of fantasy.

Cartagena—the name had a ring to it. Yet Tom had been there and knew it for the filthy spot it was. Santa Marta, Maracaibo—names wound tight with the silver threads of fantasy. Grist to the mill of the listener's ears, unless perhaps the listener had been there and knew these places for what they were. But Red was talking again, now. He was telling of a friend—Mike Devlin the pearler. How Mike had sailed into a cove on Tubbataha Island and there found diamonds instead of pearls—white stones set in old gold and locked in an iron chest. And now Mike was a king on an island of his own where the wind blew softly and winter never came.

The hours walked quietly round the clock and Tom listened to the voice of Red Flanagan. Midnight came and Tom had lived a dozen lives, fought and laughed and drank with men in far places. The women he met were beautiful creatures, yet none so fair as that elusive red-headed woman with the blue eyes. Always she was a step beyond—waiting, beckoning, drawing him closer with smooth white arms and lips that promised.

And with her went Red's treasure. In some peculiar way it was part of the girl, woven into the thin strands of her flaming hair. A nebulous thing that wandered with Red to the far corners, always in sight yet never within reach of his strong freckled hands.

The lilt of Flanagan's voice gave body and substance to the lightest of fantasy. All that was Irish in young Tom Ahearn surged to the top. A minstrel was singing a tale that might have sounded once in a low ceilinged hall where smoke blackened rafters curved above the heads of Irish kings. Or perhaps it was a song of the long-bearded Vikings.

Tom wasn't sure. Yet always there was the sea, and a ship, and a golden beach where palm trees grew. Always a treasure and always a beckoning, red-headed woman. And as night rolled westward the ship took definite

form. Her hull was deep blue and her masts were short. Sweet lines curved back from a sturdy bow to a stern where a name was painted. And soon Tom saw the name. Bronze letters that spelled a single word—*Caravan.*

He stood when Red pushed back his chair. He walked with Flanagan to the porch rail and looked at the hint of morning in the sky. Together they paced the flowered paths that led to the sea wall and the dock. A breeze was on the Sound. Light, yet filled with promise of the strong wind to follow the sun out of the east. Tom heard the ring of his heels against the planking of the pier. He heard a voice that was his calling to Anderson and Ole, the seamen. It was his voice —no doubt of that. It brought the men running and sent them to the stairs that led to the water. A small rowboat moved out from the dock. Tom and Red Flanagan sat in the stern. Ole at the oars. Anderson crouched in the bow to grab the rail of the *Caravan.*

A paid hand with sleep in his eyes came doubtfully toward the group near the wheel. He looked at Red. Looked at Anderson. Looked at Tom Ahearn and shook his head, bewilderment chasing the sleep from his eyes.

"Break out the sails, Carter," said Tom. "Anderson will give you a hand. Ole will slip the mooring when you're ready and we'll head for the East River and the Upper Bay."

"Very good, sir," said Carter. "But will we be gone long?"

"That's something I wouldn't know, Carter."

"But the provisions, sir?"

TOM looked at Red Flanagan. Red Flanagan grinned. His shoulders lifted in a lazy shrug and he leaned against the deck house. The breeze was freshening and the tide was full. Anderson was stripping the sail covers from the booms and from forward came the sound of iron on iron as Ole prepared to slip the mooring.

"We'll pick up whatever we need later," said Tom.

"But where, sir?"

Red Flanagan's hand went out. It fastened upon the seaman's shoulder and spun the man about. Red's shoe left a white mark on the seat of Carter's dungarees, and his voice boomed like the sound of a great drum.

"Where, and be damned to you!" he said. "What manners do you learn in green water? 'Tis for us to know of such things as provisions. Up you go, man! Main and fores'ls—jibs when the mooring's clear. Jump to it, you scut!"

Carter ran. And Red turned to wink slowly to Tom. He nodded his head, beckoning with indolent movement for Tom to step closer.

" 'Tis a voice you'll get when the salt rubs grooves in your throat, Tom," he said quietly. " 'Tis not to be used often or the edges grow thin."

"Fair enough, Red. But now that Carter's mentioned it—will we be gone long?"

"Devil if I know."

"Have you any idea of where we're going?"

"Haven't I told you?" said Red in surprise.

"Not that I remember."

"Now can you beat that?" The redhead laughed aloud. "I thought I'd told you of that bay in Cuba—the one of Oriente Province where the sand is white and edged with palm trees. 'Tis a small bay, no larger than a cove and hard for any to find save Red Flanagan. A lip of blue water stands in from the sea and covers me treasure with a ten fathom blanket. Beyond it the mountains reach up to the sky and somewhere amongst them is that redheaded girl."

"With the blue eyes?"

"Very blue," said Red. "Bluer than blue itself."

Tom laughed. It was an echo of the mirth that came from Flanagan's throat. He caught the redhead by an arm and led him forward to where Ole stood by the jib halyards.

"The crew's bunks are here," he said, pointing to a hatch. "Three men can sail her nicely and have plenty of time to smoke. The galley is aft and the owner's quarters sleep four with

room to spare. She has a sound bottom and her last owner used her on three-month cruises. Well provisioned, she might do more. Just now we've food for a day or two and water for a week. Any suggestions?"

Red scratched an ear and looked at the white sails. "Food and water?" he said thoughtfully. "Faith—I've never worried at all about such things. With a fair wind and a sweet ship like this little lady, damned if such stuff as food would enter me mind. But beer—we must have beer, Tom. 'Tis no use to stretch on a white beach in the tropics unless you've some beer nearby."

"And we'll need gas for the motor."

"To the devil with the motor," said Red. " 'Tis wind that makes the world go round. There's plenty of it for the asking when Red Flanagan sails. But we must have beer, Tom. Mark you—a tropic beach is a dry, dull place without it."

"Then we'll dock in the East River and take on enough," said Tom. "While we're at it, you wouldn't mind if we laid in enough provisions for a long cruise?"

"Such as what?"

"Meat, coffee, flour—"

"Saints above," said Flanagan. "You're a practical man like your father. Get your coffee and flour—get tons of it if you like. But mind you, don't forget me beer."

He walked aft to stand beside Anderson as the seaman ran the *Caravan* down the Sound. Tom seated himself on the port rail, grasped the main shrouds to steady himself against the lunge of the boat and wondered what the hell it was all about.

From the time his father's hand had rapped out the question that brought Red Flanagan to King's Point, the world had been spinning in a sea of dreams. A smiling giant with a silver tongue had told of a treasure that perhaps had never existed. Tom had heard no word of maps or charts. No set location or reasons to believe. In fact, the sails of the *Caravan* were stiff in the breeze before Red had decided upon the latest location of this nebulous fortune.

A bay on the coast of Cuba—that was all. It had no name. God and Red Flanagan alone knew where it might be. Yet here was Tom Ahearn, one of New York's rising young business men, prisoner aboard his own schooner bound for the East River and the Atlantic Ocean. He laughed at the thought. Prisoner was the right word. The persuasive charm of Red's tongue had led him aboard the *Caravan* with the sureness of an iron chain. It held him now—looking off into the sunrise while an eagerness grew in his mind.

CHAPTER IV

Treasure Island

THE smell of a deep-water ship was in his nostrils. It lifted from the deck beneath his feet and told of the back of beyond. Tall buildings with a thousand eyes pushed granite spires into the morning sky a few miles past the *Caravan's* bow. Dead things, built by men to form a city called New York. Tom saw the huge pile that housed Transcontinental News Service—an ugly hulk that waited for a thousand ants to scurry along its halls and bury themselves for the day within its offices. Old C. T. would be there in an hour or two, wondering what the devil had become of his son and Red Flanagan.

Later, Frank Van Pelt would sit with the board of directors at a long table in a long room. A phone would ring and Sylvia might ask her father if he'd seen or heard from Tom this morning. She'd be rather provoked at his neglect of the previous evening—not angry, Sylvia seldom if ever allowed herself to become angry. It wasn't practical. And above all things, Sylvia Van Pelt was practical.

He laughed again. It was a foreign thought. But so were others that came to his mind as the *Caravan* slid down the Sound. He dreamed of a white beach where trees leaned curving over a blue lagoon. He heard the dry rattle of the palm fronds when a warm

wind moved them. And staring over the bow with eyes that missed completely the majesty of New York's sky line, he saw a red-headed girl with azure eyes whose arms beckoned to him and waved him closer. The breath of the tropics was soft on his cheek. And he called to the *Caravan* to hurry.

Anderson stood at the wheel—a tow-headed Swede with salt tanned skin that was white below the line of his jumper. He stroked the spokes with a gentle hand and headed the schooner into the narrow channel. Tugs with their tows of garbage and bricks went busily past, and as they neared the Queensboro Bridge they met a freighter from Rio. Noon found them at Peck Slip near the lower tip of Manhattan. Tom called to Red who was squatting on a forward hatch. The huge redhead stood, stretched long arms over his head and grinned. He came rolling aft.

"We dock here?" he asked.

"We do," said Tom, "if you want your beer. Ole will take her into the dock under power. Stand by forward with Carter to handle the bow lines. Anderson and I will manage the stern."

It was the first order Tom had given aboard the *Caravan*. The words came well to his mouth and he liked the ring of them. Others followed as the husky schooner shoved her bow alongside the pier. Sea talk—born of the instant. Lines went out and were made fast. The motor died and a short gangway was put over.

"Sea stores for three months, Anderson," said Tom. "Hop ashore and make it fast. We'll pay extra for service but we want to be loaded and gone with the tide."

"Aye, sir," said Anderson.

"Go with him, Carter. Ole will tend ship and overhaul the gear while you're gone."

"But, sir—" said Carter.

"Get out of here!" Tom yelled. "But me no buts!"

"Aye, sir," said Carter and hurried over the gangway with Anderson.

" 'Tis a grand voice you've got for

And there sat the red devil, grinning

orders," said Red approvingly. "With a bit of seasoning it might do well on a South Sea pearler."

"You like it?"

"I do."

"Then listen to it closely," said Tom. "If we're after treasure we'll not find it on a beach. Do you know anything of deepsea diving?"

"Diving?" said Red. "Have you not heard that Red Flanagan is the greatest of all deepwater men? Twenty fathoms will be no more to me than a dip in a bucket of beer."

"Twenty fathoms?" said Tom quickly. "I thought you said the cove was but ten fathoms deep?"

"Did I?"

"You did."

"So much the better. Ten fathoms it is."

"And you can handle a diver's suit in that much water?"

"Faith—in ten fathoms I could dance a waltz if there were any music. Bring on your diver's suit but mind it don't pinch me shoulders. I like room to work when I'm digging up treasure."

"You'll have it," said Tom. He caught Red's arm and walked with him over the gangway. "There must

be a shop where we can get one to fit you. I'll phone the office and have the cashier send money down town by messenger."

"Money?" said Red. "'Tis a word with a nasty sound. Why do we need money?"

"For a diver's suit, my red friend."

"Shame upon you," said Red. "Follow me and learn that money is a stupid thing."

HE walked with Tom to a ship's chandlery on Pearl Street. A long wide store where a man might buy compass or sextant, sail needle or kedge anchor. A store where the clerk looked once at Red Flanagan and called for the owner. A small man with white in his hair and a laugh in his eye came from an office at the rear. He pounded Red's shoulder and shook hands with Tom.

"Meet my old friend Jack Haven," said Red. "He's fitted me out a dozen times and he'll do it again—but this time on tick."

"We'll pay for what we need," said Tom.

"Your credit's good," said Haven. "If I lose on you, Red will bring some other fool in here next year with money to spend on a wild-goose chase."

"Hark to the man!" cried Red. "He'd slander his best friend, no less. For such talk I doubt if we'll buy one of his rotten diving-suits. 'Twouldn't fit, anyway."

"Did the last one fit?" asked Haven, grinning.

"A bit tight, but not bad."

"Then why not take it again? The whole outfit is back in stock."

Tom laughed. He went with the ship chandler to a basement where suits were kept in which men walked the ocean's floor. A smell of rubber and canvas bit at his nostrils and he bent to lift a bronze dome with bar-crossed glass and valved throat. Red was moving the handles of a compact air pump, testing the hose and tapping the gauges. Leaded belts and weighted shoes were packed in a case and soon the deal was made. The equipment was sent to the *Caravan* and reached the dock as Red and Tom arrived. Provisions were trundled over the gangway and Red stood by, carefully checking the cases of beer lowered into the *Caravan's* hold. This, he claimed, was the most important thing they had bought.

A west wind walked them across the Upper Bay, through the Narrows and around Norton's Point. They followed the black and white markings of Ambrose Channel and held a course for the lightship. As evening grew, Tom called the men to the wheel. He leaned against the binnacle and scratched an ear.

"Does anyone," he asked, "happen to know anything about navigation?"

Anderson looked bland. "I yam able seaman, sir—not officer."

"And you, Ole?" asked Tom.

"Bane bo'sn five year, sir. No officer."

"How about you, Carter?"

"Sorry, sir. Just a seaman."

Tom scratched the other ear. "Perhaps I should have brought Captain Wilson along." He turned to Red in explanation. "He's on old C. T.'s payroll and usually commands the *Caravan* if we go out of Long Island Sound."

"Divil take Wilson," said Red. "'Tis a master mariner I am, meself—with unlimited papers for sail and steam. A captain on every one of the seven seas with—"

"Got them with you, Red?" asked Tom.

"Not at the minute."

"But you've really got master's papers?"

"A dozen of them."

Tom went to the cabin that served as chart room. He took sextant and watch from a locker and handed them to Red. He pointed to the sun low on the water, and nodded his head.

"Let's have us a sight," he said. "We'll check your figures against a chart while we're still in sight of the lightship."

"By all that's holy—the man doubts me word!" cried Red.

He handed the watch to Tom, lifted

the sextant and called on his sight. Again he shot the low red sun and called out mark and readings. Five minutes with pencil and Bowditch in the cabin and he passed the paper to Tom. The figures were noted and checked with a chart. They tallied to precision and Red laughed.

"'Tis easy when you've the hang of it," he said. "Watch me close on the trip south, Tom. You'll be a deepwater man when we reach Rio."

"Rio?" said Tom. "We're heading for that cove in Cuba."

"Cuba? Did I say Cuba?"

"Certainly. Oriente Province where the mountains come down and stand with their feet in the sea. Remember?"

"Of course—of course. How could I forget where me treasure is waiting? Or for that matter, where me red-headed girl waits and wonders what's become of Red Flanagan."

Carter lifted a hand. "I think, Mr. Ahearn, we'd better notify your father of what you're doing, sir. The *Caravan's* radio could pick up one of Transcontinental's stations and—"

"You think?" cried Red. "Since when has a seaman leave to think for an officer? Get forward, you scut! Forward!"

The thunder of Red's voice stilled the protest on Carter's lips. He stiffened, wheeled, and went forward. Anderson grinned and looked at the binnacle. He eased the wheel and glanced at Tom.

"What course, sir?" he asked. "I yam abaft the Ambrose Light."

"Mr. Flanagan will give you the course," said Tom. "Ole and I will see what we can do with that stove in the galley. You may eat—and then again, you may not."

He motioned to Ole and went below while Flanagan grinned and spat to leeward. . . .

A LAZY morning found Red Flanagan at the wheel as the *Caravan* stood on an eastward tack through the Caribbean. Days had grown into weeks that made a month while the blue-hulled schooner rounded the Florida Keys, stood off from Havana and circled the tip of Cuba. They passed the Isla de Pinos, beat in toward Santa Clara and off again to miss the thousand islands that dotted the shores of Camaguey. Pleasant days, with little to do but dream and talk of the treasure that waited so patiently in that ten fathom cove.

Weather was making in the south. Red had checked the glass and found it low, glanced at the nearby thermometer and found it high. A rotten combination. One that called for shortened sail and a trim ship. He saw Anderson leaning against the weather rail, shading his eyes against the glare of a red sun while he sniffed the air.

"How's it smell, sailor?" Red asked.

"Like vind, sir—much vind."

"Right you are, me son. 'Twill pin back your ears before noon, no doubt."

Anderson looked at the flat sails and cocked an inquiring eye at Red. Flanagan grinned and shook his head.

"'Tis our last run," he said. "We'll

keep on sail and race the wind. By noon we'll have the hook down in a tight little cove where we can thumb our noses at a hurricane, no less."

"I yam glad," said Anderson slowly. "Then we find the treasure—no?"

"Then we find the treasure—yes!" laughed Red.

He spun the wheel and licked salt from his lips. That treasure—it might be there on the coast of Cuba. It might be anywhere. Red had told the story so often he knew the size and shape and weight of the iron chest that held it. A story of gold and stones spun from the fine threads of fancy to tickle the palate of greedy mouths. For that had been Red's way—first find a greedy man with gold in his pocket and a wish for more. If the gold were ill-gotten, so much the better. It simply made him hunger more for Red Flanagan's treasure.

There would follow nights at a small table with glasses filled to loosen Red's tongue. A hint of sunken gold and a whisper of a stolen map. More questions and at length a suggestion that Red share his treasure with the man who could afford to outfit a ship to reach it. Red would ponder, then. He'd haggle a bit about the terms and at length agreement would be reached. A ship would put from a foreign shore —well provisioned with beer at Red's request—and they'd sail to a cove where the sun was warm and the beach was soft to lie upon.

Others would search the ocean depths while Red stretched on his back and dreamed of that red-headed girl with sky-dyed eyes. At times he'd take a turn below, or study a chart and shake his head.

As days slipped by he'd sigh in a manner most forlorn and ruefully admit the maps were wrong. Treasure there was, but not in this cove. If the fool who'd been backing the venture was a very greedy man, there might be further search. If not, Red would find a ship that needed the world's best radio man. He'd ship for a cruise and land in a new port to tell again his story of gold and colored stones.

Always he found a listener. Always there were men greedy to find something for which they had not worked. And once, when Red had been walking the ocean's floor near Kahoolawe he'd found a muscle bed that was a farm for pearls. This he'd held in the back of his mind. Some day, perhaps, he'd go back and claim them. A few weeks' work might see him rich. Heavy with money he'd have to spend. The thought was a nuisance. It worried Red.

FOR in the telling, his treasure had become a real thing. Just as the girl who would some day walk down a tropic beach and put her hand in his. No longer children of his mind, they had taken form and substance. And the quest of them had become Red's life. It had brought him half way across the world from the Philippines to an estate on the shores of Long Island. And as he thought of that trip and the reception that had awaited him at the end, Red smiled.

'Twas the devil's own trick he'd played. Old C. T. Ahearn had sent for him to pose as an object lesson—a sight to be seen and shunned by his son. He'd left Red alone to spin his yarns, sure in his mind young Tom would laugh and turn away. And now old C. T.'s son was here on the Caribbean, headed for a cove where Red Flanagan's treasure waited.

Again the great red Irishman laughed. And from the laugh a puzzled frown grew over his eyes. Had old C. T. been fooled? Or had the old walrus been doing the fooling? Red glanced at the sky. He sniffed and called Anderson to the wheel.

"Hold her as she goes," he said. "Call me if the wind makes too sudden, me son. I'll be in the radio shack."

"Aye, sir," said Anderson and grasped the spokes.

Red went below and looked at the bunk where young Tom slept. An early morning watch gave him a late shift below and Red walked softly to the radio cabin. He closed the door behind him and picked up the ear-

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ponent of completely idealistic and abstract thought, a man beside whom Galileo was only an ignorant schoolboy and Archimedes no more than a primitive barbarian; and myself, Helver Gunderson, of Gunderson Laboratories, the developer of the make-and-break ray, of the spinning wing, the watch-type televisor, the roadless sky pavement and the atom-engine, to speak of only a few—a man with an intellect on a far lower and humbler plane than Hartley's (I would be the last to dispute it) but still a man who at the very least has shown himself the greatest pragmatic inventor since Edison.

There we were. The combination might never happen again. Perhaps we had been put there for something, by a distant Mind which had controlled our conception. If for no purpose, still we must milk the blind cow, Chance, and obtain some nourishment from the circumstance.

To probe the final mystery. There could be no venture greater. Only the two of us knew anything about our plan and purpose, and, of course, Nivea, my wife—Hartley himself was unmarried, except to his science and his mind. We worked on the blueprints nine months together, after Hartley had brought me his calculations and equations, which had taken him ten years to produce. The actual building of the rocket was done in one of my own plants, the Gunderson Engineering Three at Bridgeport, which was specialized for experimental work of the most confidential sort and staffed with a picked corps of super-skilled and loyal technicians.

Even so, we had to go carefully. Each workman, working on his individual part, did not know the purpose of the whole. It was rumored that it was a great new submarine, that it was an invention for boring towards the center of the earth, into that great core of compressed and adamantine gold on which all the con-

Faster than light, the rocket-ship flashed off into the sky

tinents float. I let them think as they wished to think. If they had known the real purpose of that unprecedented ship, they would have thought I was insane.

The building of it took six months, and I was with it night and day, hardly sleeping in all that time more than two hours at a stretch, and frequently neglecting to eat for days, working in an increasing tension as it neared completion. There were many problems to be met, many seemingly insuperable difficulties to be overcome. There were times when I almost despaired, when my inventive skill seemed to have run up against a blank and impenetrable wall. As if there were a Hand which stood pushed out against me, and said: Thus far, and no farther!

Yet who could say that to me, Gunderson? One by one I broke down and overcame those problems, solved the last difficulty. There came the dawn when the last rivet had been driven, the last delicate instrument tested and installed, and the machine was trundled onto the cradle prepared for its christening and launching on the shore of the Sound in front of the factory, on—what day is this?—on May the 7th, 1948.

WE STOOD there beside it on its launching platform, Hooker Hartley and I, in that stupendous moment before its take-off into the distances of ultimate space, while Nivea prepared to christen it with champagne, and the dazed and uncomprehending workmen who had trucked it forth and set it there clustered bewilderedly on the ground a hundred feet below. It was a ship capable of accomplishing the great thing that Hartley had conceived and I had planned, I knew without a doubt. It was the greatest of all my inventions, the most stupendously conceived, the most perfectly wrought out in every detail. I put my hand on it and stroked its welded sides as if it had been a living bird. A thing of midnight blue and silver, shaped like a great tear, ready for the stars.

"Will it do it, really?" said Hartley, standing there bareheaded with me, hunched and shivering, with his hands jammed in his topcoat pockets, staring at it with his great luminous eyes. "Beyond the orbit, Helver?"

"Beyond the orbit?" I said. "Beyond the drift! Beyond the galaxy!"

"Beyond the galaxy!" he said. "To the outer-galactic void?"

"Beyond! Beyond the utmost nebula!" I said. "To the ultimate limits of space, Hooker!"

He shivered beside me on the launching platform, standing there soft, plump, and delicately boned, with his fragile hands jammed deep in his topcoat pockets, with his head pulled down between his shoulders, the black curly hair growing thin on top of the great skull above the mighty brain. His full lips were pursed together and a little twisted, with one eye half shut. His topcoat collar was pulled up around his ears, and still he shivered a little in the cold thin dawn. The elevation of the platform perhaps affected him. He had always been a little squeamish about heights.

And even he was awed.

"I made it," I told him. "I am Helver Gunderson. If I say that it will do it, it will do it."

Perhaps I was a little irritated. Every nerve in my body was a hot wire. There was burning sand upon my brain. I looked down at him with my red glaring eyes, and he seemed to shrink away from me a little. He had not really doubted me, of course. He knew that I was Helver Gunderson. He knew that if I had made it, it would do it. His question had just been a demand for reiteration of a true but astonishing fact.

"I use atomic energy for the take-off, Hooker," I explained to him more patiently. "And plenty of it. An adaptation of the neutron-deutron principle, stepped up to the ratio of omega-pi. We take off with an initial speed of five thousand m.p.m., accelerating with geometric progression. She travels by cosmic energy after the first nine minutes, by which time

we should be well beyond Mars, I think.

"The problem of power was not too hard to solve, you see—the problem of shape was somewhat more. It is probably that which stumps you. The hull's apparent contour is obvious, of course, but it is merely for the minimum of friction in the atmosphere. Atmospheric pressure keeps it up. Beyond a hundred miles, in half a second, she collapses into her true shape of a ten-pointed star, the only conceivable one, naturally, for maximum efficiency in interstellar space. The way I worked the mechanical problem of the change of shape was this—"

BUT he was paying no attention, I realized; he was immersed in those vaster, more splendid thoughts of his own. Shivering with pursed lips, and with one eye blinking.

"But mechanics bore you," I said a little lamely. "The point is, it will do it. It will work. Do you want to look inside?"

"What?" he said. "Oh, no. No, thanks. I'll take your word for it. I wouldn't understand it, anyway."

I felt a little baffled by him. A little humiliated and regretful that he should not find sufficiently interesting the mechanical problems which I had faced and conquered. But who was he to waste his mind on things like engines?

"To the ultimate limits of space!" he repeated, catching his breath.

He had a picture of it, I knew, in his mind. "And back," I said.

But he did not hear me. His teeth chittered, while he shivered. Suddenly he began to laugh, with the breathless gasping laughter which some men get in moments of intense excitement. All his formulae, all his dreams! The ship I had made that would prove them all. That picture of infinity which he could see. Shivering and laughing with tight lips, with a gasping in his throat, as if he was strangling with something deep inside him, and for his life he could not stop.

"I knew that you could make it," he gasped. "To ultimate space! My God, what a man you are!"

It rested there beside us in its lofty cradle, the great rocket, silver and midnight blue. "I christen thee Viking!" said Nivea in her cold clear ringing voice, breaking the bottle of champagne across its nose.

Nivea! The dawn light shone on her smooth brushed golden hair, upon her eyes like the sparkle of beautiful blue ice, upon her small clear-cut face, so cold and proud. She wore silver fox furs around her soft white throat. There was a bunch of violets at her slender supple waist, which no motherhood had ever spoiled. "I christen thee Viking!" she said, Nivea. "May you beach on the ultimate stars!"

There were only the three of us there, and the uncomprehending workmen staring up from below. No newsreel men or photographers. They would not have believed it if they saw it. The dawn wind was cold. The blue Sound sparkled. The moon was a pale ghost. The remnants of the wine bottle had dropped to the ground below. Nivea turned to me with her proud eyes. I polished my goggles and put on my helmet, and I got into it, with a last handshake with Hartley and a kiss on Nivea's cheek.

"Goodbye, old man!" said Hartley.

"Goodbye, darling!" said Nivea. "Good luck!"

I battened down the hatch, waved a farewell through the porthole, flipped my controls a couple of times, and took off.

So it was launched without fanfare that morning (said Gunderson) the greatest invention of my career, the culmination of all my mechanical genius and adaptability, upon its course into outer space according to the formulae of Hartley.

I shall never forget—though for years I did let myself forget in Mara's arms—the sight of Nivea there upon the platform with a last wave and cry to me as my swift cruiser of galactic space took off. How many

The blow—the woman's cry—had I dreamed it all in that far-off world?

years ago! What day is this? May 7th, 1948—yes, of course, that must be right. It was this year, this day, and this moment, at six o'clock in the morning. The same hour as when I left. . . .

II

With These Hands

YOU wonder (said Gunderson) why a man like me should have been interested at all in a project so theoretical, a quest so unrelated to any practical value or prospect of commercial profit, so unearthly and so abstract. You see in me no more than a super-mechanic—oh, a man with an inexplicable and unparalleled genius for machines, and with a pragmatic grasp and understanding of matter in every form which has enabled me to produce those various inventions which have changed in the course of a few years the whole aspect of man's civilization. But still only a mechanic underneath, for all of that—a big-shouldered, heavy-faced fellow with big broken-nailed hands a little grimy with engine oil, with low brow and unkempt hair, with dull eyes and no dreams behind them—a man with a cogwheel brain. A big apelike lout of a man for all his millions, not quick of wit or speech in any way, a man whose very handclasp is curved to the clutch of a wrench. A man who but for the accident of half a dozen incomprehensible brain cells might be lying with his shoulder-blades on the floor of any garage draining out the oil from your car at twenty-two dollars a week. A man, at the best, whose every purpose and accomplishment has been practical and commercially profitable, an unimaginative, hard-headed, realistic man, with his feet upon the earth, his eye to the dollar. And that is true, no doubt.

It is true, like everything else, in part. I was born to the bitterest poverty; I knew terrific toil as a boy; acute hunger was a daily and constant companion to me for the first twenty years of my life; and I have had to keep my feet on the earth, to think of profit and values and commercial utility in everything in order to climb up out of that slough which otherwise would have swallowed me.

I wanted millions, and I made them. At first, to keep away from me the specter of starvation which I had

known too well. After I had married Nivea, to take care of her, to maintain for her the background of great houses, jewels, clothes, society, travel, yachts, servants that she needed and deserved—to make her ever more proud and loving of me, because of the power of money that I could shower on her.

And to such a need of money it takes a long time to reach an end. For years there had been no time for me to taste the pleasures of pure science and abstract thinking, no time for dreams. But that did not mean that the dreams were not there. I, Helver Gunderson, super-mechanic, engineer, multimillionaire industrialist, Swedish wizard, cog-wheel freak, I too had my dreams. Of outer space. Of infinity. Of the vast dark blue voids which lie between the nebulae. Of adventures in those realms of pure and immaculate mathematics which lie beyond space and time, wherein Hartley's great mind ranged as mine did among my electrons and differential gears.

IT WAS the racial adventuresomeness of my blood, perhaps, that was aroused and stirred when Hartley first broached his magnificent proposition to me. The Norse blood. The old seafarers who were my ancestors, driven by an unappeasable urge in their quest for the unknown. By a thing within their hearts which cried, Go on! Go on, till the last shore is reached and the world's rim!

The days of the dragon boats and the thin frail sails and the howl and lash of the spindrift in a man's teeth and the glorious lightning wrack and the chartless seas are done. But if a man has that thing in his blood, this earth will not suffice him. And the sons of those men will be faring till the world shall end. Education, civilization—but still the call of the blood is there—and still I must always be aware of that adventure-cry. It was that thing in me, born in my blood, which no doubt was one of the impulses which drew me on.

A second, no doubt, was Nivea. For she, too, felt the great splendor of that quest. The time had come when there was no more money I could make, since taxes on increased gains would actually decrease my revenue, while what was already flowing in from royalties and contracts was more than even she could spend. So that I was free from pressure and Nivea's future was forever secured, as far as money could do it.

The thought of that unprecedented voyage into the void, that great quest conceived by Hartley, inspired her intellect with a lofty enthusiasm such as I had never known her to show before, and she spurred me on with her cold and passionless fire.

Nivea, my wife—you know her, gentlemen. She was a Saltonstall of Boston, high-born, with a lofty mind, cold but beautiful as ice. And God knows that I loved her, humbly and worshipfully, with all the power of my soul and brain. Yes, I loved her, and wanted her respect and admiration.

She had never thought a great deal of the inventions, you understand—those things had always seemed a little dirty and beneath her, and though she endured them because of the money they brought in, in her heart she had always despised them. Dirt and machines, test-tubes and stinking chemicals, she often told me, curling the edges of her thin fine nostrils as she drew back from me, I had only wheels in my brain, there was a stink about me which would not wash off. Who could blame her? She was so high-born, you see. She had married far beneath her, there was no secret in that. Her father had been a gentleman, he had never worked in his life. Me—me, Gunderson, the Swede, with my great awkward hands, my uncouth manners; an ignorant miner's son, born in the dirt—it could be understood how much she had sacrificed, how much she had lowered herself, by marrying me. What had I ever done to make her proud of me? But this was a project perhaps not unworthy of her, this great forth-faring into outer space.

This was something of pure science, such as even a gentleman might be honored to attempt, and to which, if successful, sufficient honor would be attached. So to warm her cold proud eyes, to do something great and splendidly worthy of her—that was another reason that I undertook the venture, gentlemen.

And yet beyond the Viking blood, and beyond the desire I had to glorify Nivea, there was most of all the necessity I had to carry through the quest because Hartley had brought it to me. Hartley, the greatest scientific intelligence that ever lived! In my far humbler sphere of endeavor and achievement I had always looked up to him as the man of hands must always look up, I suppose, for the man of mind. Ever since I had first known him, Hartley had been my god, since I had none other. And so he had come to me with this great conception of investigating outer space, with the formulae which he had worked out to the ultimate decimal of perfection. He had called on me for help, had Hartley, as to an equal. And I tell you, it made me proud. Only that stupendous brain of his could have worked out the ineffable equation. And yet only these hands of mine could have made the ship.

I shall always swagger a little through the eternities of hell because of that, gentlemen. He came to me, Hooker Hartley, and he said that never before in the world's history had there been two men such as he and I, and likely there would never be again. He said it was time the thing be done. To make a ship to fly beyond the orbit, and beyond the galaxy, if possible. And he said, "Can you, Helver?" And I said, "I can." And he said, "Will you, Helver?" And I said, "I will." And so I did.

With these hands . . .

I FIRST knew Hartley (said Gunderson) in college ten years ago. I knew him, but there was no reason he should know me. Even as a sophomore he was by far the most famous man in college, the leader in everything. Not merely because of his intellect—though even then, at nineteen years old, he was already confounding all the professors, and had started work on his epochal thesis destroying the speculations of Einstein—but also because of the other things which he represented—Groton prep school training, Newport family, wealth, breeding, generations of gentlemen behind him. A member of the best clubs, the quarterback and captain of the football team, handsome as a faun, with dark curly hair and the tilt of his head, his amazingly attractive smile, his elegant manner of wearing clothes. He knew art, wines, clothes, literature. The best restaurants to go to, how to order a dinner for a chorus girl and how to treat a servant.

He had everything, he knew everything, he was all the things that a man envies and wishes he might be. Picture me, on the other hand, clumsy, uncouth, badly dressed, friendless and poor. I was only Gunderson, the big dumb ugly Swede, taciturn and alone, who lived in a little attic room up on the fourth floor. A grind, working his way through by waiting on table, by tending furnaces, and by running a shoeshine stand for the rich men's sons. I was twenty-six, too, much older than the rest, for it had taken me time to save to go to college at all.

There was nothing to recommend me. I didn't even have an overcoat to my name. My only shoes, a pair of cheap work-brogans, had holes in their soles as big as a dollar, and I remember how the fellows used to laugh behind my back as I went clumping through the Yard from class to class with the mud and water squishing between my toes, like the sound of an elephant in muck, with the rain or snow falling on me, and my big red-knuckled hands clutching my books.

I wasn't even brilliant in studies, for while I might know the answers in most courses, still I had to plug for them, and if I did one or two things with atoms in the lab that made the professors lift their brows,

why, that was only a kind of trick, and no one could mistake me for an intellectual. I was just one of those queer shabby earnest nondescript bugs that crawl out from behind cracks in the plaster at a big college, that don't really belong at all, and never will, whose names nobody ever knows.

I was in my back room after supper one night when the door opened, and there was Hartley. I dropped everything and stood up. I didn't know he knew I was alive. I couldn't swallow. My brain was a blank at sight of him.

"Sit down," he said easily, dropping into a chair. He looked at me through cigarette smoke. "Gunderson," he said, "you and I are the greatest minds in our class, without a question, and in all college. I suspect, in fact, that we are the greatest minds in all the world. There should be a confraternity of genius. I think we should get acquainted."

"Mr. Hartley," I managed to say—I found it was all I could do to speak. "Mr. Hartley, do not make fun of me, please. I am not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with you by anyone, nor by you at all. And you know it very well. I have no intelligence at all. Or at the best, a very slow and heavy intelligence. I have only a cog-wheel brain. Beside you, I am only a mechanic."

His bright little faun's eyes danced in approval.

"I know," he said, nodding negligently. "I know. You are a grind. Still, there is something in you, Gunderson. Don't be too modest. The way you made that atom bounce like a jumping bean in lab the other day rather amused me. There's no one before who's ever done it. It was neat."

"Merely a pragmatic experiment in augmenting the molecular cohesion of air," I hastened to tell him, "to be used by planes in flight to build themselves a solid roadway under wing, and so obviate the greatest present handicap to air flight, which is the risk of falling. A mechanical invention purely, and of no theoretical scientific importance."

"A million dollars . . . you lucky dog!"

"THERE you are, damn it," said Hartley, nodding. "An invention for practical use. I can do rings around you theoretically, Gunderson. But you have a hard practicality in your mind that I lack. You can see the application, where I can see only the idea. You will be a millionaire someday, while after I've lost in the market what's left to me, I shan't know how to make an honest dime. You've got the money-making gift, Gunderson, as sure as fate, and I'm not such a fool as not to see it. So I say there's something in you. You ought to be developed. I think that I am going to take you under my wing."

"Under your wing, Mr. Hartley?" I said.

"Socially. Bring out your better points, my boy. Teach you the art of knowing how to live and spend the money when you make it. I'll bet you don't even know what a woman is. I'll bet you never even had a drink."

"Never," I said, "Mr. Hartley."

"Don't call me Mr. Hartley, call me Hooker, Helver," he said. "We're classmates, equals, aren't we, and we're friends? Do you know what I'm going to do with you tonight?" he said thoughtfully. "I'm going to take you around to Nivea Saltonstall's party, the biggest brawl of the season. Nivea, poor girl," he said. "There's no doubt she's a living beauty. I'd marry her myself, maybe, if I was the marry-

ing kind, or if she had the dough. But that's no dice. Her old man's Cabot Saltonstall, and he's down to his last dime. He's throwing this big party for Nivea to give her a chance to hook some guy with dough. But unfortunately, there are more beautiful gals on the market than guys with a hundred grand or so to buy them with. But it'll be a good party while it lasts. White tie, Helver. And do you have to wrap your hands around your wrists and your feet around your ankles like that?"

"I don't know how to dance, Mr. Hartley—Hooker," I told him.

"Just drape yourself around the punch-bowl and you won't have to. No one's going to want you to anyway, after one look at your feet."

"But I haven't got a dress suit," I said.

"I wish I could lend you one of mine, but you couldn't get your feet into the pants," he said. "You'll simply have to rent one, Helver, shoes to silk hat. You can do it for fifteen bucks at Moe's on Washington street, which keeps open all night."

"Fifteen dollars to rent a suit!" I said. "I haven't got fifteen cents."

"Hell," he said, "you've got a million."

And he pulled a letter out of his pocket and tossed it to me, a little excitedly. "I saw it in the mail rack in the transept," he said. "My old man is a director of the company. I saw the envelope and thought it must be for me, and opened it without bothering particularly with the address."

I fumbled with the envelope. For the moment my fingers were too thick to feel. I unfolded the letter, with the thick bond paper shaking and crackling in my hand. It was from Algamated Air, offering me a million cash and a royalty for the rights of the flying wheel which I had developed.

"A million!" I said. "A million! I can eat whenever I want to now! I can have a three-course dinner every day!"

"And you can go to Nivea's party tonight," said Hartley heartily. "Isn't it a fortunate coincidence that my determination to take you under my social wing happened to hit at the same time as this? I was just telephoning Nivea about you. Don't be bashful. She will like you, Helver, I'm sure."

I WENT with him to Nivea's party that night and met her. Within a week we were engaged, I don't know yet how it happened. It was such a dream. I remember Hartley drank with us to our betrothal the night it happened, and how smiling he looked and contented, and Nivea's cold proud eyes, over the rim of the wine-glass which she did not sip, drifting from him to me.

"Luck to us!" said Hartley. "Don't forget old friends, Nivea, my darling. A night beneath the moon. To you, Helver, millions, more and more."

Nivea's lips were pressed white at her wine-glass rim, and she looked from him to me and closed her eyes. Upon her shy tears, no doubt. Women, Hartley told me, are like that.

We were married in the spring, after I quit college to devote myself to business. I had conditions in history and had flunked philosophy, and even my chemistry wasn't what they were looking for, quite, so it was probably just as well. Being a married man, of course, I had to work hard, to make money to compensate for the things which she had given up.

Mr. Saltonstall, her father, kindly allowed me to advance him two hundred thousand dollars, with which he went to Paris. The climate of Paris, it seemed, had always agreed with him. And Nivea began the building of her first house. When she started buying the gold bathroom-fixtures she was very happy. It was wonderful to see her so happy, when I had time to see her. I was working night and day.

The next year Hartley's father lost his money, and I sold Roadless Skyways for five million and ten per cent of profits—it still pays the biggest dividends after the pocket televisor, which I developed in two years more and put on the market myself.

So I had been close to Hartley in his youth. I had basked humbly in the shadow of his greatness, and as he grew in fame he did not grow away from me. Nivea's home and mine was always his. It was my pride to erect the Hartley Hall of Science for him at Cambridge, the most completely equipped workshop that money could procure, with ten-thousand dollar rugs and books and paintings, and to endow the Hartley Professorship of Physics which he accepted. When he won the Nobel prize, five years out of college, Nivea and I went with him to Stockholm to receive it. He had even allowed me to aid in a humble way in the mechanical side of the problem which had won the prize for him. He was cited for it, as you recall, for developing a technic for filtering starlight rays through radium. I devised the apparatus for doing it one evening in my spare time, though the idea, of course, was his. All this time, of course, he was devoting himself to his major problem, to the working out of those abstruse and perfect formulae on the curve of space and the parabolic declivity of infinity which he had set as his life work, and while I was burying my nose in the grimy business of commercial invention, he was working on those equations reducing the cosmos to the nth root, which is the theoretical ultimate conceivable by the mind of man or God. He worked on his formulae and his equations ten years. . . .

III

The Dragon Boat

I REMEMBER the evening when he came to me with his final equations. I had been out in Chicago at Gunderson Production Five, my biggest plant, where we were turning out televisors on the belt, ironing out a few small kinks of mass production. I was very tired. Suddenly, because the night was hot and I felt lonely, and the making of money alone cannot altogether suffice for a man, and because I had not seen Nivea for two months, I decided to come home to her. I hopped my plane, took Skyway Route 3 all the way, with the road mostly clear of traffic and no red lights at that hour, and arrived home at the house on Long Island in an hour and a half.

A butler met me at the door. "Madame has a guest," he said, "and cannot be disturbed. If you would tell me what it is you wish . . ."

"You fool!" I said. "I am your master! And I don't like you, nor your smug smirking face!" And I pushed him away from me like a sack of wheat, and I went leaping up the great marble stairs three at a time, calling "Nivea! Nivea!" Below me the butler was bleating, "It's Gunderson!" as if I had come to burn the house down, or were some kind of crazy tiger.

I remember the shadowy fox-footed servants running in the halls, and I called to them, "Which is madam's room? Show me madam's room!" But they would not answer. It was a new house, new servants.

There were always new houses, there were always servants like weasels. But this night they seemed to me, perhaps because I was red-eyed and tired, more and more. And I was sick of new houses, I was sick of servants. I wanted Nivea. To kiss her hand, to throw myself on my knees before her. Nivea, my wife. My cold, proud, high-born wife.

"Nivea! Nivea! Show me her bedroom. I'm Gunderson, your master! Where is she? What's going on here?"

Then I saw one face that I knew. It was Nivea's personal maid, Jeanne. She was standing with her back to a door, with her arms stretched out in a cross on each side of her, and her mustache was trembling with her breathing and her lips were gray and her eyes were locked with terror.

"*Non! Non!*" she said. "*Mais non!* Madame is sick! M'sieu' must not go in!"

But I was in a frenzy of terror by then. I thought she might be dying. I took Jeanne by the shoulder and hurled her to the opposite wall. I

lunged against the door, and it was locked. I lunged again, and it burst in before me.

"Nivea!"

But it was Hartley in the room. He stared at me as I came bursting in. He had a highball glass in his hand, and his hand shook a little, spilling it down on the soft bulge of his waist, as he stared at me numbly.

"Helver!" he said heartily after a moment, while his face creased in a plump and happy smile. "Just the man I wanted to see!"

I slapped him on the back, and asked about his health. He seemed a little pale, and there was a clammy sweat upon his forehead. But he gulped his highball down, and the color came back into his cheeks.

"What are you doing here?" I said. "I wanted you to join me in Chicago. I thought you were in Cambridge, working. What's the news?"

"I've finished the formulae!" he said. "I couldn't wait to tell you. I thought you might come home."

"Clairvoyance!" I told him with warm admiration. "What a mind you have! Even I didn't have an idea that I'd be back until two hours ago. Perhaps I heard you calling me, old friend. Where's Nivea, have you seen her?"

"Oh, yes, at dinner."

"Where is she now?"

I LOOKED around the room. I saw some of her things upon the bureau. Some of her frocks at the edge of the closet door, which had been closed upon them. She had given him her own room, then. She must have moved to some other.

"Where is she?" I said.

But he didn't hear me, or at least paid no attention, he was so excited with his great success.

"The formulae, Helver!" he repeated. "I have finished them! Don't you want to look them over?"

"What formulae?" I said.

Stupidly, for the instant I had forgot. "What formulae?" I repeated, a little harshly, a little nerve-worn and tired.

He drew back from me. "You know, the space-time formulae that I have been working on for ten years! The thing that you built the Hall of Science for me for, and established the professorship for!"

"You've finished them at last?"

"I thought that would knock your eye out!" he said, with a pleased, quiet laugh. "Sit down, and look them over."

He poured me a stiff drink. I sat down and looked at them. My mind was tired. I was a little slow. I could not concentrate. Figures and graphs.

"What do they mean?" I said.

"They mean the way is ready!" he said. "For the great adventure, Helver!"

I drank the whisky, and the warmth seeped through my blood. I heard far off the singing of the spheres. The great blue voids called to me with a song of winds. Beyond the orbit, beyond the drift, beyond the galaxy! With my breast bared to the hurricane, and the spindrift in my face. Go on! Go on, to the ultimate shore! There are strange lands to be discovered, beyond the trackless sea! And my heart lifted in by breast, it sang, and I clenched and unclenched my hands.

"What a dream!" I said.

And Nivea was there, I don't know where she came from, but she was there on the floor at my feet. With her smooth golden hair about her shoulders, her supple slender form in her silk gown.

"Oh, Helver," she said, stroking my knee. "How proud I would be of you! Unknown shores to conquer!"

"The unknown sea!" I said.

I stroked her head. But there was no feeling in me. Neither a feeling of heat nor cold. My head was back, my heart roared in my breast, and there was a great calm within my spirit, I heard the calling of the spheres and the singing of the sea.

"Let's launch the dragon boat!" I said. "Why are we sitting here? Let's get it launched, and go! Do we want to rot and grow fat on the dull and deadly shore, when there is a wind

upon the sea? Do we want to live forever to stroke a woman's golden hair, and grub like slaves for the soft pap we eat? To rot and die while still alive! Let's launch the dragon boat, by God, and we'll put out to sea!"

I held my glass out, and Hartley filled it to the brim again.

I stood up. I took my hand from Nivea. The drink was strong and deep and good. "Let's go!" I said, crashing down the glass. "The unknown sea! The lightning wrack and the world's rim! Forever and forever. Beyond the gates of Hercules lies Italy! Beyond the going-down-of-the-sun sea lie golden sands and copper women, and things such as no man has felt or seen! Get out the dragon boat!" I said. "We're heading out to sea!"

And Nivea was laughing and choking and gasping. Laughing with pride for the glory of me.

"My Viking!" she said.

"Can you make the ship, Helver?" said Hartley, looking at me with his great luminous eyes.

"Can I make the ship?" I said.

"Do you dare do it?" said Hartley.

"Do I dare!" I said.

"What a man you are!" he said.

"What a man I am!" I said. "To the roof of the world, and back! Let's go!" I said. "Why are we rotting here, when we hear the calling of the sea?"

SO we worked together on the blueprints. Many months. Hartley remained installed in the house, to lend me any theoretical advice, as needed. I was at the shops much still, for I had a million men to feed, men and their families depending on me, and I could not leave things just at loose ends for my own selfish quest. But I gave every moment that I could to going over the plans with Hartley on Sundays and nights when I could get home.

There came this day when the ship was launched. I remember the day well. By the shore of the blue salt water, in the dawn, the great ship that I had made, all midnight blue and silver, standing in its cradle with its bow pointed to the faded stars.

"I christen thee Viking!" said Nivea. And I shook hands with Hartley, I kissed Nivea upon her cold proud cheek, I got into the hatchway of the ship. Oh, I was tired, tired. With the sleepless nights and the months of effort and the brain-shattering problems to be solved. But there was a singing in my heart, and I heard the roaring of the spheres.

"Have you forgotten anything, old man?" said Hartley.

"If I have, I have my hands."

"The wrench to tighten your inside lugs and batten down your hatch?"

"I have that, all right," I said.

"Oh, Helver!" said Nivea.

For the moment her cold controlled voice seemed to break. Perhaps she was remembering many things, the clumsy awkward youngster whom Hartley had brought to her party many years before, in his cheap rented dress suit, loutish and inarticulate, and his eyes which had lit with a humble and eternal flame at sight of her. Perhaps that boy upon his knees, kissing her hand and the hem of her skirt when she said she would be his wife.

And the inventions, the conquests he had brought her, eager to have her know about them first of all, hungry for her praise. The fame and money, the millions rolling in, the great houses he had given her, his clumsy hands fumbling with her hair. Perhaps she remembered that, and many things. The boy, the man, the work, the dreams, the years.

I shall never really know.

And for the moment her voice had seemed to break. But she got control of it. She smiled at me with a brave warm smile, the warmest from her that I had ever known. Oh, but I wished in that moment with a blind and frustrate longing that I had had sons by her, to grow to strong manhood during the years when I should be gone. To find them waiting on the shore when I came back, sons of her body, and of the Viking blood. To throw their arms about me and cling to me with pride, when I came back from the ultimate sea.

But that was not to be, and never in this life to be.

Still, her smile was on me warm, the warmest I had ever known. And I knew that nothing I had ever done before for her had so pleased her as this. Nor anything, in her eyes, was so becoming for me.

"Good luck! Don't forget to come back, Helver!" she said with her warm smile, almost gaily.

"Nor that," I said.

I could see her pride and happiness shining in her eyes, and her cold face seemed suddenly warm, intoxicated.

I closed the hatch, and tightened the lugs. I saw her through the thick glass porthole, clasping the arm of Hartley beneath the armpit, drawing him close to her, as I settled to the controls. The dawn sun shone on her smooth gold hair. Her eyes like the blue of inmost fire, the passionless fire of ice.

And the wind stirred Hartley's dark curly hair. It had grown a little thin, I saw. He was a little plump. The soft years had put it on him. In that moment, somehow, I do not know why it was, he looked no more to me than a fat and greasy worm, a man with pouchy eyes too young, a soft and squashy thing, with a great hollow skull in which no more than empty formulae rattled, and greedy eyes—Hartley, the greatest brain that ever lived! Oh, it was only the distortion of the thick glass which made him seem so, made seem malevolent and vile the smile that was painted on Nivea's cold face.

They smiled at me. His arm was around Nivea, supporting her, there on the lofty platform beside me, and she blew a kiss at me, and waved. She shouted something, but I could not hear.

There was no need of prolonging it. I pushed the electronizer, and I zoomed off. Beyond the orbit, beyond the drift, beyond the limits of the galaxy! Towards the universe's end, if possible! Towards the answer to the last question, and the sealed books of God.

Upon that unknown sea . . .

IV

Minus Time

THE rocket went off with a speed faster than light, as I had calculated (said Gunderson). I turned around in the take-off instant to wave farewell in my last glimpse of earth, at them on the high launching platform, the men upon the ground, the chimney stacks, the blue waters of the Sound. I turned, but before I had got my eyes focused, the whole earth was no more than a fading planet far down the sparkling steel-blue sky. I had shot from the atmosphere in half a breath. In five minutes I was beyond the moon. Her speed increased as she caught the cosmic rays, which began to beat upon her hull like hail. Mars went whipping past like a great red ball of fire.

In two hours I was shooting past the high-frozen mountains of Neptune, and the sun, far down within the wheeling sky at the center of the orbit, was no bigger than the largest star, blue as a diamond. In the bright blue light of outer space the other suns went hurtling past. We gathered speed.

The parsecs passed like clicking telegraph poles, and each one of them was nineteen billion miles. Before noon I was streaking upward past the Pleiades, and well upon my way. I curved my bow outward from the drift, past there, steering course 205. As night fell, Betelgeuse, hotter and bigger than ten thousand suns, was dropping like a pumpkin seed far down the sky. I set the controls, and slept. It was noon when I woke up. I had slept the clock around, and more, after those exhausting months of sleepless strain. A sleep so long and deep that I sang in every bone, and there as a great restfulness in my soul. Still the weather had grown stormy, and the rocket was pitching in great waves as she sped. My wristwatch was stopping, as though time itself was growing more motionless. There was not a star around. We had passed clear from the galaxy, the Milky Way was only a thin spot of

smoke far down the sky, and in the terrific emptiness of inter-galactic space a hurricane was blowing up.

The ion spray leaped against my porthole with a gleam like St. Elmo's fire. I saw the crests of great white billows rushing, and they were nebulae. The wind howled in the eternal void, I felt the battering and straining of my hull-plates, lightning went flashing past, and we were caught in the grip of a terrific current. I gripped the shivering controls with my great hands, and laughed. Ah, ah, the thin sails and the lightning wrack, and the dragon boat upon the trackless sea! And so, with controls locked in both fists and my eyes ahead, in the grip of an electronic current which went rushing toward a notch ahead, I shot toward the dimensionless point where space and time come to an end in nothingness, and reverse in minus quantity.

There is this about space and time (explained Gunderson, making a gesture carefully with his great heavy hands), that they are shaped like a pair of inverted cones, lying point to point. Like an hourglass, roughly, let us say, or like the torso of a woman in a cubistic dream. They are not illimitable and all plus, as the astronomers think, with distance piled on distance, and time on time. Nor are they curved, like the inside of an egg, returning on themselves in a parabola, according to the concept of the mathematicians.

In whatever direction a man goes, they narrow to a point at the end of the cone, and beyond that there is an inverted cone of minus space and minus time, and the stars rotate from east to west, and time moves backward from its end to its beginning, and all vacuums are solid, and there is a dark light. You understand. That is the secret of eternity. Once explained, it is quite obvious, and even a child could grasp it. Whereas, that is, upon this earth, within this cone of plus and forward, of west-to-east and outside-out, time moves forward from the past into the future, and dimensions move outward from the center into the infinite, beyond the end of the cone it is all just the other way. That is the reason for the stars which seem millions of light-years away.

They are old and are going backward to their beginnings, and by the measure of their seeming distance they are near. It is an obvious and a simple thing, yet there is no man who has understood this before me. I passed this point, I shot forward into minus space and minus time. The speed went out of my ship with geometric deceleration, in ratio as it had gathered. I landed on the other earth, which is called Threa.

THERE is only one other earth (said Gunderson), and from here to there is the distance from plus to minus, and no more. It is an earth that once was old, and now is growing young. The people there are like frozen flame. There I met Mara.

(He paused, Gunderson.) She was like nothing ever dreamed of, a soul of light, a body of fire. Growing younger and lovelier hour by hour. What is there to say of her that you could understand? All that men upon this earth do not yet know. Behind her the million years of the race's future, of wisdom, beauty, and love. Ahead of her the simplicity, the loveliness of the child. With her I dreamed the golden years away.

With her (he said), with Mara, and with the seven strong sons she bore me! Those sons which upon this earth I shall never have. I can see them yet, I can feel their arms about my neck, I can hear their valiant young voices shouting and laughing even now in my ear, running about at their play—Loar, Lrac, Cire, Feil, Zral, Rednug, and Ollor, my sons! My strong Viking sons of flame, upon that earth, with Mara! I can hear them calling yet! The golden years going backward into youth! Life, love, peace, strength, and beauty! Threa, the other earth! Beyond the cone. Within the reverse of the future. Ah, Mara! I lived with her fourteen years on Threa. My eldest son

was just thirteen, the littlest one was toddling at my knee.

But you would not understand. What is there to say? One day she took me with her to look through the telescope, which looks into the future, which is their past. I turned it on the earth. I saw Nivea in the arms of Hartley, beside the cradle where their youngest child lay. I got into my ship, and I came back. . . .

I shot back through minus space and minus time, and the years I had spent had been less than nothing, and through the telescope which I had mounted on my bow I watched the years upon the earth roll back like a swift film, as I sped toward it, swifter than light.

I was entering the galaxy when I saw them laughing, drinking in the bedchamber, and it was but the morning of tomorrow. I was passing the Pleiades when I saw them at the bedroom door, and—as I sped toward them—going backward from it, and backward outward from the house, and it was but the evening of today. I was making the swift turn into the drift, and they were at dinner together, saluting each other over their highballs' rims with hot and fusing eyes.

And as I shot onward, through the hours, they went backward, backward, back through the afternoon and back through lunch, and back into the morning. And then there was dawn light around me, and the small blue sun was there ahead, and I was passing past Neptune, and I was in the orbit once again. And they were back there by the Sound's shore, they were back there on the high platform beside the great empty cradle of my rocket, still watching, clasped in each other's arms, with their eyes focused on me while I shot off into space. Still watching, with the greed and hope and old evil treacherous lust within their faces, she with her warm look beside him that had never warmed for me, he with his sly fat lips and greasy, greedy eyes. They were there, watching me far off, and in an instant more the wind of my departure was blowing in their faces, and they were bent with their arms across their eyes.

I landed, and they were standing there, just waving me goodbye through the porthole, and Nivea shouting some word that I could not hear. And the golden, golden years had rolled backward and away, and plus and minus together added had become a sum of nothingness.

I TOOK the wrench and undid the hatch's lugs, and I rose up through the hatch door, tired, tired. . . .

"Don't forget to come back, Helver, darling!" said Nivea.

But there was a blank unearthly terror in her eyes, as if she had suddenly awakened from a dream that had rolled away.

"I haven't," I said, "my darling."

"You haven't forgotten your wrench, have you, old man?" said Hartley.

"Nor that!" I said.

And his face, too, as fixed with terror, as if he, too, had dreamed a dream.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said.

I got out upon the platform. With my red, red eyes and my great hands. Oh, she was beginning to moan softly with terror then, deep in her white throat. And Hartley's knees were like jelly beneath him, and his breath was wheezing in his windpipe, and the veins throbbed on his great smooth thin-haired skull, and the dawn wind blew cold, and high up there, and his face was a green and moldy paste. The whole scene was some insanity of anger I had dreamed in that other world. . . .

"I've been," I said. "I came back."

"Don't! Don't!" he screamed. "In God's name, Helver!"

He backed toward the edge of the high platform, with his arms swinging and the terror in his face. But I lifted the wrench in my great hand, and I crushed in his eggshell skull with it. I crushed it in, like rotten pulp, the greatest brain that ever lived, with one great swinging blow upon it, and he was dead with the

awful horror on his face before he crashed backward through the platform railing and fell to the ground far, far below.

And Nivea was screaming, she was screaming, upon her knees there at my feet. She had always loved me, she was screaming to me. She would bear me sons, she would forever love me, she would be always true. But I strangled her with my two hands, and with her golden hair about her soft white throat.

What day is this? May 7th, 1948? Yes, yes, that is right. The golden years that have rolled away! It is six o'clock in the morning. That is Dr. Hooker Hartley, the eminent physicist, gentlemen, lying there. That is Nivea, my wife. . . .

(He paused, Gunderson, rubbing his red eyes with his hands.

"Take him away!" said the police sergeant grimly. "He is utterly insane!"

But Gunderson did not hear the grim-faced trooper in blue. Still in his ears was the great roaring of the spheres. He was still thinking of the woman of flame.)

V

Report of Sergeant J. K. Billings, Flying Troop G, Connecticut State Police, May 7th, 1948:

WHILE flying on traffic patrol Skyway 1A, between Bridgeport and Norwalk, at altitude 1000 feet, today at six a.m., Sergeant Billings observed a large crowd of several hundred men on the ground in front of the Gunderson Plant, Engineering Three, on the shore between Bridgeport and Fairfield, and a high tower-like structure built of new planking on which there rested, in a cradle, a large torpedo-shaped device of blue and silver.

Looking down, Billings observed three figures, two men and a woman, on a platform at the top of the tower beside the torpedo-shaped device, which apparently was undergoing some kind of a christening ceremony. As Billings cut his skyway pavement from beneath him and spiraled down, he saw one of the men get into the hatchway of the torpedo, and close down the lid.

A cloud passed over the sun in that instant. Or at least for the instant, as near as Billings can describe it, he was struck with an attack of vertigo, and a momentary lapse of the time sense. He had a feeling as if a streak of gray and invisible lightning had shot back his bow, up from the earth, and in the same instant as if it had shot back again.

He wishes to mention this in reference to his request for sick leave with pay which has lain untouched on the lieutenant's desk for the past month, as proof that the complaint of overwork which he therein respectfully alleges was not just a stall, but medically sound and legitimate, and some day he will faint in the air maybe in spite of looking so healthy, unless he is allowed said leave, and then where would he be?

Anyway, this time fortunately Billings' attack of vertigo was of short duration, lasting approximately one hundredth of a second, as near as he could estimate, or about the time of two lightning streaks. He shook his head, and his vision cleared. Looking down, he saw the man who had climbed into the torpedo climbing out of it again, with a wrench in his hand, and suddenly attack the other man upon the platform. Forcing said victim of his assault to the edge of the platform, he struck him on the head with violent force, causing said victim to fall off. Immediately he attacked the woman, who was fighting and screaming for her life.

The crowd of mechanics were swarming up the stairs to the platform. Billings spiraled down to a landing. He mounted to the platform, and found the mechanics already there surrounding the attacker.

This man identified himself, and was identified by them, as Helver Gunderson, the millionaire inventor. Gunderson was crouched on the floor of the platform beside the body of the woman, who was identified as his wife, and at Billings' demand he

made a long and rambling statement in which there was no sense, except a confession that he had attacked and killed Dr. Hooker Hartley and likewise said wife of his.

To an inquiry as to whether he regretted his act he did not reply. Billings took Gunderson into custody with the help of a squad of troopers who had been summoned.

FROM various witnesses, whose names are appended, Billings obtained the following general information. That Mr. Gunderson had shown some signs of mental strain and aberration for the past number of months, working on the production of a device whose purpose they did not know, and which he kept to himself with more than usual taciturnity. That this morning Dr. Hartley, who had been summoned by Mr. Gunderson, together with Mrs. Gunderson, to come down to the plant, as the work was finished, informed various of the employees privately that Gunderson had delusions that he had made a space-rocket, and was afraid of his sanity.

He was merely going through with it, said Dr. Hartley, to humor Gunderson.

Moreover, while on the platform at the purported launching of the ship Dr. Hartley was seen to make various gestures behind Gunderson's back whenever he had the opportunity, such as tapping his skull, spinning his hand around beside his ear, winking to the men below, and so on, emphasizing his sad conviction that Gunderson was insane. The men said that Mrs. Gunderson, likewise, seemed convinced of her husband's insanity, and was laughing constantly and hysterically almost all through the performance. However, she did not care for her husband, having been in love with Hartley for many years.

"And he couldn't have been so dumb as not to know it himself, either, the old Swede," said J. Koliawsky, superintendent of construction, whose address for further questioning is appended. "He just pulled this bug act to get away with it. There wasn't anything ever to that machine, and he knew it. Lots of times while we've been working on it I've heard him stop and chuckle to himself, 'The greatest brain that ever lived!' and things like that."

The question as to whether Gunderson deliberately plotted and carefully planned an alibi of insanity, preliminary to murdering Dr. Hartley and Mrs. Gunderson, as Koliawsky intimates, is for the courts to determine.

It is the opinion of Sergeant Billings, however, that he is as bughouse as they come. He was whimpering and weeping for someone called Mara when we took him away, and talking about his sons, when the men tell me he is childless, and no one to inherit all his money.

Billings set a guard over the rocket before taking Gunderson away. The men insisted that they had hauled it out of the shop only this dawn, new and fresh with paint. But they must be wrong in that, since its paint, Billings observed, had an old weathered look as if it had been exposed to the elements for many years, and there were streaks upon it of a grayish powder which burned Billings when he touched them.

When Gunderson was asked as to what they were, in the hope that he might be induced to make some final and more coherent statement, he only said that they were star dust, and the spume of the Milky Way. Billings therefore reiterates his belief, as an officer of old experience, that Gunderson is crazy.

In view of the attack of vertigo and the simultaneous gray lightning flashes going and coming which Billings was subjected to, he respectfully repeats his request for leave, for otherwise he feels that some of the rambling and incoherent things which Gunderson told to him this morning might start him off, too, looking for this land called Threa. . . .

Illusion

by Murray Leinster

Almost anything can happen to a sentimental young kaydet on a small-town Saturday night . . .

BUD edged his way through the Saturday-night crowd toward Bagley's, where Honey was a waitress. His cadet uniform was stiffly, starchily pressed and he was shaved nearly to the raw. But he was almost nineteen, and he was a cadet captain with a special rating in bayonet, so his manner was assured and offhand and very mature.

The street was crowded. It was hot, and sultry, and the incandescent-bulb street-lamps made things seem hotter still. Everybody was in town with his best girl tonight. Farmers and mill-hands, town boys and girls. Two or three girls spoke to Bud, and he saw a couple of fellows from School in uniforms like his own; visored cap, blue coat, and gray pants with wide stripes down the seams. Bud felt a pleasant sort of tingling all over him. He was going to Bagley's, and he'd sit there and drink a coke now and then, and he'd look at Honey. Maybe she'd find time to talk to him a minute or two.

Bagley's neon sign overhead. The screen doors. He pushed his way in. Honey, with a tray in her hand, serving a couple of men in one of the booths. Nobody else in here tonight.

Mr. Bagley waddled toward the back and went out of sight. Bud took a seat and stretched out his legs. One of the men in the booth was saying something to Honey. She hadn't seen Bud come in.

He looked at her reverently. Her hair was just exactly the color of honey mixed with gold-dust. She knew how to put on make-up, and she had a swell figure, and she was absolutely the best-looking girl in town. She came from somewhere up North, Bud knew, and she was probably a year or so older than he was, but Bud was crazy about Honey, even if he hadn't admitted it to anybody.

It was queer how satisfying it was just to look at her. Sometimes it seemed funny even to him, being hipped this way about a girl he'd never even had a date with. But when he'd rather just sit and look at her

He didn't see why Honey should pretend she didn't know him

than have a date with anybody else—why—it showed that she meant plenty to him.

HE SCRAPED his feet on the floor. Honey turned her head. Bud nodded offhandedly. He didn't see either of the men in the booth because he was looking at Honey. Her eyes were oddly wide, tonight. Her mouth looked a bit queer, too. And she didn't show any sign of recognizing him. But she knew him. Sometimes she even let him talk to her. Never said much. Just listened. But she knew him.

One of the men said something to Honey. She came over to Bud and he smiled up at her and said: "Hello."

She wiped off the table-top. Nearer, he saw that she was awfully white. Her hand shook. She said:

"Don't look surprised, but—when you've had your coke, you go on out. You hear me."

Her voice was queer, too. Then she nodded to him as if he'd said, "Coke" just as usual, and she went back around the fountain and mixed it for him. She brought him the glass and said in the same queer voice, half under her breath:

"I mean it. Go on out and don't come back tonight."

She moistened her lips as if they were dry. She turned away and went back to the two men in the booth. Her face was pale. Her eyes were funny and wide and—and scared.

Bud suddenly felt all his muscles tense. If Honey was scared—! But he was almost nineteen and a cadet captain. He'd learned not to jump at conclusions. It did look as if Honey was scared. But she couldn't be. Not in here! And if he acted ridiculous—

He sipped his drink, tingling all over. He became aware of an odd, waiting atmosphere in Bagley's. Honey stayed by the two men in the booth. Bud saw her throat working convulsively.

Suddenly one of the two men got up and pushed his way past Honey. He went to the back of the place, out where Mr. Bagley had gone. Mr. Bagley grunted, invisibly. He sounded startled. Then a bottle broke, out of sight. Honey's face went paler yet. The man who'd gone out back came in again, putting something in his pocket. He nodded to the other man. Honey moistened her lips. The man who'd gone out walked briskly up to Bud.

"My friend an' me," he said in a voice that Bud found needlessly sardonic, "we bought this place an' we're closin' up for the night. You got to clear out."

Honey's features weren't twisted, but she looked terrified. She stayed by the booth as if she'd been chained there. Bud looked at her, and then deliberately up at the man who'd spoken to him.

"I'm not through my drink," he said, "and this's still a public place, isn't it?"

He kept his voice quiet.

He was trying to figure out what he ought to do. There was something funny going on, but even being almost nineteen and a cadet captain and having a special rating in bayonet doesn't give you second sight so you can size up a thing like this in a second.

"We bought it," said the sardonic man, "an' it's private now. Get out before I throw you out."

Bud rose languidly. He saw Honey's throat work. There were people just outside the door. Crowds of people.

"That being the case," said Bud, his heart pumping oddly, "did you hurt Mr. Bagley much?"

"Oh!" said the sardonic voice. "A wise guy, huh?"

"Yeah," said Bud. "Wise that there's something plenty fishy going on. Okay! I'll go out—"

"I wouldn't!" said the sardonic man. He swung his body a little, so that nobody could see his right hand through the plate-glass windows. His hand lifted from his pocket. There was something squat and ugly and metallic in it. It bore ominously upon Bud. "I changed my mind! Stick around!"

Bud felt his throat tighten.

THE other man came suddenly out of the booth. He was shorter than the first man. His face was wiped clean of all expression, but he moved with a smooth swiftness.

"Close up, Nick," said the first man, hardly. "I'll lead this guy to the back. He's a wise guy, he is!"

The short man closed the front door and shot the bolts. He ran his eyes around the walls. The light switches. He snapped them off. Bagley's was suddenly a place of deep shadow, lighted mainly from the street. But a whitish glow showed through the frosted-glass partition that went across the back.

"Move!" commanded the man with the gun. It was still in his pocket, but it was trained on Bud. "Through that door. An' don't try any tricks."

Honey's eyes were staring, panicky. But she was beautiful to look at. Maybe, if Bud got a chance to start something that'd give her a show to slip away. The thought steadied him. The gun muzzle prodded him. He went through to the back part of Bagley's. Cases of bottled soft drinks. Packing-boxes of candy, and glass jars of soda-syrup, and this and that. But the most startling thing in the back was Mr. Bagley. He lay on the floor with his mouth open and a slow trickle of blood oozing from a bruise on his forehead. One of his feet was in an overturned wastebasket full of circulars and scrap-paper.

Fingers felt Bud's pockets for weapons. He felt queer and nightmarish, but suddenly desperately desirous of seeing that Honey was safe. These men were tough ones. They'd blackjacked Mr. Bagley and undoubtedly robbed him. They'd clean out the store. But Honey—

She said in a clipped tone:

"You guys, listen! He's just a fool kid. Tap him out an' leave him here with Bagley. He's got nothin' to do with me or Mose."

The hard-faced man said sardonically:

"Yeah? If you're that anxious about him, maybe he can make you listen to reason."

"He don't mean a thing to me!" said Honey in sudden savagery, "but Mose'll kill you when he gets out! An' I swear I ain't got what you want!"

"If you ain't," said the sardonic man, "you'll wish you did. But you got it. He said so."

"That's a lie!" cried Honey fiercely.

But Bud saw that her face was chalky underneath the makeup. "Look here," said Bud rather unsteadily, "you guys—"

"Fella," said the sardonic man with ghastly geniality, "you keep y'mouth shut from now on. Or else."

The smooth man opened the back door. He motioned to Honey. Her throat worked. She stepped stiffly through the door. The gun muzzle prodded Bud again. He followed. It was an alley, dark and malodorous. Cobbles underfoot. Fifteen—twenty feet away there was a car parked. No lights, but it looked big and fast.

"I'm drivin'," said the smooth man tonelessly. "Watch 'em. She'd better sit by me."

The feeling of nightmarishness grew more intense. Bud saw Honey move stiffly forward. She got into the front seat. She had no faintest chance to try to escape. Nor did Bud.

THE motor purred powerfully under its hood, and the car slid quietly ahead and out of the alley. Bud made a desperate oath within himself. He was chalk-white too, but if he couldn't help Honey, at least he'd make them kill him before they could harm her.

The car turned and sped smoothly and swiftly away from Main Street. Four blocks, and it was on the avenue leading toward the mountains. School was only ten blocks back. Main Street was nearer than that, with a double line of parked cars, and everybody and his best girl getting sodas, and beers, and going into the movies and coming out, and crowding the narrow sidewalks and filling the air with the sound of footsteps on concrete and babbling of voices. Here there was a big car with a potent

purring underneath its hood, sweeping down the tree-shaded Avenue and making the hot and sultry night air into a cool and refreshing breeze by its motion. And there was a man with an expressionless face, driving, and a sardonic man with a revolver in his hand, and Honey with her eyes approaching horror—and Bud sitting stiffly erect with a desperation that was near to madness filling him. Because of Honey, of course. He was crazy about Honey.

They swept out of town and the road went up, and down, and up again, curving and turning the while.

Honey spoke shrilly, but as if through stiffened lips.

"I tell you, I ain't got it! Mose used all of it tryin' to beat the case! He —didn't want to be leavin' me."

Bud saw her gulp twice.

"Sure!" said the sardonic man, jovially. "Sure! Only we don't believe it, because I was in stir with Mose. I got out last month. We celled together. An' Mose got confidential. See?"

Bud found his throat dry. He said huskily:

"Look here. I don't know what all this is about—"

"No?" asked the sardonic man genially. "Too bad! Your girl friend, fella, used to be the girl friend of a fella named Mose. Mose is in stir. In jail, if that's clearer. And Mose had talent. He went to jail for a fifty-grand stickup, an' nobody's ever found the money. But when Mose an' me celled together, he told me his girl friend—who's your girl friend now—had that money. So my friend an' me, we hunted up your girl friend an' you, an' you an' she are goin' to pass over that stuff or else he and I—"

There appeared a flaring, yellow, smoky flame, low down upon the ground. It illuminated a yellow sign.

ROAD UNDER CONSTRUCTION.
TRAVEL AT YOUR OWN RISK

Beyond it, vague and monstrous in the headlight rays, there was an area of raw red clay with road-machinery parked for the night. There was no watchman, but road-scrapers and surfacers do not tempt automotive thieves. There was, however, a small padlocked toolshed. But so incredible was the local trust in honesty that a belated shovel leaned against its door.

The smooth man slowed and slid the big car into first. The sardonic man said:

"Hold it, Nick. Let's make this neat!"

The smooth man stopped. And the sardonic man said genially:

"Fella, we might need that shovel. You go get it. An' if you try to duck, I'll drill you. Get it an' bring it here."

Bud said with an effort: "You mean —steal the shovel for you?"

"Yeah. Sure! Steal the shovel for me. You're gettin' bright. Steal. Yeah!"

Honey said through stiff lips: "He figures he'll drill you, kid. He will."

"No," said the sardonic man. "Not unless he tries to duck. I like to do things neat. A shovel'll come in handy. An' he can work it. I hate to work a shovel."

BUD got stiffly out of the car. He went stiffly over to the toolshed. The headlights of the car glared upon him, upon his cadet uniform—even upon splashes of red mud on his shoes from crossing to the shed. He stood numbly for an instant with the shovel in his hand. It felt oddly similar to something he was accustomed to handle, but Bud's brain was not functioning very clearly yet.

From the darkness of the car behind the headlights, Honey's voice came hoarsely: "If you think you can make it, kid—duck!"

Then Bud came out of his queer numbness. Blood flowed through his veins again. And he saw a chance—a faint chance—of helping Honey.

He went back to the car and climbed in. Absurdly, he wiped his feet on the running-board before he entered. He sat down in the back seat again, holding the shovel in an instinctive approximation to the way

he would have held a rifle, grounded on its butt. And now his heart was pumping loudly and irregularly, so loudly and so irregularly that they should have heard it.

"I thought maybe y'hadda idea," said the sardonic man, "of hittin' me on the head when y'came back. But y'pretty tame, fella. Pretty tame!"

The car lurched and bumped in low gear. Here was a place where the highway had once made an inexplicable detour from the line, and a straight cut-off was in course of construction. The smooth man had found this place before. He turned, now, and the car labored to and upon the to-be-abandoned patch of roadway. It dived into thick woods. It stopped.

"Here we are. All private." He looked at Honey. "Goin' to talk, or do we argue?"

Honey said hoarsely: "I'm not crossin' Mose! No matter what you do!"

"We' goin' to argue, then. We' goin' to have that stuff. What y'goin' to do with the kid? He ain't any good to work on her with."

The sardonic man nudged Bud with his gun muzzle. "Get out, fella. An' bring the shovel."

Bud's heart was near to bursting. He was scared, yes. Horribly scared, for fear he wouldn't get a chance to do the one thing that meant the ghost of a show for Honey. But he was almost nineteen, and a cadet captain, and he had a special rating in bayonet. It was fear for Honey that hurt. He was crazy about Honey.

The sardonic man waved him toward the woods. "I thought y'might be useful," he observed. "I was wrong. But y'could be plenty inconvenient afterwards. So you' gonna dig a hole. It don't need to be deep, but it's gotta be fast. Dig!"

Bud, his heart choking him, wielded the shovel. He dug. Two. Three. Half a dozen shovels. The sardonic man spat.

"Huh!" he said distastefully, "Diggin' a hole to get planted in, an' too yella to try to swing on me with th' shovel!"

Bud's breath whistled through his teeth. He wasn't yellow. But a cadet captain with a special rating in bayonet knows better than to swing a shovel, anyhow. Swinging a shovel—or a rifle—is silly. It wastes time. Three-quarters of a second at least, when such things count. The way to do it, if you're too close for a long point, is to step in still closer and strike up, not down, with the butt and for the chin.

"Let's have it, sister"

Then your butt—or shovel-blade—is already in position for a smash to the face, and then you slash down with the barrel or the shovel-handle as the case may be. Bud was trying to get a reserve-officer's commission when he graduated, and he had a special rating in bayonet.

HE USED it. Utterly without warning, the shovel-blade smashed up. It hit the sardonic man's gun on the way, and went on to graze his chin. And then—the whole thing didn't take a quarter of a second, because Bud was trained for it—the blade smashed horribly home just as a rifle-butt should do. It bit into something that gritted.

There was a horrible noise, not human at all. The shovel-handle came slashing down in the strictly regulation fashion, according to the manual of bayonet combat. It was a short point again, and ready. But the sardonic man wasn't thinking of fighting any more. Only the smooth man had heard the noise, and he couldn't

see. There was a thud over by the car. He'd vaulted to the ground. He came running, his gun out. He moved fast. But Bud was training for a reserve-officer's commission, and he was carrying out regulation maneuvers.

He plunged forward snarling, as regulations require. The smooth man couldn't grasp the situation in the third of a second before Bud reached him with a ferocious long point. The shovel-handle hit him in the throat with all of Bud's weight behind it. It didn't pierce, because it wasn't a bayonet, but there was no need for a short-point jab, or the up-swing of the butt that takes a man under the chin, or the butt-smash in his face. No chance for any other bayonet-combat maneuver at all, because the smooth man twisted slackly off the rounded end of the shovel-handle and fell down, and Bud went plunging on to the car.

He leaned in, and he heard the sardonic man making funny strangled noises as Bud flicked on the switch.

The car roared thunderously as it streaked away. It skidded wildly when they hit the red mud where the cut-off joined in again. But Bud clawed it out onto the hard surface beyond and it went away from there. His eyes were wide and staring, and his breath came in a series of wheezing gasps, and he wanted to be sick and to weep and he was filled with an incredible exultation all at once. The result was that he drove like a lunatic until Honey pulled at his arm and cried out in his ear.

Then he braked so hard that the car skidded from side to side of the road, and stopped short with a jerk, and suddenly he knew that Honey was safe, and that he was crazy about Honey, and the next thing he knew he was kissing her hysterically and telling her that she was safe, and kissing her quite hysterically again. All of which was because, though he was a cadet captain and had a special rating in bayonet, he was just almost nineteen.

He suddenly realized that she wasn't kissing back. He stopped abruptly. He panted, half-sobbing:

"I—I'm sorry, Honey. I was—kind of excited. I'm—sorry. I—I'll take you home now."

He started the car again, but his hands and his whole body shook as he drove. And Honey shivered, too. She said:

"I got to pack, now. I got forty grand of Mose's money waitin' for him to get out of stir. If *those* fellas found me, there's others. I got to get away quick!"

Bud swallowed. The car wabbled in the road as he asked desperately:

"But, Honey—they were lying, weren't they?"

Honey stared at him. There were tear-streaks on his face. She could see them in the reflected headlight glow.

"No. It's true," she said hardly. "Mose's my man an' I'm stickin' to him. What's the difference?"

Bud caught his breath. The car wabbled more.

"A—a lot," said Bud miserably. "I—I love you." He drove for a space in stricken silence. Then he said carefully, though with a lump in his throat: "That don't mean that I—blame you, or anything. I—I'll take you home."

Honey regarded him strangely for a moment. She asked him, almost humbly, if he'd do something else for her. He would. He drove her home. He waited for her, his face very pale, during the five or ten minutes she needed to pack her belongings. She'd be taking the midnight bus away, but she wouldn't take it in town. She'd take it at the bus-terminal in the next town, ten miles away.

SHE came out and jerkily instructed him in the exact technic of abandoning this car, while he drove her toward the terminal. The car was bound to be a stolen one and Bud didn't want to be mixed up with it. The smooth man and the sardonic one, if and when they got themselves fixed up, wouldn't hang around. They'd know she'd skipped, and there was Mr. Bagley to identify them and bring charges.

Bud drove Honey toward her destination, his heart like lead but paradoxically thumping in his throat. Then Honey asked him to park in a side road for a minute or two. He did.

"You came through for me," she said. "They d ha' cut me up in little pieces if I didn't tell 'em where to get Mose's coin. An' they'd ha' killed me afterward anyways, so's I couldn't tell Mose who it was. So I owe you something. Mose won't mind. Could you use a grand?"

Bud shook his head. The lump in his throat tried to stifle him. He was very far removed in manner, just then, from the offhand and very mature cadet captain who'd gone down to Bagley's only an hour or so ago.

"I—don't want any pay," he said.

"You could buy a car," said Honey, "an' take girls out an' have a swell time. An' it's just as honest money as a lot of other coin. Mose stole it, sure! But lots of others—"

"I—don't want money," said Bud unsteadily. There was the burning taste of tears in his throat. "I've—loved you ever since I saw you. I'd have died for you and—been glad—"

He swallowed. Honey bent close and looked in his face. Bud knew that this was the last time he would ever, ever see her. And she was very beautiful. He tried to smile at her, gallantly, as such a moment demanded. But it didn't work. And she didn't smile back. "All right, then," said Honey, unsmiling.

"All right—what?" asked Bud, uncertainly.

"Anything you like," said Honey tonelessly. "You earned anything you want to ask. Mose'd kill me, but I play fair with him an' I'll play fair with you."

"But—"

"The way you were kissin' me just now," said Honey fiercely, "an' sayin' you love me. I know what you want, an' I' never two-timed Mose before, but Mose'd never have me again if it wasn't for you. So I—"

Bud put out his hand. In a queer and most inappropriate attempt at jauntiness, he flicked on the switch and stepped on the starter. He backed out to the main road and drove Honey to the bus-terminal. He helped her out there. And then, while she looked at him queerly, he said in an offhand way:

"Honey, I've had a swell time, but it's getting late. I'll get on back to barracks. G'night."

He drove back to town, though occasionally as he drove he made strange, small, inarticulate sounds. He abandoned the car as Honey had instructed him to, and he walked back to school.

But when he got up to his room he closed the door and locked it swiftly. And then, quite suddenly, with his features twisting like those of a small boy, he lay down on his bed and pulled his pillow desperately over his face. Bud was almost nineteen and a cadet captain, but with his head buried under the pillow he blubbered. He cried heartbrokenly, stifling the sounds he could not prevent. You see, he'd been crazy about Honey.

If you want to catch a mermaid or a million, just—

Whistle Thrice

AT three o'clock Jones had lunch. After that he lounged in the shade, vaguely wondering when mosquito-time would begin, watching the tree shadows on the farther margin of the lake with the white feet of the birches stepping out before the rest, and dimly concerned as to whether he would go out in the boat or simply remain where he was and do some bait-casting from the rocky point. This mild quandary put him to sleep; when he wakened, he found himself in a moment of mysterious and silent beauty. No whisper came from the trees; not a frog croaked; and never a ripple stirred on the golden lake.

Jones, sitting up, felt his spirit journeying deep into this moment of delight and far from the vision of Gorilla Smith, the head of his firm, whose voice had entered the dream of Jones and brought with it all the hot uproar of Manhattan's summer.

A fisherman loves silence but he always uses it. Jones, as he felt the sunset quiet sifting down around him, automatically reached for his rod. A small island lay like an ornament of jade on the golden breast of the lake, and at the tip of the island appeared a soft design of lily pads exactly such as small-mouth bass delight in. Jones cast toward it but his eagerness made him overshoot the mark, bearing a little to the left, so that the bait splashed just past the end of the island.

What followed brought him startled to his feet. A tremendous tension set the line quivering; there was a great thrashing of water; and then a girl's voice cried:

"Cut the line! You've caught me by the hair!"

But Jones kept the rod bent with the power of his strong wrist. He began to reel in, and something came around the end of the island, still striking the water into a smother, a wavering brightness just beneath the surface of the lake. At a point where

by Max Brand

rushes lifted well above the lip of the water and made a semi-transparent screen, the figure was stayed.

"This is a private lake," said Jones to the invisible figure. "What are you doing here?"

"Curse the lake! There's not much privacy about it," answered the voice. "How long have you been over there, peeping?"

"I've just waked up," said Jones. "Stop trying to break my line."

THE efforts ended with an exclamation. "I've cut my hand on that infernal leader!" she cried. "Pay out some slack and let me get back to my island, will you?"

"*Your* island?" said Jones. "What are you? A mermaid or a siren or what?"

"No matter what I am, I've got to get out of here," she told him.

"You're a trespasser," said Jones. "Come on in and we'll talk it over."

"I tell you, I can't be seen!"

"You're not as invisible as all that," said Jones. "I had a glimpse."

"What?" cried a voice of agony.

"Dimly—under the water," said Jones. "Haven't you anything on at all?"

"What do mermaids and sirens generally have on?" she demanded with anger.

"Naturally," said Jones.

"Are you going to pay out some slack?" she asked. "Are you going to let me out of this?"

"This is the only luck I've had for years," said Jones. "Why should I let go of it?"

"Do you mean, actually . . . ?" she said.

"I actually do," said Jones.

"Exactly what sort of luck do you have in mind?" she asked.

"You can find it in a lot of the old books," said Jones. "The fisherman who catches a water-spirit always gets his wish."

There was a pause.

"What wish?" asked the voice behind the rushes.

"By your voice, you're a siren," said Jones. "And a first-rate siren ought to be able to grant quite a wish while she's about it."

"I'm not the kind of a siren you have in mind," said she. "When sailors hear my song, it makes them homesick, and they go away."

"You've never sung to my kind of sailor before," said Jones. "I intend to stay. I like your sort of music. What are you paying if I let you go?"

"Will you tell me in two words what you're driving at?" asked the siren. "What do you want?"

"I only want to be made an emperor, or something like that," said Jones.

"Oh, that's quite simple," said the siren.

"What can you make me emperor of?" asked Jones.

"Whatever you please. Russia, for instance," she told him.

"Russia isn't an empire any more," said Jones.

"That's true. I forgot," said the siren.

"I don't suppose you keep in touch with history," he replied.

"Ever know a siren that did?" she asked.

"True," said Jones. "But what other empire have you in mind?"

"How about Ethiopia?" she asked.

"It would fit me," said Jones, "like old shoes."

"It's yours then," said the siren, "unless I think of something better in the meantime. . . . Will you pay out some slack now?"

"Certainly," said the emperor, and let the line run.

The gold had vanished from the lake, by this time, and a twilight wind was speaking quietly to the trees when sudden exclamations came from the rushes. "That wretched bait is so tangled that I'll have to cut it out of my hair!" cried the siren.

The line pulled taut.

"Shall I bring a knife out to you?" asked Jones.

"Certainly not!" she answered.

"Will you come and get it, then?" said he.

"Good heavens, no!" said the siren. "What can I do?"

"You could make yourself invisible," said Jones.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like a *complete* idiot," she answered.

"Or we can wait till it's dark," said Jones.

"Does it ever get that dark?" she asked.

"Certainly," said Jones, "to nearsighted people like me."

"There's nothing wrong with your eyes," said the siren.

"An incurable astigmatism," said Jones, "with a cast in the left eye and a cataract on the right. That's why I missed the lily pads and hit your hair."

"Well," said the siren, sadly, "I don't suppose there's anything else for it. I'll be hideously late for dinner."

"Where do you live?" asked Jones.

"In the sea, of course," said the siren.

"Naturally," agreed Jones. "But how do you happen to be in a lake?"

"Sirens are very much like salmon," said she. "Part of our life is spent in the salt, and part in the fresh water."

"I understand," said Jones. "The purpose for which salmon ascend rivers is . . ."

"I wish it were dark!" said the siren.

"To all intents and purposes," said Jones, "I already hardly can see my hand before my face."

"I haven't the slightest faith in your intents," said the siren, "but it's getting terribly cold."

"It really won't grow any darker to speak of," said Jones. "You can see where that half-moon is rising."

"Great heavens!" said the siren.

"Ah," said Jones, "do sirens have a heaven?"

"Certainly," she answered.

"The angels must make very pretty fish," said Jones.

"They're no more fishy than others," said the siren. "Will you tell me what on earth I can do?"

Jones took off his coat, laid it on a rock, and turned his back.

"I am looking in an opposite direction," he assured her.

"Well . . ." said the siren, desperately, and presently water sounds began to splash toward the shore. A faint noise of dripping rustled on the rocks just behind Jones. He sighed.

"All right," said the siren.

HE turned. His coat covered most of her. Besides, it really was quite dark, so that he stuck his fingers painfully when he set to work on the disentangling of the barbs of the bait. He was only sure of one thing, which was that the siren was trembling, and yet the air still kept the warmth of the summer day.

"What color is your hair?" asked the emperor.

"Green," said the siren.

"It would be, of course," said Jones. "The bright glints in it must be moonshine; or some of the sunset gold, perhaps. What's your name?"

"Sirens don't have names," she answered.

"I mean, your father's name," said Jones.

"Sirens don't have fathers," she replied.

"What the devil do they do, then?" asked Jones.

"It's all a matter of parthenogenesis, with us," she answered.

"As with the rotifers?" he suggested.

"Yes, or some of the hymenoptera," she said. "What is your name?"

"Since I'm an emperor," said Jones, "only my first name counts. You can think of me as the Emperor Dexter."

"Are you the Dexter Jones who played in the golf tournament?" she asked.

"What have sirens to do with golf?" said Jones.

"We walk invisible on grass," she said, "unless someone has caught us by the hair with a fish-bait."

"If you walk invisible," said Jones, "maybe you laid me that stymie at the seventh hole. By the way, I suppose that I can see you again whenever I want to?"

"What makes you think so?" asked the siren.

"In the book," said Jones, "all the

fisherman has to do is to come to the water's-edge and whistle thrice, at the same hour. Would you rise from the sea?"

"I won't know till I hear the whistle," said the siren.

"Ah, there we are," said Jones, and finally removed the bait from the tangle of hair.

"May I borrow that boat and the coat while I row back to the island?" she asked.

"Take everything you want," said Jones.

She rowed the boat away on silent oars and did not return. After a half hour, he whistled thrice but there was no answer, so Jones went back to the hotel, ate a solitary meal, and then sat for hours in the moonlight until it began to enter his brain, storing away bale after bale of the gossamer stuff out of which dreams are woven.

The next morning, nothing happened, but in the afternoon he received a letter neatly typewritten and without a signature.

> My dear Emperor,
> When I had a chance to think things over, I saw that Ethiopia was not half good enough and I decided on a much more famous empire. I enclose your insignia which all your subjects will be able to recognize at once.

That was all the note contained except for the enclosure, which consisted of a little square fragment of worn tapestry on which appeared a capital "N" with the golden bees of Napoleon crawling over it. Jones put the "insignia" in his pocket and went, at sunset, to the shore of the lake again. He waited until the gold had slid away from the water and the images of the tree had drawn back from the margin of the lake before he whistled thrice.

THEN he listened with bent head and his back to the beach, staring into the tree-shadows until something bumped against the rocks of the little point. Turning, he saw the dim outline of a rowboat, together with a bundle on one seat that might be his coat. Nearby he saw the slim shadow of a canoe, with one gleam beside it where the paddle dipped. "Ah, there you are again," said Jones.

"Yes, Imperial Majesty," said the siren.

She was just about the loveliest thing he'd ever seen

"One of these days you'll catch the devil for poaching on this lake," said Jones.

"Why? Who owns it?" asked the siren.

"A hard-boiled old gal called Miss Darnell," said Jones. "Elizabeth Darnell."

"What are *you* doing here, then?" demanded the siren.

"I'm invited," said Jones, "because I handle some of her investments now and then."

"If I get into trouble," said the siren, "you can help me out, then."

"Or else you can disappear," said Jones, "the way you did last night."

"It wasn't my fault," said the siren. "The moon grew too bright, and I dissolved in it, suddenly. Did you need the coat?"

"Not a great deal. When I warn you about Elizabeth Darnell, though, I'm telling you something. She keeps a stable of Great Danes as tall as stags and feeds 'em with the flesh of trespassers, if you know what I mean."

"I could dive into the lake and disappear," said the siren.

"She'd have a warrant waiting for you when you got home," said Jones.

"You'd better get that canoe of yours back to your own landing. But wait a minute. I haven't thanked you for the empire."

"You don't find it a little dead, do you?" she asked.

"Not at all," said Jones. "I played tennis with Murat, and Josephine dropped in for tea this afternoon."

"I thought you'd divorced her," said the siren.

"No. I haven't gone that far in my career," answered Jones. "I'm back there at the Peace of Tilsit, pulling Russia's hair with one hand and punching the nose of Spain with the other and kicking the shopkeepers in the shins, in between."

"It must be fun," said the siren.

"Tremendous," said Jones. "By the way, it's getting so dark that it's hard to keep my mind on you. Will you come ashore?"

"Why?" asked the siren.

"To talk," said Jones.

"I can talk from here," said the siren.

"My mind keeps wandering, at this distance," said Jones. "And I have important things to say."

"Have you?" said the siren.

"There are several subjects I'd like to touch on," said Jones.

"I'm already late for dinner," said the siren. "I have to go, now. And thank you for everything."

"Do you mean you're going to do a fadeout like this?" asked Jones. "Do I have to say goodbye?"

"You could whistle thrice some other evening," suggested the siren.

"This is my last evening," said Jones. "I have to go back to work tomorrow."

"I thought you were an emperor," said the siren. "Who can make you do anything?"

"Even emperors have people behind their thrones," said Jones.

"Who's behind yours?" asked the siren.

"Some people call Him 'Gorilla' Smith because he has hair on his chest and such a grip on things," said Jones. "He hates New York in the summer heat unless he has someone to kick around. It's my turn to be kicked."

"If I were an emperor," said the siren, "I'd slap him down. . . . I really have to go, now."

"May I light a match as I say goodbye?" asked Jones.

"And you wearing the cocked hat and riding the white Arab?" she asked.

"No, I'm on the *Bellerophon* sailing into exile," said Jones.

"Good heavens," said the girl, "has Waterloo come and gone?"

"Just now, I think," said Jones.

"Then we'd better say goodbye in the dark," said the siren. "I don't want you to see my tears."

There was a faint splash.

"By the way," said Jones, "I forgot to ask for another gift."

"Gift?" said the siren.

"Certainly," said Jones. "Whenever the fisherman whistles thrice he gets whatever he wishes for."

"Very well," said the siren, "what is your wish?"

Why, a golden treasure, of course," said Jones.

"You shall have it," said the siren.

He did not hear the paddle strokes, but the canoe began to fade into the dark.

"Goodbye," said Jones, "and look out for Miss Darnell and the Great Danes!"

"Tell me what she looks like so I'll recognize her," said the siren.

"I've never seen her," said Jones. "You'll know her by her dogs."

Her laughter came through the dark in silvery music.

"Goodbye!" she called, and the canoe vanished under the thicker night beside the trees.

JONES went back to the hotel again, ordered a fish dinner, failed to eat it, tried scotch-and-sodas for a few hours, tried bed but could not sleep, and reached ten o'clock the next morning with half an hour to train-time and his suitcases still not closed. Then he came to a pause during which the summer sounds bore drowsily in upon him through the

open window with the smell of new hay sweetening the air.

A bellboy brought up his mail. One letter contained a blank fold of paper, and inside the fold lay a paper-thin little horseshoe, of gold. Jones held it for a moment and regarded the empty spaces of the future.

He picked up the telephone and called New York. Presently he was saying: "Hello. Mr. Smith?"

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" rumbled Gorilla Smith. "Why aren't you back here? I expected you yesterday."

"I'm not due till tomorrow," said Jones.

"Then what d'you want, ringing me up?" demanded the Gorilla. "I don't care what the weather is up there and you don't care what the weather is down here. Goodbye!"

"I wanted you to know that I'm extending my vacation," said Jones.

"Extending what? I'm not extending it," said the Gorilla. "I'm cutting it short. Take the next train and get back here on the run."

"I'm not taking the next train," said Jones. "I may not take a train for a week."

He listened to the silence. He could feel it in his heart and in his head. "Are you drunk, or a fool, or only crazy?" shouted the Gorilla.

"I'm simply waking up," said Jones.

"If you've got anything to say, say it!" roared the Gorilla.

"All I have to say is: To hell with you!" said Jones, and hung up.

It was as though he had cut a life line, or the string of a balloon which now soared into dizzy heights and would burst at any moment. Even in the stillness of his room he felt as though a wind were blowing in his face and through him.

He went over to Jackson Pond and played tennis with Dick Waterson. He played with a singular indifference and clarity of eye and mind. Waterson's flat, acing serve shot bullets into the corners of the service court. He picked those bullets up on his racket and turned them into winners. Waterson's great sliced drive was wiping off the face of the baseline; forehand or backhand, he murdered those drives with a dreamy precision.

"Say, what have you been doing to yourself?" asked Waterson after the second love-set. "Have you gone crazy or something?"

"Yeah. Crazy," said Jones.

IN the middle of the afternoon he got back to his hotel. The desk waved him frantically forward. "It's New York again!" called the clerk. "Fourth or fifth time since you've been out. Please hurry!"

"Tell New York I'm in, now," said Jones, "but I'm not interested. I'm going up to my room and don't want to be disturbed."

He went up to his room and slept till dark. Then he got up, ate an omelet for supper, and walked into the night. It was much too late for sirens but his feet carried him of their own volition to Darnell Lake. Whatever wind there was, the trees shut away and the stars lay with untrembling brightness in the still face of the water. A fish broke the surface with a sound like the smacking of wet lips. Far away, deep-voiced dogs were barking.

After a moment, Jones lifted his head from his thoughts and from the empty vision of the future. He whistled thrice.

And she was there.

"I thought you'd never come," said the siren, from behind him; "or else I thought you were clear off there on St. Helena."

"I turned back the hands of the clock," said Jones. "I've grown young and thin; Barras is lifting my star in the East; I've got the army in the mountains; 'beyond the Alps lies Italy!' That's the proclamation I made to the army today."

"And New York?" asked the siren.

"New York? I never heard of it," said Jones. "Or wait—no—isn't that some little town in the English colonies?"

"But the Gorilla?" asked the siren.

"We've said goodbye," said Jones.

"Do you mean that?" asked the

siren. "Do you mean," she asked, coming suddenly close to him, "that you've snapped off your career—short?"

"My dear," said Jones, "an emperor with a siren and a golden treasure. What more career do I care about?"

"But you haven't done it!" she protested.

They called him Gorilla Smith

"I have, though," said Jones. "It came over me that an emperor ought to have higher things to think about than the Stock Market and what Steel is doing and what will the Old Man say?"

"Ah," she said, "there *is* something wild and delicious about you!"

"Of course there is," said Jones. "There's a siren about me. What's that you're wearing?"

"It's a muslin sort of a fluffy, silly thing," said the siren.

"I mean, the perfume," said Jones. "No, it isn't you; it's the breath off the hayfields, and the whole green and the coolness of the summer . . . and you're a lovely thing, you know."

"But you've never seen me," said the siren.

"Certainly not," said Jones, "but I've heard your song, and that's all I'll ever care to see or hear. But wait a moment. There's the moon—you see it coming up like a fire through the trees? I'll see you by that."

"I'll have to go!" said the siren. "Please let me!"

"I'm sorry," said Jones, "I haven't asked for a gift yet, you know."

"Ask for it, then," said the siren.

"I wish," said Jones, "that you should stay here with me until the moon is above the trees."

"That's a ridiculous wish, for an emperor," she said.

"That's because most emperors know nothing about sirens," said Jones.

While he was standing with her, the deep-throated barking of dogs had been ranging through the woods and now, suddenly, like noise breaking into a room with the opening of a door, the chorus came sweeping upon them.

"Get behind me!" said Jones. "By Harry, the murdering fools *have turned the dogs loose in the woods!*"

HE saw them then come sweeping out of the shrubbery with their heads close to the ground—as big as young lions—five of them striding like huge shadows over the ground. Their chorus turned into a wild riot of noise as they served and came straight toward him.

Jones picked up a chunk of rock and braced himself. If he had been alone, he would have taken to the water, but there was the siren.

"Get back to the lake—dive in!" he ordered.

And then he saw, staggered by the sight of it, that she was running out ahead of him, calling out: "Down, Jim! Down, Bess! Good boys!"

They rose up in a great, tangled wave around her, over her. He saw a monster with forepaws on her shoulders, as tall as a tall man, but there was no question about the joyous nature of their uproar. And she, with a few strokes of the voice, made them drop down, panting, on the ground. Then she came back to Jones.

"You mean to say that those dogs know you?" he asked.

"I'm sorry; it was a horrible shock," she said, "but you were wonderful about it. You *were* wonderful!"

"Wonderful, my foot!" said Jones. "Are you Elizabeth Darnell, or what?"

"I'm sorry," said she.

"Well," said Jones, "goodbye. I've been a damned fool. I thought— Well, goodbye."

"I thought you were going to stay?" said the siren.

"For what?" asked Jones.

"For the moonrise," she answered.

But it was already there, and the light which first had printed the tree shadows in ink upon the lake now lighted her as far as the bare throat.

"It isn't true," said Jones. "The real you is old and sallow and hard and has a damned snappy, mean voice over the telephone. You're not lovely, and perfect, and glorious, and beautiful like this, are you?"

"Do I please you?" asked the siren. "Ah, that makes me happy!"

When Jones reached the hotel that night the night clerk said: "But if you please—Mr. Jones. I mean singing at this hour of the night. . ."

"Damn the night! I mean, God bless the night," said Jones. "And here's ten dollars I've been meaning to give you. . . ."

When he got to his room and threw the door open, he was surprised, first, to find the lights were burning, and then in a corner of the room, in a hard, straight-backed chair, he saw a big old man with a sawed-off chunk of grey beard stuck on his chin. He had a mouth made for biting and holding on, not for speech. As he spoke now, he used only half of that grim stretch of lips.

"Now what in blazes is the matter with you?" he demanded. "You blithering young jackass, what do you mean by it? Is it more money you want?"

"Chief," said the emperor, "there's nothing in the whole world that I want. If you were to fence in the whole of Eurasia with a steel fence and offer it to me, I wouldn't take it. I wouldn't need it."

"Then why the devil did you leave me?" asked Gorilla Smith.

"I didn't leave you, did I?" asked Jones happily.

"You're drunk," said the Gorilla, "or else you're crazy."

Jones looked at the ceiling and half closed his eyes. "I want to tell you a wonderful thing. You won't believe it, but it's true. She loves me!"

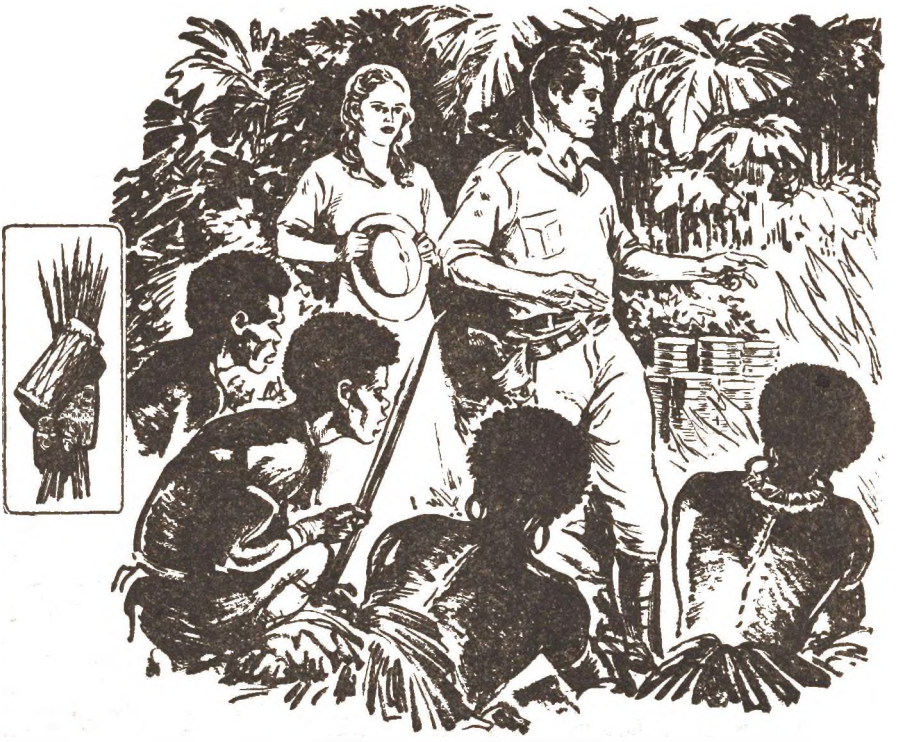
"The Darnell gal?" asked the Gorilla.

"Yes—loves—" said Jones, reeling slightly. "But how did you know who it was?" he demanded, rallying himself.

"Why do you think I sent you up here, except to marry that account?" demanded the Gorilla.

"Why?" asked Jones. "You—! Marry. . ."

He stared helplessly at the huge, iron face; he was seeing in it things of which he never before had dreamed.



The Stuff from Singapore

by Donald Barr Chidsey

I

When the Rain Falls

THERE were forty-four of them, squat blacks, part pygmy, brought by some local chief down to Port Moresby, where Driscoll had engaged them at a time when the labor market was not good. They stood in a circle now, glaring at Driscoll. They should have been at work, but he had found them grouped around a formless mass of stones half a mile from the nearest would-be grove. Some held clubs in their hands, some held machetes.

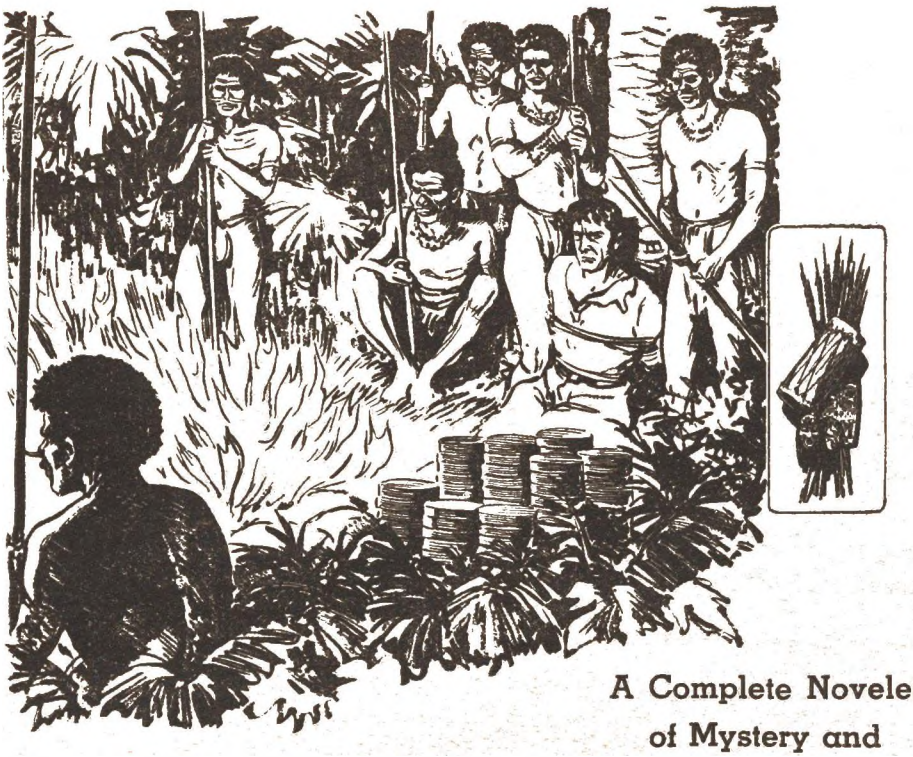
The two mission-educated lads, who were out as foremen and go-betweens, were not in sight. Driscoll didn't blame them. They were afraid of these hill people whose dialect they had difficulty understanding.

Driscoll was afraid too; but he dared not show it.

"Boys go workum. No feastum now. Workum." He spoke crisply, motioning back toward the cleared ground which he could not see. "No workum," he threatened, "no *kaikai*."

What manner of gods were they worshipping? What was the significance of this pile of stones? Has he interrupted some ancient dark ceremony?

He did not know; he could not even be sure how much of his pidgen they understood. The fact that their women were not with them made this



A Complete Novelet of Mystery and Adventure along the New Guinea Coast

gathering the more ominous. The marys—the women—were back among the huts. Only men were here, hill Papuans, almost naked, with great shocks of stiff black hair. In their own country they had conceivably been cannibals; cannibalism was practiced back there, Driscoll knew, despite the denials of the government—for the much-publicized dark heart of Africa is as a civilized city compared with the interior of New Guinea.

They could understand some things, notably *kaikai*, or food, and fear. He must promise one; he must on no account display the other.

"No workum, no *kaikai*," he repeated sternly. "No *kaikai* belong boys, no *kaikai* belong marys. Workum—plarnty *kaikai*, plarnty *mani*."

Slowly, scornfully, he walked out of the circle, not looking to right or to left. They were silent. When he had walked about fifteen feet beyond the last of them a chunky club whistled past his ear. It clacked against a tree not a yard from his head. He paid it no attention. Blood was pounding in his temples, yet his face felt cold; his chest felt tight. He walked on.

Had he broken into a run there would have been a shower of deadly missiles. Had he even turned, at this point, and made some attempt to remonstrate, it is probable that they would have beaten him spongy. But he walked on.

HE walked to the edge of the northwest clearing, crossed a moss-green log which bridged a ravine. He was troubled about these back-country laborers. What deviltry were they up to? Was this some tribal feast-day, and had he blasphemed their gods? Would they return from the jungle, and if so would they return in peace to take up their allotted work?

He had no complaint about the way they did that work when they *did* do

it. If they were not intelligent, they were at least tireless; they were strong, and comparatively fast. His acres—*his* acres! he glowed, even now, at the thought—were being rapidly cleared for planting. Already in his mind he could see row upon row of coconut trees, bearing magnificently, and under them, to make every possible use of the ground, rows of coffee. It would be true very soon, this dream—if the natives behaved.

When he crossed the bridge to the central grove, where planting had already begun, Joseph Ngom sidled up to him. "They no hurt mastah?"

"No hurt. Why they no workum, Joe-Joe?"

The boy shrugged. He was scornful of these squat and ignorant hill-people—he, the smart boy who had been educated by missionaries and sported a white man's first name—but he was also uneasy about them. He had expected to do much swaggering and bossing-around on this job. He wasn't getting much chance to; and that hurt.

"*Kaikai* no good?" Driscoll asked. "Not enough maybe-so?"

Joe-Joe shook his head. It was, incidentally, a huge head, and Joe-Joe himself was a somewhat larger than average Melanesian. His hair shot up straight and stiff; and because he wished to seem civilized and had learned from missionaries the somewhat alien idea that it is well to be clean, he periodically treated this hair with lye. His purpose was to kill the lice; and it is possible that he succeeded; but he also succeeded in changing the color of the hair, which had become a sickly yellow streaked with pink, a combination that made a spectacular contrast to Joe-Joe's black face and body.

"Plarnty *kaikai* 'e come. *Kaikai* good, house good, plarnty marys, plarnty pickaninny. Me no know. No know little people."

He could talk tolerably good English, and ordinarily in conversation with Driscoll he did so; but now, excited, he lasped into pidgin.

"Where's Pete?"

Pete was the other mission boy. His name was not Pete, but this was close enough for Driscoll's purposes.

"Him 'fraid, go hide far-far—'fraid," Joe-Joe sneered.

It was raining again when they reached the house, and Driscoll gratefully tugged off his boots and thrust his hot feet into sandals. There was still much to be done to this half-finished bamboo-and-nipa-palm bungalow, but he did not feel like doing any of it now. He had been working ten, eleven, twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for the past three months—working harder than any of his own hands; and he was tired.

He lighted a pipe and dropped into a chair on the veranda, meaning to take advantage of a breeze from the bay before night and the insects drove him indoors.

Strachey came up the path that wound among the mangroves. "Blowing up. I'll wager there's a storm outside."

Driscoll nodded absently.

"Got a tenderful. Mostly mullet." Strachey was in a talkative mood. "But I can't get the swing of that dynamite trick. Joe-Joe did try to teach me, but I simply can't do it properly. Seems wrong—you know? Not sporting."

"It isn't sporting," Driscoll admitted "I'd rather go after 'em with a line any day. But you can't stop to think about that when you've got so many mouths to feed."

"See here—" Strachey was changing his shirt, and he talked to Driscoll through a screened window. He was obliged to shout because of the rain. "What was all that tom-tomming back there a little while ago?"

"The boys are up to something. I don't know what."

"Not any trouble?"

Strachey sounded alarmed. He was a man who had no understanding of natives and no sympathy for them; and was, moreover, easily frightened. He was a smallish jerky fellow of about forty, sociable, vague, insignificant. He had blue eyes, a very pale

face, an expression of absent-mindedness, and the accent of a British colonial too long away from home.

"I don't believe so," Driscoll answered, "but you can't be sure. They're not afraid of us, the way the coast boys are. And they've got different gods—different gods entirely. I don't want to sound like an old 'fraidy-cat, Strachey, but if I were you I'd stay out of the jungle for a while, at least until the boys get over this hocus-pocus and come back to the job. Just forget about your specimens, eh?"

HORACE STRACHEY was a free-lance botanist—or said he was. Driscoll did not believe him. But he seemed harmless, and a white visitor was always welcome. If Strachey behaved himself he could stay as long as he wished, and no questions would be asked. He had appeared unexpectedly six days before in a twenty-eight foot ketch. He had explained that his sailor, a Loyalty Islander, had deserted over near Kalo, and that he himself was not skillful enough to start for Port Moresby alone.

He would linger, he said, if Driscoll didn't mind, until some schooner put in to escape rough weather, and then he would see if he couldn't borrow a man. Coasting schooners not infrequently did take cover in the island's snug little bay. Strachey himself had been here before, he told Driscoll.

"About four months ago. I was on a small chartered vessel owned by a Captain Masters. You've heard of him, of course? Buck Masters. We put in here for two or three days, until the blow was over. But it was sheer jungle then. Not a sign of anybody, not even a native. Bless me, when I came in again the other day, and found you here, and all those boys, and houses built and groves being cleared—why, I could scarcely believe my own eyes!"

"We've done a lot," Driscoll had admitted, "but there's a lot more still to be done."

"You certainly must like solitude, to come out to a place like this!"

Driscoll did not answer.

The rain rushed for the earth in broad, slapping sheets. It drove under the eaves and onto the edge of the veranda, so that Driscoll was obliged to move his chair. Smoking his pipe, tilted against the wall, he could just distinguish the line of white surf which marked the reef, the entrance of the bay, *his* bay. Then the rain came up even more furiously, a gray sizzling mass, and even this was blotted from sight.

"I say, you don't really suppose those boys mean any mischief, eh?"

"Well, I'd keep out of the jungle. I know you like to prowl around for—uh—for specimens. But I'd keep out for a while now."

"I most certainly shall. My word!"

Driscoll had more than once wondered about those "specimens" his visitor sought. Strachey was characteristically vague about them. Certainly he never brought any back, for all his long rambles, nor was there in his luggage or aboard the ketch any sort of equipment to suggest the scientist. But Driscoll thoroughly believed in minding his own business.

Strachey came out on the veranda, lighting a cigarette.

"I say," he shouted over the roar of the rain, "those boys really are nasty-looking chaps, eh? You don't think you really might have trouble?"

"I don't know. I don't like to be an alarmist, but if they aren't behaving themselves any better by this time tomorrow I might ask you to take Pete—he knows something about sailing—and go to Moresby and report to the authorities."

"I—I say now, that's awkward."

"What's awkward?"

"Why, I'm afraid the *Ellen's* not in proper shape just now. Stupid of me. When I was tossing those dynamite charges for fish out there this afternoon, only an hour or so ago, I chucked one much too near to where she's anchored. Did some damage to the stern, I'm afraid. Put the rudder out of commission."

"Hm-m-m . . ." said Driscoll.

Driscoll flashed his light. The surly mate was lying in the mud . . . very, very dead

"That makes it awkward, doesn't it, eh?"

"It certainly does."

THEY were silent for a time, while the rain thundered. They knew their situation. Though at any time a trader might poke into this little bay in order to escape a storm, no vessel could be definitely expected for another two weeks, when a coasting schooner would make a regular stop with supplies and mail. Driscoll had no boat of his own except a tiny outrigger canoe hastily built by Pete for fishing in the bay. Three sides of the plantation were sheer jungle; and nobody could conceivably break through to the nearest outpost of civilization without at least half a dozen trained carriers and more tinned goods than the plantation at present could provide.

"You know—I say, Driscoll, we're just the same here as if we were on an island!"

"Yes," said Driscoll.

Behind them, back beyond the northwest clearing, the tree-drums started again. They could be heard even through the whine of wind and the crash of rain. *Tom*-tom-tom! *Tom*-tom-tom!

It was very hot; and Driscoll, his pipe out, rose slowly, stretched himself, glowered for a moment at the gray wall that blocked the bay, and went indoors.

Because he was ambitious and planned an establishment which would some day call for the supervision of five or six white men, and which might often be visited by others, he had constructed a larger house than he needed. Much of it was unfurnished, yet there were five habitable bedrooms. Driscoll's was the farthest west, a room with double exposure, in which he got the best breeze on the few nights when there was a breeze. Strachey's was next to his. The door of Strachey's room was open, and on the floor—the room contained no furniture except a single cot—was an opened suitcase, in which, visible on top of a pile of shirts and shorts, was a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

The sight held Driscoll, he didn't at first know why. Then it occurred to him that he had never seen Horace Strachey wearing any sort of glasses, nor was there anything about his eyes or nose to suggest that he ever *had* worn them, or had ever needed them.

Almost without intending to, Driscoll stepped into the room, picked up the glasses, held them against his hand, raised them to his eyes. They did not magnify or diminish anything, nor did they in any way distort his vision. They were common ordinary window glass. Strange . . . And he saw also in the suitcase a bottle of black hair-dye. Horace Strachey's hair was light brown.

A little ashamed for snooping around a guest's bedroom, and yet not entirely sorry that he had done so, he went out.

Back in the jungle the tree-drums were thudding. *Tom*-tom-tom! *Tom*-tom-tom! What the devil were those black boys up to?

He had a double-barreled shotgun and sixteen boxes of shells. He had intended to use the gun only to bring

down game with which to feed his men and himself. He hoped that it would never be used for anything else. He had also his revolver, a Webley Mark VI, .455 caliber—a British army gun. He thumbed off the latch, "broke" the pistol, spun the cylinder. No oil needed. He crammed cartridges into every chamber but the one upon which the hammer would rest, clamped the gun shut again, returned it to its holster.

Tom-tom-tom! *Tom*-tom-tom!

The rain ceased suddenly, and the sound of the drums was louder, more urgent. The wind moaned. Loosened raindrops slithered off leaves and pattered upon the palm-thatch roof.

"I say, Driscoll, do come out here!"

Was it nerves? There was no alarm in Strachey's voice, only excitement, yet Driscoll took the pistol with him when he went out on the veranda.

"I say, mighty decent of it to show up just now, eh?"

Coming past the break in the reef and straight into the little bay, swift and sure, as though she knew precisely what she was doing, was a slim dazzling white yacht.

"Ill wind that blows *somebody* good, eh, Driscoll?"

II
The Noisy Captain

ALVA KELLEN, to quote a thousand toastmasters, needed no introduction. They recognized him the instant they saw him; for like the Klings and Tamils, the Gurkas and Parsees and Burmese, the Punjabis, the Sikhs, the Ruthenians, the Hindustanis, the Aleutians, the Cajuns, Abyssinians, Annamites, Filipinos, Algerians, Laplanders, Tongans, Macedonians and Madagascans, not to mention assorted millions who live in countries with somewhat better plumbing facilities, they were familiar with his likenesses as immortalized in celluloid at Hollywood.

Kellen lived up to these pictures. He was not youthful, being perhaps in the higher forties, but he was not flabby either: and he was breathlessly handsome, as advertised. His voice was masculine but not harsh, his celebrated smile never failed him. This afternoon he wore fawn-colored shorts, a brown bush shirt, brown woolen stockings, Javanese sandals, a khaki topee impeccably tilted—and of course the Alva Kellen smile.

Others, however, were in the party. There was Hudson T. West, tall, white-haired, almost as good looking as Kellen himself, but older, showing his age. There was his daughter Annamarie, who was slim and straight, brown-haired, brown-eyed, lovely at the first glance, at the second downright beautiful. She was introduced as Alva Kellen's fiancee. There was Captain Buck Masters, who beamed and roared and seemed always on the point of slapping a back—or else stabbing it. Buck Masters' face was brick-red; his hands were huge and ruddy with reddish hairs on their backs; he could sail any ship anywhere in any kind of weather, he could drink any man under the table as easily as knock him down, and his merest whisper was a bellow. Finally there was Whitey Nelson, the engineer, glum, grim, blond, with lowering yellow eyebrows and a coarse red mouth.

Driscoll and Strachey met them by the water's edge. There was no dock, no beach, only a landing space in the stick mud between mangroves. Buck Masters, when he saw Strachey, burst into a roar.

"Well, well, well! If it ain't my old friend Horry! Fawncy meetin' you heah, eh wot, 'Orry? Last time we was cruising together we touched at this spot, eh? But it was a different place then, eh?"

"Certainly was," Strachey murmured. He managed a pallid smile, submitted a limp hand. "Mr. Driscoll here has done wonders with it. Mr. Elliot Driscoll, Captain, of Sidney."

Alva Kellen said, with the sheerest conceivable edge of condescension in his voice: "Ah, an Australian?"

"Yes. My mother was American, though." Driscoll explained, "and I've spent most of my life in the States."

"You can be a citizen of any country in the world," thundered the unquenchable Masters, "but if you tackle a spot like this I'll say for you that you've got guts! Yes, sir—guts!"

Without waiting for an invitation he started up the slope toward the house, talking all the while, asking questions, asking other questions before these could be answered. How long had Driscoll been here? Not more than four months, he'd warrant, because it was only about four months ago he and Horry Strachey had popped in for shelter. How did he get supplies? How many blacks did he have? Sign 'em from around Moresby way or over at Samurai?

Driscoll made tea and served it on the veranda. Alva Kellen was faultlessly polite, asking many questions about Driscoll's project. "Mighty interesting . . . interesting."

Hudson T. West also asked some questions. Nelson, the engineer, was belligerently silent. The girl was silent too, and seemed frightened. She watched Driscoll most of the time, occasionally flashing a smile to her famous fiancé when he directed her a remark. Buck Masters, of course, talked without pause, deafeningly.

IT WAS from Masters and Driscoll learned, in snatches, between other remarks, the history of their trip thus far. Alva Kellen, an amateur yachtsman of many years standing, held a master's license and was in fact captain of his own vessel, an eighty-foot Diesel yacht called *Ramona*. He was taking a long vacation, a sort of prehoneymoon trip, and upon their return he and Annamarie West were to be married. Carrying originally a mate, a deck hand, a cook and a steward, they had made direct from San Pedro to Papeete, where the mate, the deck hand, the cook and the steward had promptly jumped ship. These men were arrested but refused to return to the *Ramona* and were sent back to the United States while Kellen shipped a crew of Kanakas. It was at Papeete, too, that he had picked up Buck Masters, an expert South Pacific pilot. The Kanakas had deserted at Raiatea, where two stranded Chinese and a white man, a beachcomber, had been signed on. The Chinese were still with them, acting as cook and steward. The beachcomber had taken a knife between two ribs in a brawl in the New Hebrides.

"We left him in the Presbyterian Hospital," Masters told. "Bad luck Mr. Kellen's had with crew. Couldn't find anybody else at Vila, so we came along as we are."

They were going to Port Moresby when the weather cleared, from there down to Sidney, then back by way of New Zealand, the Tongas, Tahiti and the Marquesas.

"Won't you show us around your plantation, Mr. Driscoll?" Hudson asked. "What are those tom-toms back there? Natives?"

"The hands are having a little celebration of their own."

"Couldn't we attend?"

"I don't think it would be altogether safe."

But he showed them around. He showed them the main house, the smaller house built for Pete and Joe-Joe and possible future native overseers; showed them where he planned to build a shed for sorting and sacking coffee beans, a smoke house, drying platforms, the place for a dock, the place where he hoped some day to start a trail for trucks to connect with another plantation trail to Port Moresby. He showed them what had already been accomplished in clearing the jungle. He showed them through the native compound.

Ordinarily, even in the daytime when the boys were at work, this village-on-stilts was a scene of great activity. Today as Driscoll and his guests passed along its one street they were met by silence. The fires were not burning. No pickaninnies tumbled in play; no pigs oink-oinked about, nosing slime. The marys were thirty-odd in number but they could be glimpsed only occasionally in the dark doorways. They were hiding, and kept their children with them. They were afraid.

Assuredly something was up.

"I think we'd better get back," Driscoll said.

He missed Alva Kellen and the engineer Nelson, who had been far in the rear, arguing in low voices. Not wishing to have any of the party out of his sight at a time like this, he excused himself and doubled back behind a food storage shed.

". . . and if you don't, you know what's going to—"

"I know what's going to happen to *you*, if you don't tone down a bit! See here, do you think I'm going to—"

This much Driscoll heard, and then he came in sight of the two men.

Alva Kellen, his face dark with rage, was leaning close to Nelson. Kellen held a small automatic pistol.

Nelson looked angry when Driscoll appeared, but Kellen laughed easily. The actor spun the pistol by its trigger guard, then thrust it into its holster.

"I was just explaining to Whitey what I'd do in case those laborers of yours should happen to go on the war path."

"Yes," muttered Nelson, who looked sore.

"I think they'll be all right," Driscoll said, "if they're left alone. They're just blowing off a little steam back there."

The sight of Alva Kellen with a pistol in his hand was nothing new—on the screen. In real life it was different. He had held that automatic like a man who knew how to use it and who wouldn't hesitate to do so.

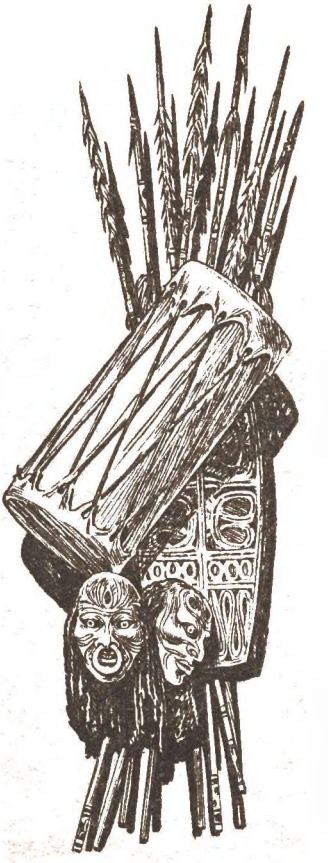
DRISCOLL was troubled. He rejoined the others, walked ahead a little. There was no longer any need to point out sites and sights; they had finished the tour of inspection.

"Were Alva and Mr. Nelson quarreling?" It was Annamarie West.

"Oh, no. They just stopped to look at something."

"I thought they might be quarreling. They often do."

She was silent a moment, then said unexpectedly:



"I've heard of men who lived out in wild places like this, but I never really believed in their existence. Oh, perhaps old broken-down men who were stuck in a hole they couldn't get out of. But not young men like you."

"Maybe I like it."

"Maybe. But it seems incredible. Just think of you hacking out a great patch of jungle, miles from anywhere, and planning all these houses and sheds and that road—planning to make the spot useful and—and profitable. *Think* of it!"

"I don't. I haven't got time, usually."

She stopped; and from politeness he stopped too. She was looking up at him with huge eyes. Her lips were parted. "Why in the world did you ever do it?"

Driscoll said, "Well . . ." and looked at the pipe in his hand.

"I'm sorry." Her face was flaming, her lips trembled, and she walked on, not looking at him. "It—it's really none of my business, is it?"

"I think there's more rain coming," he said. "We'd better hurry."

Kellen, when the group was assembled again, invited Driscoll and his guest to dine aboard the *Ramona*. From the deck of that vessel the beat of tree-drums was faint and faraway, yet it still was audible, troubling. At least to Driscoll.

Strachey said to Driscoll: "Good to be where we're safe, eh?"

"I suppose so," Driscoll said. "At the same time, I wouldn't like to have anything happen to those two mission boys."

"You worry too much about those blacks," Buck Masters shouted. "If it was me, I'd put a bullet into their legs. *Then* they'd behave!"

Driscoll shrugged.

"Look here," said Kellen, "if there really is any danger ashore, Mr. Driscoll, don't you think that you and Mr. Strachey ought to spend the night on board?"

"Delighted." Strachey nodded, beaming. "Awfully decent of you to ask us, Mr. Kellen. Now if we—"

"What's the matter, man?"

Strachey had stopped short, his eyes bugging half out of his head, his jaw slack. Even in the dim light of the afterdeck they could see how pale he had become. He looked as if he were seeing a ghost. He staggered back against the rail.

Kellen grabbed him by an arm, supporting him. "Look here, do you feel all right? Are you ill?"

A small silent Chinese had appeared, holding a tray of cocktails. Kellen took one, held it to Strachey's trembling lips. "Here, take this, man. It will do you good."

Strachey muttered "Thanks," and swallowed the cocktail. He put it back on the tray, trying to laugh.

"Sorry . . . Little touch of heart."

"Shall I get you some digitalis? Or some aspirin?"

"No, no! I'm quite all right now, thanks so much."

BUT it was no old heart malady that had hit him, Driscoll knew. It was terror. . . . But at what? The plantation hands were far away, on land. The afterdeck was peaceful enough. Yet Horace Strachey, who talked about biological specimens but never collected them, who secreted hair dye and dummy glasses in his bag, was frightened nearly to death. His face shone with sweat, his hand was not steady. His laugh was jerky, apologetic.

"The tropics. Gets a man sometimes, y' know."

"Quite," murmured Kellen.

Conversation at dinner was not brilliant. Alva Kellen, though alert to his obligations as host, was inwardly troubled about something. Whitey Nelson, who throughout had acted less like an engineer than a favored guest, glowered in silence. Horace Strachey talked nervously and eagerly but his words made little sense: he was still badly frightened about something. The girl, dressed in deep blue and lovelier than ever, scarcely said a word; she watched Driscoll most of the time. Only Masters, who could not be quieted by anything, and Hudson T. West, maintained a proper level of sociability.

Driscoll wondered about West. Unquestionably he was well born, well educated, and had both a natural and a carefully cultivated charm. His manners were perfect, his amiability genuine. Yet in spite of this, and in spite of his expensive clothes, there was something gone-to-seed about him. Driscoll could not have described it, but he knew that it was there. Hudson T. West, for example, seemed to pay an inordinate amount of attention to his host, yet at the same time to distrust and perhaps even despise him.

Altogether a curious crowd.

When the meal was finished and the soundless Chinese was serving brandy, Alva Kellen again proposed that Strachey and Driscoll spend the night on board.

"Good of you," Strachey said, "but I think not, for me."

"But I thought you said before dinner that you'd be delighted to?"

"Did I? Silly of me. No, I think I'll go back. That is," he looked at Driscoll, "assuming that *you* are?"

"I think I should," Driscoll said, "as long as the natives are acting this way."

Buck Masters said: "Far as that goes, if there's going to be any trouble I might as well be along too."

"If you put it that way," Alva Kellen said, and his eyes shone, "I think I'll sleep ashore tonight myself. Like Captain Masters here, I'd hate to miss a fight."

"There won't be anything like that," Driscoll said hastily.

"Meaning you don't want us?"

"Not at all! Glad to have you! The accommodations aren't exactly luxurious, but if you don't mind—"

"Too much blasted luxury on this boat in the first place," Masters boomed. "A change will seem good."

"I'll go along too," announced Whitey Nelson.

"Not I," Hudson T. West said, and shook his head, smiling. He put a hand on Annamarie's arm. "I like my comfort, and I think I'll stay here and protect my darling daughter."

Annamarie said nothing. She was staring at Driscoll.

IT was exactly three o'clock when Elliot Driscoll awoke. He knew this from his luminous-dial watch. There was no rain, though it had been raining intermittently all night. Driscoll could hear soft shuffling footsteps in the next room, and wondered foggily why Strachey was moving around at this hour. Then rain came again, fiercely, suddenly, as it always came, and that slight sound was blotted out.

Driscoll almost went to sleep again. He was not sure what it was that yanked him back to wakefulness. A sound of some sort. A sound, he believed, from the far end of the house. It was difficult to be sure, through the hammering of rain.

On any other night he would have ignored it. Tonight he was keyed to an unaccustomed pitch of nervousness. He felt that something was wrong. He had been so much in the jungle that perhaps he had absorbed a bit of the instincts of a beast.

He slid out of bed, stepped into boots, threw a raincoat over his shoulders, cocked an old topee on his head. He strapped on the Webley.

The corridor was quiet. He put an ear to the door of Strachey's room and heard one sound only—the creak of a bed—and that for but an instant. He moved on.

It was then, by his wrist-watch, exactly three-three. . . .

The next door was ajar. Kellen had taken this room. Driscoll listened there for a moment, but heard nothing.

In the living room he picked up an electric flashlight. He did not switch it on, but stood listening, hearing nothing but the rain on the roof. The tom-toms back in the jungle had ceased earlier in the evening.

Beyond the living room was a small corridor from which opened the doors of the two bedrooms, occupied by Masters and Nelson. Driscoll was about to go into that corridor, to see if everything was all right, when he heard a slithering sound almost at his feet. He switched on the flash.

A whip snake. Not long, not thick, but deadly poisonous. It was stunned by the blare of light.

Driscoll stepped swiftly on its head, grasped the squirming, slashing tail. He released the head, and whirled the snake around five or six times, very fast, slamming the head against the floor. Then it dangled helpless and probably lifeless in his hand. He went to the door and threw it far into the darkness.

There was nothing extraordinary about this. The house was on stilts, but it was jerry-built at best, and snakes could get in if they wished. He frequently found small harmless ones in his living room or kitchen, sometimes even in his bedroom; though this was the first time he had found a whip snake.

He went into the little corridor and

listened at Nelson's door, then at Masters'. The rain had ceased and was a mere drip-drip from trees. A thousand moths thrummed against the screens.

Driscoll *should* have been satisfied that all was well. He wasn't. That inner something kept pushing at his consciousness, warning him. He went outside, moving slowly, now and then switching on the flash for a second. He went around the west end of the house, the end in which his own bedroom was located.

The attack came suddenly, from behind. Driscoll had heard nothing and he suspected nothing—until there was that sharp hissing intake of breath. He swung on his heel.

It felt like a push, nothing more. He did not learn until later that the left sleeve of his raincoat and the left sleeve of his pajamas beneath were slashed from shoulder to elbow.

He caught a glint of something which might have been the knife. This was all he did see. He stepped sideward and lashed out with his left fist, hitting what felt like a shoulder. He stepped back. With his right hand he drew the Webley.

He had dropped the flashlight to get the revolver, and it took him a moment to recover it. When he had done so, and had switched it on, there was nothing in sight.

But he had not imagined that attack. There was the slashed clothing —and there were the footprints.

The prints had been made by bare feet. They were recent. Water oozed into them, and soon they would be gone, for once again it was starting to rain.

This was under a large low-hanging sago tree, and even if there had been a moon in the heavens, and stars, their light would not have penetrated to this place. He stood in back of his house, somewhere between the windows of Kellen's and Strachey's rooms. The footprints, fast disappearing, led off in the direction of the jungle.

Apparently nobody had awakened. He prowled along the back of the house, looking for more footprints, not finding any. He had worked his way past the east end of the house, along the path which led to the native compound, and he was about deciding to give up the search, when he stumbled over the body. . . .

III
The Living Are Afraid

WHITEY NELSON probably had been handsome. Now he was hideous with blood. The whole front of his head, it seemed, had been crushed. His eyes were not visible at all, his nose and mouth were a red pulp.

He was dead—oh, he was very dead indeed! But he was still warm, and some blood yet struggled to get out of the great wounds on his head and face. One arm was badly bruised, perhaps broken. It was the left arm, and it lay across the chest as though he had raised it to protect his face and it had been beaten down.

A club lay at his side, and with this, surely, he had been killed. It was a shapeless thing of teak, and rain fell upon it, washing off the blood, washing off the hairs, washing off, too, whatever fingerprints there were.

He was in underclothes. He wore a watch on his left wrist and its glass had been smashed. Chunks of the glass were wedged under the unbroken hands, showing the exact time of the murder.

Three o'clock. . . .

When it was dawn they gave up all further search. It had always been hopeless. The rain washed all footprints away almost as soon as they were made, and whenever the rain ceased there rose a low writhing steam which baffled the beams of the flashlights, hiding the muck beneath. They had gone to the compound where Driscoll ordered all the natives outside, and they had searched each hut separately. There were only women and pickaninnies there, the women wide awake, the pickaninnies sleepy-eyed, whimpering, frightened. No men.

"It was one of those blacks," said Alva Kellen.

"I think so too," Strachey declared.

Driscoll shook his head. "It's not like them. They might get whipped up in a religious frenzy and kill a man, but there'd have to be a lot of them. One alone wouldn't come sneaking into the house, club a man to death, and then carry his body outside. It just isn't their way of doing things."

"What about those two Port Moresby boys you've got?"

"Pete and Joe-Joe? Not possibly. They were asleep all the time, they told me. Neither of them would do a thing like that. They're mission boys."

"Some of the lyingest, crookedest blacks I ever knew," Buck Masters declared, "were mission-educated."

"That's probably true. But it wasn't Pete or Joe-Joe. They're probably better Christians than any of us here. Right this minute they're back in their house on their knees praying."

"Praying they won't be found out, probably!"

"Besides," added Driscoll, "what earthly reason would they have for killing Nelson?"

"What reason would *anybody* have for killing him?"

"That's true, I suppose."

But Driscoll was thinking of Alva Kellen and the look he had surprised on Kellen's face the previous afternoon. As they started back for the house, he took Kellen aside.

"I hate to bring up a thing like this, but did you have any sort of grudge against Nelson?"

The actor turned, staring in astonishment. But after all, he *was* an actor. "Why, of course I didn't! What in the world makes you ask that?"

"Yesterday afternoon I saw you—"

"Oh, *that* business!" Kellen laughed easily. "Maybe I'm a little movie-struck myself, Driscoll. I always did want to play westerns, and even now I like underworld pictures best. I like to fancy myself having a lightning-quick draw. Childish, isn't it? But lots of us are probably that way, in secret. I'm really a crack shot, and I don't care who knows it. I was boasting about it to Nelson yesterday, and he sneered at me, and just to show him how fast I really was I drew the automatic. I'd brought it along, of course, in case of snakes or something."

"Naturally. You didn't have anything against Nelson, then?"

"Good Lord, no! He's been working for me eleven years. I might have got sore at him now and then, and bawled him out about something, but essentially I always admired him. He knew his engines!"

"I see."

"That—uh—that corpse? Do you suppose that if we rushed it to Port Moresby perhaps some medico might perform an autopsy and learn something? I don't know *what*, I'll confess, but nowadays the doctors are very smart along those lines."

Driscoll shook his head. "You forget our latitude," he said dryly. "In this part of the world people must be buried right away."

HE felt he ought to be doing some sort of detective work; but he didn't know what. Examine clothes, shoes? Whoever hauled Whitey Nelson out of bed and out of his room—they'd found blood on the bed and the windowsill—had surely got wet. But everybody's clothes were wet! All five of them had been soaked in a shower on the trip back from the *Ramona*, and there had been no opportunity to dry the clothes. You didn't expect dry clothes or dry shoes in Papua, in this season.

Nobody had noticed his slashed sleeve, and he had not told of his experience behind the house. Was the man who had attacked him the one who had killed Whitey Nelson? At first it seemed probable; yet there were objections to the theory.

In the first place, the man who attacked Driscoll had had a knife. Why, then, should he have clubbed Nelson instead of stabbing him? He had been in bare feet; yet though all of these guests had wet shoes, none, Driscoll

observed, had muddy feet. The man with the knife had run into the jungle. Each of the guests had appeared from the direction of the house within a minute of Driscoll's shouted alarm. It scarcely seemed possible that one could have got back into the house by that time.

The man had bare feet. This argued a native. But Driscoll knew that the man he had punched in the shoulder, there in the pitchy dark under the sago tree, was wearing a shirt.

He had been barefooted, but wore a shirt!

None of the plantation hands owned a shirt. Pete and Joe-Joe, being comparatively civilized, had one apiece; but they treasured these, and kept them for Sundays; and Driscoll, who had already searched the house Joe-Joe and Pete shared, had found these two shirts clean and comparatively dry.

No, the murderer, Driscoll believed, was one of his own guests.

Horace Strachey? There was decidedly something fishy about Strachey; but he was absolved because of one thing—Driscoll himself had heard him moving around in his room at exactly three o'clock, the time of the murder.

Buck Masters? Conceivably. He was of the lowest type of South Sea Islanders. A little earlier he would have been a blackbirder, before that a sandalwooder, perhaps even an out-and-out pirate. He was, and gloried in being, a hardened scoundrel who would shoot a black as readily as a bird and would demand five or ten dollars for slitting a white man's throat only because of the extra risk involved. And he had had the best opportunity to get at Nelson, being directly across the hall. For this very reason, however, he would presumably be more careful; for he was a cunning rascal. Knowing Papuans as he did, and knowing that Driscoll knew them, it was not likely that he would have tried to make it look as though a plantation hand had committed the murder.

Alva Kellen? There was a man who for all his denials unquestionably had hated Whitey Nelson. The reason for this Driscoll did not know, but there could be no question of the fact. He had seen Kellen's face when Kellen held that automatic. There had been a blood feud between those two; and was this its climax?

"Excuse me a minute. I'll make coffee."

Driscoll went into the kitchen, leaving Strachey and Kellen and Masters to look at one another, shift from foot to foot, smoke, say nothing. Presently Masters drifted into the kitchen after him.

"What do you think?" he whispered.

"I don't know what to think," Driscoll admitted. "What about Kellen? He was having some sort of disagreement with Nelson, wasn't he?"

"He was, but that don't mean he killed him."

"I didn't say it did."

"Those two didn't get along well together. They tried to keep it to themselves, but I could tell. Anybody could tell. That bloke Nelson was almighty uppity for a mere engineer. In port he used to swank around spending money like a millionaire."

"Blackmail? He had something on Kellen?"

"That's only a guess, you understand!"

"I understand."

"And what's more, I'd never testify to that before any court, and if you report it I'll deny I ever said any such thing. Maybe Kellen did it—I don't know. But anyway, he's my boss."

Driscoll nodded, bending over the alcohol stove. The loyalty of the underworld. He understood. "Any other ideas?" he asked.

"Yes."

Driscoll looked up, his eyes narrowing.

BUCK MASTERS took his time about lighting a pipe. He tossed the match to the floor, puffed a moment, and said slowly, in a low voice:

"Did you take a good look at this man West? He's pretty fond of that

daughter of his, and she don't give a hoot for Kellen. If you ask me, West's on the financial chutes and he's depending on Kellen to pull him out. He don't like Kellen, hates the man's insides, but he yesses to him all over the ship."

"But why in the world should he—"

"Now I happen to know, from what I heard one night in Vila when Kellen was feeling his hootch, that Kellen's leaving a good big sum of money to Annamarie West, even though they ain't married yet. That's in his will already. And he's never been married before and don't have any near relations, so there'd be nobody much to dispute it. Well, suppose West got to feeling ashamed and disgusted with himself for practically forcing his daughter to marry this actor in order to save his own fortune? That's possible, ain't it?"

"And he'd want to kill Kellen? But *Nelson* was the one killed!"

"There could have been a mistake. Got the wrong room. It was mighty dark, and he wouldn't have dared show a light. Nelson and Kellen are about the same height and build, and when a man's in bed—"

"But Mr. West was on the yacht!"

"Was he? Listen, Driscoll. I've seen him swimming, at Punaavia, and he's got plenty of muscle! He can swim like a fish, too."

The bare-footed man had worn a shirt, had made for the jungle. From there it would not be difficult to work his way around to the edge of the bay, to swim back to the *Ramona*. There were sharks in that bay, to be sure, and needle-fish, but not many of them; and the *Ramona* was anchored not far offshore.

"Of course," Buck Masters shrugged, "as far as you're concerned officially, one of the black boys did it."

"I'm not so sure that I'm going to report it that way."

"Only get yourself into a mess of trouble if you don't. No affair of mine. How's that coffee coming?"

In the living room, a few minutes later, Driscoll remarked that it was up to him as proprietor of the plantation to make a prompt report to the territorial authorities.

"We'd better start for Port Moresby as soon as possible."

There was some silence. Then Alva Kellen cleared his throat and said: "I don't know about Captain Masters, but I could no more run those engines than I could fly."

Said Masters: "I couldn't either. I wouldn't know one end of a Diesel engine from the other. I'm a sailman."

"You mean," cried Driscoll, "that we're stuck here?"

"Looks that way."

Strachey whispered: "Like — like being on an island."

Back in the jungle the tree-drums started again. *Tom*-tom-tom! *Tom*-tom-tom! It was clear and very loud. It seemed, in fact, closer than it had been yesterday. . . .

ANNAMARIE WEST'S hair, long and thick, was brown, but there were glints of red in it; and when she shook her head they danced like the reflection of sparks in rich polished wood.

"It's—it's—I can hardly believe it," she whispered.

Her father rose, pale and shaking.

"I must lie down," he muttered. "Oh, horrible!"

Driscoll too rose. "Let me help you to your cabin."

It was not just politeness that caused him to volunteer assistance so promptly. It was a desire to see Hudson T. West's stateroom.

Driscoll helped him to stretch out in his bunk. Making a pretense of getting a cold compact, he managed a swift and superficial search of the room. He found no evidence that Hudson T. West had swum ashore the previous night. "Let me take your shirt off for you.'

"No, no. I'm all right as I am. Thank you so much."

Driscoll would have liked to see whether one of those two large shoulders was bruised, but he did not dare to insist.

On deck Annamarie was calmer, in

better control of herself. Yet she too had been badly shaken. "I suppose this will mean the end of the yachting trip."

He asked: "Are you sorry?"

"No. I'm glad!" She stared across the bay toward the black-green shore where tropical sunlight smashed down upon the wavelets. "I—I know I shouldn't talk this way in front of you. But just the same I'm glad the trip is over."

Driscoll leaned closer, elbows on knees. "I wanted to ask you a few things. About last night. Did you notice anything unusual, here on board?"

"Unusual? No. What? I went to bed very early. Father went to bed at the same time. I'm sure he didn't notice anything out of the way or he would have mentioned it this morning."

"Tell me to shut up if I'm asking too much," said Driscoll, "but why are you glad that the trip's over?"

She shuddered a little.

"I don't know. It's all been so unexpected. I became engaged to Alva —so suddenly, almost before I knew what I was doing. He—he swept me off my feet. And Father was so eager to have me marry him. Before I knew what was happening I'd said, 'Yes' and he had planned this cruise. He announced it to the papers right away, and I was swamped with reporters and photographers—it was all so confusing. I was glad to get away at first."

"Are you afraid of Kellen?"

She whispered, "Yes." She gazed down at her hands in her lap. "I don't really know why, either. He's been kind—generous. But there's something about him . . . He's *cruel!* It's a horrible thing to say, but I don't trust him."

"He was a bachelor for a good many years. Why do you suppose he's so eager to be married to you?"

"My position," she answered simply, "and my looks. I might as well say that. I think he loves me too, in his way, but what he really wants is my name. We are a very old family, you know. And Alva's ambitious, socially. He knows he can't be a big star much longer, and he wants position. He wants to be envied. He thinks of me the way he thinks of this yacht or of his place in Beverly Hills. It—it's beastly to say this. And now I feel I shouldn't back out of it, because Father wants so much for us to get married. I don't know . . ."

Driscoll changed the subject, discreetly.

"We've got to stay here a while because nobody knows how to run the engines. The next supply-schooner isn't due for almost two weeks, but there's a chance that some other vessel might put in in the meanwhile. And now,"—he rose—"I've got to row back. Should I send somebody out?"

"No, no, I'm all right."

"Those Chinamen—the steward and the cook?"

"They're perfectly harmless."

"Mr. Kellen and Captain Masters will be back in a little while anyway, I guess." He put a hand on her shoulder. "We'll just have to stick it out for a while. Think you can do it?"

"I—I'm all right. Thank you."

He rowed slowly and very thoughtfully back to land.

BURYING Nelson was no pleasure. None of the plantation hands had returned, and their tree-drums sounded persistently, monotonously, through the heavy wet air. The mission boys, Joe-Joe and Pete, had dug the grave. Alva Kellen, as captain of his own ship, muttered a brief and formal prayer. Then they all went back to the house for a drink.

For a while no one spoke.

"I think each of us ought to write out a statement, before we do anything else," Driscoll suggested.

"Good idea," said Kellen. "Afterward I'll go back to poor Annamarie."

"And I'll go out and snoop around, and see if I can't find something we've missed," Buck Masters decided.

Two hours trickled by. It was difficult work. Once Kellen rose, slamming down his pen. "Those drums are driving me crazy!" He took another

drink, lit another cigarette, and sat down to finish his statement.

None of them worked steadily. Kellen fidgeted, and drank too much. Driscoll was thoughtful. Horace Strachey was acutely frightened, as he had been ever since the previous night aboard the *Ramona;* his eyes were never still, and he seemed to cringe as though expecting a blow. Buck Masters, perhaps the coolest of them, sat writing a little but mostly watching the others with small shrewd eyes.

Nobody wanted any lunch. They had another drink instead. Driscoll collected the statements without reading them, folded each, put them together, tucked them away in his desk.

"Anybody coming back with me?" asked Kellen. "I want to get as far away as possible from those damned drums."

No one answered.

A few minutes later they saw him rowing back to the yacht. He was rowing jerkily, badly. Nerves.

"Well . . ." Buck Masters stretched, tightened his belt. "I'll be on my way."

Driscoll said sharply: "Now I don't want you to be trying any of that old-fashioned rough stuff on my boys! They're in no mood for it, and we've had enough trouble around here as it is!"

"I ain't going to touch your beloved blacks. I'm just going to do a little detective work, that's all."

"I don't see what you expect to find."

"Never you worry about what I expect to find, young fella." He came closer, and his eyes were small and angry. "What's more, I don't want any young pipsqueak of a planter giving me orders."

"Not orders. A warning. This is my property, remember."

"I know it's your property. Want to come along?"

"No."

"All right, then." He went to the door, and turned. He looked at Strachey, and there was a sneer on his mouth. "What about you, 'Orry me lad?"

"N-no, thank you. I'll stay here with Mr. Driscoll."

Buck Masters grinned. He swaggered out.

Chiefly for lack of something else to do, Elliot Driscoll spent the rest of that afternoon checking accounts, putting his house in order both literally and figuratively, and packing a bag in readiness for quick departure when the opportunity came.

Strachey sat and watched him. When he went into his bedroom, Strachey followed as far as the door, and stood there. When he returned to the living room, Strachey trailed him, abject, scared.

"Sit down and be quiet," Driscoll snapped. "You give me the jitters!"

"Driscoll, you don't— You don't understand."

"I understand enough to know that unless you sit down and be quiet for a while I'm going to knock you down!" He softened a bit, as Strachey shrank away. "Why don't you take the *Ellen's* tender and go out to the yacht? If Masters comes back and wants to go there too we can shout for one of the Chinks to row it back for him."

"No, no! I couldn't do that!"

Driscoll shrugged. "Afraid of Kellen? Afraid of West? What in the world *are* you afraid of, eh?"

Strachey did not answer.

IV
Strachey's Story

DARKNESS came suddenly, as it always does in the tropics. Driscoll went to the kitchen and opened tins of beef and of beans. He heated these. He made tea. Strachey took a little of the tea, but he shook his head when Driscoll offered him food. So Driscoll ate alone. "I wish Masters would come back," he muttered.

Then he got up abruptly.

He went to a back window, stared out. The jungle, beyond the house Pete and Joe-Joe shared, was a blank black wall. No sound came from it

except the soggy far beat of tom-toms. No light showed.

"If—If Masters *doesn't* come back—"

"What makes you think he won't?"

"I don't know," Strachey said weakly. "I don't know."

Driscoll cleared the table, washed and dried the dishes, and put them away. He was coming back into the living room to pour himself a drink, when they heard the first shots.

There were two of them. They seemed, like the sound of the tom-toms, soggy and feeble from forcing their way through the wet jungle air. "What was that?"

"Shut up."

Then three more shots, in swift succession, a high shrill scream, a deep roar.

"Masters," muttered Driscoll, and went again to a back window. "The meddling jackass!"

"You'd better not stand in that window."

"Oh, don't be a fool! None of those boys has a gun of any sort. It must have been Masters who fired. He ran into a few natives and lost his head. And now we're in for it."

"Wha—what are you going to—do?"

"What can we do? We've got to go back there and find him and bring him back."

"But you can't do *that!*"

"Can't afford to do anything else. If they haven't killed him already they will right away. I'm not worried about his miserable hide—he's only getting what he deserves. But what about the rest of us? Once they've killed him there'll be no holding them."

He jerked his chin toward the doorway, started in that direction.

"Come on. We've got to bluff them out of it before they go stark staring mad."

Strachey made a screechy sound, like a small animal stepped upon. He stiffened in his chair. Driscoll cursed. "Well, stay here if you want, then. I'm going—" He stopped when he saw that Strachey was not listening. Strachey was looking past him toward the front door. Driscoll wheeled.

Though it had not rained all day, the man in the doorway was wet. His hair was wet, black, slick. His shirt and shorts were wet. Water dripped from him. He wore no shoes, no socks. His wet yellow face was twisted in a sort of grin, and he made a strange clucking sound in his throat. He saw only Strachey, as Strachey was seeing only him. He held a short bright knife in his hand.

The only other time Driscoll had seen this Chinese was aboard the *Ramona*. In the galley. He was the cook. He did not seem aware of Driscoll at all. He crept toward Strachey, who was like a rabbit facing the approach of a snake.

Driscoll took a step forward, grasped the Chinese by a shoulder, spun him around. He tore the cook's shirt as he did so, and saw a large blue bruise on the cook's shoulder.

The grin disappeared, and the Chinese spat like a cat. He raised the knife, furious at this unexpected interruption. Driscoll swung an uppercut to his lower ribs; then slipping closer, before the little Chinese could collapse, crossed a right to the jaw.

THE Chinese went down with a crash. He hit his head against the doorjamb. After that he didn't move.

"So *this* was the man who jumped me last night! What in the world was he doing in your room before—"

It was not another squeal from Strachey which caused Driscoll to look up and see the second Chinese, the steward, who like his companion was wet from head to bare feet. It was, perhaps, his jungle training. The steward had just taken a pistol out of an oiled-silk bag. It was a very large black automatic. At arm's length, he held it, pointing at Strachey.

He fired four times, and Strachey went over backward, chair and all. Driscoll yelled, "Hey!" and reached for his Webley.

The Chinese turned only his eyes and his automatic. There was no expression on his face. He did not seem

to care what happened now. His work was done. The rest didn't matter. But the rest mattered a great deal to Driscoll.

They fired simultaneously. There was a single roar of sound. The Chinese lurched forward, his left leg crumbling. He straightened himself in an instant, raised the automatic again—

Driscoll shot him twice through the heart. . . .

ALVA KELLEN was at the head of the steps, leaning over, peering through the darkness, when Driscoll got Strachey and the injured Chinese out to the yacht.

"Is that you Driscoll? What was all that shooting? What's happened? Have you seen either of those Chinks of mine?"

"Give me a hand," grunted Driscoll. "I've got one of your Chinamen here, and I think he'll be all right in a little while. The other one's dead."

"Good grief!"

"Here's Strachey. Handle him carefully. He's in bad shape."

Horace Strachey's right shoulder was broken, and through the hasty bandages Driscoll had put on his chest blood was oozing steadily, angrily. His eyes were glazed with pain. His lips were squeezed shut, but in spite of this there was a thin driblet of blood forcing its way out of each end of his mouth.

They got him to a settee in the smoking-saloon, and Annamarie herself washed his wounds while Kellen, too excited to be of much use, babbled questions.

Driscoll told his story briefly. Kellen exclaimed: "Then that accounts for the murder of Whitey Nelson! Those Chinks must have been absolutely crazy!"

Driscoll shook his head.

"I don't think so. They knew what they were doing. They wanted to kill Strachey, and that's all they did want. But I don't think they killed Nelson. One of them at least was in Strachey's bedroom last night at the time of the murder. I heard him there but thought it was Strachey himself."

Strachey opened his mouth. His eyes were clearer now, and he was conscious. He didn't seem afraid. He knew he was going to die.

"I killed Nelson," he said.

"Take it easy, man! Get his head a little higher there."

"I know what I'm saying," Strachey slobbered. "I killed Nelson. Got into the wrong room. I wanted to kill Masters."

He shook his head when they tried to stop him from talking. He *wanted* to talk, now.

His story, when he got well started, was for the most part clear enough. He talked slowly. Now and then he would pause to cough a little, and the blood would flow again for a moment; but generally he seemed to have control of himself. His voice was low. He looked at Driscoll most of the time.

"It was the opium. It was in Singapore, and a clique in the Sun Wei Kuan secret society organized a raid on the government opium factory and stole a lot of the finest *chandu*. Worth at least two hundred thousand dollars. Straits dollars. They stole it for a syndicate in New York. All Chinese.

"Something went wrong with their arrangements to get it out of Singapore, and they approached me. I suppose because I was a white man and probably wouldn't be suspected. I needed the money, and I had no criminal record. I knew what was in those four big suitcases, almost the size of small trunks they were, but I accepted the offer just the same. I was to take them aboard a Dutch freighter as personal baggage, and keep them in my stateroom until a Chinaman approached me with a certain password in Colombo, Ceylon. Then I was to let him take them away. That was all I knew. I didn't know how they planned to get them to New York."

HE PAUSED a moment, coughing gently. Annamarie wiped blood from his mouth. He swallowed, went on.

"We stopped two days at Batavia, to take on cargo. That was to be the only stop before Colombo. I left the ship and took a taxi to the Hotel des Indes. I was pretty nervous, and I thought a good luncheon and a few drinks might set me up.

"The first thing I saw when I went into the lobby was a Singapore detective. I knew that he was working on the robbery of the opium plant, which had been kept out of the press, and I knew that he had been still in Singapore when we left. There hadn't been any other ships to Batavia in the meanwhile, so I knew that he must have chartered a plane to get to Batavia before I did. That could only mean one thing.

"I got panicky. He hadn't seen me, and I went right back to the ship. I knew that there were two deck passengers aboard that ship who were members of the Sun Wei Kuan and were watching me. They were making the trip just to see that I didn't try to slip off with the opium. They would kill me in an instant if they thought I was trying to do that.

"I knew this; but I was panicky. There was another small Dutch freighter just about to pull out for Samarang, further along the Java Coast, and I got aboard that ship with the four bags. It wasn't necessary to pass through customs because the bags were sealed and simply taken from one ship to another on the same dock.

"At Samarang I put the stuff in bond. I didn't know what to do. If I ran away without the stuff, leaving it in bond, it would be opened sooner or later and I'd be a marked man after that. I'd had to sign for it, of course. That would mean I would never be able to go back to any British place again—and I'm a British subject with a British passport.

"On the fourth night in Samarang I was going back to my hotel when I ran into the two Sun Wei Kuans who had been assigned to watch me—the two who had been deck passengers on the ship out of Singapore. I don't know to this day how they'd managed to follow me to Samarang, but there they were. They didn't stop to ask questions. They assumed that I'd tried to steal the opium, and they knew their lives wouldn't be worth a tuppence if they returned to Singapore without having killed me. They drew pistols right away—and I ran.

"Thank heaven they were poor shots! I got away, down a dark alley, but I didn't dare to stay in Samarang, nor did I dare to go away without that opium.

"It was then that I met Buck Masters. Everybody who knows anything about shipping in this part of the world knows about Buck Masters. He'd do anything for enough pay. He had his boat with him too, in Samarang, a little schooner he sailed with only two Malays as crew. I made him a proposition. I didn't tell him what I had in those bags, of course, but he must have known that there was something fishy about it. He agreed to take me to Rabaul. I figured that in Rabaul I could perhaps sell some of the stuff, then get to Noumea and sell some more, and then if I had any left I might even get Masters to take me all the way to Suva. My big thought was to get as far away from Singapore as possible, as far away from those two Sun Wei Kuans as possible—*and* to get rid of the stuff. After all, it was worth a fortune.

"Masters hinted again and again, trying to learn what I had in those bags, but I kept my mouth shut. I was afraid he'd murder me and throw me overboard."

Again there was a pause. Strachey was weakening. His lips trembled, his voice was getting lower. But he persisted.

He looked again at Driscoll.

"We put in here to avoid some rough weather. Masters' schooner was about ready to fall apart: it couldn't have withstood a good hard gale. And while we were here, while Masters was on land, hunting, I took all the stuff ashore and hid it. I left the bags where they were, stowed under my bunk, but I hid every single tin of opium. Covered it with creepers and

leaves. I thought I'd come back some time later, alone, and recover it.

"Masters didn't know this, of course. He got drunk, after we sailed out of here, and stayed drunk for three days. At the end of that time he piled us up on a reef. There was another vessel standing by, the sea wasn't rough, and we were rescued without any great difficulty, but the schooner and everything aboard were lost.

"But drunk as he was, the last thing Buck Masters did before he was taken off, was go below and smash open those bags. He learned then that they were empty. He must have guessed, by this time, what it was they had contained, and he must have guessed what I'd done with it. He didn't say anything.

"THE vessel took us to the New Hebrides, and Masters got in some trouble there with the Condominium authorities at Port Vila. I never did know just what it was. He had to skip out of the Group in a hurry. I stayed for a while. I had practically no funds left by that time, and I was obliged to wireless to friends in Singapore for a loan. The money came eventually, by mail, but it was some time before I could buy a boat small enough to handle alone. I was sure I could find this bay again. And I did—and learned that you, Driscoll, had bought the property in the meanwhile and started to lay out a copra plantation."

Driscoll murmured: "I begin to understand. That explains those trips for 'specimens.'"

"Yes . . . I couldn't find the stuff at first. In fact, I never found it at all. But I found the place where it had been."

"Masters had been back and taken it?"

"That's what I first thought. You could still see the marks of the tins in the soft earth. They could only have been moved a little while before. Then at last, when the natives began kicking up a fuss, I realized what had happened. The natives themselves had found the stuff while they were clearing the jungle, and they'd taken it deeper into the jungle. They probably thought it was some new kind of god. That explained the tom-toms.

"I didn't know what to do then. My boat was damaged and I couldn't leave. You didn't suspect anything, Driscoll, and I thought I might as well stay around. Then in came this yacht, and the first person I saw was Buck Masters. It had taken him a little time to do it—he'd probably been obliged to dodge the authorities, and of course he'd be without funds too after his schooner was wrecked—but he'd made it eventually.

"I was afraid of Masters. I knew he wouldn't hesitate to drag me out into the jungle and torture me in an attempt to learn where that opium was. I figured it was his life or mine.

"What made it even worse was when I saw that steward, here on board, last night. He was one of the two Sun Wei Kuans! Don't ask me how he got all the way to Raiatea. Chinamen can do extraordinary things when they're determined to. And these two chaps didn't dare go back to Singapore and their families while I was still alive. That's why I insisted upon sleeping ashore last night.

"I killed Nelson. I thought I was killing Masters. I thought he had taken the back room at the other end of the house, instead of the front room. I crept in there at about three o'clock and beat him with a club. I used that because I wanted to make it look as though the natives had done the job."

He was still looking up at Driscoll. His voice was very weak now, almost inaudible.

"I heard you coming. You stopped for something in the living room, went to the front door, came back again. That gave me a chance to haul Nelson's body out through the window. It was the only means of escape I had. It wasn't until then that I learned I had killed the wrong man. I left him on the path leading toward the native compound, and I went back to my room by the front door.

You were around back then. A few minutes later I heard you shout the alarm. You'd found the body. You—You—"

He coughed, and blood gushed from his mouth. He tried to sit up. They held him.

"Don't try to say anything! Lie still!"

"I— I'm sorry, Driscoll. Sorry I gave you all that trouble. I—I"

Then he died.

ALVA KELLEN went to the galley to find himself a drink. Driscoll took Annamarie out on deck. She was pale and quiet, and she trembled a little, but she did not weep. Her father tried to help him, but Hudson T. West himself was so badly shaken that he was of no service. He slumped into a deck chair.

The night was very still; the sky was dark; it smelled of rain again. A fish, jumping near the *Ramona's* bow, made a loud spanking splash. There was no sound of tree-drums: these had been silent since the shooting in the jungle.

"What are you going to do?"

"Go looking for Masters."

West cried: "But you can't do that! They'd kill you!"

"I've got to do it. Haven't any other choice."

The girl was clinging to him, and at last there were tears in her eyes.

"No, no," she whispered. "No, no, no . . ." Then in a louder voice: "You *can't* go back! You *can't!*"

Alva Kellen came along the deck, wiping his mouth with a silk handkerchief. He was pale as death.

"What's this?" he muttered. "Who's going back?"

He saw how Annamarie was clinging to Driscoll, and his eyes hardened; but the girl paid no attention.

"Elliot—Mr. Driscoll—says he must go back and try to save Captain Masters! You mustn't let him go alone!"

"Well, I'm certainly not going to go *with* him!" Kellen shook his head. "See here, Driscoll, forgive me for being so blunt about it, but please don't try to act like a big hero. We've had enough people killed already. If Masters was fool enough to go out into the jungle at night, and if he ran into some natives and shot at them, then whatever he gets will be no more than he deserves."

"I know that. But still I've got to go after him. If I don't, the natives will think I'm afraid. I know what you're going to say," he added hastily. "You're going to say, 'Let them think so.' But I can't. I can't afford to do that."

"You *must!*" the girl cried.

"You don't understand," Driscoll said wearily. "You haven't lived out this way, and you don't know how it is. Don't think for an instant that I consider Buck Masters worth risking my neck for! It isn't that. It's simply that I'm a white man, and I've no other choice. If those plantation hands thought I was afraid of them, I'd never be able to handle them again."

"What of it?" cried West. "You're certainly never going to come back to a place like this again anyway?"

"I've started a plantation," Driscoll said, "and I'm going to finish it."

The girl released him, turning wildly to Kellen. "Alva! You can't let him go alone!"

"I certainly can," Kellen muttered. "I don't think anybody can accuse me of a lack of courage. But at the same time, I don't see why I should commit suicide just because Driscoll does!"

He turned, left the deck.

Driscoll was already on the steps and unpaintering the *Ellen's* tender. The tender of the yacht rocked gently beside it.

"Mr. Kellen is absolutely right," he called. "If I don't return, you three stay on board. You're in no danger here. They haven't firearms, and they're hill people—they wouldn't know how to build a canoe or even a raft. Just stay here until the supply schooner comes, and let her take you away. Good night."

He rowed swiftly, and did not look up. For a long time, almost until the tender's prow rubbed the mangrove

roots of the shore, he could hear the sound of Annamarie's sobbing.

V
Crescendo of Drums

THE lamp was still lighted in the living room, but the house was utterly still. In the doorway was the sprawled figure of the *Ramona's* steward. One leg was twisted under him, as though broken. The right hand grasped the large black automatic. That hand was still warm when Driscoll worked the automatic out of it. The jacket was empty, the clip was empty, and he could find no extra cartridges on the body. He left the pistol there. His own shotgun he took outside, shoved it underneath the house, covered it with leaves and loose earth. He did not need it, and did not want it to fall into the wrong hands.

Then he went to Pete's and Joe-Joe's house. Neither of them was there, nor was there any answer when Driscoll called softly for them. He didn't blame them. They could afford to run away and hide; they were not white men.

He crossed the central grove, walking among the small coconut trees he had planted. He crossed the log over the ravine, and below him man-high tree ferns rustled apologetically. He crossed the northwest clearing.

The pile of stones which he had visited the previous afternoon was his objective. That was their temple, their rallying place. Back in the compound the marys and pickaninnies lay wide-eyed and trembling — Driscoll had *felt* them staring at him when he passed through, but he had not *seen* one of them—but the men were in the blackness of the jungle, making strong magic around a pile of stones and a heap of stolen opium from Singapore.

When he quit the northwest clearing and plunged into the jungle a curious tightness fastened itself upon his chest. Fear? Probably. God knew, there was reason to be afraid! He was wet with sweat, for the night was very hot, and he could not see anything at all.

He smelled the fire without seeing it. The foliage was very thick. He did not know how far away that group of stones was, perhaps a quarter of a mile, perhaps more, and he was not sure that he was walking in the right direction. He wished that they'd beat their tree-drums again. The sound of those drums had been terrible, but the silence was more terrible still.

He moved slowly, cautiously. The smell of the fire was a little stronger now. Spiked creepers and stinging nettles tore his clothes, scratched his face. A snake squirmed away, almost at his feet. He could not see it, only hear it.

Stumbling along like that in a world of utter darkness—he could not even see a speck of sky above—it seemed, for a fleet instant, no more than natural when the earth fell away beneath his feet. All directions were the same here—up, down, left, right.

He realized that he was falling. There was a subdued patter of earth, a thud of tiny stones, and he was dropping through space. For a little while after that he knew nothing at all.

WHEN he recovered consciousness he found himself lying in soft earth. He had not been hurt, only stunned. But he could not understand it . . . He rose, turned with arms outspread.

First he found a single upright piece of bamboo. Bamboo was common enough thereabouts, but it grew, as it grows everywhere, in clumps. This piece was alone. It was about the thickness of Driscoll's wrist, and it was covered with some sort of grease.

Then he found earth, a sharp bank, a wall. He followed this, feeling with his hands. It was circular.

A man trap! He understood at last. In their own country, back in the hills, these blacks who could not build canoes no doubt were expert in the construction of traps like these. It was, he estimated, about ten feet

across at the bottom and probably somewhat less at the top, for the walls appeared to be not perpendicular but in-leaning. The planted bamboo pole no doubt was sharpened on top. Had he pitched forward as he fell he would have been impaled. And now, caught, he could not climb it to freedom, for the grease was too thick.

Probably they had built several of these between the pile of stones and the northwest clearing, in order to barricade themselves against further interruption. He might easily have walked between two, for he had been treading no defined path; but he'd been unlucky.

And now what? He didn't know. It was probable that he was within shouting distance of the natives themselves, for though he could not hear anything the odor of that fire was stronger than ever. If he shouted, then, he might expect them to come. But they would find him in a hole, and they would look down on him, literally. And this he could not risk.

They were simple creatures. In their own minds, when they looked down upon a man they were better than he. If they found Driscoll here it was more than likely that they would kill him.

If he remained, it was possible that with the coming of dawn he would find a means of escape. But by that time the natives would have killed and probably eaten Masters, and by that time they would have assumed that Driscoll was afraid of them. Thereafter nothing would be safe.

He began to feel along the wall.

Again and again he encircled the pit, but he could find nothing to get a grip on—no outjutting stone, no root. He tried to climb the bamboo pole. Impossible. He could not go up a foot.

When he first heard the footsteps approaching he supposed that somebody had been sent to peer into the pit or pits. He squared his shoulders, dropped a hand over the butt of his revolver. Show no fear. It was the only way to handle these fellows.

But the footsteps were light, irregular. No native would make that much noise. And when they came very close, and Driscoll heard a sobbing gasp almost immediately above his head, he knew who this was.

"Look out," he whispered.

But it was too late. She was already at the edge, already slipping in the soft earth as he had slipped. He caught a faint flash of her skirt, which was white—and then she fell upon him.

The elbow-length sleeve of her dress was ripped. She had come that close to being skewered on the sharpened bamboo pole.

She was stunned, at first, as he had been, though because of his presence in the pit she had fallen with less of a jolt. He had his arms around her, he whispered reassuringly into her ear.

"Where—where are we, Elliot?"

Her voice came shakily.

"We're in a pit," he said at last. "A man trap." Then he said: "Why did you come?"

"I couldn't let you go alone. So I persuaded Alva to row me ashore, and I thought I had taunted him into coming with me, I told him he would be a miserable coward to stay behind. I think he meant to come, then. But when he landed he lost his nerve. Said he was going to row back to the *Ramona*. I said: 'All right, I'll go alone!' and jumped out of the rowboat and ran up past the house and into the woods. I didn't suppose that a man with any spark of shame would allow that. But I waited, when I got in the jungle, and I listened—and still he didn't follow me. So I came on here alone."

"You shouldn't have done it—Annamarie."

"I wasn't going to let you go alone." She reached up, kissed him swiftly, then stepped back. "All right," she said, striving to seem businesslike, "now what are we going to do?"

"We're going to get out of this place. I couldn't do it alone, but maybe the two of us can together."

HE GLANCED up, and was amazed to find that he could see the lip of the hole. Dawn already? No, it was the fire. The smell was stronger now, and he could even hear the crackling of the flames, which must have been very close and large. They shone against the foliage above, not directly, not uninterruptedly, but with sufficient force to mark the edge of the trap.

Driscoll saw that the trap was about ten feet deep.

"Feel like a variety tumbling act?" he asked. "Think you could stand on my shoulders and then climb out to the ground?"

"I can try."

As a matter of fact, the trick proved unexpectedly easy, the bamboo pole serving to help her keep her balance.

She found another piece of bamboo, broke it off, tossed it down to Driscoll who propped it against the side of the pit and readily climbed out. The glare of the flames was brighter now, and they saw that the fire was only about sixty feet away. It hissed and crackled, and shadows crossed it and recrossed. The fire itself, to be sure, they could not actually see, but a thousand reflected licks of red light danced in the foliage all about them.

She whispered: "And now what do we do? Is Captain Masters over by that fire?"

"I suspect he is, but we're not going there now."

"But I thought you said—"

"The first thing we do is take you down to the shore and whistle for Kellen and see that you get safely back aboard. This is no place for a woman at night, out here. And nobody can guess what those boys are going to do when they see me."

"I won't go! I won't go without you! I've found you, and I won't let you walk into danger like that again without me! Don't you understand? I—I—"

He said quietly: "I understand," and kissed her.

The little red lights danced and glittered brilliantly in her hair as he held her head against his chest; but staring across the top of that head, Driscoll smiled a tight grim little smile.

She had raised her voice a trifle too high in that wild instant of protest. Or perhaps he himself had spoken too loudly.

"Darling," he said quietly, "it seems that we're neither of us going to go back just yet."

She turned in his arms, but did not release him. He heard her gasp, felt her heart thump wildly against his breast as she saw the blacks. Her hands tightened on his back.

There were seven of the blacks, and they had appeared with no sound. Six held clubs or machetes. The seventh had a large revolver—Masters', no doubt.

They did not move.

Driscoll whispered: "Don't say a word."

He still held her by one elbow in case she fainted. He did not touch the Webley. Even a move toward that weapon would be a confession of weakness, and in open battle now they would have no chance. What would it profit him to blast a few Melanesians? The thing was to get Annamarie away.

He looked around. Great black shiny chests and shiny black faces; thick bunches of muscle; shocks of dull black hair; huge white eyes.

"Feastum good," Driscoll said gravely. He motioned back toward the fire. "Mastah see, Missy see. Come."

He did not attempt to push through them. He turned, turning Annamarie West with him, and deliberately, very slowly, with great dignity, walked toward the fire.

He did not hear the natives walking behind him, but he knew that they were there, very close.

THE pile of stones had been considerably enlarged, and now it had definite shape. The stones in many places were held together by mud or clay. They formed a shallow trough perhaps ten feet long and four feet

across, oval, a sort of monstrous bathtub. In this the fire raged.

Four tree-drums, very tall, stood at the four corners.

Captain Masters sat on the ground to the right, some distance from the fire yet fully in its light. His face and head were all blood and bruises, one eye being entirely closed; and what of his body showed—two natives had been ripping the clothes from it when Annamarie and Driscoll stepped into the clearing—was hideously bruised. His wrists and ankles were bound with sennite. Yet he was alive; and with puffed lips he greeted them.

"You took your time, Driscoll."

His voice was hoarse, still loud.

He rolled his one good eye toward a pile of bamboo poles at his side. They had been sharpened, these poles, at both ends. Masters knew what they were meant for, and knew too the reason for the fire.

Strangest of all about this scene, stranger than the drums, the fire, the figure of battered Buck Masters, stranger than the naked unmoving savages, were the cans from Singapore.

They were piled at each end of the trough, and there were scores of them, hundreds. Each was flat, broad, round, covered with paraffin, and each, Driscoll knew, contained *chandu,* pure prepared opium, sticky black tarlike stuff. The cans were a fortune. And they were, indisputably, the cause of all this trouble.

For Driscoll could tell from the way they were piled that Horace Strachey's guess had been correct. The natives had found them, and supposed them some sort of gods hitherto unknown. These tins must be propitiated, or who could tell what might befall the tribe? The safest thing to do, obviously, was make offerings to them. Otherwise—

"What have you got that revolver for, Driscoll? Saving it as a souvenir?"

Driscoll said, "Shut up."

He was not yet prepared to act. Whatever he was going to do must be done slowly and impressively.

He must show no fear. He folded his arms and spoke.

What he said, of course, could not matter, since the blacks wouldn't understand a word of it anyway. The *way* in which he said it counted for everything.

As a matter of fact, he realized in the middle of it what it was which had somehow inexplicably sprung into his head at this moment. He was reciting over and over again, with tremendous pomp, that old jingle about thirty days having September, April, June and November. Ridiculous, of course. At least it would have been ridiculous in any other circumstances. But nobody who heard it this night around the blazing sacrificial fire showed any inclination to laugh.

WHEN he had ended he marched to the fire. Not looking right or left, but with the uptilted head of a man who performs some ceremony indescribably sacred, he picked the top can from the nearer pile.

There was a hissing of breath among the blacks, some slight stirring as a few edged forward. Driscoll ignored it. The heat of the fire was furious against his face. He raised the can in both hands, closed his eyes, recited once more the rhyme about thirty days having September. . . . Then he took out his clasp knife.

This was the telling moment. If they attacked now, it was all over. If they permitted him to do what he meant to do, he might yet bluff his way out.

He did not dare to hurry.

He scraped paraffin, clicked back his knife, and with both hands wrenched the top off the can. He threw the whole thing into the fire.

The natives broke and ran. They ran back into the jungle, squealing with terror, their arms over their faces to shut out the sight. But they did not go far.

Very solemnly, very slowly, Driscoll picked up another can, tore it open, cast it upon the flames. Then another, and another.

It flared and spluttered and spit, and clouds of smoke rose, swam around the clearing, sifted down the jungle lanes. Driscoll picked up another can, and another, and another.

Masters cried: "Do you know how much that stuff's worth?"

"It's worth our lives," Driscoll whispered. "So keep quiet!"

The sweet-sickish smell was horrible, choking. The *chandu* sizzled and spluttered in rage increasingly loud as each fresh can was thrown to the flames.

He completed the great pile at one end of the trough, and walked slowly, sternly, to the other end. He must finish the whole job. He must violate every can, burn every ounce of the stuff. Otherwise the gods might still be angry and might still demand sacrifices.

He did not look at Annamarie. He did not look at Masters. The plantation hands were coming back into the clearing one by one. They were silent, awed, fascinated. This was the sensational climax of the whipping-up of their emotions which had been in progress for days. This would, or *should*, quiet them. It should satisfy them. A white man had defied the new gods—and had lived. Therefore the white man had more potent magic than any they had ever known before.

"Beatum bokis, bokis 'e dead-finish," Driscoll intoned solemnly, and threw the last opened can.

Even after that he waited for more than ten minutes until the smoke which stung his eyes and nose and throat had thinned sufficiently for him to see and be seen. Then he stalked to Buck Masters. He leaned over, and with his sheath knife he cut the sennite which bound Masters' wrists and ankles. He addressed the plantation hands once more.

"Orait! Boys no kaikai mans! Dim-dim 'e go Mastah, 'e go Missy! Tomorrow boys workum, workum plarnty! Good night!"

To Masters he whispered: "Now get down to the boats, and don't walk too fast! We'll be right behind you."

It would have been successful. Driscoll had not a doubt of this. The boys were properly frightened. Buck Masters was experienced enough to know that he must walk slowly, not looking back. Annamarie was upright, waiting for Driscoll, trusting him. They could go in silence and untouched. The gods were destroyed. It would have been, and should have been successful. Alva Kellen spoiled it.

VI

Blood and Ashes

HE CAME charging out of the jungle a little to the left of where Driscoll stood, and he did not even see Annamarie. His shirt was torn, his hair mussed; his face, gleaming with sweat, had been cut in a dozen places by spiked parasites; his eyes glittered like the eyes of the madman he was at that moment. He held an automatic.

"Where is she? She can't call me a coward! You black devils can't take her away from me! Where is she?"

He was drunk with liquor and with excitement alike. He must have gone back to the *Ramona* and restored a wobbly courage with whisky swiftly downed. He waved the automatic, and never heard Driscoll's yell of warning.

"Where is she, you devils? You fiends! Tell me, or I'll—"

He started to shoot.

In the failing light of the fire and through the thinning clouds of opium smoke Driscoll saw one native swing in a complete circle and fall flat on his face. He saw another tumble backward, mouth open in a scream. He saw a third—this happened in the blinking of an eye—loom up behind Alva Kellen.

The third native had a club, which he used not once or twice but repeatedly. Alva Kellen probably never knew anything after the first terrible blow, and never felt any pain. Almost instantly he was surrounded and they were beating him. But they were beating a lifeless corpse.

Driscoll, yanking out the Webley, sprang for Annamarie. "*Run!*"

Had she fainted it would have been the end for both of them. But she did not faint. She turned and ran. She stumbled, fell, rose and ran on. Driscoll ran after her.

A stone or a hurled club caught his left shoulder and spun him around. He dropped to one knee, and as he was rising he saw the silhouette of a charging black. He fired once, didn't wait to see whether the bullet had struck its target, ran on. He had lost sight of Annamarie's white dress now but he could hear her tearing and crashing through the bushes ahead.

In the northwest clearing he caught sight of her again, reached her side. Behind them the jungle was alive with savages and the wet night air was loud with their yells.

The fallen tree which spanned the ravine between the northwest and central clearings was too narrow a bridge for Annamarie in this state of terror. She slipped, disappeared into the tall ferns below. Driscoll sprang after her.

On hands and knees, calling, he slammed aside ferns. He found her at last, in half a swoon, seated, her eyes wide open.

"Can you walk? Here—"

HE SCOOPED her up, tore through the ferns, across the unseen busy little river at the bottom of the ravine, up the other bank while loose earth shook and gave under his feet. He scrambled to the top.

She got to her feet. "I'm all right. I——"

Across the ravine a stumpy huge-shouldered Melanesian was pointing something at them. Something small and dark and shiny. Alva Kellen's pistol! Driscoll saw the flashes, two, three, four of them. He fired back twice, and got an empty click when he pressed the trigger for the third time. But the native had disappeared, and the ferns of the ravine were rocking and shaking as he plunged through them to the river.

The native compound was utterly silent. The house was silent. He shouted for Joe-Joe and Pete, but with no real hope that they would hear and answer. Half carrying Annamarie, he stumbled down among the mangroves and reached the shore.

They were shouting behind him, they were screaming with rage.

"Masters! Here!"

Masters, as Driscoll had guessed, had the wit and the legs to save himself; and he'd had a good start. When they reached the shore he was half way to the *Ramona,* rowing the tender of Strachey's ketch. He was alone in the tender.

There was no other boat here. The *Ramona's* own tender, in which Annamarie and Kellen had come ashore, had apparently not been paintered well by Kellen. It rocked now, oarless, half way between yacht and shore. There would be no time to swim to it, bring it back. And Annamarie obviously was in no condition to swim to the yacht.

"Masters! Don't you see us here? Bring that back! . . . You fool! There's room in it!"

"There's room—but no time!"

He rowed on with long fast strokes.

Driscoll cried: "I'll shoot!"

There was no reply, except that Masters rowed the faster, bending low over the oars.

Driscoll aimed once in the air, fired. Masters went on rowing. Driscoll aimed deliberately at the boat, and fired again. It was his last cartridge—the last, at least, in the revolver.

Masters chuckled, and the sound carried across the water. "Better luck next time!"

They were not yelling back there any longer. They knew, now, where the two whites were. The shouting and shooting had told them. A rock whistled past Driscoll's head and splashed into the water. Another struck him in the back of the right leg.

"Try to swim for it," he whispered. He started to reload the Webley. "Swim! It's your one chance!"

"Not if you stay here!"

"They won't come close while I've got this. A couple of shots—"

A rock hit his right hand, and the pain was sudden and stunning. The Webley, the chamber thrown open for loading, spun through the air, splashed, sank beneath the water among the tangled roots, among the snakes and stinger, in the soft black mud of the bay.

"Mastah! Mastah!"

A long shadow slid around a clump of roots, and there were two blurred shadows above it.

"Mastah, catchum quick!"

"Pete! Joe-Joe!"

It was the pirogue Pete had constructed hastily for fishing and which they had not used since Strachey's tender was available. It was rickety and small, and no outrigger had been attached; but it could carry four persons.

"We hear you, Mastah. We wait for you."

"Let's go!"

CAPTAIN BUCK MASTERS was on the forward deck explaining something to Hudson T. West when Driscoll climbed aboard. The two mission-trained boys were helping Annamarie to a deck chair.

"Oho! You made it after all, eh?" cried Masters.

Driscoll did not answer, verbally. His right fist was useless now, cut as it was by that rock; but there was nothing the matter with the left. He didn't say a word to Buck Masters. He hit him instead, in the jaw.

Masters reeled back against the rail, which saved him. He virtually bounced off that rail. He was dazed, and he probably would have fallen forward; but Driscoll, not waiting to find out, hit him again.

Driscoll leaned over him, nudged him with a contemptuous toe.

"Listen, Masters. Is it true that you can't run those Diesels, or were you lying to us this afternoon just so's you'd be able to stay around and search for that opium?"

"I can run them," the man muttered.

"Well then, get up and do it. Otherwise I'll tie a weight around your neck and throw you overboard! Or I'll let Joe-Joe and Pete loose on you—which would be even worse!"

When they moved at quarter speed through the break in the reef, Driscoll steering with one hand while Annamarie West bandaged the other, he turned his head to watch the blaze. The natives, gone completely berserk, had fired his house, the house for Pete and Joe-Joe, even their own houses—for they would not remain here, fearing the white man's vengeance, but would attempt to find their way back to their hill homes.

"After all the work you've put in on it," Annamarie whispered, and there were tears in her eyes and she bent over the bandage.

"I think that when I come back I'll build a little further from the shore," Driscoll said thoughtfully. "Catch a better breeze that way."

"You don't mean to tell me you're coming *back?*"

"Of course. I had a bad break this time but next time I'll know better. I'll hire coast boys, boys who know what it's all about. I'll have that house rebuilt in another two months, if they don't hold me up too long with red tape at Port Moresby."

She was silent while she finished the bandaging. Then she smiled, reached up and kissed him.

"We'll bring a radio," she decided. "That will help. And curtains will make the house look ever so much nicer."

"Annamarie, what are you talking about?"

"This," she answered, and put her arms around his neck and kissed him again, but less briefly this time.

"But—But—" He struggled. "A lovely girl like you, a girl who's got everything ahead of her, and rich and all— Why in the world should you busy yourself in a place like this?"

"That," she said, "is my own business." She smiled up at him, refusing to release him, and her eyes shone. "But you'll find out," she promised. "I'm sure you'll find out."

To My Shipmate

A Story of the Men Who Go Below the Sea in Pigboats—and Sometimes Don't Come Up

by Steve Fisher

I GUESS you had better come back because the damage was done before you went, and Carol wants you, and I too have been thinking; thinking that you and I might start all over again and be the kind of shipmates people always thought we were.

I know that what happened must have affected you or you wouldn't have gone away, but I really don't know what was in your mind, and whether or not you saw the whole thing as I saw it: our lives together in the Navy, mostly on those little pieces of pig-iron junk that are the R-boat submarines, with nearly everyone believing that there were no two officers living who were greater friends than you and I. . . .

Our lives together which started when we were in Annapolis, and particularly on that day when we were both sophomores waiting for our chance in the first big football game. We were sitting on the bench there shivering when the coach happened to call you out. He didn't even remember your name and had pointed at you just by the sheerest chance of luck.

"Hey, you—"

At first you were so surprised that you didn't know what to do, then you jumped up and threw off the blanket and ran out on the field, and blessed if you didn't grab the ball on an end-around and romp through a broken field to make the only score that was made that day.

That was the start of everything because it made you a star over night. I remember for two weeks you insisted it was an accident and you were very modest about it; and because in that time you had done nothing else great I thought it would be forgotten. But the middies needed an idol, and the team needed a star so that it was

not long before they actually convinced you that you had done a wonderful thing that day. In a way it was all right because it gave you confidence and for three years you automatically carried the glory of the team, and in the last year someone elected you All-American. You always told me:

"Next time, Cotton. Next game, see? When we're ahead, and in the last few minutes of play. . . ."

But of course you always forgot, and during that three years I sat there on the bench cheering you until I was hoarse. The middies said I was a swell roommate for a star like you because I was never jealous of the things you did. Not even when you became regimental commander and forgot to "see about" getting me that officership. They said I was content to bask in the light you shed, and that I thought there was no one in the world like you. . . .

I WOULD like to recount each day, but so many of them have gone by, and so many weeks and months and years, that that is impossible. But I know you could never forget the grand send-off the Academy gave you on graduation day, and how the admiral in the Asiatic Fleet greeted you with open arms, and how he sat and talked to you about the Academy for hours just as though you and he were the only ones who had been there. It was through him that you made junior lieutenant while I didn't get the rank until long after. Not until we were stationed outside of Honolulu.

It was then, when we were together on the Pearl Harbor submarines, that you began to get your real glory. My junior (half) stripe wasn't even soiled before you made senior lieutenant and people began to speak of you as the best pigboat skipper in the Islands. God knows why, but they thought everything you did, even the little things, couldn't be done quite as well by anyone else. They spoke of me as sort of a lucky little guy who was happy just to be near you.

They said I couldn't be jealous of you, and I wasn't, because I saved your life that day the torpedo broke loose, didn't I? We were cruising off Maui, and you were forward when the heavy "fish" smacked you right in the middle and kept bearing down. The sailors and I tried to catch it, but it was greasy and slipped through our fingers. I will never forget the cry that burst from your throat, and how pallid your face became, and how blood dripped from your mouth.

Then the boat lurched and I must have lost my mind because I had more strength in that moment than I have ever had before or since. I lifted the nose of the torpedo and hauled it with the sway of the boat; got down on my hands and knees on deck and shoved my body against it until it was off you, and there was no longer any danger of it crushing out your life. You remained conscious (though I don't know how) and I remember how you looked up at me and whispered:

"Thanks, Cotton. . . ."

Then the sailors lifted you and put you in a bunk and you lay there half grinning and we tried to cheer you, though we didn't know until a long time afterward how wrecked you were inside. It seems strange when I think of that afternoon now because even then you were hero of the event. At least people thought of you as being the hero, even though it was I who lifted off the torpedo and saved your life.

But I didn't mind. People said that I didn't. You remember them saying that, don't you?

I came to see you at the hospital and you looked so grave and white that I felt terribly sorry for you. "You're a swell friend, Cotton," you told me. "I know what you did for me, even if the rest refuse to understand it."

I asked: "We're shipmates, aren't we?"

You nodded. "Sure. And I want you to know that you're to be in charge of the boat while I'm gone. I've fixed it up with the admiral."

I had known you would do that. I said: "Thanks." I told you next time I came up I would bring Carol to cheer you, and you said that would sure be swell because you had heard me talk about her and you were anxious to see what she looked like.

Next time I did bring Carol. She had afternoons free because she worked at the Republic Theater, the only legitimate stock company in Honolulu. You seemed to get on quite well with her, and I was glad because I thought I had made you happy.

THE boat went out for a week then, but the moment we tied up again in Pearl Harbor I came over to see you. The nurse in the corridor told me you had company. I just laughed at that and told her you were a popular guy and would always have company. But she knew—everyone knew—how I felt about Carol, I guess; and the nurse told me as though she was telling me someone had just died on the operating table.

She said: "It's—that red-haired girl."

Something happened to me when she said that. I don't know what it was. Carol was the only thing I had ever been able really to call my own. I was proud to be engaged to her because she was a leading lady on the stage; and because she was beautiful and gay, and said clever things at parties. But it was mostly because I loved her so much.

Maybe it wasn't love. Maybe it was a sort of worship. She had always seemed to understand me; when I got a bump in the service she would tell me it didn't matter; and she made me believe that someday I would get a break. But even realizing the intensity of such love I never could have understood how deep and real it was until that moment.

I didn't know what I was doing. I just nodded at the nurse and moved forward. Outside of the room I heard your voice asking why she had come there every day to see you, and I heard the rich softness of her words as she answered

"I should think you would have guessed by now."

You said: "You love me."

She did not answer, and there was a pause before you went on: "What about Cotton?"

"I don't know," she said, and she sounded a little hysterical. "I have tried so hard to be sensible. But what is the use? Nobody can fight against a thing like this."

You said: "Cotton is all right, poor guy. But of course—"

And I broke in then. I don't know why, or what was on my mind. If I had had a gun I might have killed you both. I stood there halfway to your bed and looked at you, propped up, your face as pale as the pillow; and Carol sitting there in a chair beside you. You had been holding hands, but you stopped now, and you looked at me not knowing whether I had heard anything or not. I kept looking at you, and the wind went out of me, so that I felt suddenly weak.

"Hello, Bill," I said. "Hello, Carol."

You both said hello, and I rushed on: "Gee, we had an awful time at sea this week. You should have seen those decrepit old rafts the Widgeon was hauling; and guess what? on Wednesday a cable to the raft busted and—"

I rambled on, sitting down in a chair and tapping a cigarette on the side of it and hoping you hadn't seen my hand shake. I went from one thing to another, telling you all about your boat, and that since I was skipper we didn't get the high marks in maneuver performance that we had when you were in command. I told you that sheepishly as though I were commending your superiority, and you seemed to listen, but you weren't. I could see that you were nervous, and Carol was nervous. At last you broke in.

"Cotton."

I looked up. I knew the axe was coming now and I was afraid. I wanted to get up and run. I wanted to do anything but hear what you had to say.

You put it quite simply: "Carol and I love each other," you said.

I just looked down, and I was trying to think of so many things that there was really nothing in my mind except confusion.

"It's all right," I said quietly.

Carol said: "Cotton, I don't want you to think that I am cruel. I want you to know—"

"It's all right," I repeated, and at last I was able to smile. "I've always been a pretty good loser, haven't I? People said that I have. I mean, I don't like it. I'm not glad. But it's not going to kill me."

I don't know how I got all that out, but as soon as I had I got up. You said:

"Cotton, you're man enough to understand these things. We can still be friends, can't we?" And Carol was crying.

"Sure," I said, a little surprised, "haven't we always been friends? I'll be best man if you want." Then I left the room, and I closed the door quietly. I thought at first I was going crazy. I could not believe this or anything like it had ever actually happened.

The next day when you announced your engagement and people saw we were still friends they said there was no one like that guy Cotton Clark for a good loser. Gee, they said, he's a swell guy; and *you* knew I felt no malice toward you, didn't you? You knew it because *everyone said* that I didn't.

DURING your convalescence you stayed in your cottage at Waikiki, and when you got off the boat you invited me up so that I saw Carol with you quite often; so often that the sight became natural, and it was hard to believe that it had ever been any different. I remember Carol in her white bathing suit, red hair tucked under the bathing cap, holding your hand and running into the waves.

Too, I remember sitting at the table with you and her as the boy brought us supper. Carol would keep looking at her watch all the time so she would be sure and not be late for the night performance at the Republic.

By the time you came back to the submarine and took command I had begun to lose weight. My face became pale, and when I looked in the mirror I saw a haunted look in my eyes that I could not understand.

We did a lot of maneuvering, both plain and fancy, in the days after your return, and the admiralty applauded your skill. I sat around smiling, and agreeing with you when you said things, but it was not until then (in the years I've listened to them) that I became aware of the *pump-pump-pump* of the Diesel engines all the time; and the sickly warm air we have to breathe below decks; and the way the sailors keep playing, over and over: A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody.

You got your stripes in China

You began to notice me, and you spoke of collaring me and taking me to a doctor, but you never did, and then (*that* day!) we went to sea again. The time came for the dive and you gave the order. I just looked at you. You were at the periscope and I stood in the central operating controls room watching you; and watching the sailors as the throbbing of the powerful Diesels ceased, and the soundless batteries went on to take their place.

I watched, and my shadow seemed to be reflected in the glistening bulkhead. I kept looking at the sailors in their dungaree trousers, and their undershirts, wet with sweat. I noticed that their faces were white, and their eyes seemed like glass.

There was something, that day . . .

I felt the first lurch as the boat pointed downward, and too, I heard the water rush up over our tiny hull, swallowing the hull into its greedy black belly. It was a sea that swished against us and we rocked and swayed back and forth moving like a drenched cigarette-stub down a wobbly trail into the depths of some gutter.

It was so quiet in the C.O.C. that I could hear the men's breathing—hard, labored breathing. I felt the hull touch the bottom, and ooze into the mud, and I heard you give the order to reverse, and then I looked up with my heart in my throat, because the engineer officer came in. I knew then that it had come.

"We won't be able to come up," he said in a husky voice. And he went on to explain what was wrong with the ballast tanks, and that it looked as though someone had tampered with them. "Damn it," said he, "I inspected them."

He scowled and got red.

You told him: "Inspect them again. And *fix* them!"

Your voice was too loud.

He looked at you dully for a moment, and there was silence so intense that I thought the world would collapse so that a little thing like a submarine on the bottom of the sea wouldn't matter. The shiny steel bulkheads were dripping with moisture.

We kept rocking back and forth.

"I'll do what I can, sir," the engineer said.

So he went to work with the best men he had, and part of the time you tried to supervise, and I did what I could, too. I pointed out something they hadn't seen before. Yet, even so, it seemed hopeless, and we set the oxygen tanks going, and walked about the ship looking different from the way we had ever looked before. I mean all of us—you and I, and the sailors. We knew the little R-boats weren't much good, and though if the worst came we could put on air lungs and go up through the torpedo tubes, it meant that one man would have to stay below. The last man would have to remain to shoot the next-to-last one up.

During the hours we lay there on the bottom, sweating, yet freezing; rocking back and forth with the current; listening to the pressure of the sea against our iron hull; watching the lights flicker, and grow dimmer—during that time we thought about that last-man business. You had got very pale and I could see that you were trembling. I could see that you were fighting desperately against hysteria.

"Of course," you said, "a skipper is the one who must stay down."

I didn't look at you. I whispered: "I'll tell Carol for you."

"*You'll* tell Carol?" You touched my dungaree shirt, and then you laughed, although it was soft laughter. You said: "This is what you wanted, isn't it? To get rid of me and—"

"Bill," I said, "you must be mad to say that. We're shipmates and—"

You shook your head. "Why try and pretend? I know how you've felt about me. You hate my insides. You hate everything about me. You love Carol and want to get her back!"

"You're hysterical," I said, "what you say isn't true!"

"Isn't it?" you echoed, and I had never seen you look as you did then. Sweat was running down your face. Sweat and grease. "Prove it," you went on, "prove what you say!"

"How?"

You said: "Carol loves *me*. Me, understand? For her sake—not mine—for *her* sake understand—"

You were going to ask me to stay down in your place but you never quite finished. You looked the other way and mumbled that you were sorry and that you were a fool for losing your head, and then you left me and went back to the ballasts.

It was only a few minutes later that the engineer said: "They're ready. We can come up!"

SO WE came up, and when we were on the surface and everything was normal again, you and I had coffee in

the wardroom and I told you how I really felt. That you had spoken the truth: that I did hate you, and that I had stuck close to you all these years because of that hatred. I told you that in spite of what people said I had not been a good loser. That I had been the rottenest loser in the world. I reminded you that you had never once in all your shining glory thought of me. That you had neglected to get me on the team you had made through luck; that when you were regimental commander you had forgotten me; that you had never introduced me to the admiral in China who made you junior lieutenant just because you were a pleasant young man to talk to.

I told you it was not so much your glory I hated, but the way you rode it. I did not mention Carol, nor that I had saved your life that day the torpedo fell.

But I did tell you about the ballasts. I confessed that it was I who had tampered with them, and that the engineer had known that and deliberately stalled. I said that I had done that, and got him to help me, so I could see whether or not you were the hero people thought.

You just looked at me.

I said: "It won't go beyond this wardroom. The engineer doesn't even know what you said. I just wanted to find out for myself."

You didn't say a word. You got up and went to the bridge, and when we were back in Pearl Harbor again you went straight to the admiral. It occurred to me that you were going to make a report against us, but I should have known that you didn't dare; that you had gone to the admiral to get a transfer to the fleet. You didn't even say goodbye to Carol.

* * *

As I have mentioned, all this that happened must have affected you tremendously, or you wouldn't have gone away. It is because I don't know exactly what was in your mind, and exactly what their effect was, that I have written this to tell you my feelings. And to tell you that Carol, in this year that you have been away, never has been quite able to see me again. That's because she still loves you. . . .

So I guess you'd better come back because the damage was done before you went, and Carol wants you, and I too have been thinking—thinking that you and I might start all over again and be the kind of shipmates people always thought we were.

A Tale Told Over a Tall Glass:

Midnight Keep

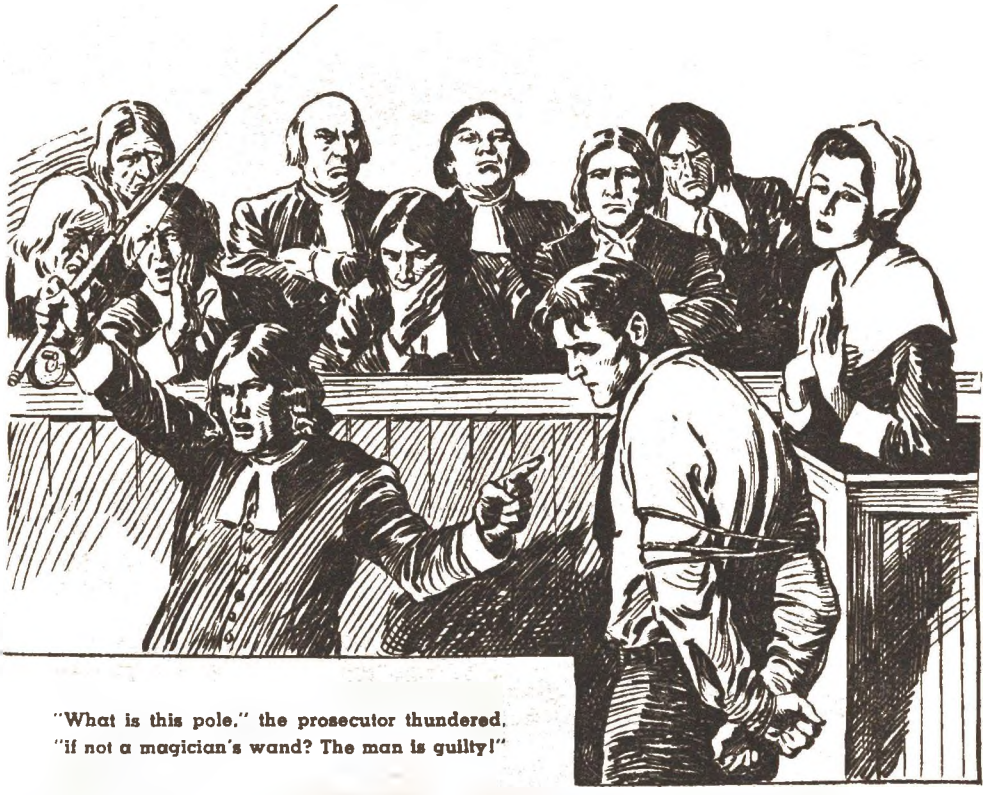
by Theodore Roscoe

Ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you—Job-XII-2

EVERYONE waited to hear what Stuart had to tell. His gray eyes were strange as he pushed back his chair and stood, lean and conventional and yet somehow unfamiliar, at the head of the table. His fingertips were rigid on the crystal rim of his sherry glass; his left hand seemed to be clenched in the pocket of his jacket; and there was a bated silence in the room, a sudden withdrawal of conversation revealing the murmur of the fire and the low rat-a-plan of wintry rain on the avenue windows.

It was the custom (and sole purpose) of the Tall Glass Club that at each meeting one of its members must tell a story, the only restriction being that the yarn be true. That some might draw the long bow and others put a strain upon credulity was to be expected, if not hoped for, as the little group of tale-lovers was as various as it was congenial—the membership including an aeronautics expert, a portrait painter, a minister—MacNaughton had been in the diplomatic corps; Garde was a former police commissioner; Lanwell, a metallurgist; Farraday, a surgeon; Glazebrook an explorer; Parks was an Egyptologist —a group perhaps unique even in so cosmopolitan a city.

Two weeks ago, Johnny Howe had given a vivid account of his work with Limon Dake in a fruitless venture to salvage the *Lusitania;* and at the last gathering, Denny Sassoon (*the* Denny Sassoon) had related an unbelievable



"What is this pole," the prosecutor thundered, "if not a magician's wand? The man is guilty!"

wartime adventure with the Intelligence in Tiflis.

"Stuart comes next," Denny had chuckled, drawing his successor's name from the rolls. "At least Westy's story ought to *sound* like the truth."

Denny's humor was understandable, for of all those present Westmoreland Stuart was least apt to exaggerate—the question rather concerned his ability to spin a yarn at all. Though he was a loyal habituee, the Tall Glass Club knew him more from reputation than from contact—a sober and unobtrusive chap with a pleasantly formal manner, a quiet smile, the serious eyes of a scholar, preoccupied air; unpressed tweeds, Ph.D., Phi Beta Kappa; that sort of thing—as a considerable historian more familiar to the lecture halls of universities, the archives of libraries and the more remote corridors of museums. He had written a history of England and a biography of some Scottish laird or other, too erudite for popular consumption.

That night of Denny Sassoon's amiable raillery, he had surprised the Tall Glass Club with a promise.

"I'll tell you a story I once told to three Scottish police officers, and I promise you that when I'm through you won't believe it either. Those three Sandy MacDonalds stared at me as if I were mad, for I walked in on them out of a night of howling rain, my clothing in ribbons, mud and blood from head to foot; and the only evidence of my misadventure was a fish-pole. After I'd told them what had happened, the first one grinned, the second

Down a tunnel of blackness roared the big car, to come crashing head-on at its end—with the 17th Century.

one looked scared, and the third one said, 'It's aw' right, laddie!' and started to telephone the nearest insane asylum. I ducked out of the station in a fury. But then I hadn't shown them the real guarantee. I can see their faces yet—blank as three bricks—when I staggered in and told them I'd just fought a battle with Oliver Cromwell."

"Oliver *Cromwell!*"

Westmoreland Stuart had nodded somberly. "I mean Cromwell—called Ironsides—the Puritan leader of the Roundhead Revolution—the man who defeated Charles's Cavaliers—the dictator of the Commonwealth—Cromwell!"

"But good Lord!" someone else had cried. "You say you'd fought a battle with—! But Cromwell died in 1658—!"

"And I promised you you wouldn't believe the story," was the grave reminder. "Neither did those three Scotch constables when I told them I'd gone back to 1658. But that is the truth, gentlemen; I was motoring in northern Scotland, and I took a road that went back to the Seventeenth Century—to swords and cloaks and horse pistols—to three hundred years ago. Next week when I tell you the story, I'll be prepared to show the guarantee."

The members of the Tall Glass Club had stared at Westmoreland Stuart that night almost as hard as they were staring at him now, incredulous, puzzled, unable to fathom the impossible statement. Perhaps Lanwell knew him best of all the company, and the metallurgist's features were a daze of unbelief.

"Let's hear about it, Westy! I knew you went to Scotland shortly after you graduated from college. Something is changed in you ever since; I used to wonder about it. What happened—?"

CHAPTER I

The Lady of the Legend

PEOPLE are only beginning to speculate (Westmoreland Stuart began) on the mystery of Time. What is it? Can one measure it with a clock? How can one accurately define the Past, Present, Future? The boundary lines are foggy and obscure. Fourth-dimensional philosophers like Olensky claim there is no Future, for Tomorrow is already incipient in Today—the acorn, in effect, is an oak tree. It's all pretty deep, this study of a Time Dimension—more for the mathematical wizard than for me—but it has a certain bearing on the story, and as a student historian it interested me.

Somewhere in boyhood I'd come across the writings of a French astronomer—Flamarrion, I believe—and although I couldn't understand much of it, one chapter gripped my imagination. As I recall it sketchily, Flamarrion's idea was something like this. Light travels at a certain speed—much faster, of course, than sound. At any rate, both vision and sound keep on traveling, on and on out into space. We know the gleams we see from certain stars started traveling toward us years and centuries ago.

You see what I mean?

To put it simply, these gleams, the things we see, travel on light-waves. Suppose, says Flamarrion, that some astral being is standing on a star in the middle of Orion's belt, watching the Earth through some gigantic telescope. What would he see? He wouldn't see what is happening on the Earth today, because the *scenes*, the light-waves haven't reached his star as yet. Measured by our earthly clocks, this star-gazer would see events that had happened Yesterday, even centuries ago. If he were watching from the North Star he would be seeing events that had happened before the birth of Christ.

Those light-waves and the scenes they carry—I could imagine them as a never-ending procession of events, like projections from a moving-picture machine—travel one after another into Eternity at so many thousands of feet a second. Then assume, says Flamarrion, that someone was launched from the Earth in a projectile that traveled *faster* than the waves

of light. Pretty soon this interspacial speedster would begin to *overtake* the events, go back down the years in Time. One after another he would catch up with the things that had happened on Earth and were outward bound. The cosmic newsreel, so to speak, would be running backward. He would fly past the Civil War and come to the Revolution. Early England would run itself out in reverse, and the Dark Ages, the Crusades, the days of Rome come into view. . . . I say it gripped my imagination as a boy, and I used to dream about going back and seeing those great events.

I don't know when, in a vague way, I began to *want* to go back. This business of the Past has many queer angles; consider the glamor. Yesterday —the very word breathes romance. How many times have you heard that wistful, "Give me the good old days"?

LANWELL can tell you how I majored in history in college and won the title of class grind. But I didn't grind at it; I loved it. I ate, dreamed, lived with the subject. . . . As a matter of fact I led a fairly athletic existence; my interest in history's lore lured me into all sorts of tangent endeavors—archery, wrestling, games that went back to the periods I happened to be studying at the time. Almost fanatically I took up fencing—a pretty fair brand of it —from De Carey, a former Belgian champion; and I starved myself to buy a couple of falcons. On the side I collected old pistols, and I forged some rather good pieces of armor. Trout-fishing was probably my only pastime that my school companions considered normal.

I don't quite know what fired my passion for England in the Seventeenth Century, the time of Cromwell. Perhaps it was tracing my mother's family back to the Sixteen-hundreds. Bowen was the name—Scottish Highlanders, though it doesn't sound like it—and a family curiously divided in those days; half with Cromwell's Roundheads, half with the Cavaliers. Digging back into family history, I found a lot of fascinating old records, documents, letters and what-not. I discovered the clan had once owned an obscure castle in a remote northern keep; my last year in college I read and thought of almost nothing but those spicy horse-pistol sword-and-cloak days; and it was with the intention of writing a book on Bruce of Kinross, fishing the Highland burns, and visiting that old ancestral stamping-ground that I went to Scotland.

Do you know that north-Scottish coasts below the Orkneys? It is a part of the world I never want to see again!

I'll never forget that little Scottish fishing village tucked among the gray cliffs of that gloomy headland—the desolation of that countryside! Talk about the jumping-off place!

You hear of Scotland and you think of bagpipes, kilties and heather. But the Uplands near the coast—! Deep in history, I'd neglected my geography, and I wasn't prepared for the bleakness of that landscape. Rocky pasturelands and treeless crags swept by salt spray and sky. Miles between villages where the coast roads climbed off into nowhere; lonely shepherds'-cottages; dark glens echoing the boom of surf; valleys forlorn with cold-running streams and ancient stone fences and here and there some sullen old demesne frowning down from a barren eminence half-seen through fog.

It wasn't the Scotland I'd pictured, and the queerest sort of depression came over me the farther I drove north. It was midsummer, but it seemed like autumn, a time of year that usually gives me a psychic let-down. There were rain and gray mist and a smell of rocks and sea, and when the sun came out the landscape seemed more desolate for the contrast.

Like the countryside the natives were taciturn and morose, frosty-eyed old clansmen who regarded my American knickers and rented Bentley roadster with suspicion. Most of them spoke Gaelic, and I might as well have talked to the flocks of black-faced

sheep that imperviously blocked the roads. By the time I reached that ancestral village I felt as lonely as a lost soul at the end of the map.

THE fisherfolk were kindly enough, and the innkeeper, Geordie, more cosmopolite than the rest, gave me a good room, a good brand of whisky and a good peat fire. That thawed me out a little, but the thick stone walls of the inn couldn't keep out the end-of-the-world feeling of that place. My window looked out on a cold seascape where the tide ripped around the headland and the horizon seemed to touch Norway. About ten miles offshore there was a speck of island that kept dimming and reappearing under a rag of haze, about the loneliest-looking fragment of land I'd ever seen.

I found Bowen Castle quite easily—a dour ruin of a place some three miles up the headland road. Two threatening sheep-dogs drove me off the first time I turned my car in at the gate, but I found the castle was up for rent, and later had no difficulty in gaining admittance from the caretaker. When I saw the interior I was furious. The owner had installed electric lights, central heating and three bathrooms, and then, having spoiled the ancient establishment, had been unable to meet the cost of his depredations.

But the walls were genuine, and for a week I explored the old rooms and went over old documented records. I found three things that more than rewarded my interest. One was a letter from Cromwell to a Lord Bowen, thanking the laird for his assistance to the Puritan Cause; Cromwell's own handwriting and a stirring last line in which he said, "I shall never die."

There was another letter, from this ancestral laird to a Duncan of Laidlaw— "The end has come. The King will return. Our men are moving north from Bowen Castle tonight." And there was an old dim portrait in one of the castle halls, a picture of one of my ancestral cousins, a face of such beauty that I will find it hard to describe. I'd like to be able to tell you about her, but I can't. The eyes in that portrait seemed alive, and the smile brightened up the whole room. It looked like an original Van Dyck; it was a wonderful painting.

"Who is she?" I grasped the old caretaker's arm with such violence he gave a plaintive bleat.

I had the oddest tightening in the throat when he told me she was Elizabeth Bowen, youngest daughter of the first Lord Bowen, and that she had died in 1657. When he told me she had been most beautiful of all the Bowen women and that there were a host of romantic legends about her, I could believe it. I wanted to hear about her, and I made that crusty old Scotchman tell me her story. We sat in that room with the autumn wind crying past the windows, and I couldn't take my eyes off the picture.

She was nineteen when the Bowen Clan was split by the revolution in England. Her father joined with Cromwell's Puritans while her Border uncles sided with the Cavaliers of Charles. The war raged into Scotland, and the wild country rang to the clash of arms. For a while, when the great Cromwell was off in Ireland, the king's Cavaliers seemed to be winning. Battles seesawed through the Highlands where the clans were divided, and one dark night a troop of Cavalier horsemen appeared before Bowen Castle. Elizabeth Bowen admitted the Cavalier leader who was wounded, and who had mistaken these northern Bowens for allies. Her father and brothers were off fighting in the south, but the girl was not the one to turn a wounded man away, and the young Cavalier did not realize his mistake.

Of course they fell in love, and of course the girl's father would not hear of it. The brothers swore to kill the Cavalier, but he was as daring as the girl was faithful to her heart; they met in secret trysts and defied their warring families. Cromwell won in England and established the Commonwealth, but the Scottish clans went on with their feud, and the girl

was still separated from her Cavalier.

Then the legend of Elizabeth Bowen took a strange turn. Cromwell's reign had begun to totter; there was talk of a king returning to the English throne; the Puritan Cause was weakening. One night the girl's father came to her and told her he had decided to leave the country with a party of Cromwell adherents—he would not tell her where—and she must prepare for departure. But she decided to run away with her Cavalier; summoned him by signal and told him they must fly. They met on the beach under cover of darkness, and tried to escape the headland in a skiff, setting out for the little island I had seen on the horizon.

"And did she reach the island with her Cavalier?" I gripped the old caretaker's arm. "Did she escape?"

He pointed at the tiny fragment of land dimly visible from the castle window, and shook his head. "No one ever lands on yon island," he told me. "Not fishermen nor sailors nor any mon in th' ken o' this village—leastwise nae lass alone wi' a dead Cavalier in a sma'boat. Her father shot him, d'ye see, just as they were puttin' out from shore, an' he let her row off with him alone, knowin' she'd never land there nor never come back. It's a wild rocky spot out there on that island, wi' shoals an' surf an' the tide roarin' round like th' Devil's own fury. Th' cliffs goes straight up, an' there's not a tree. Mony a one has tried, but they don't ever make it. Th' surf is too fierce for a sma'boat, an' th' shoals too murderous for a big un."

"Elizabeth Bowen." I murmured her name.

"Aye," the old caretaker nodded sadly, "an' this were her very room. 'Tis a pity she did nae get away wi' her Cavalier. Her boat drifted back smashed to pieces on that domned bit o' rock, same as boats been driftin' back from there ever since. But then mayhap she were better off, for th' men ae her clan, they went away that night an's not been heard of frae then to this, nobody ever knew where. It's thought perhaps some Cavaliers who was in these hills an' vanished at th' same time did awa' with 'em."

"And I hope to God her father got what was coming to him," I said, angered at such conduct from an ancestor. I stared at the portrait and unconsciously voiced a wish. "If I'd only been alive back then—"

CHAPTER II

The Dark Halls of Time

NOW I'm coming to the part of the story that has to do with Time—I'm trying to explain how I got there and the strange concatena-

The blades glinted like red-flecked serpents of steel.

tion of moods and sensations that, in a manner of speaking, led up to my going back three hundred years. If it hadn't rained for the next three days, a world-smothering, sky-blinding downpour that confined me to my room and my thoughts, this might have been no story at all. But it rained. It rained like Noah's flood, and in that brooding loneliness of wind and rocky headland and torrential sky I brooded.

To say I had fallen in love with a picture doesn't explain it, although the winsome face of that portrait had woken a response in me that had nothing to do with history. I was just out of college, remember, and it was my first time away from home, and the feminine influence had somehow never touched me before. You can't fall in love with a girl who died in 1657. Or can you?

I saw her face in my dreams. I could imagine her charm, her grace in the lovely dress of the period. Staring from the window out at the blowing seascape, I could picture her putting out from shore in the smallboat with her Cavalier, starting out through dark and storm for that distant island. Her brothers, her father would have come running with guns and lanthorns down the beach. A flash of lightning —a simultaneous crack from her father's pistol. The Cavalier crumples at the oars. The girl rows on. Somewhere out there near that evil speck of mist-shrouded rock the smallboat founders. Elizabeth Bowen—

Well, I could think of little else, and whether I fell in love with a portrait or not, I had fallen in love with the time, the period, the century. In those days, men fought hard, lived hard, loved hard—I thought of my contemporary college mates with scorn. It came over me that I was callow and futile in comparison with Elizabeth Bowen's Cavalier. At my age he had killed men, ridden day and night in battle, given his life for love. Grubbing around in dusty libraries, collecting antiques, writing heady papers, what had I learned of life?

Suddenly I hated the whole modern world of motor cars, moving pictures, paved roads, steam pipes, bathrooms. The world where you ran to the nearest policeman instead of defending yourself.

My life seemed as flimsy and unadventurous as a straw man's. I wanted fire, romance, action. I wanted to fight with a sword and ride with the wind in my hair. You can see how I remembered that star-gazing chapter out of Flamarrion, how my love of historical lore turned into a wish that I might be projected back into those times. It came over me like a sickness, that morbid yearning.

Shut into that room in that end-of-the-world village, I stewed in the toxic atmosphere of the place, brewed in my own thoughts. When the rains briefly cleared, I would stare at the sea and think of that tragic elopement; I borrowed a marine glass from the innkeeper and focused on that outer island.

Seen through a glass, the island looked as cheerless as the moon. High, dark murailles standing against gray sky, black waves pounding in and smashing like tons of breaking obsidian. Save for a few gulls sailing in the flying scud, there was no sign of life among the cliffs. No vegetation grew on the jagged escarpments. I could see how no boat could live in that wild surf, and the savage outer reefs were strung with warning buoys. Sullen-walled, unassailable, its stone foundations hammered by great explosions of spray, the island suggested a fortress ringed by bursting shrapnel.

"Ye wouldn't want to land there if ye could," the innkeeper had said. "Nothin' but sheer cliffs for twenty leagues around. 'Tis a cauld ugly barren, lad, an' there's some as say they seen bogles an' spooks on them clifftops, but I nae believe it, as how'd they get there through them barriers? Unless maybe there's th' soul o' poor Elizabeth Bowen—"

I SPENT a funny three days in that rain-marooned inn, confined to my room. I fetched out my foils, and

spent hours fencing with myself in the washstand mirror. I flung a coat across one shoulder and pretended myself a Cavalier. I stared at the wild seascape and mourned a girl who had died for love in 1657. Do you see how all that atmosphere of old castles and historic landmarks had gone to my head? As for the romantic side of it, I'd neglected that necessity in my history-cramming, and now I swallowed too much of it at one gulp. You might have said I was a little drunk when I emerged from my confinement at the end of three days with a jeer on my lips for all things modern.

Oddly enough, this revulsion against my generation didn't stop me from haughtily ordering my car, packing up my trout rod, and driving off for a go at the tarn on the end of the headland. I'd seen big ones feeding in that ancient pond beyond the castle, and I had sense enough to want some air after three days in a Scotch inn. But I had to stop at the castle for another look at Elizabeth Bowen's portrait, and I moped around too long that afternoon.

It was a glowering, windy day with moments of sunshine dispersed by scudding squalls of rain. When I left the castle the sky was heavily overcast, there was a somber late-afternoon light in the western wrack, and another blow was making.

The road out on the headland was paste and brown glue. Twice I mired down in soggy ruts, and by the time I reached the tarn it was too late to fish. I tried one cast, and the rain let go as I was unhinging my rod. Next thing I knew, I was caught in a terrific storm.

The sky went black as coal-smoke, and a blizzard of water came swooping across the moors at headland's end. Tarn, road, and rocky hillside were flooded in one gush. I swung the car in a whistling cloud of rain, the road had become a leaping river, and with water up to the hubs the Bentley struggled along like a motorboat.

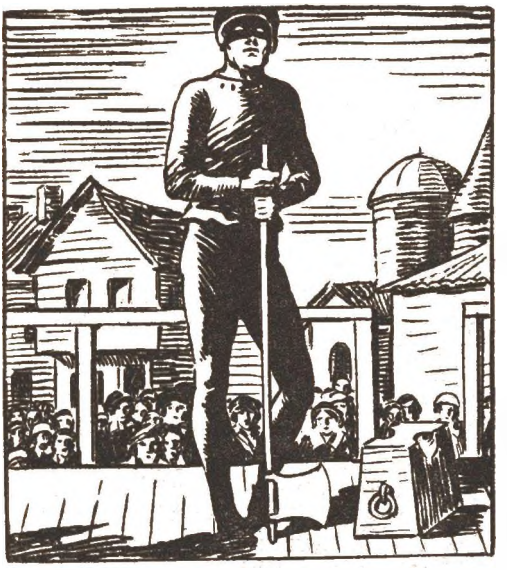
Torrents spouted down the hill above the roadway, a thousand cataracts of brown water rolling stones and sludge in their channels. Wooden fences came adrift; brush tore away from foundered slopes; the embankment slid and splashed across the road behind me. In that squall the last of daylight was extinguished; the Bentley's headlamps were feeble gleams in sheets of water. There was a taste of brine to the deluge. The sky might have been an ocean coming down.

Somewhere I must have taken a side-road, for I missed the approach to Bowen Castle, and what little I could see of the way before my downed headlamps looked unfamiliar. Water blew across the windshield; came drenching through the canvas top; churned around the skidding wheels. I could make out ghostish walls of rock on either side, as if I were driving down a narrow gorge, and then to my dismay I seemed to be in a sort of quarry.

I SUPPOSE it was the quarry from which the blocks of Bowen Castle had been hewn; be that as it might, I'd never seen it before, and it was a frightening place in that rainstorm. Rivers plunged down the coliseum-like walls; loose shards of rock bombarded my fenders; the storm whirled like a maelstrom in that hillside amphitheater; and the road abruptly ended in a black-surfaced lake.

What happened in that quarry I will never exactly know. It seems to me I was trying to back the car and turn, anxious to grope my way out of the trap. There was a tremendous spate of rain as if the whole oceanic sky were cloudbursting down. Tons of water whooped around me, the headlamps dimmed, my rear wheels sank in a rut, and then there was a great, shuddery crashing as if the flooring of the world had caved.

One wall of that quarry fell down with the thunder of a mountain avalanche. At the concussion, the ground collapsed under my car; the roadster dropped eight feet down with a neck-breaking crash; I had the momentary



And in that dawn, the headsman waited.

impression of having fallen into a mine; and then, in a tumult of wind, showering gravel and water, I seemed to be flying down a tunnel.

It took me a moment to realize I was still in the Bentley; catlike, the car had landed on all four wheels in that subterranean drop, and those wheels were flying down an incline. It was exactly as if the cave-in had precipitated me into a subway, a black, rock-walled subway that was diving for the middle of the earth. At any moment the car might crash on some hairpin turn, smash into some unknown ending. Picture yourself driving in a coal mine; careening down the steepest hill, and unable to stop.

To my dying day I will never forget that nightmare. The terror of that terrific descent. The scream of black wind. The whistle of burning tires. The drumming of blood that deafened my ears, and the suffocation of long-tombed air. Down, down, down that ghastly steep corridor. A hundred miles an hour? The speedometer needle quit at a hundred and ten. The roadster shook, swayed. Oil spurted up through the floorboards. Bolts broke away. Desperately I yanked the emergency; there was a smell of calcined fabric as the brake-bands melted like butter.

Those are only impressions remembered as fragments of a dream; nothing was clear at the time save the sensation of incredible speed. I believe that roadster was going three hundred and fifty miles an hour. I was falling. Plummeting. Hurtling underground like a meteor. If that tunnel had curved once! If there had been one bump in its smooth-surfaced floor—!

Everything fainted in me but my reflexes. Time, space, all known dimensions went out of gear. In five minutes I seemed to have gone a million miles; then the tunnel floor tilted upward, and on its breakneck momentum the car took a long ascent like a roaring roller-coaster.

Only for a split millicron of a second did I see the wall that appeared squarely before my headlamps. I put my face between my elbows and gave a last desperate kick at the brakes. There was a crash of masonry, the windshield burst to a million pieces, the car went through a cloud of plaster like a shell going through the wall of a chicken house; then I was out in the open air, gasping, half conscious—the roadster upright, stalled and smoking in a nest of ilex scrub.

I think I sat there for quite a while, feeling of my arms and legs, pinching my bloodied nose, staring at night-sky and foliage and a brush-grown hillside dreamy in smoke-green moonlight. There was a smell of earth and wet leaves after rain, and somewhere a brook was guttering. In a grassy bank behind me, dim and shadow-mouthed, there was a black, yawning hole partly choked with a mound of plaster. I couldn't look at that.

Conceivably my head wasn't clear, and I stumbled off through the ilex in drunken bewilderment, trying to locate my bearings, staring about me as a man might stare when suddenly finding himself on Mars. I'd had a bad shock, I knew. I didn't believe any part of that midnight ride under the earth, and I tried to tell myself I'd had an accident, suffered a blow

on the brain. . . . Better find that brook—cold water. That would pull me out of this shock.

But the shock of that under-earth plunge was nothing to the jolt I got when I emerged from the thicket of scrub and came out on a sleepy wood-bordered road. There was a stone hut at the bend of the wagon-track, I remember, and a man and a girl, in whispery embrace, were standing at the corner of the hut. Can you see them there, half in shadow, posed like the figures in a painting, the shimmer of bright steel from the man's cuirass, the glint of moonlight in the girl's tumbled hair. That man and that girl—how I stared!

The man was a Cavalier. And the girl was Elizabeth Bowen!

CHAPTER III

The Dark-Eyed Cavalier

I KNEW I was dreaming, then. . . . Save for the English cuirass worn in the fashion of King Charles's cavalry, the man's dress was not unlike that of the Three Musketeers—rakish hat with plume, wide-sleeved blouse, bloomer-like breeches and high-heeled cavalry boots with flaring tops—the gentleman and officer of Seventeenth Century England!

The girl, too, was in the costume of that period, the costume portrayed by that beautiful painting I had seen in Bowen Castle. I knew it was the girl of the portrait the instant I saw her.

The illusion of reality was remarkable. I could hear the wind-stirred leaves at my elbow. The nocturnal rustling of woods and sleeping fields. That pair by the moon-shadowed cottage—I could hear them whispering. The girl put both hands in his and looked up at him and sighed. I felt pretty queer about it, I can tell you.

"I'm dreaming this." I muttered the words in my teeth, and pulled my palm across my eyes, expecting, naturally, that when I looked again the Cavalier and the girl would be gone. They didn't go. I stared.

The cavalier whispered, "There is nothing to fear. The crash you thought to have heard—give it no heed." His voice lowered to a murmur that I couldn't catch, but the reference to a crash and a quaintness to his manner of speech had me pinching myself for all I was worth. And the next moment there was an illusion that no amount of disbelief could pinch away. Hoofbeats slashing the moon-lit road—the sound of a horseman coming at full career through the blue-black woods.

The girl gave a low cry of fear, and that impossible Cavalier spun her back into the darkness of the cottage wall with a shout too real for any imagining.

"Fly! Fly!" he was crying. "The secret path back to your village. If a Roundhead should see you here all is lost—!"

She was gone like a figure in a story book, melted in that woodsy background exactly as I expected the Cavalier to melt. But instead of vanishing he made a dash straight for the boscage where I was crouching, his boot-tops flapping at tremendous strides, cloak bannering from his shoulders, plume flattened on his hat.

In the moonlight I saw him as in a stage-spot, young and tall as myself, built like an athlete and amazingly agile for his breast-plate and boots. Black locks blew about his collar as he ran; his teeth were clenched; and his face was strained and grim. His evident desperation was terrible to see. He was running like a hunted animal.

I couldn't move. His cry of "Roundhead" had completely stunned me, and I hunched there in a sort of ictus, staring and paralyzed, while he charged at my hiding-place. Perhaps twenty feet from the clump of ilex he stopped dead and turned. I wish you could have seen the way he got out his rapier. Merely a gesture toward his belt, and that blade was shimmering in his hand as if by magic.

IN THAT space of a breath his assailant was on him. Hoofbeats came slamming around the cottage. I heard the crack of a pistol, the whistle

of a ball speeding through the scrub. A yell of challenge burst from the Cavalier and was answered by a squall from the horseman who careened up through the moonlight as big as an oncoming express train. A Roundhead, on my word of honor! Dark cloak and spurred boots; smoking pistol in upraised hand.

He cast aside the weapon as his horse reared abreast of the Cavalier; dismounted with a leap I've never seen equalled in any rodeo. In the next incredible eye-wink, Cavalier and Roundhead were at each other like fury unleashed, blade against blade.

As a student of *escrime* I could only begin to appreciate such speed. Thrust, parry, riposte, reprise, in that first moment when they engaged, those blades were just blurs of brilliant light. The men seemed fairly matched. Although hampered by his steel cuirass, the Cavalier was afforded the advantage of its protection, whereas the Roundhead, with more freedom of movement, wore no armor. Steel rang on steel, flickering lightning and bursts of sparks. A display of amazing footwork as the contestants dodged, circled, sidestepped, closed in. Both men were perfectly balanced; had wrists as limber and sinewy as if the steely arm-muscles were part of the sword.

The ferocity of that combat brought home its reality, no nightmare could have been so appalling. Those sword-points were cold steel, and I could see the savage gleam of the Cavalier's eyes and gritted teeth. A thin-lipped, murderous leer on the long-jawed visage of the Roundhead. Every thrust of the Cavalier's rapier was a homicidal try for blood; and the Roundhead countered with wicked lunges, aimed deliberately at the Cavalier's throat.

"Ho, varlet! You will learn what it means to invade our territory!" I remember the Roundhead shouting. Then his words were scrambled by the clash of steel, but I think he snapped out something about hearing a crash which had brought him at full gallop to see who dared trespass thus brazenly on the frontiers of "The Protector."

"And by God's wounds!" was the Cavalier's jeer. "It would take more than a curst Puritan to teach me any lesson! In the name of the King, I am going to split you open as one would slit the belly of a pig—!"

Varlet! The Protector! Curst Puritan! In the name of the King! Can you hear those shouts? Can you understand the meaning they conveyed? I couldn't begin to imitate that vocabulary, and I'm not going to try. That speech, as I heard it then and later, lurid and declamatory, quaint with forgotten oaths and mannered colloquialisms—the grandiose phrases—words delivered with the flourish of old-style handwriting—that speech was as foreign to modern English as another language. I couldn't begin to quote verbatim that mixture of Shakespeare, Jonson, Pepys and John Bunyan—that language as I heard it spiced with the argot of the soldier and the cant of Milton, the accent varying from the Scotch brogue to the twang of Londontown—it would take an etymologist to reproduce it. But certain words placed the period—words like "prithee", "whilom", "knave"—and when I heard "curst Puritan" and "The Protector" that period was dated.

My mind was still trying to justify that Seventeenth Century scene, so to speak, and the cries of those duelists only increased my bafflement. There I was in tweed knickers, cap and college sweater, fresh from the world of motor cars and telephones, staring pop-eyed at a duel between a Roundhead and a Cavalier!

It wasn't funny. Impossible or not, I was in that clump of ilex—there those men were, in deadly combat on the turf. There was blood on the Roundhead's left shoulder, a sullen smear where his opponent's point had pricked home. The Roundhead's blade flashed—flick, flick, flick—and in that vengeful flurry a brutal gash opened in the Cavalier's cheek just under his right eye, a razorish cut that must have got him to the bone.

Moonlight. Damp woods. The chestnut charger grazing in the background. Roundhead and Cavalier spinning, dodging, genuflecting, weaving in and out, circling in deadly waltz, blades ringing between them as watery blurs of light, crimson seeping down the Roundhead's sleeve. I couldn't take my eyes off the combat —I'd never seen two men deliberately trying to kill each other before.

Heaven knows how it might have ended otherwise, for those swordsmen were as evenly contested as the balance of a scales. But a second Roundhead arrived on the scene with all the unexpected violence of the first. Hoofbeats on the road! A charge from around the corner of the cottage! A Puritan cavalryman tall in saddle, cloak billowing, sword drawn and uplifted so that its point seemed to scratch the face of the moon. He thundered up with all the flurry and "Hola!" of reinforcements, and the Cavalier gave a scream of despair.

I SAW the newcomer leap from saddle and come racing to the first Roundhead's aid. The Cavalier couldn't stand ground before that pair. So far it had been a fair fight; now the Cavalier didn't have a chance. Wildly he thrust and parried, striving to beat off two murderous blades. Carefully the second Roundhead stepped in, maneuvering to draw the Cavalier's blade aside and give his companion an opening for the fatal throat-thrust. I saw the sweat of desperation on the Cavalier's bloodied face, the agony of fear on his mouth, the dilation of his eyeballs.

It was too fiendishly deliberate, too cold blooded, those two against that one. I found myself creeping backward in the brush; then I made a headlong dash for my ambushed car.

Certainly there wasn't any fancy about that Bentley Special with its top torn to shreds, fenders dented, the wheels still smoking and the driver's seat filled with windshield glass. I raced around the car, hunting some attachment that might serve me for a weapon. My first thought had been the long-handled crank, and to my dismay I saw the toolbox ordinarily bolted to the runningboard had, somewhere in that underearth excursion, dropped off.

Why I snatched up my trout rod I can't remember; probably it was the first thing available. At any event, it was lying on the roadster's seat and, packed in its canvas sheath, it made a fairish sort of truncheon. Somehow the feeling of that familiar article in my grip was the straw that broke the camel's back of all sanity.

As it turned out afterward, I could have armed myself with no more formidable a weapon. In the world to which I had been so magically transferred, that homely trout rod was to play the part of Excalibur. An Excalibur, I'm constrained to add, that eventually turned in my hand. Little thanks that it saved me in the end— it very nearly cost me my head.

But the point is I had it in my fist when I burst from the ilex scrub back into that scene of sword-play, shouting like the maniac I thought I was, you can wager, and looking it double. Just in time, too. Outnumbered, pressed as though by two panthers, the Cavalier had been run through the sword-arm. Blood was purpling his sleeve, and he was sinking to one knee, gray-faced, panting, weakly trying to raise his lowered blade at the moment I arrived. The Roundheads were granting him no quarter. The first, who had run him through, was wiping his rapier on his cloak-hem, crying at his companion to finish the job.

He didn't see me until I was on top of him, and I'll never regret for a moment the slashing blow I let him have across his murder-darkened face. That trout rod was supple steel, too. The fellow screeched as if he'd been struck by a bolt of lightning, staggered back, floundered into his howling companion. I wish you could have seen the expressions on those Roundheads when they saw me. Or the face of that rescued Cavalier. Eyes? You never saw such eyes! I've a notion the Cavalier was as startled as his enemies; all

three of them opened their lips and gave me the same stare.

Then, before I could unleash another blow, those two Roundheads decamped like two gusts of wind. Acrobatic leaps for their saddles. The horses curveting in unison. Turf flying at my mouth, and hoofs thundering in departure. And they were gone in the night shadows, the hoofbeats quickly fading.

THE Cavalier spoke first and his words, breaking that seance of silent staring, I can quote verbatim. He drew himself up to full stature; faced me with lowered blade, hand clutching his pierced sword-arm, swaying in the uncanny moonlight.

"Man or vision or whatever you be, you come opportunely to save the life of one who is henceforth your debtor. Would that I may some day repay you, sir. In what service are you who comes to my aid in such strange disguise?"

It took me a minute to answer. Something had happened to my tongue, and when I did find a voice it hardly sounded like mine. It sounded like an old, scratchy gramophone disk reciting the lines of a bad play, and coming in late on the cue.

"I come from America—" It was funny how I found myself talking in a parody of that Seventeenth Century dialect. "From New York—I—well, I *was* in Scotland. My name is Stuart—Westmoreland Stuart—"

He gaped, and shook his bloody head.

"And what country is this?" I went on. "And in whose service are you?"

"In the King's service, m'Lord, and I acknowledge no other."

Actually he managed it with a sort of flourish, saluting me with his rapier —an effort that made him groan. Then he sank to one knee, and there was no mistaking the blood rippling down from his cuff. I remember knotting my pocket handkerchief about his arm, devising a tourniquet and temporary bandage. His obliviousness to pain was extraordinary, but his amazement at my bungling efforts at first aid was even more remarkable and out of all proportion to the occasion.

"You're badly hurt," I had sense enough left to declare. "Where's the nearest doctor? Where—?" Then I suddenly recalled the vanished Roundheads. If this Cavalier was flesh and blood those Puritan horsemen might prove pretty substantial, too. "We'd better get out of here, wherever this is—"

"God save you, m'Lord, but it's England! We're not far from Shrewsbury in these woods, and it's enemy territory we're in at present. We must to Shrewsbury at once, if your lordship so wills. A Royalist stronghold in the teeth of the curst Rebels; Captain Montrose at your service, m'Lord. Captain Montrose of Prince Rupert's Horse, who hold the town! A pox on the Roundheads! We must fly, for they will return!"

England! Shrewsbury! Prince Rupert's Horse! As is the way with dreams, this was following a certain impossible logic — everything made sense, and nothing made sense—I was legging it through those misty blue woods at the spurred heels of that Cavalier.

We broke from a thicket of cedars; emerged on a rocky hillcrest overlooking a walled town. I could stare down on a sleeping spread of rooftops gathered in the embrace of a rectangular battlement; I could make out a guard tower, a cathedral spire, the turret of a castle. The miniature rooftops were of tile, the houses plaster and hewn logs. There was a marketplace. A barracks. Within the gate a square alive with horses, people, strangely fashioned carts. Through the dark wynds and narrow alleys wove a pattern of moving lights—the glimmer of torches and lanthorns. I could make out sentries patrolling the outer walls, and on the moon-lit ribbon of path, half way between hilltop and town, I saw a soldier—puff-sleeved, high-booted, posting guard with a blunderbuss.

My guide turned on me, pointing. "Shrewsbury! Held for the Crown by Prince Rupert!"

"And who held the territory in which you were caught?"

His eyes on me were puzzled, and I knew his answer before he gave it. "Oliver Cromwell!"

I saw it all, then. Unable to explain it, I saw the whole phenomenon. My heart pounded; I felt the strangest possible confusion of sensations. Somehow, by some trick of speed, some marvelous conjunction of psychic desire and unguessed physical transference, I had outstripped the course of human events, caught up (in the manner of Flamarrion's star-bound projectile) with Yesterday, raced back into the Past and come abreast with a time-dimmed page in English history. I wasn't dead; I was alive. I wasn't mad; I could reason. It was no hallucination; I couldn't dream the detail of an entire town.

"My God!" I whispered to myself, "I've gone back to 1650—!"

I THINK of myself going into that moon-painted town, and I think of Gulliver. Three hours ago I'd been trout-fishing in a remote corner of Scotland; now I was in the middle of England strolling up to the gates of Shrewsbury. Involuntarily I pulled out my watch. Eight o'clock. Nothing had happened to that Ingersoll; it was the calendar that had stopped, gone askew.

"Halt, in the King's name! Who goes there?"

"Captain Montrose of Prince Rupert's Horse and one Westmoreland Stuart from America!"

I might have been the man from the moon. The guard's hat was off and he went to one knee in the path as if the leg had given way under him. With a brusque, "To one side!" my guide kicked him out of the way and we slipped on down the path toward the town.

Shrewsbury, I learned, had long been under siege—he couldn't exactly say how long—cut off from the rest of the world by Cromwell's forces. The Puritans held the country on all sides; but the little town was self-sufficient, strong as a fortress and quite able to hold out for the Crown until (it was an odd phrase to fall from my companion's lips) the end of time.

The Cavalier informed me that the Rebellion seemed endless, but the wretched Puritans would never win. Although there had long been no news from the Royalists on the outside, the loyal troops in Shrewsbury had every confidence that the King would once more reign in London and Cromwell's head would sit atop a pike in London Tower. As far as he knew the Rebellion had bogged down in a sort of stalemate.

Well, that was another angle to an amazing situation. I grilled my memory, trying to recall the fate of this little town as it must have been recorded in the history books. Somehow I couldn't remember this particular siege, but any modern high-school boy knew the outcome of the Civil War. Cromwell had won, overthrown and beheaded the King, established the Commonwealth. This Cavalier at my side—he didn't know it. Do you see? It hadn't happened yet!

When we reached the gates of that town I was in a ferment of excitement. The thought that I would see history as it was, made my heart pound like a donkey engine. My companion was telling me of an impending battle—within twenty-four hours the troops of Prince Rupert (I placed him as King Charles's nephew) were to attempt an assault on Cromwell's outlying siege lines. I'd see that battle, live it, take a part.

My heart was already expanding; my senses tingled. By George! I'd get me a sword and cloak and pistol, and I'd live. First thing I'd do, I'd find out the address of Elizabeth Bowen and call her up—no, of course there wouldn't be any telephones—but somehow or other I'd see that ancestral cousin.

As if aware of my thought, the Cavalier touched my arm. "Softly here, m'Lord," indicating the watch-tower above the gate. "Best that we enter quietly as possible—for a Cavalier is not supposed to go a-wandering be-

yond our lines. There is a certain Puritan maiden—"

"I saw the tryst," I whispered. "I understand."

I couldn't see why he should gulp an apology or stammer something about "my favor", but I supposed it was all a part of the Cavalier code toward a stranger, and I confess I was flattered by his deference. With a gesture I could not refuse, he insisted that I wear his cloak. My solicitude for his arm seemed to embarrass him— "It is a trifle, wanting but a moment's doctoring!"—and then, before we announced ourselves to the watch-tower, he asked me if I wished an immediate escort to Prince Rupert.

That would have been a little too much for one night's swallow, and I stuttered out something about a quiet place to spend the night, perhaps an inn.

The gate-guards must have been personal friends, for the Cavalier advanced without challenge, whispered something I couldn't catch, his hands cupped to mouth, face uplifted to the watchmen. There was a rattle of chain and the massive portal opened like a canal-lock. Pulses hammering, I sidled in ahead of my bowing escort, and found myself in the public square of that Seventeenth-century town.

CHAPTER IV

Night Scene

AS I saw it etched with the smoky light of crimson torch-flares, it was a stage-set from an old-time play: backdrop of dark-windowed house-fronts, their rooflines a silhouette of cornices, chimney-pots and gables; foreground an open square jammed with carts, dogs, horses, clumsy wains. Picture a milling populace of Seventeenth-century people—men in waistcoats and breeches—women in flouncy cambric skirts and sunbonnet hats—crowding together in mid-square, a babbling, gesturing, weaving throng. Hawkers deployed through the press crying their wares; I heard the sing-song of a tinsmith, the hail of a green-goods vender. On a near corner men were bartering violently in a leather-merchant's stall. A gaffer scuffled by with a flaming sconce on his shoulder. Leaning on a hogshead that looked like him, a sweaty, apple-cheeked fat man was clanging a bell. A young woman scurried in front of me, leading a trotting pig. Horsemen on husky barbs pushed roughshod into the jam; urchins played tag underfoot; chickens and geese squawked and hooted under every third person's arm; there were fragments of a thousand different sounds, and to my way of thinking the most unbelievable confusion—until I remembered there weren't any traffic police to adjust the helter-skelter.

Colorful? That Seventeenth-century populace was as colorful (and as fascinatingly ragged) as Joseph's coat. It was a fine night, and the whole town was out. If there was a curious aroma beginning to haunt my nose, it was only the camembert that I've learned to ignore at every otherwise perfect banquet. My companion urged me forward with a nod, and I moved on, entranced.

It was my second step forward that sank me down to my ankles in mud. The square wasn't wholly paved, and at least half of that crowd was splashing in a sea of mire. Without paying this neglect the least attention, my Cavalier mentor slogged me off through the sticky underfoot morass. I noticed then that every man's shoe was clogged with mire to the buckle; the women's skirts were black at the hem; but I, of all the throng, seemed to notice it.

Then I came to a scene that I was more persnickety about. The only way I can describe it is to say that walking into that odor was like walking through a green fog. I could almost see it in the air. The rank effluvium made my eyes water; I couldn't help clapping my hand over my nose and coughing in dismay. Where had I caught that odor once before? Its dreadful pungency took me back to a childhood day at the seaside, a great crowd gathered about a beached whale.

Then I could see the source of that wicked aroma. It *was* in the air. Lofted above the heads of the crowd at that end of the square was a scaffolding, a gallows. Hanging under the crossbar, for all the world like three marionettes, limp and thin—terribly thin—their ankles loosely bound, hands tied behind their backs, heads awry on broken necks, were two men and a woman. They weren't for sale. They had been there too long—a month, I should have judged—and the birds had been at them.

In the moving air they turned slowly and in an awful unison, like a vaudeville dance trio, their ragtag costumes fluttering, eyes straight ahead, never cracking a smile. Did I say eyes? But the face of the red-haired man on the woman's left was more than blind. Sockets burned out as if by a red hot iron bar.

Perhaps you don't like to listen to this description. How do you think I felt, looking at it? And if that was horrible, the imperviousness of the throng pushing around the gallows was worse. My companion, who had halted beside me, wasn't peering at the horror at all; when I turned on him, I found him staring in a baffled way at me.

"Those bodies hanging up there! Whuh-what—huh-who are they?"

"Rogues," his manner implied them beneath my casual interest. "Two rascals and a wench. He with the eyes burned out—he is up there for treason. The man on the other side is a goldsmith convicted of counterfeiting the James the First sovereign. I have been wondering, m'Lord, if you were hungry—"

I was staggered by the man's sangfroid. As for hunger, I was almost certain I would never enjoy a meal again. "But do you—do you keep thuh-them hanging here all the time?" I whispered.

"As a warning against blackguards and traitors," I was assured.

"And that woman," I said with the last of my fading voice. "What was she?"

He squinted at the face as it swung to look down on us; managed an offhand shrug. "A thief," he snarled. "A trull. I remember her case. She stole a shilling."

NOW I leave it to you, my feelings the rest of the way to that Shrewsbury inn. The Jolly Monarch —I remember that tavern's name, and a dim sign over the door, but I don't remember how we got there. Blindly I followed the Cavalier through a maze of narrow streets, crooked alleys, courtyards and gloomed lanes. Doorways were black and precarious, for you never knew what might come flying out of one—at one alley-turn a shower of garbage fell into the street from an upper window, barely skimming my head. I was soon to learn that Seventeenth-century English towns had no refuse disposal and sewage systems other than the nearest gutter and the handiest back alley.

"These people," I thought, "haven't got any." Nerves, you understand. Certainly they didn't have any in their nostrils or in their eyes. I'd read about criminals hanged in public view and left there to the weather, only it hadn't been odorous on paper. And that poor woman hanged for stealing a shilling—

I was glad to get to that inn. At least there would be a fire and some grog, and I wanted to wash my hands. More than that, I wanted a quiet room, a chance to pull my wits together, determine some course of action, think. I don't know why, but something had gone out of that excursion into the Past. An edge had dulled on my enthusiasm somewhere on the other side of town; I was tired, a little depressed, suddenly assailed by a gray ghost of foreboding.

Flourishing his plumed hat, the Cavalier opened the door. A bell jangled overhead; a blatant gust of hot air, smoke, stale breath, rum fumes poured on a jabber of voices out at my face. Simultaneously there was a crash as of falling tinware, and a man came rotating around a table, ran three steps toward the door, drew his sword, turned, then fell backward

over the doorsill, and flopped writhing at our feet. Blood ran from a stab-wound in his ribs, staining the lace of his shirtfront. His eyes were bulging in agony. He opened his mouth in an appeal for help, and his teeth were glistening red.

Immediately the best hostel in Shrewsbury was bristling with drawn swords, the air electric with tension. Gentlemen in lace and ruff glared at each other across oaken tables; women huddled in the dimness of a smoky corner; a leather-aproned lackey dropped a great platter of smoking beef and fled through a rear doorway, and the fellow who had done the stabbing, an elegant, curly-locked dandy of a man, stood in mid-floor with boots braced apart, knees limber, rapier bowed between his hands, smirking and dimpling and twinkling at everybody in the place.

"And who is next then?" his black eyes flicked from side to side, enjoying the suspense, taunting the tense-posed figures at the nearer tables. "Who's next to try the patience o' the Earl of Stafford? I trust I've killed yon cuckold idiot, and it may be some friend of his among you would like to take issue. . . . Sink me! but it seems you prefer to live."

It seemed one of his listeners didn't. A raffish stairway clambered up one side of the fume-fogged room, and a man was creeping down the steps, his body half-concealed by the bannisters, moving like a catamount, animal-eyed. That villainous dandy in mid-room didn't see him. Neither did anyone else. I tell you, I could have screamed at the suspense. The good Earl of Stafford was coolly wiping his sword-blade on a woman's mantle when his new assailant sprang over the bannister rail.

"My brother! Foul offspring of a hangman, you have slain my brother—!"

YELLS. Oaths. Pandemonium. Men sprang to get out of the way. Surprised, the Earl of Stafford spun only in time to avoid a slashing cut across the back of the neck. For a moment he was hard pressed by the wild man who had answered his challenge, but the other's blade was no match for his expert swordsmanship. His laugh was a jeer that yipped shrilly above the fierce clash of steel; nimbly he worked himself out of the corner where he had been flung, and he saved himself by gaining the shelter of the newel-post at the stairway's foot.

His antagonist was on him like a whirlwind, a bigger man, shouldered like an ox, bull-necked, armed with a basket-hilted rapier dangerous to any blade. Had the dandy's point become enmeshed in that basket hilt, he would have been disarmed at a flick.

At the foot of the stairway he was fencing so his sixte was covered by the newel-post, a hamper as much as an advantage, and it was beautiful the way he maneuvered around to give his quatre fuller play. Never had I seen such wrist-work. I thought of a cobra striking off the swipes of an enraged bear. Captain Montrose gave me an appreciative side-glance.

"That is Herbert, Earl of Stafford, best swordsman in our ranks. Captain Severn is mad to fight him. His brother at best was a fool."

The best swordsman in the Cavalier ranks! Watching that dandy's technique, I went sick. Another murder in the making. And were these grinning onlookers unaware of it? On my word of honor, you would have thought they were watching a game. Several applauded one of Stafford's deft ripostes. There was a ripple of laughter when the earl dropped his blade-point and drove it an inch into his antagonist's midriff. Slowly, with surgical precision and nicety, that dandy began to cut down his savage foe. A gash across the ear. A red nip in the cheek. A prick just under the eye. A stab in the shoulder.

Nobody made a move to stop the thing. Bleeding in ten places, Severn charged in frenzy; and to show his contempt, the earl never flinched a backward step, but stood smirking and nodding, and parried with prime, a guard which was nothing but a thumb-to-nose gesture at his raging

adversary. Then as abruptly as it had started, the duel was over.

Severn was on the floor, making a sound like chuckling, unable to rise. The Earl of Stafford kicked his outflung leg aside with a boot, stepped over his panting chest and, drawing up a chair, sat down beside the fat man with the cards. A weeping youth crawled out from under a table, and dragged the groaning Captain Severn into a back room. A curtain might have dropped on a stage. The Jolly Monarch resumed its drinking and feeding. Someone banged a flagon on a table. Dice rattled. If two men had lost hot blood within its smoky, airless confines, the room gave no protesting sign.

"But my God!" I shuddered at my companion. "Those men were—were—dying—! We can't leave that one out in the street—"

"A good place for him, m'Lord. If he came back in here the Earl would run him through the heart. Some midwife or friend will pick him up and take him to the barber."

"To the barber?" I whispered.

"Why, is he not in want of doctoring?" The Cavalier's forehead, bewildered, went suddenly pale. "For my own part, I am beginning to feel this curst arm-wound. If your lordship will permit—"

Turning aside hastily, he reached up to the low eaves over the door and snatched down a handful of cobweb. Before I could stop him, he had stripped the bandaging from his arm, rolled up the sleeves, and plastered the ugly incision with that dust-gray spiderwebbing. The pain of it sank him limply into a chair where he sat looking up at me, sweat glittering from every pore of his face.

"But you need bandages, water, iodine," I gasped at him. "You shouldn't have done that, man! You'll get lockjaw—!"

"Iodine? Lockjaw?" He shut his teeth on a groan. "Some medicine of America, m'Lord? We have none of it here. The cobweb is good. It is almost so sure a cure as sympathetic powder."

"Sympathetic powder?" My stomach was gone under my belt.

"A great curative compounded by Sir Kenelme Digby. But we have long since run out of it in this curst siege, and then it is necessary to have the sword that dealt the wound. It is the latest wonder of surgery. One puts the powder not on the wound, but on the sword that made it. They say it never fails—"

SYMPATHETIC Powder! Well, I was badly in want of some similar nostrum for myself just then. All this death and filth and blood—it was a little too much for my sensitive stomach. And now my Cavalier companion had lost his mind—smearing his sword-wound with cobwebs and talking of a powder for the blade that had inflicted the thrust. Somewhere in the back of my brain I remembered reading of Sir Kenelme Digby. Admiral, theologian, alchemist, physician to King James, he had been the greatest quack and fake-healer of his time. Of his time? It came to me as a shock. Of *this* time!

"But you must be tired," my companion was speaking up to me in a weakened voice. "Your long journey from America must have fatigued you. *Sack!*" he roused himself to bawl at the leather-aproned lackey. "Two cups of sack, poltroon, and quickly!"

Heretofore we had remained unnoticed in that corner beyond the door. Now there was a general turning of heads, several shouts of, "Ho, Montrose!", and I was awarded one or two curious but casual stares. The Cavalier's cloak hid my clothes; our corner was shadowed, and I presume my English cap with its pointed brim was taken for an infantryman's headpiece with uplifted helm, for no one questioned my presence there, and at my companion's brief responses we were ignored.

Attention returned to an argument started over a card game—I recall its name was "John Come Kiss Me Now"—a scuffle threatened to become another murder, with men's hands leaping to their belts, but a woman's

hoarse laughter intervened. All this seemed to mean nothing to my Cavalier escort—but I couldn't help staring about me in anxiety. Particularly at the impervious back of that dandy, the Earl of Stafford.

"Do murderers go unpunished in Shrewsbury?" I couldn't help asking my companion, and in a whisper that went no farther, you can believe.

He saw where my eyes were, and looked at me in surprise. "But surely m'Lord does not take Stafford for a murderer? Speak it softly, i' God's name. Murderers under the law are drawn and quartered, save those who can read a passage from the Bible, in which case they are branded with a *T* on the thumb, but burned alive if they kill again. Stafford does not wear th' Tyburn brand, and he is a man of much spirit, known to his friends as the Tiger Lily, deadliest of all duellers. I fear even his politics might wane, were he to hear your words. What you saw here tonight was merely an exchange."

I comprehended the warning, if not the exact meaning, behind my companion's whispered advice. And my head reeled. Merely an exchange! A polite discussion with the Tiger Lily!

I thought of that woman hanged for stealing a shilling, and I would have felt happier if the door to the alley were open. I didn't want to join my companion with that cup of sack when it came. The fact that the cup looked unwashed and the sack would have burnt the throat of a brass plumbing-pipe had nothing to do with it.

Looking back on that episode at the Jolly Monarch, I have often wondered what my Cavalier friend made of me. The faces I must have screwed. My twitchings and palings and nose-wrinklings. My Twentieth-century English, my state of nerves, my peculiar astonishments and aversions, the trout rod (I found I was carrying it, to my surprise) in my hand. I've an idea he was as bewildered by me as I was by him—I can see us eyeing each other as an Egyptian might an Eskimo—but his politeness allowed no curiosity, and I know now that he was considerably awed. His arm was bothering him, too, but his disregard of pain was amazing, and I'll never forget how he stood up under it in that place. I was uninjured, and the Jolly Monarch had me near to fainting.

The air alone in that room would have given a stone image a headache. The windows were shuttered and a log roared in the great fireplace where a cauldron straight from the witch's scene in Macbeth erupted a Vesuvius of boiling-cabbage fumes. That aroma and woodsmoke barely managed to penetrate the fog from ale, strong wine and sack. Add a dash of garlic and boiled beef. Candles drinking up most of the oxygen and fifty eupeptic people consuming the rest; mix in some soldier's socks, fifty quarts of perspiration, hair oil, perfumery, drying horse-blankets and a strong suspicion that no one present ever took a bath, and you have a faint idea of that room's odor. Like a dozen Greek wrestlers eating limburger in a brewery over a laundry.

I sat there with that Cavalier drinking sack, and my brain began to spin like a squirrel cage. I wanted to ask him a thousand questions but my introduction to the town, the Jolly Monarch and the Tiger Lily had dried my tongue. Now I was smothering. I wanted to get out of there, but where could I go? Gulliver had nothing on me. I'd not only traveled out of my country; I'd traveled out of my Time. That Seventeenth-century drink didn't do a thing to clear my head.

Neither did the meal that came. Misreading my distraught expression, my associate (somehow to call him Captain Montrose makes him seem more earthly than he was to my dazed perception) banged the table, summoning a great Falstaff of a man who proved to be the innkeeper. You know the cartoons of John Bull? Add another hundred pounds of flesh and good humor, and you have the host. I didn't hear what the Cavalier told him, but that vast mountain of flesh

became at once a palm-rubbing billow of obsequiousness. The gentleman from Scotland (a knowing wink) wanted food and lodging? M'Lord should have nothing but the best. The Jolly Monarch was only too honored —that sort of thing.

IN came wine bottles, a pig with an apple in its mouth, plover's eggs, a pasty, and a wholly nauseating boar's head that so resembled the innkeeper's in its ingratiating smile that I looked around for him in alarm. He was there. Bringing up the rear of this cavalcade of waiters, an enormous pudding balanced on his palm. Try to imagine such a meal on a July night in a room as hot as a fireless cooker, as airless as a Turkish bath and malodorous as a glue factory. His moon-face dripping, mine host sliced and served. His soiled, pudgy hands, slapping beef-slabs onto crockery plates, weren't the only evidence that he was one of those present unfamiliar with baths.

I hope you'll pardon all this reference to malodors and unsanitation. It has a bearing on the denouement of this story, and it impressed me almost as much as the Tiger Lily's cold-blooded blade. It explains a despair that came to me during that stay in the Jolly Monarch. If I could have had a good cup of coffee—

Coffee? The innkeeper stared at me. Then I remembered that Seventeenth-century people never heard of coffee. Watching my Cavalier friend stoke himself with beef, sack, pork, more sack, I ate a plover's egg and tried to think of excuses for leaving. The room was now roaring in my ears, hot as a furnace. Some girls sitting with a swain on the stairway were singing, "Who's For The Ferry For Twinkenham Towne?" At a nearby table a pockmarked man with white hair was describing Cromwell to a listener. "A murrain on him! Tomorrow night will see his head on Prince Rupert's pike!" Two soldiers were discussing a battle with a Puritan vedette encountered the day before in Shrewsbury Wood. "Thomas Highbridge caught him fro' behind wi' his mace. Cut his ear off clean as th' sheriff takes off a poacher's. Watt Ashburton chopped off his feet an' we left him there tryin' to get up." A thin man with the face of a poet and a cataract over one eye came through the door and started an argument with the host over a bill. "You silken bag of guts!" There was a loud outburst of laughter as the innkeeper hurled a flagon at the thin man and kicked him from the door.

"Captain Montrose," I gasped, politely strangling on the last bit of sack I could swallow, "you said something about taking me to Prince Rupert—"

He looked at me across a pile of dishes, gummy-eyed. "God's mercy, m'Lord. I'm unwell. My arm. If you will but wait, I—"

"Stay where you are," I adjured him. "I can find my way."

"The castle," he said thickly. "Use the password, 'Tomorrow night.' I will join your lordship as soon as I can find the surgeon who will sell me a bezoar stone for my arm—" Groaning, he swayed to his feet; protested my offer to return his cloak. "Great honor. Keep it, m'Lord. Heaven forefend that I have perhaps delayed you. Your arrival," his voice dropped to a low whisper, "will restore our confidence. Victory tomorrow night should be assured. God grant you safe journey to Prince Rupert; he has long been expecting you—"

The Cavalier sank down into his chair; and I found myself, dazed, shatter-pated and shaken, out in the night.

I FELT as though I had been asphyxiated. The sack had paralyzed my stomach, and the Jolly Monarch had paralyzed my head. Finally that Cavalier's parting speech had scrambled my brains, for it was evident he had mistaken me for someone else. Who? Some courier expected from King Charles, bottled up in another corner of England? Some envoy long awaited from the outside? Out in that alley I leaned against a wall and tried to sort my seething thoughts.

As a historian I should have remem-

bered this Shrewsbury siege; in my desperation that night I couldn't put my finger on it. I couldn't recall the situation of England at this exact date, or the disposition of the warring troops. It was somewhere toward the end of the Rebellion, I knew. Cromwell's Puritans controlled most of England; Cromwell held London and he had established his famous "New Model" army, the first truly professional army in history. Charles and his nobles held a few fragments of England and some impregnable towns like Oxford and the one I was in at present. Soon the King and his Cavaliers were to be defeated; the Commonwealth established. That was the situation in general.

The situation in particular was unrecorded in any history book. I, a Twentieth-century American, was in a Seventeenth-century English town in the middle of the Cromwellian Rebellion. The Cavalier Royalists held the town, which was surrounded by Puritan Roundheads. Tomorrow night the Cavaliers would attempt to break the stalemate. Prince Rupert, the Cavalier general, was expecting a messenger. I had been mistaken for that messenger.

I had wished myself out of the Jolly Monarch; now I wished myself out of Shrewsbury. A mistake in identity that might prove difficult in wartime wasn't the only reason, but the implication was dangerous. Suppose I were challenged by some of these soldiers in the streets? Suppose some bloodthirsty swordsman like the Tiger Lily decided against my face? Friend or foe, these people seemed as ready to run you through as not. I'd had no intention of visiting Prince Rupert when I left the inn. Now I decided to call on this *generalissimo* and appeal for his protection. I tried to recall what the history books had said of him. A good soldier and a nephew of the King. I'd go to him at once. Tell him my story. Ask him to get in touch with the nearest American consul.

That I forgot there wouldn't be any American consul in the England of the Sixteen-hundreds shows you the mental mix-up I was in. Can you see me, then, starting off across that town, late at night, staggering from sack, armed with a trout rod? In memory I see those rambling streets as dark-glimpsed scenes from the imaginings of a fever. The muddy alleys and cobblestone squares. Candlelight sprinkling through shuttered windows. Smells that came walking out of doors. I remember the dark shops and the vague-glimpsed signs. *Joiner. Tinker. Goldsmith. Midwife.* The unfamiliar medley of sound—neighing of horses, jingle of little bells, clank of a blacksmith's hammer, the slow creaky rattle of carts.

Revived by the open, I might have enjoyed some of that, if I hadn't encountered other scenes. Boys stoning a blind cat at the end of an alley looked at me in astonishment when I drove them off with my weapon. Then that crowd I saw dancing gleefully around a helpless idiot, the brutal shouts of, "Tom o' Bedlam! He's a Tom o' Bedlam!" and the glimpse of that squealing madman with his yellow eyes and toothless mouth and a cow's horn fastened around his neck.

Are you beginning to see that town as I was beginning to see it? There was, somewhere during my ramble, a cathedral standing like a postcard picture on a moon-drugged square. Two men built like wrestlers, bare to the belt, were dragging a chained woman across the cobbles, while a third wrestler lashed her back and shoulders with a knotted rope. Her shrieks are with me to this day, and that press of onlookers watching in doltish indifference. The woman had white hair and would die. Her eyes were on a thin priest, a black-skirted shadow on the church steps there, but the priest only looked away. Had I yelled I might have been massacred, but I couldn't lift my voice above a husk.

"Stop it! Stop it! They're killing her!" I grabbed the cleric by the arm.

He looked at me, blank-faced. "It's the old woman who escaped from deb-

tor's jail this very afternoon. Owed ten sovereigns to a weaver, they say, an's been in durance for two years, since there's no one as would offer to pay."

"Great heavens! I'll go her bail!" Tearing out my wallet, I thrust a handful of bills into the priest's astonished fist. "There's twenty pounds! Please! Take it out there to those devils and—"

"And what kind of money is this, pray?"

Of course paper money was unknown in that century; the coin of the realm was a minted piece called a *unite*, or gold. I would have given every cent I owned to stop that woman's screams. Sweat watered my forehead. Not a piece of silver on me! Two hundred dollars in British pound-notes, and I was penniless!

"We've got to help her!" I choked at the priest. "My God! we can't just stand here. You must give those devils some money; pay her—" My eyes were on a gold candelabra glimmering in blue darkness beyond an arched door. "Give them that!" I cried. "There must be some money in the church."

I'll never forget the shock on his moon-powdered face, or the hollow tone of his answer. "Would you take from God that which is God's? Would you take money from the church to pay the debts of a foolish criminal?"

By that time the poor woman and her captors and that blood-drinking crowd were around the corner, and I couldn't speak for rage. I'd forgotten that Seventeenth-century debtors were considered as felons. I'd forgotten about John Bunyan's long imprisonment for bankruptcy. Red-eyed, I glared at that man of the Church. And the Lord had said, "Forgive us our debtors."

"I'll go to Prince Rupert!" I remember finding my tongue to shout. "He's the commandant of this town! I'll tell him about those murderous curs! I'll put a stop to this killing and woman-beating—!"

But I was not destined to see the famous Cavalier general. In fact, ten minutes later I was running for all my legs were worth to escape a meeting with the nephew of Charles the First. Three alleys away from the church. the prince's castle in sight, I was halted by a shadow that sprang from a black doorway and came at me, stooped low, face hidden by a lifted arm, like a figure from the French guignol. Clutching my trout rod, I leapt sideward to avoid him, but he was on me with a terrifying jump, panting, throwing me against a night-streaked wall.

"M'Lord, you must fly! Fly! Prince Rupert and his troops are already hunting you! It is the Tiger Lily's doing! He asked the innkeeper at the Jolly Monarch who you were, and the great belly—I had given him your name—told! I knew something was wrong at the way the Earl rushed from the inn, and I followed him to the castle. I heard him tell the Prince about you, and Prince Rupert declares you an impostor. Every soldier in Shrewsbury will be after you. They will kill you as a pretender!"

He was dragging me at a sprint along the wall; into an airless and murk-gloomed alley. I saw his face in a yellow slant of moonlight, and I had to yell: Captain Montrose, the Cavalier!

CHAPTER V

Flight to Cromwell

WE ran. Up one alley and down the next. Through a rabbit warren of poor hovels, and across a sleeping ghetto. Mine not to reason why, mine but to do or die—I could see it in my companion's face. Somewhere off to the left in that town there was a growing babble, not unlike the nearing of a cattle stampede, tramp of running boots, jingle of arms, oaths, shouting, and I don't know when I've heard a sound as ominous.

"Make haste! Make haste!" my companion kept turning to gasp at me. "If you are caught with me, it is your life and mine. You must reach the outer gate before the alarm is given the guards."

"You're risking your life!" I cried. "Don't come with me!"

"Never could you find your way," he shook out. "You saved my life, whoever you be, and a Montrose always repays a favor. There is no danger for me if we reach the gate first. Give the password and go through—they will not see me on the square."

"'Tomorrow night!'" I recited the signal.

"'Tomorrow night!'" he repeated hoarsely. "Godspeed your escape, friend. Heaven send you through the curst Puritan camp. But should the Roundheads take you to Midnight Keep, I would that you would grant a well-wisher one more favor. There is a Puritan girl, daughter of Lord Bowen—"

"At Midnight Keep—?"

"Aye, where Cromwell is in headquarters. Perhaps she could help you, for her father is powerful. If you see her, perchance, tell her this for me. Should we Royalists capture her town tomorrow night, as my name is Montrose, I will look out for her!"

"Well spoken, Montrose," I panted. "And where is this Midnight Keep?"

"East by the first highroad in Shrewsbury Wood." He was moaning for lack of breath, clutching his wounded arm. "But I would wish no man the ill luck of falling in with Roundheads. And there's the gate!" he pulled up suddenly in an alley-mouth. "God's fortune! but we've beat the alarm. The square's all but deserted, only mind the surgeons working on the gallows!"

And that was the last picture I was to carry with me out of Seventeenth-century Shrewsbury. That gallows on the public square, and two dark-cloaked figures working at some awful enterprise on ladders raised to that crossbar. Despite panic and peril, the emergency of that hubbub close on my heels, I couldn't help stalling in that alley-mouth to stare at that hellish scene.

"Why, they're shaving the heads of those corpses—!"

"Gathering usnea!" my Cavalier corrected with a frantic gesture. "I' God's name, good friend, to the gates—to the gates—!"

"Usnea!" I gagged. "What's that?"

"Moss scraped from the heads of criminals long-hanged on the gibbet," my companion groaned. "A wonderful salve for rheumatism, i' God's truth. But you will want more than usnea if you do not fly—!"

I flew. That usnea-gathering scene chased me out of Shrewsbury faster than any threat from the troops of Prince Rupert. I never felt my feet touch the mud on that public square. I know I gave the password to the gate-guards, and I know those vast doors opened to let me through, but I can't remember anything of that getaway but usnea. It took me up that moon-soaked slope beyond that town at a run that should, according to the Flamarrion theory, have carried me back to Adam. I crossed that hillcrest and went into those woods like a rabbit before the hounds. The alarm drums were only beginning to roll when I dived into Shrewsbury Wood. Usnea!

Do you know, I looked up that wretched stuff some years afterward, and I found it was a popular remedy and sold in all apothecary shops right up to the time of George Washington and John Adams. Our early American forbears used it! There's a medicine for you. Moss scraped from the skull of a long-dead criminal!

It was just what I needed to cure my romantic notions of the Cavalier days. It was a woman hanged for stealing a shilling, a garbagey alley, cold-blooded swordplay in an unventilated inn, a crowd teasing a madman and brutes flogging an old lady for her debts—all those horrors rolled into one. Usnea! It brought up my wishful yearning for swords, cloaks and horse pistols in one gulp, as if the "good old days" of King Charles were a dose of green apples.

I hated that Royalist town as a child would hate a Christmas tree, its bright festoons turned into vipers. I fled to reach Cromwell and the Puritans. Fetching out the pocket compass I always carried on fishing trips, I

set a course for that Roundhead town as the crow flies. I wanted to meet those "New Models". I wanted to congratulate them for overthrowing the old regime. I would tell them about the attack the Cavaliers were planning, and I prayed they'd smash that Royalist stronghold of superstition, ignorance, hypocrisy and brutality into a heap of bricks!

Ironic, wasn't it? There I was rushing through those night-misted woods, fleeing from Cavaliers to Roundheads —I, who wanted the Past!—because the Puritans were more modern. I could have cheered when I broke from the cedars after a desperate four-hour dash, and caught first sight of Midnight Keep. Cromwell's town! Somehow, even in moonlight, its valley-sheltered walls looked clean, its distant rooftops patterned and orderly. There was a smart precision about the sentries patrolling the battlements, civic virtue in the way the brush was cleared along the highroad to the gates, a hint of sanitation and intelligence and authority. I sighted that town as Columbus might have sighted the new world. I was swinging my trout rod almost cheerfully, thinking of Elizabeth Bowen, as I hiked down the valley and approached those Puritan walls.

As a matter of fact, I was going from the frying pan into the fire. My first indication of trouble was when the gate-guards, answering my confident hail, opened the huge portals, and I saw in the moonlit square beyond (my heart fell back into my shoes!) a row of stocks! Perhaps you've laughed at old woodcuts of your Puritan forebears sitting in those things. A hard wooden bench built for absolute discomfort, the sitter's hands and feet ignominiously sticking through a low board fence in front of him, his wrists and ankles locked in holes fashioned for that purpose. But the comedy is only for the onlooker whose sense of humor and moral superiority may lead him to pelt the helpless sitter with garbage and rotten eggs. For sheer misery I give you a day in the stocks. I know. That was my second indication of trouble. When I found myself in them!

THAT scuffle at the gates of Midnight Keep happened so fast it was over before I could realize what had occurred The Roundheads who ganged up on me from behind must have followed me out of Shrewsbury Wood. I remember a shout of, "Ho, the guard!" Someone bawling, "Take him! Take him!" The gate-men pinned my arms as I tried to jump back; in the struggle I kicked a good howl from someone with sensitive shins; a lanthorn was trampled underfoot; and then those Roundheads landed on my back. Cudgels and constellations. A face wolfish, somehow familiar, gleefully yelling for my downfall. Cloth tore and blows thudded and I was down. The next thing I knew I was sitting in the stocks.

"Spy!" It was the wolf-faced man, jeering down. "Perhaps this will teach you to strike the cheek of Martin Whitgrift or any other captain of Cromwell's Guard. Sit impounded, then, until morning, and reflect on what will happen to you as a captured spy."

I couldn't wipe a trickle of blood from my right eye, but I could glare helpless fury with my left. Whitgrift! The name came back to me. One of the two Roundheads I'd seen fighting the Cavalier that evening (or was it ten years ago?) of my arrival in the Seventeenth Century.

Deliberately he dealt me a cut across the face with my trout rod, and with no further word stalked off across the square with his soldiers. I shouted at him to come back, that I had important information; to release me and take me to his commanding officers, take me to Cromwell.

"It is useless to cry out," a voice said at my shoulder. "Best stopper thy tongue—ecod!— for words of blasphemy lengthen thy sentence. Save thy breath and strength, friend, for with daylight you will need all thy fortitude."

In my extremity, frenzied, I hadn't noticed the others. There were two,

sitting in shadow at the end of my bench. The nearest was a gaunt, sag-shouldered man whose face, turned toward me, looked wan and ill. There was a wicked bruise on his temple, and his clothing, I saw, had been fouled with garbage. Beyond him sat a youth, back bowed in exhaustion, head sunk forward on his caved chest, whether dead or asleep I couldn't tell.

"Fainted," the gaunt one informed me, noting the question in my stare. "A day without water in this bondage is fatiguing. For myself, I have only been here since last evening. Blasphemy. Ecod! it is as hard for me to stop swearing as it would be for a dog not to bark. Damme, my father was a soldier under King James. From him I learned the words."

"You mean there is a law—?"

"A law?" He nodded sickishly. "A million laws. This Commonwealth is one law after another. Ud's death!" his voice sank under a whisper. "Methinks there are too many laws promoted under Ironside. Lambert—the boy, there—is here for falling asleep in church. Damme! I have been here so often the flesh is gone from my bones from the hunger, but I can't stop swearing. By the Rood, though, I guess we are well off compared to you!"

He was eying me curiously, and his tone constricted the muscles around my heart. "But they can't hold me long for a spy," I said hoarsely. "I can prove my innocence. I—"

"But what would a good Cromwell man be doing in a Cavalier's cloak?"

I'd forgotten about that cloak, and it came back to me then as a blow. No wonder I'd been arrested. Walking out of Shrewsbury Wood into the Roundhead lines, wearing the cape of a Royalist cavalryman! But my shouts and protests did me no good that night. As my companion had suggested—his name was Huselrig—I might as well have saved my breath.

WHEN morning arrived I needed all the breath I could summon. My first impression of Midnight Keep, the Puritan town, was of a place much cleaner than Royalist Shrewsbury—the houses trim, the cobbles of the square well-swept; market stalls, wagons, the cattle and the people who drifted into the square with coming daylight, workmanlike and orderly. In spite of my unmerited position, I was favorably disposed toward the town. Anyway there weren't any gibbets where ghouls might gather usnea.

But with the sun climbing over the housetops, my opinion suffered. So did I. The sun was hot; the stocks beyond the reach of shade. There were flies.

Already several hours in the stocks had begun to tell on me; my wrists and ankles were sore, my arms and legs aching, my back ready to break from that cramped and ludicrous posture. By seven o'clock the sunlight was painful. By noon the square was unbearable, every cobblestone baking like a loaf of bread, the air powdered with the dust of passing traffic, and thirst commencing to swell my tongue. By three of that blazing summer afternoon I was ready to faint.

I kept thinking Whitgrift or the soldiers would return with an order for my release, but I might have been officially forgotten. If so, I was not ignored by the populace of that town. My checkered cap attracted attention, and my travail began with the arrival of small boys who hooted at me as a foreigner, then pestered me as if I were an animal in a cage. Soon I was the center of an ever-thickening crowd, women who peered and backed fearfully away, men who stood around in hard-faced condemnation. I don't know when I've seen faces as humorless. These Puritan elders, rigid-lipped, stern-eyed, might have all been weaned on astringents.

My troubles grew with the crowd. Someone had pointed out my Cavalier cloak, and from then on I was badgered by all kinds of abuse. I was spat at and vilified. I was the target of the nearest missile to hand. From time to time I was joined on the bench by newcomers—two soldiers who had been drinking overtime—a

boy who had stolen a turnip—a fainting girl with a brand on her forehead. The youth who had fallen asleep in church was now awake and raving, out of his head; and Huselrig beside me was only half conscious and moaning. But in that wretched line-up, I was easily the main attraction.

The torture by mid afternoon was unbearable. The Puritan crowd became a faceless brown-gray mass. My companions in misery were writhing shadows. Noises joined together in a senseless roaring on my ears. Of that long day in a Puritan town I remember only burning sunlight and thirst.

But evening I recall in greater detail. When lilac shadows were starting and the crowd, wearied of my novelty, was going home to supper. In despair I lifted my eyes to the heavens, but there was only a white echelon of geese. Then suddenly a girl was standing at my elbow—a cool-looking girl with gentle features and compassionate eyes. I think she must have slipped from behind a dray parked near the stocks. She wore a gray-blue cape, I recall, and big-buckled shoes—a Puritan girl—and I wanted to cry out when I saw her face. It was she, the girl of the painting, Elizabeth Bowen!

SHE made a cautioning gesture, looking around in pale anxiety, and then, before I could speak, she took a stone jug from under her cloak and pressed it to my lips. I never tasted a drink of water like that one, and I never will again. Watching frantically over her shoulder to be certain the big wagon was between herself and the view of the gate guards, she hurried down that miserable line, and passed every sufferer a drink. Only when she had returned the jug to its hiding place under her mantle did I dare raise a cry.

"Elizabeth—! Elizabeth Bowen—!"

She ran to me at once, eyes wide in fright, finger to lips. "You know me?"

I whispered, "I am your cousin. Wait—! I come from a far country! You must help me! Go to Lord Bowen—to Cromwell's headquarters—somebody! Tell them I am no spy, but have information concerning a Cavalier attack on your town. Go quickly, in heaven's name!"

She was gone so abruptly that I wondered if I hadn't imagined her. Afterward I remembered the message from the Cavalier, Montrose, and to this day I am unhappy that I failed to deliver it then. She didn't come back with the soldiers her father sent to release me. Whitgrift was with them, instead. I was taken from the stocks and hustled across the square, no man saying a word. I couldn't walk without support, and an officer named Pride, kindlier than his captain, half carried me.

I remember a room somewhere, a hot candle-lit room that spun for a long time before its occupants came into focus, and then I was standing, supported by Pride and Whitgrift, before a stoutish man seated at a massive table. I didn't remember anything about this ancestral uncle, but I recognized the Bowen nose in the ruddy Scotch countenance, and called him by name. He peered at me a long time before ordering the soldiers ranged behind him out of the room.

"My daughter declares you claim to be a relative. Captain Whitgrift tells me you are a spy. Take care of your words, for I am a general of Cromwell's Guards. Tell your story, and quickly; and if you would not know the executioner, tell the truth!"

"Prince Rupert is going to attack!" I gasped. "Plans are laid for an assault on Midnight Keep. At midnight tonight—!"

Something in my vehemence must have carried conviction, for his eyes were startled. "Midnight tonight? And how did you come to be in Shrewsbury?"

"I came from Scotland!" I husked out. "By car!"

"By car? What mean these words? By car?"

"Yester evening," Whitgrift put in with a snarl. "I saw him in Shrewsbury Wood. He came to the aid of a Cavalier scouting along the Forbidden Wall!"

"I didn't know there was any wall!" I cried.

"The Forbidden Wall is a range of cliffs!" Lord Bowen thundered. "No man of the country is allowed to trespass there! How came you there with a Cavalier? How came you near those cliffs yester evening?"

Lord help me, if I didn't try to tell him. About myself. America. Scotland. The fishing trip. The quarry. The subterranean ride. About automobiles. He didn't believe me. Officers Pride and Whitgrift didn't believe me. But when I described Bowen Castle and delved into family history, I had my Scottish ancestor pop-eyed. He was staring as though at a mesmerist when I was through. I'd give all my chances in heaven to know what he thought of me, that Puritan uncle, but he was a Covenanter and a stern, self-disciplined man. The automobile brought the queerest quirk to his lips, but news of the Cavalier attack he received like a general.

"Captain Whitgrift," he said in a strained voice, "the man should have been brought to headquarters before. He is mad, but he knows something and he knows much. We have long been aware the Cavalier forces were planning an attack. Cromwell must be informed. If the madman lies, at least naught will be lost. Meantime do you saddle him a horse and ride with him, you and Pride, to the Forbidden Wall where he speaks of this strange tunnel and devilish machine. Kill him if he attempts escape. Kill him if there is no such machine. If there be such a machine let him ride it back to town or into battle and you with it. Be on!"

CHAPTER VI

Battle Cry

AS I rode out of Midnight Keep with those two Puritans on either flank I reflected grimly on what would occur if that roadster should be missing. Pistols pointed at my shoulder-blades, my guards galloped me up the valley road for Shrewsbury Wood. Night was making, and a star stood over the woodland like one dim hope. Once I turned to look back at the Roundhead stronghold. Men with lanthorns were moving along the walltops like fireflies, and I could hear a great clattering of horses in the square. Cromwell must have heard my story and given swift orders.

From that point on I kept my face to the woods. It must have been ten o'clock when we started, and it seemed like years later, the night black around us on that highroad, when a sound like low thundering broke loose in the dark behind us. Pride turned in his saddle, exclaiming:

"The cannon!"

Whitgrift muttered something; his face was pale as we spurred into a glade of moonlight. Pale? It was deathly when, some moments later, we galloped past the little hut, up the slope of ilex, and found the car. Not till then did I notice my trout rod in his hand, and he threw it at me as if it were hot, and reared back in amazement at sight of the Bentley and the tunnel mouth! I reared back, myself; fell from my horse and ran to the roadster in dismay. There wasn't any crank!

What a jar that gave me! I'd forgotten about the tool-box dropping off during my Jules-Verne ride from Today back to 1650. All the laws of Time and Space might have gone awry, but Gravity was still working, and the crank handle to that Bentley was somewhere in that infernal tunnel, half way to Tophet. Lord! that was the reason I was armed with nothing but a trout rod.

"You've got to push!" I howled at the Puritans. "You've got to shove to get the car started. It's our only chance!"

It took some tall explaining to get those precious Puritans anywhere near the car, and I had to give a demonstration before I could convince them the roadster wouldn't kick their chins off if they shoved against the spare tire. Fortunately the Bentley had stalled on a downgrade, and it wouldn't take much man-power to start the heavy car rolling. Trout rod

beside me in the driver's seat, I switched on the ignition, kicked the clutch into neutral, and shouted at the Roundheads to push. I can tell you my heart was in my mouth. Would the engine turn over? I hadn't the slightest doubt about my Puritan guards killing me if the motor failed to perform.

I was sick with relief when the wheels moved under me, and when the roadster joggled down through the brush, picking up momentum on the decline, I pulled a memorable breath of deliverance. "Hop on!" I hollered over my shoulder. "I'm going to give her the gas!" There was a heart-warning thrum from the engine as I let her into gear; a drone as I yanked the accelerator; a shriek. That banshee howl was from my passengers clinging to the spare in a cloud of oil-smoke from the exhaust. They didn't stop howling when I bounced out onto the wagon-track, either.

"God ha' mercy! God ha' mercy!"

"It's all right!" I bawled, slowing down to let them grab a better perch. "The running-board! Stand on the running-board! Hang on!"

Whitgrift seemed to understand, but we left Pride staring in the roadside weeds, knees visibly shaking, the eyes as big as harvest moons in his head. The speed of a motorcar must have seemed to Whitgrift as fabulous as Sinbad's flying carpet. His eyes yelled as I took a hill on high. Maybe I was a little reckless on the turns—served him right, the martinet!—but I wanted to reach that battlefield. I could hear it above the drone of the Bentley's cylinders. A low, murmurous bumbling sound that grew in pitch and dissonance as the woodsy highroad drew nearer. Presently I could make out a feverish haze in the night ahead; a haze that reddened as we approached, tipping the treetops with crimson, tinting a great mushroom of smoke that was spreading across the night.

We might have been driving toward a forest fire. The light developed against the sky, the mushrooms of smoke became a thousand swirling tendrils, the bumbling sound that was like the roaring of flames broke into ten thousand separate sounds—a vast, persistent shouting of men in travail; steel clashing on steel with the din of a canning factory; the sharp rat-a-plan of horses in stampede; minor thumps, dull explosions, a crackling as of match-sticks; trumpets and fish-horns; cheers, screams—a tumult that shook the road under the car. We were going fifty when I topped the ridge above that battlefield, and I'll never forget my first glimpse of that Armageddon as long as I live.

IT was like one of those vast panoramic battle-canvases by Meissonier, black background of night smeared with fiery reds, the tiny figures of men moving as schools of fish in a maelstrom. From rim to rim the broad valley below was a seething sea of smoke and flame. A near-by stand of timber was burning, and on a farther slope a wide acreage of fired brush made a blazing green patch. But most of the light was shed by hundreds of flaring torches aloft in the hands of running pikemen.

"Look!" Whitgrift found his voice to scream. "Prince Rupert's men are trying to burn the town."

I saw then that those massed torch-bearers were storming toward the walls of Midnight Keep, but the Puritan soldiery, prepared for the assault, were raking the Royalist lines with blunderbuss-fire. Flame-balls danced and burst all along the wall-top like strings of Chinese crackers. A chain of lightning zigzagged down a front of Roundhead infantry concealed near the gate. Brass cannon spat yellow tongues of thunder.

The Royalist incendiaries wavered, fell back, formed again, charged on. I could see the mercurial flashings of spears and battle axes. The shine of steel helmets and the pin-flicker of swords. Above that pyrotechnic display, I couldn't help stopping the car a moment to watch. Seen in distant perspective, the battle was colorful, awesome, not without a certain

grandeur. A Miltonian picture of conflict on the furnace floor of Paradise Lost.

"The Cavaliers!" Whitgrift screamed. "They come! They come!"

Prince Rupert's Horse! I could see them charging down the long slope below, streaming out of Shrewsbury Wood and pouring into the valley like a flood released. Pigmy horsemen riding hell for leather, a wave of shimmering lances crested by gorgeous plumes. For a moment it looked as if they might smother the Roundhead infantry strung out below the town's flame-painted walls, but a wild cheering broke loose near the gates of Midnight Keep, the Cromwell's Horse swept out in counter-attack. I remembered the history of Cromwell's tactics, and it was the queerest thing in the world that I should see them demonstrated. Instead of charging, the Roundhead cavalry bunched forward into battle at a trot; taking the assault not in head-on collision, but more as a cushion might take the blow of a battering ram. This was Cromwell's famous "interrupted charge," new to English warfare. It broke up the Cavalier charge into fragmentary units, the shock was scattered into a wild melée.

But the Puritan infantry was losing ground before the fiery rush of the Royalist foot-soldiers. Suddenly I was aware of the Roundhead lines falling back across the highroad below the hill, rows of tumbling, running men. God knows what I thought I could do, but I shouted at Whitgrift to hang on for his life, and drove the Bentley roaring down the valley road. Can you see me swooping down into that wild scene of battle? Can you see the faces of the first squad of Seventeenth-century soldiers who saw us coming?

Pandemonium wasn't the word. They were too scared for any stampede. Simply they clutched their guns and stood as images, pop-eyed. Cut-out open, engine roaring, headlamps blazing yellow, that car was a Biblical dragon straight out of the Apocalypse. And then those Royalist pikemen who'd never seen anything faster than a horse! I ploughed a furrow through a regiment of those Royalists as a bullet might go through a swarm of bees. Skidding through a hurricane of torch-tinted dust, I raced between two lines of cavalry, giving them everything I had with the horn. Cavaliers and Roundheads stopped in their wild maneuvers, hollered, broke ranks, fled. Bucking horses and squalling men. A blur of smoke where cannoneers, seeing me coming, had deserted their guns. I had a glimpse of infantry in wild confusion on either side of the road; horsemen who dropped their bloody lances, sent their mounts leaping out of the way.

SMOKE, red dust, fire-spurts, crowds of fighting men kaleidoscoped around me in a noise like the falling of the firmament, and the wonder isn't that I didn't pile that car into a cavalry squadron, a ditch or a cannonade, and crash up. No, the wonder is that some wild-eyed marksman didn't spear me through the head. Time and again a sword-cut swiped past my ear; bullets peppered the engine-hood; horses kicked at the fenders; cannon-shot bounded across the road ahead of me; and once a hurled axe skimmed my hair. I don't know where Whitgrift dropped off, but I looked around after one bad bounce and he was gone. Why I wasn't smashed to jam in that car, I'll never know. Except that my tombstone wasn't dated for the Seventeenth Century.

Two glimpses of men in the thick of that battleground were outstandingly clear. One was of Cromwell—I didn't know it until later—a stalwart figure on horseback at a bend in the pike. I almost sideswiped him going by, and he never budged. I don't believe he saw me. A wagon was burning like a bonfire near-by, smearing him with red light. Sword drawn, face rigid as stone, he made the figure of an equestrian statue. At the time I didn't recognize the profile—dominant nose, blunted jaw, humorless mouth somehow grimmer for the

clipped moustache and dab of goatee. Cloaked figures of his staff were grouped behind him, and all were watching two Roundheads pistoling a Cavalier who was tied to the burning wagon. Ironside's eyes had no expression.

The other glimpse, equally unforgettable, was of a swordsman standing over a dead Puritan squarely in the middle of the road. His blade, limber in his grip, was a scarlet shimmer. The Puritan was no more than a boy, and the Cavalier swordsman was smiling down at the upturned, childish face. Then he lifted his head at the rush of my car-lights, and I saw it was the Earl of Stafford! The Tiger Lily!

I was delighted to see him. Steering down mid-road so that my wheels wouldn't touch the dead boy, I struck that petrified fencing-master head-on at fifty miles an hour. Like a dummy he sailed over the car, and I never regretted it for a second.

I don't know where I went or how I got there, after that. It seems to me I drove aimlessly for hours around that storming field, lost, shock-numbed, uncaring. Perhaps the advent of my automobile turned the tide of battle for the Puritans; I couldn't say. I do know Cromwell's line recovered and held. His trotting cavalry had been forewarned of my coming, and the Puritan horsemen held their mounts in good order, whereas the Cavaliers fled at sight of me. That, and the Puritan discipline, along with the military improvements of the New Model Army, won the field. I was too far off on the sidelines to witness Cromwell's final charge, but the frenzied cheering and the screams from the direction of the Royalist lines told me Ironside was winning.

Did you ever hear the shrieks of a massacre? From the western end of the valley where the Royalist troops had been bottled came a wailing that beggars description. Chop and crunch of axes. Pistols snapping. Clashing of a thousand competing swords. A loudening oratorio of screams. I had to get away from that sound of slaughter. Driving blindly, I steered for the walls of Midnight Keep, and presently I found myself in a sector of the field where the battle had passed. Lord! that was worse.

It must have been along toward morning; a light rain had started to fall, extinguishing torch-flares and incendiary fires, blearing the panorama with watery glooms. The rain sifted into a sticky, oyster-gray brume, thick as London fog, chill, a damp smudge alive with phantasmal shadows, unidentifiable sounds. I made the mistake of trying to identify them.

THE rough ground was littered with every conceivable kind of junk, discarded guns, bits of body armour, helmets, broken lances, splintered pikes. Here and there on this steaming field of scrap were shadows that crawled, twisted, flopped or lay inert, weird fog-wrapped creatures that couldn't possibly be men. I stopped the car by a lofty cedar, a great ghostish tree that made a landmark on the field, certain my wheels were on a slope where I might start up again, and I found myself impelled to walk across that Aceldema.

I suppose no other man in the world today would weep for the wounded of a Seventeenth-century war. I would. For the wounded of any war, Lord knows, but heaven pity those countless legions maimed in battle before the days of Florence Nightingale. Those cat-calls, squalls, sobs and wolf-howls that I heard that night. Cries for life and moans begging death. It began like the croaking of swamp-frogs and grew in volume, one wail echoed by another, as I groped forward in that mist. Those sounds weren't human. Mewing, spitting cries, barks, shrill laughter—it was the meal time bedlam of a zoo.

I could weep now when I tell about it, and I wept then. At a Puritan soldier with a leg mashed under an overturned cannon, who bawled at me to get him loose. At a Cavalier, sprawled wide-eyed with a great raw hole in his thigh. I remember another

Cavalier crawling like a speared crocodile with a splintered lance jutting from his spine, squealing, "Water! Water! Water!"

There was a Roundhead panting on his back, both legs mangled to the knees; a soldier burned from boots to collar who bit at my stumbling shoes; a man who sat on the head of a dead horse, rocking back and forth and holding a bullet-pierced stomach; a blind one who staggered past me shouting, "God's mercy! God's mercy!" hands grabbing about him in the mist.

I won't go on with it, except to say there were dozens of those horrors in that steaming backwash where the tide of battle had ebbed, and no one there to help them. No, I'm wrong. Here and there I came across bands of Grim Reapers wading through the knee-deep vapor; Puritan axe-men who dispatched the Cavalier leftovers with merciful blows, but had no time for their own wounded. And there was one surgeon.

He was standing in a group of men who held lanthorns. A blacksmith was heating an iron in a charcoal brazier. A Roundhead officer was tied in a sort of chair, his crushed leg roped to a bench. To say the less of it, the only anaesthetic was a cup of wine before the surgeon picked up his saw.

There was no dawn that day. The sun wouldn't rise on such a scene. There was only a sickly hue of calamity in the East, a pallorous dilution of the darkness that crept off under the trees and crawled into ditches and under bushes with the moaning wounded. Hands pressed to head, I was floundering in a circle, trying to find my car, when I came on the Cavalier. He was on his back in a patch of trampled grass, and there was nothing familiar about his mist-blurred ashen face.

"Friend! You from America! It is I —Montrose—!" I went to my knees beside him, blind with tears. "The girl —Elizabeth Bowen—did you—see her—?"

"And she asked for you," I lied thickly. "You will see her yourself soon." He stirred in my arms.

"Take care of her!" he gasped. "I die! The Puritan soldiers—cut off my hands!"

He was dead before I could clear my vision to see him, but I gave him my promise, and I swore it before God. The Puritans had done this thing! Those New Model Roundheads! I cursed them. I cursed Ironside and the whole Rebellion! I would get Elizabeth Bowen out of Midnight Keep, away from these ranting fiends if it killed me.

Cloaked shadows drifted at me through the fog-blear, and I found Whitgrift's long-chinned face squinting into mine. Whitgrift! I glared at the Roundheads with him. Why were they aiming those bell-mouthed guns at my head? A squad of them, their weapons trained on me like a battery. Whitgrift's eyeballs seemed coated with ice.

"You are under arrest," the voice was that of Poe's raven. "The Protector's order. Do not try any work of magic with your infernal devices. You cannot reach your machine of hell, and we have in our possession the wicked instrument which you have carried. In the name of the Commonwealth, I am to convey you to Midnight Keep for immediate trial."

"Trial?" I whispered. "What for?"

"Lying and blasphemy!"

"Why, you hypocritical, red-handed—!"

"And heresy against the Calvinist Doctrine!"

"Do you butchers," I whispered, "dare talk about religion?"

"And treasonable collusion with the enemy and a traitor!"

"Wha-a-at?" I was raging, strangling.

"And *witchcraft!*" Whitgrift concluded succinctly. He made a birdlike nod at his soldiers. "Seize him, men!"

CHAPTER VII

Cromwell Decides

IF I live to the millennium I would never forget my trial before those Seventeenth-century Puritans. I was

in no condition to go to any courthouse, and hardly able to care when my guards informed me I was to be granted no lawyers for the defense.

I was stupefied by the turn events had taken, numb with alarm and absolutely staggering with nervous exhaustion. As a further handicap, not to say hazard, the Puritan prosecutors assailed me with a jargon of Cromwellian legal terminology which, added to the period dialect, was about as comprehensible as Persian. So about all I have left of that trial in my memory book are faces, clear-cut as Daguerreotypes, and impressions.

Perhaps the oddest and strongest of those impressions, as I look back on that trial, was an atmosphere grotesquely associated in my mind with Thanksgiving Day. The Puritan costumes were not unlike those of the Pilgrims—high-crowned, broad-brim hat—Buster Brown collar and cape—knee-breeches and big-buckled shoes. Too, there was something banquet-hallish about the long, low-eaved courtroom with its vast ceiling beams, its thick-shuttered windows and tall, massive doors studded with enormous bolt-heads suggestive of the portals to old Newgate Prison. One looked around half-expectantly for friendly Indians and window-decorations of cornsilk, pumpkins and autumn leaves.

Instead of a banquet table, however, there was a raised platform at one end, a gallery above it where privileged spectators might enjoy the show. The Commonwealth Judges, about fifteen in number, were ranged along the back of the platform (you know the faces of mourners at a funeral?), and the three High Judges posed grim as ancestral portraits on a six-foot bench draped ominously in scarlet. At the right there was a sort of dock where the jury sat—every man of it looking as if he'd been bought by the D.A. To the left of the bench were the bleachers, rows of expectant Roundheads and their women. Bobbed-haired court clerks sat at a small table under the judges' bench, scribbling with quill pens. Gallery and bleachers were packed and there was a dead silence as I was marched through the door—a stern-lipped hush that frosted my skin as though I'd entered an ice chamber.

Halfway to the bench I was halted beside a sort of wicket while the Prosecutor, a hateful man with the eyes of a famished shark, read the Accusation. I can still recall some of the verbiage in the opening of that masterpiece. The court was informed I had been brought to trial for certain actions—

"By which it appears that he, the accused, has been and was the originator, author and continuer of many unnatural, heathen and heretical acts, deeds, thaumaturgies and deviltries, and was therefore to be found guilty, if it so pleased the court, of treasons, heresies, desolations, damages, mischiefs against the Commonwealth and the practising of witchcraft."

It went on that rigamarole, for about fifteen droning pages. I listened at first, half deaf in dismay and bewilderment. I was to be arraigned on a charge of treasonable collusion with the enemy for having given him aid, succor and assistance. When do you suppose that was? Why, the time I came to the aid of that Cavalier against the two Roundheads on my entry to the Seventeenth Century. Whitgrift, again! That cur had never forgiven me the blow in the face.

Then collusion with a traitor to the Commonwealth. Whitgrift testified to that. He's seen some woman in Puritan dress consorting with the enemy Cavalier at that rendezvous in Shrewsbury Wood. Hadn't recognized the woman, but she was doubtless a turncoat, and she would be burned at the stake as soon as found.

"Lies and heresy. A dissenter against Calvinist doctrine." That meant the stories I'd told about my arrival from Scotland, my descriptions of the United States and New York's skyscrapers, my "blasphemous slang and un-Puritan way of speech and dress.

"Witchcraft!"

But I couldn't repeat all the crazy chatter in that nonsensical charge. I

was described as the Devil, can you believe it? That Bentley roadster was my "horse." The proof? I had "come from a hole in the ground—at my own confession entered the Commonwealth "by way of the Forbidden Wall." Be it known to the Judges that I worked many tricks of black magic, that the guard had taken from my person several infernal "machines." My pocket compass and watch fob were introduced as evidence, and, of all things, a wretched packet of safety matches.

Can you imagine what finally did me in on that witchcraft business? That shark-eyed prosecutor saved it for the last. My trout rod! He held it up for Judges, gallery and jury to behold. That ridiculous fishing rod in its canvas sheath.

"HIS wand, m'Lords. The whip with which he drives his metal horse. The staff of wizardry that has been seen to never leave his hand or his side. Martin Whitgrift will testify it was with this devilish instrument he drove his burning-eyed, iron animal across the field of battle last night. It is a staff of Satan, m'Lords, curiously fashioned and hinged with a spool of thread attached. May I call attention to the Judges that thread has long been known as a means for weaving conjurations, baneful influences and spells. Whereby it is on this evidence that Martin Whitgrift accuses the prisoner of consorting with the Powers of Darkness. With your favor, the accusation closes, m'Lords."

I don't know what came over me, then, but it seemed as if some vessel broke open in what was left of my reeling brain. Everything in that courtroom including my own silly face went red. Nervous tension snapped inside of me, a spontaneous combustion of rage. Blinding, suffocating fury against these idiotic proceedings and the people who stood for them. By God! I'd tell this fatuous courtroom a thing or two. I'd show these fools some magic they might well be afraid of. I'd give them a dose of modern knowledge! I'd reveal to them their history as they hadn't heard it yet—tell them what was going to happen to their narrow-minded, bigoted regime—describe to them the end of their damned Puritan era, the downfall of the Commonwealth, to the last minute detail I'd picture for those judges the death of Cromwell. I'd scare the living daylights out of these pitiful, obscene witch-hunters. Do you see how I'd do it? I'd let them have a forecast of the defeat that was bound in their miserable future! Tell them of secrets and privy schemes in their official archives that, as a contemporary, I could not possibly know. They wanted some witchcraft! I'd give it to them!

"Will the accused stand forward?"

Aided by a prod from one of my guards, I stood forward. I'd let this insane asylum courtroom hear something now. I—And then I couldn't speak a word. Couldn't utter a syllable. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, dry as a shingle, and my knees dissolved to water. Elizabeth Bowen was in that audience! First row near the Judges' bench! Hands clasped on the railing before her, fingers tightly locked as though in prayer, face white with strain, blue eyes fixed on me. As sure as I was there in that dock, those fear-widened eyes were trying to tell me something, trying to convey some message of encouragement.

I stood in a well of icy cold, fighting to keep my gaze averted. If those needle-eyed Puritans spied our meeting glance the girl would certainly be lost. In Puritan demonology, a witch could contaminate any girl he gazed upon, provided that girl had some enemy who might wish to bring a charge of that sort.

Deliberately I switched my stare to the bench. That, too, stunned me dumb. The quality of mercy was not strained among those three Commonwealth judges. The one on the left had the pitiless smile of Torquemada. The alternate on the right must have been ninety years old and spent that sere and austere lifetime with a pickle

in his mouth. The judge in the middle, stern-jawed, frowning, for all the world a painted plaster bust from the shelf of a schoolroom, was Oliver Cromwell!

Ironside! Dictator of the Commonwealth! The general who had lifted his eyes with, "God be praised!" when told a Royalist town to the last man, woman and child had been massacred. The Protector! The General I'd seen in last night's battle coldly watching an execution!

His eyes on me were hatpins impaling a bug. His jaw was stern with its trimmed V of whisker, his mouth grim-lined, his features not unintelligent. And that impression I had of his face wasn't brutal in particular. Rather, he was like some business tycoon who had no time for a fractious office boy. I saw his glance flicker at the trout rod which the prosecutor had placed on the clerks' table (to their evident malease) and it seemed for a moment as if the great man might smile. I was sure something in his face had softened when those piercing eyes slanted down at me again.

"I am disposed," he declared unexpectedly in a deep-toned voice, "toward clemency in this case. You, the accused, are certainly not native to England, and although the court cannot entirely condone various actions of misconduct on your part, it is also aware of your assistance at last night's battle. In that light, I am almost prepared to waive the death sentence demanded by the Prosecution." He paused to regard me, sternly judicial. Then, "What is your name?"

"Stuart," I said in the calmest voice I could command. "Westmoreland Stuart."

I might have hurled a bludgeon at Cromwell's forehead. He was on his feet with a roar that upset the inkwells, brows thunderous, eyes livid as lightning. "Stuart? You confess yourself to be a Stuart? As Protector of the Commonwealth, I declare this trial to be at an end!" His palm came down on the bench before him with the crash of Judgment. "Confine the prisoner in the Tower! I condemn him to die at midnight tonight as an enemy of this state! To the block with him! Off with his head!"

OFF with his head! It was Alice in Wonderland in Puritan dress. Gilbert and Sullivan comedy. Now was the time for the curtain to come down, for the audience to laugh. The audience spun and tilted as the courtroom scene went merry-go-round in my vision, but it didn't laugh. And the only thing that came down was the beefy hand of a soldier, capturing my collar. Off with his head—

I suppose I was fainting, for there were black spots before my eyes and the Thanksgiving stage-set went topsy-turvy. It was too much after fifty hours without sleep, a day in the stocks and that battle. My knees melted. Then the nightmare blurred.

Vaguely I recall a procession through narrow, cobble-paved streets. A squat, ugly building with a tower like a black-windowed lighthouse looming against night. Doors ponderously opened. Steps spiraling up in darkness. My bonds were unfastened, and I was handed a vellum Bible. Then, *clang!* I was flung into a turret cell, alone in darkness with my thoughts.

To this day I can feel the cold of those turret walls, the shut-in sensation of imprisonment behind the basket-weave grating of that tower-cell door. I don't know how long I sprawled there in the corner where I'd been thrown, the Bible clutched in my hands. Had there been light enough (and there was only a wan infiltration of moonlight that cast a pattern of window-bars on the stone floor near my shoes) I doubt if I could have held my mind on reading. I could only sprawl there thinking—seeing Cromwell's face as it had glared when I'd told him my name was Stuart—the same as that of the English Royal family, that unhappy King Charles who was Cromwell's enemy—Charles Stuart!

No wonder that Cavalier met in

Shrewsbury Wood had shown me deference. No wonder Prince Rupert had named a Pretender. No wonder I'd been condemned by Cromwell to die at midnight on the block. At midnight! The thought started me frantic, pacing. Evening when those fiends had brought me here, now it was dark. Two hours gone? My stomach shrank to a walnut. That made it ten o'clock, with two hours to go. I rushed at the door and set to pounding it with my fists! I pounded my knuckles to the raw, but I could rouse no response save spiders, bats and an operatic accompaniment of jeers, howls and groans from some dungeon down below. My cell door, I discovered, was at the top of the tower stairs; I might as well have been shouting from the summit of a chimney.

The window proved worse. Iron bars looking out on a summer moon the yellow of Hallowe'en, and a Hallowe'enish picture in the courtyard fifty feet below. Soldiers paced in silhouette along the sullen lower walls, and there was, centrally located in that prison yard, a wooden platform and something that looked like an anvil, only it had a groove for a man's neck. A shining battle-axe rested against this miserable piece of furniture; a masked executioner leaned negligently on the axe-handle, and a wicker basket was handy. The floor of the platform was polka-dotted with dark splotches.

Switching my eyes in horror from that waiting piece of scenery, I found my gaze going to a lighted window perhaps thirty feet across the court, a casement some ten feet below the level of my own. This was the subtlest kind of torture. I could look into that candle-lit room down there and see a table framed by the window, a jailer asleep at the table, his stupid face pillowed on his arm, and three inches from the jailer's sleeping hand a big ring of keys. It was the ruffian who'd locked me up in this hopeless tower, and those keys—

I looked down across the court at that key-ring with a yearning that almost brought them to me by the process of osmosis. But there was no use wishing, and no use trying to break my window-bars. I paced around the cell; found myself again at that window. Sleeping jailer and keys were still there. I paced; went back. Jailer and keys still there—as near as looking from your New York apartment into Mrs. McGillicuddy's, and as far and unattainable as China.

What time was it now? Off with his head! To the block at midnight! Did you ever have a nervous breakdown when thoughts and pictures, words and faces start running through your mind like papers through a windy funnel? Pacing between cell door and window, between hopelessness and despair, I must have gone as close to insanity as it is possible for a half-rational mind to go.

"Whist—! My friend—! I am here —by the door—!"

I SHOCKED around on my heels, glaring. That whisper wasn't madness. The girl—Elizabeth Bowen—her face a misty oval at that basket-work grill. Choking back a cry of fear, I sprang to the door in white panic.

"How did you get here? My God!" Sweat broke on my temples when I saw she was actually out there in the darkness. "You must leave at once! Run! If the guards should discover you—!"

"The watchman is my friend," she whispered. "He allowed me to the tower, but only for a moment. Look! I have brought your magic wand!"

"My wand?" Nausea swept over me. Utter despair.

"The wand with which you drive your metal horse. Surely," she sobbed at me, "it can open this door for you, help you escape. I stole it from the courtroom but a few moments ago. We must hurry—hurry! Before they find it missing!"

Something came shadowing at me, poked through the grill. As God is my witness—that infernal trout rod! I tell you I was on the edge of tears. Gently I took the girl's in-reaching hand, pressed her fingers in mine,

groaning. "But my poor child, there's no such thing as witchcraft—no such thing as magic! Go! Go, before the soldiers find you!" She had begun to weep helplessly, and the stifled sound almost drove me mad. I blurted: "If only I could take you away from this devilish place. If I could only get those keys across the court and—"

Bang! It was like a blow between the eyes, the thought that struck me. I spun on my heel. From trout rod to window I stared, wanting to yell. Next second I was stripping the rod of its sheath, fingers going faster than they'd ever gone in my life. My hands went clumsy as sausages. Magic in that trout rod? Wizard's thread? A wand?

There was just enough space in that tower cell for me to whip that metal switch, and because the girl's life might depend on it as well as mine, I made the record fly-cast of all time. Shades of Isaak Walton—who has since become my patron saint—I sent that winged hook between the bars of that window as a hornet might have gone. Zzzzzzzzzzz! Twelve years went by while the reel spun under my thumb and the line floated out through the moonlight above that court. Then *plink!* I never hooked a fish the way I nailed that ring of keys. Can you imagine—but you can't—the face of that jailer who woke up to see his key-ring go leaping across the table and sailing out of the window.

Then it seemed another twelve years while I cranked like a maniac, desperately reeling in. I saw the jailer rush away from that window across the court, howling bloody murder, just as I brought the big key-ring jangling over my sill. Yells broke out in the lower courtyard as I opened the cell door, swept the girl into my embrace, and sprang with her for the tower stairs. The watchman at the bottom of that evil staircase looked once at the trout rod in my hand, and fainted.

IT got us out of there, that fishpole, and it got us through the town gates. The alarm drums let go just as we reached the Bentley. Thank heaven the car was untouched, still there where I'd parked it under that tall cedar the night before. In the moonlight I found it readily enough, and I suppose those Puritans had been afraid to put a hand on it.

"My father was killed near this tree," the girl said huskily. "Last night."

"You're going away with me, Elizabeth Bowen. Away from all this. Back to—?"

But what could I tell her? There was no time to tell her anything. All the hounds of hell were coming out of Midnight Keep to catch us—dogs, horses, men—and I had just time enough to hustle the girl into the car and get it started. Can you see her sitting beside me in wonderment as I worked the gears? Fortunately I'd parked on an incline where I didn't need a push; releasing the emergency was enough to start us rolling, and the engine picked up like a race. We were off up the valley road, streaking, and when I looked at the girl beside me, my heart drummed like an engine, too. The picture from Bowen Castle. Come alive! Color in her cheeks and her eyes like stars and her blown hair shining in the wind. And to think she'd never seen a motorcar before!

Emotion swelled my throat-muscles to choking. If it was the last thing I lived to do, I'd get this poor child away from Midnight Keep, away from this terrible England. These Puritans, these Royalist Cavaliers—I would save her from these benighted people, or die in the attempt. I would take her with me to Scotland, to America, to another world!

I really meant it, too.

Then it came to me as a shock that it wasn't England or its people that were at fault—it was the *Time!* It was the Past—the Century—the miserable Seventeenth Century! In revulsion against it, I could see the whole era as a dreadful pantoscope of human wretchedness, a time of ignorance, superstition, blind folly. The Past was an eon of night in which men groped and stumbled, gripped in a

bondage of barbarism, stupidity and pain. The history which recorded the romance and lace failed to mention the usnea and its smell. Yesterday—for common humanity—meant chains and the slavery of hypocrisy, dark injustices and cruel deaths.

I cursed the romantic fancies that had ever made me yearn for Yesterday, and I longed to take the girl out of its sufferings and black shadows into a world of cleanliness and electricity, a humane world of hospitals and democracy and freedom of thought, action and speech. I brushed a hand across my eyes, and prayed for our deliverance to the Twentieth Century, the Present I had lost, the world of Today.

The Cavalier

We got away from Midnight Keep, and without mishap reached Shrewsbury Wood. And if I hadn't had to stop for a brass cannon mired in the mucky highroad, if I hadn't lost time backing and turning up a sideroad to get around that miserable gun, we'd have made Scotland together. My intention was to risk everything on a return to that wizardish tunnel, and I'm sure we could have won through. But the gun, like tragedy incarnate, was there.

And so, in the cloak of Nemesis, was Cromwell. Ahead of us, at the Forbidden Wall.

HE must have guessed I'd make for that tunnel-mouth in the embankment, and he'd spurred on some wood-screened shortcut to head us off, outriding the rest of his vicious guards. My headlamps picked him out, posed like a statue in the tunnel-mouth, waiting. His horse-pistol was cocked in his hand, and he was standing on a mound of rocks he'd heaped up in the earthy aperature to block my car.

"Ho, illborn of evil name!" his shout came to me. "Think you to escape the Commonwealth thus easily? No Stuart eludes Ironside and lives!"

"Curse you!" I shouted through the jagged windshield frame. "Let us by!"

I squeezed the horn and revved the engine, starting up through the ilex brush, and for answer he sent a bullet whistling over my head. I couldn't give him time to reload that single-shot pistol. Stopping the car, and leaving the engine running, I cried at the girl to keep down, sprang to the ground, and charged like a madman, whipping cuts of moonlight with my trout rod. He squalled at me to stand off, drawing his sword.

"Take care, baseborn Stuart! I fear none of your witchcraft! No man has quit Midnight Keep for three hundred years, and no man is allowed approach to these escarpments—certainly no Stuart come from the outer world to overthrow us. He who tries to leave this island by the Forbidden Tunnel dies!"

Island! That was the word that got home to me; stopped me dead in my tracks. *Island!* I had to stand there and yell it like an echo.

"Island, indeed!" that devil in the tunnel-mouth squalled at me. "Ten miles by water to the rest of the world—stormy water no cursed foreign boat can navigate. Our outer walls are as those of a fortress, black, barren cliffs against invasion. But here in the heart of that rim of cliffs we are not barren. An island of civilization we are, and have been, for three hundred years! Save for the remnant of Royalists who have remained barricaded in our midst like a cancer, here we have preserved the finest civilization ever known to history. Here we have carried the torch handed us by that first Oliver Cromwell, my ancestor! Here we have preserved the in-

telligence and learning that reached its great peak in the Seventeenth Century! Here we continue to practice the Puritan doctrines, the great good laws of the Commonwealth, the—"

I couldn't breathe. My heart was chugging and no blood would come. My memory gave a somersault to Scotland, to those letters and documents I'd found in old Bowen Castle. The original Lord Bowen's letter to a Duncan of Laidlaw, written when the Commonwealth was beginning to totter. *"The end has come. The King will return. Our men are moving north from Bowen Castle tonight."* North from Bowen Castle? But Bowen Castle was on the end of a headland. North would mean toward the sea. And those Roundheads, and a party of Cavaliers along with them, who'd disappeared on that long-ago night when—

"My God!" I cried. "Then you and all these people on this island are the descendants of—"

"Cromwell's men and the Cavaliers who followed them here from England," the man in the tunnel-mouth cried. His face shone as though emblazoned. "Our goods, our wagons, our books, cattle, mounts all were brought here by our ancestors. It is told in our histories how the tunnel was sealed after the coming, and the law passed that this approach be forbidden. Now you have come from barbarous England, from the world of darkness that followed the first great Cromwell's reign, come here to—"

"Fool!" I screamed. "You've cut yourself off from the greatest period of all history! You and all your followers, you've bogged down out here in a Slough of Despond, thinking you're carrying on at the peak of civilization! Why, your crazy Seventeenth Century is a stupid, brutal cesspool of bigotry, lies, cruel ignorance, filth, compared to the—"

"Have at you, barbarian!" he screamed, and before I could think what was happening, he was on top of me with swinging blade.

CHAPTER VIII

Farewell to Yesterday

HORROR of the man and his words, the wretchedness they implied, almost robbed me of power to move. I slashed his face with that trout rod, running backward while his sword just missed me, and I might have blinded his eyes if the fishline hadn't tangled in his sword-hilt. Jerking about, he tore the rod from my fingers; and in a tangle of cord, I sprang at him. Kicking, gouging, we went down locked together; rolled in the brush. He freed his blade of the snarl, but I had his wrist in my clutch, and I hung on for dear life while we thrashed about in the scrub.

More than anything else had been, these moments were a swirling, feverish nightmare. My brain shivered and reeled and flung out a terrified clutch for something substantial to cling to. There was just one thing. . . .

One thing I knew, and the thought made me battle like a madman. I was back in the Twentieth Century—had never left it!—and that tunnel was no psychic phenomenon, but an undersea passage to modern Scotland. I say I fought like a madman. Rage-blind. Tooth and nail. Ravening. But this modern edition of Cromwell, a direct descendant, had the strength of his indomitable ancestor, the muscles of that brutal age. He crushed me in the grip of a gladiator, and would have slain me with dispatch if my clawing hand hadn't found an extra sword.

It must have been Whitgrift's—flung aside that first night when I'd chased him from these woods. Chance put it into my grasp, and I sprang up armed as if by Merlin. That Seventeenth-century descendant yelled when he saw me with a rapier; came at me like a whirlwind unchained. Our blades zipped together like flashes of lightning, dipped, smote and rang. He beat my blade down, and his point came at me—not one point, but a thousand. Wildly I slashed and parried and gave ground, stumbling backward through the ilex and certain I was going to die.

What little I knew about fencing was no competition for this swordsman. He countered my every thrust, using the forte of his blade with wicked skill, pivoting nimbly to fling me off balance. His arm had the terrific vitality of a panther's strike; his sword quick as the flicker of a snake's tongue. I was bleeding in six places in as many seconds, and he began to play with me like a cat with its lunch, dancing and feinting, lunging and shouting and measuring me for the kill.

And he would have slain me finally, had it not been for the girl. She must have known at once my fatal inadequacy. Poor Elizabeth Bowen! When I think of her, living as her ancestral cousin had, deprived of the Time in which she was born, condemned to that island of darkness by its evil and self-willed isolation. I never saw her run from the car. She was there between us before I could cry out or snatch her away. There to catch the fatal thrust meant for me, squarely above the heart that poured out her life in saving mine.

I saw that cruel blade flash in and out, and I must have gone berserk as she fell. Without sound, she fell. And I think without pain. But I saw her dead on the turf and that monster's crimsoned sword, and I hurled myself at him and saw nothing more. Until suddenly I was over him with my rapier broken off in his bulged chest, and his glassed eyes staring up at me with all the blindness that characterized his ingrown life.

Somewhere in the woods behind me horsemen were coming, and hounds. But I found time to kneel by the girl and tell her about her Cavalier; and somehow or other, unconscious of the act, I cleared the tunnel-mouth of its barricade. Then it was too late to go back for the girl. Better leave her in the country she knew.

I stood still over her just for the smallest splinter of a moment; I bowed my head. Even with those grotesqueries, those assassins, at my heels, I certainly owed her that much at least.

Just as I drove the car into that awful mine-shaft, the Roundhead mob broke from the woods. And as I hit the steep descent, full speed, little caring whether I crashed in that underearth passage or not, I heard the clatter of Cromwell's Horse boring after me, and saw the faint downthrown rays of their torches.

* * *

There was no applause from the members of the Tall Glass Club when Westmoreland Stuart, the historian, stopped speaking. No sound in the room save the unabated drumming of the rain at the windows. Nobody spoke. The silence, as Stuart sat down, was that of the theater audience which refuses to leave its seat after the show, and sits rapt in the mood of the play, unwilling to break the spell, entranced.

Finally Denny Sassoon (*the* Denny Sassoon) pushed back his chair; stood up. "I think I owe you an apology, Westy," he said contritely to the gray-eyed historian. "For what I said last week. About your story having to sound true. Lord! of all the Ananiases in this crowd, you certainly sound on top, and I can't help believe your great adventure happened."

Sassoon smiled leniently.

"I said there was a guarantee," Westmoreland Stuart reminded. "Something I wouldn't show those Scotch constables when I told when I got back to that fishing village, but something I'm willing to show you. You believe my story as it stands and you deserve to see the proof. Here, then." Stooping, he brought something out from under the table where his chair had been ranged; something that glimmered and flashed in the firelight as he held it to view, and caused a general indrawing of breath from his hearers. "I don't know of any better thing for me to sign off with; I've talked far too long. Pass it around if you like. You'll see the name engraved on the hilt. I couldn't withdraw my own blade, do you see? And I grabbed this one—all that mob was coming after me—out of this dying hand. Right"—he nodded at an exclama-

tion from Sassoon— "Cromwell's sword!"

One after another the members of the Tall Glass Club examined the blade . . . stared as though thunderstruck.

"But what happened to that island?" somebody had to ask. "What became of Midnight Keep?"

"Earthquake and tidal wave. Dashed away. Swept out of existence like my sentimental fancies concerning the romance and pageantry of history and the happy simplicity of the 'good old days.' That mob which stormed after me into that tunnel, you understand —carrying flambeaux and resin torches. Well, there must have been gas in that underearth, undersea passage. God knows how old that tunnel was, I've an idea it may have been dug in a day when that island was still a part of the mainland—somewhere back in the dawn of history when the world was inhabited by races extinct today. Who knows? Anyway, an accumulation of inflammatory gas would not be impossible in such a long-closed shaft. My car got through it before I was suffocated. But my pursuers with their blazing torches didn't get any farther than the first gas-pocket.

"That was what it sounded like to me. A series of terrific detonations. Those explosions probably traveled the length of the tunnel like fire going up a fuse. An ammunition factory couldn't have let go with more of a jolt. It lifted the bottom of that channel between island and headland at least fifty feet out of the water. Of course the Scotch fishermen thought it only an earthquake, and you can read about it in the *London Times* of that date. Resulting tidal wave crashed across the island and swept everything away as though it were glass before a fire hose—Shrewsbury, Midnight Keep, woods and fields were gone. The people? Swallowed up by the earthquake when the island was swamped by that submarine convulsion. I went out there once. Some years afterward. How? In a plane. Flew over the place and tried to make a landing. But there wasn't any spot to land. Nothing there. Just a jagged, ugly terrain of spume-swept rocks. Barren. Barren as my youthful soul was of sentiment on that day when I escaped Midnight Keep.

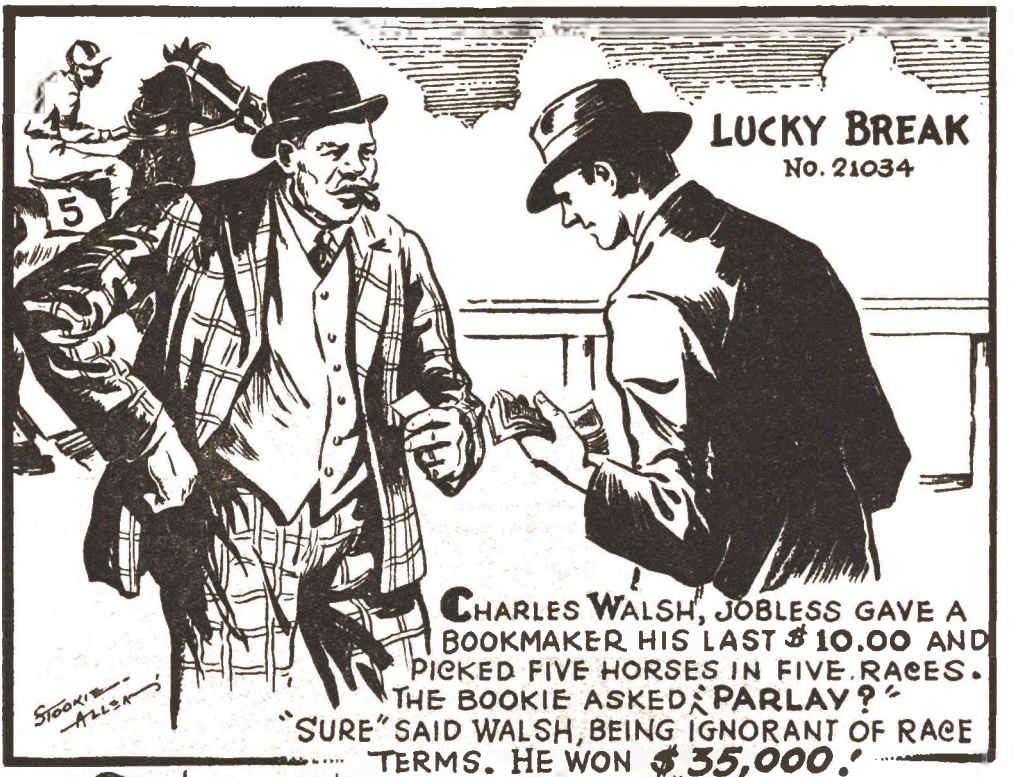
"I hated that Seventeenth-century island when I left it; hated the Seventeenth Century and all the dark ignorance it represented, all the puff-cheeked bombast, the ridiculous ceremony, the superstition and filth and cruelty of that period—hated it with a loathing that choked me like a hand on my throat. Gallantry and pageantry of the Past? An illusion that had shredded, ripped to pieces, blown away like carnival tinsel in a rainstorm.

"I'd seen behind the painted canvas, so to speak, had a glimpse of the dreariness behind any illusion. The good old days? Smallpox and soiled laundry. Injustice and stupidity and blind, obscene dirt. The childish religions—a priest concerned with the number of angels who could squat on the head of a pin—a Puritan calling down the wrath of a Jehovah-like God —the savage fighting—the death and folly in the name of some foolish political abstraction—that, it seemed to me, was the Past. I thanked God I lived in the present, the clean modern present of tile bathrooms and steam pipes and asceptic surgery and trial by jury with adequate opportunity for defense. The Today of an intelligent religion, of a chance for the common man, of science, ethics, democracy!"

Westmoreland Stuart paused, and stared at some point on the tablecloth his hearers could not see. His eyes clouded and his lips hardened. "But now I don't know," he said quietly. "I'm older now. All I know is that history repeats itself, and the Seventeenth Century may be forgiven because it knew no better. I came back to our fine modern world, back to the Present, back to civilization"—he paused to let it sink in—"on August Fourteenth, 1914."

THE END

DOLLARS AND SENSE



BEATING THE DRUM

FOUR MONTHS OLD, TODAY . . . No longer (we like to think) a wide-eyed infant, but a spanking, lusty toddler, already looking back upon his past with the wisdom that time leaves as it passes. Our first steps mastered —to continue the figure as long as it will hold out—we now seek new and finer worlds to conquer. We have already contrived to get into our larger brothers' toy cabinets; we've kicked over a few old chairs and scuffed up a threadbare rug or two; and now with the true courage of the Young Explorer we are wondering if we couldn't just manage to reach the cupboard shelf and get at that open jar of strawberry jam.

We have been in these first few issues experimenting rather frankly. We have tried stories that every publishers' tabu in the business would put beyond the commercial pale. Unhappy endings? We have snapped our blithe young fingers. Unconventional situations? And a large yawn to you, Mr. Conventional Sitch. Backgrounds, characters, style—we have tried a little of each. And this, mind you, not at the promptings of any wild-eyed pixies perched upon the editorial shoulder, but simply in an honest attempt to arrive at, not a formula, but a level of reader-taste which shall be our reliable guide in the future.

So far no buildings have fallen upon us. We have not been struck dead by the lightning of popular fancy. Our blunders, we like to think, have been relatively minor. Our authors are enthusiastically egging us on. Now, shout they, they can write the stories they have always really wanted to write. This all is distinctly encouraging; but the only satisfactory way, short of gazing into the Rajah Howara's mystic globe, of actually discovering the helpful truth is through the *vox pop* that manages to reach our ears.

For instance we had a few faint misgivings about the Borden Chase story in the first issue. We didn't doubt that it was a good, almost a perfect, story but we wondered if most people would like it. To our surprise, practically everyone did. Mr. Chase's mail has been reading like the wildest inspirations of a blurb-writer's dream.

We wondered, too, about Joel Townsley Rogers' "Lonesome Road" which led off the second number. And that was a lot of good honest wonder wasted. Good old L. R. turns out to be the most popular story we have yet printed. "Congratulations, to Mr. Rogers," cheers Thomas Hickey of Brooklyn, "for supplying me with the best story I have ever read." And there was an avalanche of similarly minded letters.

So you see. . . . Well, anyway (to return briefly to the long-since abandoned figure of speech that popped up in the first paragraph) while we are still in our formative years, we do wish you'd drop us a line and let us know exactly what you like. We strive, you see, to please.

—THE EDITORS

COMING NEXT MONTH

JANE BROWN'S BODY
by Cornell Woolrich

In California, dead dogs brought to life. In Russia, the beat of lifeless hearts restored. Could the queer-eyed little doctor make this one dead girl live and breathe again? A complete short novel by the author of "I'm Dangerous Tonight."

THE SEVEN STARS
by H. Bedford-Jones

Bringing today's vivid headlines off the front page and into your ken, as a gallant Yankee skipper fights for his ship on the torpedo-riddled China Seas. A complete novelet.

Othe. fine fiction by
MAX BRAND
RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS
ROBERT CARSE
PHILIP KETCHUM
RICHARD SALE

ALL-AMERICAN FICTION

Where's Red Flanagan?

by Borden Chase

(*Continued from page 24*)

phones. A flick of his hand brought sounds from the air. He listened, tuning to a wave he knew well. A rattle of dots and dashes made him smile.

"Where's Red Flanagan?" they called. "Where's Red Flanagan?"

His hand moved with speeding rhythm and the key spoke. "Gone to look for his treasure," it said.

"That you, Red?" came the staccato answer.

"Hello, C. T. What's on your mind this morning?"

"Where are you? Where's my son? What have you been doing for the past month? Send me your location. Are you at sea? Where? Where?"

"So many questions," sent Red. "But I've a few of me own to ask and yours will have to wait. Tell me, Cassidy, did you know young Tom would sail with me? Tell me the truth, Cassidy."

"I was afraid he might."

"And now that he's sailed, you want him back?"

"I do."

"Shame upon you, Cassidy. 'Tis a poor sport you are."

"Sport, be damned. Where are you?"

"At sea. Heading into one of the sweetest blows the Caribbean ever stewed in her pot of wind. Young Tom's asleep but he'll be slacking halyards within the hour."

"What part of the Caribbean? I'll send tugs."

"You'll send nothing."

"Flanagan, listen to me. I'll send tugs. Where are you?"

The keys clicked out question and answer, and it was like sending tiny sparks of yourself out over the storm-tossed night.

"A dozen or so miles from me treasure with a tail wind chasing us on. Keep your tugs, Cassidy. We don't need them."

He closed the key and pushed back his chair. Anderson's shout came from above and Red hurried to Tom's bunk. He caught his shoulder and shook it.

"Up you go, man. There's work on deck and wind for breakfast. Rouse out, Tom—a storm's climbed smack up our tail."

Tom was out of his bunk and after Red up the companion ladder. He glanced at the sky and felt the air drawn from about him as though old Boreas were spreading his chest and pulling a huge breath into his lungs.

Soon the wind would come, blasting out of the heavens as the giants howled. And on the masts the sails stood white and full, unreefed and sheeted taut.

"Hi, Carter!" he cried. "Cut the flying jib. You, Ole—slack the main and start a reef. Red—take the wheel while Anderson and I lower the fores'l. Look alive—all of you!"

RED grinned as he spun the spokes. The whip of that voice was old in his ears. He'd heard it when he was young. Not loud. Not wild. But the voice of old Cassidy Ahearn come from the past to command a situation. There was the time off the coast of France when a torpedoed freighter was pushing her nose through a quiet sea.

War time. And a frightened captain had ordered an S. O. S. to be sent. A call that would bring nearby ships racing to a rescue. And racing to their doom. Not far from the stricken ship were two submarines, the tips of their periscopes scanning the sea in patient search. Waiting. Eager to greet the first of the rescuers with a tin fish that carried death in its throat.

A captain's orders were things to be obeyed. Red had reached for the key. But Cassidy's voice had stopped his hand—held it till a switch was

thrown and the set went dead. Then, through long hours while a gibbering captain had crowded their shoulders, these two radio men had pounded a silent key. Hammered out calls for help that died within the four walls of their shack. Oh, it had been great sport. Sport for kings. And Red had been sad when he lost this sharp-voiced partner. Lost him to a world where men sat crowded within stupid cities to make those things called dollars.

Cassidy had made them. Plenty of them. Cassidy couldn't follow the wind to China. Couldn't stretch on his chest under a drunken palm to watch the white surf pounding a golden beach. He couldn't laugh with bright-eyed girls whose shoulders were smooth and soft to the touch of a seaman's hands. He'd forgotten the taste of salt on his lips and the welcome smell, after weeks at sea, of a land breeze walking across the water. He'd made his jail and the walls were strong. But now he'd like to lock another within them. Chain young Tom to a silly thing that men in their folly called Big Business. 'Twas a crime, no less.

Young Tom had spoken of Sylvia to Red on days when the sails were limp and the sea was flat. He'd told of this blonde with the frigid smile who'd walk one day down a flowered church-aisle to become Mrs. Tommy Ahearn. Yes, thought Red, he'd spoken of her as though she were a birthday—something that was bound to happen, but nothing to set a man raving.

And Red Flanagan had sighed. Such a way for a man to talk of a woman who would one day be his queen. No doubt it was the way of all who were made sodden by this thing called Big Business. Red had never again mentioned Sylvia's name and when next Tom spoke of her, the giant redhead stretched his arms, rested his head against a coil of rope and pretended sleep.

Tom took the hint. And from that day on the only woman who walked the decks of the *Caravan* was the girl with blue eyes whose hair was red. Tom learned the way she tilted her head when she smiled, the easy litheness of her step and the scent of tropic flowers that clung to her hair. There came nights when he saw her moving out of a dream to touch his hand and beckon him on to fantasy. Soon she was his as well as Red's. His red-headed girl with lips that smiled. Once, when a heavy moon was halved by a sharp horizon, Tom spoke of this to Red. Told him he wished the girl were twins so there need be no quarrel when they met.

And Red had laughed till tears filled the creases about his eyes. Laughed as he was laughing now with the *Caravan* lifting under his feet as she showed the round of her beautiful back to the waves that leaped to catch her. Yes, the voice that cracked the orders had been that of old Cassidy Ahearn. But, by the grace of old gods that ruled the roads of the sea, young Tom would have his chance at the far places before old C. T. dragged him back within the walls of his jail. He'd know the scent of a woman's hair and the taste of lips that were moist and warm, caught in a smile that promised much to the man with the strength to take it.

"She blow like hell!" cried Anderson.

"We'll founder sure," said Ole.

"Furl the main!" yelled Tom Ahearn. "'Tis a short run to the shore."

A GIANT wave broke at the crest. The wind flung it across the rail and sent another for good measure. Blue water leaped the hatch and swirled about Tom's waist. Tripped him. Tumbled him over and over. His hand went out and caught a line. Slid burning for a yard or two and held. His legs cleared the lee rail and he dragged waist-deep in the Caribbean.

"Take the wheel, Ole!" cried Red. "Hurry or I'll rip out your arms!"

The Swede ran sliding to the wheel, grabbed it as Red Flanagan's hands set it free. The giant redhead leaped across the hatch, fought a rac-

ing wave as though it were a man and lunged against the lee rail. He reached to grab Tom's shoulders and heard a voice that hammered in his ears. Old C. T.'s voice spoken from his son's mouth.

"Cut the mains'l, Red! Don't waste time here, you fool!"

Red's grin was wide. "Hi, chick," he cried. "Learn to walk afore you spread your wings. Up you come!"

His big hands closed on Tom's shoulders and drew him clear. Together they turned to lean into a sea, then straightened when the smother of water left them. Red drew a breath. He crouched to shake the water from his eyes and so missed a fist that whistled past his chin.

"The mains'l, you fool!" cried Tom.

Red caught his wrists and held them fast, gripped with the strength the sea puts in a man's hands. He looked, drawing Tom's eyes with his own, toward the mainsail. The wind had ripped it free and sent it flapping like a frightened bird into the morning. The masts were bare. Save for a small working-jib that strained the sheets to thin hard poles of hemp, the *Caravan* was a hurrying skeleton.

"Easy does it," said Red. "Is life such a precious thing you'd hit a friend?"

"The ship, blast you!" Tom cried. "Do you want to lose her?"

"Soft, man—soft as it goes. You've read too many tales of bucko mates with shriveled souls." Red crouched in the half lee of a hatch and drew Tom with him. "T' hell with the ship, me son. A friend comes first—the ship long after. A yard of canvas and a bit of rope can be replaced. But a man's life is not like money. When it's gone there's no bank to lend it back."

"Suppose we founder?"

"Suppose we do?" said Red. " 'Tis been a fine trip and a fine day. I've had other fine trips and other fine days. In fact, me son, there's scarce a night Red Flanagan puts his head on the pillow but what he can look at the stars and say, 'This day was good.' And after that—what more can a man ask?"

"But what of me?" cried Tom. "I'm young, Red—young."

"Aye, young—but your good days are lived. When once again we put into Long Island Sound you'll go back to the four office walls that make your jail, and the money that makes you a slave. Each night you'll stare at the ceiling and say, 'This day I've made money.' And when the last night comes, you'll say, 'God gave me a life. And what have I done with it? He put me on a world that is big and round and filled with beauty. And what have I seen? He put the breath of love in my lungs. But have I loved? He gave me ears to hear the voice of the South Wind. But have I listened?' That, and more, you'll say, Tom. And with your face turned to the wall you'll go to a five minute self-made hell far worse than any conceived by a gentle God that let you be born into this heaven called Earth."

HE loosed Tom's wrists and turned away. A slanting deck hurried him to the wheel and he took it from Ole's hands. He lifted his head and yelled at the wind. Laughed at it. Dared it with loud words to blow a bit harder. The *Caravan* echoed his voice with screams from the rigging. The stout little schooner buried her teeth in the seas and fanged them like a wolf at the side of a mountain bear. The small jib held and gave them steerage-way.

They ran with the storm and rode the wind to a curving arm of land. A place where tall green hills took the thrust of the gale and sent it spinning aloft to mix with cooler airs and lose its violence. Long heaving swells moved the surface of the cove. The *Caravan* lifted and fell as though she were breathing deep after an uphill run. Her jib slatted and luffed as Red soothed her about and ordered the anchor down.

Quiet came, and the breath of green things that grew to the water's edge. Tom walked aft and stood with Red at the wheel.

"A beautiful place, this," he said. "I hope your cove is equally fine."

"My cove?" said Red.

"Yes. The cove where the treasure's waiting."

"Faith—'tis here. This is the very place."

Tom laughed. "I thought you said it was further along toward the tip of Cuba?"

Anderson joined them. "Aye, sir. I yam sure it bane a hundred miles further."

"You're sure?" cried Red in astonishment. "And why, may I ask?"

"You showed us on the chart—no?"

"Now did I?" said Red. "Then drunk I was, or mixed a bit in the head."

"Oh, come now, Red," said Tom. "This can't be the place."

Red's eyes were wide. "Saints in glory—do I not know the spot where me very own treasure is hid? And if I don't—who does? 'Tis ten fathom down and close to the spot where our anchor's fast in the sand. Doubt if you like, but come morning I'll go below and bring each of you a diamond as big as a man's fist. Or would you rather have emeralds?"

Anderson looked at Tom. "I yam afraid he's drunk."

Tom winked. "We'll see soon enough."

Red's hand went out and gripped Anderson's jumper. He drew the seaman toward him and squinted one eye as though sighting on a mark. The action brought Tom's head about and chased a smile across his lips. He said nothing but watched while Red held the seaman inches off the deck.

"Drunk, am I?" cried Red. "One more such filthy remark and I'll toss you over the side to fetch a diamond yourself, me friend."

He set the man down and walked to the rail. A moment of study and he called Tom to him, pointing with one long arm toward the shore.

"Look you," he said. "Was ever a fairer spot dropped from the heavens to kiss the ocean's lips? Look at those hills—growing from the beach, nursed with the milk of leaning palms to become mountains in the distance. An empty beach of soft white sand. Ours for the asking. A beach where a red-headed girl might come walking of nights, strayed from those caves where the waves slip in to spy upon her beauty. See them, Tom—beyond that spit of land that reaches from the hills?"

"I see them," said Tom.

"Then look again at the beach. The sun has warmed it to a turn but there—not far from the water—a leaning palm makes a spot of shade where you and I can stretch and rest. Tell Anderson to fetch the beer. A case will do for it's late in the day. We'll watch the stars come out of their cases, like white jewels spread on blue velvet by a master salesman."

Tom turned and motioned to Anderson. "Get Carter and Ole," he said. "Go below and break out the diving gear. We'll have a look at the bottom and be sure the treasure is here."

Anderson grinned. "Aye, sir."

Red lifted his eyes to the heavens and sighed. "Was there ever a man with more doubt in his soul than this same young Thomas Ahearn?" He leaned against the rail and sighed. "Very well. Break out the stinkin' canvas and rubber. I'll still your doubts and rest tomorrow while you fools lug me treasure aboard."

CHAPTER V

Ten Fathom Deep

THE air pump was brought on deck and Red busied himself about connections. Hose, lead shoes and diver's belt were dumped near the after hatch and Ole rigged a stage over the side. Tom watched while Red climbed into the clumsy harness and gave instructions for the proper handling of the pumps. Another anchor was swung from the stern and Red walked with heavy steps to the rail. He climbed over, waved away the helmet Ole lifted, and made Tom repeat the language of the signal line. When he was satisfied all was as it should be, he stuck his head into the bronze globe and stood like a glass eyed monster watching the men at the pump.

At length he lifted a hand and the

stage was lowered. The clear water closed over his head and he adjusted the air valve with care. Not far from his mouth was a small sponge that had been dipped in vinegar. He moistened his lips and gaped to equalize the pressure in his ear passages.

Sunlight followed him down to a sandy bottom that stopped the fall of the stage at six fathoms.

A nice depth, thought Red. About fifteen pounds of air to the square inch, pleasantly warm water and enough light to watch the parade of fishes.

He walked slowly across the hard sand, leaning against the wall of water and setting his feet solidly. To his left he saw a low reef, worn smooth by the sweep of the current and grooved in spots to the curve of a man's back. Red turned and dragged his lines. He coiled the slack carefully and seated himself. Yes—the rock was nicely shaped. It was a comfortable seat. Red had never found a better in his quests for treasure.

He leaned back and looked into the world above him. Big fish and little fish, striped and spotted and splashed with the colors of the rainbow. They nibbled at the weblike fronds of marine plants and moved in lazy circles that took them nowhere.

Not far from his feet Red saw a spindle-legged crab. It climbed up a rock and slid back down again. Once again it made the climb and again landed in the very spot from where it had started. Red laughed.

He turned to see a white-bellied shark sailing toward him through a liquid sky. He lifted a hand and with the other, snapped the band at his wrist. A rushing stream of air bubbled from the suit and exploded upward in globelike pellets. The shark turned, flicked its tail and was gone. Red smiled and wished he could scratch an annoying itch above his left ear.

AN HOUR went by. A pleasant hour in which Red sat and pondered upon the frailties of humans. At times he signaled for slack on his lines and coiled it carefully at his feet. Not once did he leave the vicinity of his comfortable bench. And when an inquiring crawfish poked at his shoes with twitching feelers, Red let it poke. It was a peaceful world and much to Red's liking.

When a worried signal came down the line, Red heaved himself to his feet and stretched. He answered, walked to the stage and signaled to Tom to take in the slack.

A single stop of ten minutes was Red's only decompression period. And when Ole unscrewed the helmet the red Irishman demanded an instant bottle of beer. This, he claimed, was far better than hot coffee for a deepwater man like himself. He sat on the after hatch and let the seamen unstrap his boots and belt. A few easy shrugs took him clear of his suit and he rested a hand on young Tom's shoulder.

"'Tis the right cove," he said. "The very one I've hunted for years. And as true as me name's Red Flanagan, there's treasure beneath this water."

"You found the ship?" asked Tom.

"Ship?" said Red. "What ship?"

"The Spanish ship you told about. The one that carried the treasure when it was sunk."

"Oh—that!" laughed Red. "Now to tell the truth, I didn't see it. But this trip below was only me first. Have patience, lad. Tomorrow or the next day I'll stub me toe on its hull."

"Perhaps," said Tom. "But while you're waiting for tomorrow, I'll have a look below and see what luck there is for an Ahearn."

"You'll go below?"

"Why not?"

"Blessed if I know," laughed Red. "But six fathoms is deep for a novice. Mind you don't spin yourself or spread-eagle your suit with too much air."

"Don't worry," said Tom. "We've talked of that for hours on the trip south. I know my lessons, Red."

"And you mind how to gulp to clear your ears?"

"I do."

"Then over you go, me son. And

may you be the one to first dip hand into Red Flanagan's treasure." He turned to Ole. "Hop to it, Swede! Dress the man and help him to the stage. I'll watch the pumps while I take me rest. Fast, now!"

A dubious crew watched the telltale bubbles lift from Tom's helmet as the stage went down. Red's indolence was gone and he kept a light hand on the signal line. Ten minutes passed and he spoke to the man below. An answering tug made him grin and he called to Ole for slack. Young Tom was on the bottom and Red remembered his own first walk below the sea. He'd bent to adjust the buckle of his boot and a moment later found himself turning in a slow circle that had no top or bottom. Fright sent his hand to the air valve and closed it tightly. Pressure spread his suit and shot him spinning to the surface. What a time! 'Twas only the luck of the Irish that brought him through. That, and a calmness that had come when he thought death near.

And now as the minutes passed he wondered if all were well with Tom. Had it been right to send him down? Was it fair? True, each man must walk alone on his first trip below. And there must be a first trip if there is to be a second. But Red was glad when Tom signaled to be drawn up.

He glanced at his watch and grinned. Fifteen minutes. Not long for a diver but ages to a novice. This young Ahearn had fine stuff in him. Too fine to be jammed into a jail.

The helmet had been off just long enough for Tom to take a breath of free air when Red knew something was amiss. Tom's eyes were bright and his teeth showed a wide grin. He reached forward and pounded Red's shoulder. Grabbed him by the arm and shook him hard.

"It's there, you old red-headed magician!" he cried. "I'd have bet a thousand to a dime you were lying in your teeth—but it's there!"

"There?" said Red. "What's there?"

"The ship—the Spanish ship. She's deep in the sand but there's a tear in her deck where we can get through. I was afraid my lines would foul or I'd have had a look inside."

"You—found—a ship?" said Red. "A Spanish ship?"

"Of course," laughed Tom. "Your ship—your treasure ship. She's waited here for you all these years, Red. And now we've found her."

"SAINTS have mercy upon a sinner," cried Red. He looked at the sky with eyes that were wide. " 'Tis the sins of me youth come back to plague me. I loved the lad as though he were me own, and yet I let him go below and the pressure has touched his brain. He's mad—mad as a loon!"

"Mad, be hanged!" said Tom. "Climb into this harness and see for yourself. She's not more than fifty feet from the *Caravan's* stern anchor. Lord knows why you didn't stub your toe on her when you were below."

"Aye—He knows," said Red quietly. "And so do I." He reached for the suit. "Help me, you scuts! Let's have those shoes! . . ."

Once again on the sanded floor Red walked with dragging steps toward the stern anchor. He found it, passed it, cast about in a wide circle and at length saw the hulk of a wooden ship. A Spaniard—no doubt of that. With gold in her belly or maybe diamonds.

Red's mouth was open and his eyes were wide. He touched the old wood with an unsteady hand. It was real. No fantasy here. That laughing young fool had destroyed in fifteen minutes something Red had been building over a lifetime. It was gone—Red Flanagan's treasure had vanished into thin air. For Red knew his treasure was not held in an iron chest—not made of gold or colored stones.

It wasn't in the finding. Not at all. Red's treasure was in the search.

"Ah, me," he said quietly. " 'Tis the luck of his father, he has. Vile luck that runs to money like a squirrel to a tree. I should have known better than to trust meself with Cassidy's son."

He walked to the flat stern and traced with his fingers along the worn

name. *Santa* something-or-other. Time had blurred the rest. "Perhaps," mused Red, "perhaps she's empty. 'Twell might be. Not every Spaniard carried treasure. Or if they did, by the tales men tell, the wealth of the world would be on the sea's floor."

He climbed aboard and made his way carefully to the spot in the torn deck. There was room and plenty to go below but Red backed away. Not through fear of the rotted timbers or jagged edge. He was a diver—a deep-water man. The tricks he'd learned would carry him safely below and back to deck again. But the thought of what he might find in the hull of the Spaniard stopped him.

An iron chest would be there—no doubt of it. But for this day at least it would stay where it was. And perhaps tomorrow, too. That beach was calling and Red's tongue was sour with the taste of vinegar. A case of beer would wash the tang away and he meant to have it.

He jerked the signal rope. . . .

CHAPTER VI

When Redheads Meet

MORNING was early on the shore. It came, all soft and whispering from the hills and waited for a sun to lift out of the sea. And with it, leaning against the rail of the *Caravan* stood Red Flanagan. He stared at the beach then looked below to the ship's dink where a case of beer was resting on the curved deck. He sighed and put one foot on the rope ladder. A hand touched his shoulder and he turned. Tom grinned at him.

"Going ashore?"

"I am," said Red.

'Going to let the treasure wait?"

"It's waited two centuries or more. Another day won't harm it."

"Mind if I go down and poke around?"

"Poke all you want but don't send for me. I've a date with a red-headed girl on yonder beach."

"Give her my best," said Tom. "I'll bring up a sapphire necklace to match the shade of her eyes."

"Bring up a dozen, much good it will do you," said Red. "She cares not at all for treasure such as you'll find in the Spaniard."

He climbed to the dink, shipped the oars and stroked with easy grace to the beach. The surf was scarce worthy of the name. A gentle line of tiny waves that purred with the voice of a kitten. Red beached the dink and lifted his beer. He set it on his shoulder and walked through the ankle deep sand to a leaning palm. Here, he put down the case, drew out a bottle and flipped off the cap with strong white teeth.

The beer was cool in his mouth and he stretched at length beneath the tree. For a time he listened to the rattle of the fronds when the breeze slipped in from the sea. The sun was up and Red was content. Let Tom visit with the fishes or poke about in the dark hulk of the sunken Spaniard. Red would look at the sky and dream of the girl whose arms were round and soft and stretched toward him. He rolled on his side and cupped a hand beneath his ear. He looked down the beach and his mouth opened.

"Good St. Patrick—could a sip of beer make liars of a man's eyes?"

He sat up and shook his head. Coming toward him along the beach was a girl. Tall, slender, with arms lifted as though to hold the beauty of the morning within her grasp. She sang as she walked, a lilting tune with Spanish words. Her step was light as the breeze that touched her skirts. A sweet stride and a long one.

She looked toward the roof of the sky and the same breeze plucked at her hair with greedy fingers. Loosened it. Swirled it about a face so beautiful Red felt sacrilege in the stare he held upon it. Wide eyes with long lashes. A rounded cheek and full red lips. Dark eyes. And hair as black as a raven's wing. A vision walked the beach toward him and Red held his breath till his lungs were bursting.

He breathed at length. A long sigh that came from lips pursed with incredulous wonder. The girl heard it. She turned, looked at Red and smiled.

She stopped, put hands on hips and waited.

"You're real?" asked Red. "You're really—real?"

"Why, yes. I think I am."

"You speak English?"

"And French and Spanish—with just a touch of German."

"You—live in the mountains?"

"Hardly," she said. "There's a city not more than an hour's drive from here. Its name is—"

"Don't tell me its name!" cried Red. "You've ruined everything, entirely. I suppose you live in the city—work there?"

"Yes."

"A shop girl?"

"No. A dancer—if it's any of your business, my red-headed friend."

Red was standing now. He bowed and pointed to the sand.

"Would you join me in a bottle of beer?"

"No beer, thanks. It's bad enough to drink it at night when I'm working. But I'll join you for a few moments' talk."

She seated herself and folded her arms across her knees. Her eyes caught sight of the *Caravan* and she smiled.

"Your ship?" she asked.

"My ship," answered Red.

"A beauty," said the girl. "But what are you doing here?"

"That story will wait," said Red. "I'd like to ask the same of you—after I ask your name. Mine is Red Flanagan."

"*The* Red Flanagan?"

"Is there two of us?"

She laughed. "I've heard of a Red Flanagan where I work. A great red giant who looks for a treasure and a red-headed girl."

" 'Tis slander," said Red. "He looks for no redhead."

"No? I'd heard her eyes were blue and her hair was red as a Cuban sunset."

" A tinge of red, perhaps," said Flanagan. "But truly it's dark—very dark."

"And her eyes?"

"Dark too. Very dark."

"Then you're not the Red Flanagan sailors tell of when they visit the cafe where I work."

RED'S sigh was long. Illusion was crashing about his ears. As though it were not bad enough that young Tom should find a treasure ship, here came a girl from the mountains who was not a girl from the mountains. Always he had seen her as she had walked across the beach—her arms up and the breeze swirling her hair. And her voice was soft and her smile was sweet. But saints above—she worked in no sailors' cafe.

"You're sure," he said, "you work in a cafe? Very sure?"

She smiled. "Not in the morning."

"Ah," said Red. "That's better."

He flipped the top from another bottle and drank deep. A stage was over the *Caravan's* side and Red saw the glint of a bronze helmet. Young Tom was on his way to the Spaniard in search of gold, eh? Well, let him go. He'd find nothing below the sea so warm as this girl's smile. And that reminded Red of his question. He turned and touched her arm.

"Your name was what?"

"Rosita."

"It would be," said Red. "A pretty name, and said with a sweet voice. But you should live in the mountains, Rosita."

Her lips curved. "Very well—I live in the mountains."

"And there is no city an hour's ride from here."

"Not for miles and miles."

"Your father is a rich old Cuban who came to this island—it is an island, you know—he came here because of—"

"Political reasons?"

"Correct," said Red. "And he keeps you hidden from the world like a precious pearl, too fine for the sight of common eyes."

"He must be very mean."

"Mean?" said Red. "So mean 'twould serve him well to lose his daughter."

"To Red Flanagan?"

'No—not to Flanagan. Her eyes are

too dark and her hair is too black for that great fool. Besides—Red's been saving his years and he's feeling the weight of them."

"What years?" she asked. "Some thirty odd?"

"A poor guess," said Red. "I'll match you two for one and be the winner, Rosita."

"You don't look it."

"Save such words for the nights at the cafe. Tomorrow morning there'll be a lad here on the beach with me. Or better still, he'll be alone. You'll like him, Rosita."

"Will I?"

"Very much," said Red.

He dipped into the throat of his jumper and drew out a small chamois bag that hung by a lanyard. His fingers fumbled with the draw string and pulled it free. Into the palm of his great hand rolled a pearl. Not large, but tinted with the smoke-filled shade that speaks of value. He breathed on it. Rubbed it against his cheek and held it to the sun.

" 'Twould set well in a ring upon your finger," he said. "Will you like the lad you'll find here tomorrow, Rosita?"

"Perhaps."

"The pearl is yours," he said and tossed it into her lap.

She lifted it. "You trust me?"

"Why not?" he asked. "Your father may be mean but he's a Cuban gentleman. And girls who live in the mountains are honest, sweet and clean. Why shouldn't they be? On a beach like this, with no city within hundreds of miles, what chance have they to learn of the deceits of the world?"

"What chance, indeed?" said Rosita. "But how will I know this man of whom you speak? Has he a name?"

"Aye—a good one. Given to him by a father along with a head for business. But you'll not need to know it, Rosita. If you knew Red Flanagan when you saw him, I think you'll know the boy."

"But his name is—?"

"Tommy Smith," said Red. "And begone with you now. I see his helmet breaking the water. Begone!"

She laughed and patted his cheek with a hand that was soft and smooth. Red watched her walking along the beach and he lifted a great paw to touch the warm spot on his cheek. Later he followed to the place where she had climbed a low hill. A five-minute walk took him to a well-paved road where telegraph poles held aloft their slender wires.

RED spat and turned away. He went again to the beach and drank his beer. When a long hail came from the *Caravan* he ran the dink down the beach and bent to the oars. Minutes later he climbed aboard to stare in wonder at two gold coins that lay in young Tom's hand.

"You found them—on the Spaniard?" he asked.

"Where else?" laughed Tom. "Not much, I'll admit. But enough to prove there's more where these grew."

"No doubt you're right," said Red in quiet disgust.

The world was upside down. Spanish ships and gold coins. A girl who walked the beach with swirling hair and round soft arms. But for that bargain of the pearl, Red would have lost his faith in common sense and tried to fly with the seagulls that circled the masts of the *Caravan*. At that, he gave a trial hop and flapped his arms. And then he laughed. Laughed till the birds were frightened at the sounds that came from his chest.

For years he'd dreamed his dreams and called them real. Now, out of nowhere a wand had come to touch fantasy and give it substance. And Red was surprised. Well, for the moment, perhaps. It had all been sudden and born of the instant.

But slowly a thought came to him —a grand thought. One that lit his eyes and poured mirth into his laugh. This dream—this story that he'd told —why shouldn't it be true? Faith, it had always been true in Red's mind. And now it was true in fact. Truth had caught up with a silver-tongued weaver of tales. It had him by the nose and it wouldn't let go. So be it. Perhaps the girl had a father who

lived in the mountains. Perhaps there was no road that led to a nearby city. And as for those telegraph poles—t'hell with 'em.

Red motioned to Anderson and called for the diver's suit. . . .

A long slow search was made in the Spaniard. Throughout the day and late, until darkness stopped their work, Red and Tom scoured the slimy passageways. A single coin, and clipped at that, was their only reward. Tom was disgusted. He toyed with the meal that Carter cooked and wondered if they'd find the treasure in the morning. Red ate his fill and swore they would. But cautioned Tom of the things compressed air could do to a man.

" 'Tis not wise to rush it, Tom me son," he said. "You've done a big day for your first. Let well enough alone and rest tomorrow. The next day you'll be ready to go below again."

Tom met him with protest but Red was stubborn. There would be no diving in the morning, nor for that matter would either go below throughout the length of the coming day. Red wasn't satisfied with the working of the pump. He'd take it down and oil it. The gear could stand a bit of attention, too. He'd do that in the morning while Tom stretched his legs ashore.

And that night, when Tom slept the sleep of a tired man, Red Flanagan sat in the radio shack and listened to a question that swam in from the air.

"Where's Red Flanagan?" asked the set. "Where's Red Flanagan?"

Red's hand made answer. "Hello, Cassidy. You're up late these nights. Shame, man. Do you never sleep?"

"Red! Is that you, Red?"

"It is."

"Where are you? What's your position?"

"A short skip and two jumps from nowhere, Cassidy. Would you care to join us?"

" 'T'hell with that. What's your position?"

Red frowned as he listened. "Are you at sea, Cassidy?" he asked. "Would you be sending from that long white yacht of yours?"

"Blamed right I am. I'm coming to get that young fool before you ruin him completely."

"Coming to get him?" sent Red. "Did you think of that yourself? Or is there a blond girl named Sylvia standing now at your elbow?"

"Suppose there is?"

"I thought as much," said Red. "From what I've heard of the lady, you're in good company, Cassidy. Send me your position and I'll notify all nearby shipping to beware of icebergs."

"Blast it, Red—where are you?"

"Looking for me treasure and a dark-haired girl with night in her eyes."

Red closed the key and went to bed.

YOUNG Tom Ahearn climbed into the dink and rowed ashore the next day. And the next. And the next. Agreement was made that Flanagan would search the Spaniard each morning for treasure and rest in the afternoons. His only request was that Tom take a case of beer ashore with him in the morning and bury it in the wet sand that it might be cool when Red arrived later in the day.

While Red stretched on his back and looked into the sky, young Tom went below and walked with slow steps along the lower decks of the Spaniard. A happy arrangement, and one that suited the mind of each.

At night Red spoke with old C. T. —laughed at him—gibed at his search and the hopeless task of it. The key raced and jumped under the sure hand of a master while in the next cabin Tom slept with his face turned toward a port where the light of a million stars mellowed the Cuban sky.

The week was old when Red roused out early one morning to sit on a hatch and wait for a word with Tom. The sea was flat with a peculiar calm and a yellowish hue crept over the horizon. Red whistled the bars of Maguire's Kick and waved a wide hand when Tom's head poked above the hatch combing.

"Top of the morning, Tom me lad."

"And the same to you, my red friend," said Tom. "What brings you out of your bunk at this hour?"

"A restlessness and an itch on the soles of me feet," said Red. "I fear the Spaniard's empty. Faith—'tis not me treasure ship after all."

"But you said it was."

"Did I? Perhaps I'd had too much beer."

"Perhaps, but does it matter?"

"How's that?" said Red quickly.

Tom seated himself on the edge of the hatch and lit a cigarette. He blew smoke into the air and watched it hang in a lazy cloud then spiral aloft as a thin gray funnel. He turned to Red and pointed to the sky.

"You told me once," he said quite softly, "that you look at the heavens each night before you sleep. And you ask yourself a question."

"That I do," said Red.

"You say to yourself, 'Has this day been good?' And always the answer is, 'Thank God, it has.'"

Red nodded thoughtfully.

"I've tried the trick myself of late," said young Tom. "And my answer's been the same."

"Glad I am to hear it," said Red. "But what's that to do with a treasure ship that holds no treasure?"

"Nothing, perhaps. But you also spoke of a smiling girl with soft round arms that were lifted and beckoning when she walked toward you out of nowhere."

"Aye—I did that. An elflike thing with hair so black it shamed the tropic night."

"Black?"

"I said black—did I not?"

"If memory serves me, she was a redhead."

"A redhead?" cried Flanagan. "Out upon you for a fool! Never in me wildest dreams did I say such a thing. But then—perhaps I may have said there was just a tinge of red. A tiny smidge of it when the sun touched it. But no—I must have been speaking of the man who walked to meet her. That tinge of red was in his hair. A smattering, no more—like your own."

"The man who walked to meet her?" said Tom. "And who might he be? I've always thought it was you, Red."

"DIVIL take the man!" said Red quickly. "We were talking of the girl—a girl whose eyes hold the darkness of thunder clouds that drift down from Mokuaweoweo to Honaunau Bay. Dark they are, like an ocean deep when the sun is gone. And filled with love."

"You think there is such a girl?"

"Think? Faith—I know!"

"So do I, Red. I've met her."

"And when was this?"

"A few days past," said Tom. "She waits for me each morning beside that leaning palm that grows near the water's edge. We sit and study the clouds to find an answer to our dreams. And she's beautiful, Red—beautiful."

"Will wonders never cease?" said Red slowly. "The lad has the touch of the Little People in his hand. A conjuror with a wand. He finds the cove and he finds the ship, and come morning he'll likely find me treasure. When he walks the beach he finds the laughing girl with love in her eyes and he's no doubt tasted the sweetness of her lips."

"Not yet," said Tom.

"But you know her name?"

"Rosita."

"Ah—Rosita," said Red wisely. "I met a girl with such a name in Barcelona. But I waited over long to taste her lips and so I lost her. Best hurry, lad. Worry the tip of her ear with your teeth, feel the softness of her hair on your cheek, then kiss her once and we'll up anchor. There's another cove, another ship, and another girl just over the round horizon."

"But not for me, Red. I love Rosita."

"Faith—I've loved them all. There's no sweet sorrow in leaving a girl unless you love her."

"But this one is different."

"It seems I've heard those words before. At least, I think I have."

"Why not?" said Tom. "Each man at length finds a girl who is different.

And then he marries her, Flanagan."

"Marries her?" cried Red. He closed one eye and squinted with the other. "Did you say—marries her?"

Tom laughed. "That squint of yours is familiar. I've seen it grow on another face a good many times more than once."

"T'hell with the squint," said Red. "Do you mean to marry Rosita?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" Red lifted his eyes to the sky as though to find an answer in the full dome. "Sure, the spell of the far places has caught the lad. He asks me—why not?"

"Faith—and I'll ask it again," laughed Tom.

Red put his hand on the lad's knee and looked long into his eyes. His lips were dry and he moistened them with the tip of his tongue.

"This Rosita—did she tell you she danced in a—"

"In a way most beautiful?" said Tom. "Yes, she did."

"Or that she knew sailors—"

"Are apt to be dreamers? She did."

"That a few miles beyond this cove is a—"

"Another cove equal in beauty to this?" smiled Tom. "She did."

"Did she say that other men have shared her—"

"Have shared her dreams but not her heart? Yes—she did."

Red's hand tightened on Tom's knee. "Does she know that Cassidy Ahearn is worth a dozen millions? That some day those millions will be yours? Does she know your name is Thomas Ahearn—does she?"

Tom shook his head. "She thinks my name is Tommy Smith—a friend of the giant redhead who owns the *Caravan*."

RED looked away. Again he'd played with dreams and let fantasy harden under his touch to become a real thing. This girl Rosita—a dance-hall girl who'd met a sailor on the beach and learned to love him. And the boy—heir to a fortune that might be snatched from under his nose by a thickheaded father with a will like a rock. What a mess it was.

Red filled his lungs with the morning air and gave such a sigh as could only come from the chest of a troubled Irishman. He thought of the blond and icy girl who searched with old C. T. He thought of the life that waited for Tom in a wide winged house, a well-ordered, regular round of duties and quiet pleasures. A life as steady as the pulse of a sleeping man.

Such things were the spawn of money. They came to those who played in the game called Big Business. By all that was right they belonged to young Tom Ahearn. But he'd never have them if he married that girl with night in her eyes and love that curved her soft red lips. She'd fit ill in the white house. Its walls would crush her wings. And Red knew that tropic love is a wild thing that must be held with a silken thread and fed on words of sweetness.

He sighed again. There was such a sweetness in the voice of young Tom. One that would be wasted on that ice-fringed Sylvia. It would never sound within the walls of that wide winged house. And then—was there any rule that said young Tom should follow in the path his father made? Was it well for a man to live with a steady pulse? Red's jaw clenched.

So be it! Better a moment at a cup that sparkled than years with his nose in a mug of flat wine. Young Tom should have his black haired girl if—and 'twas a mighty if, thought Red—

"Rosita spoke with you, perhaps," he said. "Of a pearl that was colored with a brushful of smoke?"

"A pearl?"

"Aye—a pearl."

Tom's hand went into his pocket. "This one, no doubt? She asked me to return it."

He dropped the pearl into Flanagan's hand and grinned at the frown that came to his friend's eyes.

"Then—you know?" asked Red.

"I do," said Tom. "Rosita told me when she showed me the road that leads to the city less than an hour's

drive away. She told me about the cafe where sailors watch her dance."

"She told you that?" whispered Red. "And what said you?"

"I said that in such a city there must be a church and a priest who'd marry us."

"Marry a dance-hall girl to a sailor without a penny to his name?" said Red. "But no—you've got the *Caravan*."

"She's yours," laughed Tom. "You'll need the *Caravan* to hunt that treasure. I've found mine. And I don't mean to let it slip between my fingers as you have done, my friend."

Red's laugh was loud. "A gift for a gift," he cried. "You mind the farm where these things grow?" He lifted the pearl and rolled it slowly between his fingers. "I pricked it on the chart that day we spoke of Kahoolawe—a muscle bed close to the Islands and untouched."

"I could find the spot in the dark," laughed Tom.

"'Tis yours," said Red. "I'll meet you there some day when the breeze blows down old Alalakeiki Channel. Have a cool bottle of beer waiting and a strip of beach where I can lie and count me wealth."

"Why not come with us now?"

"Ah, no—one more search I must make for me treasure. Just one more, Tommy boy. And this, I promise, will be me last." He handed the pearl again to Tom and closed his fist about it. "Give it back to Rosita—a wedding gift from Red Flanagan. 'Twill pay the priest and pay the passage, too. But off with you, now. Her car is waiting, no doubt?"

"It is," said Tom. "But today we'll sit on the beach and watch the weather. A storm blew me in, and ever since the skies have been clear. If the glass is right there's the father of all storms making up in the south. When it comes, it will start Rosita and me on our way—a lucky storm. And we'll think of you, Red, safe in a tight cove aboard the ship you own."

"Aye—I'll be aboard the *Caravan*."

He walked with Tom to the leerail and watched his friend swing over. There was a long hand clasp, a slap on the shoulder and a wink that was very wise. Tom rowed to the shore where a slim girl stood while the rising wind danced in her swirling hair.

CHAPTER VII

Storm Warning

HE smiled and walked to the radio shack to sit for a time with his thoughts. At length he touched a switch. His smile widened as the familiar question rode the air waves.

"Where's Red Flanagan?"

"Have done with your plaguing, Cassidy," Red answered.

"Is that you, Flanagan?"

"It is."

"Send your position, you red-headed thief."

"Such a thief as you'll never meet again," sent Red. "But I'll not send me position."

"Keep it, then. You're a greater fool than I thought. Have you not learned that radio can be checked for position? Have you not seen the planes that flew from Havana to circle your cove?"

"Planes? Yes, I've seen them and cursed them for their droning. The things spoiled me dreaming. But why?"

"I sent them, Flanagan."

Red tilted his head and listened to the crash of the spark. It was loud. Strong. Close. It told of a good set on a nearby ship and worried Red.

"Where are you, Cassidy?" he sent.

"Go to the forepeak and look, you stupid redhead. Look to the south and tell me what you see."

Red jumped to his feet and ran from the room. He leaped to the shrouds and climbed them with a speed that gave the lie to the bulk of his great legs. Wind plucked at his jumper, billowing it stiff like a straining sail. It sang a wild song in the rigging and drummed in his ears. He squinted his eyes and looked to the south.

Far out, under a low bundle of swollen clouds he saw the yacht. A trim thing, a bone in her teeth as

she raced for the shelter of the cove. While to port and starboard the Caribbean rolled its waves into a boiling stew of fury.

"'Tis Cassidy himself," said Red slowly. "Coming like the divil on the back of a storm."

He climbed down the shrouds and turned to face the shore. Two figures that might be one for their closeness were seated beneath the leaning palm. Their eyes were lifted to the coming storm and each raised a hand to wave to Red. He cupped his fingers to his mouth and shouted.

"Begone with you! There's two storms coming in place of one. Begone, Tom!"

Two laughs rolled out to meet him. He stamped his feet and paced the deck. A scene crawled into his mind —such a scene as Red would leave not see. An angry Cassidy cursing his son while a cold blond woman spoke icy words to a weeping girl. Influence closing the roads and the power of wealth turned loose to stop a marriage. Lord knows, thought Red, a Cassidy Ahearn that could build an empire out of nothing was strong enough to wreck a house of dreams.

And wreck it he would unless—unless the strange gods that rode the wind were kind to a dreamer who'd always followed them.

"HI, Ole!" cried Red. "Out with you, man! Up sail and haul the anchor. Carter—Anderson! Out you go, you scuts! Bend your backs or 'tis Red Flanagan will tear the arms from your shoulders!"

A wondering Swede made answer: "Up sail? I yam afraid you're drunk, Red. The vind—she blow like hell!"

"The divil take you for an old woman!" cried Red.

He ran toward Anderson with arms lifted. The Swede turned and leaped to the sail covers, ripped them clear and hauled at the halyards. Carter, fresh from his bunk, stood drenched with sleep and stared stupidly. Red's shoe lifted him clear of the deck and the Flanagan's shouts sent him scrambling to the windlass. Ole looked once at the others and lent the strength of his back to a line.

"Up they go!" cried Red. His great hands hauled the halyards taut and belayed. "Full sail—no reefs! We'll dance the lady *Caravan* to a tune she loves!"

"We'll sail to our deaths," yelled Carter.

"Dat red fool dares the hurricane," cried Ole.

Red's laugh was louder than the wind. The schooner swung and heeled hard over. She felt the thrust of the storm and shook with a long tremble that ran from stem to stern. The masts creaked and bent to make the shrouds like twanging bowstrings. The seamen stared at Red with eyes that spoke of fear.

"Do you swim?" cried Flanagan. "Faith—'tis no matter if you don't. There's life preservers aboard. Fetch them!"

When three wondering seamen had buckled fast the straps, Red drove them to the rail.

"Over you go, lads! Tommy Ahearn will take you to town. Thanks for the work—and tell him I've gone to find me treasure!"

He swung the wheel and a sloping deck sent the sailors over the side. They swam for the shore and Red looked over their heads to where two figures waved with beckoning hands and called him back. Red lifted an arm, waved it once and drew the storm's breath deep into his chest.

"God speed you both!" he cried.

He turned and braced his feet against the lunge of the ship. With clear eyes and hard hand he rode the tempest out of the cove.

The fury of the storm caught him then. It heeled the *Caravan* till the reaching waves were scarce a hand's-breadth from the straining canvas. Red walked her into the wind as though to let her catch a breath. Again he spun the spokes and the schooner ran like a wild thing.

Over his shoulder Red watched the white yacht change her course to follow. Smoke spewed from her stack and was whipped instantly to shreds.

"Follow us, Cassidy!" Red cried into the wind. "Stamp and curse and beat your hands. Follow us to hell and be damned to you!"

THE Caribbean had lost its blue and hammered the *Caravan* with slate-colored waves. Leaping things whose crests were torn by a thundering wind, carried a hundred yards and hurled in a chunk at the rigid sail. A taut shroud snapped. Tearing canvas matched its voice with a snapping sheet. The flying jib whipped loose and waved like a rag in a madman's hand. The mainsail held and curved the mast.

Red laughed and lashed the wheel. He turned again to watch the yacht. A good ship, that. In the dance of the winds she matched her steps with those of the *Caravan*. Closer—always closer. No matter. The coast was a blur in the distance and the road to town was short.

A sea with the soul of a murderer climbed the *Caravan's* bow and slashed at her decks. Another followed and the brave little schooner shuddered. Death was in those blows. She knew it. And so did Red. He made his way below. A moment to catch his breath and he crouched at the key of the set. Before his hand moved to make the first word a name came out of the storm. Pounded in metallic letters.

"Where's Red Flanagan?" Flanagan grinned.

"Flanagan! Flanagan! Flanagan!"

Red's hand swung smoothly. "Hello, Cassidy. The top of morning, brother."

"Flanagan, curse you — are you mad?"

"Not near so mad as you, Cassidy. Sane enough to tell you to put about and run for shelter. There's a bay nearby where once I stretched on the warm sand and—"

"Be quiet! Cut your sails and stand by for a line. We'll tow you!"

"'Tis mad you are complete, Cassidy. The *Caravan* would take you for company on her trip below. But set your mind at ease, brother. Tom is safe ashore and I'm alone. And a fine boy he is, Cassidy. Such a boy as only that red-headed girl with the blue eyes could mother. Yours he is, Cassidy, but there's a touch of Flanagan Ahearn in his mind. He's not meant for the jail you'd put him into. Nor the cold woman you'd buy for him. Let him go, I say—let him go. Do you hear me, Cassidy?"

"Yes, brother. I hear you. But what of Flanagan Ahearn?"

"Faith—he died when Red Flanagan was born. He died when I cracked that Spaniard's head in New Orleans —the same that tried to knife you, Cassidy. Do you remember?"

"I do."

"'Twas then you took the Ahearn name with you to fortune. But I was free, brother. Free to look for another such red-headed girl as I'd lost to you. Free to look for a treasure I thought never to find."

The sound of tearing wood filled the cabin. A horrid sound that came when the mainmast fell. Seconds later another followed and the *Caravan's* heart had burst. She lurched like a spent deer that has run from death to death. The hand of the sea lifted her high and held her as the prize taken in chase. And in a cabin at a silent key a redhead laughed and kicked the black water with a disdainful toe.

"But I've found me treasure, Cassidy," cried Red aloud. "Such a treasure as you'll never know. A greater one than all your gold could fashion."

The *Caravan* pointed the curved line of her blue bow toward the deeps below. She moved fast, graceful in her last long stride as she had been in her first. And with her went a smiling giant to answer for all time the question that had raced from ship to shore and back to ship again around a friendly world.

"Where's Red Flanagan?" the air waves ask.

Gone—but he's found his treasure. . . .

THE END

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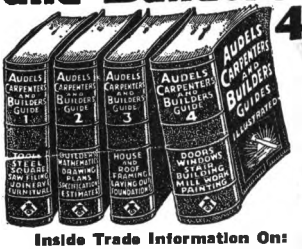

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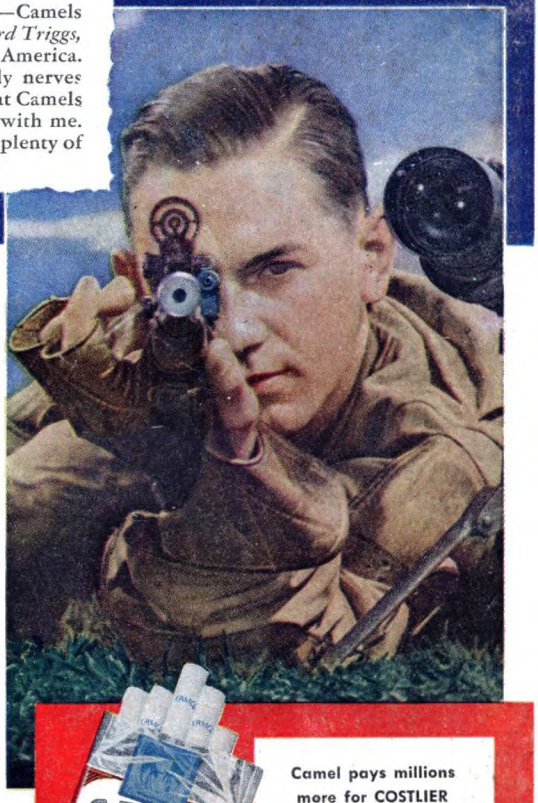

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