

Nov. 1937

All-American Fiction

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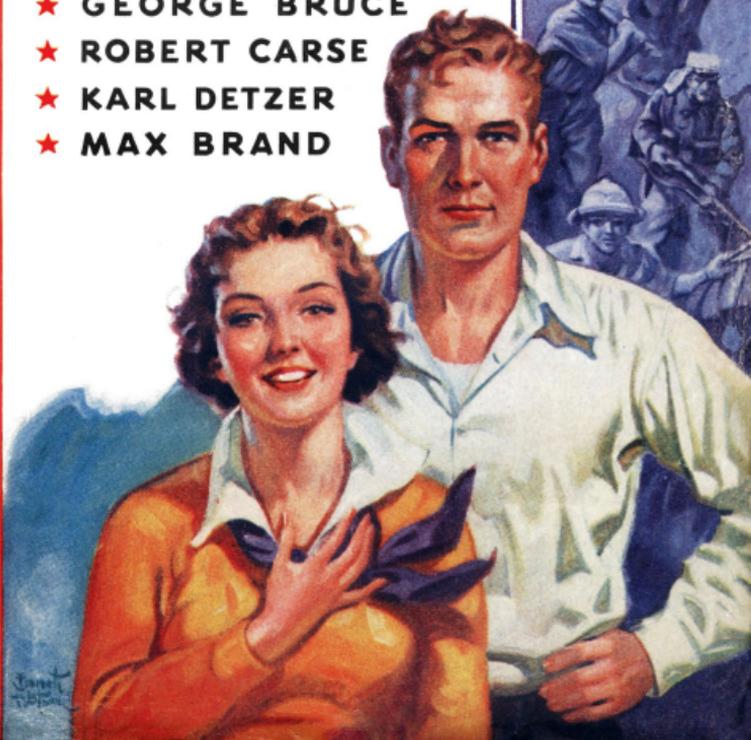
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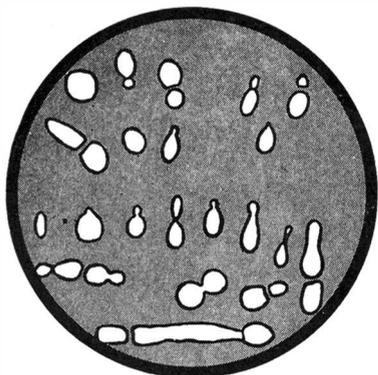


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REAL RELIEF FROM DANDRUFF



Discovery that Strange Bottle-Shaped Germ Causes Dandruff Leads to New Kind of Therapy, Antiseptic in Character. Listerine Treatment Brings Quick Relief to 76% of Patients in New Jersey Dandruff Clinic. Thousands Report Remarkable Results

Pityrosporum ovale

The germ which causes dandruff, magnified many times. In cases of dandruff it is always present on the scalp and hair and in dandruff scales.

IF you have any evidence of dandruff, don't waste time on untried ointments, salves or solutions that merely strike at symptoms and relieve only temporarily.

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Listerine surrounds the hair and scalp and penetrates infected hair follicles, and kills the germ *Pityrosporum ovale*, which, research now shows, causes dandruff.

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After the first few treatments you will notice how Listerine Antiseptic diminishes the number of unsightly crusts and scales. How it allays irritating itch and burning which so often accompany a dandruff condition. How it cleanses and freshens the scalp so that it feels lively and youthful. How it brings new vigor to the hair, itself.

For your own satisfaction, examine Listerine's brilliant results in the most searching clinical study of dandruff undertaken in years.

Curing Rabbits of Dandruff

Rabbits given dandruff by inocula-



WOMEN SAY THE BEST WAY TO APPLY LISTERINE IS BY MEDICINE DROPPER APPLIED TO THE PART IN THE HAIR

tion of *Pityrosporum ovale* were treated on one side, only, with Listerine Antiseptic once a day. The other side was untreated.

Within four days improvement was noted, and at the end of fourteen days, on the average, a complete cure was effected. No scales, no crusts. The sides not treated with Listerine showed evidence of dandruff nearly a month later.

Relief in Two Weeks

In a noted midwestern skin clinic, men and women dandruff patients were chosen for the Listerine treatment. A majority were instructed to massage the scalp *once a day* with Listerine Antiseptic. The rest of the group used a non-antiseptic solution. We ask you to carefully note the convincing results again achieved:

A substantial number of the users of Listerine Antiseptic obtained

marked relief in the first two weeks on the average. In many other cases, scalps were found to be clear and free of dandruff in from three to eight weeks—itching stopped, dandruff scales were eliminated, and in some cases falling hair was terminated. *Virtually none of the persons using a non-antiseptic solution showed any improvement.*

76% Got Relief

Meanwhile in a New Jersey clinic, other dermatologists were cross-checking the results of the midwestern clinic. Fifty men and women, all with definitely established cases of dandruff, were undergoing treatment twice a day with Listerine Antiseptic. At the end of three weeks, 76% showed either complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms of dandruff, i.e., itching, scaling. Only three failed to respond to the Listerine treatment, possibly due, as a research report suggests, to irregularity in applying the treatment.

Keep it Up

If you have the slightest evidence of dandruff, start now with Listerine and massage, once a day at least. Twice a day is better. Caution: Don't expect overnight miracles. Remember, dandruff is a germ disease, requiring persistent and systematic treatment, which *should be antiseptic*. Remember, also, that Listerine's results against dandruff are a matter of laboratory and clinical record.

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THE EDITORS

All-American Fiction

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Vol. I No. 1

NOVEMBER, 1937

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I'M DANGEROUS TONIGHT CORNELL WOOLRICH 10
 MYSTERY: One night in Paris the devil whispered to the dressmaker—and so was created the flaming red gown that changed ten tangled lives

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SCAPEGOAT KARL DETZER 56
 HUMOR: Beware of Greeks bearing goats who have dined on dynamite

DREAM A DREAM OF BANGKOK DONALD BARR CHIDSEY 83
 ROMANCE: Where the yachts come up like thunder on the Road to Mandalay

BUSHMASTER ROBERT CARSE 92
 AFRICA: The jungle is beautiful when you fly above it, but if your plane should crash . . .

A FINER WORLD BORDEN CHASE 103
 SPAIN: Dispatch from Madrid: Tension gathers as rebels prepare barrage

SOUTH BY THE SUN RICHARD SALE 130
 ADVENTURE: LeFevre violates the one law of the fugitive: Don't crowd your luck

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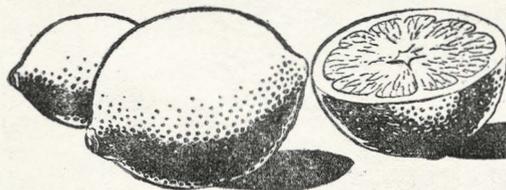
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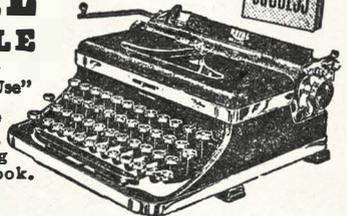
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I'm Dangerous Tonight

by Cornell Woolrich

This is the story of a dress that was haunted by the Devil himself. It bore the label of Paris' smartest modiste but its fabric was woven in Satan's own workshop — where the furies spin and spin. . . .



Complete Short Novel

Prelude

THE thing, whatever it was—and no one was ever sure afterwards whether it was a dream or a fit or what—happened at that peculiar hour before dawn when human vitality is at its lowest ebb. The Blue Hour they sometimes call it, *l'heure bleue*—the ribbon of darkness between the false dawn and the true, always blacker than all the rest of the night has been before it. Criminals break down and confess at that hour; suicides nerve themselves for their attempts: mists swirl in the sky; and—according to the old books of the monks and the hermits—strange, unholy shapes brood over the sleeping rooftops.

At any rate, it was at this hour that her screams shattered the stillness of that top-floor apartment overlooking the Parc Monceau. Curdling, razor-edged screams that slashed through the thick bedroom door. The three

others who shared the apartment with Maldonado—her maid, her secretary, her cook—sat bolt upright in their beds. They came out into the hall one by one. The peasant cook crossed herself again and again. The maid whimpered and seemed ready to add her own screams to those that were sounding in that bedroom at the end of the hall. The secretary, brisk, business-like, modern, and just a little metallic, wasted no time; she cried out, "Somebody's murdering *madame!*" and rushed for the bedroom door.

She pounded, pushed at it; it wouldn't open. But then they all knew that Maldonado habitually slept with her door locked. Still, the only way to reach her was through this door.

The screams continued, a little less violently now than at first.

"Madame Maldonado!" the secretary cried frantically. "Open! Let us in! What is the matter?"

The only answer was a continuation of those long, shuddering moans



"And over the dark
sea there fell the
devil's laughter—"

Bierce

of terror. "Come here and help me!" the secretary ordered the cringing cook. "You're strong. Throw your weight against the door. See if you can break it down!"

The husky Breton woman, strong as an ox, threw her shoulder against it again and again. The perpendicular bolt that held it was forced out of its groove in the sill, the two halves shot apart. Something streaked by between the legs of the three frightened women—Maldonado's Persian cat, a projectile of psychic terror, its fur standing like a porcupine's quills, its green eyes lambent, its ears flat—hissing, spitting.

The secretary was the first to enter. She was an intelligent young woman of the modern breed, remember. She believed only what her eyes saw, what her ears heard, what her nostrils smelled. She reached out quickly, snapped the light switch. The screams

died with the darkness, and became instead a hoarse panting for breath. Eve Maldonado, greatest of all Paris designers, lay crouched across the bed like a terrified animal. There was no sign of a struggle anywhere in the big room. It held no intruder in it, no weapon, no trace of blood or violence. Maldonado was very much alive, unbruised and unhurt, but her face was the color of clay, and her whole body trembled uncontrollably. She couldn't speak for a long time.

Her overtaxed vocal cords refused to respond.

But there were things in the room that should not have been there—a thin diaphanous haze of smoke, as from a cigarette, suspended motionless halfway between floor and ceiling. The bowl beside the bed was crammed with cigarette-ends, but none of those butts in it were smoldering any longer, and both windows overlooking the Parc were wide open. The fresh before-dawn breeze blowing through them should have dissi-

pated that haze long ago. Yet it was plainly visible in the electric light, as though it had been caused by something heavier than burnt paper and tobacco. There was a faintly noticeable odor also, an unpleasant one. A little like burnt feathers, a little like chemicals, a little like—sulphur or coal gas. Hard to identify, vague, distinctly out of place there in that dainty bedroom.

"Madame! What was it? What has happened?" the secretary asked anxiously. The other two were peering in from the doorway.

A steel gleam on the night-stand beside the bed caught her eye. She put out her hand and quickly hid the needle before the other two had seen it. "Madame," she whispered reproachfully, "you promised me—!" Maldonado had been in a severe automobile accident a year before. To relieve the pain she had suffered as an after-effect, it had been necessary for awhile to—

THE young woman went over and hid the needle swiftly in a drawer. Coming back, something on the floor touched her foot. She stooped to pick up some kind of triangular cape or cloak. It was black on one side, a bright flame-red on the other. At first glance it seemed to be brocaded satin, but it wasn't. It glistened. It was almost like the skin of a snake. An odor of musk arose from it.

Maldonado affected exotic negligees like this one; she must have dropped it in the throes of her nightmare just now. But then as the secretary prepared to fling it back across the foot of the bed, she saw that there was already one there, an embroidered Chinese thing. At the same instant the designer caught sight of what she was holding; it seemed to renew all her terror. She screamed once more, shrank away from it. Her voice returned for the first time.

"That's it! That's it!" She shuddered, pointing. "Don't bring it near me! Take it away. Take it away, I'm afraid of it."

"But it's yours, *madame*, isn't it?"

"No!" the woman groaned, warding it off with both hands and averting her head. "Oh, don't—*please* take it away."

"But it must be yours. How else did it get here? You must have brought it home with you from the atelier. You've forgotten, that's all."

Maldonado, beside herself, was holding her head between her two hands. "We have nothing like that at the shop," she panted. "I saw how it got in here! I saw how it came into this room!"

The secretary, holding the thing up by one hand, felt a sudden inexplicable surge of hatred well up in her. A hatred that was almost murderous. She thought, "I'd like to kill her!" And the craving was literal, not just a momentary resentment expressed by a commonplace catch-phrase. She could feel herself being *drawn* to commit some overt act against the whimpering woman on the bed. Crushing her skull with something, grasping her throat between her hands and throttling her . . .

It must have shown in her face. Maldonado, staring at her, suddenly showed a new kind of fear, a lesser fear than before—the fear of one human for another. She drew back beyond the secretary's reach.

The secretary let the thing she was holding fall to the floor. The impulse died with it. She passed the back of her hand dazedly before her eyes. What had made her feel that way just now? Was Maldonado's hysteria catching—one of those mass-psychoses to which women, in particular, are sometimes susceptible? This woman before her was her employer, her benefactress, had always treated her well. She admired her, respected her—and yet suddenly she had found herself contemplating killing her. Not only contemplating it, but contemplating it with delight, almost with an insatiable longing. Perhaps, she thought, it was the reaction from the severe nervous shock Maldonado's screams had caused them all just now. But even so, to take so horrible a form—

Something was affecting the other two, too; she could see that. Some sort of tension. The maid, who was a frivolous little soul, kept edging toward the door, as if she didn't like it in here, without knowing why. The Breton cook had her underlip thrust out belligerently and the flesh around her eyes had hardened in hostility, but against whom, or what was causing it, there was no way of telling.

Maldonado said, "Get them out of here. I've got to talk to you." The secretary motioned and they went.

The maid returned for a moment, dropped the fugitive cat just over the threshold, then closed the door on it. The animal, perfectly docile in her arms until then, instantly began to act strangely. Its fur went up and its ears back, it crouched in wary retreat from the inanimate piece of goods on the floor, then finding that its escape was cut off, sidled around it in a wide circle and slunk under the bed. No amount of coaxing could get it out again. Two frightened green eyes in the shadows and a recurrent hissing were all that marked its presence.

MALDONADO'S face was ghastly. "That," she said, pointing below the bed where the cat lurked, "and that"—pointing to what lay on the floor—"prove it was no dream. Do dreams leave marks behind them?"

"What was no dream?" The secretary was cool, patient. She had humored Maldonado before.

"What I saw—in here." She caught at her throat, as though still unable to breathe properly. "Get me some cognac. I can speak to you about it. I couldn't in front of them. They'd only say I was crazy—" She drank, put the thimble-glass down. A trace of color returned to her face. "There was someone in this room with me!" she said. "I was lying here wide awake. I distinctly remember looking at my watch, on the stand here next to me, just before it happened. I can even recall the time. It was 4:35. Does one look at the time in one's sleep?"

"One could dream one had," the secretary suggested.

"That was no dream! A second later, as I put the watch down, there was a soft step on the balcony there outside my window, and someone came through it into the room—"

"But it's seven floors above the street, there's no possible way for anyone to get on it! It's completely cut off!" The secretary moved her hands.

"It didn't occur to me to scream at first, for that very reason. It seemed impossible that anyone *could* come in from there—"

"It is," said the secretary levelly. "You've been working too hard."

"It was no burglar. It seemed to be someone in an opera-cloak. It made no hostile move toward me, kept its back toward me until it had gone all the way around there, to the foot of the bed, where you found that—thing. Then it turned to look at me—" She shuddered spasmodically again, and quickly poured out a few more drops of cognac.

"And?" the secretary prompted.

Maldonado shaded her eyes with her hand, as though unable to bear the thought even now. "I saw its face—the conventional face that we all have seen in pictures and at plays. Illuminated from below with the most awful red light. Unspeakably evil. Little goat-horns coming out of here, at the side of the skull—"

The secretary flicked her thumb toward the bureau drawer where she'd hidden the needle. "You'd used—that, just before this?"

The secretary's glance was piercing. "Well, yes. But the cat didn't. And how do you explain what—you picked up from the floor? Whatever it was, it was all wrapped in that thing. It took it off, kept swirling it around there in the middle of the room—a little bit like matadors do in a bull-fight. I distinctly felt the breeze from it in my face, coming from that way, toward the windows, not away from them! And then he, it—whatever the thing was—spoke. I heard it very clearly. There were no sounds from the street at all. He said, 'Why don't you create a dress like this, Mal-

And the dress touched her, and the red rage came



donado, and dedicate it to me? Something that will turn whoever wears it into my servant. Here, I'll leave it with you.' That was when I at last found my voice and began to scream. I thought I'd go insane. And even through all my screaming I could hear Rajah over there in the corner with his back up, spitting madly—"

The secretary was getting a little impatient with this preposterous rigamarole. Maldonado was supposed to be one of the brainiest women in Paris, and here she was driveling the most appalling nonsense about seeing a demon in her room. Either the sedatives she was using were breaking down her mind, or she was overworked, subject to hallucinations. "And did this visitor leave the same way, through the window?" the secretary asked ironically.

"I don't know. I was too frightened to look."

The secretary tapped her teeth with her thumbnail. "I think we'd better tell Dr. Renard that that"—she indicated the drawer—"is beginning to get a hold on you. He'd better discontinue it. Suppose you take another swallow of cognac and try to get some sleep—"

She brushed the fallen cloak aside with the point of her toe, then stopped, holding it that way. Again that sudden urge, that blind hatred, swept her. She wanted to swing the cognac-decanter high over her head, to brain Maldonado with it, to watch the blood pour out of her shattered head.

She withdrew her foot, staggered a little. Her mind cleared.

Maldonado said: "Take that thing out of here! Don't leave it in here with me! How do we know what it is?"

"No," the secretary said weakly, "Don't ask me to touch it any more. I'm almost frightened myself now. I'm going back to my room, I feel—strange." She pulled the door open, went out without looking back.

The cat, seeing an avenue of escape, made a belated dash from under the bed, but the door was already closed when the animal reached it again. The cat stood up on its hind paws, scratching and mewing pathetically. Maldonado slipped off the bed and went to get it. "Come here, come here," she coaxed. "You seem very anxious to leave me—" She picked it up and started back with it in her arms, stroking it. As she did so she trod unwittingly on the cloak, lying there coiled on the floor like a snake waiting to strike.

HER face altered; her eyebrows went up saturninely, the edges of her fine white teeth showed through her parted lips; in an instant all tenderness was gone, she was like a different person altogether.

"Well, leave me then, if you want to so badly!" she said, as the cat began to struggle in her arms. Her eyes dilated, gazing down at it. "Leave me for good!" She threw the animal bru-

tally on the bed, then with a feline swiftness that more than matched its own, she thrust one of the heavy pillows over it, bore down with her whole weight, hands turned inward so that the fingers pointed toward one another. Her elbows slowly flexed, stiffened, flexed, stiffened, transmitting the weight of her suspended body to the pillow—and to what lay trapped below it.

The little plumed tail that was all that protruded, spiraled madly, almost like the spoke of a wheel, then abruptly stopped. Maldonado's foot, unnoticed, was still caught in a fold of the cloak, had dragged it across the floor after her.

Hours later, the secretary returned to tell her she was giving up her job. She was putting on her gloves and her packed valise stood outside in the hall. The little maid had fled already, without the formality of giving notice. The pious cook was at Mass, trying to find an answer to her problem: whether to turn her back on the perfectly good wages she was earning, or to risk remaining in a place where inexplicable things took place in the dead of night. As for the secretary herself, all she knew was that twice she had been tempted to murder within the space of moments. There was some unclean mystery here that she could not fathom. She was modern and sensible enough to realize that the only thing to do, for her own sake, was remove herself beyond its reach. Before temptation became commission.

What had precipitated her decision was a phone call she had made to the workshop in an effort to trace the cape that was the only tangible evidence of the mystery. Their answer, after an exhaustive check-up had been made, only bore out Maldonado's words: there had never been anything answering its description in the stockroom, not even a two-by-four sample. An account was kept of every button, every ribbon. So whatever it was, how it had got into Maldonado's room, it hadn't come from the shop.

The secretary saw at a glance that a change had come over Maldonado, since she had left her several hours before. A shrewd, exultant look had replaced the abysmal terror on her face. Whatever unseen struggle had taken place in here in the interval, had been won by the forces of evil. Maldonado was sitting at her desk, busy with pencil and sketch-pad doing a rough draft. She had the cape draped around one shoulder.

"Three times I took this thing to the window, to throw it out into the street," she admitted, "and I couldn't let go of it. It seemed to cling magnetically to my hands. The idea wouldn't let me alone, it kept me hypnotized, until finally I had to get it down on paper—"

A cry of alarm broke from the secretary. "What happened to Rajah?" She had just seen the lifeless bedraggled tail hanging down below the pillow. "Take that off him, he'll suffocate!"

Maldonado paid no attention. "He has already suffocated." She held up the sketch. "Look, that's just the way—what I saw last night—carried it. Call the car. I'm going to get to work on it at once. There's money in it, it'll be worth a fortune—" But her eyes, over the top of the sketch, had come to rest on the secretary's slim young throat. There was a sharp-pointed ivory paper-cutter lying on the desk. As she held the drawing up with one hand, the other started to inch uncontrollably toward it, like a crawling five-legged white beetle.

Inching, crawling—

The secretary, warned by some sixth sense, gave a muffled cry, turned and bolted down the long hallway. The street-door of the apartment slammed after her.

Maldonado smiled a little, readjusted the cape over her shoulder, went on talking to herself as though nothing had happened while she studied the finished sketch. "I'll advertise it as—let's see—*I'm Dangerous Tonight—a dress to bring out the devil in you!*"

And so a deadly thing was born.

Chapter I

American in Paris

SHE was standing on a small raised turntable, about two feet off the floor, which could be revolved in either direction by means of a small lever, on the same general principle as a mobile barber's-chair. She had been standing on it since early afternoon, with short rest-periods every half-hour or so; it was eleven at night now.

They were all around her, working away like ants, some on their knees, some standing up. The floor was littered with red and black scraps, like confetti. She had eyes for only one thing in the whole workroom: a pair of sharp shears lying on a table across the way from her. She kept looking at them longingly, moistening her lips from time to time. When they were closed, like they were now, they came to a sharp point, like a poniard. And when they were open, the inner edge of each blade was like a razor. She was digging her fingernails into her own sides, to keep from jumping down to the floor, picking them up, and cutting and slashing everyone within reach with them. She'd been doing that, in her brain, for hours; she was all black-and-blue from the pinch and bite of her own nails. Once, the seamstress kneeling at her feet had saved her. She'd already had one foot off the stand, on her way over to them, and the latter had stuck a pin in her to make her hold still. The pain had counteracted the desperate urge she kept feeling. It did no good to try to look at anything else; her eyes returned to the shears each time.

The funny part of it was, when she was at rest, off the stand in just her underthings, and had every opportunity of seizing them and doing what she wanted to, she didn't seem to want to. It was only when she was up there with the dress on her that the urge swept over her. She couldn't understand why her thoughts should take this homicidal turn. She supposed it was because she was due to meet Belden at the Bal Tabarin at

midnight, and just tonight they'd picked to work overtime, to finish the thing, keeping her here long after she should have been out of the place.

Meeting him wasn't like meeting anyone else; he was living on borrowed time; he couldn't stick around any one place too long waiting for anyone. He was wanted for murder in the States, and there was an American detective over here now, looking for him; he had to lie low, keep moving around fast, with this Government man always just a step behind him, creeping up slowly but surely. Twice now, in the past two weeks, he'd just missed Belden by the skin of his teeth. And Belden couldn't get out of town until the fake passports his friend Battista was making for him were ready. He'd have them by the end of this week, and then he was going to head for the Balkans—and take her with him, of course. Until then, he was caught in a squirrel-cage.

He was a swell guy; suppose he did run dope from France into the States? She was for him. She'd rather part with her right arm than see him arrested and taken back to die.

He'd killed one of their Department of Justice agents, and they'd never rest until they'd evened things up. They sat you in a chair over there, he'd told her, and shocked you to death with electricity. It sounded awful, a million times worse than the swift and merciful guillotine.

She was crazy about him, steadfast with that utter loyalty only a woman in love can know. She'd have gone through fire and water to be with him, anytime, anywhere. She was ready to be a fugitive with him for the rest of her life—"Whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people"—and when a Parisienne is ready to leave Paris behind forever, that's something. She hadn't seen him in five days now; he had to keep moving—but last night he'd got word to her along the underworld grapevine: "The Bal au Diable, Wednesday at twelve." And here it was after eleven, and she wasn't even out of the shop yet! Wouldn't that look great, to

keep him waiting, endanger him like that?

SHE couldn't hold out any longer. Pinching herself didn't do any good, her sides were numb now. Her eyes fastened on the shears; she started to edge toward the edge of the stand, her hand slowly stroking her side. One good jump, a grab, a quick turn—and she'd have them. "I'll take Maldonado first," she decided, as she reached the edge of the platform. "The sewing-woman's so fat, she can't get out of the room as fast—" Her knees started to dip under her, bracing for the flying jump.

The designer spoke. "All right, Mimi, take it off. It's finished."

The sewing-woman pulled; the dress fell to the floor at the mannequin's feet, and she suddenly stopped eyeing the scissors, wavered there off-balance, got limply to the floor. Now she could get at them easily—and she didn't try, seemed to have forgotten.

She staggered into the little curtained alcove to put on her street clothes.

"It's been a hard job," Maldonado said, "You all get a bonus." She went downstairs to her car. They started putting the lights out. The rest of the staff, the piece-workers, had gone home hours ago. The sewing-woman stayed behind a moment to stitch in the little silk label: *I'm Dangerous Tonight, by Maldonado*. Without that label it was just a dress. With it, it was a dress worth twenty thousand francs (and if the buyer was an American, twenty-five thousand).

Mimi Brissard looked at the junk she wore to work. Stockings full of holes, sloppy old coat. And it was too late now to go back to her own place and dress decently for him. She'd never make it; she lived way out at Bilancourt. She'd look fine, showing up in these rags to meet a swell guy like Belden! Even if he was a fugitive, even if the Bal au Diable was an underworld hangout, he'd be ashamed to be seen with her. He might even change his mind about taking her.

The sewing-woman had finished the label, hung the dress up. "Coming, Mimi?"

"Go ahead," the girl called through the curtain, "I'll lock up." She'd been with them for five years, they trusted her. There was no money or anything kept up here anyway, just clothes and designs.

"Don't forget the lights." The old woman trudged wearily down the curved stone staircase to the street.

The girl stuck her head out around the curtain, eyed the dress. "I bet he'd be proud of me if I dared wear that! I could bring it back before we open up tomorrow, and they'd never even know." She went over to it, took the hanger down. The dress swept against her. Her eyes narrowed to slits. Her indecision evaporated. "Let anyone try to stop me, and see what they get!" she whispered half audibly. A minute later she had slipped the red dress over her lithe young body and was strutting—there is no other word for it—before the mirror.

She hadn't heard the step on the stairs, maybe because the watchman wore felt-soled shoes to make his rounds. He must have come up to see what was taking her so long.

"Eh? Wait, where do you think you're going in that? That's the firm's property." The old man was standing there in the doorway, looking in at her.

She whirled, and the tiny arrow-headed train, that was like a devil's tail, spun around after her. The shears were still lying there on the table, midway between them.

"Where do you think I'm going? I'll tell you where you're going—right now! To the devil, and you're not coming back!"

There was no excuse for it. The rebuke had been paternal, half humorous. He was a good-natured, inoffensive old man, half crippled with rheumatism. He was certainly no match for her young and furious strength. And the lust to kill—this dynamic murder-voltage charging her—that gave her the force and determination of two able-bodied men.

Her hand gave a catlike pounce,

and the shears clashed; the blades opened, then closed spasmodically, like a hungry mouth, as her fingers gripped the handle. They came up off the table point-foremost.

He saw in her eyes what was coming. "Wait, *mademoiselle!* Don't! Why—?"

She couldn't have told him even if she had wanted to. There was a murderous frenzy in her heart. She closed in on him as he tried to retreat, facing her because he was too horrified to turn his back. There was a spasm of motion from her hand, too quick for the eye to follow, and the point of the shears suddenly sank into his chest.

He gave a cough, found the wall with his back, leaned against it. His head went down and his old black alpaca cap fell off. He could still talk. "Have pity! I've never harmed you! I'm an old man! My Solange needs me—"

The shears found his throat this time. He fell down on top of them and was silent.

Something dark like mucilage glistened where he lay.

She had jumped back—not in remorse, but to keep the bottom of her skirt clear of his blood.

Tensed, curved forward from the waist up, peering narrowly at him like something out of a jungle that kills not for food but for love of killing, she executed strange gestures, as though her arms were those of a puppet worked by strings by some master-puppeteer. Stretched them full-length up over her head, palm to palm, as if in some unholy incantation. Then let them fall again and caressed her own sides, as though inordinately pleased.

At last she moved around him, retrieved the ring of keys that he carried beneath his blouse. She would need them to come back into the building later on. She found the light-switch, plunged the room—and what it contained—into darkness. She closed the door, and moved down the circular stone-stairs with a rustling sound, such as a snake might make on a bed of dry leaves.



Chapter II

First Night of a Gown

THE *bal* was not on the list of synthetic Apache dens that guides show visitors to Paris. It was too genuine for that; sightseers would have been disappointed, as the real thing always makes a poorer show than the fake. It did not pay those who frequented it to advertise themselves or be conspicuous. Nothing ever seemed to be going on there. People would come in, slump down in a chair; no one would pay any attention to them; they would sometimes sit for hours, seemingly lost in dreams; then as suddenly be gone again, as unnoticed as they had come.

There was an accordion fastened to the wall, and a man who had lost an arm in the trenches would occasionally come in, sit down by it, and play softly sentimental ballads with his one hand only, pulling it in and out of the wall.

The *bal* consisted of simply a long, dingy, dimly lighted, smoke-filled semi-basement room; no one ever spoke above a low murmur. If the police never bothered anyone, possibly it was because that was the smartest thing to do. The *bal* often came in handy as a convenient starting-point for a search for any wanted criminal at any given time; it was a focal point for the Paris underworld.

When Mimi, in her red-and-black dress, came down the short flight of stone steps from street-level, Belden wasn't there. At one table was a soiled glass in a china-saucer stamped: *1Fr50*. As she passed by she glanced into it; in the dregs of vermouth-and-cassis floated a cigarette end. That was Belden's unmistakable

trademark; that was where he'd been sitting. He never drank anything without leaving a cigarette in the glass or cup.

She sat down one table away. She knew all the faces by sight, but she gave no sign of recognition, nor was any given to her. No . . . There was one face there she didn't know. Out in the middle of the room, only its lower half visible under a snapdown hat-brim. It didn't have the characteristic French pallor. The chin was squarer than Gallic chins are apt to be. There was a broadness of shoulder there, also, unknown on the Continent.

The man had a stale beer before him. But that was all right; no one came in here to eat or drink. He was staring at the red-and-white checks of the tablecloth, playing checkers on the squares with little *sou*-pieces. He looked at nothing, but he saw everything; it was written all over him. The atmosphere was tense, too. Without seeming to, all the others were watching him cautiously; they scented danger. His presence was a threat. . . .

Petion, the proprietor, found something to do that brought him past her table. Carefully he removed the neglected glass and saucer from the one ahead.

"Where's Belden?"

Petion didn't seem to hear. The corner of his mouth moved in Apache argot. "Get out of here fast, you little fool. That bird over there is the one that's after him. The American *flic*. Luckily Belden saw him arrive. We got him out the back way. He's up at your place, waiting for you. His own room is too hot." Petion couldn't seem to get the grimy cloth at Belden's table straight enough to please him.

The man in the middle of the room jumped a five-*sou* piece with a ten-*sou* piece. You could almost *feel* the eyes peering through the felt of the shadowing brim.

"Now, watch out how you move—you may draw him after you without knowing it and put him onto Belden."

There was a fruit-knife on the table. She glanced at it, then her eyes strayed to Petion's fat neck, creased above his collar. He caught the pantomime, gave her a surprised look, as much as to say, "What's got into you? He been feeding you some of his product?"

He straightened the empty chair and said aloud: "Well, what are you hanging around for? I tell you the dog is a United States Government agent."

"All right, clear away," she breathed impatiently, "I can handle this."

SHE got up and started slowly toward the stairs to the street. Death by electrocution, the thing she'd always dreaded so, ever since Belden had first told her what he had coming to him. Death by electricity—much worse than death at the point of a pair of shears or a table-knife. She veered suddenly, as uncontrollably as though pulled by a magnet, turned off toward that table in the middle of the room, went directly over to it. She was smiling and her eyes were shining.

There was a small, nervous stir that rustled all over the room. One man shifted his chair. Another set his glass of *vin blanc* into a saucer, too noisily. A woman laughed, low in her throat.

He didn't seem to see her, not even when her fingertips were resting on the edge of the table.

"*Soir, m'sieu.*"

He said in English: "Wrong table, *petite. Pas libre ce soir.*"

She'd learned some English from Belden. So now she pulled a second chair out, sat down, helped herself to one of his cigarettes. Her hand trembled a little, but not from nervousness. In the dim recesses of the room whispers were coursing along the walls: "She's giving him the come-on, trying to get him somewhere where Belden can finish him. That's the kind of a girl to have!"

"She'll trip herself up. Those fish are no fools."

She began to speak quietly, her eyelids lowered. "I am Mimi Brissard, and I live at Bilancourt, number 5 rue Poteaux top floor front."

The line of his mouth hardened a little. "Move on. I told you I'm not int—"

"I am Belden's girl," she continued as though she hadn't heard him, "and he is up there right now, waiting for me. Now, are you interested?"

He pushed his hat back with a thumb and looked at her for the first time. There was no admiration in his eyes, nor any gratitude, only the half-concealed contempt the police always have for an informer. "Why are you welshing on him?" he said warily.

She couldn't answer, any more than she could have answered the old watchman when he had asked her why she was stabbing him to death. She fingered the dress idly, as though she sensed something, but it eluded her.

"You better go back and tell him it won't work," he said drily. "He's not getting me like he got Jimmy Fisher in New York, he's not dealing with a green kid now. I'm getting him—and without the help of any chippy either!"

"Then I have to prove that this is no decoy? Did you see that vermouthish-glass with the cigarette in it over there? That was he. This goes with it." She palmed a scrap of paper at him: *Bal au Diable 24h*. "I was to meet him here. You spoiled it. He's up there now. He's armed and he'll shoot to kill, rather than go back—"

"What did you think I expected him to do, scatter petals at my feet?"

"Without me you haven't got one chance in ten of taking him alive. But through me, you can do it. And you want him alive, don't you?"

"Yep," he said curtly. "The man he killed—Jimmy Fisher—was my brother. . . ."

She squirmed eagerly inside the glistening cocoon that sheathed her. But a change had come over him meanwhile. Her nearness, her presence at the table, seemed to be affecting him on some way. He had come alive, menacingly, hostilely, and he

was . . . dangerous, too. His jaw-line set pugnaciously, a baleful light flickered in his gray eyes, his upper lip curled back from his teeth. His hand roamed down his coat toward the flap of his back-pocket. "I never wanted to kill anyone so much in my life," he growled throatily, "as I do you right now!" He started tugging at something, at the small of his back.

She looked down, saw that a flounce of her dress was brushing against his knee. She moved her chair slightly back, and the contact broke.

His hand came up on the table again, empty. His face slowly slipped back into its mask of impassivity. He was breathing a little heavily, that was all, and there was a line of moisture along the crease in his forehead.

"So he's at Bilancourt, 5 rue Poteaux," he said finally. "Thanks. You're a fine sweetheart. Some other dame, I suppose."

"No," she said simply. "I loved him very much only an hour ago, at eleven o'clock. I must have changed since then, that's all. I don't know why. Now I'd like to think of him being electrocuted and cursing my name as he dies. . . . Follow me there and watch which window lights up. Keep watching. My window-shade's out of order. Tonight it will be especially so. I'll have trouble with it. When you see it go up, then come down again, you'll know he's ready for the taking."

"Okay, Delilah," he murmured. "When I first hit Paris I thought there was no one lower than Belden. He shot an unarmed kid of twenty-five—in the back, without giving him a chance. But now I see there's someone lower still—and that's his woman. He, at least, wouldn't turn you in; I'll give him that much. But let me warn you. If you think you're leading me into a trap, if I have to do any shooting, you get the first slug out of this gun! That's how you stand with me, little lady."

She smiled derisively, stood up. She didn't bother to reply to his contempt. "Don't leave right after me, they're all watching you here. I'll

wait for you under the first street-light around the corner. She added dreamily: "I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do more than this. That's why I'm doing it."

She went slowly up the stone steps to the street-door, her pointed train wriggling after her from side to side. She turned her head and flashed a smile over her shoulder. Then she went out and the darkness swallowed her.

Frank Fisher rinsed his mouth with beer and emptied it out on the floor.

Chapter III

Mademoiselle Judas

THE room was dark and empty when she stepped into it from the hall outside. The dim light shining behind her outlined her; her silhouette was diabolic, long and sinuous and wavering. Two ridges of hair above her ears looked almost like horns. Something clicked warningly somewhere in the room, but that was all. She closed the door.

"Chéri?" she whispered. "I'm going to put up the light. It's all right. *C'est Mimi.*"

A bulb went on, and its rays, striking out like yellow rain, touched off a gleam between two curtains pulled tightly together across a doorless closet. The gleam was black in the middle, holed through. It elongated into a stubby automatic; and a hand, an arm, a shoulder, a man, came slowly out after it toward her.

Steve Belden was misleadingly ogre-like, for a man who had poisoned thousands of human lives with heroin. In repose his face was almost pleasant looking, and his eyes had that directness of gaze that usually betokens honesty.

The girl glanced quizzically at the gun as he continued to point it at her. "Well, put it way, Chéri," she protested ironically. "Haven't you seen me some place before?"

He sheathed it under his arm, scowled. "What took you so long? D'you know he nearly jumped me. waiting for you at the *bal* just now?"

Petion got me out the back way by pretending to shake out a tablecloth, holding it up at arm's length for a screen. For a minute we were both in the same room, he and I! I hope you haven't steered him over here after you without knowing it."

"He wasn't there any more. Must have looked in merely, then gone away again."

"What's the idea of that dress? I nearly took a shot at you when you opened the door just now."

"It's what they kept me overtime working on tonight. I left it on to save time. I'll sneak it back first thing in the morning—"

"You'll have to have some reach, if you do. Battista finally came through with the passports. We're taking the Athens Express at daybreak. Matter of fact I could have made the night-train to the Balkans, if it hadn't been for you. I waited over so I could take you with me—"

"So four hours more in Paris does the trick?" she said, looking at him shrewdly.

He frowned.

"Yeah, and then we're all set. Fisher's extradition-writ's no good in Greece, and Panyiotis pulls enough



The spotlight moved. The man reached forward to claw at the dress

weight there to fix it so we both disappear for good. If I've outsmarted him for three weeks now, I can outlast him the few hours there are left. What'd you say?"

She'd said, "If—" in a low voice. "When did you get any sleep?"

"Night before last."

"Well, take off your coat, lie down here, rest up a while. I'll keep watch. I'll wake you in time for the train. Here, let me have that, I'll keep it trained on the door."

"What do you know about these things?" he grinned, but he passed the gun over to her, stretched himself out. "Put out the light," he said sleepily. He began to relax, the long-sustained tension started to go out of his nerves; he could trust her. She was the only one. . . .

THE gun was not pointed at the door, but at him—at the top of his head from behind, through the bars of the bed. Her face was a grimace of delight. Then slowly she brought the gun down again. A bullet in the brain—You didn't feel anything, didn't know anything. But electrocution—what anguish, what terror preceded it! Electrocution was a much better way.

A sharp click from the gun roused him, after he had already begun to doze off. He stiffened, looked at her over his shoulder. "What was that?"

"Just making sure it's loaded." She kicked something along the floor with the tip of her foot, something metallically round. It rolled under the bed.

His eyes closed again. He turned his head toward the wall. His breathing thickened.

A warning *whirr* of the shade-roller roused him a second time. He raised half upright on his elbow. His free hand clawed instinctively at his empty shoulder-holster.

She was reaching for the cord, pulling the shade all the way down again to the bottom.

"What're you doing?" he rasped. "Get away from that window! I told you to put the light out, didn't I?"

"It slipped. It needs fixing," she

murmured. "It's all right, there's no one down there. Here goes the light—"

The last thing he said, as he lay back again, was: "And take that damn dress off too, while you're about it. Every time I lamp it on you, it throws a shock into me all over again. I think I'm seeing things—"

She said nothing.

He drowsed off again. Then in the dark, only seconds later, she was leaning over him, shaking him awake. Her breath was a sob that threatened to become a scream. The whiteness of her form was dimly visible. She must have discarded the dress while he slept.

"Steve. *Mon* Steve!" she was moaning, "Get up!" She pulled him frenziedly erect with both arms. "*Sauves-toi! Out! File—vite!* Maybe you can still make it by way of the roof—"

He was on his feet, clear of the bed, in an instant. "What's up? What's up?"

"I've sold you out!" The groan seemed to come from way down at the floor, as though she was all hollow inside. "I tipped him off at the *bal*. I signaled him with the shade just now—"

The light flashed on.

"Oh, don't stand there looking at me. Quick, get out this door, he has four flights to climb—"

He was usually very quick, but not this time. He stood there eyeing her as though he couldn't believe what he heard. Then at last, he grasped what she had told him. He pulled the gun from her unresisting hand, turned it the other way around, jabbed it at her heart. It clicked repeatedly, almost like a typewriter.

"I—the bullets—" she shuddered. "Under the bed— Oh, get, Steve— save yourself now—"

A warped floorboard groaned somewhere outside the room.

"Too late!"

Belden had dropped down on one knee, was reaching out desperately toward the bullets. There was no pounding at the door; a shot exploded into it, and splinters of wood flew out

on the inside. The china-knob fell off and lay there like an egg. The door itself ricocheted back off the flat of someone's shoe.

"All right, don't move, Belden. You're through."

Fisher came in slowly, changed gun-hands with a sort of acrobatic twist, and brought out handcuffs.

"Pull your finger-joint out of that trigger-hole," he added.

The automatic turned over, fell upside down on the floor.

Fisher didn't speak again until the manacles had closed. Then he said, "Got a hat or anything you want to take with you?" He seemed to see Mimi for the first time. He nodded, said curtly: "Nice work, *Mademoiselle Judas*."

She stood shivering. The dress lay on the floor behind her, but she made no move to reach out for it.

Belden took his capture calmly enough. He didn't say a word to Mimi Brissard; didn't even look at her. "It's a pleasure," he said bitterly, as Fisher motioned him forward, "if only because it means getting out of a town where there are—things like this." He spat on the floor at her feet as he went by.

Fisher hung back a minute to look her almost detachedly, up and down. He pocketed his gun, took out a wallet with his free hand, removed some lettuce-like franc-notes. "What was it—money?" he said. "You haven't asked for any, but I suppose that's it. Here, go out and buy yourself a heart."

The wadded bills struck her lightly in the center of the forehead, and fluttered down her to the floor. One caught upon her breast, just over her heart, and remained poised there, like a sort of badge.

She stood there with her eyes closed, perfectly motionless, as though she were asleep standing up, while the man she'd loved and his captor began their long descent side by side down the four flights of stairs that led to the street.

When they came out of the house a moment later, they had to force

their way through the crowd of people standing there blocking the entrance.

Fisher thought for a moment that it was his own shot at the lock upstairs in the house that had attracted them. But they were all turned the other way, with their backs to the building. Out in the middle of the narrow cobbled street two or three of them were bending anxiously over something. Some broken white thing lying perfectly still at their feet. One of the men was hurriedly opening and separating the leaves of a newspaper—but not to read it.

Mimi Brissard had atoned, in the only way she had left.

Chapter IV

The Lady from Dubuque

"D O I dare?" Mrs. Hiram Travis said aloud, to no one in particular, in her stateroom on the *Gascony* the night before it reached New York. Or if to anyone at all, to the slim, slinky red-and-black garment that the stewardess had laid out for her across the bed under the mistaken impression that she would wish to wear it. A stewardess who, although she had assured Mrs. Travis she was not susceptible in the least to seasickness, had come out of the cabin looking very pale and shaken after having taken the dress down from its hanger. Mrs. Travis had noticed the woman glaring daggers at her, as if in some way *she* were to blame. But this being Mrs. Travis' first trip abroad, or anywhere at all except Sioux City, she was not well versed in the ways of stewardesses, any more than in those of French couturiers.

In fact she hadn't really known what that Maldonado woman was talking about at all; they had had to make signs to each other. *She* had wanted just a plain simple little dress to wear to the meetings of her Thursday Club back home in Dubuque, and then the next morning *this* had shown up at the hotel all wrapped up in crinkly paper. She hadn't wanted Hiram to think she was a fool, so

she'd pretended it was the one she'd ordered, and good-natured as always, he'd paid for it without a word. Now here she was stuck with it! And the worst part of it was, if she didn't wear it tonight, then she'd never have another chance to. Because she really didn't have the nerve to wear it in Dubuque. Folks would be scandalized. And all the *francs* it had cost!

"Do I dare?" she said again, and edged a little closer.

One only had to look at Mrs. Hiram Travis to understand the reason for her qualms. She and the dress didn't match up at all. They came from different worlds. She was a youngish forty, but she made not the least attempt to look any younger than that. She was very plain, with her chin jutting a little too much, her eyes undistinguished, and her mouth too flat. Her hair was a brown-red. She had never used rouge and she had never used powder. The last time she'd smoked a cigarette was behind her grandmother's barn at the age of fourteen. She'd never drunk anything stronger than elderberry wine in her life, until a week ago in Paris, just for the look of things, she'd tried a little white wine with her meals. She made swell pies, but now that Hi had made so much money in the lawn-mower business, he wouldn't let her do her own cooking any more. He'd even retired, taken out a half-a-million dollar life-insurance policy, and they'd made this trip to Paris to see the sights. Even there the latest they'd stayed up was one night when they had a lot of postcards to write and didn't get to bed until nearly eleven-thirty. About the most daring thing she'd done in her whole life was to swipe a fancy salad-fork from a hotel for a souvenir. It was also the closest she'd ever come to a criminal act. That ought to give you the picture.

She was mortally afraid of about eight million things, including firearms, strange men, and the water they were traveling on right now.

"Golly," she clucked, "I bet I'll feel like a fool in it. It's so—kind of

vampish. What'll Hi say?" She reached out and rested her hand on the dress, which lay there like a coiled snake ready to strike. . . .

She drew her hand back suddenly. But she couldn't help reaching out again to touch the dress with a movement that was almost a caress.

Instantly her mind filled with the strangest thoughts—odd recollections of instants in her past that she would have said she had completely forgotten. The first time she'd ever seen her father wring a chicken's neck. The day that Hiram—'way back in high school—cut his arm on a broken window. A vein, he'd cut. He'd bled . . . a lot; and she'd felt weak and sick and terrified. The automobile smash-up they'd seen that time on the State highway on the way back from Fair . . . that woman lying all twisted and crumpled on the road, with her head skewed way around like it shouldn't be—couldn't be if the woman lived.

It was funny . . . When those things had taken place, she'd felt terrible. Now—remembering them—she found herself going over every detail in her mind, almost—lovingly.

In a magazine she had once seen a picture of Salomé kneeling on the ground holding on a great tray the head of Baptist John. The woman's body was arched forward; there was a look of utter, half-delirious absorption on her face as her lips quivered for the dead, partly open mouth. And quite suddenly, with a little shock of revelation, Sarah Travis knew what Salomé had felt.

The dress slipped from her fingers. She hurried to put it on. . . .

GEORGES, the *Gascony's* chief bartender, said: "Perhaps *monsieur* would desire another. That's a bad col' you catch."

The watery-eyed red-nosed little man perched before him had a strip of flannel wound around his throat, neatly pinned in back with two small safety-pins. He glanced furtively around over his shoulder, the length of the glittering cocktail-lounge. "Mebbe you're right," he said. "But

the missus is due up in a minute, I don't want her to catch me at it, she'll lace it into me, sure enough!"

Sarah, of course, wouldn't dream of approaching the bar; when she came they'd sit decorously at a little table over in the corner, he with a beer, she with a cup of Oolong tea, just to act stylish.

Hiram Travis blew his long-suffering nose into a handkerchief the size of a young tablecloth. Then he turned his attention to the live canary dangling over the bar in a bamboo cage, as part of the decorations. He coaxed a few notes out by whistling softly. Then he happened to look in the mirror before him—and he recoiled a little, his eyes bugged; and part of his drink spilled out of his glass.

She was standing next to him, right there at the bar itself, before he'd even had time to turn. An odor of musk enveloped him. The canary over their heads executed a few pinwheel flurries.

His jaw just hung open. "Well, fer—!" was all he could say. It wasn't so much the dress she was wearing, it was that her whole personality seemed to have subtly changed. Her face had a hard, set look about it. Her manner was almost poised. She wasn't fluttering with her hands the way she usually did in a room full of people, and he missed the nervous, hesitant smile on her lips. He couldn't begin to say what it was, but there was something about her that made him a little afraid of her. He even edged an inch or two away from her.

Even Georges looked at her with a new professional respect not unmixed with fear.

"Madame?" he said.

She said, "I feel like a drink tonight," she said, and laughed a little, huskily. "What are those things—cocktails—? Like that woman over there has."

The bartender winced a little. "That, *madame*, is a double Martini. Perhaps something less—"

"No. That's what I want. And a cigarette, too. I want to try one."

Beside her, her husband could only splutter, and he stopped even that when she half turned to flash him a smile—the instinctive, brilliant smile of a woman who knows what feeble creatures men can be. You couldn't learn to smile like that. It was something a woman either knew the minute she was born, or never knew at all.

Georges recognized that smile.

"I can't believe it's you," Hiram Travis said, stupefied.

Again that smile. "It must be this dress," she said. "It does something to me. You have to live up to a gown like this, you know. . . ." There was a brief warning in her eyes. She picked up her cocktail, sipped at it, coughed a little, and then went on drinking it slowly. "About the dress," she said, "I put my hand on it and for a moment I couldn't take it away again, it seemed to *stick* to it like glue! Next think I knew I was in it."

As the bartender struck a match to light her cigarette, she put her

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hand on his wrist to steady it. Travis saw him jump, draw back. He held his wrist, blew on it, looked at her reproachfully. Travis said: "Why, you scratched him, Sarah."

"Did I? And as she turned and looked at him, he saw her hand twitch a little, and drew still further away from her. "What—what's got into you?" he faltered.

There was some kind of tension spreading all around the horseshoe-shaped bar, emanating from her. All the cordiality, the sociability, was leaving it. Cheery conversations even at the far ends of it faltered and died, and the speakers looked around them as though wondering what was putting them so on edge. A heavy leaden pall of restless silence descended, as when a cloud goes over the sun. One or two people even turned and moved away reluctantly, as though they hadn't intended to but didn't like it at the bar any more. The gaunt-faced woman in red and black was the center of all eyes, but the looks sent her were not the admiring looks of men for a well-dressed woman; they were the blinking petrified looks a black-snake would get in a poultry-yard. Even the barman felt it. He dropped and smashed a glass, a thing he hadn't done since he'd been working on the ship. Even the canary felt it, and stood shivering pitifully on its perch, emitting an occasional cheep as though for help.

SARAH TRAVIS looked up, and saw it. She took a loop of her dress, draped it around her finger, thrust it between the bars. There was a spasm of frantic movement inside, too quick for the eye to follow, a blurred pinwheel of yellow. Then the canary lay lifeless at the bottom of the cage, claws stiffly upthrust. Its heart had stopped from fright.

It wasn't what she had done—they could all see that contact hadn't killed it—it was the look on her face that was so shocking. No pity, no regret, but an expression of savage satisfaction, a sense of power to deal out life-and-death just now discovered.

Some sort of unholy excitement seemed to be crackling inside her; they could all but see phosphorescent flashes of it in her eyes.

This time they began to move away in numbers, with outthrust lower lips of repugnance and dislike turned her way. Drinks were left half-finished, or were taken with them to be imbibed elsewhere. She became the focal-point for a red wave of converged hate that, had she been a man, would surely have resulted in some overt act. There were sulky whispers of "Who is that?" as they moved away. The bartender, as he detached and lowered the cage, looked daggers at her, cursed between his teeth in French.

There was only one solitary drinker left now at the bar, out of all the amiable crowd that had ringed it when she first arrived. He kept studying her inscrutably with an expressionless face; seemingly unallergic to the tension that had driven everyone else away.

"There's that detective again," she remarked with cold hostility. "Wonder he doesn't catch cold without that poor devil being chained to him. Wonder where he's left him?"

"Locked up below, probably, while he's up getting a bracer," Travis answered mechanically. His chief interest was still his own problem: what had happened to his wife in the ten brief minutes from the time he'd left her preparing to dress in their stateroom until the time she's joined him up here? "I suppose they asked him not to bring him up with him manacled like that, for the sake of appearances. Why are you so sorry for his prisoner all of a sudden, and so set against him? Only last night you were saying what an awful type man the other fellow was and how glad you were he'd been caught."

"Last night isn't tonight," she said shortly. "People change, Hiram." She still had the edge of her dress wrapped around her hand, as when she'd destroyed the canary. "I don't suppose you ever will, though." Her voice was low, thoughtful. She looked

at her husband curiously, then deliberately reached out toward him with that hand and rested it against him.

Travis didn't go into a spasm and fall lifeless as the bird had. He displayed a sudden causeless resentment toward her, snapped, "Take your hand away, don't be pawing me!" and moved further away.

She glanced disappointedly down at her hand as though it had played a dirty trick on her, slowly unwound the strip of material, let it fall. She stared broodingly into the mirror for awhile, tendrils of smoke coming up out of her parted lips.

She said, "Hi, is that half-million-dollar insurance policy you took out before we left in effect yet of still pending?" and narrowed her eyes at her image in the glass.

"It's in effect," he assured her. "I paid the first premium on it the day before we left Dubuque. I'm carrying the biggest insurance of any individual in Iowa—"

She didn't seem particularly interested in hearing the rest. She changed the subject abruptly—or seemed to. "Which one of the bags have you got that gun in that you brought with you for protection? You know, in case we got robbed in Europe."

The sequence of questions was so glaringly, so unmistakably meaningful, that he did what almost anyone else would have done under the circumstances, ascribed it to mere coincidence and ignored it. Two separate disconnected chains of thought, crowding upon one another, had made her ask first one, then the other, that was all. It just would have *sounded* bad to a stranger, to that professional crime-detector over there for instance, but of course *he* knew better. After all he'd been married to her for eighteen years.

"In the cowhide bag under the bed in the stateroom," he answered calmly. "Why? Every time you got a peak at it until now you squeaked, 'Throw it away, Hi! I can't stand to look at them things!'"

She touched her hand to her throat briefly and moistened her lips.

Travis noticed something, and said: "What's the matter, you seasick? Your face is all livid, kind of, and you're breathing so fast—I coulda told you not to monkey 'round with liquor when you're not used to it."

"It isn't either, Hiram. I'm all right. Leave me be." Then, with a peculiar ghastly smile lighting up her face, she said, "I'm going down below a minute to get something I need. I'll be back."

"Want me to come with you?"

"No," she said, still smiling, "I'd rather have you wait for me here, and then come out on the deck with me for a little stroll when I come back. That upper boat-deck . . ."

The little undulating serpentine train of her dress followed her across the cocktail lounge and out. Hiram Travis watched her go, wondering what had happened to change her so. Georges watched her go, wondering what had gone wrong at his bar tonight. Frank Fisher watched her go, wondering who it was she kept reminding him of. He had thought of Belden's sweetheart in Paris at once, but discarded her, because the two women didn't resemble one another in the least.

FIFTEEN was the number of her stateroom, and she knew that well, yet she had stopped one door short of it, opposite seventeen, and stood listening. The sound was so faint as to be almost indistinguishable, a faint rasping, little more than the buzz of an angry fly caught in the stateroom and trying to find a way out. Certainly it was nothing to attract the attention of anyone going by, as it had hers. It was as though her heart and senses were tuned in to evil tonight, and the faintest whisper of evil could reach her.

She edged closer, into the little open foyer at right-angles to the passageway, in which the door was set. None of the stateroom-doors on the *Gascony* opened directly out into the public corridors. There was a food-tray lying outside the door, covered with a napkin, ready to be taken away.

She edged it silently aside with the point of her foot, stood up closer to the door. The intermittently buzzing fly on the other side of it was more audible now. *Zing-zing, zing-zing, zing-zing.* It would break off short every so often, then resume.

Mrs. Hiram Travis, who had been afraid of strange men and who had shuddered at the mere thought of criminals until twenty minutes ago, smiled knowingly, reached out and began to turn the glass doorknob. It made no sound in her grasp, but the motion must have been visible on the other side. The grating sound stopped dead, something clinked metallically, and then there was a breathless, waiting silence.

The faceted knob had turned as far as it would go in her hand, but the door wouldn't give. A man's voice called out: "Come on, jailer, quit playing hide-and-seek! Whaddya think you're going to catch me doing, hog-tied like I am?"

She tried the knob again, more forcefully. The voice said: "Who's there?" a little fearfully this time.

"Where's the key?" she whispered.

"Who are you?" was the answering whisper.

"You don't know me. I'd like to get in and talk to you—"

"What's the angle?"

"There's something you can do—for me. I want to help you."

"He's got the key, he took it up with him. Watch yourself, he'll be back any minute—" But there was a hopeful note in the voice now. "He's

got both keys, the one to the door and the one to these bracelets. I'm cuffed to the head of the bed and that's screwed into the floor—"

"I left him up at the bar," she said, "If I could get near enough to him maybe I could get hold of the keys."

There was a tense little silence while the man behind the door seemed to be thinking things over.

"Wait a minute," the voice said, "I've got something here that'll help you. Been carrying it around in the fake sole of my shoe. Stand close under that open transom, I'll see if I can make it from here—"

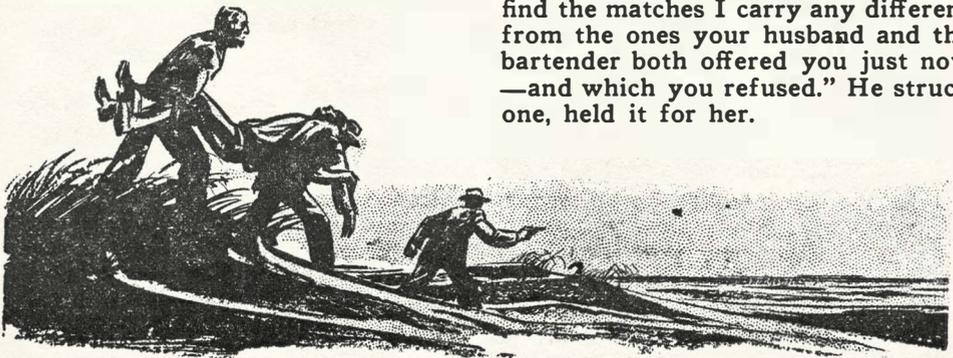
Presently a little white, folded paper packet flew out, hit the wall opposite, landed at her feet.

She stooped swiftly to pick it up, scarcely conscious of the unaccustomed grace of her movement.

"Get it? Slip it into his drink, it's the only chance you've got. Now listen, the cuff-key is in his watch-pocket, under his belt; the door key's in his breast-pocket. He turned his gun over to the purser when we came aboard, said he wasn't taking any chances of my getting hold of it while he was asleep. I don't know who you are or what the lay is, but you're my only bet. We dock tomorrow. Think you can do it?"

"I can do anything—tonight," Mrs. Hiram Travis of Dubuque answered as she moved away from the door.

FISHER looked at her a full half-minute while she stood beside him holding her cigarette poised. "Certainly," he said at last, "but you won't find the matches I carry any different from the ones your husband and the bartender both offered you just now—and which you refused." He struck one, held it for her.



"You see everything, don't you?"

"That's my business." He turned back to the bar again, as though to show the interruption was over.

She didn't move. "May I drink with you?"

He stiffened his finger at the Frenchman. "Find out what the lady is having." Then turned to go. "If you'll excuse me—"

"With you, not on you," she protested.

"This isn't a pleasure trip," he told her briefly. "I'm on business. My business is downstairs, not up here. I've stayed away from it too long already. Sorry."

"Oh, but a minute more won't matter—" She had thrust out her arm deftly, fencing him in. She was in the guise of a lady, and to be unnecessarily offensive to one went counter to a training he had received far earlier than that of the Department. It was ingrained in the blood. She had him at a disadvantage. He gave in grudgingly, but he gave in.

She signaled her husband to join them, and he came waddling up, blowing his nose and obviously beginning to feel his liquor. Tonight was one night Sarah didn't seem to give a rap how much he drank, and it was creeping up on him.

Georges set down three Martinis in a row. Mrs. Travis let a little empty crumpled white paper fall at her feet.

"Y'know," Travis was saying. "About this fella you're bringin' back with you—"

"Sorry," said Fisher, crisply but pleasantly, "I'm not at liberty to discuss that."

Mrs. Travis raised Fisher's drink to her lips with her left hand, moved hers toward him with her right. Georges was busy rinsing his shaker.

"Last Spring one of you fellas showed up in Dubuque, I remember. He was lookin' for some bank-robber. Came around to the office one day—" Travis went into a long, boring harangue. Presently he broke off, looked at Fisher, and turned a startled face to his wife.

"Hey, he's fallen asleep!"

"I don't blame him much," she said, and brushed the lapel of Fisher's coat lightly, then the tab of his vest. "Spilled his drink all over himself," she murmured in explanation. She took her hand away clenched, metal gleaming between the finger-cracks. "Take him outside on the deck with you, Hi," she said. "Sit him in a chair, see if the air'll clear his head. Don't let anyone see him like this in here. . . ."

"You're right," said Travis, with the owl-like earnestness of the partially-intoxicated.

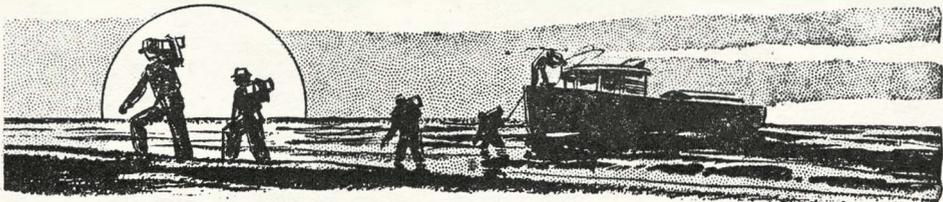
"The boat-deck. No one goes up there at night. I'll join you—presently." She turned and walked away.

SHE dangled the handcuff-key up and down in the palm of her hand, standing back just beyond his reach. He was nearly tearing his arm out of its socket, straining across the bed to get at it.

There was something oddly sinister about her, standing there grinning devilishly at him like that, something that made Steve Belden almost afraid. This ugly dame was really bad. . . .

"Well, come on, use that key! What'd you do, just lift it to come down here and rib with me it? That knockout-powder ain't going to last all night. It's going to pass off in a few minutes and—"

"First listen to what I have to say. (Please turn to page 138)





The Champion

By Max Brand

NEARLY thirty years ago, when beer was only five cents a schooner in the saloons near the Stockton Slough, Jumbo Cafferty looked with apparent suspicion on the change he received after buying a round of drinks. Like a champion prizefighter, Jumbo usually did most of the buying because he was known through the length of the San Joaquin-Sacramento Valley as the greatest haypress feeder in the land. There was even room in his huge body for an odd sense of humor. He picked up a quarter, shook his head over it, and bent it double between his thumbs and forefingers. He did the same to a solid fifty-cent piece and threw them back on the bar. "Why d'you pass out counterfeit in here?" he roared. "Whyn't you have honest money?"

The bartender, abashed, picked up the fallen coins and bit into the fifty-cent piece. Then his eyes screwed up in his head, for instead of sinking into lead, he had almost broken his teeth on the hard metal. Jumbo's followers bellowed laughter as though at a signal.

Then someone by the door yelled: "Hi, Jumbo! Here comes your girl!"

The many beers had rolled a mist over Jumbo's brain but the thought of the widow, like a sea-wind, cleared his mind again and he went to the door with great strides. He pushed the swing-doors open and stepped out into heat and dazzle of the California sun. It was true that Mrs. Rosa Pinzone was coming up the street with her span of bright sorrels drawing the rubber-tired buggy. The silver mountings of the harness flashed like jewels in Jumbo's eyes but they were not half so brilliant as the thought of Rosa. If she inclined a little toward plumpness she made up for it by plenty of bounce. She was a dark beauty with brown eyes full of conversation and her skin was as golden as the dust of poppies. A month before, Jumbo had decided to marry her and settle down at last on her two hundred acres of unmortgaged land. For four successive Saturdays he had given up his evening beer and driven with her to dances to Ripon, to Lodi, and to points between; he had two-

**California—in the days when women wore
pompadours, and men had hair on their chests!**

stepped and waltzed and schottisched with her until six in the morning and gone contentedly back to work with a feeling like that of money in the pocket. And for all that, behold her now shining under the wide brim of a Merry Widow hat and at her side his enemy, his rival, that handsome devil Frenchie who was almost as famous as Jumbo among the haypress fans of the state. It was he who handled the reins.

Now she saw Jumbo. She waved carelessly. She spoke with laughter to Frenchie who looked back over his shoulder and laughed loudly, in turn.

Jumbo's big hands doubled gradually into fists. "I don't make it out," he said.

A voice answered him. "Frenchie and the Moffett crew broke the haypress record a couple of days ago. He fed in close to forty-eight tons."

THE tidings pierced the soul of Jumbo Cafferty. And then a stupor came upon him and remained in spite of all the beers he drank. It was late that night before he muttered: "Yeah, women are like that!" and roused from his coma. "Where's the boss? Where's McCann?" he asked.

"He's over at Shanley's Place," said someone.

Cafferty went to Shanley's and found the owner of the haypress playing cards in a back room, dressed up for Sunday in a white shirt without a collar.

"Who taught Frenchie how to handle a fork? Who taught him how to build a feed and then feed it?" asked Cafferty.

"You did," said McCann.

"Who taught Frenchie everything he knows?" asked Cafferty.

"You did," said McCann. "And what of it?"

"I'll tell you what of it," answered Cafferty. "The dirty rat has gone and

broke the record that him and me set three years ago. He's gone and broke it behind my back. Tomorrow we'll take that record and—"

"Not tomorrow," said McCann, checking a bet. "Not on Monday. The boys gotta get the Sunday beer out of them."

"We're in the Minnehan hay right now," said Cafferty, "and there ain't enough of it for two days' work. We're in the Minnehan hay, and it's the cleanest stack of wheat and barley that I ever seen."

"The boys'll be cooked," said McCann. "They'll all be weak in the knees. Anyway, it ain't a championship crew. Harry Lucas, he ain't no first-rate feeder. And that bale-roller, Sammy Pleasant, he's too young and soft."

"I'll make him big and strong!" exclaimed Cafferty. He thumped a fist against the great arch of his chest. "I'll make 'em all big and strong. I'll scare hell out of 'em. Go get the wagon. We're gonna pick up the crew and start home now."

"It ain't closing time for another hour," protested McCann.

"We're gonna start now."

"All right."

"Hey, you can't quit," said one of the players.

"Argue with this bohunk. Don't argue with me," answered McCann, and got up with a grin and his winnings.

He and Cafferty went the rounds of the Stockton saloons until they had picked up the entire crew. Old Steve, the derrick driver, came weeping and promising to kill Jumbo when he could find a knife to cut the blackness out of his heart. Whelan, the power-driver, and Harry Lucas, the second feeder, were both in the same place and they fought Jumbo savagely to save their last hour for more beer until he bumped their heads together and lugged them out, one un-

der each arm. Chicago, the wire-puncher, was a drunken, senseless log, and so was Sammy Pleasant, the young bale-roller. Jumbo put them in the bottom of the wagon where their heads rattled against the iron-bound floorboards all the eleven miles over the dusty, rutted highway until they came to the Minnehan hayfield. It was smoothed by silver moonshine, and the high-shouldered haystack, and the derrick rising above the adjoining haypress was like a black gibbet among the stars.

"Monday is no good to try for a record," repeated McCann, when he pulled up the rig beside the cookwagon.

"Any day is good if I wanta make it good," shouted Cafferty in high anger. "Any day is a Jumbo day, if I wanta make it!"

Jumbo Cafferty sat up in the black of the morning, put a knuckle in each eye to get the sleep out, and swept the straws out of his hair. The rest were struggling their feet into socks wet with dew and grunting as they pulled on their shoes. A half moon dazzled them from the west and only in the east the stars were bright above the gray-green mist of the dawn. Bessie McCann stood at the door of the cookwagon beating on a tin pan and shouting: "Turn out! Turn out! Breakfast! Breakfast!"

Jumbo stretched himself luxuriously, swaying a little from side to side and twisting until he had flexed every pound of the muscle that draped his big bones with elastic ropes and rubbery sheets of strength; then he turned to the east and the pale beginning of what he intended to make the greatest day in his life.

He went to the cookwagon and from a full bucket sloshed some cold water into a wash-basin.

It was young Sammy Pleasant, the bale-roller, about whom he was worrying, for Sammy, he was sure, would prove the weak link in the chain. He was too handsome to be strong, thought Jumbo.

It was Sammy who said, as they sat at breakfast: "There's no use try-

ing. This is Monday, isn't it? And we're all sick with stale beer. We have to put off that try for the record, Jumbo."

There was a deep-throated, sudden assent from all the rest.

Jumbo looked up from his mush and milk, slowly. He saw the eyes of Mrs. McCann, frightened and curious, fixed upon him. Then he rose to his feet. Three other men sat on the same bench but the back-thrust of his great legs shoved it away shuddering inches.

"Whatta you mean?" thundered Jumbo. He paused, and a slight tingling of tinware on the stove followed his roar. "Lying down? Quitting? Yellow? . . . I'm gunna watch for the man that shows yellow today and when I see it I'm gunna break him wide open so's the rest of the world can know what's inside him."

He sat down. He could feel the beat of his pulse in the great artery that ran up the left side of his throat. There was no clatter of spoons or forks. The crew waited, silently, for someone to answer, but there was only a faint sighing sound as Jimmy McCann blew out a long breath of cigarette smoke.

IT WAS still a murky gray-green dawn-twilight when the derrick pulleys began to screech and the first hay dumped on the feeding-table. Cafferty weighted the forkful. It was from the sun-bleached top of the stack but the dew which soaked it made ample compensation. They would be baling heavy hay from the start. Then he built the first feed, swiftly, putting on the layers until they were stacked high. He looked over the battlefield with a calm eye. The men were all in place. Jumbo leaned around the edge of the press and looked down at Whelan.

"What you say, Dick?"

Whelan was knotting the bandana which he would pull up over his nose and mouth when the dust-cloud became too dense for clean breathing. "I'm gunna ride 'em all the way, Jumbo!"

"Al-l-1 *right!*" Jumbo yelled, and jumped back as Whelan tripped the beater and let it fall. It came down gradually, the apron lifting at the same time to force the feed of hay into the press, but such a morsel as Jumbo had prepared no Little Giant press in the country could swallow unassisted. Cafferty first jammed down the pyramided top of the load so that it commenced to spill into the box; then he pulled out the lower layer a bit, gave the whole mass of the feed an assisting thrust, and helped the apron to close with the push of his left hand. As the door clicked, the weighted, iron-bound beater descended with a rush that made the press shudder and set all the guy-cables trembling. Jumbo heard the hay crunch in the bottom of the box and stepped back as the apron fell. He built the second feed, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, each a diminishing mouthful, so that the bale would come compact and square out of the box.

"Bale!" yelled Dick Whelan, as the last feed rammed home.

Jumbo, building the first feed of the next bale with instinctive hands, listened hungrily and heard the clank of the iron as Sammy Pleasant knocked away the locking bar. Then came an instant of silence. No, not utter silence, for Jumbo could hear the hiss of the steel needles as Chicago punched the wires through. He would have two of them through and be picking up the third before Sammy had the door wide and was at the tying with his gloved hands. Yet so quick was Sammy that a moment later his impatient voice, with a thrill of triumph in it, was piping: "Wire! Wire! Wire!" to prove that he had had to wait for the final strand. It was the old duel between roller and wire-puncher.

And now Jumbo heard the bale bump on the dusty floor of the dog-house beneath, and the soft slam of the door. He began to push down the top of the feed. He saw Sammy roll the bale onto the scales, weigh it, write the poundage on the red-wood



There they came—
Frenchie and the widow

tag. As he slipped the tag under the central wire, Sammy shouted over his shoulder: "Two hundred forty. Jumbo!"

Two hundred and forty pounds? And out of the lightest part of the hay? Jumbo laughed with joy.

A dust cloud was rising. Out of that cloud Jumbo shouted encouragement to the crew while his heart swelled with love for them. Even Chicago, with his beautiful face and his crippled body and the malicious devil inside him, seemed to Jumbo a glorious spirit.

THEY put out Jumbo's tally of twenty-five bales in under fifty minutes. Sammy Pleasant shouted the news as Jumbo climbed from the feeders'-table into the soft limbo of the stack and picked up the massive Jackson-fork lightly, with one hand.

"We're going to *kill* that record!" cried Sammy, shaking a fist above his head, laughing up at the giant on the stack.

But Jumbo felt the first cold touch of doubt, for the rolling of twenty-five bales had crimsoned the face of Sammy Pleasant; and where the dust whitened his cheeks, the rolling sweat inscribed lines of an undecipherable writing.

"... but he's proud! Book-learning makes a man proud."

Sammy, in fact, had gone halfway through high school.

The sun was already hot but Jumbo.

who never had known fatigue, could sweat a gallon and feel no difference. However, what would happen to the rest when flesh began to melt away?

Now his soul was pinched when he heard Sammy's voice calling out the lighter weights of Lucas' tally: "Two thirty-five; two twenty-five; two thirty-two..."

Yet after all he could not expect Harry Lucas to jam the press as he did and build the bales up like the solid grain of wood from top to bottom. Lucas was no Frenchie, swift-handed, dexterous, with the strength of a bull behind a cat's-paw. Jumbo's heart softened, remembering Frenchie whom he had taken to his heart like a brother, confiding to him all the intricate little devices of the feeder's art. They had built the old record together and broken it over and over until it stood above forty-seven tons. He had given, always, a full share of the glory to Frenchie, but it was true that people looked up to him rather than to the foreigner for an explanation of the great runs the press had made in those days.

So Frenchie had gone off by himself and now, with his natural strength and with his purloined craft, he had helped to put the high mark within eight pounds of forty-eight tons! The loss of Frenchie had been like the loss of a hand.

An audience began to gather before the middle of the morning for the news had spread through the district that the McCann press was trying for the record. Before the morning-lunch period Sammy Pleasant shouted up at Jumbo: "Frenchie! Frenchie's here! He's got your gal!"

Jumbo saw the big fellow at once, in a blue silk shirt with a red necktie. His overalls fitted him as closely as a sailor's trousers around the narrow of the hips. He wore a hat of clean gray felt pushed back from his face, and, as usual, he was smiling, for Frenchie seemed to find the world around him a little ridiculous.

There was the widow sitting beside him in her rubber-tired buggy, in her fluffy yellow dress with a red some-

thing at her throat, paying no more attention to Jumbo than to a man in a picture but adoring Frenchie with upward eyes. And yet for the moment Jumbo could forget the two hundred acres and Rosa as well, he was so stirred by the sight of his old partner. Out of the hot days of struggle in the past he remembered only the singing voice of Frenchie calling through the dust-cloud:

"Courage! Le diable est mort!"

Jumbo delayed a first feed for a moment as he danced on the platform and waved his great arms. "Oh, Frenchie! Hi, Frenchie!" he shouted. "How y'are, boy?"

Frenchie turned at Jumbo's cry, lifted the hand which held a cigarette in a slight salute, and once more was laughing with Rosa.

Jumbo did not feel anger but only a sorrow for the old days when he had been to Frenchie a great and faultless god; and he knew that no one ever had been to him what Frenchie was in the other years: a tower of strength, a wall to lean on.

A MOMENT later Mrs. McCann came out with the mid-morning lunch of bread, butter, stewed plums, and a pail of steaming black coffee. Jumbo swung down from the table and went up to Frenchie. "Well, you come over to see how we can do it, eh? Wait! We're gunna stick that record where you'll never touch it!"

Having spoken, he waited with a childish eagerness for a flash of the old warm friendship.

"You won't do it with Sammy Pleasant," Frenchie said. He pointed. "He's sick. He's going to crash on you in an hour or so."

"Don't kill yourself trying, Jumbo," said Rosa. "You're not young like Frenchie, you know."

Disappointment, in Jumbo, turned into anger that made him clench his fists, but since his boyhood he had walked in fear of what his big hands might do, so he swallowed his first wrath.

Then he turned and regarded Sammy Pleasant. The big lad reclined

with head and shoulders against the bottom of the bale-stack, holding a cup of coffee which the shudder of his hand kept spilling.

Jumbo went toward his bale-roller and heard Frenchie's laughter behind him. He dropped to one knee beside Sammy Pleasant. "How you feel?"

"Fine."

Jumbo pushed his fingers into Sammy's hair and tilted back his head. Against the heel of his palm he felt the rapid blood in the temple beating.

"I'm all right, Jumbo," said Sammy Pleasant. "Don't you worry. I've got a lot left in me and I'm going to pour it all in."

Jumbo stood up. "Stop piling them three high. Leave the tops till noon and I'll throw 'em up."

From that point on, Sammy Pleasant rolled the top bales to the side and left them on the ground.

Jumbo looked down on the greatness of his own body and laughed. "The kid ain't like me. He's made big but he ain't made same as me. God was taking His time when He made me."

He remembered what Rosa had said about youth and laughed again. He was thirty-five but he never had thought about time. Time to Jumbo was a child unworthy of consideration. But then the thought of Rosa's smile and her two hundred acres stabbed him again. He saw that he could win both Rosa and the record by this day's work.

When twelve o'clock was announced by the banging of the tin pan at the cookhouse, the bale-roller's tally showed two hundred and twenty-one bales tied and weighed, at an average of two hundred and thirty-five pounds to the bale. That gave them within a few pounds of twenty-six tons for the eight hours of work and Jumbo, as he went into the cookhouse, was jubilant.

But it was a cheerful, noisy crew that sat around the table in the cookhouse until Sammy Pleasant, with half of his steak uneaten, got up from the bench and went out of the wagon, steadying himself with his hands

against the wall. The other men stopped eating for a moment and looked at one another with empty, staring eyes, and nothing moved except the streams of sweat that ran down their faces, for in the cookhouse the heat of the stove was added to the hundred and ten degrees of that blistering day.

"He's big, but he's a bum," exploded Dick Whelan, at last.

BUT Jumbo got up and left the cook-wagon, carrying Sammy's unfinished plate with him. His own stomach was clamoring for more food but he turned his back on thoughts of himself and went down to where Sammy Pleasant lay under the wagon with his face in his hat, groaning a little with every breath he drew.

Jumbo turned him on his back. The two hundred pounds of him was as loose as water.

"I'm fine. I wasn't hungry. I'm fine," said Sammy.

Jumbo fanned his face with his hat. "Take it easy . . . I ain't gonna see you killed. Take it easy . . . Let the record go. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

"I'm going to last it out," said Sammy. "Did you see Frenchie laughing? . . . I'm going to last it out, all right."

"Not unless'n you eat," said Jumbo. "Leave your head rest on my knee, like that. . . ."

"I won't be a baby. I'm not sick."

"You just leave go all holts and take it easy," ordered Jumbo. "There's nobody can see us."

"I'm no man. I haven't any guts," Sammy said, when the steak was finished, "like you got, Jumbo. There's nobody like you."

"I guess there *ain't* anybody like me, at that. I'll tell you what. I never was tired in my life. You lay there and rest while I go and throw up those bales."

He went off and spent the rest of the lunch hour completing the stack, throwing the bales up lightly, not with the craft of a bale-roller but with sheer, clumsy excess of power.

The whole audience from beneath the oak-tree, except Frenchie, came out to watch him. Frenchie, of course, had gone back to spend the heat of the day lolling on the Pinzone porch.

Jim Coffey's boy touched his leg and said: "Jumbo, is it true? Are you the strongest man in the world?" And nobody laughed.

But just at the end of the lunch hour, as he hoisted the last third-rank bale into place, old Tom Walters came and confronted him. "You're going to make yourself sick, Jumbo Cafferty," he said. "The bigger you are, the more there is for the sun to fry. A man isn't meant to work straight through a day as hot as this. A man is meant to take an hour off for lunch. *God* means him to!"

Heat was raging through Cafferty's brain so that the trees in the distance seemed to lift and fall on the waves of it. Those bales had turned to lead.

And then he was back on the platform with the sun focused as with a burning glass on the back of his head, and the dust cloud suspiring upward around the press. Straight up the dust lifted for there was not a breath of wind, not a touch of mercy in that terrible afternoon.

Yet Sammy Pleasant was carrying on very well. He looked sicker than ever but he was rolling and piling the bales steadily.

"How you making it?"

"That steak's working," yelled Sammy, white-faced but laughing.

Cafferty's heart opened. He and Rosa would have a son like Sammy, able to laugh, beautiful to behold, but harder in substance.

Then disaster struck suddenly, from an unexpected direction.

A Jackson-fork is the gift of a genius to men who have to handle hay swiftly, in large masses, but it has four tines as sharp as needles and the curve necessary to the steel prongs makes them clumsy and dangerous. Jumbo was on the twentieth bale after lunch when a voice screamed, and he saw the derrick was bringing in not only a forkload of hay but Harry Lucas writhing on top of it.

A tine had gone through the fleshy part of Harry's left forearm. Jumbo got him to the ground, and Bessie McCann bandaged the wound.

"There goes our record, and God help it," said Jimmy McCann.

"Jumbo, I'm sorry," said Harry Lucas, his long face twisting with pain. "I wanted to do it for you. We all wanta do it for you. But the fork just sort of flipped around and snagged me."

"Steve!" Jumbo shouted. "Steve, you could handle a Jackson-fork for half a day, couldn't you?"

"I handled a Jackson-fork before you were more'n born, son."

"Listen, Harry," said Jumbo, "you got hands enough to work the derrick horse. And we can go right on!"

"How can we go on?" asked Jimmy McCann. "With only one man to do the feeding . . . There ain't no man that can feed a press, without being spelled, for a whole half-day!"

"Can't nobody do it?" said Jumbo. He laughed. "Take a look and see. *I* can! Harry, get out there to the derrick horse. Steve, let me see how good you are with that fork."

THE spectators had crowded in around the press crew and they began cheering when Lucas with his bandaged arm went out to take control of the derrick horse. Jumbo looked and saw that only Frenchie, sitting beside Rosa Pinzone under the shadow of a great striped umbrella over her buggy, was silent, smiling with an inward, contemptuous knowledge. It was the only thing that could make Jumbo's heart sink.

He never had known fatigue before, but he knew it by the time he had pushed another ten tons through the jaws of that Little Giant press. A haypress feeder works like a sprinter, at full capacity all the time. Some track athletes can sprint almost an entire quarter mile, but no one, no matter what his powers, can sprint a half mile or a mile. That, in a sense, was what Jumbo was trying to do.

He called to Jimmy McCann. "Hey, Jimmy, fetch the flask over."

McCann brought the whiskey flask and handed it up.

"That stuff's no good on a day like this," he said. "It'll boil in you."

Jumbo said nothing, but when the power horses were changed he used the spare moment to pour a long draught down his throat. Afterward, he had false power for half an hour. Then the fatigue grew greater, in a sudden wave, and he felt choked.

It was the dust that did it, he kept telling himself. No wind would come to slant the white smother away from the press. It boiled up, thick and heavy, thicker and whiter than a fog with the sun sparkling through its outer layers. One could feel it about the waist, like thin water. When it reached the nose, it poured into the lungs like a liquid and set the men gasping. It often made of Sammy Pleasant, seen from the feeders' table above, a mere shadowy silhouette as he bobbed up and down, rolling his bale toward the stack. He was slow even in lifting the bales two high. Jumbo thought Sammy would faint.

The mid-afternoon lunch came at half past four and Jumbo felt his knees give way under him.

When he got to the lunch pails, the men stopped eating and looked at him. Young Sammy Pleasant pushed to his feet and came to him, wavering as though he were walking into a fierce wind.

"Jumbo," he said, "if it wasn't you, I'd say you were fagged out."

"Fagged?" shouted Jumbo. "I never was tired in my life."

Jimmy McCann brought matters back to a practical basis. He had the bale-roller's book in his hand as he said: "Boys, I want you to listen to something. We've bailed and piled thirty-eight tons of hay already. A hay-press day is from dawn to sunset. Keep on at this rate, and you're gunna turn out fifty tons of hay and break every record that ever was on the books."

He had his answer not from the panting crew of the press but from the crowd of spectators. There were two hundred of them, now, shouting

applause. Only Frenchie was silent and aloof, when it seemed to Jumbo that one word from his old partner would give him vital strength. But Rosa—bless her!—was clapping her hands vigorously. The very soul of Jumbo was comforted.

He munched a bit of bread, took a long swallow of whiskey, and began to pitch the bales, three high, to make the top row of the stack.

But the lifting of every bale sent a wave of hot blood bursting against his brain. A mist formed across his eyes; through it he could see Frenchie, standing somewhat apart.

Then the brief lunch-period ended as he put up the last bale, and turned back toward the press.

THERE came a time, about twenty bales later, when Jumbo began to forget the record and pray for the sun to go down. But it was plastered against one place in the sky and there it remained hour after hour, burning its rays through the welter of dust.

Now a voice called softly to Jumbo and frightened him a little. For it placed him back in the old, happy days when to his own exhaustless strength was added the river of power that flowed in Frenchie. He saw it was not a ghost but Frenchie himself, who had climbed up to the platform and crouched in a corner, calling:

"Jumbo, you can't do it. You'll kill yourself. You're dying on your feet now. Take a slip and fall and pretend you've knocked out your shoulder. Nobody'll know. . . . You're dying on your feet."

"Get off or I'll run the fork through you!" Jumbo yelled.

Frenchie disappeared, but his voice remained at Jumbo's ear saying:

"You're dying . . . you're dying . . . you're dying on your feet!"

When Frenchie said something it was apt to be true, but of course it was impossible that Jumbo should die like this. That wise God who had made him with such affectionate care would not throw away His handiwork in such a manner. This thought came to Jumbo rather dimly. All things

were dim in the darkness of his eyes, the shadow from within that veiled everything. Through that impalpable curtain he saw Sammy Pleasant, all a-stagger with exhaustion, now piling the bales three high. He could not make the straight lift but he laid the lower rows in two steps, giving each of the top bales two lifts. That was slow work, but the ground would be clean when the sun set and the work ended.

And Jumbo knew this work was done for his sake. It was just after this that he heard the voice of Frenchie suddenly rising:

"Come on, Jumbo! *Le diable est mort!* Ten bales more, Jumbo, and you smash the record to *hell*. . ."

Cafferty knew that cheerful battle cry. He had learned its meaning in the gay old days. *The devil is dead*. The voice was a fountain of brightness that cleared his brain. Once more the pitchfork was light in his hands, building the feeds high and heavy, ramming them down the throat of the press. If only the descending sun had not been a streak of blood-red, staining his consciousness! If only a little time remained!

He heard Frenchie's ringing voice like quicksilver running through his blood, and flicking the others also, touching the whole crew, taking the stagger out of young Sammy Pleasant with a word of praise.

"I gotta win," said Cafferty, to his soul. "Even Frenchie wants me to. Frenchie would be up here helping, if it wouldn't spoil the record. Frenchie—he's with me . . . and God wouldn't hold me back. Even Rosa is helping me now!"

For she had taken her stand near the dog-house in spite of the dust that boiled out around her and whitened her dress; and from a pail of water she sprayed Sammy with her wet fingertips, continual little showers of cool drops.

"For me!" said Jumbo to his bursting heart, and envisioned the pleasant future, the two hundred acres, the well-matched mule team, the heavy wagons with red-painted, shining

wheels, until his thoughts settled upon the bigness, the black beauty, of Rosa's kitchen range and remained there.

HE DISCOVERED that for half of eternity he had been worrying about a certain sound, which was the noise his feet made as he lunged to thrust the feed down the throat of the press. Formerly, it had always been a steady, rhythmic beat but now there was a stutter in it, and he found that he was staggering each time that he stepped forward.

The hay grew heavy again.—It seemed to have turned to sticks of molasses, heavy, clinging to the tines, and his legs had no sense in them whatever.

As he worked, he saw Sammy Pleasant falling from the second tier of bales as he tried to lift a third-row bale into place. He thought that was the end, but a moment later Sammy was pushing the bale into place.

He saw the crowd that stood on the top of the bale stack, yelling itself hoarse every time a bale came out of the press. Hundreds of people had come for miles to see the end of that day.

The voice of Frenchie from beside the scales, where he was adding up the tally of the bales, sang out to him: "Jumbo, one more bale and you win; Jumbo, Jumbo, *le diable est mort!*"

"The devil is dead!" said Jumbo.

He laughed like a drunken, defiant Viking god. Then stilled.

Darkness like a hot, black night had gathered over Jumbo, but he found the hay through the instinctive swing and reach of the hay-fork, built the feed by instinct, and helped the closing apron home. One red glint out of the west told him that the sun still watched him as the beater carried down the fifth feed and the bale was made.

After that he felt himself falling. He heard the separate noises as his knees, his hips, his shoulder and elbows, and then his head struck the floor of the feeders'-table.

HE LIVED by fits and snatches, after that, for hours. First he was aware of Frenchie, kneeling by him and holding up a hand that stopped the cheering voices. Then they were lowering him from the table.

The next thing he knew was Jimmy McCann's voice saying: "My God, he's bleeding from the mouth; he's gunna die!" and then Frenchie silencing McCann with a ripple of cursing.

"How's Sammy?" asked Cafferty.

"Sammy, he is all right."

"He's game, ain't he?"

"Maybe," said Frenchie.

"Send everybody away except you," said Jumbo. Frenchie sent them all away. "Make me stop trembling," said Jumbo. "It's like I was afraid. If they see me, they'll think I'm afraid."

Frenchie took his hand and the trembling ceased. The doctor came. He spoke in a quiet, precise voice after he had listened with a stethoscope, and taken the temperature. "Can you hear me, Jumbo?"

Something locked Jumbo's jaws and he could not speak, but he heard Frenchie say: "He's gone again. It's like that. Comes and goes. Doctor, tell me what's gunna happen?"

Jumbo lost the doctor's words but he heard the slow, falling voice.

When clear consciousness came back to him again, his body was so cold that he felt he was afloat on a black sea, with the waters about to lap over his mouth. Above him the Milky Way was a dust cloud blowing through the sky and the stars were drawing down closer and closer to the earth. Some of the stars were blotted out by Frenchie's shoulders.

"Frenchie, there's a lot to think about that I never thought."

"Ah, my old!"

"Yeah, you never'll speak English very good," said Jumbo. He added: "But I like you the way you are; I like you fine."

"*Mon vieux!*" said Frenchie.

"What does that mean?" said Jumbo. "Don't be a fool like you was a woman or something."

But he knew by Frenchie's weeping voice that his life was feared for, and this made him want to laugh. Instead of laughing he fell asleep.

When he wakened again, a cold wind was blowing breath into his body. The stars were dim in the east and a gray light shone faintly on the dew which covered the head of Frenchie.

"Frenchie!" he said.

At the vigor in his voice, Frenchie leaned forward with a start. "*Tiens!*" said Frenchie. "The strength comes back to you! May all the doctors be— Ah hi, Jumbo, but I have been sitting here with some thoughts."

"Where is Rosa?" asked Jumbo.

"Tomorrow," said Frenchie. "I tell you tomorrow."

Jumbo lifted his head. "Now what are you talking about?"

"Listen, *mon vieux*," said Frenchie, bending to peer into the eyes of his friend. "When Sammy dropped, Rosa comes to him running and takes his head in her lap. Bah! . . . and calls him her darling!"

"Yeah?" said Jumbo, watching two hundred well-fenced acres fade from his vision.

". . . and her sweetheart," continued Frenchie, "and helps him into her buggy. I spit upon it! . . . and takes his head on her shoulder and drives away. . . ."

"Yeah?" said Jumbo. "That kind of leaves the world to the two of us, don't it?" Jumbo held out his hand.

Frenchie took it in both of his. "My old!" said he.

"You gotta learn English right," said Jumbo, disturbed. "I'm gunna take some time off and teach you."

He looked beyond Frenchie into the green east, with a curious joy for his eye seemed to travel across the horizon and through an opening gate of amber light. Then from the trees near the slough some crows got up and flew in single file across the brilliance, slowly laboring their wings up and down, as though they were drawing the day after them across the great world.

Bloodstones

by H. Bedford-Jones

A Novelet of Romance
and Adventure in the
Land that Law Forgot

I

Red as Flame

GARTH reached out for Dysart's tobacco pouch. He had buried Dysart an hour previously, and thought he might as well use his late partner's tobacco. You must see him as he performed this trifling action, on which his entire future existence was to depend. Stripped to his shorts, his body lean and hard and brown with the Malay sun, with clipped, yellow hair and very bright blue eyes beneath the white mark of his sun-helmet—eyes now haggard and worn with strain, laughing no longer. Brown arm and hard brown hand adrip with sweat. Garth was waiting for the rains to break, waiting with all his heart and soul.

The rubber plantation was not far from the Siamese border. As Dysart had said before gasping out his life in a hurry, between Siam and hell. Dysart had been out here eight years, Garth only two, but Garth knew hell lay on four sides of him right now. The outbreak of cholera would not pass until the rains came.

His fingers touched the tobacco pouch, took it from its peg, and opened it. As he began to tease out some of the tobacco into his pipe, he thought about sending home the word to Dysart's family in England. A letter, of course. No hurry; what with the cholera and the plantation, he had his hands full at the moment.

"And I'll have lawyers up from Penang to settle the inheritance, and Dysart's share of the plantation," he muttered with a slight frown. "Thank

heaven we were full, equal partners! . . . Don't know much about his family. Apparently he wasn't on any too good terms with 'em. I suppose some of his papers will turn up with the address."

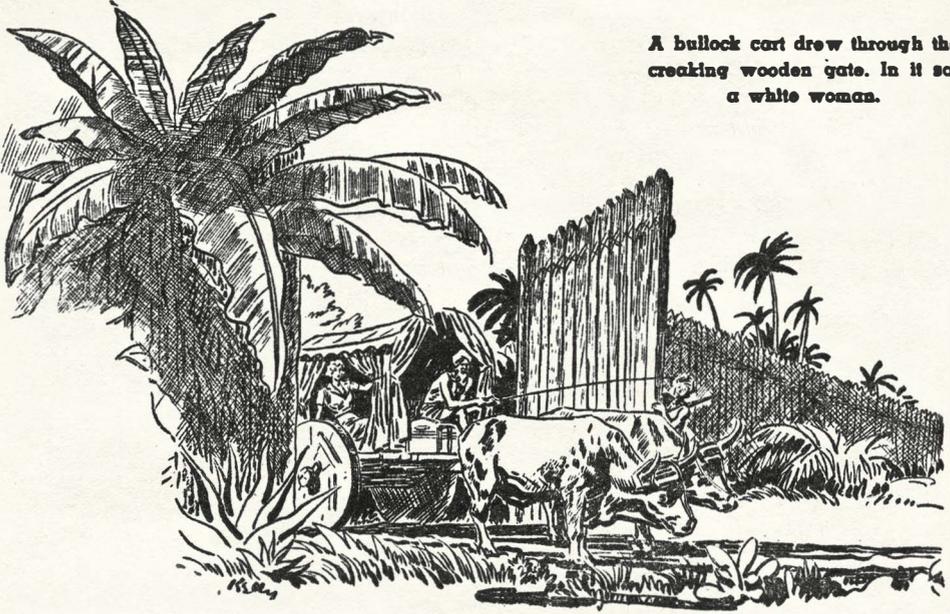
He frowned again. A hard, craggy man of thirty, Dysart had been. He had come out as a creeper, or assistant manager, on one of the big company plantations, had made money, and was not too careful how he made it. Still, he had been square as a die with Garth. A reliable man, if not a bosom friend. Garth was all for hard work and damned little sentiment. You could tell that by the frosty gleam of his blue eye.

"I'll make a go of it; I've learned the ropes," he went on, as he stuffed his pipe. "That is, if I don't go under with the cholera. We've lost a hundred out of five hundred coolies to date, and Lord knows how many Malays and women; fifteen hundred acres to keep going somehow. I'll pull through. If we—Hello!"

Something hard in the tobacco touched his fingers. He leaned forward and turned over the pouch, emptying it. Something tinkled on the teak boards of the table. Garth sat staring at the three scarlet-glinting stones—glorious stones, of a deep glowing crimson. Rubies, exceptional rubies, cut by native cutters up at the mines in the northern hills.

Garth knew nothing of stones. He needed to know nothing. One look was enough. Three rubies, dark as frozen blood, spoke for themselves. Here was a fortune. How had Dysart come by them? Not honestly, that was certain.

His mind slipped back. Dysart had been away for a week or more on a hunt. The cholera had burst suddenly during his absence. He had returned here, had died within two days. Not



A bullock cart drew through the creaking wooden gate. In it sat a white woman.

once had he mentioned rubies. These were the facts. But Garth had heard stories galore about Burmese rubies. Smuggled, stolen . . . Dysart had brought these back with him, hidden in his tobacco pouch. Rubies like these must have been stolen from the mines; these three stones spelled a fortune.

Garth caught his breath, leaned back, and held a match to his pipe as his eyes gripped the three splotches of red. Swiftly as his brain rejected it, the temptation hit him just the same, hit him hard.

Here he was alone, ruler of his little domain, well off the beaten track. The railroad was a half-day's travel by pony or cart. The managers and foremen were either Chinese or native. Not a soul would know or suspect. The three red stones were his for the taking. A fortune—all his.

And what would it mean?

An end to this terrific labor that gutted soul and body. Labor and peril by day and night; incessant concentration on the trees, on the rubber-machinery, on the men who worked it. He was everything from midwife to expert mechanic, in this place. And now three little red stones would end

it—would bring him more in an hour than he could earn from this plantation in years. He could give the damned thing away.

A smile lent his lips a wry touch. "But it's mine; or half of it. I've worked it up, I've made it. I own it. These stones belong to Dysart's heirs. That's the simple way of it. Too bad, but so it is."

Garth looked at things like this, always. Even Dysart had urged him to take a Malay girl, as others had, but Garth merely smiled, seemed a trifle tempted, and did not. It looked very simple to him, unfortunately. There can be something terrible about this simplicity, about a man who sees things like that.

HE PUT the stones back into the pouch, and the tobacco on top of them, and hung the pouch up on its peg. He looked around the empty little house of *bilian* poles and split-bamboos, one room with a "bath" behind, raised on poles above the ground. His own bungalow, across the *kampong*, was exactly like this one; but death had hit here. Dysart was gone, and his Malay woman too, both dead:

even the servants were dead. Well, the place had been disinfected.

With a shrug, Garth reached out again, this time to the water bottle. He poured some of the reddish fluid into a glass and drank it with a grimace. Permanganate of potash everywhere, to chase the cholera out of corners; even in this water. At least he was alive, while—

Sepak, his servant, came running and stood before him breathing hard.

"*Tuan!* A bullock cart is at the gates; the guards have stopped it. A woman is in it. A white woman. She wants to come here."

Garth's jaw fell. "A white woman? Who is she? Who is with her?"

"No one, *tuan*. That Babu from the railroad village—may Allah curse him for an infidel!—is driving the cart."

Garth reached out again, now for his topee and clothes. There was some mistake about this, of course. The woman could not be coming here. She was probably trying to reach the new mission-school over at Kuala Pedang, and had got her names twisted.

Wearily, for he had already tramped miles that day, Garth emerged into the sunlight of the clearing and cursed his stiffened legs as he climbed down the ladder to the ground. Across the *kampong* or compound was his own place. He avoided it and took the path to the main road, past the factory with its crude rubber-milling machine, on out to the main entrance of the plantation. Sepak trotted at his heels.

"What is the news from the village?" demanded Garth.

"The news is good, *tuan*," Sepak replied. "No more are sick. The rains are coming in a few days at most. . . . Two of the Tamil coolies were caught trying to pass the guards this morning."

"Have them flogged," snapped Garth. Why the devil would these poor fools never learn the value of quarantine? "Anything else?"

"*Tuan*, the village sent word. Pesap the hunter found another man with his wife, and the other man is Sakya, the arrow-maker. Instead of killing

the two, Pesap is awaiting your judgment; he has them tied up."

"Go to the village. I will come there and give judgment as soon as I've talked with this woman and sent her on her right road," said Garth.

Sepak darted off toward the Malay village, while Garth strode on to the gates, where his Sikh guard had halted a bullock cart. He saw the woman talking with the stalwart, turbaned Sikh. An eager thrill shook him as he approached and took in the cool, slender length of her eager greeting, her level gaze and well-balanced features. Not too pretty, luckily; but she had character. There was something intensely calm and serene about her.

"Mr. Garth, isn't it? I'm Ellen Dysart." Garth made a gesture of surprise. "It can't be true—what this man was just telling me. About my brother."

The world turned around for Garth. He wanted to curse the Sikh for talking, and could not. Dysart's sister? Coming out here like this?

"Eh?" he said. "I didn't know you were coming."

"Nobody did. I just came out from England, you know. I wanted to surprise him." Her face held a queer hurt agitation. "Tell me, please! It can't be true."

Garth nodded, and took a quick breath, facing the worst.

"Sorry, but it is. He was buried this morning. Look here—this is a mess! You have no business here. We've got a cholera epidemic going full steam. I'm terribly sorry to be so blunt and rude, but you just can't—"

Her face stopped him; he thought she was going to collapse, she went so white.

"You don't understand," she said, and to his surprise her voice was quite firm and steady. "Alan and I were quite alone in the world. I was coming out to make my home with him. I've nowhere else, you see. No one at all . . ."

"Well, you've got to stay away from here just now," said Garth, staring at her. He had been on a tension for days now; his nerves began to go. "I'm

alone here and there's the devil to pay. You take the night train and go on to Kuala Lumpur for a few days; the rains are due any day, and then you can come back safely."

She wrinkled up her forehead, repaying his stare, and shook her head.

"I'll just take over my brother's place, thanks," she said. "You seem to need a bit of help. I've had nurse's training—"

"You clear out," snapped Garth. "I don't want any woman around—especially you. I've no time to be polite and talk airy nonsense with you and help you get over the shock of your brother's death. I've buried a hundred of my men and I've got several hundred more to see through this business. May be dead myself tomorrow. You can see that I don't want any more grief than I have already."

She flushed a little, not comprehending the American slang, taking his last words quite literally. "Thanks, I don't need any help, and I'll keep my grief to myself, Mr. Garth. But I think you need a bit of help. I've every right to take my brother's place; and I mean to do it."

Every right! Why, of course. By her own words, she was Dysart's heir. She owned half the plantation now. She owned—good Lord! The rubies, yes. A savage laugher broke from Garth.

"Want to step right into hell, do you?" he broke out. "Why, you poor silly female, you don't know the first thing about the life. Just the ordinary existence here would do you up in a week's time; but now we've blazing fury on all sides. No doctor. The mission chap died, and the nearest men are too busy with their own cholera to look at us."

"And you're on the ragged edge, aren't you?" she said. Garth found himself gasping mentally at her inflexible, cool precision. Then she struck into his very thoughts. "Yes, I mean it. Alan was your partner. If he's dead, then I'm part owner here. I mean to take over, that's all. You can't stop me."

"Damn you!" blurted Garth, and turned very red. "Oh, see here! I'm

sorry. Please forgive me. I'm just a bit done up—"

"Don't mention it; I can swear rather fluently myself, if necessary," she said, and smiled a little. Her smile was good to see; it lit up her features marvelously. "Will you tell this Hindu what to do with my luggage, please?"

Garth swallowed hard. He made a last effort.

"Please, Miss Dysart, go away and come back later! I tell you, I don't want you here now. It's no place for a woman. The stink in the village would knock you over, and I must go there right off. I can't be catering to a lot of feminine prejudices. I've got to work—"

He broke off, conscious that he had descended to trifles. He gave the Babu a helpless look, and then gestured. "Leave the *memsahib's* luggage here."

"With alacrity, *sahib*, and thanks to God that I need come no closer," said the Hindu, tumbling luggage out of the cart. Garth held open the gate.

"Come in then. . . . You'll be sorry."

She shook hands, and smiled again.

"Perhaps you'll be able to get some sleep tonight, Mr. Garth."

Garth stifled impolite words; true, he had been up all night with Dysart. The two of them walked on together; he stumbled now and then as he walked, wearily.

II

A Woman Can't . . .

IN THE village, he gave simple and direct judgment in the matter of Pesap the hunter, the unfaithful woman, and the terrified, bound arrow-maker. "Let Pesap divorce his wife, after the law of Allah. Let Sakya then take her to wife, without dowry. Since he hungers after her, let him have her. It is finished."

The Malays applauded with open appreciation. Garth picked out servants for Ellen Dysart and sent Sepak to have Dysart's bungalow put into shape and get up her luggage. Then he walked with her through the village.

The stench was frightful. Death was here and there, but no new cholera cases had developed. The barracks of the Tamil and Chinese laborers were next on the tour of inspection. And they were not pretty places either. Reports from the watchmen, from the guards told off to disinfect the wells, and Garth could turn his steps homeward toward the evening.

In the cool *kampong*, he took her to the bungalow and up the ladder, and showed her the rear room.

"Baths," he said laconically. "They'll bring up tubs of water. Dine with me at the other bungalow in an hour. Oh, one thing more!" He indicated Dysart's black leather tobaccopouch hanging on its peg. "Bring that over with you. I'll have a half-hour's sleep. I'll feel more like talking."

So he left her, to shave and bathe and get a spot of sleep before dressing in the hot sunset.

At the back of his mind, even while he slept, lay the three red stones. Not the woman; he was too weary to waste thought on her. The rubies—that was the big thing. He could appreciate what it must mean. Such stones were no aimless mine-offal; they would be known and numbered in native minds, the subject of whispers and jungle rumors. They had turned up here, far from Burma and the mines—how? In only one way: by the path of blood. The secret was gone with Dysart, but not lost.

No matter how or where Dysart had got them, all this world of hill and jungle must even now be vibrant with drums and voices speaking of them. Whether smuggled out of Burma, stolen from some Siamese temple, or filched from a native-hoarder, no matter; there would be the drums, in any case! Stones did not just disappear, in this part of the world, without all sorts of repercussions.

Ellen Dysart listened, wide-eyed, as Garth told her all this and more, after giving her one cautious glimpse of the three red drops.

"Keep 'em in the pouch. Nobody would dream of looking there," he concluded. "And don't look at them

yourself, unless you're sure you're all alone."

"But what are they worth?" she asked.

"A fortune. I suggest that you take 'em and go, tomorrow morning."

"I'm going to work in the village and barracks in the morning, thanks."

"You can't. You don't know the people. You don't talk Malay."

"Give me two of your Sikhs who understand English. I'll take all this end of the job off your hands. Later, I can catch on to the plantation work."

"Don't you understand?" He regarded her curiously, searching her eyes, her features, her firmly slender and capable hands. "You've no need. Those stones make you rich. Hire a man to come in and help me run the outfit—"

She smiled slowly. "Don't you understand? Having money isn't being rich. I must have something to do. I want to do this work, take over Alan's place."

"A woman can't."

"Men have always said that," and now she laughed softly. "Wait and see."

He saw her safe home, and returned to sleep in the sweating night, wondering at the spirit of her. True to her word, she had kept any grief to herself; yet he knew she must have grieved.

Those accursed red stones weighed on his mind as though they had been hung about his neck. He wished with all his heart she would clear out with them.

THE rains broke that night in a flood. Day brought a new world; the cholera was wiped away as by magic. Ellen Dysart, however, had plenty to do before the village and the barracks were half to her satisfaction. Each day that passed dragged at Garth. He had a horrible certainty about those red stones. He waited, as he went about his work, in the uncomfortable assurance of hearing something about them; he could only hope that Dysart had kept clear of crime in obtaining them.

So heavy grew his feeling that, in the lull of returning normality, he made one determined effort to get rid of Ellen Dysart and the rubies together—for her own sake. He appreciated her work and herself; indeed, he appreciated her far too much, he told himself. Their meals, together their daily contacts, had brought a new light into his life here. His daily grind now covered all that he and Dysart had formerly split between them; mornings divided between ground-clearing and the rubber-work, afternoons in processing the latex, and in making the rounds of the cattle and labor-lines, and in settling disputes among the workers and the Malays. Yet he knew he must get Ellen Dysart and the rubies out of here.

So, of a morning, he walked her grimly about the plantation, explaining the thousand and one details of the day's work. They ended up in a far corner where Chinese coolie gangs were clearing *lalang* weed preparatory to tree-plantings.

"From muster-roll in the morning to inspection of the cattle sheds at night," he told her, "this is man's work. I don't doubt your ability. I do doubt your physical strength. Beyond all this, you're a woman, and to any woman there are numerous practical drawbacks in tackling this job."

"Will you kindly mention one of them?" she retorted with challenging air, and tapped her khaki-drill skirt with the riding-crop she carried.

"Not necessary." Garth turned his back. "Now, while I take a glance at the work over there, suppose you lift your skirts and take a look at your legs."

An instant later he heard a faint, startled cry, and grinned. When, at her command, he swung around, she was standing pale and shaken.

"Where did those awful things come from?" she gasped.

"Leeches are everywhere, with the rains. You can't keep the bloodsuckers out," he rejoined. "That is, during the day. They get in around the eye-lets of your boots. Your brother and I could pick each other clean occa-

sionally, but that's obviously out of the question with you and me. Another thing, you can't very well go about alone." He flicked a hand at the trees, where monkeys by the score were chattering.

"If you took a tumble and were knocked out, those little dears you were admiring a few minutes ago would be all around you. And what would happen? They'd tear off your skin in shreds and leave you for the ants to finish. Or the ants themselves—you'll strike red ants before you know it, and you have to strip and get 'em off in a hurry. Can you? I fancy not."

Her face had gone gray with realization. "Oh!" she said, expelling a slow breath as she stared at him. "I see. You're rather brutal about it. But do you think that I'm going to be deterred by that sort of thing?"

"I rather think you are," he said gravely. "I've only touched the edges. You'll find out all sorts of things for yourself, and you won't like 'em, either. May as well face the facts once and for all. Women like you just weren't made for this sort of a job."

"I shan't admit it," she exclaimed. Color lifted in her cheeks; her gray eyes flared suddenly. "I can do my part, even if it's not out here. I can look after the dressing stations for sick coolies. I can run the bungalows, I can attend to a dozen things that'll lighten your end of the work!"

"Much better," said Garth, "to go back to civilization and hire a white man to represent you here, and lighten my end of the real burden. You can do it, with those three aces your brother left behind."

"You really don't want me here," she said slowly, as though just realizing the fact. The hurt look in her eyes stung him, almost stung him into blurting out the truth; but he checked himself and smiled.

"Right. You should be able to see, even from the most elementary Mrs. Grundy standpoint, that it wouldn't do. You've pitched in beautifully at a moment of crisis; you've given me

simply invaluable help. Now your job is to clear out gracefully and leave me to run the show, either on a partnership basis or—"

"You are brutally frank about it," she said. And smiled a little.

IT WAS just then that Garth became aware of something unusual. The working gangs had halted, to stare. Following their gaze, he sighted a tall white-clad figure approaching by the path that led from the jungle. The odd thing was that, at this far corner of the estate, the man could have arrived only out of the jungle itself.

"But where could Alan have got those rubies?" the girl went on. "He might have bought them from some trader, I suppose—"



"Not with the loose change in his pockets," intervened Garth hurriedly. He shoved aside this query, and the necessity of shielding Dysart's true character from this girl. "Wait here. There's a stranger coming. Let me speak to him alone."

He left her standing, and went hastily to meet the newcomer. The man was excessively thin, fairly young, and deep eyes burned in his dark hatchet-face. He was very spruce, with a black mustache, but his whites told of hard jungle service and his topee was patched as though a hole had been knocked in it at one time.

"Hello! Where did you spring from?" demanded Garth.

"Morning. Oh, we're camped a little way off. My name's Pembroke," he said, in English faintly clipped and accented. "This must be Dysart's plantation. He invited us over to look in."

Garth shook hands, as a matter of custom; he was astonished by the steely hardness of the long skinny fingers.

"Dysart's underground," he said bluntly. He was, inwardly, all in a jangle of warning nerves; his fears had come true. Dysart must have run into this man on his hunting trip. "He got back here, came down with cholera, and died in no time. I'm his partner—Garth."

Pembroke was startled into immobility. His tightly-drawn features froze, his gaze burned into Garth. "Dead! You've got cholera here?"

"Quite an outbreak," Garth said cheerfully. "It's over now the rains have come. So Dysart ran into you, eh? He didn't have any chance to talk about his trip, sorry to say. That's his sister yonder. You'll come along to the *kampong* and lunch?"

"Don't mind if I do, thanks." Pembroke made a slow reply, as his eyes drifted about. "Dysart dead! That's terrible. I don't know what Barday will say to that; it'll hit him hard. Barday's my partner, you know. Left him in camp to run over here. We're running lines for a French company just across the border."

Garth chatted with a nimble tongue, but his brain was busy. Surveyors carving new plantations from the jungle were not rare; the explanation was plausible; still, he somehow felt it to be a lie. Pembroke was no Englishman. Surveyors from across the Siamese border would have no business here. Pembroke's errand lay with the dead Dysart, and Garth could guess what it might be.

As they walked on and he introduced Pembroke to Ellen Dysart, Garth became critically appraising. The slight but significant sag of the white trousers told of a pistol in the hip-pocket.

Pembroke filled and lit his pipe:

the tobacco was English shag, not French at all. "I heard, of course, there was a spot or two of cholera about," he observed. "Didn't know it had struck here, though. I say, these leeches are cursed bad!"

"They are," Garth agreed drily. "Run along, Ellen. We'll follow."

She left them and hurried ahead, laughing, brightly eager. The two men halted and rid themselves of the pests.

"So she didn't come until after Dysart died, eh?" observed Pembroke, as they went on together. "Too bad. He was all right when he got here?"

"Oh, quite," said Garth. He was being pumped now, and he relished it. "He got in a bit late in the evening. When I saw him next day, he was down with the plague, and died before the next dawn. It was rather virulent when it struck; I found a whole family of six Malays dead in one house, even before the case was reported. The ants had already eaten their eyeballs. We've disinfected pretty well."

Pembroke merely nodded and glanced about the *kampong*, which they were entering. Obviously he had no particular fear of cholera. "I must have a chat with you after lunch," he said negligently. "Surely the two of you aren't alone here?"

"At the moment, yes. A couple of police officers will be over for tea later in the day; we usually have one or two visitors around," Garth lied.

Luncheon went off very pleasantly. Pembroke spoke very fully about himself, about his partner Barday, about their work of surveying; he showed himself a man of some charm, of rough experience and ability, but decidedly "not a *sahib*", as the saying goes. This leaked out in tiny ways. Garth guessed him to be ruthless and determined. Ellen, he perceived, liked their visitor not at all.

She left them, after the meal, and returned to her own bungalow. Pembroke lit a cheroot, rubbed his thin hawk-nose, fastened his intent gaze on Garth, and plunged abruptly into his business. "About Dysart. He spent a day with us, in camp. Odd he didn't mention it, or the imitation rubies."

This was clever, and Garth was just a trifle slow on the intake. His eyes must have flickered involuntarily at the word *imitation*.

"Imitation? Rubies? What on earth are you talking about?"

"Just that. Barday had three imitation stones and Dysart took a fancy to 'em. He wanted to have some fun with the traders here, he said, so Barday gave them to him. I suppose you turned them up among his things?"

Garth shook his head. "He didn't mention them, or meeting you. In fact, he was a bit light-headed when I talked with him, and he was gone quickly, you know. I went through his clothes after he died, and I'm certain no such things were in his pockets or on his body. The hunter who went out with him didn't come back, and we've not known what happened to the man. He was a Malay, and a good chap."

"Yes," and Pembroke nodded. "He was with Dysart at our camp. Well, I'd best be getting back," and with this, he dismissed the subject.

Garth walked out with him, saw him off, exchanged cheerful farewells and came back home again, frowning, in search of Ellen Dysart.

III

Raid by Night

SHE was silent, despondent, bitter as Garth spoke of her departure. Her objections had been broken down. Then, at his mention of the rubies, a quick light came into her eyes. She broke out suddenly.

"I know what you think, what you've never said! Alan couldn't have bought those rubies; they're too valuable. And you've been trying to evade the question with me. Well, you don't need to evade. I know Alan was no angel. Perhaps he stole them—"

Garth intervened. He had to tell the truth about this visit from Pembroke, and he pitched into it headlong. She listened without comment, though a light frown touched her brows. Garth went on quietly.

"Pembroke's yarn about the imita-

tion rubies, proves your brother didn't steal them; otherwise the chap would have come right out with it. Perhaps this Pembroke came by them dishonestly. No matter. We don't know what happened. The hunter who went with Alan has never come home. He's dead. The rubies are yours, if you can keep them; no use being too damned virtuous about such things anyhow. Will you get out of here in the morning with them? There's no train you could catch, now."

She nodded. "Yes. I can't fight you—or rather, fight conditions here. I realize it now. You've been very good, and very patient. I'll get things packed up this afternoon, and you'll be rid of me in the morning. Glad?"

"No," Garth said gravely. "Glad in some ways—sorry in many ways."

He glanced up, as a low, mournful cry rang from the trees, a cry so human that the girl gave him a sharply startled look. "What was that? It sounded almost like a woman."

Garth smiled. "A mother, at least. Did you hear the words? *Tingal anak*—farewell, children! It's a little bird that dies when her young are hatched, and that's its cry. Does sound like the Malay words, for a fact. Well, see you later!"

He swung off, to get about his work, and left her to pack.

He was sorry—more than he cared to admit. As the rain broke and came down in a deluge that halted everything, he finished his afternoon inspection gloomily. It would be vastly different, alone here. She had transformed the whole place. Her capability, her quiet force, her very presence, had come to bulk enormously for Garth; these few days had changed everything for him. The rubies had changed everything, too. These made things easier for her, and she could leave without fear of financial distress.

Garth's premonitions were all gone now. His fears had been realized with Pembroke's arrival and now he could face the matter with a smile. Pembroke would return. Yes, whenever he and his precious pal had framed up

some course of action—perhaps tomorrow. Garth would be ready for them. His Sikh guards would be ready. The rubies would be gone. And if Pembroke got ugly about it—well, Garth could also be ugly, at times.

The two of them had a bangup dinner that evening, and afterward smoked and talked and listened to the radio—an English "wireless" Garth had picked up in Penang. The rain rather spoiled it, however. Thunder was pealing from time to time, lightning streaking across the hills, and the rain coming down in intermittent floods that drowned sight and sound.

"If those two men are really camped in the jungle," Ellen Dysart said, "they must be having an uncomfortable evening."

"Serve 'em right," and Garth shrugged. "I'm sending out a couple of the hunters in the morning, to keep an eye on them and report. I expect the truth is that they collared those stones in Siam or up in Burma, and your brother collared them in turn. Fortunes of war. You're the winner, and a good thing."

She laughed. "You're really human tonight! I'll be sorry this time tomorrow. Even if you are a brute, you're rather a pleasant sort of one."

"Thanks." And Garth flung her a quick grin. "You're an angel—a real one. What, you're not going?"

"Yes, it's late, and there's a lull in the rain." She had risen, and, after a glance at the clock, Garth did not object. With a flashlight he accompanied her across the dripping *kampong*, saw her safe home, eyed her piled-up luggage, and with a curt goodnight, went back to his own place in a rather savage humor. She would be gone tomorrow, and he hated the thought.

THE ceaseless rustling drum of the rain on his thatched roof sent him to sleep. He woke once, in silence, to find the squall lulled again, and drifted off as a new downpour began. When he awakened again, the lamp on his table was alight, and he sat up in abrupt alarm. He was no longer alone.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Careful, Garth. Put your feet to the floor, and this Sakai will plump a dart into you. I fancy you know what that means. Take it if you want it."

Pembroke was standing there, lighting a cheroot, eyeing him with unconcerned gaze. Not at the thin, tall, dripping figure did Garth stare, but at the squatting little Sakai in the doorway behind—the naked jungleman, who held only a bamboo tube at his lips and watched him with a reptilian gaze, steady, unwinking.

No Malay this, but a man the Malays feared—a Sakai, one of those aborigines who had peopled all this land, before they were driven for refuge into the jungle recesses. Little pot-bellied, they were scarcely superior to beasts, in human shape, armed with the *sumpitan* or blow-pipe whose poisoned darts brought sure death at a touch.

Garth relaxed. He was no fool; he could appreciate the threat, and all that it signified. Deadlier than a cobra's sting were the tiny *sumpitan* darts. His own pistol had been hanging over his bed; the peg was empty now. Pembroke had taken the weapon and belt, and was wearing them.

Gathering himself on the bed, Garth sat cross-legged and immobile. Beside him were his pillow and "Dutch wife"—the long, bolsterlike pillow indispensable in the steaming tropics.

"Well?" he demanded. "What's the big idea, anyhow?"

"The rubies Dysart brought here," said Pembroke calmly. "You gave yourself away today. You lied too strong. Dysart snaffed 'em from us. We killed his Malay and precious near got him as well. But he got clear. Now we want the rubies."

"No can do," said Garth. The other shrugged, pulled up a chair, and sat down, puffing at his cheroot unconcernedly. "Thought you said they were imitation?"

Pembroke merely smiled at him, most unpleasantly, and said nothing. The Sakai grunted something, and

Pembroke replied. These little croaking sounds meant a good deal. Few men know the Sakai language. So Pembroke was an old-timer in the jungle, had perhaps been born there.

The silence, the waiting, began to get on Garth's nerves, as did the beady snake-eyes of the crouching savage.

"Better tell me where they are," Pembroke said unexpectedly, lifting his voice a trifle to be heard above the increasing downpour of rain, "before Barday finishes getting grub from your store, and goes after Miss Dysart. That pal of mine is apt to knock her around a bit. Rough, he is, when he loses his temper."

Garth flushed, made an impulsive movement and checked it as the *sumpitan* was moved slightly. Pembroke chuckled.

"Aye, he's watching. Better than a gun, he is. A gun may misfire, but not he."

Garth nodded, reached out for the pillow and put it against the wall, behind him, leaning back against it and relaxing.

"Won't talk, eh? Nice place you have here." Pembroke glanced around. "One or two things I fancy; noted 'em today. Hope you didn't have a boy sleeping in your store. Barday'd probably kill him, and I don't like killing. Not with bullets. You take these darts, and they're better all around, and silent. Where are the rubies?"

"Can't tell what I don't know," said Garth. The other grunted and went on pulling at his cheroot.

The rain pelted down. The savage emitted a fetid, unwashed odor, though the rain had washed his skin hard enough. Garth sweat as he sat there, knowing himself perfectly helpless. The rain drowned all sounds. Barday was raiding the store—and no one was there. The storekeeper had died of the fever; another was being broken in, but he did not sleep on the premises.

"So you collared the rubies yourself, eh? And didn't tell Miss Dysart anything about 'em," Pembroke spoke again, loudly. "So maybe she can't tell. And maybe you'd better."

Garth licked his lips, nervously. Three red stones, however valuable, were as nothing against the peril he was risking to save them. These men would not spare Ellen Dysart to win their point. And as for Garth himself!

"By the way"—and Pembroke eyed him amusedly—"if you don't talk, we're taking Miss Dysart along with us. And you, too. We'll be across the border into Siam or Indo-China before anyone knows that you're gone."

Garth grimaced. They believed he had taken the rubies and had said nothing to Ellen Dysart—which would be the natural thing, from their viewpoint.

A big tarantula moved across the wall seeking cockroaches whom the light had roused to motion. Pembroke spat at the moving blotch.

"Call your pal off." Garth broke out desperately, abruptly. "Leave Miss Dysart alone! Don't trouble her. I'll give you the rubies."

After all, the matter was simple enough. He had adjusted himself to the situation, had focused on it, and found his own course clear.

Pembroke nodded with a satisfied air and stood up. "After the way you looked at her today, I figured it that way," he said. "Where are they? Here?"

"No. In the store," Garth said. "In the safe. Wrapped in a cloth, in the money box. I hope," he added bitterly, "you'll have the decency to leave the money."

Pembroke laughed. "That goes without saying. The combination?"

Garth told him, and he repeated it over, with a nod.

"Right. You sit tight; if you put foot to the floor, or make a false move, you get drilled. Those darts have *ipoh* poison on them; and if you know anything, you know that leaves you stiff in less than a minute. If you've told me wrong, heaven help you!"

He croaked something at the Sakai and stepped out into the night.

SILENCE again. Garth shifted uneasily, took out the pillow, replaced it with the Dutch wife, mut-

tered to himself while the unwinking beady eyes of the Sakai dwelt upon him, his blowpipe ready at his lips. Garth could count, he knew, on no help whatever from servants or natives; no one was close by. Nothing would bring help, in such a night, except fire; and there was no fire. His one weapon had gone with Pembroke.

So, to his mind, it had become all very simple. As he sat there thinking, he weighed everything and came to a balance.

His years of hard labor, his time of drudgery here, his sweat and effort—for what? A stake with which to go on to more profitable things. He had carved out his own destiny here. Beyond this present moment, he had ambitions; not a plantation, but a rubber factory of his own. Others had done it. He could do it, and make money.

And now all must be gambled on the turn of a hand. He smiled thinly. All life in Malaya was a gamble. Nonetheless, he shrank a little as he sat waiting under those beady eyes. Death in sixty seconds or less—no joke about that. It was a hard thing to face, almost as hard as quitting, but not quite. Harder still, because of Ellen Dysart. And if he lost his gamble, he lost her as well, and all the future that she made so brightly shining.

These things ran through his mind, in a matter of seconds. Then he stirred and shifted, very careful not to look at the naked brown savage. The lamp, on the near corner of the table, was almost between them; but the Sakai, squatting, was below its light and not blinded by it.

Entirely absorbed in what he was doing, Garth arranged the two pillows and then shifted them again. The Sakai, who had probably never before in his life seen a pillow, watched him with unwinking stare. Garth ignored him. In fact, he turned half away from him, as he adjusted the pillows to his liking. The Dutch wife was the heavier and longer of the two, but the head pillow was large and wide and downy.

The rain lessened and ceased, abruptly. Garth, sitting cross-legged on

the bed, lost his balance and put out a hand to the wall to steady himself. His other hand was under the Dutch wife—under it and clutching it. He gained his balance, caught hold of the head pillow, and turned.

As he turned, he sent the unwieldy Dutch wife into the air with a heave—into the air, straight at the lamp and the squatting figure beyond it.

IV

Checkmate for Rubies

ALL in the one lightning-quick motion, Garth whipped the wide pillow about and held it before him like a shield. There was a *spat* as the blowpipe dart hit the pillow, and a crash as the Dutch wife smashed the lamp and went on to strike the squatting figure. Another *spat*! Garth was doubled up behind his feathery shield as the room was swallowed in darkness; then, pillow and all, he came up and leaped with the push of the bed spring to help him.

That Dutch wife could not help falling foul of the long bamboo *sumpitan*; it had been a good gamble, and it won. Garth cleared the corner of the table and came down on top of pillows and blowpipe and naked, squirming jungle-beast. The house shook to the crash. Then Garth was grabbing out in a wild frenzy of fury and panic, and his fingers took hold in oiled and stinking skin. He had the wild man by throat and arm, and grappled for very life.

Rolling, twisting, squirming like a snake caught by a mongoose's teeth, the Sakai erupted in torrential energy—a dynamo of tortured steel-coils. Garth was lifted into the air and flung down again, but kept his grip. Over and over they rolled, crashing into chair and table and bed.

Another roll. Then from the Sakai burst a horrible strangled cry; he had come down square upon the hot smashed lamp. He recoiled with a spasmodic contortion that flung both men clear across the floor of the room. All the while the Sakai was fighting like a madman, clawing and tearing.



The flames blazed red behind them, lighting their faces.

As they struck against the wall, Garth felt a stab of keener, cleaner pain. Then they were through, smashing through the split bamboos and out, falling to the ground half a dozen feet below. They came down with a crashing shock, and Garth passed out in a shower of fiery stars. . . .

Painfully, he wakened in the steaming wet grass, and groped about.

How long had he lain there? Not a great while. The naked body beneath him was still warm and he himself was still aware of the shock; but the jungle man was limp and dead; his neck was broken. Rain was pelting down again in a deluge.

Garth, in the pitchy blackness, gained his feet and took shelter under the house. He leaned against one of the ironwood props; something was wrong, he did not know just what. Part of his wild scheme had failed. Instead of setting fire to the house, the lamp had been extinguished. There was a dull growing hurt under his arm; suddenly aware of it, he felt for the spot. His fingers came upon the haft of a little knife, whose blade was gripped in his side. So the Sakai had held a knife!

Was it poisoned? In a swift access

of fear, Garth gripped the haft and tugged out the blade. A small, curved, useless thing to him. Blood gushed after it; he could feel the sticky fluid on his hand. His fear passed. The Sakai used poison only on their darts, otherwise he would have been dead by now.

His pajama coat was torn and shredded. He got it off to use as a bandage to stanch the blood. As he fumbled with it, his fingers came in contact with a long, thin object hanging in the cloth. He drew it clear, and a cold shiver of realization seized him. It was one of the poisoned darts, that must have missed him by a hair!

Somehow Garth got a crude bandage in place, then paused, peering through the rain. Go back up to his room and dress? No point to that. He had no weapon there. His rifle was at the Dysart bungalow. He caught a flash of light from the direction of the store, at the edge of the *kampong*, and this decided him. He must reach Ellen Dysart, warn her, then get word to the guards or to the village!

He started across the clearing, holding the little knife and the poisoned dart. He was weak and dizzy, still badly jarred from that fall, but exultation filled his brain. He had accomplished the impossible, and now the rest would be simple enough.

Something brushed against him in the wetness of the night. A moving object crashed into him; he pitched over in blind panic. There was a grunt, a startled squeal, a rush through the grass. Garth staggered up, between a groan and a gasp of laughter. A pig, strayed from the village and foraging, nothing worse! For a moment he stood, swaying on his feet, his sense of direction lost; then he found himself and went on, but now that hurt under his arm was savagely tearing him with pain. The rain was so heavy that it blinded him, its rustle filling the darkness with imagined shapes and movement.

Then, mercifully, the black bulk of the other bungalow rose before him. Here was security; here were weapons, companionship, his job accom-

plished. With untold relief he felt the ladder under his hand, and dragged himself up.

"Ellen! Ellen!"

He had forgotten her luggage, piled and ready. As he lifted his voice above the pelting drone of the rain on the thatch, he walked into the lot of it and was flung sprawling. He heard her cry out something, caught a burst of light as her electric torch flashed on, but an excruciating wave of pain shot through him and wiped away the world. For the second time, he lay unconscious. And he had told her nothing.

THIS time, his waking was to light and unreality. There was the warmth of her hands upon him, her breath upon his face, her presence close to him, her voice in his ears; then abrupt cessation; an electric, startled silence—broken by a laugh.

"I told you he was a sharp 'un, Barday! Pretty picture, this. Keep your eye on the lady. Now we'll soon have what we came after—"

Garth lost the words; the picture filled his brain, as he rose on one elbow. He was lying on the floor, on the mats that covered the *bilian* poles. In the rays of the lighted lamp, Ellen Dysart stood staring at the two men in the doorway with dismayed recognition and alarm in her eyes. She had just finished applying a bandage to Garth's side, and still held fragments of his sopping red-wet pajama coat.

"Mr. Pembroke!" she ejaculated.

"Yes, it's me," broke in the tall, thin man, his face more saturnine than ever. "Meet my pal, Barday. And stand right still, miss. Either you or Garth knows where those rubies are, and we want 'em."

She shrank back a little. Barday was a big man, wide of shoulders, bearded, his dripping features heavy and brutal. He grinned at the girl.

"Now, you!" Pembroke took a step forward, and snarled down at Garth. "Pulled a fast one on me, didn't you? Sure, we found the Sakai; and then the light brought us here in a hurry. Now, hand out those stones fast."

He planted his foot heavily in Garth's side—the hurt side. Under the pain of it, Garth sank back and his senses swam for an instant. Ellen Dysart burst out with one angry cry and flew at Pembroke. Barday swept her into a bearlike embrace, laughing as she fought and struck at him. He held her close, helpless, winding about her arms the folds of her wrapper.

"I say, Pem, she ain't 'alf bad!" he exclaimed jovially. "Wouldn't mind 'aving 'er along of us. What say?"

"Chuck it, you fool," snapped Pembroke impatiently. "Hello! The Sakai did some damage before you scragged him, eh?" He snarled down again at Garth, and drew back for another kick. "Come on, speak up! Where are they?"

Garth heaved up on his elbow again. The little knife had vanished. Under his hand was the tiny hardwood dart, its point black with poison that the rain had not affected. He almost put his hand on it as he evaded the kick, and shrank from the deathly touch. The force of Pembroke's boot stretched him out anew, for he was weak and helpless.

"The rubies! Is that what you're after?" Ellen Dysart gasped out the words. "All right, take them and go away. You can have them. Anything! Only go—"

Pembroke swung around.

"So you know about 'em, do you? Good!" he exclaimed with satisfaction. "Come on, Barday, loosen up with her; she's not your kind. We want to get those stones, get back and break camp, and be on our way over the border before morning. Now then, miss, talk up! Where are the stones?"

The bearded Barday, sullenly, drew back from the girl, but still held on to her wrist in one hand by way of caution. Ellen Dysart shrank, her wrap all wet and stained from contact with his dripping clothes. She gathered the folds about her throat with her free hand, turning a white face to Pembroke.

"There!" She pointed to a suitcase open on the floor beside her bed. "In that tobacco pouch. Now get out!"

Pembroke chuckled. "We'll make sure first, miss," and he went over to the grip and stooped for the pouch that was in plain sight.

Garth, his head still swimming, sat up. That first kick had damaged him; his whole side felt stiff and sore and wrecked, but after an instant his head cleared. Weapons? Not a chance. The girl's pistol—Dysart's pistol—hung over the bed at the other side of the room. The rifles were leather-cased and hanging high on the wall, unloaded. No, not a chance. He was licked.

"Well?" A deep growl broke from Barday, as he watched. "What about it, Pem? No tricks, you blasted 'alf-caste! If you turn 'em up, you 'and 'em over. It was you lost them to Dysart. My turn now to 'ave them."

"True enough," said Pembroke, without resentment. He was turning out the tobacco pouch into his hand. "Ah! All ship-shape this time—look!"

He picked out the three red stones and held them in his palm, the pouch and the tobacco in the other hand, and came toward them. He extended his hand into the light from the lamp. The three red stones burned there, glittering and glowing. Garth had come to one knee, holding to a chair, and the sight of the three rubies fascinated him. Well, they were gone, lost; after all, it might be for the best. But he hated to be beaten by these blackguards. Evidently, they had brought with them only the one Sakai. Any other of their men would have waited in camp.

Barday's eyes glittered on the rubies, greed filled his face, his breath came hoarsely over his heavy lips. Pembroke, more controlled, nodded and popped the three stones back into the pouch, the tobacco on top of them.

"That's where Dysart hid 'em," he observed complacently. "Might as well keep 'em there. Good place. Catch!"

He tossed the pouch. Barday caught it in his free hand, and stuffed it into a pocket. Pembroke drew out a che-root and leaned over the lamp to light it.

"So we'll be off," he said. "I'll take

your flashlight, miss; we can use it. Did you fetch the stuff from the store, Barday?"

"It's outside," grunted the other.

He glared at Garth, who still clung to the chair. While some strength was coming back, Garth was in no haste to show it. His brain had been working fast, fighting against all temptation. The best thing was to let the rubies go, of course; yet he hated to do it. . . . For the sake of Ellen Dysart, he must crush down his burning hatred of these two men, his unwillingness to accept defeat, his flaring truculence.

"Clear out, the two of you!" cried Ellen Dysart indignantly. "I've given you the rubies; now go! We don't want to see you again, ever; we'll not put anyone after you—"

"I'll make sure of it anyhow," said Pembroke. He moved toward Garth, his dark eyes burning. At this instant a hoarse laugh escaped Barday.

"Blimey, if she ain't got pluck!" he said, and jerked suddenly at the wrist of Ellen Dysart, pulling her toward him. "I'll just 'ave a goodbye kiss—"

Pembroke paused to swear at him angrily, but Barday was already clutching the girl in his huge embrace. That was his mistake; she was aroused now, no longer caught by surprise and dismay.

A sudden howl of agonized fury burst from the bearded man.

AS BARDAY crushed her against him, as he lowered his face to hers, Ellen Dysart put both hands to his beard, caught hold of it, and tore.

Blurting out wild oaths, Barday tried to get away from her. Then his arms swept out. One of his fists caught her full in the face and knocked her backward, sent her sprawling; she lay in a heap, motionless, while Barday pawed at his bleeding face.

Garth, scooping up something from the floor, was on his feet.

"Here, none o' that!" Pembroke swung toward him hastily. "You fool, she's not hurt—anyhow, you're not worth a bullet—"

Garth, silent, deadly, was coming straight at him. Pembroke launched a

blow and it caught Garth in the mouth, staggering him. He came in and grappled. One harsh curse broke from Pembroke—then a frightful scream, as he saw what Garth held, what had scraped across his throat.

He put hand to holster, and ripped out his pistol. But Garth, with a crazy laugh, had turned from him and was already springing at Barday, who gaped blankly as he came. Then they were together, striking out insanely. Another scream from Pembroke.

"Out o' the way, Barday—he's got a *sumpitan* dart—give me a shot at him—"

The little sliver of wood plunged home. Barely in time, for Barday's fist lashed out, and Garth was knocked away headlong. Barday jerked the tiny shaft out of his hairy chest. A drop of blood, as red as the rubies, hung there.

The pistol blazed and crashed. Garth, struck of balance, felt the hot burning breath of the bullet as it seared his cheek. Then he fell against the table in a limp heap. The lamp fell with an explosion that echoed another shot from Pembroke.

Darkness engulfed everything. A bedlam of frantic, furious oaths filled the air; the floor of ironwood poles shook as Pembroke and Barday broke in panic for the open, cursing each other. Blue flames were running along the mats, catching the grass and the inner thatching, flickering across the room, when Garth dragged himself erect. That he had escaped Pembroke's pistol was a miracle, but he had no time to think of miracles now. Already the flames were crackling fiercely.

He reached Ellen Dysart, tugged at her senseless figure, and somehow managed to lift her in his arms. The effort raked his side with pain, sent a thudding agony all through his head; Pembroke's second bullet must have grazed his skull. He wavered, stumbled, and caught himself. A wave of heat and flickering flame rushed at him and spurred him to frenzy.

Somehow he reached the ground with her, and went reeling out across

the *kampong*. The rain drenched them instantly. Then it ceased altogether.

With a breath of relief, Garth arrived at a safe distance from the burning house. He was about to set down his burden, when he stumbled over something. He looked down and saw that Pembroke lay there. A final thrust of energy, and he turned aside to leave space between them. Wild hysteric laughter tore at him. No need to ask now about Barday! The three red stones, the rubies of dark blood, would not be far away. Sixty seconds, at the most—and the *sumpitan* poison dropped you like an ox. Barday's body would not be far off . . . and with it, the rubies . . .

He half fell in the grass beside the girl, and sat holding her warm body against his own, watching the bungalow with a dull wonder. There was no burst upward of the flames, owing to the drenched roof-thatch. The crackling roar, the popping of bursting bamboos, was already passed its peak and waning.

Ellen Dysart moved and stirred. She did not draw away from him; her arm went about him as she lifted her head.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "The house—"

"Everything's all right," said Garth quietly, and held her closer. "Forget it all. Never mind the fire. It'll bring our men in no time."

The ruddy flames touched the trees about the clearing, reflected from their glittering wetness. Birds began to waken, monkeys to screech. From the girl came a little shaky laugh. Garth turned to her. "What is it?"

"My luggage," she replied. "All of it—in there. Everything I have. Now I can't possibly go tomorrow—"

Garth burst into laughter; it sent a stab through his side, and he winced. "No, I guess you'd better stay," he said, looking into her face as the flames lessened. "I may need a bit of nursing. Besides, things are all different now—oh, hello! There's blood on your mouth, and your lips are swelling, where that brute hit you—"

"It's nothing. I wasn't aware of it, really," she said, then felt her bruised lips and grimaced. "What do you mean? How are things different?"

"Every way, my dear," said Garth. "Listen! The fire has wakened all the birds—"

They heard it from the trees across the rain-wet *kampong*, that mournful voice lifting to them with its cry: "*Tingal anak! Tingal anak!*"

"Oh! That bird!" she said. Garth drew her face closer to his own.

"Yes, that bird. You heard what it said, and it's true. 'Goodby, children! Goodby to us, as children. Goodby to everything that was. Life begins now, my dear, for us both.'"

Silence fell upon them for a moment, until shrill voices began to sound, and the dying flames touched the figures and gay *sarongs* of Malays running. Ellen Dysart stirred and drew her face away, but Garth smiled.

"Never mind; don't worry, my dear. They don't know what kissing means. Thank heaven we're not Malays!"

"Thank heaven!" she said, and laughed shakily as they kissed again.



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by Karl Detzer



Which proves that Love and Laughter begin at College

YES, SIR, I admit everything, except that part about me being a communist. But it's enough to make a communist out of me if you kick me out just because I am the victim of circumstances. Oh, yes, sir, very much beyond my control.

You may not believe it, sir, but it all started because I listened to your advice and tried to follow it. No, sir, I don't mean to add insult to injury. But how was I to know that I couldn't trust a college president?

Very well, sir, I'll explain. You're the first person that's been willing to listen, except Edith, of course. Miss Edith Blunt. Yes, sir, J. Westerford Blunt's daughter. And how such an old fool as J. Westerford Blunt can have such a . . .

Excuse me, sir, I forgot. But after what I've been through this week, you'd forget, too, that he's a very distinguished and valuable alumnus of

Midstate. In fact, you'd begin to doubt it. Particularly after what he said about you yesterday.

Yes, sir. About you. Several times. No, I'd rather not repeat it. Very well, if you insist. He said it to me when we were up on top of that pile of roofing tile, down at the tile-yard.

He said: "If I ever get out alive, I'll see Midstate and that doddering old nitwit roast to a crisp, golden brown before I give 'em a red cent."

Yes, sir, those were his exact words. Nitwit, yes, sir. I'm afraid he was referring to you, sir. Was he what? Well, he may have been a bit high, but I'd hate to state that he was intoxicated. He could still prop himself up on his elbow and holler. Very well, sir, from the beginning.

IT started two weeks ago at chapel meeting when you gave us that address on making this Homecoming different. I don't like to toss any roses, for fear you'll think that I'm just trying to sugar you, but that was the most powerful oration I ever heard. It moved me deeply, sir. It even stimulated me to better things.

Maybe you remember, sir, when you got through hol—addressing us, sir—

how Monk Markey, the student president, gave a little pep talk of his own, and called for volunteers to handle the Homecoming on the campus. Well, still under the inspiration of your address, I volunteered.

That was my first mistake. After this, you won't catch me volunteering to walk out of a burning building! But there were about forty of us Freshmen didn't know any better then, who thought we owed it to old Midstate to give our time and intelligence. Yes, sir, I said intelligence.

When our jobs were assigned, I found I had two. I was to be a guide, with a sign hung on me saying: *Ask Me*. Monk explained that we weren't just to stand around waiting for somebody to ask questions, but were to find questions for them to ask and be generally helpful and courteous. Well, sir, that's what I was aiming to be. I couldn't help it if . . . Yes, sir, I'll go on.

"Prexy is expecting plenty of the old grads back for Homecoming," Markey warned us, "and he's got the idea that some of them ought to be in a charitable frame of mind, what with this and that. If we can show them what great steps Midstate has taken, maybe they'll do some free-hand endowing. But it's expecting too much to ask an alumnus to endow anything, after a losing game. Therefore, men, we must beat Hawkins college!"

We cheered the sentiment. It would certainly be very discourteous to the old grads to let Hawkins beat us up in the Wednesday afternoon baseball classic, even if they are the highest-paid team outside the big leagues. In fact, we decided that this shouldn't occur.

As you know, sir, if you read the newspapers at all, Hawkins hasn't lost a game all season, and didn't lose in football, last fall either, and all because of Ruby. Why, that's the name of their mascot. Yes, sir. The goat.

I don't blame you for groaning, sir. It makes me want to groan myself, to think of that goat. But at the moment, with your address ringing in our ears, our plan had all the earmarks of in-

spiration. According to Hawkins College, their team can't lose as long as Ruby is on the field. It's a tradition, like Eton lads turning out to be gentlemen, just because they dress up like Singer's Midgets.

So we decided to take their tradition away from them. They were due in on the twelve fifty-five train Wednesday noon, and the big committee had planned a grand parade for 'em up through town and across the campus to the gym. The game was to start at three o'clock, which gave us two hours and five minutes to dispose of Ruby.

Yes, sir, that was my second job. Pug Slatter and Willie Armitage and I drew that assignment. We made arrangements with Bensley the butcher to use his truck, and we spent two nights getting the paper-flower decorations in Hawkins' colors, ready to hang on it. We even had Ruby's name in forget-me-nots. The plan was to have the truck lead the parade, right behind the band, and in front of the cars carrying the Hawkins team. I was to drive.

When we got to Laskey's pool hall, I was to break suddenly out of line and drive rapidly down the alley. Pug Slatter would be waiting in his car, with the engine running, ready to duck into the alley behind me, then stall his car, giving me a chance to get away.

It all would have worked out, too, if it hadn't been for Mr. J. Westerford Blunt. When he decided to attend this Homecoming and the reunion of the Class of 1911, it changed the entire course of my life. No, sir, I'd never even heard of him. Not till last Monday evening.

I HAD spent the afternoon answering questions. The old grads began to appear about noon, and I was assigned to the corner of the campus across the road from the Sweets and Eats Shoppe, with my sign around my neck, saying *Ask Me*. From some of the dumb questions the old grads asked, you'd wonder was four years of college worth while after all. After

answering them ever since noon, I was tired from mental strain by eight o'clock in the evening, so I went in and had a nourishing double banana-split with maple nut, and was starting back to my room when I had the most astounding experience.

I had just cut across the campus, under the big trees by lovers' lane, when I heard a sort of a sob in the bushes, and I stopped, naturally.

"Hello," I said experimentally, not being one of these people that goes off half-cocked.

"Hello," a girl's voice answered, and I tell you it was full of infinite loneliness and sadness, and besides, it sounded like she had a cold in the head.

"What's the trouble, honey?" I said, still not approaching, because I didn't want to seem to be forward.

She came out of the bushes then, and I saw her face, under one of the electric lights that the Working Girls Protective League got the town council to put up along lovers' lane. Well, sir, that face did something to me. The girl was crying, and in spite of that she was the most beautiful. Very well, I'll skip it.

Naturally, when you find the most beautiful woman in the world crying like that and crawling around in the bushes at eight o'clock at night, you think she's hunting for something. There are so many things a woman can mislay.

"What have you lost?" I asked this one, adding quickly: "Or was it something you'd rather not mention?"

She gulped and answered, "I'd rather not. But I guess I have to. I've lost my father. Mr. J. Westerford Blunt."

"Oh," I said, relieved, "your father!"

"And I've been looking under bushes for him," she explained, blowing her lovely nose. "Because I remember mother lost him once at a reunion of his old army regiment, and she found him talking French to himself in a briar hedge."

"Oh, I see," I told her, just to make conversation, though I really didn't.

"He met several members of the class of 1911 this afternoon," she went on, gulping, "so he told me to put the car in a garage and meet him for the get-together dinner tonight. But I've been hunting him, and . . ."

Well, she broke right down again, and if there's anything I can't stand it's to have a beautiful woman crying in my arms, so I—

Did I what? Oh, no, sir. She sort of fell into my arms of her own accord. Oh, no, I didn't make any passes, if that's what you mean. Naturally I tried to comfort her. Even promised to go hunt her father, if she'd just go along to point him out. Yes, sir, she went along, and we did look.

We looked everywhere, from the basement of the Methodist church to the calaboose, but there was no sign of J. Westerford Blunt. But plenty of excitement. Mr. Blunt had been everywhere. He and four other old fellows from the class of 1911. Just seeing the sights, I guess. And singing. No one minded them much except the Methodist Ladies' Aid. Yes, sir, it was meeting in the church basement. He sang for them, they said. Yes, sir. No, sir, they said they didn't care for his voice.

You can see yourself we had to give up hunting him at last. Edith had to go to bed, didn't she? Oh, she had a reservation, all right. In Carstairs Hall. I took her there, and promised to look her up first thing in the morning, which I did.

OH, YES, she'd heard from him by that. But she was still very worried. He telephoned her the night before about five minutes after I left and she was sure he was sick. His voice sounded like he had a cold, she said, and when she asked him where he was, he couldn't remember exactly, but was sure he'd pitch Midstate to a shut-out on Wednesday.

"You can see why I'm worried," she said. "Father is a very respected citizen at home, and never telephones sounding like he has a cold, and as far as I can remember, never has thought of playing baseball any more

than he ever thought of singing at the Ladies' Aid."

She told me all this on the way down to the Sweets and Eats Shoppe, where we had breakfast, and then we started out to hunt him again. How long did we hunt this time? Why, all day. She'd just about given up hope when we came upon him. Yes, sir, at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Why right here, sir, coming out of this building. He'd been hunting you, he said. I'm positive, sir. Something about presenting Midstate with a new science lab. I didn't get it all, because as soon as Edith introduced us, he began to ask me about the prospects of Midstate against Hawkins in baseball. Naturally I told him how we were planning to kick hell out of tradition by stealing Ruby.

He listened, and then he hollered, "Whoops!"

Don't ask me why he hollered it, sir. Unless it was because he was so pleased that Hawkins was going to get taken for once. I left him with Edith. What else could I do? I promised to see her at five o'clock Wednesday, after the game. No, sir, not until five o'clock. I couldn't take any chances. Only Ruby, I mean. And she wasn't taking any chances on J. Westerford Blunt.

Wednesday . . . That was yesterday? . . . Thank you.

So much has happened I couldn't remember. Wednesday was a pretty busy day, what with finishing the artistic touches on Bensley's butcher-shop truck and making sure Pug's car was parked in the right place, and everything. The train came in on time, and of course it was full of Hawkins fans and the ball team and their band and rooting section and everything. Our parade was all lined up in the street outside the station, with decorated cars for the team and plain cars for the rooters, and the truck for Ruby.

My troubles began right then. We had planned to drive the truck down to the old tile-yard, on the other side of the town dump, and keep Ruby there during the game, it being a very

uninhabited place usually, and there being little chance that Hawkins men could find her there. But, as I say, things went wrong from the start. Those Hawkins people weren't so gullible as we had been led to believe. What did they do? Why, four men from the rooting section piled right into the truck with Ruby!

There was very little I could do, all four of them weighing in the neighborhood of two hundred pounds each. I finally just got up in the driver's seat and started off, with Ruby and those four hoodlums behind me. Of course I was miserable, our plans seeming to have gone to pot, but I kept a brave front, remembering your inspired address and hoping for the best.

When we did reach the alley beside Laskey's pool hall, there sat Pug waiting in his car, as per our agreement, and about twenty other Midstate men loafing on the sidewalk to give a hand in case things didn't go right.

Well, I decided that if I couldn't steal Ruby alone, maybe I could steal her and the four hoodlums, too, provided, of course, that our men on the sidewalk would do their part. But I never expected exactly what was going to happen. The band was playing, "Hail, hail the gang's all here," and the Hawkins rooting section was drowning it out with yells, and nobody was thinking of Ruby especially, when suddenly I turned into the alley, before they knew what was happening, and Pug swung in behind me, and our twenty Midstate men that were waiting there went into action.

What I mean action, too. You would have been very proud of them, sir. They landed on Bensley's butcher truck all at the same time, and you could hear the springs let go of one accord. I will say that Hawkins had very good judgment in the four men it picked to take care of Ruby. But they were outnumbered from the start, not only by our twenty Midstate men on the sidewalk, but by several others as well, including Mr. Bensley, the butcher.

Of course, Mr. Bensley, having seen

what was happening to his truck and not being an alumnus of either Midstate or Hawkins, wasn't particular who he hit, and since he happened to be carrying a cleaver as he ran out of his shop, he was very effective. In fact he would have killed me and Ruby as well, if it hadn't been for Mr. J. Westerford Blunt.

YES, sir, I'm grateful to him for saving my life. For that, maybe, but nothing else, sir. You see, Mr. Bensley had actually lifted the cleaver over my head when Mr. Blunt and the whole class of 1911 appeared out of nowhere, and he was hollering, "Whoops!" again in his loudest voice, which is very loud, and he caught Mr. Bensley with one hand and the cleaver with the other, and he threw them right through the window of Mr. Laskey's pool room, which probably hurt Mr. Laskey's feelings no end.

Things were happening by this time, of course. The Hawkins rooters and the whole team, too, were piling out of cars and running toward us, so I knew that I must use judgment and use it fast. You know, sir, when you see a baseball team and two hundred rooters running toward you at top speed, all with a single idea in mind and that's to tear you to pieces, it is remarkable how rapidly your thought processes work.

I said to myself, "Get out of here, John!" and I acted on the impulse. Ruby still was in the truck, but everybody else was out in the alley on top of each other. So I naturally stepped on the accelerator. And it was then my luck really went bad. For instead of just me and Ruby starting down the alley, who should throw himself on the rear end but Mr. J. Westerford Blunt. Oh, no, sir, Edith wasn't with him. She'd lost him again.

Why, he didn't say anything much. He just kept on hollering the same, "Whoops! Whoops!" and some silly yell about the Class of Eleven landing in Heaven. Oh, certainly, sir, I was driving. Rapidly. It was very difficult, too, with all the springs broken. Oh, yes, sir, that's the whole point.

About two hundred of them were running after me. I turned to the right at the first corner, and then I opened up. Well, I just drove. Yes, sir, he was sitting on Ruby in the back of the truck and hollering.

What was he hollering now? Why, just: "Excelsior! Excelsior!" No, sir, I haven't any idea what he meant by it. But he sounded very happy. I didn't have time just then to dig into hidden meanings.

Why not? Well, because there still were about fifty of them following me on foot when I got to the second intersection and I could hear the siren of the town marshal's car start screaming, too. Oh, no, I didn't stop. How could I? I did just the opposite. By the time I got to the edge of town there wasn't anybody following, so I hurried around Old Mill Road toward the tile-works.

There was a big sign beside the road which said, *Men Working*, but I didn't see any men. There happened to be another sign at the new storm basin, but I didn't happen to notice it, and it wasn't till later that I found out that it said, *Danger—Blasting*.

In fact, the first thing I really did notice was a very uncouth person in the middle of the road, waving a red flag at me. Now I ask you, sir, with all I had on my mind at the moment, wasn't it natural for me to think he was a Hawkins man? At any rate, I did. When he waved the red flag, I didn't even slow down.

"Stop!" hé yelled. "Stop! Stop!"

And Mr. Blunt yelled, "Let 'em have it! Hit that line! Yea, Midstate! Nine rahs and a locomotive!"

SO I drove straight toward the fellow with the red flag. Why, nothing happened, right then, sir. He proved to be a very good jumper. He leaped aside, at least ten feet, saving his life as we went by, and Mr. Blunt stuck his head out of the rear end and hollered at him. Well, just hollered, that's all. No words that I noticed. Just, "Yahh!"

We'd gone about a hundred yards past him and were almost to the gate

of the tile works, when the explosion let go. Oh, yes, sir. Dynamite. Right beside us. They were blasting for the storm basin, and the man with the red flag was supposed to warn traffic to halt. No, it didn't do any real damage, just took out the headlights and windshield and blew one of the rear tires, and frightened Ruby, of course. Fortunately the road made a sharp turn. I swung in through the gate to the tile-works and went straight across the yards and under a shed in the far corner. Then I stopped, with me and Ruby and the truck and Mr. J. Westerford Blunt completely out of sight of the road.

Well, I just sat still for a few minutes, getting my breath, and combing stones and pieces of glass out of my hair, and thinking how lucky we were to have captured Ruby. Mr. Blunt? Why, he went to sleep. Yes, sir, right there in the back end of the truck, with Ruby in his arms. I didn't want to disturb him. He certainly looked as if a little shut-eye wouldn't hurt him, so I climbed out quietly and went and looked around.

The men from the storm basin were having an argument at the gate. One of them was saying we'd come in there, and the rest were claiming we couldn't possibly have turned in, at the rate we were going. So finally one of them—the fellow with the red flag—said he'd watch the gate, and the rest went away. Back to work, I suppose.

Well, I slipped back to the truck, and there Mr. J. Westerford Blunt was, sitting up, wiping his lips on his necktie. Because he'd been refreshing himself again, sir. Out of a bottle. No, sir, it hadn't broken. No, I've no idea what was in it, although he told me it was panther juice.

But he had to use his necktie, sir, because he didn't have any handkerchief. Ruby had eaten it, out of his breast pocket. And had started on his mustache. That's what wakened him.

"Well," he said. "I guess we stopped 'em! Hawkins college! They can't play marbles. But I'd like to see that game. Now that we've got Pearl—"

"Ruby," I corrected him.

Mr. Blunt looked at the goat very thoughtfully, then he repeated. "Pearl. It suits her better."

Why, I didn't answer anything, sir. There didn't seem to be anything appropriate to say. I could see he was still very tired. So thinking he would go back to sleep, I slipped away again, very quietly, and left him and Ruby cuddled down in the cart, and I went to explore the tile-yard.

I was gone about twenty minutes. I don't know if you've ever hung around that tile-yard, sir, but it's deserted supposedly. Just piles and piles of stock left standing, with roadways between them, and some old tall bake-ovens and sheds. And not even a watchman. That's why we picked it in the first place.

But this time, as I was coming around a corner of a stack of tiles, I heard a voice say, "I'm sure I left them right here. Six pieces."

Then another voice, pretty exasperated, said: "Well, what could happen to six pieces of dynamite?"

OF COURSE I pricked up my ears. I'd had an experience with dynamite just a few minutes before, and I didn't want another. I waited, out of sight, for them to finish their argument. But the one just kept repeating that he'd left the six pieces and three caps right there, and the other kept saying that dynamite didn't have any legs to walk away with, and they didn't seem to be getting anywhere.

Not until one of them said suddenly: "What's that?"

There was a minute of silence, and then the other said: "Why, Tony, it's a goat."

"What's it got in its mouth?"

"I guess it's chewing a stick."

"Stick hell!" this Tony answered, his voice squeaking up. "That's the end of a piece of dynamite. I'll—"

But the other fellow had more sense, and he yelled, "Hey, don't!"

Well, I decided that if Ruby was eating their dynamite, I was sort of responsible, so I stepped out and said, "I'm sorry if the goat ate anything—"

They looked at me like I was a specter and then this Tony hollered, "Is that your goat?"

Now, that was a hard question to answer, for it wasn't exactly. So I said, "It is and it isn't."

"Whosever he is, he et six pieces of dynamite!"

"And some dynamite caps!" his partner added.

Then I saw Ruby. She was sticking her head around a pile of tiles, chewing very contentedly.

"I'll go kick the interior out of her, sir," I offered respectfully.

That didn't appeal to them at all. They both began to back up and holler that if the dynamite and the caps and my kick ever should come in contact, it would be too bad. They were even beginning to get hostile about it when who should come around the corner but Mr. J. Westerford Blunt. And at the sight of him, Ruby went running.

Well, the two other fellows and I all hollered for him to be careful. But Mr. Blunt didn't seem to understand; not until I'd made a wide circle around Ruby and got him by the sleeve and told him about Ruby.

Then it was Mr. Blunt's turn to run. He began to swear at Hawkins college for pulling such a trick on him. Hawkins, yes, sir. And started to climb up the nearest stack of tile, which was about twelve feet high, and not very firm. And can you believe it, sir, his actions seemed to make Ruby angry. Not at him, strangely, but at me and the other fellows. She just put her head down and came at me for all she was worth.

This Tony screamed, "Run! Run!"

Well, sir, that was advice wasted. I was running before he had his mouth opened. Yes, sir, right up the pile of tiles beside Mr. Blunt. No, sir, he didn't help me. He tried to shove me off. Said I was tempting Providence or something. Ruby? Why, she started after the two others, but they were outside the gate and had it slammed before she got there, so back she came.

By this time quite a crowd of other WPA workers. Oh, yes, sir, that storm basin's a WPA job. Quite a

crowd of other workers came to the fence and looked in and made remarks. And the next thing we knew, Ruby was coming up the tiles, too.

YES, sir, I and Mr. Blunt thought of that. We started to slide down the other side. But this Tony hollered and warned us, if we so much as moved, us and Ruby and the dynamite all would land in one heap, for the pile was very unsteady and one false move and it would tip over. What did we do? Why, sir, we just sat, very patient, and watched Ruby climb, and wondered, what would she do when she got to the top? Butt us, probably, and certainly the top of a stack of tiles twelve feet high would be a terrible place to get blown up by a goat.

No, she didn't butt us. She decided not to. She just came up and sat down on Mr. Blunt's lap.

"Nice Pearl," he kept saying to her, and if she was made out of glass, he couldn't treat her more carefully.

Oh, yes, sir, we sat there a long time. We could hear the band playing over at the ball park, and we got to thinking about the game, again. You see, we hadn't been thinking much about anything but dynamite for a long time. But now I said:

"I wish I was there."

"I wish you was inside that goat," Mr. Blunt answered in the most unfriendly manner, and we didn't talk much after that.

After while, though, Mr. Waxman, who owned the tile yard came and looked over the fence, and Mr. Bensley heard about us, and came after his truck, and the town marshal came to put us in jail, and a couple of hundred other people came for no reason at all.

Oh, no, sir. They stayed a long distance off, on the other side of the fence. There was just the three of us, Mr. Blunt and Ruby and me, and the dynamite, inside the yard. The wind had started to blow, too. It swayed the tiles something terrible, and every time we could hear yelling from the diamond, Mr. Blunt would say, in a low voice so as not to startle Ruby:

"Beat 'em, Hawkins!"

Yes, sir, Hawkins. I can't help it if he did graduate from Midstate. He said Hawkins. He wanted them to beat us. Blamed me and Midstate and you for getting him into such a jam. Oh, yes, he was very serious.

No, I can't imagine you there, sir. That's right. But I can't imagine Mr. Blunt or me there either. However, there we were. Until finally we heard the band playing the Hawkins anthem, and the crowds yelling some more, and I leave it to you, sir, how would you have felt about then, learning you'd made all this sacrifice of stealing Hawkin's goat for nothing.

IT WAS only a few minutes before the whole Hawkins team arrived. You'd think, having won the game anyway, they wouldn't have cared so much about Ruby not being on the field, but it seems they did. This Tony and the town marshal and Mr. Bensley all tried to stop them, and Mr. Waxman who owned the yard said he'd have them arrested if they went inside the gate, because he didn't want his tiles blown up, but in they came, and at the first sight of them, Ruby stood up and looked at them carefully, and an expression of recognition crossed her face.

Then she jumped. Yes, sir, right off the top of the pile to the ground. Me? I shut my eyes and waited. But nothing happened. That is, Ruby didn't blow up. You see, this Tony remembered afterward that he'd not left the dynamite there at all, but over by the pump-house.

Yes, sir, it was the Hawkins men upset the stack of tiles. Mr. Blunt? He fell on top of me. Yes, sir, a very heavy man. And he's got a wallop, too. Yes, sir, that's what's wrong with my nose. He hit me. I don't know why. He said it was for making a fool out of him, but I leave it to you . . .

Did he what? Oh, no, sir. The town marshal and Mr. Waxman and Mr. Bensley all caught hold of him and started to take him to jail, and Edith ran up and threw her arms around him and told them they didn't dare,

because what would her mother say? And at mention of her mother, a peculiar expression came over Mr. Blunt's face, and he reached for his pocket.

Yes, sir, he paid Mr. Bensley for the truck, more than it was worth, and he paid Mr. Waxman for the tiles, and he gave the WPA foreman a contribution for the county central committee, and then he turned around and hit me on the nose again.

No, just on the nose. My ears? Why, that's what the Hawkins men did. Until Edith stopped them. She had a very busy time for a few minutes, but at last she said, "Dad, I suppose you've met John," and took my hand, and Mr. Blunt doubled up his fist again. "I'm sure mother would like John," she said, and he undoubled his fist. "I imagine he could tell her some very amusing anecdotes," she went on.

"Oh, you win," he answered. "What's the price?"

"A job for John," she answered, "when he graduates. I think he'd make a good confidential secretary." Which was pretty smart of her, I thought, for I'd been trying myself to decide just what I wanted to do with my life.

"How long till he graduates?"

"He's only a Freshman, Dad," she answered. "Almost four years."

"It's a deal," he answered, and reached out to shake hands, but you can't blame me for thinking he was going to hit me again, so I ducked.

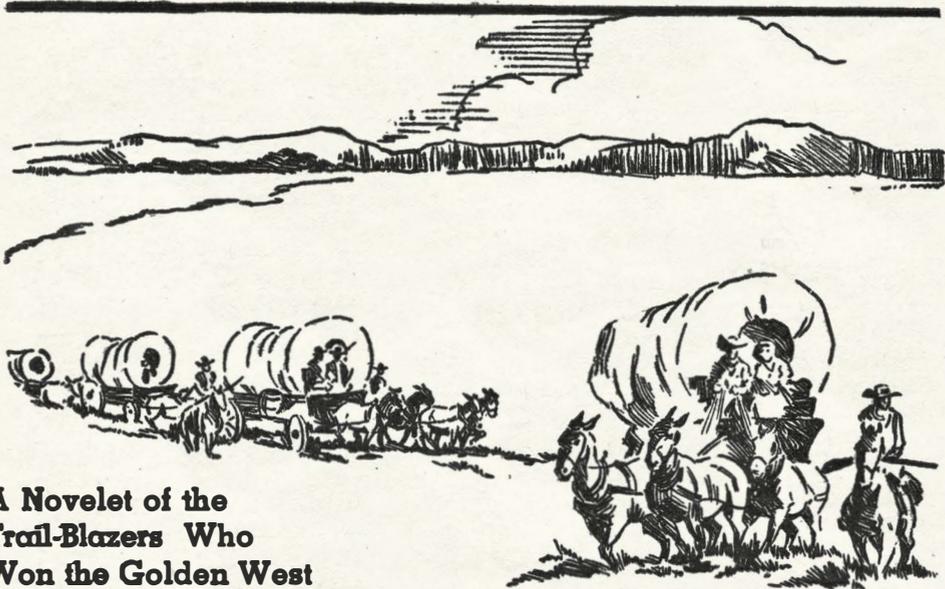
Where is he now? Oh, he started right home alone in his car. Edith? She's waiting out in your outer office for me now. Yes, sir, with a couple of newspaper men.

Why, I don't know, unless they're looking for a story. She promised she wouldn't talk to them if you let me stay in school. But if you kicked me out, why, she's going to tell all. Yes, sir, she thinks it would be very amusing in print.

No, sir, I imagine you'd not like to read it. Any more than Mr. Blunt would.

I'm to tell her what, sir?

Oh, thank you very much. Sir



A Novelet of the
Trail-Blazers Who
Won the Golden West

On to Oregon

By Philip Ketchum

I

The Barking Dog

IT WAS the first night out. Westport, someday to be called Kansas City, lay eighteen miles behind them. Some two thousand miles away, to the north and west, lay Oregon. There was one of the first wagon trains to get away in that spring of 1844 and John Heckemer, who had been elected leader, had promised them that they would be the first to arrive at their destination. Already that thought had gripped their imaginations and, after the wagons had been pulled into a circle and camp had been made and the evening meal prepared and served, there was much singing and laughter.

Most of the members of the company had gathered around the campfire within the enclosure, but Nathan Willet and Sam Schemmerhorn watched from a distance. They were a part of the group, yet not a part of

it, for they had been engaged to pilot the wagon train across the plains and mountains to the shores of the western sea. Schemmerhorn had made the trip four times. He was a little man, short, stooped, whiskered. He wore the buckskin of the trapper, Indian moccasins, coonskin hat. He was dark, talked but seldom, seemed never to sleep and never stirred a foot without his long Sharps rifle. Most men called him just Sam Shem.

Nathan Willet was younger and this was only his second trip across the plains. Tall, thin, his features bronzed by the sun and wind, he seemed older than his twenty-three years and the markings of the plainsman were already upon him. He had little to say, slept lightly, and moved with the lithe grace of an Indian.

After a while John Heckemer joined the two scouts and, leaning his heavy frame against the wheel of a wagon, said, "Well, how's this for the first day?"



Sam Shem grunted and Willet said: "Not bad. We got a late start."

Heckemer rubbed his jaw. He was a middle-aged man from New England, and as he looked over toward the campfire Willet saw a smile touch his lips, and the thought came to him that already Heckemer felt like a father toward all the people in his company. Willet didn't know a great deal about Heckemer but he recognized that the man had the magnetism of a leader, that a high sense of justice rode all his decisions and that a great stubbornness underlay his character.

Willet thought of the long trail ahead, of the problems they would face, of the dangers to be encountered. He said, "I hope—" and then his voice broke off and he frowned. Above the sound of the singing his ears had caught the sound of a dog's bark.

Sam Shem got up, muttering under his breath.

Willet turned to him. "I'll take care of it, Sam," he offered. "I told her not to bring it along."

"Bring what?" Heckemer asked.

"The dog," Willet answered. "Un-

less I'm mistaken that barking we just heard was Mary Davidson's dog. I told her to leave it in Westport. I even found a man to take care of it."

"But surely—"

Willet shook his head. "It may sound unreasonable to you, Heckemer. It did to Miss Davidson. But just the same, this wagon train takes no dogs along with it. Right now, of course, there isn't any danger. The Indians around here are friendly. But after we leave Fort Laramie and get over South Pass we'll find Indians who aren't so friendly, and there may be nights when the barking of a dog would betray our position to a roving band which might cause trouble. The dog's got to go."

NATHAN WILLET didn't wait for an answer but started to Mary Davidson's wagon. While he had been talking he had seen her slip away from the campfire and head in that direction, and he suddenly wished that he had let Sam Shem handle the situation. But after all, it was up to him. He had told her to leave the dog behind, and Sam Shem had left it up to him.

As he neared her wagon, Willet saw Mary Davidson clamber down from inside of it, and in another moment he faced her. The light from the campfire gave her features a rosy glow. She was short, reaching barely to his chin, though she stood very straight. Her skirts almost touched the ground. She had pushed her sun bonnet back from her head.

Staring at her, it came to Nathan Willet that the girl was beautiful, not after the manner of the painted and silk-clothed creatures he had seen back in Westport and Independence, but with a charm which reminded him of his mother. The curve of her cheek, the thin line of her mouth, the trembling of her chin, the imploring look in her eyes, all served to call up for him a tenderness which he hadn't experienced for a long while. Then he said gruffly, "I'm sorry, Miss Davidson, but I'll have to take the dog."

She stepped forward, put out her hands. "No please."

"Sorry," he said again.

"But—but I can keep him quiet. He doesn't bark much. I—"

"One bark at the wrong time, Miss Davidson, might cause us more trouble than we can afford."

The girl bit her lips, started to turn back to the wagon but stopped as a voice called, "What's the trouble, Mary?"

Willet saw a young man approaching and recognized him as Fred Hall. Hall was dark, handsome, and given a little, Willet had decided, to bragging. But he was a good shot, as he had demonstrated back in Westport, and he was young, husky and strong.

"It's Jasper," Mary answered. "This man is going to take it away from me."

Hall walked forward and planted himself between Willet and the girl. "See here. What's the idea?"

Willet explained as he had to Heckemer. "About five miles back," he concluded, "there's a farmer. I'll take the dog there. If he doesn't want it he can take it on in to Westport when he goes in."

Hall's face tightened with sudden anger. He said bluntly, "You'll not take that dog."

Willet felt that the situation was growing ridiculous. It seemed to the girl, to Hall, as if he would probably seem to others, as if he were deliberately exercising his authority. But he knew how Sam Shem felt about dogs and he had the same feeling himself and, looking past Hall, he said to the girl, "Get me the dog." Then he started to walk around the young man before him.

Hall grasped him by the shoulder, jerked him off balance. A rocklike fist smashed into Willet's face. He tripped, fell.

He heard the girl cry out, "No, Fred. Don't!" And then as he started to get up he was aware of the fact that the singing by the campfire had stopped and that men were running toward him.

There was a wide grin on Hall's face and a glint in his eyes. "Still want that dog?" he demanded.

Willet looked from Hall to the girl. He realized in a rather vague way that Hall's antagonism couldn't be out of affection for the dog but was undoubtedly a bid for the girl's favor. He said slowly, "Yes, I do," and stepped forward.

Heckemer came rushing up between them, thrusting him away, and a couple of other men grasped him by the arms. He heard Hall telling the others of his unreasonable demand and he heard a man named Gossard saying in a loud voice, "Ridiculous—ridiculous! Why hardly a wagon train leaves Westport without a dozen or more dogs." And then more men chimed in to support that contention.

Heckemer shouted for attention and when the group had quieted down, announced flatly, "The dog goes. We hired Willet and Sam Shem to pilot this train to Oregon. Their advice with regard to precautions we will take. That is a flat rule. And right now I'm making another. There will be no fighting between any of us. If any of you have any differences, bring them to the council. If they cannot

be settled there, settlement must be postponed until we have reached our destination. Do you understand that?"

The men chorused that they did and Heckemer turned to Mary Davidson. "Get the dog," he ordered.

SHE climbed into her wagon, and while she was out of sight Nathan Willet looked over at Hall. Hall was standing close to Gossard and Gosard was talking to him and to one or two others in so low a voice that Willet couldn't hear what he was saying. The grin, however, was still on Hall's face.

A few moments later the girl climbed out of her wagon holding a small, white puppy in her arms. Her face was pale and there were tears in her eyes. She held the dog out to Willet, bit her lips and then said, "There, take him—take him—I——" Her voice choked and she turned away.

Willet accepted the dog. He started across to where Sam Shem was standing, and as he passed Hall and Gosard and the other men, Hall said quite distinctly: "Two of a kind, but I'd pick the one that barks." And the others laughed.

Willet made no answer nor did he look toward Hall. He reached Sam Shem. Sam was grinning at him.

"Well?" Willet snapped.

Sam's grin widened. He said, "How d'yuh like bein' a villain?"

"Go to blazes," Willet answered.

Sam laughed. "Gonna ride half the night now tuh find that pup a home?"

"I said I would, didn't I?"

"Easier tuh kill him."

Willet shook his head, and Sam Shem reached out for the dog. "I'll take him back, son," he offered. "Want tuh do a little movin' around tonight, anyhow?"

Willet hesitated. "That a promise?"

"Sure, son. Get tuh sleep. I need the exercise."

II

Women Are Trouble

THE wagon train moved north and west. Some days fifteen miles, some days twenty, never more. The

camp awoke with the dawn. The wagons were broken out of their circle, the oxen and mules hitched up, the day's trek started. The wagon which led on Monday moved to the end of the line on Tuesday and another led the way. Behind the wagons followed the herd of fifteen cattle, driven by the older boys and by one or two of the men. There was a short pause at noon and then travel until dusk, when the wagons were wheeled into a circle so that the tongue of one stuck under the wheels of another.

Within that circle of cattle, horses, oxen and mules were kept throughout the night, and at one side was the campfire where the evening meal was prepared and served and around which the people sat and talked for an hour or more after the meal was over. Posted guards stayed on duty all night. Tents, which some had brought, were hardly used at all as the emigrants grew accustomed to sleeping out under the stars.

Sam Shem and Nathan Willet rode but little with the wagon train though returning to it every night. Theirs was the responsibility of plotting the course, of selecting the camp site for each night's rest and the stopping place at noon. Twenty to thirty miles ahead of the train they ranged and from five to ten miles on either side. Supplying fresh meat and sometimes preparing firewood was also a part of their task. They were seldom together but also seldom alone for various members of the wagon train usually accompanied them on their rides ahead or hunting excursions closer to camp.

Six hundred and sixty miles it was from Westport to Ft. Laramie; forty days the journey took. One day had been spent in fording the Platte river and another in making repairs to wagons and harness.

When they reached Ft. Laramie, though, they were told that there were five other companies ahead of them. Heckemer said bluntly, "We'll pass them all. We'll be first this year to Oregon."

Sam Shem heard him and turning

to Willet said, "What difference does it make, anyhow?"

Willet shook his head. "None. But it's done this. It's given the men in the company a notion that they're in a race. They work together better than a lot of people might."

They stopped for only a day at Fort Laramie and then continued on their way, following the Platte river to the mouth of the Sweetwater and then to the place where they must start over the South Pass. Before they had left the Sweetwater they had passed two of the five companies ahead of them, and on their way over South Pass they overtook another.

Day succeeded day, each with its problems, each different from the one before. Accidents caused occasional delays, but so far no serious illness had bothered them and the spirit of the company was good.

The spirit of the company—but not his own. He was possessed by a great restlessness, and on the night when they reached the broad, open valley of South Pass, nine hundred and forty-seven miles from Westport, he sat apart from the campfire and from the general celebration, watching the others moodily.

His eyes rested often on Mary Davidson. She had hardly spoken to him since that first night, and her attitude puzzled him. To the others of the company she was cheerful and gay, but always at his approach she seemed to freeze up and an unnatural hardness came into her face. That she should bear a grudge this long didn't seem to fit into her character.

She was very friendly with Fred Hall, and Hall still disliked him and still made occasional insulting remarks to Willet which Willet overlooked. Fred Hall, he had decided, was nothing more than an overgrown boy who thought himself a man and who was continually talking out loud, men's language, in order to prove his maturity to himself. As much as possible, Hall avoided heavy work, scouting duty. He was at his best around a campfire, playing a guitar, or telling a story.

Only one thing about Hall alarmed him and that was the young man's friendship with Joseph Gossard. The two were always together.

Of course there wasn't any real reason to be alarmed at that. He knew practically nothing of Gossard. The man was middle-aged and was accompanied by his twelve-year-old son. He had talked rather vaguely of his early life in Pennsylvania but once Sam Shem had said to Willet, "Gossard's been over this trail before. He knew when we shoulda crossed the Sweetwater an' he knew just where tuh look fer Devil's Gate. There's somethin' funny about him, son. Keep yore eyes open."

Willet noticed only two things—that Gossard exhibited a streak of cruelty in the way he treated his son, and the second was that the man was paying too much attention to Paul Sprague's wife.

Paul Sprague, like Heckemer, was a New Englander. He was tall, thin, quiet and reserved. His wife, much younger, wasn't at all like him. She was very attractive and she knew it. She laughed a great deal, loved to sing, and quite often managed to maneuver herself into the center of the stage. On several occasions Willet had heard them quarreling. But it wasn't until after they had left Deer Creek camp and started up the gentle rise to South Pass that he became aware of Gossard's interest in Edith Sprague.

Heckemer, apparently aware of it, had said one night, "We'll have trouble with that man Gossard some day. I wish that he would leave that woman alone or that Paul Sprague would knock some sense into her."

And Nathan Willet was thinking of all that on the night that the wagon train reached South Pass. He was thinking of Mary Davidson who was traveling west alone but who did her share of the work just as any man; of Fred Hall who rode with his mother and father and thought himself really grown up, of Joseph Gossard and his son Dick; of Paul and Edith Sprague; and of the difficulties

of the journey which lay ahead.

John Heckemer came up to him, filled his pipe, got it going and then asked, "Where's Sam Shem?"

"On ahead a ways," Willet answered.

"That's bad country ahead, isn't it?"

Willet nodded. "We go southwest to the Green River. The country's dry and barren, dusty and hot. But it ain't so far up the Green to Fort Bridger."

"Indians?"

"Plenty, but we may not have any trouble with them."

Heckemer lit his pipe and for a while discussed the route ahead, and then Willet left him to make arrangements for the night guard.

One of the three men whose turn it was for the early watch was Paul Sprague, and for a while after the camp was quiet Willet and Sprague talked together. Sprague came from a long line of seafaring men and a wanderer's blood ran in his veins. He said to Willet, "Some day this whole country will be settled and there'll be shipping up and down the Pacific coast. Your grandchildren will ride on the Sprague lines, Willet. I'll never make another journey by land like this, but it's quicker than around the Horn and I wanted to get there."

For a while they discussed the years which lay ahead, and then Willet returned to where he had left his bed roll and prepared to turn in. The night was clear and from overhead a full moon filled the camp with a soft light. From where he made his bed Willet could see Mary Davidson's wagon. For a while he stared at it, thinking of her and wondering what she planned to do when she reached Oregon. Then the movement of a figure caught his eye and, turning his head, he saw Joseph Gossard slip from the side of his wagon over to Sprague's wagon, clamber over the wheel and disappear inside.

What he had seen troubled him and for a long while he sat on his blankets, frowning. Gossard, he decided,

and the woman, too, were fools. Such an affair couldn't be carried on without being discovered, and discovery was bound to result in trouble.

Sam Shem, as quiet as a shadow, moved up beside him and squatted down on his heels and Willet told Sam what he had just seen.

Sam grunted. He said, "Son, keep out of things like that. Yuh can't stop it. If yuh try yuh'll catch hell from every side."

"But if Sprague—" His voice broke off. Across the enclosure he saw Sprague approaching his wagon and he got to his feet.

Sprague climbed over the wheel, disappeared inside the wagon and a moment later the loud sound of voices came to his ears and he saw two men, one after another, jump out from the rear end of the wagon and then come together in a brief, short struggle.

He was already running as one of the men fell and he saw, startled, that it was Sprague on the ground and that Gossard, a knife in his hand, was hurrying away.

Willet started to run. He overtook Gossard within a dozen yards, whirled him around. Gossard's face was pale and one eye was half closed. He was breathing heavily.

"Hand over the knife!" Willet ordered.

Gossard hesitated. In that brief moment he must have realized that he had been seen, and measured his chances of escaping punishment if he submitted to Willet's order. He shrugged, lifted one hand to the back of his neck where the knife was sheathed, took it out and said, "Here." And then his hand, lightning swift, slashed out at the scout.

Willet evaded that blow. Just how he was never afterward sure, but he fell away from it, recovered, danced forward and then suddenly threw his body at Gossard. One of his hands caught Gossard's wrist and held it in a clutch of steel. His other, balled into a fist, smashed at Gossard's face.

Nathan Willet was like a man gone mad. His fist smashed again and again

into Gossard's strained, white face. Gossard fell and dragged Willet with him. They rolled over and over, Willet still clutching Gossard's knife wrist. And gradually Willet could feel his enemy's strength slipping away.

Hands seized him and pulled him away from Gossard and, staring groggily around, Willet saw that the whole camp was aroused. Heckemer, clothed in a nightshirt over which he had thrown a coat, demanded, "What's the meaning of this, Willet?"

Nathan Willet looked over toward Sprague's wagon. He saw with considerable relief that Sprague was standing erect, holding one hand over his shoulder. Sprague shook his head and started forward.

"Well?" Heckemer demanded.

Before Willet could answer, Paul Sprague staggered and called out, "Will one of you—help me?"

I—I fell and— and cut myself with a knife."

Willet blinked. He looked past Sprague and saw Edith Sprague staring out toward them but her face was hid. He looked down at Gossard. Gossard was getting up. There was no knife in his hand. Sometime during the fight he must have dropped it. Several men had gathered around Sprague but Heckemer still faced Willet, and on the fringe of the circle Willet could see Mary Davidson.

"I'm waitin'," Heckemer said.

Gossard got to his feet, brushed himself off. Simulating anger he faced Willet and said, "Well, what was the idea? What had I done?" And then turning to Heckemer he added, "All I know is that I was walkin' along an' this fellow jumped me. I'm gettin' good and tired of him if you ask me."

Heckemer's lips tightened. He said, "That true, Willet?"

Willet shrugged. He looked around at the circle of faces. Hall stood in the front, a sneer on his lips. Other faces mirrored surprise or disgust. Willet knew that Gossard wasn't popular, that a word from him could clear up the situation. He had friends in that group who would believe anything he said. But his lips had been sealed by Sprague's look. Any explanation would have to involve Sprague and his wife.

He said, stiffly, "The difficulty between me and Gossard is a personal matter. I—I won't discuss it."

Gossard laughed sarcastically. "It's a matter of a card debt," he offered. "Willet agreed to pay me when we reached Fort Bridger. Maybe he doesn't want me to get that far."

"How about it, Willet?" Heckemer asked.

Willet could see that some of the men still looked puzzled. He felt that some of them wouldn't believe Gossard's accusation and that much further talk might lead them to guess at the truth. He said abruptly, "I still don't care to discuss it," and turned away.

As the crowd opened to let him through he passed Mary Davidson, and in her eyes he saw a mingled disgust and loathing and the realization of how he must appear to her made him sick at heart.

Sam Shem was waiting for him near his bed roll and Sam said quietly, "I told yuh, son, but that was sure a perty fight. Yuh're quick, mighty quick."

Willet sat down, made no answer. He thought, bitterly, that this finished him with Heckemer's company,



and when he saw Heckemer approaching a little later he stood up, stubbornly determined to maintain his silence, no matter what the cost.

But Heckemer didn't jump him as he had expected. Instead Heckemer said, "I've just talked to Sprague. He told me what happened. That was a brave thing you did, Willet, in jumping Gossard, but it was a braver thing in keepin' still as to the reason. Gossard leaves the company at Fort Bridger. He can wait there an' come on with another group. He should be punished, but Sprague has asked that his wife be kept out of the picture an' that leaves us helpless. After Gossard is gone maybe we can think up somethin' to tell the others to explain why yuh jumped him. In the meantime we'll just have to hope that they'll not get too worked up about it. As a last resort Sprague will talk—but only to save you."

Heckemer put out his hand. "Shake, Willet."

Somehow Nathan Willet managed a grin. And after Heckemer was gone he said to Sam Shem. "I'm beginning to think you're right about a lot of things, Sam. But at least you've got me to thank for one thing. If I hadn't jumped Gossard he would have gone on with us, and sooner or later there would have been more trouble. As it is, we get rid of him."

III

A Long Trail Ahead

IN eight days the wagon train reached Fort Bridger, 1,070 miles from Westport and well over half-way to their destination. During that journey from South Pass, Nathan Willet saw but little of his companions. He rode each day in advance of the company, selecting the night's camping place, marking it, preparing firewood and then moving on ahead. Now and then he marked small bands of Indians but none came close enough for any exchange of conversation and none acted hostile. Late each night Willet would return to the camp to discuss matters with Sam

Shem and Heckemer, to plan the next day's journey. And there, the night before they reached Fort Bridger, he saw Paul Sprague.

Sprague was up and around again, a little pale, a little unsteady.

Drawing Willet a little away from the camp he muttered a blunt word of appreciation for what the scout had done and then added, "It wasn't Edith's fault. It's this trip, the monotony, the hardships, and—and I guess it's partly me. I—I don't want you to think too badly of her, Willet."

Nathan Willet put an arm around Sprague's shoulder. He said, "Of course not, Paul. I think I understand." But what he meant was that he understood that Paul Sprague loved his wife, even to the point of overlooking her unfaithfulness.

Later Willet asked Sam Shem about her, and Sam told him that Edith Sprague seemed these days like a different person. "She hardly left her husband's side durin' the hull time he was laid up," Sam finished. "An' she hasn't even talked to Gossard since, 's far as I can learn."

Heckemer said almost the same thing, adding, "Gossard's told people that he's leavin' here to take up trap-pin' for Bridger. He didn't like it when I told him he was through but he came around the next day and agreed. Then he got to talkin' to the other men about you an' he was so bitter that I think most of the folks feel that he's lyin'. Some of them, I know, suspect the truth but Sprague doesn't guess it."

Willet wondered about Mary Davidson but didn't have the nerve to ask about her. Twice he had seen her, since that night at South Pass. Once when he had returned to the wagon train earlier than usual and had noticed her seated near the campfire, staring into it moodily, and then again, early one morning when she was up before he left. But on neither occasion had he approached her. The memory of that look in her eyes that night on South Pass was too bitter in his soul. He admitted, now, to himself, that he loved her, and he was a

little disgusted with himself that he should. She had given him so little hope. . . .

THE wagon train reached Fort Bridger on the afternoon of the eighth day after leaving South Pass, made camp outside the stockade and decided to lay over for a day in order to rest the stock, check over the condition of the wagons, make needed repairs and add to their supplies. One of the wagon trains still ahead of them was there at the fort, held there by illness. Jim Bridger wasn't around but a couple trappers told Sam Shem where they thought he might be found, and Sam set out to locate him. Sam Shem and Jim Bridger had long been friends.

Just at dusk of that day at the fort Nathan Willet was leaning against the stockade and staring out across the clearing when he saw Mary Davidson approaching him. He thought at first that she was planning to enter the fort but as she neared the gate she veered off and walked over to where he stood.

Willet straightened, removed his hat. A peculiar sensation crept over him. His knees felt shaky and his throat was suddenly very dry.

Looking up at him the girl said, "I've wanted to see you for several days, Mr. Willet. I wanted to tell you—" She hesitated, and looked away.

Willet twisted his hat in his hands, tried to think of some remark to make but could find no words to put to his tongue.

The girl suddenly looked. "I've talked to Edith Sprague," she said. "I know what happened back there that night on South Pass. I—I think that what you did was splendid."

Perspiration broke out all over Willet's body. He flushed, shifted uneasily from one foot to another and then mumbled a few words whose lack of both sense and assurance caused his flush to deepen. "It didn't amount to—"

Mary Davidson smiled. "But it did. I don't mean the fight. I mean the

fact that you kept still after the fight. I—" She paused and then said bluntly, "Why did you lie to me about my dog?"

"About your dog?" Willet gasped. "Yes."

"But I didn't!"

"You told me that you would take the dog back to a farmer. But you didn't. You didn't leave camp that night. You killed the dog."

"But—"

The girl ignored him. "I don't suppose that it makes any difference. The life of a dog isn't important. I was foolish about it, I know. But it would have been kinder to have told me what you meant to do."

Willet frowned. Had Sam Shem killed the dog that night rather than take it back to the farmer? And if he had, who had told the girl about it? He stared down into her face. A moment before it had been friendly, but now a tightness had settled over her features and her lips were pressed firmly together.

"I didn't go back that night," he admitted. "Sam Shem took the dog back for me."

"Fred Hall found the dog's body the next morning," stated the girl. "I don't think that he meant to tell me. Among men there seems to be a strange loyalty. But it slipped out one night. I—but if you didn't do it—" Mary hesitated, put out her hand, and Nathan Willet took it.

"Let's forget all the past," Mary Davidson suggested. "It's a long trail ahead on to Oregon."

Willet took a deep breath. He repeated, "On to Oregon," and turned to look to the west.

Mary Davidson left him and went on into the fort, and presently Willet started over toward the camp. He had nearly reached it when Joseph Gossard appeared from between two of the wagons.

He seemed to have been drinking. His face was flushed and there was a bitter, twisted sneer on his lips. Leaning forward he ripped out an oath and then stabbed at Willet with his fist.

Willet evaded the blow. He hadn't seen Gossard since the fight at South Pass, and while ordinarily he might have retaliated with a well-directed blow he felt so cheerful since his talk with Mary Davidson that he would have forgiven almost anything. Backing away, he said, "All right, Gossard. Sure."

Gossard laughed harshly, then snapped: "We've got somethin' to settle, Willet. Just the two of us. Come on."

Willet shook his head and Gossard cursed him again, and then, craftily, said, "I saw you talkin' to that Davidson woman. Want to know somethin' about her? Listen, back in St. Louis she was—"

A sudden anger overwhelmed Nathan Willet. His fist shot out, smashed against Gossard's mouth, staggered Gossard back.

Gossard blinked, weaved from side to side, then said, again, "Just the two of us. Come on." And turning he started for the fringe of trees at the edge of the clearing.

Willet hesitated for a moment and then walked after him. This antagonism between him and Gossard was something that had to be settled; this was one fight he couldn't avoid.

GOSSARD passed through the trees, out of sight of the stockade and the camp, and in a little clearing he turned around and faced Willet. It was growing dark but there was still sufficient light for Willet to see the man's face, to see that his attitude of drunkenness had slipped away, to recognize that Gossard had deliberately maneuvered to get him here. With a slight shock of surprise he knew that Gossard meant to kill him. Gossard's right hand reached up to the back of his neck. It was there that he carried his knife. He pulled it out, slowly, and Willet could see the muscles of the man's body tighten.

Suddenly and without any warning at all, Nathan Willet stepped forward and kicked up his right foot. The heel of his boot tore against

Gossard's side, his toe thudded against the man's upraised arm. And the knife curved through the air as it slipped from Gossard's fingers.

"That evens matters up," Willet said grimly.

He stepped forward then, smashing a fist at Gossard's face. The man reeled back, tripped, went down.

Willet moved over to where he lay, stared down at him, and then his body went rigid and his eyes lifted from Gossard and stared from side to side. Stepping out from the shadows of the trees but almost as silently as the shadows themselves, were three Indians. Even in the gathering dusk Nathan Willet could distinguish the war paint on their faces and his eyes caught the gleam of light from the knives in their hands.

He turned his head. When he had entered the clearing he had set his rifle against a tree and he looked that way now but the rifle was gone.

From the ground, Gossard laughed, and Willet heard him say, "Goodbye, scout. You're goin' on a long journey."

With a guttural cry one of the Indians sprang forward, his knife flashing up and down. Willet sprang back from the blow. His foot lashed up again, caught the Indian in the groin and then the other two came at him.

Willet's fists lashed out. A searing pain scraped down one arm and a burning fire lanced through his shoulder. He jerked one of the Indians in front of him, stabbed a fist at his throat, staggered backward, fell.

An Indian sprawled on top of him and the knife in the Indian's hand cut downward toward his throat. He jerked his head away from the point, grabbed the Indian's knife-wrist, twisted free. A shot crashed from across the clearing and then another as he came to his feet. And though he heard those shots he didn't understand them, didn't realize that help had arrived. His hand tightened on the Indian's wrist, twisted it until the knife slid to the ground, and then bending, he picked up the Indian, lifted his squirming body high into

the air and dashed him to the ground.

Two figures came hurrying from the side of the clearing and Willet turned that way, fists clenched. Blood was hammering at his head and his eyes were fogging. He staggered forward, then stopped suddenly as an amused voice said, "Perty, my lad, but ye didn't finish him. Mind if I lend a hand?"

Willet blinked. He saw now that one of the two men was Sam Shem and he knew that the other must be Jim Bridger, and looking around he saw two of the Indians flat on their backs. He understood, then, the rifle shots he had heard.

Sam Shem came up to him, made him sit down and examined his wounds. Willet related what had happened. Gossard, he had noticed, was gone.

Strips of Nate's jacket were hanging in tatters, and the brown naked skin of his chest glistened sweatily.

When he had finished, Bridger nodded and said, "I was afraid of somethin' like this. Talked tuh Runnin' Elk, chief of the Nez-Percés Indians, 'bout a month ago. Got an idea then he was up tuh some sort o' mischief. These three are Nez-Percés an' yuhr man Gossard musta known 'em."

Sam Shem grunted. He said, "I knew that Gossard had been this way before," and then turning to Willet, he added, "Maybe we ain't seen the last of him after all."

Willet made no answer. He went with Bridger and Sam Shem to the fort, heard of how Bridger had noticed the trail of the Indians as he and Sam were coming in, and of how they had followed it to the clearing to arrive just in time.

His wounds were painful but not serious and when they'd been bandaged, his clothing hid them.

It was decided to say nothing about the Indians, and to try and postpone leaving for another day while Sam Shem and Jim Bridger scouted ahead and tried to discover whether or not the entire Nez-Percés tribe was on the warpath.

IV

Red Wrath

EARLY the next morning Nathan Willet hunted up Gossard's son. He found the boy at his father's wagon. Young Tom was tall and awkward. His clothing was old and patched and dirty. He had a shock of uncut, blond hair, and when Willet called to him he pushed it back from his eyes and looked nervously from side to side as though debating the possibility of running away.

Willet stopped near him, frowning. He hardly knew what to tell the boy, what to do with him. He didn't think it probable that Gossard would come back for him or be further interested in his fate. The man had never seemed to treat the lad as a son.

"Tom, want to go on to Oregon?"

The boy's mouth dropped open, his eyes blinked. "C-c-c-can I? Can I, sir?" he stammered.

Willet hesitated. This decision was something which Heckemer should make but Heckemer didn't know the truth about Gossard. "I'll see."

The boy moved closer, bit his lips and then said suddenly, "That man isn't my father, Mr. Willet. My name's Tom Moore."

"What?" Willet gasped.

"Yes, sir. You see, I wanted to go to Oregon. I was working at a store in Independence and Mr. Gossard heard that I wanted to go. He came to me one night and told me that if I would say that I was his son and would work for him, I could go in his wagon. He took me to Westport and took care of me until we were ready to leave."

Willet's frown deepened. "Where are your people, Tom?"

"I haven't any, sir. I'm from an orphanage in New York. When I first ran away they sent after me and brought me back, but I don't think that they'd follow me as far as Oregon. Besides, there's plenty more orphans to work their farm."

"What would you do in Oregon?"

"Work. I'm a good farmer, sir. Strong as a man."

"But you're running away from work."

"Oh no, sir. Not from work. From Ed Slater, the farm boss at the orphanage, and from his whip. I don't mind work, sir."

Willet nodded. He said, "I'll see, Tom Moore. I'll talk to Mr. Heckemer about you," and turning away he looked for Heckemer.

The boy's story had surprised and bothered him. That Gossard had been over this trail before he was now sure. That he was a renegade seemed also certain, for surely he had planned that trap the day before with the Indians. But what had been his purpose in bringing the boy along? The only answer which he could find to that question was that with the boy he had someone to drive his wagon, thus leaving him free to ride away from the train on scouting trips. How often Gossard had done that he didn't know but he couldn't feel that that was the whole explanation.

He saw Heckemer and told him the boy's story. "Gossard has left, deserted him," he stated. "There's nothing for the lad here, and we can't send him back. Looks like taking him along is the only thing to do."

Heckemer agreed and said that he would make what arrangements might be necessary, and with that duty out of the way, Willet hung around the camp looking for an opportunity to see Mary Davidson alone. He wanted to talk with her again, to reassure himself that all was clear between them. But all morning she worked with the other women and in the early afternoon he saw Fred Hall approach her and then watched while the girl and Hall walked down to the river where Hall seemed to be instructing her in the art of fishing.

For several minutes he watched them, then he turned away. All might be clear between them, he decided, but there would probably never be anything more than that. He himself was just a scout. Hall's father planned on opening a store in Oregon. Later wagon trains were to bring out supplies and a ship load of goods

was being sent around the Horn. He couldn't match that.

SAM SHEM and Jim Bridger returned late that night. They reported no Indians in the immediate vicinity of the fort, but Bridger who had trailed Gossard for a way said that his tracks pointed towards Running Elk's town.

"We'd better get started early," Sam Shem insisted, 'an' travel fast. A renegade white man can always stir up the Injuns. There's gonna be trouble along this stretch of the trail, Jim, until Gossard is put away."

The wagon train pulled out at dawn, heading down the Bear River toward Fort Hall, some two hundred miles away on the Snake River. And as the wagons swung into line, Gossard's wagon, driven by Fred Hall, took its place with the rest, and Hall, when questioned by Heckemer, exhibited a bill of sale for the wagon, signed with Gossard's name.

"Wasn't no point I could see in leavin' the wagon here," Hall declared. "Besides, it's full of stuff I can sell in Oregon. I'm gonna run my old man a race as a merchant."

And so Gossard's wagon went along, but Tom Moore didn't ride in it any longer. His face scrubbed until the freckles on his nose seemed pale, his hair cut and his clothing washed and patched, he sat proudly in Mary Davidson's wagon, occasionally taking a turn at driving her mules.

Two hundred and eighteen miles from Fort Laramie to Fort Hall, twelve days to make it. Almost record-breaking time. And now Sam Shem and Nathan Willet talked to Heckemer and to others about the two companies just ahead, the two who were leading the way in that year's travel. As subtly as possible the notion of a race was again worked into the spirit of the company. The days were longer, now, and the day's march was lengthened. Sam Shem and Willet, talking things over, decided that if they could possibly overtake one of the leading wagon trains, they would stay with it.

"There's renegades an' renegades," Sam Shem commented. "Some live with the Injuns 'cause they like that kind o' life or 'cause the white man has run 'em out. But there's others who ride with the Injun fer the loot they can pick up. Whichever kind Gossard is, he'll not forget yuh licked him twice, son, an' whether yuh rode on with us or not, he'd seek revenge on this company fer a hundred fancied insults. Besides, he probably still fancies that Sprague woman."

At Fort Hall they were told that the two companies ahead of them had combined and had departed just two days before but they lay over for a day for necessary repairs before starting down the Snake River toward Fort Boise, a Hudson Bay Company Post three hundred miles distant.

NINE days out of Fort Hall, Sam Shem came on the first traces of marauding Indians when a party of four braves suddenly confronted him as he scouted a dozen miles ahead of the wagon train. The Indians seemed as surprised as he at the encounter but one of them swiftly strung an arrow to his bow and the shaft came within a foot of Sam Shem's head as he shot the Indian dead. The others turned and ran.

Sam didn't bother following them. He rode on until he came to the place where the wagon train ahead of them had stopped; the ashes of the camp fire was still warm. They were only a day ahead, now. During the past nine days Heckemer's company had moved swiftly. In another two or three they would overtake the train ahead.

When Sam returned to camp that night he told Nathan Willet of the Indians, and Willet could see that the old scout was worried. He doubled the guard that night, saying only that since they were now in the midst of Indian country such a precaution was necessary. Then as the campfire burned low he sought out Mary Davidson. He had had very little opportunity to see her since leaving Fort Bridger, and on the several

occasions when he had talked to her he had felt stiff and ill at ease and had been at a loss for things to say. But tonight when he came up to her wagon an entirely different feeling came over him. In the way Mary smiled at him, in the tone of her voice, he seemed to read a new understanding.

For a while they talked of incidents of the trail, of the happenings of the past few weeks and of the country which lay ahead, and once Mary said, "Oregon. The very sound of the word is like music. Is it as beautiful as they say?"

Willet nodded. "Some day," he prophesied, "it will be a great state—the greatest in the Union."

"And we will be a part of it."

"Yes, we will be a part of it."

For a while the girl was silent. Then she asked suddenly, "Why are we hurrying so? Why do you always talk of overtaking the companies ahead?"

"So that we may be the first to get there this year."

Mary Davidson frowned. "Is that the only reason?"

Willet shrugged. He was about to answer when a footstep sounded behind him and, turning around, he saw Fred Hall approaching.

Hall, since taking over Gossard's wagon, had been almost unbearable. He had sat in on council meetings, talking with a loud voice, raising objections to trivial matters, seeming to try to impress the others with the importance of his new position as an owner of one of the wagons in the train. He had also adopted a new attitude toward Willet. He didn't even seem to notice that Willet was around.

"Sorry to be late, Mary," he announced. "Suppose we take a little walk. It's a fine evening."

Mary Davidson clambered down from the wagon, smiling at Hall, and it occurred to Willet that all the time the girl had been sitting there waiting for Hall.

He said brusquely, "No walking outside the enclosure tonight."

Hall scowled and Mary looked at him oddly. Then Hall said, "Come on, Mary. If this fellow doesn't like it he can take it up with the council."

But Mary shook her head. "Not tonight, Fred. I'm a little tired anyhow. Let's walk over to the campfire."

WILLET watched them go, then turning around he sought out his horse, saddled it, led it outside and mounting set off to the west. For five miles he rode down the faintly marked trail while the thoughts in his mind churned together irrationally. He would be glad, he decided, when they did reach Oregon and when this task of his would be over. A scout had no business with a wife, anyhow. He would be a lot better off if he could forget Mary.

Noticing a hill to the left he turned his horse toward it and climbed to the top. Often during the past months he had ridden out this way and, climbing a hill, had surveyed the surrounding country for any signs of fire or smoke which would indicate the presence of Indians. And on several occasions he had spotted a fire but in seeking it out had discovered that it had only marked the camping place of an itinerant band.

At first, that night, he noticed nothing. Then, far to the south a faint glow caught his eye, and looking that way he thought that he could distinguish a fire.

It took him three hours to reach a place from which he could see the fire distinctly, for his progress toward it was slow and most of the way was on foot. But when he did reach a vantage spot, he knew that this was no camp-site of a few itinerant braves. Fifty or more Indians seemed to be gathered there. Some were sleeping but others moved restlessly in and out of the firelight, and to one side several were sitting on the ground as though in council meeting.

Willet didn't watch them for more than a few minutes. From the way some were painted he knew that they were not on any peaceful mission, and one of the figures he had seen looked

remarkably like the renegade Gossard.

Slipping quietly away, Nathan Willet returned to his horse. The wagon train was due for trouble. He was sure of that. But he didn't think that the attack would come the next morning. If it had been planned for then the Indians would have been making war medicine rather than sleeping. They would have been dancing, working up their emotions to the point of savagery.

He started back for camp but, reaching the trail, turned instead to the west. Not more than thirty or forty miles ahead was the other wagon train. He could reach it and return with help if he hurried.

Just before dawn Nathan Willet came to a clearing at the side of the river, pulled his horse up sharply and stared ahead with widened eyes. This was the last camping place of those two companies which had led the way—the last they would ever know. Before him lay the charred remains of their burned wagons and here and there sprawled a silent figure.

He rode closer, seeing in the picture which confronted him, mute evidence of what lay ahead for Heckemer and his companions. At the side of one wagon lay the body of a woman, her arms clutching an infant. Both of them were dead. A little beyond her he saw the figures of three men, horribly mutilated. And beyond there were more. Several dead oxen and mules sprawled in the center of the enclosure. No place was there any living thing.

For the space of several minutes Nathan Willet stared at the scene before him. The attack had probably come just at dawn, had taken them by surprise. But just the same, these two combined companies were larger than Heckemer's and had not been able to withstand the Indians.

He pictured what had happened; the wild yells of the redmen; the whistling of arrows, the flashing of knives, the rattle of gunfire, the stark terror which must have chilled the blood of the defenders, and then the

carnage which had followed, the scalping of the dead, the killing of the wounded, the pawing of the loot.

He could get no help here. He could get no help anywhere. They had traveled too fast to expect anyone to overtake them. Fort Hall lay nine days behind, Fort Boise at least a week ahead. Either was too far to go for assistance.

Pushing his horse to the utmost, Nathan Willet rode back toward camp. The attack, he guessed, would probably come the next morning. All that they could do now was get ready to fight. At least they had a warning as to what to expect.

V

Trail's End

IT was mid-morning before Willet found Sam Shem, and when he told Sam what he had seen, the old scout's face grew grave. Like Willet he saw no chance of help.

They had met on a broad plain where a tributary of the Snake River rolled in from the south. Looking around, Sam Shem said, "This is as good a place to fight 'em as any. We'll make our camp here, son, where we can see 'em sneakin' up in the early mornin'."

"They might not attack us," Willet mentioned.

Sam Shem nodded but it was a forlorn hope. After their easy success with the emigrants ahead and urged on by Gossard, if he was with them, the Indians would surely attack.

Marking the place for the camp the two scouts studied the surrounding country then headed back to accompany the wagons forward. Sam Shem voted against any foray into the surrounding country. "I couldn't see any more than you saw, son," he muttered, "an' if I did run across some Injuns they would know that we knew they were around. Our best bet is to ack like we was not expectin' any trouble, but to be ready fer 'em."

Reaching the wagon train the two scouts called Heckemer aside and told him what they anticipated. Heck-

emer wanted to stop at once, to prepare for immediate attack, but they dissuaded him. "Sometimes they attack a movin' train," Sam Shem admitted, "but usually they jump an outfit just at dawn. That's what they did with the companies ahead, an' since they succeeded I think they'll try it that way with us. Let's not talk about it tuh the others until we make camp."

It was a short trip that day and camp was made early, and as soon as the wagons were pulled into a circle Heckemer and Sam Shem walked around and notified each family that no one was to leave the camp, that an important meeting was to be held in just a few minutes. A hunting trip which some of the men had planned was canceled and Willet could see a feeling of uneasiness stealing over the group.

Watching the sun go down in the west he wondered how many of them would see it rise the next day, and it came to him, suddenly, that he was frightened. He had never before known fear. It was a new experience. Then he heard Mary Davidson's voice saying, "What is it, Mr. Willet?"

He swung around to face her. Her face was unusually grave. Forcing a laugh he asked, "What is what?"

The girl's frown deepened. "You are worried about something, and Mr. Shem and Mr. Heckemer. Is it Indians?"

For a moment Nathan Willet hesitated, then he nodded and said, "Yes, Indians."

"A war party?"

"Yes."

"And you think—"

"That they will attack us."

The girl stared out across the plain to the fringe of trees far ahead. And after a pause she said slowly, "Everything seems so peaceful that it's hard to realize that there is any danger."

Sam Shem came up to them and said, "We'll say nothin' about what we expect until around the campfire after supper. Sort of keep an eye on things an' don't let anyone stray away from camp, son."

Willet nodded, and then with Shem circled the enclosure, noting the places where the wagons could be shoved closer together.

IT was a strange meeting around the campfire that night. The women cleaned up the dishes and Fred Hall played his guitar while some of the people sang. And then abruptly Heckemer called for silence.

Men grew rigid, women clasped their children to their breasts, here and there a sharp gasp broke the heavy silence which had settled over the group and everyone turned and stared away from the fire at the deepening shadows of the night.

They had discussed over and over the danger of Indians. Occasionally there had been a scare. But now, at last, the danger was real.

Looking around, Nathan Willet saw Edith Sprague clutching her husband's arm. He saw Heckemer's two sons, both in their late 'teens, standing by their father. He saw Tom Moore leaning forward, eyes wide and sparkling, and he saw Mary Davidson looking over to where Fred Hall sat with his parents, the worried frown he had noticed that afternoon still on her face. Hall, he observed, was very pale and was biting his lips.

Heckemer talked in even tones, telling the people that there was no hope of securing help and outlining the plan of defense.

"We expect no trouble until just before dawn," he concluded. "Act just as usual, sleep tonight if you can and are not on guard duty. Those asleep will be awakened in plenty of time. We will let the Indians almost reach the enclosure before we fire. Not a shot is to be fired, not a warning given, until Sam Shem's yell. And then you must not get excited. You must make every shot count. Our only advantage is that we will be expecting the attack and that the Indians will not know that we have been warned. Of course, they may not come, but they know that in another day our scouts will discover what happened to the companies ahead, and if they do at-

tack us it will be in the mornin'."

There was not much more discussion. The seriousness of their situation was plain and settled over the company like a heavy blanket, numbing their minds. Fred Hall was encouraged to play the guitar for a while longer but he fingered it badly and after a while gave it up. Men returned to their wagons, some to oil their guns and lay their ammunition handy to their reach, others to talk quietly together throughout the long stretches of the night. Willet noticed Mary Davidson talking to Fred Hall in the shadows of Gossard's wagon. The girl's hand was on Hall's arm and her tone of voice sounded very earnest though Willet couldn't distinguish what she was saying. Turning away, he sought out Sam Shem and, sitting down beside the old scout, lapsed into a moody silence.

Sam Shem sucked on his pipe, now and then nodding to sleep or into what was very much like sleep, and Willet envied the old scout's self-control. For himself, he was so worked up, so excited, that sleep wasn't possible.

Time passed on leaden feet. Each five minutes seemed an hour, each hour a century, and then finally Sam Shem stirred and said, "You work left, son, I'll work right. Wake the people in each wagon, caution 'em to be silent, an' pull off the guards. We take their places."

Willet stiffened. "They're coming?"

Sam Shem nodded.

Willet strained his ears but couldn't hear a sound. He started to perspire, felt sure that he was trembling.

Sam Shem stuck out his hand. "Luck, son."

And Willet took it. "Luck."

AS the first gray light of the coming dawn showed in the eastern sky, Nathan Willet stood with Sam Shem staring out across the plain. All about them the wagon train was awake and Willet knew that others must feel the same tension as he.

"There," Sam whispered, pointing.

Willet blinked his eyes, tried to probe the heavy shadows which clung to the ground. Suddenly he thought that he saw one shadow move, and then in another instant he was sure.

"Dozens of 'em," Shem muttered. "They'll creep forward until they're close. Then, when they can't stand it any longer they'll let out a yell an' come runnin' an' jumpin'."

The shadows drew nearer and in the east the sky brightened and all at once, it seemed, Willet could distinguish the approaching savages.

Just ahead of where he was standing between two of the wagons, an Indian sprang suddenly to his feet and a bloodcurdling yell broke the stillness of the night, and then there were other yells and the remainder of the Indians charged forward. Sam Shem signaled.

A gun sounded in Willet's ear and he saw an Indian fall, and then another gun sounded and another went down. That second shot had been his. Almost without realizing it he had aimed and fired.

And now more shots poured from the enclosure as the defenders went to work. Willet fired both his pistols. He reloaded, fired again. Out there on the plain, he saw the Indians dropping. But deadly though their fire might be it wasn't enough to repel the attack. Still screaming like madmen, the Indians reached the wagons, squirmed under them, charged between them. There was no time now to reload and fire again. Those in the wagons might do that but those on the ground could not.

Willet saw Sam Shem club his rifle and break its stock over the head of one savage and then swing it at another and then pull his knife and with a yell leap at a third. Willet used his own gun as a club. He smashed one Indian to the ground, backed away and then clubbed at another.

It was lighter now, light enough so that he could see the battle going on in other parts of the enclosure. Near where he stood Paul Sprague was engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter

with two Indians and then, quite suddenly, Edith Sprague showed up at her husband's side, in her hand a heavy skillet. She raised it aloft, brought it down on the head of one of the redmen. Paul Sprague slipped and fell and Willet heard Edith Sprague scream his name and then throw her body across his just as the second Indian stabbed at Sprague with a long spear. Its point entered Edith Sprague's back and with a wild cry the Indian withdrew it.

Willet was still swinging with his gun. He saw Fred Hall's father charge and slay the Indian who had killed Edith Sprague and then the elder Hall went down under three redmen.

FIGHTING free of those who had cornered him Willet's eyes swept the enclosure. Here and there lay silent figures, here and there a wild struggle was going on, and from the wagons a steady stream of gunfire poured out on the attackers. The Indians might kill them all, Willet realized, but it would be a costly victory.

He searched for Sam Shem but couldn't see him, and then he heard Mary Davidson scream and, looking that way, saw young Tom Moore pitch to the ground with a knife through his chest and standing over him, now facing the girl, was a tall, broad-shouldered Indian who grabbed at her.

Nathan Willet suddenly went mad. He charged forward. An Indian got in his way and went down under his swinging gun. The stock of that gun had long ago been splintered and broken but as a club it was still effective. Reaching the place where Mary struggled with the Indian, Willet swung his gun against the side of the redman's head. He heard a crunch as the skull was broken and then as the man fell, two more took his place and beyond them Willet could see others.

This, he thought, was the end, and that realization made him reckless, desperate. Clubbed gun swinging, he faced them. One went down and then another. The gun was torn from his

hands and he grabbed for his knife. A pain stabbed into his side as one of the braves still facing him lunged forward but Willet hardly noticed it. He grabbed the redman, thrust the knife into his side, then released him, and starting for another his eyes widened with amazement. Standing there, facing him, clothed as an Indian, his body stained and painted, was Joseph Gossard, the renegade.

Willet sprang forward. He brushed aside Gossard's arm, stabbed out with the knife. Gossard backed away, then with a scream of defiance, charged.

Willet felt the renegade's knife tear at his side. He uttered a laugh, smashed a fist into Gossard's face and then stabbed again. His knife went true, sliding between Gossard's ribs just over the heart; Gossard's arms dropped as an expression of pain and astonishment came into his face. Then his body spilled to the ground.

Sam Shem was yelling. "Let 'em go—let 'em go," and, startled, Nathan Willet looked around. There were no more Indians within the enclosure. Those who had survived the fury of the defenders were fleeing across the plains.

Willet saw Heckemer, his face streaming with blood from a scalp wound, walking from group to group of the defenders. He saw men and women, and here and there children, clambering out of the wagons. He saw one of the men, and then more of them, fall down on their knees and offer up a prayer, and then one of the women started singing in a rich clear voice a hymn of thankfulness.

Mary Davidson came up to him. "Have you seen Fred?" she demanded.

Willet looked at her. Her face was very pale and she was trembling. He shook his head. He hadn't seen Fred Hall since the fighting had started.

"I'll find him for you," he promised. "Don't worry. He's all right."

And then Nathan Willet did find Fred Hall. He found him cowering under one of the wagons, crying and shaking with fear. His gun beside him was unfired.

Willet pulled him out from under

the wagon on the side away from the enclosure. He thought of Mary Davidson and of what it would mean to her when Hall was shown to be a coward and then, noticing that no one could see them, he said to Hall, "Right now you may resent this but some day you will thank me. Remember. You were in the fight and an Indian did this."

Willet's fist shot out and smashed Hall in the face, knocked him to the ground. His nose started to bleed.

Bending over him, Willet tore open Hall's shirt, smeared the blood on his chest. Then, very deliberately, he took Hall's knife and stabbed it through the upper portion of Hall's arm.

"There," he muttered grimly. "That ought to do the trick." And picking him up he carried him back to Mary Davidson.

THE wagon train rolled on. Behind them there on the banks of the Snake River they left a cairn of stone marking the final resting place of those who had died in the battle with the Indians. Edith Sprague had been buried there; and her husband, saved through her sacrifice, looked on to the west, his face set and grim. Fred Hall's father had been buried there and one of the sons of John Heckemer. And there were others. Tom Moore, who would never need fear being returned to the orphanage and who would never see Oregon; two brothers named Alan and Harry McDonald, and a man named Hugh Porter.

But the survivors expected no more trouble from what was left of that band of Indians. Almost ten for one the Indians had died. Expecting to surprise the wagon train, they themselves had been surprised, and the fire from the men in the wagons had been deadly.

Fred Hall's part in the fight had been questioned by no one, and that fight or the death of his father seemed to have sobered him. He was silent for long intervals and sometimes, during the evenings by the campfire, Nathan Willet would look up to find

Fred Hall staring at him as though puzzled.

One mystery had been solved. An examination of Gossard's wagon had disclosed the fact that it had a cleverly concealed false bottom and that in that hidden compartment, wrapped in oilskins, there were a hundred new rifles.

"He rode as an emigrant, brought the boy along so that we would think of them as a family an' not get suspicious," Sam Shem declared. "All along he planned on havin' this wagon train jumped by his redskins. Those guns were for them, and with them they would have raised plenty hell along this trail."

Willet nodded.

There was no further need to hurry. They stopped, now, more frequently, didn't stretch the day out so long. They came to Fort Boise, to the beautiful valley of the Grande Ronde, crossed the Blue Mountains and followed the Umatilla River to the Columbia, went down the Columbia to the Dalles, and then moved on toward Fort Vancouver.

Nathan Willet spent but little time in the camp. Eighteen hours a day he put in on horseback. He rode ahead of the train, ranged for miles to the south. Sam Shem once asked him if he was trying to get to know the whole Oregon country, and his reply was that a scout *ought* to know it all.

But on the last night before they were to reach Fort Vancouver he stayed in camp. He was thin, gaunt, and he felt very tired, and none of the jubilation which the others felt meant anything to him. Staring toward the campfire he saw Hall talking to Mary Davidson and he didn't blink or look away. During the past month Hall had seemed to take his responsibilities seriously. Willet didn't think that he would ever again act the coward.

MARY said something to Hall and then stood up and walked toward where he sat with Sam Shem, and Willet's lips tightened and for a moment he wished that he had stayed

away that night. Then getting to his feet he smiled and mumbled something about what a fine night it was.

Mary nodded. "We're almost here."

"Yes, almost there," he replied. And then, because he couldn't help it, he asked, "What are you going to do in Oregon, Mary Davidson?"

The girl shrugged. "Live here."

She sat down on the ground and Willet sank down beside her. "About that dog," she mentioned. "Fred Hall just told me that so far as he knows it wasn't killed. He made that up."

Willet managed a laugh, then said, "He's all right, Mary Davidson. He learned a lot on the way out here."

"Yes, he learned a lot," Mary answered. "For a while I was afraid for him. Maybe his father and mother didn't show it but they were terribly proud of Fred. Before—before that fight I was afraid—but he came through all right. He's going to take his father's place. Some day he'll be an important man out here."

Willet squeezed his hands together. In a very low voice he said, "For you, Mary, any man could be somebody."

The girl glanced at him. He could feel her eyes on his face but he didn't look at her. He didn't dare.

For a long moment she was silent, then, so softly that he could hardly hear her words, she asked, "Could you, Nathan Willet?"

He caught his breath, blood pounded at his temples. Turning to face her he gasped, "Mary—you mean—"

The girl nodded, tears showing in her eyes, and she whispered, "Since that night you took my dog I—I—but you were so blind—so stubborn—"

Nathan Willet got to his feet. He reached down and pulled the girl erect. He said not a word but his arms closed around her hungrily.

From the shadows, Sam Shem's voice came to him, a little mournful, a little sad. "Ye might have been a mighty fine scout, son, but I guess that's all over. I was afraid of some-thin' like this."

Nathan Willet laughed happily. He said, "Go away, Sam. I'll settle with you later. Can't you see I'm busy?"



By
**Donald
Barr
Chidsey**

Dream a Dream Of Bangkok

WHEN I was a kid I used to dream about the gilded pagodas, temple bells, and all like that. Just the name itself was a kick. Port Said, Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, all sounded wonderful. But Bangkok—Oh, boy!

"You know, when I was a kid I used to dream about this place," I told Woo Sin. "I don't mean *this* dump," I added. "I mean the city."

Woo Sin didn't answer. He was a moth-eaten skeleton of a Chinaman, maybe a hundred years old, maybe a trifle less. He was always smoking a pasty, formless cigarette which never seemed to work; I think it was the same cigarette all the time. He wore shabby dusty clothes. He was rich as Solomon almost—owned all sorts of places—and was a swell guy to work for.

After a while he asked: "Why she think make us more money?" He was talking about Aggie Marsh.

I gave him my Sunday shrug.

"She's a white woman," I pointed out, "and that's a lot in itself. She's a good dancer. She could keep the boys buying drinks. She says if she doesn't make profits jump twenty per cent inside of two weeks, you don't need to pay her anything. In any case all you'll ever pay her is a split like mine."

"You think she good, you think she bad?"

This was what really worried him. Woo Sin was a very moral man—I mean, in the Western sense—which is one reason why I used to wonder if there wasn't a dash of European blood in him. Or maybe it wasn't morals. Maybe he'd had some sort of trouble with the cops, or wasn't supposed to enter into direct competition with certain other local joints. I didn't know or bother about politics: that was his job. And you never could tell about Woo Sin. Anyway, he didn't want any

funny stuff around the Cafe Royale; this much he had made clear.

"I think she's good," I said, knowing exactly what he meant. "Of course, I could be wrong. In which case she goes out on her ear."

He nodded. He trusted me, Woo Sin did.

"Awlight. You tell her Woo Sin say okay," he said finally, and shuffled out, still struggling with that cigarette.

That is how Aggie Marsh got her job. She came back about half an hour after Woo Sin had gone, and I told her the news.

"Swell," she said, and the expression on her face was something to see. "When do I start?"

I shrugged. "Suit yourself. It's your proposition."

"When do you open up here?"

"We're open now."

"Okay. I'll run over to the hotel and get on my other dress. I sold the rest of them. Couldn't get anything, either. You can't ever beat a Chinaman, can you?"

I said, "No," and asked what hotel she was using, and when she told me, I must have winced. She wanted to know if I expected her to be at the Oriental or the Trocadero, and I said I supposed not.

"Need an advance?"

She gave me a funny look. She was a small girl, nicely put together, brown-haired, brown-eyed, alert. At first, she'd seemed sort of tough, but I soon learned that this was only something she propped up in front of her. She wasn't tough. But she'd had a hard time.

"Do you mean to say," she asked slowly, "that you'd hand me an advance when you've hardly even got my name straight yet?"

"Why not?"

She was still looking at me as if she didn't quite believe it. But not dazed. She looked suspicious, like an alley cat that's been kicked around so much it can't relax and enjoy itself when you try to pet it.

"Well, I don't need it anyway," she said at last.

"Okay."

"I'll be back in twenty minutes."

"Okay."

She was back in three minutes, looking embarrassed. "I think I'll accept that advance, after all. Do you mind?"

"Not at all." I opened the cash drawer again, scooped some money out. "Ten ticals? Twenty?"

"I'll take ten."

SHE was smart. She had never held a job like this before, but she had all sorts of ideas and some of them weren't bad. First of all, the decorations. When she arrived these were mostly strips of crêpe paper, old, lank, sad, and so faded that you could hardly tell what their original colors had been. There was also a sort of pasteboard fence, gay once but that had been a long time before, around the three Filipino musicians. Aggie got rid of all this and put in fresh stuff, a good deal the same but somehow much nicer.

She was diplomatic. From the beginning she could get almost anything she wanted out of old Woo Sin, but she never went to him over my head.

Then the sign, the very name of the dump. Café Royale? Terrible! It ought to be the New York Bar. This would be a come-on for tourists, and tourists, after all, when we had them, were the real spenders. The trouble was we didn't have them very often.

Aggie actually persuaded Woo Sin to change the name and to have a new sign painted.

"Well, you're from New York and I'm from New York," she said in defense, though her voice was a bit catchy and she didn't look right at me the way she usually did.

"I'm from Paterson, New Jersey," I corrected.

"Same thing—out here."

She couldn't do anything with the musicians. Nobody could have made those boys less putrid than they were. But Aggie tried. She rehearsed with them when business was slow, and succeeded in keeping them off her neck long enough to get them to learn how to accompany her when she sang a few torch songs. She didn't have

much of a voice, but she had a nice personality; and the bloods of Bangkok thought it was pretty fine to hear American jazz, even if they couldn't understand the words. I told them that Aggie Marsh was a very famous night-club entertainer in the States. She was popular, but she managed to keep the customers at the proper distance. And to give them credit, very few of them ever made any passes. They liked her the way she was, kidding them. She put a lot of pep into the place.

Of course she danced with them. That was part of the contract. I don't think she liked it, but when you're broke there are a lot of things you have to do that you don't like.

NOW I've said that we didn't get many tourists, which is true. Bangkok is not a hot town that way. Everybody has heard of it, everybody knows it's the capital of Siam, and probably a lot of men and women have dreamed about it the way I once had; but not many visit the place. Britishers and a few Americans sometimes come up by rail from the peninsula and stay a day or two before taking another train to Aranya Prades on the Cambodian frontier, where they get a bus for Angkor, Phnom-Penh and Saigon. They go on by sea from Saigon, they don't come back to Bangkok. Coasting vessels put in there, and a few carry passengers, but these passengers are wise, experienced travelers, not rich tourists, not suckers. Maybe two or three round-the-world cruises we caught too, in the course of a year. But people who take those cruises are middle-aged or older still, couples who have saved for years and are determined to see all sights of interest. They weren't concerned with us. They went with professional guides to the palace, the floating market, Wat Benchamabopit, Wat Po, places like that. If they took a drink at all it was at one of the hotels. By nighttime they were too tired to play around. They went back to their ship.

Aggie Marsh, with all the optimism of a newcomer, put her faith in

yachts. She used to get a lot of information about private yachts and a shade breathlessly she'd pass it on to me. She got it from copies of the *North China Times* and the *Singapore News*, obtained Lord knows how, and even, twice, amazingly, the *Honolulu Advertiser*.

"Yachtsmen are what this place needs, Harry. Men with real money who are out to have a good time."

"Sure," I said. "But how many of them stop here?"

"There's no reason why they shouldn't!"

"There's no reason why they should."

"But they don't know that! Now suppose a private yacht does put in here, and suppose the owner and his friends go out looking for some fun—won't we land them?"

"Possibly."

"And wouldn't they spend money?"

"Sure."

"Well, you needn't be so snooty about my idea! There are at least three big yachts in these waters now. One's the Vandeem crowd, but they're mostly older people. One's the Bessie Lobdel yacht, all movie people, they ought to be good spenders. And best of all there's Arthur Bellman's *Mad Hatter*. Arthur Bellman, in case you didn't know," Aggie added, "inherited about thirty millions a couple of years ago."

"I did know."

"And he loves spending it. He's got a big crowd of friends with him on his cruise. They left Honolulu about two weeks ago, bound for Hongkong."

"What makes you think they're going to stop in Bangkok?"

"Nothing. Only if they do, and if we get them in here—"

She got thoughtful. She didn't say any more about it that night, but I knew what she meant. Poor kid!

I've never been in jail, but I suppose that a convict, unless he happens to be a lifer, at least can count the weeks and months and maybe even the days until the time his sentence is up. Being broke in Bangkok is different. I guess I must have been getting to be

like a lifer, with no hope at all, when Aggie Marsh came along. She was full of plans for escape.

WE WERE making more money now, but we still weren't getting rich. I couldn't save enough—wouldn't be able to save enough in years and years, to walk into a steamship-office and buy a ticket for the States. Get a job on a ship? Most of the ships had Chinese or Lascar crews, and when an American vessel did appear its captain wasn't looking for extra hands. Throw yourself at the mercy of the American consul? Ever try it? I had myself a job, so why should anybody at the consulate worry about *me*? Half around the world is a long way. That college-boy talk about they-always-have-to-send-you-back-even-if-it's-peeling-potatoes is sheer hooley. No, I couldn't get back any more than Aggie Marsh could. Not without the dough. She knew this too.

"That Bellman yacht's still in Hongkong," she would report every now and then. "We still have a chance."

"Sure," I'd say. "There's still a chance for me to get elected President of the United States, if it comes to that."

But just the same, I couldn't help hoping. My friends back home, if they ever thought of me at all, probably figured I was spending long sunlit hours in a hammock under a palm tree, sipping strange tropical drinks, being fanned by a turbaned blackamoor, and with maybe some dancers or geisha girls or something twisting to the sound of tomtoms and flutes nearby. You see, I know how people in Paterson, New Jersey, *do* think about spots like Bangkok; because I know how I used to think about it myself.

Well, it wasn't like that at all. The Café Royale—excuse me, the New York Bar—was open just about whenever I wanted to have it open, which was most of the time. Saving every *satang* I could, what else was I going to do? There are some Americans in Bangkok, not many; but how was I

going to hang out with a rich set even supposing they'd consent to have any part of me? After all I got a percentage of what the place took in and naturally I hated to lose the sale of a single drink. Aggie Marsh felt the same about it. Fourteen hours wasn't a long day for us. We ate in the place too to save money. The food wasn't fancy but we took it and liked it; or at any rate we told one another we liked it.

The kind of trade we had—Hokkiens, Khehs, Hailams, Burmese, Cantonese, Klings, Malabar, Javanese—was certainly not the fulfillment of a cabaret proprietor's dreams. They didn't bring girls, but expected to find them. Without a blush they would nurse a single beer or *pahit* for three or four hours, and then walk out, leaving no tip. Yes, as Aggie said, we certainly needed a few American millionaires.

"The Vandeem yacht's in Penang now," she told me one afternoon, "and heading west for Kandy. Well, I never counted much on that crowd anyway."

Maybe it was because they didn't drink much that I had so little trouble with them, about Aggie or about anything else. Or maybe it was because they were mostly south China boys and Malays of one sort and another, sailors and house servants accustomed to obey white people. Also they were small fellows, while I'm pretty big.

THERE was a night, though, that an Annamite got gay. He was a sleek youngster, and liked himself. He could talk a little English, which he seemed to think gave him certain rights to Aggie's company. She was tired that night, and she wanted to be left alone. She was reading a Singapore newspaper—the ship-news section, of course. I had never remembered seeing that Annamite boy around before. He was sort of drunk. And finally, when he kept pestering Aggie, I tapped him on the shoulder and suggested, very nicely, that he let her alone. He sulked, and went to order another drink.

I got behind the cash box again. The big room was rectangular, open, with no booths, so that from this spot I was able to see everything.

Pretty soon, his *stengah* only half finished, the Annamite was back by Aggie's table, wheedling. I went over to him again, still pleasant. But this time he got nasty. He shook himself out of my grip, gave me a push in the chest, and snarled something in his native language. So I chucked him out.

I was pretty sore myself by that time and I wasn't any too polite about it. I just picked him up by the seat of his pants, and chucked him out. We had swinging doors, which made it nice and old-fashioned. And that was that.

At least, I *thought* that was that. Which was my mistake.

I had turned back and had picked up the half-finished *stengah* which I was about to hand to one of the two Cantonese bartenders, when Aggie screamed.

Wheeling around, I saw the Annamite charge through those swinging doors with a knife in his fist. I dashed the drink into his face. It stopped him short, naturally; and before he could get through spluttering I had clouted him. He went down. I kicked the knife out of his hand, hauled him to his feet, knocked him down again, hauled him up and dragged him outside. I booted his pants all the way to the middle of the block.

Aggie looked at me and said simply, and very quietly: "Thank you, Harry."

I said, "Don't mention it." I picked up the knife and chucked it on a high shelf where it couldn't be seen. There were two others like it up there. Souvenirs. But Aggie Marsh didn't know that.

That night when I took her home she was very quiet. We were usually quiet, both of us, on that walk home, because we were always both so tired. But we always walked, to save ricksha fare. Aggie wasn't living at her hotel any more. I'd found her a fairly decent furnished-room not far from where I lived myself.

"You know," she said, looking up at me. "it's funny you've never asked me how I happened to get stranded here."

"Oh, I don't know, You're probably just like me. Nothing to be ashamed of, but it just doesn't make you very happy to talk about it."

"Yes, that way . . . I had a pretty good job in a Frisco night club when this man offered to take me to the Orient as a dancing partner. Just as a dancing partner, you understand."

"Did I say anything?"

"I knew he was a poor bet, but the idea of visiting China and Java and places like that was a big thrill to me—then."

"Sure," I said. "I know."

"So I went, like a fool. We danced four weeks in Shanghai. Then we came down here. We were supposed to be going to Singapore where he said he had another engagement for us, but I've wondered since whether he was telling the truth. Anyway, when we got here he sprang his proposition. Well, I wasn't terribly surprised. He'd been building up to it for a long while. I told him no as nicely as I could, but he was persistent, and so finally I got sore and turned him loose in a way he couldn't possibly misunderstand.

"I figured it would make things pretty bad between us, but I didn't expect to wake up next morning and find him checked out. He had practically all my money too. I waited around a couple of days, thinking he might get over his peeve and come back but he didn't. So I set out to look for a job."

She told me the rest of her story in quick little phrases.

I listened quietly.

Knowing only English and a little French, she had visited dozens of plain and fancy joints. She was a ballroom-dancer without a partner and without very much of a wardrobe and she was determined to make her living on her feet. She didn't tell me much about it, but I could use my imagination. She'd been feeling pretty low, she admitted, when she'd limped

into the Café Royale, and got my promise to speak to Woo Sin.

"I—I can't tell you what a lifesaver you've been, Harry."

"Sure," I said. "Well . . . You'd better be getting some sleep."

"Yes."

"Good night, Aggie."

"Good night, Harry. And—and please be careful about going home tonight. You'd better stick to the middle of the street."

"Sure," I said. "Well, good night."

"Good night, Harry."

TWO days later she told me that the yacht belonging to Bessie Lobdel, the movie star, was returning to the States. But there was still Bellman's *Mad Hatter*. There was still a chance that it would come to Bangkok.

Cocktail time is only something on the clock in Siam; and late-afternoon business was usually so slack that we would treat ourselves to individual walks just to get away from the joint. I was out like that one afternoon, it was getting dark. I'd been out for half an hour when I decided to drift over to the Hotel Oriental terrace and have a drink. I used to go over there every now and then, late in the afternoon, and sit and sip a highball and watch the boats. Bangkok is not on the Gulf, it's up the Menam quite a distance, but sometimes big ships got there, and the river's always crowded with sampans and junks and *prahus*. You can sit on the Oriental terrace and watch them go by; and in the early evening, when they're black silhouettes against the gray of the river, and when everything gets sort of soft and gray all around, it's pretty lovely; it quiets you. This was my only extravagance.

Well, that night I found Aggie Marsh there, which gave me a shock. She saw me. She smiled, embarrassed, and said something about figuring I'd be right back when she had slipped out.

"You're not going to bawl me out, are you?"

I said, "Hell, no." I went on: "Only thing is, it's mighty bad for the old in-

sides, sitting here at just this hour."

"It is, isn't it?" she murmured. "Yes, I've only been here a few minutes but I've learned that already. I don't suppose all those boats are going anywhere much, just up and down the river, but it certainly breaks your heart to see them, doesn't it?"

She got up, and put her arm through mine; and I don't think I'd ever seen her quite so blue.

Once I stole a glimpse over my shoulder. The Menam—in daytime about as ugly a stream as you could find anywhere, the color of cocoa, foul, smelly, strewn with garbage—was now, at this precise hour, so beautiful that it took my breath away. Aggie tugged at my arm.

"You shouldn't do that, Harry," she said gently. "We've got to get back to work."

"You know," she said a little later, as we were approaching the dump, "sometimes I think you feel just the way I do about it."

"Sure," I said.

"If only that— Oh, well. Let's forget it."

ABOUT a week after this, at just about the same hour, when things were quiet, and Aggie and I and just one waiter were having the joint to ourselves, the swinging doors opened and Arthur Bellman came in.

I recognized him right away. And why not? After all, this lad had gone to a lot of trouble to get his picture in the papers and to keep it there.

I don't think he was drunk, but he was feeling good. There were four guys with him, and three women. They were all feeling good.

"The New York Bar, eh? Well, well, well, imagine finding *this* here! Are you from New York, pal?"

I nodded. He put his arm across the bar and we shook hands. He turned, blinking a little. He saw Aggie.

"Are you from New York too?"

"East Fifty-second Street," said Aggie, who really came from Norwich, Connecticut. She dropped a mock curtsey, and she smiled at him.

Now Aggie had a real smile, in case

I've forgotten to mention it. Things usually happened when she turned that smile on. And things happened now to Arthur Bellman. You could see that.

"Oh-oh," he said softly. "How 'bout a drink, honey?" He turned to the crowd he'd brought with him. "What are you people guzzling?" To me he said: "Have one yourself, pal. And send beers out to the ricksha boys."

Though he was long, he looked squashy. His clothes were expensive and fitted him well, but you had the feeling, looking at him, that beneath them, in little crevices of his body, there were pockets of stale air. You somehow expected him to smell of perfume, though to give him credit he didn't. He wasn't old, not more than about twenty-six, and he wasn't dumb, but he seemed prematurely—well, rotten. That's the only word I can think of to describe him—rotten—meaning it literally, not figuratively.

His hair had no color. His face was pinkish. He looked as if he couldn't grow a real beard. He looked like the sound that your heel makes when you draw it up out of mud.

As for the people who were with him, all I can say is that they were people who were with him. They made a lot of noise, but that was all right.

You get used to noise.

"This is a grand place," he cried. "Never expected to find anything like this here. How 'bout another one, pal?"

By the third drink, he was lamenting that he couldn't stay around all night. Aggie asked, why? and he explained that after all a man had to eat. Aggie said that we could fix him and his friends up right there—nothing fancy but good sandwiches at least and some salad.

He thought this very amusing. He thought everything Aggie Marsh said was amusing. But what, he asked, what about wine?

He couldn't dine without his champagne.

Then I spoke my piece. Jerking my

head toward the door behind the bar, I said: "We got a case of good champagne in back there."

THE funny part about it was that we really did have it. When I took the job as manager of the Café Royale the stock included one bottle of some sweet champagne of a marque I'd never heard of, and even that got broken by accident. But Aggie Marsh, soon after she came, had talked Woo Sin into buying a whole case of 1926 Mumm's Extra Dry. She insisted that you *had* to have something like that for emergencies. What she meant it for, of course, was for that yachting party she was always dreaming about. I think Woo Sin was firmly convinced it was a waste of money, but bought it just the same. And there it was.

Arthur Bellman almost had hysterics. Champagne in a dump like this! Well, well, well! Champagne it would be, then. Put 'em all on ice, pal, old pal, and then send out and get another case. They'd have champagne and ham sandwiches for dinner. This was rich!

"I think I'll stay in Bangkok a long time," he cried in his high, grating voice to Aggie and the rest, but mostly to Aggie.

The rest just kept on being the guys and gals Arthur Bellman had brought with him. I assumed that they were his guests on the yachting trip, but I don't remember what any of them looked like or anything any of them said.

The Filipino musicians came in a little while after that, and Bellman went off into further shrieks of delight. I'll admit the Filipinos were not much to look at, and they were even worse to listen to; but I couldn't seem to think that they justified so much noise.

But then, Bellman was a big millionaire, and Aggie Marsh and I both wanted to get back to the States.

I sat behind the cash box watching them—not the musicians, but Arthur Bellman and Aggie Marsh. He danced with her three times, clowning. One of the pieces they played was meant to be a waltz, and it was pretty fast,

the way those Filipinos like to play. Bellman thought this was a riot. He clowned to it heavier than ever, holding Aggie around the waist and swinging his left arm and her right arm exaggeratedly high into the air with each whirl-about.

Well, Aggie was a swell kid and she'd had a tough time of it and she wanted to go back home. You can't blame her, I said to myself. Once or twice when Bellman was notably rough I found myself stiffening in the legs and about to slide off my stool, but each time Aggie tossed over his shoulder an agonized but beseeching glance; and I stayed where I was. Sure, you couldn't blame her.

"Say, this is a marvelous dive! We're going to come here every night, aren't we, crowd?"

They chorused their yesses, and the waiters opened two more bottles.

I had not sent out for another case. There was plenty of time for that. I kept the service zipping, the waiters busy, the tables crowded with cigarettes, matches and ashtrays. But I never slid off my stool. I just sat there watching, and remembering.

I was remembering the way Aggie used to sit afternoons and pore over those newspapers she'd cadged from sailors, reading in the shipping sections about yacht-movements in these parts, and making notes, figuring, hopping. I was remembering how sometimes when the going was a bit too rough there used to come into her eyes a sort of glassiness that told me how much she was suffering; and how nights when we walked home she used to be so tired that she could hardly drag one foot in front of the other.

Remembering this was what kept me sitting there. At least, until Aggie Marsh let out that scream.

WELL, it wasn't so much a scream as a sort of squeal of disgust. I'm bound to admit it was not a very dignified sort of sound, no matter how you look at it. But it had sincerity. It meant what it said.

She was stepping back, trying to step away from Arthur Bellman who

stumbled after her pawing the front of her dress. There wasn't anything melodramatic about it. Aggie Marsh was in no danger. She could have slapped him in the ear, and he was so drunk that it probably would have knocked him off balance. No, nothing melodramatic. Not movie stuff. Just mean and dirty . . .

Incidentally, it made me even more sore, as I ran toward them, to notice that Arthur Bellman's friends weren't doing a thing to quiet him down. Evidently they were used to that sort of thing.

I pulled him back, not roughly but as gently as I could. He turned on me. He'd been all laughs a second before, but now he was furious.

"Keep your filthy hands off me, bartender!" he yelled, and he brought up his right palm, catching me in the mouth.

I was more amazed, in that instant, than mad. It just didn't seem possible that a rat like Bellman would fight. But when he hit me again in the mouth, this time with his closed fist, I got over the amazement.

It jerked my head up. I suppose it hurt, for that matter, though I didn't feel any pain at the time. It certainly made my lips bleed.

I saw Aggie Marsh looking at me. Her brown eyes were very big. She was not frightened, not physically.

My fists were closed, but I held myself still when my glance met hers. I was trembling all over. And yet I honestly think I might have held on to myself if it hadn't been for what Aggie Marsh said.

Well, she didn't really say anything. That is, not anything I could hear. And maybe she didn't even know, herself, that she was moving her lips that way. But I knew it. I couldn't miss it. Her lips said as distinctly as if the words had been written out on a blackboard:

"Go ahead, Harry."

Well, so I went ahead. I don't think anything ever gave me greater pleasure. The only trouble was that it was over so soon. Arthur Bellman took a chair, a table, four empty wine-bottles,

and a flock of sandwich plates, ashtrays and so forth down with him, making a great clatter. Two of his friends were too drunk to do anything but get to their feet and sway there, gawping at me in astonishment. The other two tried to get frisky, but I'm not awarding myself any credit for the way I handled them. They were pretty tight, and I was mighty sore. They went outside, and quick. The two others went out the same way. The women fluttered out, scared. Arthur Bellman had picked himself up from the floor and was shouting:

"You'll see what I can do! I'll close this damn place down! I'll have that bum thrown into the can so fast he won't know what happened to him!"

The words weren't very distinct because some of Arthur Bellman's front teeth wobbled a bit, but it was the gist of what he was yelling as he scrambled back into his ricksha. . . .

WE STOOD in the middle of a very big silence, Aggie Marsh and I. Then she came to me slowly, a step at a time, and she was crying.

"I—I'm sorry, Harry.

"I thought I could do it. I thought I was tough. I ought to be! I—I guess a couple of months ago, before I came in here, maybe I might have been able to go through with it. I don't know. But with you there looking at me—"

"You don't mean to say that because I was—because of me—"

"Harry," she said a little sadly, a little dreamily, "you're an awful fool. Can't you see anything at all. Can't you see that—Well, about how I—"

The musicians, the waiters, the bartenders—there weren't any customers at the time—didn't laugh when I kissed her. Not even when I kissed her the second and third times.

When Woo Sin ambled in about an hour later we had the place pretty well cleaned up. He kept his eyes on the floor, shyly, the way he always did. That pasty, disconsolate cigarette still hung from his loose yellow lips.

"You have tubble?" he asked.

"Little trouble, no more."

He sighed. I'm perfectly sure that the cops had been to him, after Arthur Bellman had noisily been to the cops. Woo Sin didn't say that, never mentioned it, but I'm sure that's the way it was. And he had arranged it, somehow. He was no fool.

Now his eyes went up a little, apologetically, and he saw a cold bottle of champagne standing on the bar. It was the twelfth bottle of the case, the last one, forgotten in the fuss.

"Champagne?" Woo Sin asked.

I grabbed it, slapped three glasses on the bar. "We were just going to have a little, to celebrate."

"Yiss?" he asked.

"Miss Marsh and I have decided to get married."

He didn't smile. He never did that. But I could have sworn, even though he wasn't looking at me, that a flicker of amusement crossed his rheumy old eyes. He nodded very thoughtfully, and he lifted his glass.

"Ve-y good, you go ma-ay. Ve-y good."

He drank; and Aggie and I drank. He put his glass down, and thoughtfully and sedately wiped his mouth. It was the first time I had ever seen him take any sort of drink. He stuck that property cigarette back into his mouth, all the time looking at the floor.

"Awlight," he mumbled finally.

"You fix-em, Woo Sin?"

"I fix-em. You ma-ay. Ve-y good. Awlight."

He stuck his hands back into his sleeves and shuffled out. We stood there with our arms around one another and watched him go.

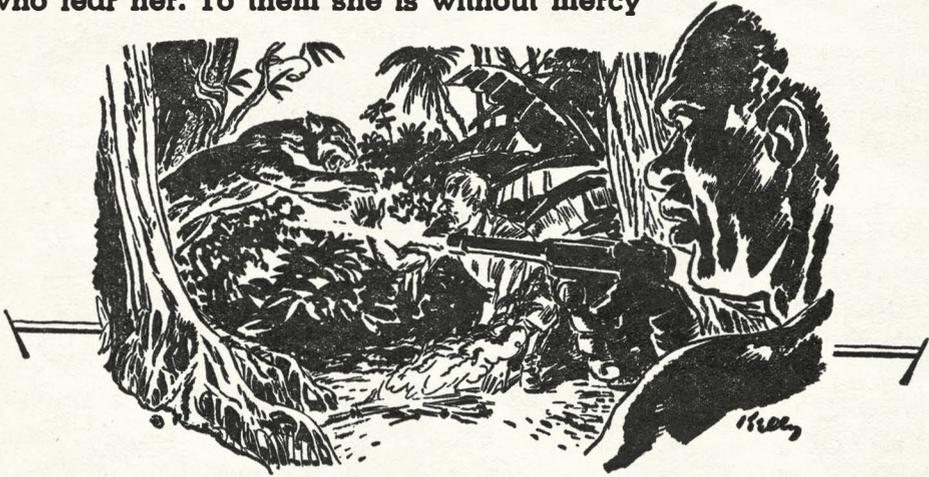
"Well," I said, "that's the whole case now. It's going to make a terrible nick in the savings, but it was worth it."

She held me a little closer.

"It'll be cheaper with the two of us in one room anyway, darling. Oh, we'll make it! We'll make it without benefit of yachts this time, won't we?" She smiled, still looking toward the door.

"Sure," I said.

Africa, savage mistress of men, knows those who fear her. To them she is without mercy



Bushmaster

by Robert Carse

DARK and vast, veined with lightning, the storm came in behind them from the Congo and the sea. Vernot had raced the big bomber before it with all the speed of his motors, steadily holding altitude and his northeast course. Now the plane vibrated throughout, laboring in the first violent wind-gusts. He was forced to shout when he turned to the big black man crouched in the observer's seat:

"Take a look at the map, Bigfoot. How many more kilometers into Fort Sibut?"

Bigfoot ran a spatulate thumb along the detail map of the area he kept spread out for the lieutenant. "About a hundred and twenty-four kilometers, *mossieu*," he said in his clumsy French.

Vernot smiled a little bit, slanting the plane into a climbing bank. "That means we're right over the post at Bangui now," he said. "We're making good time for this crate."

The black man stirred in the seat and spoke slowly. "We're not going to put down at Bangui, *mossieu*?"

Vernot glanced around again from the instrument panel, his eyes narrowed in his pale, aquiline face. "Keep your wits, soldier," he said. "The orders read for Fort Sibut, not Bangui. Sibut is where they want the serum. We'll ride right through with this. We'll be in there in less than an hour." Then he stared out into the storm, all his trained faculties aroused and concentrated to combat it.

It was gaining on them. Now it was about them, on every side, and they were swerved and tossed in the vortex of its fury. The light had gone from a soft green to dull gray, then dark bronze. The rain made solid, glistening walls and on the jungle roof the spray of the shattering drops leaped and smoked in a great silver blur. The trees swayed and snapped under that force; Vernot believed he could hear their branches crash.

Lightning struck. It seared jagged through the bronze-colored light.

Vernot saw the river and the clearing at Bangui, the mud-brick walls of the post, the thatch huts and the flat yellow of the maize and millet patches beyond the parade ground. Then all light went except the ruddy glow of the instrument panel.

Muscles tightened in Vernot's body. He wanted to laugh, or sing. He felt elated, possessed by a strange fierce happiness. This was what he liked, he told himself. It was in such a storm that he had a chance to prove himself. He had flown this jungle many times, from the coast to the Sahara and twice straight on across the desert to France. To fly the area here had become a routine, monotonous job. Tonight, though, it was different; now he must use all his skill. He began to talk aloud, more to himself than the black man:

"They picked me, Vernot, for this. Every time they've got a dirty, difficult job of flying down at the coast, I get it. The big boys grin and say, 'Let Vernot pick up that one'. This time it's sleeping-sickness serum for some rum-rotten colonel of colonials. They want to save a drunk's life and risk mine and a plane. They give me some dumb black recruit as a mechanic instead of a white man, and they push me off in this big, heavy crate. Then they sit on their tails and keep the radio hot, asking did I get in. . . . That's a laugh, though. They know Vernot always gets in. . . . How about you, boy—do you think we'll get in?"

"*Oui, monsieur*," Bigfoot said. "Down at the coast, they all say you're the best pilot in Africa. They all believe in you."

Vernot laughed, pulled his throttles wide. "You figure," he asked, "that you're lucky to be riding with me, hey?"

Bigfoot nodded. The lieutenant had taken time to look at him. "I hope to learn a lot with the lieutenant."

"*Par exemple*," Vernot said. "You're the funniest-looking mech' they ever found for me. Where did you pick up that *nini-nini* French—on this coast?"

"No, boss." Bigfoot wagged his long

head under the stiff red woolen cap a quartermaster sergeant had given him to wear. "In the United States. In Louisiana."

"Go on," Vernot ordered him. "It gives me a kick to hear you talk." It amused him to listen to the black man's grotesque *patois*. "What's an American Negro like you doing in the French Colonial Army?"

Bigfoot shifted his massive body. He had been forced to tell part of his story to the recruiting officers at the coast when he had joined up, and now he did not care much to repeat it. He went on uncomfortably:

"The Cane River country is my country, up back of New Orleans. But I ain't been there for years. I been working on the deep-water ships as fireman and oiler. I come out to this coast last trip. Up in Lagos I gets in a fight with a real bad black-boy, over some no-count gal. I had to kill him. Chief engineer, he keep me in the ship until we gets to French Africa, and then he tells me to get out. He say the English cops from Lagos come after me, and the French cops pretty soon, too. I didn't know what I could do until I saw all them trucks and planes over at the military post. I found the black soldiers talked almos' the same kind of French they talk 'round my country, at home. I helped a corporal fix a truck, and he took me over to the recruiting office and got me joined up. I work in the garage for a while, then they send me over to the field to work on the planes. I like that. I like being with you."

VERNOT no longer listened to the low-pitched words. The storm had reached a crest of violence. He labored against it with a calm, steady persistence although his mind was filled with the knowledge that he could not win. Skill did not count for much in this moment; the storm and the luck were too strong against him. Something had happened to the right wing of the plane. It was grinding, tearing loose. It heeled the rest of the plane with it, over and over again in a plunging dive.

"Bigfoot" he called clearly. "Make fast your belt and hang onto that serum-container. Watch your head!" While he talked, the wing went and he lost the last of his control.

The plane crashed from tree to tree in a series of rending shocks. With a great, whining roar the motor nacelles and propellers broke loose and fell. This was it, Vernot thought; it was like this that you waited for the final, crushing destruction which was the end of flight and all that you had made your world. . . .

Suddenly, he was aware through the haze of his semiconsciousness that the plane was still. He lowered his left arm from about his head, took his right hand from where it had clenched tenaciously about the crumpled wheel. Oil and gasoline soaked the fuselage, but there was no gusting sweep of flame. Rain splattered in the gaping rents and coolly brushed his face. He heard the black man moving and breathing behind him. He brought himself to speak, his nerves steadying as he remembered the other.

"You're all right, .soldier?" he asked.

"*Oui, mossieu.*" Bigfoot let the pent-up air go from his lungs in a deep laughing sound. "You done fine, getting us down like this."

"There was nothing else to do," Vernot said, clipping the words. "Sit still. Don't move." He got carefully to his feet. The plane trembled under him, and the branches holding it bent and quivered. He went to his hands and knees, worked to the door. "Find the flashlight," he ordered. "I want a look at this."

"No good, *mossieu.*" Bigfoot said, running his fingers over the shattered lens and bulb of the light. "It's bust'."

"That tears it," Vernot said, vexedly. "That probably fixes us. One of these branches is going soon—then we go. But get me a wrench and one of the 'chutes."

He knelt in the middle of the plane and stripped the guy-lines from the parachute, made a long rope from them. He knotted the rope-end to the

wrench, lowered the wrench out and down into the darkness. "It's a big tree," he said half aloud. "With many branches. We can get down it to the ground." He tried to look at the black man where he faced him. "This is no time to lose your nerve," he told the other. "Just do what I say. Take that 'chute-cloth and make a pack. I want the serum-container and both canteens, the compass and my sextant and the food bags. Wrap it all up in the 'chute-cloth, then lash it with the other guy-lines. Move fast!"

Vernot had his rope back in the plane by the time Bigfoot had the bundle made. He knotted it to the top of the bundle and then swung it through the shattered door. It snagged several times, broke through small branches, then at last veered free as they tugged. When the rope came slack in his hands, Vernot laughed.

"That was easy," he said. "Now let's go. We're got to get to Sibut, soldier." He had found his holstered pistol, was buckling it on and jamming his képi strap under his chin. "Are you ready? You're sure you can follow me down?"

Bigfoot was inhaling slowly, like a man about to dive into deep water. "Don't do that!" the lieutenant snapped. "What do you think this is going to be, a race? Take your time. Follow me."

They lowered themselves slowly, hanging by their hands to the twisted steel of the door frame. Mossy branches were below them, and their feet grazed against them. Then Vernot loosed his grip and dropped. The branch he hit buckled, groaning with his weight. It began to give with a snapping crack as Bigfoot slid to it. Vernot swung on, down through the darkness.

He grasped at lianas and lower limbs, calling directions back up to the big black man. Wind beat at them, pummeled their straining bodies. They slipped again and again, unable to hold a firm grip. It seemed to Vernot that he clung forever in lightless, howling space. Every effort he made

was blocked by the wind. He hated the wind, for what it had done to him and the plane, and cursed it with words he did not hear himself. They were whipped from his lips; and he was struck heavily about the head by lianas and limb ends. He smelled the rain-wet earth before he tried to open his eyes. It was as though it had risen mysteriously up at him out of the bottomless night. He called once more to Bigfoot above him, let go and sprawled down among the bights of the parachute line where it tangled about the bundle.

THE black man landed several yards away, lightly, almost without sound. "Pick up the bundle and bring it in under the tree," Vernot ordered. "Open it up and get everything ready. We're going out of here as soon as the wind stops." He held the small, illuminated compass in his hand until the point steadied. "Fort Sibut is north by east of here. It's not far, about forty kilometers. This is supposed to be pretty tough bush, where nobody lives or hunts. But the River Bamba is due East. Once we reach the river, we'll get to Sibut very quickly."

He stood silent after that, feeling great confidence in himself, tremendously glad merely to be alive. The black man was perhaps not too stupid, he thought; he had acted all right coming down the tree. Knew how to take orders anyway. He glanced up, trying to see the tree and hearing the rapid crash and descent. It was the plane, turning over out of the tree top. He pushed the black man into movement, ran with him away from the tree.

Leaves and branches hailed down, then gouts of oil and pieces of fabric. The plane caromed toward the earth with terrific speed and force. It hit no more than a dozen yards from where Vernot ran. The ground and the jungle shook. "*Ca y est*," Vernot said, and grinned. He went to look at it, Bigfoot trotting along at his heels. There was a deep, ragged hole in the ground; there was steel in a contorted

heap. "That's where we would have been." Vernot stretched out a hand to touch the steel. "Underneath, at the bottom of the hole. Call yourself lucky, soldier; Vernot is going to write you a lot better ticket than that."

The sougning rush of the storm stopped hours later. Vernot had chosen to take shelter at the foot of a big cottonwood tree, his pistol in his hand. The black man hunkered beside him and when the green-shaded light came down through the trees Vernot saw Bigfoot slept. He cursed him and Bigfoot jumped wide-eyed to his feet. An apologetic smile hovered on his mouth.

Birds and monkeys had awakened and begun a great chattering and chirping. The puddled ground smoked in the heat and the tree-ferns and flowers opened. Bigfoot grinned and wet his hands among the ferns, washed his face. "You feel pretty good, *hein*?" Vernot asked. He had tipped his képi to one side, pulled down his tunic hem. "You think this isn't bad, after last night."

"Yes, sir." Bigfoot made a short, shy gesture. "This is a little bit like my country at home. It makes me think of that." He took a long look around.

"All right, soldier," Vernot said smartly. "We'll eat and then we go."

Their food was regular issue rations, tinned beef and spaghetti. Vernot used two full tins out of the lot of ten. "We've got a long march today," he said. "We won't eat again until night and we can't stop to hunt game. Now fall in. Take the pack. I'll take the canteens and the serum. Keep right behind me, all the time."

Bigfoot nodded, bent to pull off his heavy hobnailed boots, swing them about his neck by the knotted laces. "What are you doing that for?" Vernot snapped. "A snake will get you, that way."

Lines deepened across the black man's sloping forehead as he found words to express himself. "It's better for a black boy, without shoes in the bush, *massieu*. Then I feel the ground; I feel everything, boss."

Bigfoot took a deep breath. His toes

splayed out, curled down into the steamy ground. His shoulders drew back, his deep chest swelled, and strength seemed to flow up into him, drawn up from the very earth. For a second, Vernot was conscious of a new force in the black man—almost a threat.

Vernot cursed him briefly. "So they called you a mechanic," he said. His face was hard, his lips drawn. "Don't forget that, stupid—you're supposed to be a military mechanic, a soldier. . . . Follow me!" He held the compass in one hand and his steps were timed, at the military beat. The steel-clipped heels of his boots left sharp marks in the soft ground and Bigfoot followed them exactly, his wide, caloused feet soundless.

ii

THERE were little animal trails through the forest, dim traces that slanted and branched in every direction. Vernot did not pay them any attention until near noon; he kept an undeviating course with the compass, at times shoving into bramble bushes and bamboo thickets that were head-high. He halted as they came to a sort of grassy savannah where the sky was clear overhead. He was panting badly and his tunic was dark with sweat. "Give me the sextant," he said.

He was glad to get the delicate, bright mechanism of the sextant into his hands. It made him calm, gave him strength and reassurance. With things like this, he thought—the sextant and the compass and his wrist-watch—he would always be master of the jungle. It was fear and ignorance that would defeat a man here, knowledge such as this that would bring him through safe. He stood with his feet spread as he took the altitude-sight, checked and rechecked his compass and the wrist-watch. "Six kilometers," he said aloud. "That's all. This afternoon we've got to step out. We've got to reach the river by tomorrow."

Bigfoot sat lazily batting at the big blue flies which bumbled about him.

He looked up as the lieutenant spoke, forward at the country bordering the savannah. "It is swamp there, *mossieu*," he said in his low, slow voice. "You will cross there?"

Vernot started forward. He was suddenly conscious of a hand laid on his arm—He spun angrily, jerked himself free.

"Not there, boss," Bigfoot said. "Over more to the right. Ground firmer there."

"Why, you—" Vernot began, in a sudden fury. Then he checked himself. "Don't be a fool," he said. "What do you know about this country? You've never even seen it before. . . ."

"No, boss." Bigfoot's eyes were at once respectful and direct. "But I know swamps, boss. Look." He stooped, picked up a small log, threw it a few feet ahead of where Vernot was standing. It sank out of sight almost at once. The tension between them relaxed. They went on, a little to the right.

They were forced to go along the game trails after they left the savannah and entered the swamp. The bamboo and alder-stands on either side were impenetrable. The ground had changed to sticky black mire in which their feet slid up to the ankles. Flies and mosquitoes came at them in swarms; the thickets cut off sight and any breath of air. The third time he slipped and fell, Vernot took off one of the canteens and handed it back to the black man.

"That's yours," he said. "Keep it. If you don't want it, heave it in the bush. But if you go dry, don't come to me."

He staggered as he began to go forward again. Their pace was very slow and for minutes at a time they stood still while he rested. He was splashed with mire, but somehow he had kept his gold-braided *képi* clean. He had worked his handkerchief up under the band in back to hold the sun and mosquitoes off his neck. His face was puffed by repeated bites and he slapped viciously at the flies. He halted at last, shaking with weariness, and asked the black man for the sex-

tant. "We can't get through before night," he muttered when he had checked the sight. "It will be getting dark right away. Find wood for a fire."

The fuel that Bigfoot collected was of dried alders and bamboos. Vernot knelt down to light it, tightly holding his metal-cased matchbox. The light was fading fast in the sky. Only thin, bands of silver and dulled scarlet marked the passing of the sun.

Then night fell down the sky like an immense sword. Vernot had been watching it, keyed for its descent. Yet its speed and the vast, rushing down-sweep of blackness startled him. He plucked matches out to light the fire. The box shook in his hand, overturned and dropped. He reached down, almost desperate in his haste and need for light. Bigfoot had advanced, taken the box. A match flared in his fingers and Vernot saw the dark, heavily boned face and wide eyes.

"Get back!" Vernot struck with his hand clenched hard. "This is my job. Do what I tell you, when I tell you—open the pack!"

The fire burned with a heavy smoke and low flame. Vernot lay stretched out on a pile of bamboos when he had eaten, dozing and then suddenly awaking. "Watch out for snakes," he mumbled once. "Fire brings snakes, but it will keep panthers away." After that his eyes closed and his head lopped back. He began to talk in his sleep, his voice irregular, harsh. The pistol was at his side, the safety-catch off, and his twitching body struck against it.

Bigfoot moved over silently and picked up the weapon. He handled it lightly, peering out of sleepy eyes, hefting it in his great paws, carefully, almost gently. He heard the noise in the bush an hour or so later. It was some big beast like a cougar, he thought, but bigger and tougher than the cougar in the Cane River swamps at home. "Lieutenant," he whispered. "Wake up. There is something here, close. Maybe panther."

The lieutenant raised halfway, his eyes not yet focused in the uneven

light. The bush was still. Down-wind somewhere at a water-hole there was a solitary warning cry from another animal. It was like a signal for the panther. The dark-marked beast attacked in a vaulting bound, up out of the bamboos.

IN THE drift of smoke Bigfoot saw no more than the brassy eyes and the flash of teeth. He kept down on firing the pistol with both hands. His finger-pressure sent a lashing succession of shots. The panther flung backward. Its screaming snarls filled the night. It crawled flat to the ground, snapping at the wounds. Then blood jetted from the nostrils and mouth and it was dead.

"*Bon docteur*," Bigfoot muttered and smoothed his fingers along the pistol. "You fixed that one fine."

Vernot was up behind him, lunging in the trail. "What's the matter?" he asked thickly. "What did you do?"

The black man nodded into the shadows beyond the fire. "A big one," he said. "The kind that jumps quick. But the lieutenant's gun is very quick."

Vernot was taut with rage. He poised with his fists lifted and reaching until he saw the form of the panther. Then he tried to smile and his hands lowered. "How did you know it was panther?"

Bigfoot shrugged his tremendous shoulders. "The lieutenant had said there might be panther here. And back home, in the swamps at night—"

"*Nom d'un autre!*" Vernot said savagely. "Shut up! Give me that pistol! You think I want a black boy's history of Louisiana? Bring that beast over to the fire. I want fresh meat, and that skin to take into Sibut with me. I'll show those infantrymen what a flier can do when he's grounded."

Lines crossed Bigfoot's broad face. An old memory came slowly back to him, of the cane-brake swamps along the river he had known once. "*Mossieu* will excuse me," he said. "That's no good, to take the meat and the skin. The blood smell brings other things in a swamp."

Snakes will come, and beasts like that one there. They'll fight for the carcass, a lot of them. It's no place for us to stay, no more."

Vernot stared. There was a constant crackling and rustling in the bush. He stepped to the fire and kicked it into flame. "All right. You've asked for it." He was taking a sight with the compass. "Get the pack together. We're pulling out."

Bigfoot handed him the pistol before he started to make the pack. From the corners of his eyes he watched Vernot turn the gun over and over. "It would be better to leave some of this, Lieutenant," he said. "Maybe the canteens and the food. They are heavy things, and it will be hard for us in the swamp. Without them, we can go faster."

The pistol stopped turning in Vernot's hand, leveled. For several seconds, motionless, he and the black man faced each other beside the smoky fire. It was Vernot who laughed. "You've got just about as much intelligence as the crawling stuff out there in the swamp," he said. "It will be sport watching you with them, while you haul the pack through. Give me the serum-container and the canteens. Just remember one thing—what would happen to you if you came into any post without me."

For them the night became a terrible, unending dream. Vernot kept stubbornly to his compass course for a while, then he lost it when the instrument slipped out of his hands into the black quagmire. They were bogged to the waists and when they fell, the stuff oozed lapping to their chins. Snakes, lizards and great frogs were all about them in the slime. A reedy kind of grass grew there and formed small, unstable hummocks. Vernot attempted to make his way straight across them and several times Bigfoot had to pull him back.

"Not that way, Lieutenant," he muttered. "The snakes are thick in there. And on the other side it's not safe. We would sink over our heads."

Vernot began to mutter complaints. Bigfoot listened patiently and then

without a word once again proved his point by throwing soggy roots into the mud. They sank down into sucking, swift-closing slime. Snakes slithered and reared in the reeds and Vernot started, leaped back.

"All right," he whispered. "We'll go around." He waited then, for Bigfoot to move first, floundered heavily after him.

VERNOT wrenched his knee when they were part way across that place. He could not walk any more alone. Bigfoot supported, half carried him. The black man's immense strength was nearly gone; he breathed with choking gasps and was unable to reply to Vernot's repeated questions. The pack came loose one time while Vernot clung to him and they plunged suddenly into slime up to their shoulders. It was all Bigfoot could do to save the big steel-cased serum container; the rest was lost at once, sunk out of his depth and reach. He went on, carrying Vernot, the serum container banging at his hip.

Where solid ground rose from the swamp Bigfoot found a mangrove tree. He crawled up among the broad, twisted roots and eased Vernot in against the trunk. It took the last of his strength to do that; he toppled down beside Vernot and was immediately asleep. He awoke to hear Vernot calling him.

It was daylight. The lieutenant stood below the tree clawing the caked filth of the swamp off his body. His képi was already cleaned and he had reset the strap under his chin. He looked quite strong and military, and as though the horror of the swamp had already become for him a distant memory. "Up!" he said. "Now we've got the third lap to the river. Where's the pack?"

Bigfoot pointed to the serum-container where he had wedged it in the roots. "That's all that's left, *mossieu*. The other things got lost, in the swamp." He came down the tree as he spoke; he had seen Vernot's eyes and the way the other man's hand twitched over the pistol butt. The

delicate balance between them, upset by the long traverse of the swamp, was restored. Vernot was once more the master, but the memory of his helplessness rankled.

"You mean," he said huskily, "that the sextant is gone, and the compass, all the food. . . . What did you do—how did you lose them?"

Bigfoot stood motionless, head back and heels met, in the position he had learned to take before an officer and a white man. "The lieutenant had the compass," he said. "The rest slipped away, in the mud."

Vernot did not answer for more than a minute. He stared at the jungle, vast, green and dim before him, then at the serum-container. "You saved that, you fool. Serum for a drunk. You kept that, and let the rest go, so that now I—" His voice broke off short. He shook himself as though he were emerging out of the depths of a tortured fever. He ran his hands up over his face and held them there. "We'll go on; we have to go on. But there's no trail, no way to keep direction. Without instruments we'll have to be careful—very careful. . . . You hear me? If we get lost, we're through. We must keep to the west, and find the river. Follow me!"

Their course that day was through densely grown mangroves and other great trees. Hour after hour, they hauled themselves up and over the interlocking gray roots where they protruded in weird, gnarled forms from the ground. The light was cast with green and never clear. They had no opportunity to see the sun. It was masked from them by the matted jungle roof. Vernot began to tire and falter; his wrenched leg bothered him again and at last he slowed, dropped flat. "If I had the compass," he said. "Even if I had the map . . ."

iii

BIGFOOT had waited a long time, more than two hours, he thought. The lieutenant sat lurching from side to side, plucking at his bad knee. "You've been carrying me," he said.

"It doesn't do any good. It hurts my knee when you lift me. And I have to lead. You don't know the way. You'll get us lost." He hobbled erect and looked about him through the serried, moss-draped barriers of the trees. He closed his eyes, to keep that sight away. "Wait—I'll be all right. I'll find myself. I'll remember the map detail."

"*Oui, monsieur,*" Bigfoot said quietly. "But we've waited here a couple of hours now. Daylight is the time to go through a place like this. After dark, it is very hard. If the lieutenant will let me carry him again, we will get to the river."

"How?" It was the question Vernot had asked insistently. "You don't know. There's no course, no trail." He had opened his eyes, moved forward near to the black man.

"We'll find a trail soon, *monsieur*. Some little track the animals use. It will bring us to a stream. Then we will get to the river. After that, it will be easy."

"Of course," Vernot said. He laughed, his eyes not quite sane. "It will be very easy." He reached and broke loose a branch, held it like a cane. He started hobbling ahead, and the black man picked up the serum container, silently followed him.

* * *

The branch snapped in Vernot's grasp. He tripped and his legs gave under him. He lay almost prone, laughing. "It's easy," he said. "Very easy." He kept on saying the word, over and over, calling it at the birds and chromatic-winged butterflies among the trees. The echoes of his voice came chattering back and the monkeys up in the high branches answered him, swung down to peer through the lianas.

Bigfoot was near him, still on his feet, and Vernot's glance fastened on the black man. "You're always there," he said. "Always following me. Why don't you leave me? You think I'm lost. . . . You think that without the compass and all the mechanical

gadgets I'm no good. . . . But if you want to stay, sit down. Take it easy—you can't drive me and yourself all the time. You're tired, too. Rest, for just a couple of minutes. Then I'll try it again. . . ."

Bigfoot silently obeyed, relaxing instantly like some weary, powerful animal. He almost fell asleep. Through lowered lids he watched the lieutenant. Vernot had started to fumble at his pistol-holster. He opened the holster and the blued-steel weapon came out into his hand. He stared once at Bigfoot as he started to raise it, up, toward his temple. Bigfoot gathered himself and lunged in a scrambling dive to grasp the barrel, pull the muzzle down.

"No, lieutenant," he said hoarsely. "That way, a man can hurt himself."

Vernot's laughter was loud. He jerked himself clear and spun the pistol around by the trigger guard, slapped it and dropped it back into the holster. "You're a fool," he said. "Really funny. You didn't think I was going to shoot myself. No . . . You thought I was going to drill a hole through that coconut you call a head. You're afraid—afraid of me." He laughed again.

Bigfoot got up and slung the serum-container into position by its strap. He held his hand out and took the lieutenant by the arm. "We can walk together, *mossieu*," he said. "Side by side. You're ready?"

Vernot cuffed him and stood alone. "You forget," he said. "Black men get shot in Africa for putting their hands on a white . . . I'm Roger Aunac Vernot. There was a man of my family, a Roger Vernot, with Napoleon at Austerlitz and Moscow. There was another who was killed at Sedan. My father was a colonel of *chasseurs* who got his number on the Champagne in 'sixteen. I've got every medal that they can give me. It doesn't count, for me, if I ever reach Sibut, or if that damned colonel ever sees his serum. But *you'd* walk alongside me. You'd tell me what to do. . . . Go ahead!"

Bigfoot went about thirty paces

before he turned to look behind. Vernot was not following him; he was stumbling and running wildly off between the trees. Bigfoot called to him in a strong voice, but Vernot did not stop. Bigfoot had to use all his speed to overtake him. Vernot fought him, hit him with his hands and knees. "No, *mossieu*," Bigfoot insisted quietly. "It won't do any good. Alone out here, a man is sure to die."

Vernot rested trembling, beads of sweat down his jaws, his eyes oddly blank. "Yes," he muttered. "Yes, you're right. Stay beside me, soldier."

* * *

The tree-toads and cicadas made a murmurous chorus in the hush of early afternoon. Vernot listened to it as though he heard familiar and lovely music. He had brought Bigfoot to a stop where the trees formed a sort of small, deeply shadowed glade about a rotted cottonwood that had long since fallen. Vernot crouched on the pulpy ruin of the trunk, his head lowered as he looked off into the obscurity. The light there was almost like that of night. In the feverish disorder of his brain it started a train of memories. He faced Bigfoot when he talked, but the black man knew that Vernot's words were not for him. Vernot spoke for himself, fighting the fear that sickened his brain, going back out of the jungle to his life long ago:

"No, I'm not afraid. . . . You know that, *ma mère*. I was never afraid. You're my mother, and you can remember. . . . That time when we closed the house in Paris, when Jules and I were through with school, and you took us down to Brittany. You told Jules to watch out for me, because he was my cousin, and he was older; he was fourteen. . . . But Jules was the one who found the old, locked room. He showed me how we could get into it by climbing up the ivy on the wall, then through the shutters. It was dark in there, though, and there were rats. . . . The boards in the floor were loose, and we

couldn't see. Jules got out; he got to the window and jumped down. The shutter stuck, and I couldn't follow him. I heard him yelling for a time, calling to the gardener, and for you. Then there wasn't anything, anything but the rats. I got lost for a little while, I guess, because it was dark, and I didn't like the rats. I was right at the window, though, when you came up on the ladder and got me out. I was waiting for you, all the time, and I wasn't afraid. . . ."

The words droned very low; their sound merged with the murmuring of the cicadas and tree-toads. Vernot's head lopped against his knees. His hands and body were lax until Bigfoot touched him. Then he jumped up screaming.

"No, *mossieu*," Bigfoot said. "Don't have fear. It's all right. We're going on now. You're going back—to your mother."

Vernot stared at him and very slowly smiled. "My mother," he said dimly, "died twenty years ago. But I don't know you. Who are you?" He shook his head wearily; his eyes were glazed. They made Bigfoot uneasy to look at them.

"You all right, boss," he said quietly. He had begun walking, holding the lieutenant by the arm.

Vernot grinned. "Another soldier," he mumbled. "Maybe you've heard the song, then. The one we used to sing at Saint Cyr—*Auprès de ma blonde*. But you're no blonde. You're black. You're lost, and I'm lost. We're both going to die, out here."

"No, *mossieu*," Bigfoot said. He took long, firm strides, to the beat of the song the lieutenant thickly sang. "Not here. Not yet."

IT WAS late in that afternoon when they entered into the grassy, rolling region on the far side of the jungle. Vernot was still singing, babbling scraps of choruses and sounds like words. He sobbed and spoke from time to time, his voice sharpening, but Bigfoot had closed his ears against them.

There was a distant, nearly imper-

ceptible pulsation of sound now which Bigfoot followed. It was no more than a tiny tremoring, but he recognized it: those were drums, beaten by black hands somewhere in a native village. On the lieutenant's map, there had only been one village in this region, that outside the post at Fort Sibut. It was good, he thought, that back in Louisiana they sometimes played the drums.

He lowered the lieutenant to the ground and gathered big bunches of the yellow, dry grass. He took a match from the lieutenant's case and set the bunches aflame. The flame ran roaring with the wind, whirling up great ivory-shaped columns of smoke. They would see that at Sibut, he knew. In this season they would understand it had been set by men as a signal. Between now and dark they would be sure to come along the river and find him and this other man. . . .

Bigfoot took a soft breath.

He stirred Vernot to consciousness, got him on his feet. "The river," he said. "You can see it now. The trees, along the bank, where the jungle breaks. It's not far."

"No," Vernot mumbled; "it was always pretty close."

* * *

They lay on the muddy bank, just above the shallows. The launch came down the river noisily. The tricolored flag was at the stern and there were men in white uniforms and topees under the awning. They leaned out and yelled and waved their hands.

Vernot dug his heels and hands into the bank to drive himself erect. The effort was agony for him and he swayed perilously. But his hands went high over his head and he yelled in answer to the white men in the launch. "*Ici, à moi!* It's Vernot—Vernot! I've got it!" He pointed, to the serum-container which Bigfoot had placed on a stump. "Pick it up, black man," he said. He straightened and took three stiff tottering steps forward. Then he fell.

iv

THE veranda of the bungalow used as a mess by the officers at Fort Sibut was wide and carefully screened. Bigfoot stood just inside the screening and to one side of the door of the room where the officers and wives gathered about the long table with its bright candles and bottles of wine. Lieutenant Vernot was at the head of the table, in the seat of honor, freshly shaved and wearing a mess jacket and stiff collar. Bigfoot could hear the lieutenant's voice, breaking through the blur of general conversation, then going on alone.

Back in the native village a drum was beaten. In a little while, he thought, he could go over to the huts and have any of those tall black girls he wanted. That would be good; it was good to be here right now in the cool dark, alive and strong and in a new, clean uniform. It was only today that he had believed he would never live to have any of this. . . He looked up slowly, for the drum had stopped, and a white sergeant had come out through the door. "Major's orders are for you to stay around until after dinner," the sergeant said.

"Then the colonel's wife wants to meet you and thank you for helping Lieutenant Vernot. Listen to Vernot. . . ."

The lieutenant spoke in a distinct voice warmed with wine. He told of the panther and the swamp now, and how he had killed the panther, crawled through the swamp with the serum-container dragging at his sinking body. That night had been hard, Vernot said, but the next day was the worst. He had nearly lost his way in the forest, and he had been very hungry and weak. It was then the temptation had been greatest to halt, or just sit there, waiting for death. Once he had conquered that, though, everything had been all right.

He had won through. . . .

"Zut, ma belle!" the sergeant grunted. He was a stocky man with shrapnel-scars on his chin and a triple line of ribbons on his tunic. "The way he tells it, black boy, nobody'd guess you were even there."

Bigfoot glanced around and his eyes smiled at the sergeant.

"Maybe," he said. He moved his head to indicate the room where Vernot sat. "But *he* knows. He won't forget. . . ."

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A Finer World

by Borden Chase

A page of living history
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THE CAPTAIN'S PEN moved leisurely. "Yes, my dear wife," he wrote, "this war is a filthy business. Sometimes I regret that tradition demands that the eldest Escosura be a military man. By choice I would have tended toward music. The violin, perhaps. Were I a musician, I would not now be defending this most miserable of all cities in Spain. The place disgusts me with its squalor, yet here I must stay while you, dear wife, worry and count the hours. Please God, our child may know a finer world—"

"Your pardon, Captain," said the lieutenant. "We have checked the range. Four guns cover the road."

For a moment the captain's pen paused.

PEDRO GOMARA looked at the mountain. Each morning he watched the sun lift above the top of it. It was as though the mountain were a giant who slept at full length on his back with arms folded upon his chest. There were four peaks that formed the chin, lips, nose and forehead. This month the sun came from the giant's mouth. It was a wonderful sight.

Pedro had heard of giants. The old one of the village—José Sanchez—had told stories of these creatures who once roamed the earth until God had sent the angels to turn them into stone. Pedro wished that he were a giant. Then he would leave the valley and go to the *Ciudad de Oro*—the City of Gold—beyond the mountain. He would take Manuela with him and she should have shoes and a lace mantilla. He would take her in his arms



and run and run. They would laugh and sing and dance.

This thought worried Pedro. If he were a giant and Manuela were not, her head would come scarcely to his ankle. It would be difficult to dance. But then, why worry about such things? He turned his back to the mountain and dug with his hoe into the soft earth. Weeds—why must there always be weeds? Why did the worms feed upon cabbages and leave the weeds free to their growth? It was all very confusing.

He looked across the fields to the low-roofed home of the Casados. Manuela was there, although he could not see her. Probably she was near the kitchen milking the goat, or preparing breakfast for Carlos Casado, her father. He was a lazy old devil. Short, dark, with a pouch that wobbled when he walked. He was early to

bed and late to rise, and his fields were the disgrace of the valley. Some day the *padron* would tire of such sloth and Carlos Casado would be kicked into jail. Pedro smiled at the thought, then blessed himself and repented. It is not good to wish a man into jail.

He worked slowly along the row in the direction of the low stone wall that marked the edge of the field. Manuela saw him and waved. Pedro called to her and she ran toward him.

"*Buenas dias, Pedro,*" she said. "Do you go into the village tomorrow?"

PEDRO watched the sun on her hair but he did not answer. Always he was slow to speech. Thoughts came quickly but it was difficult sometimes to put them into words. Nor did he want to talk of going to the village. He did not care about the village. The sun was matching gold for gold with her hair. And the sun was coming off second best. That was what he wanted to tell Manuela but there were no words.

"Your hair is like the case of José Sanchez' watch," he said.

Manuela twisted the toe of her right foot against the instep of her left foot. Sanchez' watch was a great, round timepiece that he kept in a leather cover. The case was surely of pure gold. A beautiful thing worth many pesos. It was very nice to think that Pedro likened her hair to this bright case. Manuela was proud of her hair. This morning she had combed it for ten minutes with her mother's comb—the one that had come from Madrid and was kept in a box near the statue of the Virgin.

"When my hair is not braided it is brighter," she said.

"I know," said Pedro.

"Will you always like my hair?"

"Always."

"Even when I go to Francisco DeLugo?"

The words were out before she could stop them. It was like that hollow in her tooth—the large one in the back and bottom of her mouth. Sometimes when it was not hurting, her tongue pushed at it and made it ache

and jump. Then she was sorry. She was sorry now. Pedro was displeased, and he was ready to go on with his work. She caught his arm.

"Maybe I will not have to marry Francisco," she said. "In the village they are talking. They say the government will change such things."

"In the village they always talk," said Pedro, slowly.

She took her hand from his arm and turned away. "You do not care. You want me to go to Francisco."

Again Pedro waited for words. One thought followed another through his mind. These people of the village were forever saying stupid things. They talked of the new government—the government that was to give each man a piece of land, a bag of money, a goat and a house. But months had passed and Pedro still worked for Don Diego. All the people of the valley worked for Don Diego. And that was as God willed, for Don Diego owned the valley.

As for Francisco DeLugo—he, too, was a rich man. Not so rich as Don Diego, but then no one could be so rich as Don Diego. Francisco owned the store where you could buy clothing, and knives, and tools. There were shoes there, too. Sometimes an old one could buy shoes. Francisco always wore shoes. He had promised Manuela's father that when Manuela was the wife of Francisco DeLugo there would be shoes for old Carlos, and a new goat, and a barrel of good wine. It was unheard of in the valley. But Manuela was beautiful. Her hair was like gold.

She was smiling at Pedro now. "Maybe I will not have to marry Francisco," she repeated. "Maybe the government will make you rich as he. Then you will have shoes to give to my father."

Still Pedro could say nothing. When Manuela talked so quickly it chased the old thoughts from his mind and brought new ones. It had always been so. When they were children and had looked at the mountain she would talk of the City of Gold that was in the valley beyond. There were houses

of marble with windows of gold. And Pedro would think about this. He would wonder how it was possible to see through a window of gold. Before he could ask, Manuela was talking of the streets that were paved with diamonds and rubies. Pedro thought the wheels of the carts would grind these stones to red and white powder. He would gather the words and start to say them but already Manuela was talking of something else.

WHEN he was alone, Pedro often dreamed of this City of Gold. There were great tales in the village of men who had gone out of the valley and walked to the city. They had followed the long road of the valley to a cleft in the mountains where the road twisted and turned through canyons to come at last to a broad plain. And when they reached the city they never returned to the valley. At least, so the old ones said. But Pedro wondered how they knew. If these adventurous men had not returned, how was it possible to know if they had reached the City of Gold? Who was to say that such a city existed?

"Will you buy me a comb when you marry me?" said Manuela. "I mean, when the government makes you rich?"

She was rubbing her shoulder against his arm and that bright hair was just beneath Pedro's chin. He touched it gently with those great hands of his, and a few soft strands were caught by the rough skin of his finger ends. He put out his tongue and drew them across the tip. Manuela smiled and lifted her lips. They were soft, and moist, and red as new wine. Her breath was warm and had the odor of grass that has been cut and left in the sun for a day. Pedro heard a great sound in his ears. It thumped and thumped. It rocked him and made his legs shake as though the bones had gone soft. Always this happened when Manuela lifted her lips, but when she laughed and ran away Pedro had to sit down and rub his hands in the earth. Sometimes the ground would sway and he would be ill.

Today Manuela did not run. Her hands were pulling at his shirt and she was lifting her lips higher. She was leaning against him and Pedro found his arms about her shoulders. He was holding her tightly, pushing his lips against hers. And the ground swayed and shook, and the bones in his legs went soft.

How long they stood this way Pedro could not know. His thoughts were in confusion, now. The government, gold, land of his own, shoes for old Carlos . . . So many thoughts and each one mixing with the next. When he heard voices shouting he thought it was part of this strange new world.

Men were singing and there was the sound of a drum. A woman laughed and added her voice to the song. Feet were pounding along the dirt road. Many feet. Hundreds of feet. Pedro heard the hollow thump that bare heels make when they are thrust hard against solid earth. He looked up.

There were men and women on the road from the village. They were marching — marching toward the mountain. Their faces were those of people he knew—Sancho, and Ferdinando from the far side of the valley, and Estrella and Carmen, the wife of young Felipe the blacksmith. Felipe was there, too. He marched beside old José who owned the gold watch.

Aged men and young were marching with their women, and they sang and laughed and shook knives in the air. Some carried scythes. Others strode along with axes on their shoulders. Matteo Ruiz carried a sword. It was an old sword that had hung above the door of his home. He had fought with it years ago against the Riffs. And now he held it aloft and marched very straight for a man of seventy years. He sang.

Pedro thought this must be death. The good God had stricken him down because he had dared to kiss a woman who was to be the wife of Francisco DeLugo. But it was a strange death. Not like the one of which the padre told.

"Pedro!" cried Manuela. "What is it, Pedro?"

So he was not dead. Manuela saw this great army, too. She was frightened and she was crowding closer to him. He stepped forward toward the road and watched, silently.

"Hi! Pedro!" cried a voice. "Join us! Join us, comrade!"

"Where do you go?" asked Pedro.

Felipe, the blacksmith ran toward him. "To the mountain," he said. "Over the mountain to the City of Gold! It is ours, now. Come with us and share the gold!"

"You are mad," said Pedro, slowly. "All of you are mad."

Manuela jumped up and down, up and down. Her hands beat against Pedro's arm. She laughed and laughed. "See, my love?" she cried.

Pedro pushed her away. He walked into the road to where the marchers were. They had stopped while Felipe talked with Pedro. No—not stopped. Rather, they had paused for an instant to let Pedro and Manuela be caught up in the tide and now they were marching again. They were singing and shouting. Pedro walked at the side of old José Sanchez.

"What is this?" he asked. "Why do you march?"

AND old José told him. He told Pedro how the government was giving land and gold and goats to the workers. Spain was theirs. All Spain was for the workers. And then some fools had revolted. They had brought guns and cannon to stop the government. They were fighting to hold what was not justly theirs. But the government would take it anyway.

"This is strange," said Pedro. "It is very strange."

"It is truth," said José.

"And the *padre*?" asked Pedro. "He says it is true?"

Old José laughed. "The *padre*?" he shouted. "Ha! He is of the rebels. Why should we listen to him?"

Other voices caught the name. "The *padre* is a devil—a rebel!"

Surely, thought Pedro, this is blasphemy.

He wanted to think further but Manuela was at his side. Her arm was

through his and she was hurrying him on. Her eyes were bright, and the red of her lips had gone into her cheeks. Sun played with her hair. And she was singing. The tune was old in the valley but Manuela put new words to it. She sang of the City of Gold—of a marble house with windows of gold where she and Pedro would live and love. Others listened. The marchers stilled their voices and quickened their steps to the tempo of her song.

She was a bright one, this Manuela. Words came quickly to her tongue. No wonder Francisco had promised that Carlos should have shoes and a goat and wine when Manuela went to the church as Francisco's bride. Who wouldn't want Manuela? Pedro looked about. The men of the village were staring at her as though she were a saint. And the women were smiling. Strange that they should not be jealous. Still, who could be jealous of a saint? Who could hope to marry a saint?

But Manuela loved him. She had let him kiss her. She did not want Francisco to have her.

"This City of Gold," said Pedro. "It will be ours?"

"Ours!" said old José. "All of it—ours!"

Pedro looked among the marchers for Francisco. He was not there. But then, why should Francisco march over a mountain for gold? Did he not own the great store in the village?

"Some did not come," said Pedro.

José laughed loud. "Some were afraid. They were fools to be afraid. Life is good."

Pedro did not know what José meant. He would have asked but now they were passing the bend in the road where Pedro's house stood.

It was a small house. The walls were built of stones that he had dragged from the fields. The roof was thatched and there was a leak near the door that needed mending. There was a pig in the yard, and Pedro wondered who would keep the pig out of the cabbages while he was marching over the mountain. Perhaps it would be better not to go. There might be no

City of Gold in the valley. Surely, no one had come back to tell of it. It might be but another of the old men's tales. But if he did not march—if he stopped and made Manuela stop—then Francisco would take her—

Francisco must not take Manuela to the church! No! Manuela would march with him over the mountain and then they would come back with gold. Pedro would take some diamonds and rubies from the streets and they would come back. And if the pig was in the cabbages when Pedro returned, he would throw a diamond at him.

Pedro laughed at the thought.

"Good!" cried old José. "Laugh, my son. It is good to laugh."

"Pedro is one of us!" said Felipe. "He laughs! Good Pedro—strong Pedro! He will kill the rebels with his great hands."

How they shouted. It made Pedro feel that he was truly a giant. He lifted his hands and shook them clenched in the air. Yes, they were strong hands. He could break a man's arm with a single twist of those hands. But that would be cruel. Pedro had no wish to break a man's arm. He wanted to hurt no one. He just wanted those diamonds to throw at his pig. He wanted Manuela whose lips were soft and whose breath was sweet. He marched on. . . .

"**WE** LEAVE the road, here," said Felipe. "The rebels will be waiting with guns in the canyons. But we will march over the mountain. We will fool them."

Pedro looked about. It had been a long walk to the mountain. The singing had stopped and the pace had slowed. Carmen Felipe's young wife, was heavy with child. She was tired. Her blue cotton dress had lost its freshness. There were stains beneath the armpits. Felipe was helping her. And he too, was tired. His leather blacksmith's-apron rubbed at his knees but pride had kept it tied about his waist. Now he rolled it and threw it to the side of the road.

"I will not need it again," he said.

Pedro saw that the skin had broken on Felipe's knees. His trousers were frayed from the pressure of the apron, and the leather had rubbed the skin raw. And Felipe limped. He was not used to much walking and his shoe had found a soft spot on one heel. Still he put his arm about Carmen's thick waist and helped her on.

Matteo Ruiz had thrust the sword through his sash. It knocked against the calf of the old fighter's leg but Matteo did not notice. He walked erect with his long white hair blowing about his shoulders. Truly, he was a soldier. His eyes were on the mountain-top and they were fierce and strong. Pedro wondered how a man of seventy years could keep such fire burning in him.

The people of the fields were less tired. They wore no shoes and their legs were thick. It is not hard to walk when there is no load of grain on one's shoulder. Pedro could walk for days. And Manuela—at times she ran ahead and gathered blue flowers and thrust them into the men's shirts. There was always a hole to put them in. A wife's needle could not keep pace with fraying cotton in the summer months.

They started up the mountain where gray stones pushed through the earth, and thin twisted trees grew. There were bushes there that pulled at the women's skirts, and vines that caught about their ankles. Pedro had forged ahead. He took a long knife from Fernando, and he cleared a path for the others. Farmers with strong arms widened the trail, breaking away the low branches and trampling the thorn bushes. The women sang again but their steps were slower. People who lived in the village climbed poorly and soon Pedro and the farmers were far ahead. Manuela matched stride for stride with the best. She was strong and her legs were thick. Her hair had tumbled about her shoulders and it was flecked with green where bits of leaf had caught in it.

At a level place where water ran from beneath a rock, Pedro stopped and turned to look back across the

valley. It was only then he saw the rest of the marchers. There were hundreds, thousands — they stretched along the road for miles. As far as eye could see they marched in a long column above which a brown cloud lifted. It was dust from the road rolled up by the heels of marching feet. This was all very wonderful. It frightened Pedro. There were so many—so very many. These people of the valley were but a handful against the thousands who followed. Pedro had not known there were so many people in all the world. And they were all going to the City of Gold.

"Look, Manuela," he said. "Look down at them."

MANUELA had thrown herself on the green moss beside the rock. She lifted her lips from the spring and they were moist. There was a crystal bead on the tip of her nose. She wet her fingers and wiped the dust from her cheeks. Then she stood beside Pedro and looked down into the valley.

"*Por Dios,*" she whispered. "The whole world marches to the city."

Others of the valley turned when she spoke. There was laughter and Ferdinando the wagon-maker said it would be well to hurry. With so many hands there would scarce be enough gold to go round. Pedro had been thinking of this, too. All the gold of Spain would not fill those hands. He turned his eyes upward to the mountain-top and saw that night was coming. It would be cold but they must hurry. If he were to throw diamonds at his pig it would be well to hurry.

All night they climbed. Pedro gathered dead branches and made a torch. Others did likewise and on the side of the mountain was a long procession of moving lights. When Pedro looked back it was as though a monstrous dragon of fire was following. He was glad when morning came.

But when the sun leaped above the rim of the mountain Pedro saw it was no closer than when he watched it from the valley. Many things were different from what they had ap-

peared. This sleeping giant of a mountain had looked smooth and round. Now there were steep walls of jagged rock. There were deep clefts where tangled underbrush grew so densely that it had been an hour's work to go the distance a man could throw a stone.

Manuela had burned her arm. A sharp stone cut the flesh of her instep. But she would not stop. Nor would she let Pedro help her. It was well for the women of the village to have their men help them. They were soft. But Manuela worked in the fields and she was strong. She laughed at the cut in her foot. She laughed at the burn. When Pedro grumbled she kissed him. And when the sun was high they reached the top of the mountain.

Manuela looked from the heights.

"Look!" she cried. "It is true! See, Pedro—the City of Gold!"

She was pointing across a valley that stretched beyond the mountain. Sure enough! By the edge of a bright river that twisted through the valley was a city. A wonderful city with white buildings. A faint haze hung like a veil of lace above the roof tops. It softened the lines of the marble houses, blended them one with another. But through it, as true as God's word, shone light from a thousand golden windows. Bright shafts of red gold like the rays of the sun—like Manuela's hair. Pedro stared and could not talk.

For a time they rested while others climbed to join them. The strong ones came first and later the women and old people. Matteo Ruiz drew his sword and waved it in the sun. The fire was still bright in the old soldier's eyes and he shouted loud and laughed. Felipe held his wife erect that she might see the wonderful sight. He was crying but the men did not mind his tears. It had been a long climb and not once had his wife complained. But even a fool could see the lines of pain in her face. She too, was crying now. Maybe it was for joy. Maybe when young Felipe was born he would have a cradle of gold with diamonds and rubies worked into it. Maybe he

would have money enough to go to a great school in a far city and learn to paint or make gay music. Maybe—

"Downhill, now!" cried old José. "It is all downhill. Before the sun sets we shall reach the City of Gold."

HE STARTED over the crest and Pedro marched at his side. Manuela sang again and Felipe sang too, as though ashamed of his tears. Matteo Ruiz waved his sword and those of the valley crowded forward. The mountain slope urged them on. Slowly at first, but with the vision of the city in their eyes they marched faster. The sun was hot. It warmed the blood in their veins. It danced on the City of Gold and called to them.

"Hurry!" it said. "Hurry while there is time!"

Pedro heard it. He was tired and he wanted to think, but the sun on those windows of gold kept calling. Manuela caught his hand and they quickened their steps. She sang again and it was a marching tune. Others joined in—old José, and Felipe, Carmen and Ferdinando, Estrella and the women of the farms. Matteo Ruiz beat the time with his sword. His eyes matched the sun in their brilliance. He slashed at the brush and stained the blade with green. Soon it would be red, he promised. Soon it would be red.

The sun rolled over the heavens. It touched their shoulders and urged them on. The mountain slope grew steeper, hurried their feet to a faster pace. It was with them, now. It helped them. And over the crest came hun-

dreds more, thousands more. The sound of their song was loud in the air, and it was a marching tune.

Pedro looked over his shoulder. It was as though a river had been born on the mountain-top and he ran before it. It pushed him, crowded him, hurried him. There was no stopping it. There was nothing to do but go on, and on. He wanted to tell Manuela. Wanted to ask her if she too, felt the river pushing her.

There wasn't time. There wasn't a moment for anything but to march and march and sing. The breath was hot in his throat. It was like warm wine and muddled the thoughts in his mind. He was running when they reached a green field that led onto the road. Manuela was running. Old José was running. They were all running toward the road that led to the City of Gold. And the road opened its arms as though to embrace them. . . .

* * *

"THERE are four guns trained on the road?" the captain asked.

"And the range is correct," said the lieutenant. "As reported, the main force is crossing the peak of the mountain. A small group has just reached the road. We could try a few rounds of shrapnel, if the captain wishes to be sure of the range."

"Very well," said the captain. "A few rounds. It will give me time to finish my letter."

The guns roared as the captain's pen moved leisurely. "Please God," he wrote, "our child may know a finer world—"



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Delayed Pass

by Eustace Cockrell

1

Gambling Man

PADDY SHEEHY didn't look like a gambler. He was small round and garrulous, and if he had the traditional cold gray eyes you couldn't tell it because he wore thick glasses and on the rare occasions when he had them off he blinked like an owl and couldn't see anything.

He had the glasses off now, polishing them. He had two clippings in front of him. They were lying side by side on his desk. He finished polishing his glasses and put them back on.

He looked at the first clipping again. It was a newspaper photograph, dated December 20th, 1932. It showed a young man in a football uniform just getting off a punt. Under the picture were the words: *Quarterback Larry Holmes, wt. 185, St. Anne's*. Under this in smaller type Paddy read again: *St. Anne's triple-threat back and drop-kicker de luxe*. At the top of the picture was the legend:

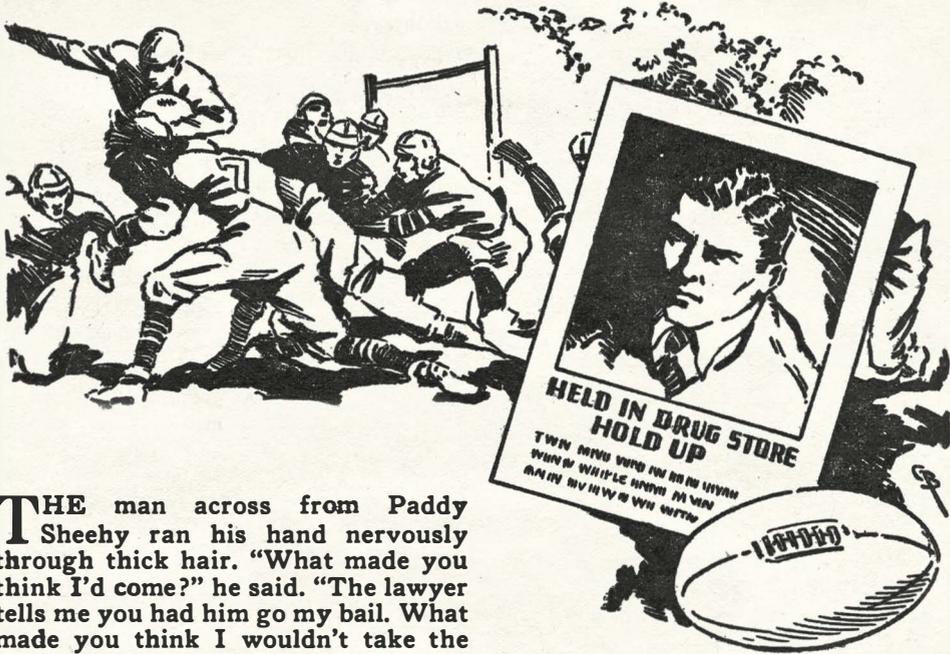
THE GLOBE'S SELECTION FOR ALL-AMERICAN QUARTERBACK

Paddy picked up the other picture and studied it, looking at the picture of the football player from time to time. This picture showed only a face. It was a face that worry and dissipation had eaten some lines into and it was a newspaper picture, too. Under this picture was one line: *Held in Drugstore Holdup*.

Finally Paddy put down both pictures and picked up the telephone. He called a number. While he waited he put his feet on the desk, whistling silently to himself.

"Max," he said at length into the phone, "this is Paddy Sheehy. I want you to go down to Police Court this morning"—he consulted the story under the picture—"at ten o'clock and go bail for—wait a minute." Paddy looked through the story under the picture hastily again. "For Harry Jones. His preliminary hearing is set this morning. Waive the preliminary, give Jones twenty bucks, tell him to get a shave and get himself cleaned up and come to my office at two o'clock this afternoon. That's all."

Paddy hung up the phone. "It's a good bet," he said to himself, "even if I lose."



THE man across from Paddy Sheehy ran his hand nervously through thick hair. "What made you think I'd come?" he said. "The lawyer tells me you had him go my bail. What made you think I wouldn't take the twenty and run out on you?"

Paddy smiled. "Why," he said, "if you took the twenty and ran out you wouldn't be any good to me anyway, and as for the bail, it wouldn't never been paid. You'd been picked up or maybe it just wouldn't been paid anyway. Things can be handled pretty good in this town."

"What do you mean, if I had taken the twenty I wouldn't have been any good to you anyway?"

Paddy lit a cigar and leaned back, letting his eyes run casually over the other's shabby clothes and noticing his build, his shoulders, "Why," he said, "if you had taken the twenty and run out on me it would have looked like you wasn't honest and if you ain't honest you're no good to me."

Paddy's caller grinned then and he looked young. "I'm charged with first-degree robbery and you go my bail and then you get me over here and say if I ran off with your twenty dollars it wouldn't look honest. Do you think a guy that's supposed to have stuck a gun in someone's face and asked him for his dough is honest?"

Paddy pursed his lips, frowning.

"It's different," he said. "A thief, of course," he went on, "is a sap. It's a sap's trade, goin' out with a rod. But you ain't a thief."

The boy across from him didn't say anything, he was looking down at his feet, frowning.

"It's a kind of funny proposition all round," Paddy said. "But it was worth twenty bucks even if I do lose."

The boy looked up wearily. "What do you want me to do?" he asked and there was hopelessness in his voice.

"Why, Larry," Paddy said, and he underlined the *Larry*, "I don't want you to do anything at all, maybe. It's just you might want to."

The boy stiffened momentarily and then slumped back again. "My name is Harry," he said. "Harry Jones."

"No," Paddy said. "No, that won't do. You'll have to be Larry Holmes. It'll be easier for you anyway—more natural-like."

"How did you know?" Larry Holmes asked.

Paddy pushed over the two pictures. "I happened to see this picture and do a little remembering. I checked

my memory with the other one, and then I did a little wirin' here and there."

Larry was looking at the two pictures. There was a funny, held-blank expression on his face.

"I found out," Paddy Sheehy went on, "that during the summer of 'thirty-three your father's outfit went under and that it left some people holding the sack. You didn't go back to St. Anne's that Fall because you didn't have the money, and you was too proud, too, seein' your old man killed himself. So you drift, you ain't got any people. You wind up here. Things are tight here, you can't get a job. You won't take no charity—you get a rod instead."

"And what does that make me?" Larry Holmes asked evenly. "An Elk?"

"Why, no," Paddy Sheehy said, "it just makes you a big chumperoo. What you should have done was go back to St. Anne's and worked your way on through and kept your chin up and people would have admired you and you would have got a job when you got out and probably been married now and had a cottage with an electric refrigerator and you wouldn't be sittin' in here, all washed-up, listening to a tin-horn gambler."

Larry didn't say anything for a while. He just sat there looking at his shoes. "I didn't go back, though," he said. "I was pretty proud of my old man," he finished lamely.

"But I *am* a gambler," Paddy said, as if he hadn't heard. "And no gambler can get by if he don't have the best of it, so when I saw your picture in the paper and remembered who you were I figured here is a chance for me to do me some good. And so here you are."

"What do you want me to do?" Larry Holmes asked again.

"You ain't played any pro football, have you?" Paddy asked.

"No."

"Your credits are in good shape?"

"Yes."

"Well, son, all I want you to do is go back to school. That is," Paddy added,

looking at the ceiling, "if you can make the team."

LARRY HOLMES didn't say anything. He sat there looking out the window, looking at the heat come shimmering from the asphalt street. "Oh," he said at last. "I see."

"I can get the charge dropped," Paddy said. "That would save you five years, chances are, right there."

"I'm out of shape," Larry said.

"You're still young," Paddy said. "You got July and August and half September."

"You mean," Larry said slowly, "on you?"

"I'll square that charge," Paddy said, "and I'll stake you out in a trainin' camp and I'll pay your tuition and I'll give you a good allowance while you're in school. And I'll pay your way on through so you can finish," Paddy said. "I ain't cheap."

"I didn't know they bet like that on football," Larry said. "You could make it pay? I mean—I mean," he stopped. "I mean, I could make it pay?"

Paddy picked up a card. "You play a couple of dogs, then Smith-Carroll. They got a very good club, one defeat last year, most of the team back—I could maybe place fifteen-twenty grand around the country on that one. Then you got two games with good clubs—" Paddy paused. "You can always bet on football, pretty near," he said. "You can give points, you know."

"I see," Larry said.

"But I expect to get most of it the last game," Paddy said. "Maybe all."

"The Henderson game?"

"Yeah. They'll have a pip of a team—with all the material. Traditional rivalry. Lot of sentimental dough around. Lot of smart money. Maybe come game-time, even so, you rate to beat 'em seven points. I take Henderson and six points. You can miss a drop-kick, can't you?"

"Suppose I threw a knee out the first game," Larry said. "Suppose I can't make the team. What if the coach jerks me? There's a hundred things can happen."

"Why, son," Paddy Sheehy said, "I know all that. I never said a gambler had to have a cinch. I said he had to have the best of it. I'll take my chances on those things."

Larry Holmes stood up and shrugged his big shoulders. "I'm ready to go," he said, "and it won't cost you as much as you thought it would, either."

"How's that?" Paddy asked.

"I won't go back after the Henderson game," Larry Holmes said.

"Suit yourself about that," Paddy Sheehy said softly, "but don't pull no funny ones or I'll send you to a school that's got a five-year course."

"I guess you could, at that."

Paddy picked up the phone and called a number. "You guess right . . . Hello, Charlie," he said into the phone, "I'm sendin' a boy out there and I want you to get him in shape. He ain't no fighter, just put him in shape. Don't boil him down none, let him eat. I'll be out next week."

He hung up. "Here's a C, kid," he said. "Get yourself some clothes and then a taxi. Tell 'em to take you to Charlie Kochosky's trainin' camp. It's about ten miles up the river. Tell Charlie I sent you."

"I guess I ought to thank you. Four hours ago I was all set to spend the next five years makin' big ones into little ones," Larry Holmes said. "Now I'm about to go collegiate again, sponsored by a wealthy sportsman." He laughed.

Paddy Sheehy didn't answer him. He was looking out the window, a funny little frown on his face. He didn't look pleased with himself.

II

Second Start

LARRY came out of the gym feeling pretty swell, fresh and springy. The Old Man hadn't given them much to do the first day. And it had been a grand day, too. Bright, hot September weather. Not so hot as that training camp but good and warm.

He stood in the door, looking at the

campus, the vine-covered walls, the old trees in the twilight. They were just as he remembered them. But something was in between there, though. Something had happened to him. Something about . . . He stopped thinking.

Then suddenly it was just the same; there wasn't anything. The years wiped out. Because there she was. There she was, walking out of the library, coming along the curving walk toward the entrance of the gym, looking at her watch with a worried little frown and then hurrying.

Four years—Harry Jones—"This is a stick-up, buddy,"—Paddy Sheehy—"if you can make the team, son— Larry pushed himself back into a shadow.

This, he thought, is silly. If she's on the campus I'm bound to see her. It'll be in the sport pages tomorrow that I'm back, anyway. Get it over with. He walked out into the open. She was a few steps past him, she didn't turn. He set his voice.

"Hello, Pat," he said.

She took one faltering step and then she stopped, but Larry had caught up with her before she turned. She looked a little pale, but that was all; she looked just the same. She smiled. She smiled a *casual* smile.

"Why, Larry Holmes," she said and she put out her hand. "It's like old home week. What in the world are you doing here?"

"Why," Larry said, "why, as a matter of fact, I've come back to school."

"Come back to school? How quaint. Aren't you afraid you'll be bored? College must seem distressingly juvenile to you now."

This wasn't right. This was all wrong. She couldn't act like this. She couldn't do it. "I—I never finished, you know," he said. "I saved up some money. I thought I'd come back and finish."

"That's right," she said, wrinkling up her nose, smiling. "You didn't come back. I remember now. Well," she hurried on, "they come and go, but I go on forever. I'm right on the edge of becoming a Doctor of Philo-

sophy. Then I'll sit around and philosophize. Doesn't that sound gay?"

This was pretty hard. What do I say now? Larry thought. I can't remember; I mean, I can remember. I was Larry Holmes, then, All-American football player, campus hero; and she was a cute kid. Anybody could see she got a bang out of it when I cut in on her at the dance, that time. She blushed and she was obviously pleased. She wasn't any damned doctor of anything then. She was a beautiful dancer, and she didn't have a line. She didn't say anything. I did all the talking. And now she's talking to me like I was a kid.

"I did," he blurted out. "I mean it wasn't very gay. I mean when I tried to think. I've had an awful time," he said, feeling sorry for himself.

"Oh, Larry, I'm sorry. Really I am. It must have been bad. *Nobody* could get a job then."

"I didn't know how to do anything," Larry said. "I didn't know how to do a thing but play football." He laughed shortly. "I couldn't even do that," he said. "I couldn't make the grade with the pros. I never got anything but a try-out."

SHE glanced at his clothes. Looked at him, then, appraisingly. "You look very fit and prosperous now," she said. "And playing football," she went on. "There really isn't much future in it, is there?"

"I—I don't know," Larry said. "I guess not." He groped around for a minute. "I—you're not married or anything, are you?"

She laughed. "No," she said. "Are you?"

Larry sighed. They came out of the campus and turned automatically down the street that led to her father's house. "No," he said half absently, "I'm not married."

She laughed again. That same patronizing little laugh. "That's funny," she said. "I pictured some beautiful heiress picking you off. You used to have such a nice touch with your women."

He looked at her quickly but she was looking straight ahead. "Not so good," he muttered.

She didn't look then, either, she kept on walking, looking straight ahead. "Good enough," she said coolly.

Now there's nothing to say, Larry thought. She's put me in a hole again. Somehow she's got me in a hole. He soothed his hurt for an instant, vindictively remembering the last time he had seen her. "*But a whole six weeks, darling. I'll die.*" Well, you didn't die. It would have been better if you had. I'd have remembered. I don't want to remember you like this. You didn't die in six weeks, you lived five more years. You're having fun, aren't you, making me feel a heel? But no, feeling this way didn't help. Start over, keep calm. Don't let her jockey you around like this.

"I was an awful fool," Larry said, and he was as cool as she was now, thinking. "Sneaking off and quitting school because my father turned out to be a crook and then killed himself. But I was very proud of my father. It's a thing that any kid is liable to feel who was brought up as I was." Now, he thought, she wasn't such a swell technician. She was in the hole now, skirting around, not mentioning why he didn't come back. Now what was she going to say?

"I," she began, "I didn't want—"

He could see behind her eyes now. Now for the first time. And she was hurt. You aren't so tough, Patricia, my girl. He addressed her mentally. You had a bad time when you read about it in the papers and then sat down and wrote your heart out about how it didn't change anything with you and you meant it, too. You were plenty in love with me, my dear, and you can still remember it.

"I'm sorry, Larry," she said. "And I think it's grand, your coming back to school. That's a brave thing for a person to do. Coming back to study, to try to learn something besides how to run a broken field. I think it's grand. And," she added, "I'm glad."

They were getting pretty close to

the Professor's home. Old Prof Mackey's house. It looked just the same. It looked like home, almost. Larry could see it now. Same little old brick house sitting back behind some sort of wild-looking untidy bushes. Funny for an old boy like that to have a daughter like Pat.

Larry Holmes said, "I'm glad to be back."

They were laughing. Larry didn't know how it happened but they were laughing. They turned into the walk and started up the steps. Patricia stopped laughing.

THERE was a man on the porch. He was standing on the top step watching them come up the walk. He wore glasses and a mustache that could have been improved with trimming. He looked annoyed. "Patricia," he said, "I waited for you. What happened to you?"

"Oh," she said. "Oh, I'm sorry, Claude. I forgot. I ran into an old friend. Claude," she said, and she was trying, Larry could tell, to be casual, "this is Larry Holmes. Mr. Barnes."

Larry walked up two steps and took Claude Barnes' hand. He didn't like him. That was easy. He knew he didn't like this guy. "How do you do, Mr. Barnes?"

The man's eyes lit up behind his glasses. "Holmes?" he said vaguely. "Oh, yes, Larry Holmes. I've heard Patricia speak of you. You used to be a football player here, didn't you?"

Larry swallowed. "Yes," he said. He started to say something else but he found he couldn't manage anything more just then. "Yes," he began again.

Professor Mackey appeared through the front door. He looked at Barnes. "Hello," he said. He put his arm through Patricia's. "And how are you?" he asked. He noticed, then, for the first time, Larry's presence. He started. "Larry Holmes!" he cried. "Larry Holmes. What are you doing here? It's good to see you, son." He came over and patted Larry on the back.

Larry grinned. He'd always got on with the old man. In fact, the old man

had always acted just a little in awe of him in the old days. "Doctor," Larry said, "I find I'm too uneducated to cope with the world. I've come back to get my degree. As a matter of fact I've signed up with you for a course."

Professor Mackey turned to his daughter and Claude Barnes and he sounded proud. Just like it was all his idea. "Now isn't that fine?" he said. "Now isn't that splendid! Son, you'll have to stay to dinner with us. I've often told Claude that you were the dumbest student I ever passed. I want to exhibit *my* school spirit. What I had to condone to keep Larry eligible for football!" He turned then to Barnes and half whispering went on, "Larry was really a great asset to the school. He was All-American."

"Father, I don't think you ought to talk like that. Larry's given up all that silly business. He's really come back to try to complete his education."

"What?" said Professor Mackey, mockingly. "You mean you aren't going to die for dear old St. Anne's this fall?"

Larry shut his teeth. "I'm out for football, sir," he said.

There was a long silence. Larry was looking at nothing. "That's why you were coming out of the gym?" Patricia said.

"Football," Barnes contributed. "Remarkable spectacle, really. Remarkable situation in this country. Remarkable."

This was a rotten thing to do. Walk home with a girl like Patricia Mackey just because you'd been a little gone on her under the dear old college elms these many years ago and try to pick it all up. Down here to throw a couple of games and earn his way out of the hoosegow. Pay old Paddy Sheehy back for that favor—and it was quite a favor, too, my fine fellow—toss a couple of games, make Paddy a few bucks. Nobody hurt there. Kid game, college football; silly, all the ballyhoo. Remarkable. That's what Barnes said. He didn't know the half of it. Poor old Prof. Half kidding, half on the square, I was driving a car he

couldn't buy with a year's salary last time I saw him. Poor old dunce. Ph. D. That was it, the car, the All-American bushwah—that was what Pat liked, anyway. Her letter to him all those centuries ago had been just a stall; what else could she do? Make it look good. She's teamed out with a guy her speed now. Barnes. Probably working on a thesis that'll show bees have better government than ants. That's something for you, Larry, you cheating highwayman, you. Would a bee hold up an ant? Would a Beta run in a crooked deck on a Deke?

"I'm sorry, sir," Larry said. "I can't accept your invitation to dinner. I'm eating at the training table, sir." He turned on his heel and walked down the old brick walk, walking on his heels, remembering a time he had been thrown off the first blinds of a train one cold night, broke and hungry, at a water tank; but feeling worse than he had then, just the same.

STANCOUSKI came into the apartment. Stancouski had been a senior and captain of the team the last year Larry had gone to school. He was the line coach now, and Larry was living with him. He came into the little apartment and scrambled around in the hall closet getting down a bag. Larry pushed the letter he had been writing into his pocket.

"Kid," Stan said, "you don't ever go any place. That's bad. You can get stale at football."

"Where are you going?" Larry asked him as Stancouski dragged a suitcase into the living room and started getting out a raincoat from the closet.

"Downstate," Stan said. "I'm gonna have a try at catchin' a few plays those guys are gonna throw at us next week."

"How's Smith-Carroll?"

Stan sat down. "Larry," he said, "you're too old to be chesty. If you guys play real football, you'll take 'em by three or four touchdowns. I wouldn't tell the squad that, but you *know*. You've been around; you ain't

gonna get cocky like a college kid and let it affect you. You'll take 'em three or four touchdowns barrin' mud and you'll take 'em three even if she is sloppy."

"No," Larry said. "I'm not going to get any pumpkins on my chest. I guess that's one good thing. I've outgrown that."

He grinned tightly.

"And I'll tell you another thing," Stan said. "You're playin' better football than you did the year you was All-American. You ain't quite as fast but you think better and you're kickin' better. 'Specially your drop-kickin'. You ain't missed one point after touchdown yet, have you?"

"Not yet," Larry said. "I practiced some last summer, when I figured on coming back."

"Well," Stan said, "we got some games comin' up where that'll be wheat in the mill, those three-points, for drop-kicks, and those one-points after touchdown. We've got some games comin' up where it'll be thirteen-fourteen, seven-six, that sort of thing. Kid, you keep on not missin' and I'll be a head coach some place next year."

Larry opened a book, propped it up in front of him. "Go on and get packed," he said. "I've got to study."

When Stan had left he fished out the letter and went ahead with it. It was a letter to Paddy.

. . . I have just talked to my roommate, Stancouski, that I've told you about. He has just left to scout the team we play next week. He says that we will take Smith-Carroll Saturday by three touchdowns. I think this could safely be figured as nineteen points. I have noticed the experts' selections in the papers and they figure it a toss-up. This is a mistake. Smith-Carroll has been bothered, according to Stan, by a weakness in pass-defense. Their replacements in backfield men are not up to the caliber that one would believe from the papers. Powers, their fullback, is particularly weak against flat passes involving some deception; we have plays designed to capitalize this weakness. I am playing very well—better, Stan says, than ever; I think you would be wise to go along with nineteen points. My idea would be that your associates

could get you nice odds on this bet in this vicinity.

L.H.

P.S. As I have pointed out in my letters I will have to do my best in these games that our coach does not figure close to remain in the line-up and so be of future service to you. In a game he figures to win handily he would just as soon jerk me for a bad play early in the game as not. This will not be so in the tough ones. He does not have a really capable substitute for me at the moment, though one boy, a sophomore, is developing fast . . .

Larry made two copies of this letter, sealed them up, and stamped them. One he sent air-mail, the other he took to the post office and had registered.

He came back to the apartment then, and sat down again at his desk. He took out paper and wrote another letter.

Dear Professor Mackey:

Last summer I was apprehended while holding up the proprietor of a drug-store with a gun. I was caught committing this crime in a city where a gambler lived who recognized my picture (taken by the papers). He arranged to have this charge dismissed through his political connections in this city. He did this on the understanding that I should come back here to college and in the event I was able to make the football team I should arrange for St. Anne's to lose when he gave me the word. I have done this. I am being square with him because I owe it to him. If you could, without going into the sordid details, explain to your daughter my conduct here this fall I would appreciate it. Of course, I place you on your honor never to let this information go any farther than it now has.

Yours sincerely,

Larry Holmes.

He took another sheet of paper.

Pat:

It's worse than ever. I haven't seen you but that one time. I won't go any place where I might see you. You can take your Englishman and marry him. Do you remember the night I met you? I cut in on you and I hadn't met you but I was a big shot then and it didn't make any difference. You were awfully beautiful then—you are worse—or should I say better?—now. . . .

Larry crumpled up the last two let-

ters and tore them carefully into very small pieces. He then made a little pile of them on the floor and lit a match to them. He had to keep pushing them around to keep them from burning the floor. He went into the bathroom and brushed his teeth. Finally he looked at himself in the mirror. "You're going nuts," he said to his reflection. He took the toothbrush and put it away and then rinsed out his mouth. He went back into the living room and propped open a book. He started reading.

He didn't see what he was reading. "Pass," he thought. "Pass on the first down. Quick kicks, screwy football. They'll call me a great field general. Paddy will win some money. Paddy Sheehy, you near-sighted, fat little double-dealing rascal you, I'll give you a go. I'll give you what you paid for if I have to sell my immortal soul. Or should I say half-soul, Paddy, my pudgy benefactor?"

"I DON'T see why you had to drag Claude and me along with you," Patricia said. "You know we both think football's silly."

"Hmph," Professor Mackey grunted, "I see he's starting his second line-up. The big dunce. Drawing three times my salary and he starts his second team." He turned to his daughter. "It's a pretty day," he said, "a jolly crowd. We have free tickets. What else would you be doing?"

"I'm enjoying it," Claude Barnes said. "Really most remarkable. St. Anne's—we, I mean—we are wearing the red sweaters, aren't we?"

Patricia sighed. "Yes," she said. "They call them jerseys."

"Quit prattling," Professor Mackey said. "They are about to kick off."

Smith-Carroll kicked. The ball spun lazily down the field, there was a swift converging or red jerseys. White jerseys broke through and the St. Anne's ball carrier was downed on his own eighteen yard line.

"By Jove," Barnes said, "they are fierce, aren't they?"

The St. Anne's quarterback tried a thrust at left tackle. It netted him

a yard. He went back in punt formation. The pass from center was bad. The punt was worse. It went hardly fifteen yards.

"Nervous," Professor Mackey muttered. "Bad pass from center then he has to hurry and kicks one straight up."

The white jerseys came out of their huddle, they radiated jubilation. There was the pass from center and the full-back slashed fifteen yards off right tackle.

Eleven men in clean red jerseys were trotting in from the St. Anne's bench. "About time," Professor Mackey muttered. He turned to Barnes. "He's putting in his first team," he said. "We'll see something different now."

"Er—something different?" Claude Barnes asked. "They all use the same rules, don't they?"

"He means they'll play better," Patricia explained. "They get paid more."

"Your friend Mr. Holmes," Claude Barnes said, "which one is he? Is he in this new group?"

"His number," Patricia said, "is thirty-three. He's the one without the helmet."

"It looks downright suicidal," Barnes said. "They are so fierce."

"He's the type," Patricia said drily, "that would sacrifice an ear for a little attention every time."

Her father glanced at her sharply. "He's a sweet quarterback, anyway."

Smith-Carroll tried the line twice but they needed five yards for a first down. They threw a pass. Larry Holmes coming over batted it down behind the line for a touchback. And on the first down with St. Anne's in possession of the ball on their own twenty-yard line, Larry kicked. It was a long, high, spiraling punt, drifting downfield fifty yards. The ends were down and the Smith-Carroll safety man was thrown in his tracks.

"I told you it would be different," Professor Mackey chortled.

"I say, that was pretty," Claude Barnes said. "It rather changes the complexion of things, doesn't it?"

"We might have had a touchdown by now if old master mind down there hadn't started his second team," Professor Mackey grumbled.

"What's Mr. Holmes doing way back there by himself?" Claude Barnes asked. "He looks rather out of it."

"He'll show you in a minute," Professor Mackey predicted.

"He's what they call the safety man," Patricia explained.

Smith-Carroll tried twice at the line and then went back in punt formation. The kick was low and Larry took it running, by himself.

He sprinted for the sidelines, outrunning a tackler, and the white jerseys were converging, forming a cup around him and the boundary of the field. Then suddenly he was running straight across the field toward the other sideline.

"He's reversed the field," Professor Mackey said, standing up and beating his daughter on the back. "He's loose—no, he's not. No, no. What kind of blocking is that anyway? Now, I ask you. Larry should have scored then. One man in his way and they couldn't block him out."

"He ran that punt back forty yards," Patricia said. "Quit beating me on the back."

"That's why he's back there," Professor Mackey said. "Is that boy a sweetheart?"

Patricia stood up suddenly. "I'm going home," she said.

"I say," Claude Barnes said dazedly. "Wait. I say, I'll go along."

"No," Patricia said. "Don't come. Stay and let father whip up a little school spirit in you. I'm going home."

"Let her go," Professor Mackey said, taking Barnes by the arm. "I," he added absently, "am pretty much an old fool."

III

Correspondence of a Football Player

LARRY came out of the gym. Twenty-eight to nothing. It had turned into a rout. Stan was right.

I was right. It turned into a rout because I could out-think them, that's the reason, really. I out-thought them four touchdowns. I had that big full-back crazy. He didn't know what to think. Perfect scouting, perfect coaching, and, yes, perfect signal calling. And Paddy. Eight points insurance, Paddy. You could have won a lot of money walking through the stands, little bets, betting nineteen points. They would have thought you were crazy. They would have gobbled you up. Maybe you had a man walking through the stands. Maybe you had a man standing in a pool room in Chicago, leaning on a bar in Kansas City, shooting off his mouth and waving his money—your money—at some club in New York. You must be mighty smart, Paddy. You got me off pretty slick. Who did you fix, Paddy, and how much did that cost you?

Funny, me coming out of here a month ago, standing in the door like now and thinking it was nineteen thirty-two there for a minute. Just because a dame walked across the campus and looked at her watch. . . .

Somebody slapped him on the back. "You were sweet today," Slade, the big left-tackle, said. "You had 'em thinkin' you were doin' it with mirrors. We got Old Man Undefeated lookin' for us."

"Henderson beat Chrisman, sixty-two to nothing, today," Larry said dryly. "They used four full teams and the sport writers couldn't tell which was the varsity."

"They can't use 'em but eleven at a time," the big tackle said. "I ain't cocky, I'm just knowledgeable."

"We got three tough games before we get thrown to the lions," Larry said. "Let's play them first. You may break a leg next Saturday."

"Well, don't you break yours. I never see puntin' like that in my life."

"They had a guy in the pro league named Kercheval," Larry said, "could kick 'em farther'n that in a sea of mud against a high wind. You just haven't seen any football players. But," he added, "you will. We can't cancel Henderson, now."

"Holmes," Slade said, "you're too old. I'm goin' home, you ain't any fun to talk to. I'm goin' home. You're too old."

Too old to play, not old enough to work. Too old to remember, too young to forget. Too much muscle, not enough brains. Too many memories not worth remembering. Set a thief to catch a thief and a Sheehy has caught us all.



He took the letter to the post office.

No, sir, every man to his own campus and let the devil take the hindmost, and let Paddy Sheehy take all the loose sentimental money—and me, why me, I'll take vanilla, thank you. There she comes, looks just like Pat. Just like Pat. Looks so much like Pat, it is Pat. All right, Pat, all right for you.

Larry stepped down from the gymnasium steps and fell in step. "Carry your books, madam?" He took her books from under her arm. He didn't look down. "Daniel went to the king," Larry hurried on, "and said, 'Look here, king, I've got lions in my den,' and the king said, 'Well, all I can say, sir, is that you must have brought them with you.'"

"I've heard that," Patricia said. "Give me back my books."

"No, no. That's rude. Wait, I'll make one up. Ph. D.'s should have learned to say please. No, bad meter. Ph. D.'s should have pretty knees. There, that's much better. See how easy?" Larry stopped.

"Claude didn't wait," Patricia said, "you may carry the books. And thank you kindly, sir."

Larry didn't say anything for a mo-

ment. Relief left him a little breathless, feeling silly. "I always waited," he said, not meaning to say that.

"Darned if you didn't," Pat said. "Waited five years to come back."

"I didn't mean to say that," Larry said. "I meant to say I never waited."

"Father says you are doing well in his class," Pat said. "What's the matter?"

"I stay home nights," Larry said.

"Do you draw little circles and little X's on the table cloth and say, 'Now if the defensive forward hadn't fallen off his horse we could throw a triple lateral pass to a friend in the grandstand and by the time he was caught the police would have something better to think about.' Do you still talk like that?"

"Stan's not there much at night," Larry said weakly. "You didn't use to loathe football so, Pat."

"I DON'T loathe football. I like it. I liked marbles, fine. I was good, too. Used to beat half the boys in town. I went to the game today. I saw three or four plays. I saw you run back that first punt. I heard them scream. I saw you come out without a headgear just like you used to. I left then."

"Why did you leave?"

"I was bored. I thought it was silly and boring for a bunch of adolescents to be cheering for a grown man."

"Pat, what if I told you I had to play?"

"If the school is paying you to play, I'd say you were cheap because they aren't paying you enough. If the school isn't paying you I'd say you were a liar. Nobody can make you play football."

"Well," Larry said finally, "we are about home, thank the Lord." He shifted his books to the other hand. "I hope I never get weak-minded and go trying to get me a Ph. D."

Old Professor Mackey was sitting on the porch. Larry spoke to him and turned to leave. Mackey stopped him.

"Larry," he said, "what did the coach want to start his second team for? I don't understand that."

Larry looked helplessly at Pat but she was looking away. "I guess, sir," Larry said, "he doesn't believe everything he sees in the papers. What's your thesis about, Pat?"

"*Mental Areas Explored by the Binet-Simon Intelligence Test*—any suggestions?"

"I might check it for spelling," Larry said slowly. "I remember you were a little weak when you got over two syllables."

How's that, kid? Funny, how he was always talking to her that way, inside of himself. So I still have the letters, eh? You came out bad that time. There you go remembering. Well, I'm remembering, too. You got no darned license to be the only one can remember.

"I'll see you again, Larry," Patricia said and she walked into the house. "I've got to study now." She didn't look at him, she just walked on into the house.

Professor Mackey frowned. "What did you do with yourself the last four years, son?" he asked suddenly.

"This and that," Larry said. "Here and there. Mostly I was on the bum, sort of."

"Feel any older?"

"I don't remember," Larry lied flatly.

Professor Mackey filled his pipe. "Larry," he said, and there was a note almost of pleading in his voice, "you learn by remembering, you grow up by remembering. Any time you don't remember and profit by it you stay the same age. Except your body gets older. You have all the disadvantages of aging and none of the advantages."

"What do you gain by getting old?" Larry Holmes said, almost angrily. "Look at my old man. Great football player. Football is a great developer of character. That's what he told me. He gave me everything I wanted. Made me a football player. Put me tops so he could throw me farther down."

"You say things you don't believe," Mackey said slowly, "and that's worse than believing things that aren't so. And that's all your father did. He

believed things that weren't so. Maybe it was wishful thinking. Then it came on him all at once. Not physically all at once, but to him, all at once. Everything went by the boards. He was a crook in the eyes of the law. He would live a long time. I imagine he thought it would be better for him to be a dead memory than a living memory. Living in a penitentiary. So he rallied his courage and he killed himself. That tragedy was a product of the times."

Larry didn't say anything. He just sat and stared at the floor. He sat there sixty seconds and he didn't hear the motor stop in front of the house. Professor Mackey coughed.

"Larry," he said, "here comes Claude Barnes. He's staying for dinner. Why don't you stay, too?"

There was a pause.

"All right," Larry said. "I'll stay to dinner. Your daughter will say I'm staying to dinner because I don't have to eat at the training table now because I have made myself valuable to the coach and I can get away with some things I couldn't while I was trying to make the team. I can just hear her saying it. I'm going to say, 'Don't be adolescent.'"

"I hope so," Professor Mackey said. "She is, you know? Adolescent . . ."

"I hope so," Larry said.

THE letter came on Monday. It was from Paddy's lawyer. It read, Larry guessed, dictated literally: *Okay nineteen set-up looks like nothing till H. Go all out look good don't get hurt. Little Paddy has gained weight this week. He keeps talking about seventeen thousand. Don't children do the cutest things? Love, Aunt Sophy.*

Larry took up his pen.

You don't have to be so cute. No one is opening my letters. We rate to beat every team we play—until we come to H—by enough touchdowns so that there shouldn't be much betting. I think your policy is the best, not betting till then. I will try to protect myself from injuries, so that I can be of maximum service to you in the last game.

"But now—H. is very, very strong. They may beat us two or three touchdowns on the level. Breaks play a lot in this game. We are weak in replacements. They can send in man after man, one as good as the other. Stancouski will see them play each game until our game with them. We are definitely pointing for them. They will be well scouted; we will be well coached. I will be smarter than their quarterback. I will outkick him. I can out-think him. They will be gunning for me and they play to take the sting out of a dangerous man early. I will be dangerous to them. The boy I thought would turn out to be a capable substitute for me hasn't shown the stuff he would need in that game. However, I will talk to Stancouski before the game, get complete opinions from him, write you and await your reply. I remain,

Yours faithfully,
Larry.

He folded the letter and put it on the table. Stan wouldn't be in for an hour. Larry picked up another page. He wrote idly this time.

Dear Paddy, you darling little plump rascal:

I have just come back from football practice. I have been practicing throwing things. I will be a mean thrower come Henderson. I aim to do an artistic job for you. I have my principles, that why I haven't told Miss Patricia Mackey that you are a fat skunk and that I love her very dearly and that I will not accept your dirty bribe because I am an honest boy. This would fix things up in nice shape.

I would go to the big house, you would go out for a glass of beer, Patricia would go to her grave, grieving over me. You see, she's really very much in love with me, has been for years. When I court 'em they stay courted. When you court 'em they go off to the penitentiary for being hold-up men. That is the difference.

Larry chewed his pen-holder a few minutes.

There is another difference. I'll tell you. Patricia is a professor's daughter, you are not. I, though, am neither a professor's daughter nor a fat skunk. I am a lean skunk. Professor Mackey, my darling's pa, is neither a professor's daughter nor a lean skunk nor yet a fat skunk. He teaches mathematics. He says my father was a product

of the times. He says I am a louse, by inference.

My father, he says, shot himself to keep out of my hair. He thinks if he had been in the penitentiary—better known as school for wayward boys—it would have distressed me and I would not have turned out to be the success that I am now. Love is tempered to the shorn lamb, Paddy, my boy; remember that and you will go far—farther than the lambs you shear. Good night, fat skunk.

Yours,

Lean skunk.

Larry looked at the clock. Time to mail Paddy his report. He stood up and fumbled for a stamp, couldn't find one. He walked to the closet, got down a topcoat and found a book of stamps in the pocket. He took up the already addressed envelope and pushed the letter into it. He picked up the other letter, smiling to himself a little grimly, and tore it into tiny bits. He decided he would scatter it along a little at a time until he got to the post office. That would provide something for the detectives to work on if they ever investigated his correspondence.

He walked out. He had a bitter taste in his mouth.

HE REGISTERED the letter at the post office and mailed it. The man at the window called to some one in the back of the post office, and threw him the letter. Larry saw him stop tying up his sack for a moment and stuff the letter in. That was good. Go right out. Paddy would like that. He walked out of the post office and stuck his hand in his pocket, still smiling. Yes, Paddy would like that. He would drop the last two bits of the letter, now. The letter to the fat skunk. He picked one out and dropped it. A good detective could really break this case, just follow me around and pick up the little pieces. There, under the street light.

Larry froze. He snatched up the bit of paper. There were four letters on it. They were: "Stan—"

"It's not a ghost," Patricia Mackey said, "it's a little piece of paper." She came up out of nowhere and stood

beside him, her mouth quirked into a smile.

The train whistle cut into Larry's mind like a knife. Two sharp blasts, then the peculiar uncertain sound a train makes pulling out. That tore it!

There she goes. There goes the letter. I'm fixed up now. I'm fixed up now.

He looked up at Patricia suddenly, she was watching him and a look of real concern was creeping into her face. She had just walked into the light, alone. But the train whistle was still in his mind—the train that was taking the wrong letter to Paddy Sheehy.

Larry smiled weakly, feeling pale. "I'd trade that for a good ghost," he said. "It's in code and portends disaster. A man just dropped it from his rocket ship."

"Walk me to the post office," Pat said. "I've got a letter to mail. I'm all skeert now."

"It's closed," Larry said. "I know. I just saw it close in my face. I'll walk you to a box though, and then home if you're scared."

"I haven't a stamp."

Larry felt in his pocket. He took out his stamp book. He also took out the last bit of paper. He didn't look at that. He threw it away. Yes, a good detective could break this case, but why call in a detective? The scene of the crime always comes back, anyway, to the murderer. "Here's a stamp," he said. "Let us be off."

"You act as if you were," Patricia said.

"Patricia," Larry said, "you speak the truth." There're no more trains tonight. As he walked along, his mind was frantically busy. Rushing. Like a broken-field runner. I'll wire—no, too risky. I can't be in communication with a known gambler and let a telegraph-operator know. Not in a small town. I'll phone—no, that's just as bad. I'll write, air mail. Let the mail fly tomorrow, Larry prayed, let it be clear. He phrased another letter. One to mop up spilled milk. *Dear Paddy—little joke—little drunk—* No, not that! *Training—little funny—don't*

read, this is code—ridiculous—couldn't remember—*fat skunk? Lean skunk?* Oh, he was sunk all right.

Patricia broke in upon him. "I said I wanted you to walk me home, not run me home."

Larry slowed down. They were on a bridge, an old bridge; it ran across the railroad tracks. There were two green lights disappearing down the track, then there was a beautiful radiance in the smoke over the green lights as the fireman opened the door and threw in some coal. The light from the open door pushed up into the sky, into the smoke, the thickness of the night, and it was very beautiful. They had stopped, leaning on the rail of the bridge looking at the disappearing train and the red against the sky. Larry looked down at Pat and when he looked down he could see the faint rain falling that he hadn't noticed.

"It looks," Larry said, "like they might not fly the mail tomorrow. Let's go home."

The rain came down a little faster. "God pity all animal-acts at sea on a night like this," Pat said. "It was a pretty train, though."

"As trains go," Larry said. "And it's the gonest train I ever saw."

"You sound sad. Did you want it to wait?"

"Let's not cry over spilt spleen," Larry said. "Let's show we've got sense enough to go in out of the rain."

STANCOUSKI was still up when Larry came in. "Hell of a night," he said. He was chewing tobacco and looking around the room with an unprejudiced gaze.

"Yes, sir," Larry agreed. "Lovely."

"I hope we don't catch mud for Henderson."

"Are they as tough as they say they are?" Larry asked. "Really doesn't seem possible."

"They're worse," Stancouski assured him. "Big, fast, and lots of 'em. They got two backfields look just alike—poison. They got three lines look just alike—more poison. They've got everything."

"Well," said Larry, "let me be the first to go on record as saying they will trim us. We haven't got everything."

"We got one thing they haven't got," Stancouski said. "We got you. We got a starting line as good as theirs. We've got a starting backfield maybe not quite. We've got you."

"You thrill me," Larry said.

"They ain't got anybody can kick like you can. Not by ten yards, puntin'. Not by a mile, drop-kickin' or place-kickin'. Not by two miles, thinkin'."

"Do go on," Larry said. "This is swell, Stan."

"I know," Stancouski said, "you're all grown up and it's just a game with you. You're not a college kid. But you'll go. You may yawn when the old man talks sentimental to the boys at half time. But you go. You play your best anyway. That's all we care about. And you got a head on you and you can kick and pass and run. You're better'n anything they got and you may be the boy who can win for us. If we don't catch injuries in the line where we can't replace them."

"What if old Horatio Holmes, me—what if I get a shoulder knocked down? A knee thrown out?"

"You ain't going to be in there," Stancouski said, "any more, till Henderson, than is necessary. The old man ain't a dunce. He figures he'll take these two clubs without you."

"You mean he's going to start saving me?"

Stancouski took out a pencil and a notebook. "Right," he said. He opened the notebook. "Now lookee here," he began again. "They use a six-two-two-one against these guys they played last Saturday. Sometimes the center comes outa the line, it depends on . . ."

LARRY picked up his pen and put the book down cautiously. Stan was in bed. He started writing.

Dear Paddy:

I wrote you a letter a few hours ago and then I sat down to while away some time and wrote you an-

other letter to amuse myself. I mailed you the wrong letter. I am sending this air mail though the weather looks now as if they might not fly the mail tomorrow. If you get this letter first I wish you would tear up the other letter. If you get the other letter first I wish you would lay it to insanity and not think anything about it. I didn't mean what I wrote in it any more than a person playing on the typewriter really wants 'all good men to come to the aid of their party'. I have just been talking to Stancouski. He has scouted H. one game. They are very good. He thinks our only chance of beating them lies with me. My kicking, my possible ability to out-think them. This makes it all better, in a way. Incidentally, it looks as if I won't be playing very much until the H. game because they seem to think I might get hurt and they don't want me hurt. Please forget the other letter if you get it.

Yours,

Larry.

He folded the letter, put it in an envelope and stamped it. Then he got up and putting on his coat started for the mailbox.

"If you do any good," Larry muttered as he dropped the letter in the slot, "I'll be surprised."

IV

Stormy Saturday

THE car pulled up in front of the Mackeys' house and the little man got out. He looked up and down the street, muttered something to the driver and walked up to the door. The car moved away. The little man rang the bell, standing whistling silently to himself.

The door opened. "Miss Mackey?" he asked politely. "Miss Patricia Mackey?"

Patricia looked at him for a moment. "Yes," she said uncertainly. "I'm Patricia Mackey."

"I'd like to talk to you," the little man said, "in private for a minute. My name is Paddy Sheehy. I'm here to see the game tomorrow."

"Come in, won't you?" She led him into the living room and turned on a light against the dusk.

They faced each other squarely.

"This is a nice room," Paddy Sheehy said. "I haven't been in a room like this for forty years. I came to see you about Larry Holmes."

"Larry Holmes?"

"Yes, about Larry Holmes. I'm going to do a little monologue about Larry Holmes. I don't want you to say anything until I finish."

Patricia was sitting very straight in her chair. "I shan't," she said.

Paddy Sheehy leaned back in his chair. "I saw a picture of Larry Holmes," he said. "Here it is." He took the picture out of his pocket and handed it to her. "As you can see from the picture he was in a little jam. I happened to remember about him, his playing football. I got him out of the jam and I got him into shape. I sent him back here to college. To pay me back he was to throw a couple of football games for me. I'm a gambler, ma'am."

Patricia handed back the picture. She was pale but she didn't say anything.

"Well, he never had a chance. He never had a close enough one come up so that he could throw it by himself. All he's done is tell me that St. Anne's would beat Smith-Carroll three touchdowns. I bet he was right and I won seventeen thousand dollars on that game. Betting nineteen points. I put up money through my connections all over the country."

"You are a rather despicable creature, aren't you?" Patricia Mackey said.

Paddy went on as if he hadn't heard. "I squared this robbery charge," he said. "I spent a good deal of money on Larry, just on the chance. Clothes, training camp, tuition. I haven't given him the word about tomorrow. I haven't told him what to do. This is the biggest game of the season, in a way. I can go down to the telegraph office and lay fifty grand on this game, wiring around the country."

Patricia held her voice up but it came out a whisper. "Why do you tell me this?" she asked.

"Are you in love with the guy?" Paddy asked.

"No!" Patricia's answer came quick with indignation.

Paddy took two letters out of his pocket. His face was expressionless. "Read these," he said. "This one first. But before you read them I want to explain that I came to you to ask your advice. I don't know whether I can trust him or not. What do you think?"

He watched her.

Patricia read the letters. Slowly, carefully she read the letters. She handed them back. Her face was a pale mask. She didn't say anything. She just sat there, not looking at anything for a long time.

"I want to know, too," she said at last. "Now, I want to know, too. Whether you can trust him or not. Please tell him to lose the game."

"Thank you, ma'am," Paddy Sheehy said, "and good evening. I'll take your advice. We'll see what we'll see."

IT WAS quiet down there. Under the stadium. You could just barely hear a little rumbling sound as the seats were filling up. Slade, the big left tackle, was sitting next to Larry. He kept untying his shoes and then tying them again. He had them knotted so tightly each time it took him a little while to get them untied again.

"Well," the Old Man said, "what the blazes. Lot of you guys are playing your last game. I'd like to win it. You'd like to win it. I've done all I can. I believe, if you play your best every minute of the way, doing what I've tried to teach you to do, you've got a chance. That's all there is." He started reading out the starting lineup. Stancouski was going around, whispering to the starters some bit of information: "He'll play a little wide, maybe. . . . If you notice anything tell Larry. We got to out-think these guys. . . ."

"Larry, I'm starting you at quarter," the Old Man said. Stancouski was at his elbow. "Mix 'em up, lots of laterals. If they got a weak spot in the line it's the left side, inside end. That end is poison, so's the other one. Throw enough passes to make the

ends float. You know, fellow. Win this one for me. . . ."

There was a faint mass of sound in the dressing room that signaled Henderson's arrival on the field. Larry didn't look up at Stancouski. "Quit tying your shoes, stupid," he snarled at Slade.

"All right," the Old Man said. "Let's go."

* * *

Professor Mackey sat down and adjusted the blanket. He looked around. "Where's Claude?" he asked absently.

"I don't know," Patricia snapped. "Am I supposed to know everything?"

Professor Mackey didn't say anything for a minute, then as the team came out and they stood up he said pleasedly, "I see Master Mind isn't starting his second team against Henderson."

"No," Patricia said, not looking at her father. "No, that's right. He isn't starting his second team against Henderson."

She sounded as if she were talking to herself.

Larry was standing out there, standing on his heels not looking at anyone, he couldn't look at anyone. He concentrated with fierce attention on the referee flipping the coin. He heard Slade call it wrong. The Henderson captain, the big stocky fullback, said, "We'll kick."

Larry trotted back into position. He heard them shouting around him, shouting encouragement to one another, the old stock things they always shouted, the things he used to shout. He knew how they felt. Funny; sort of gone inside, hollow across the stomach and their hearts beating faster; the band and the cheering. Then when the play came, and they hit someone, cracked down on someone, shook themselves up, they'd get up then, grinning a little sheepishly at how they had felt a moment ago, and they'd start playing football. Start playing football? Start trying to figure out some way to give one

away so it wouldn't look bad. That's what you've got to do. And do it fast, get it over. That's the thing. I wonder if Pat's watching the game?

There was the shrill sound of the whistle and a dull roar from the banks of color that surrounded the field and was the crowd.

* * *

"He's tried the line twice," Professor Mackey said, "and he's right where he started. He'll kick."

The ball came back from center. The bare-headed figure standing far back behind his own line of scrimmage juggled the ball, then recovered and swinging his foot kicked the ball, with a resoundful thud, into the chest of an intruding Henderson player. Blocked. Larry cursed silently and ran in to try to recover. The ball bounced crazily, back, end over end toward the St. Anne's goal line and the crowd was silent a tenth of a second as the big Henderson tackle followed the ball, catlike, four steps before he dived for it. It was over the goal line. The Henderson tackle snuggled the ball into his arms and grinned his triumph.

The referee's whistle shrilled and he looked once at the head linesman, then threw his hands up high in the air and crossed them quickly, twice. Touchdown. The Henderson team bounced over, shouting, to line up for the try for point.

The St. Anne's center said, his arm over Larry's shoulder:

"It was my fault, Larry." His eyes were wet with rage.

Larry walked back into position. "That's all right, kid," he said. "Get in there and block this one, the game isn't over yet." He wasn't looking at the center, he was looking at the ground.

But the kick was good.

"That's the first punt Larry's had blocked on him this year," Professor Mackey said. "They must have a splendid line."

"Seven to nothing," Patricia said. "Seven to nothing in three minutes. Seven to nothing already."

"The game isn't over yet," Professor Mackey said. "Seven points doesn't look big on a dry field."

ST. ANNE'S kicked off. What wind there was now blowing was behind them. Slade, kicking for St. Anne's kicked over the goal line; the Henderson back let it roll and the referee brought it out to the twenty-yard line.

Henderson tried bucking the line twice, were pushed back; and they needed twelve yards for a first down, then. The St. Anne's line was raging. The Henderson quarterback went back into punt-formation and the kick was off, nicely, against the wind, low. Too low for the Henderson ends to get down the field with it. Larry had caught it and was gathering speed, heading toward the sidelines, before a Henderson man was near enough to try to tackle him.

He was big and black-haired, the meat on his arms and chest and shoulders was solid. It was the Henderson right end and he took a long dive for Larry when he saw that Larry was outrunning him, escaping. His hand brushed Larry's leg. Larry took two more steps, stumbling, and then he fell; and the ball, slipping greasily from his fingers, was bouncing away from him toward the Henderson tackle who had come down on the punt.

* * *

Paddy Sheehy came down the stadium steps looking carefully at the faces in one section as he came. He found the one he wanted and came over to it. The half was just over. Score—seven to nothing. The Henderson band was out on the field, playing, and Henderson rooters on the other side of the stadium shell were singing and cheering and going joyously crazy.

Sheehy stood, poised and peering.

The seat next to Patricia was vacant at that moment and Sheehy sat down. "He did his best," he said, talking in a normal flat voice that didn't travel anywhere. "But he was crude

with that fumble, and I don't blame the coach for jerking him."

Patricia looked at him and no surprise was on her face. "Yes," she said, "I guess he was a little crude but he did his best."

Paddy Sheehy took his glasses off and wiped them as he talked; it gave him a stupid, vacant look. "I wanted to tell you something."

"Yes," Patricia said.

Paddy said: "Since you are in love with this boy. It might make a difference."

"I—" Patricia said and then she stopped. She looked at Paddy for a moment but he was blowing on his glasses and not seeing her. "I guess I am," she said. There were tears in her eyes.

"I thought I'd let him go," Paddy said. "It might help him some. I thought I'd let him go and then maybe it would take that taste out of his mouth."

"Let him go?"

Paddy took out a pencil and a little pad of paper. He wrote:

Aunt Sophy hedged at half past.
The dish looked too good but she's
all right again, now.

Paddy.

He handed it to Patricia. "That means I hedged at the half because the odds were too good and I want St. Anne's to win, now."

Patricia laughed. Paddy told the Western Union boy, giving him a dollar, "Don't miss, son. That's a death notice. He's got to get it. There's five more for you if you bring me an answer." He stood up.

"Don't go," Patricia said. "Mr. Sheehy, this is my father, Professor Mackey. Mr. Sheehy is a friend of Larry's, father."

"I won't go," Paddy said. "I'll sit in the aisle by your father."

"Larry's a good kid," Professor Mackey said. "I like that boy. But he's off his game today."

"He may get on," Paddy said. "He may get on. In fact, professor, I'll bet you fifty cents St. Anne's wins this football game."

* * *

"He's startin' you this half," Stancouski said. "Try to look like you wasn't playin' in boxin' gloves." Larry had Paddy's note in his fingers, Stancouski thought it was funny how Larry kept staring down at it, and blinking very fast.

Larry turned to the messenger boy. "Tell the guy that sent me that note, 'Okay,'" he said. He turned to Stancouski. "I'll look like Dutch Clark," he said. "My uncle just died and left me a billion dollars." Larry laughed. "Oh, boy," he said.

Stancouski just grinned.

IT WAS getting dark and Stancouski felt cold. The last quarter was about half over. Seven to nothing. He pulled the blanket around him a little tighter and turned to the head coach sitting beside him on the bench. "That," he said, "is the damnedest job of playin' this game I ever saw. He got word his uncle died at half time and left him some dough. Boy, what a prime heel that uncle must have been."

"It's a good job," the old man said. "But still it isn't good enough."

"We got time," Stancouski insisted. "We got five, six minutes. He'll kick."

* * *

Larry cut into the line running his best. There was a hole there. No. There were three Henderson men jamming up the hole, coming through fast, fresh men in clean jerseys, jamming up the hole. Two of them hit him at once. Hit him hard. They didn't want him to get up fast. He was still a threat.

He didn't get up fast. He got up slow. He felt he was lucky to get up at all. He limped back to the huddle.

"Kick it out in the coffin corner, kid," Slade said. "We can't shake you loose. They're too tough."

Larry tried to grin, through the dirt on his skinned face. "There aren't but eleven of 'em," he said.

"There ain't but eleven of 'em," Slade said, "but they act like more." He straightened a taped wrist, gingerly. "There ain't but one of you,

either," he said. "That's the hell of it."

Larry watched the Henderson safety-man drifting back, watched a halfback dropping back, tentatively. They knew he had to kick. A smart team. A big, fast, tough team. Well coached. How well?

"Shut up, stupid," he said to Slade.

Back now, on his own fifty. Kick it out in the old coffin corner. Then hold 'em and block their kick. That's the way to figure. That's the way they figure. Okay.

They didn't know what he knew now. They didn't know he couldn't kick. They didn't know they had done something to his right leg on that last pile-up. Something to the muscle in his hip. Well, what they didn't know wouldn't hurt 'em. Or maybe it would.

From punt formation Larry snapped a flat pass over center and the end that took the pass ten yards behind the Henderson line was coming over fast and he outran one man in the secondary but the safety was running him out of bounds on the thirty before he stopped and lobbed a lateral to the halfback running wide open ten yards inside of him. The St. Anne halfback scored standing up.

"That's as good as seven to seven," Professor Mackey said up in the grandstand. "Larry is poison on those tries after point."

"Six to seven," Paddy Sheehy corrected softly after a moment. "He hasn't been kicking them after touch-down against a line that comes in like that."

There was a roar of disappointment. It rose from the St. Anne rooters.

"Nobody would have had time to kick that one," Patricia said. "But I wish he had."

Down on the field, Slade slipped his arm over Larry's shoulder.

"That tore it," he said crying a little. "We couldn't hold those guys out of there for you, kid. We tried, but . . ."

"That's all right," Larry said. "I'll have another try before church is out."

Minutes hurried . . . ran. Precious, important minutes that could never be recovered.

Professor Mackey stood up and folded his blanket. "You owe me fifty cents," he said dully.

"Let him play it out," Paddy said. "You always score on one play."

"Not from the twenty-yard line against that team; not jammed over against the sideline," Patricia said.

"He's in kick-formation," Professor Mackey said.

"Five'll get you seven he makes it," Paddy Sheehy said.

But the drop-kick was in the air then. Larry had sent it. Where was his leg. He'd sent the drop-kick. Sent it from the thirty-yard line, standing on the thirty, sent it for goal posts ten yards behind the line—forty yards and an angle. He's aimed at the goal posts, all right. But it was too far away and the angle made the target too small—small as the fork of the tree he had practiced kicking through for two months in Charlie Kochosky's training camp—lots farther away than the tree had ever been. There it went, cockeyed by a fraction—it was going to be short, he didn't know how far. And there went his leg. It had swung back and he tried to stand on it and he was crumpling down, with pain running up his leg and he couldn't see the ball because he was too low now. He couldn't see anything, he was lying on the ground. He couldn't . . .

But the crowd in the grandstand could see it—and the referee blowing the whistle and the scoreboard boys adding three points to St. Anne's score.

"Let me down," he said. He was on someone's shoulders. "Let me down, you're hurting my leg." Everybody was yelling and jumping and shouting all around him. Things wavered and blurred.

IT WAS all right now. He was all packed. Paddy had gotten his, certainly. He was going. That was the thing. He was walking down the street and it was dark and he was going to catch the train. He felt all

right. A little light in his head, bitter—clean and bitter in his mind, but somehow all right . . . Pat, Pat . . . That was all right, too. It was all all right. He was somebody else, now. Now, at last. He was out of the gym, off the campus, out of the apartment and he had left a note for Stan. They were raising hell over on the campus. The bonfire was a beauty. Best one he'd ever seen.

He stopped and leaned against the rail of the bridge.

"You're hard to catch," Patricia said. "You're a hard man to catch up with—That drop-kick—Larry. It was—beautiful. Not—kiddish . . ."

It didn't surprise him then. It seemed like something nice that he had wanted to happen and so it had happened

"I'm glad you came."

"Stan showed me the note," Patricia said and her voice was shaky.

"I'm glad you came," Larry said gravely, a little absently. "I wanted to kiss you goodbye."

Patricia looked down at the cold rails running under the bridge. "It's been a long time," she whispered. "Too long. But if you'll kiss me I'll wait again. I'll keep on being in love with you till the next time you come back."

She made a little gesture with her hands, tried to smile. "Whenever that may be," she said. Her laugh was terribly shaky.

The train was beautiful, driving through the dusk, loud and romantic and vicious as trains ought to be. The green lights on the observation platform were hard and bright and at the same place on the grade the fireman opened the door to throw on some coal and the same red glow showed against the sky, eerie and lovely.

"That's the train the letter was on," Larry said. "That's the one I was catching tonight."

"It's a good train," Patricia said. "One of the best. And Paddy—Paddy is one of the best. And the letter. The letter was lovely. I wept. I'm weeping now. I love you, Larry, and I say it's swell."

 *
 * **P**RETEND with us that this column is
 * really three pages. It should have
 * been, but this is all that survives. . . .
 * On one page we were going to tell you
 * what gay and talented fellows our authors
 * are; to explain why Max Brand prefers
 * *filet de sole Meuniere* to, say, creamed
 * spinach; how Borden Chase can dash off
 * a radio sketch with one hand and a
 * movie scenario with the other; and why
 * Cornell Woolrich, when he left home at
 * the age of four, didn't join the Navy. But,
 * alas, it was not to be. . . .

* We are going to squeeze in a word to
 * those of you who noticed the name
 * **GEORGE BRUCE** so brashly blazoned
 * on our cover and, finding no Bruce in
 * the book wondered. MGM is at this
 * moment filming *Navy Blue and Gold*
 * (the Bruce work that is its author's
 * darling) and the novelet we so con-
 * fidently counted on is probably still be-
 * neath that pile of treatments and con-
 * tinuities on the Bruce desk at Culver
 * City. *Selah!*

* Next month we can promise you an is-
 * sue even more exciting than this one,
 * featuring ace novelets and short stories
 * by Max Brand, Frank Richardson Pierce,
 * Richard Sale, Carl Rathjen, Richard
 * Howells Watkins, and other topflight
 * stars.

* Our enthusiasm for **ALL-AMERICAN**
 * **FICTION** has been, and is, practically
 * without limits. We were pleased and sur-
 * prised, though, to find that the enthusi-
 * asm of the authors to whom we outlined
 * our ideas was even more so. This is one
 * hook without isms or tabus. We want our
 * authors to write the story as they see it
 * and feel it. *A Finer World* in this issue
 * is a case in point. Every editor who saw
 * it liked it but wanted changes made that
 * Borden Chase couldn't believe in and
 * flatly refused to make. We followed Mr.
 * Chase's hunch and printed the story ex-
 * actly as he wrote it.

* So Mr. Chase, all dewy with gratitude
 * and affection, is at this moment locked
 * in his apartment pounding out more
 * stories for us as fast as he can. Similarly
 * enthused are Theodore Roscoe, Joel
 * Townsley Rogers, Richard Wormser, Wil-
 * liam E. Barrett, L. G. Blochman and a
 * corporal's guard of others. Their event-
 * ual output should find its way to these
 * pages in the very near future. And then,
 * of course, there's still that Bruce novelet.
 * Oh yes, we go right on expecting it.

G. W. Post.

South by the Sun

by Richard Sale

THE MARQUESAS are lonely and volcanic. They sit in the ocean forlornly, a sort of rash upon the infinite skin of the sea, and all around them, the water preens itself in the tropical sun, placidly suggesting itself as a monstrous looking-glass for the cerulean skies. An eruption of hot lava made them into land. Another eruption from the same submarine mouth may, someday, return them to the gullet of the parent volcano. But land they are now: gray, solid rock; cheerless, grim, sometimes mighty, and always bathed in that quiet sense of plaintive solitude.

When you raise up the Marquesas as a landfall, you sight the rockhead on the sheer cliff which hangs up over the treacherous channel which leads into Hakatea Cove. Like all landfalls, that rockhead hooks itself in the sky for moments like dark mist and then gradually evolves into slate shadow, and the mate on watch shouts: "Land ho!" But unlike most landfalls, that rockhead becomes formidable quickly. It gains form, substance, raises

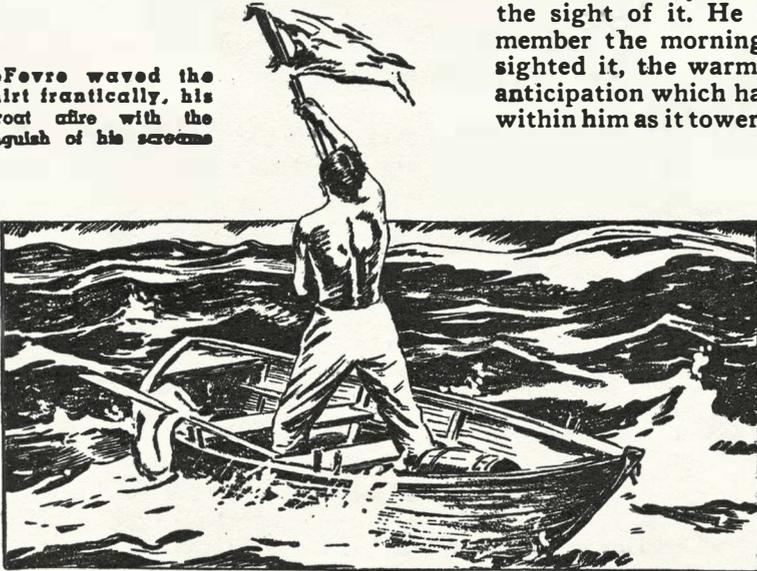
itself into the sun and you know that it means one thing: the Marquesas. It could mean nothing else in the Pacific.

The rockhead warns the mariner then of the channel. It is a thin, meager channel and very greedy. It is homicidal. Many ships have died in the channel with the quiet blue waters of Hakatea Cove no more than twenty-five yards distant. To reach the cove, you must go through the channel. There are rocks around and you have to pick your way for the ship with care and caution. It is rough outside when you want to get through that channel most, and that makes it harder. The heavy seas often hide the rocks. . . .

LeFevre sighed. He lay on his back and stared up at the rockhead above the channel. Distance did not soften the pocked face of the rock for him. He was not at sea, coming in, the sun and the water cosmetizing that rock. He lay beneath it, looking straight up at it. It had no beauty that close. It was too huge and adamant.

LeFevre closed his eyes to shut out the sight of it. He could remember the morning he first sighted it, the warm thrill of anticipation which had burned within him as it towered up and

LeFevre waved the shirt frantically, his throat afire with the anguish of his screams



became real. But that had been three years before. Three endless, solid years, and since then he had gazed upon the rockhead once a day at least, and it had become a loathesome thing. It symbolized his own plight.

Yet it had been really welcome that first morning. It had promised momentary security. It had promised segregation. And the irony of the thing lay in the fact that it had kept its promise. Security and segregation it had given. But when LeFevre stabbed the mate of the *Tahoe* to death in Melbourne, Australia, three years before, he had not reckoned on a security and segregation so complete in the Marquesas. He had had more than his share. He was sick to death of it.

He had murdered the Swede on the *Tahoe* because of a stupid quarrel and because the Swede had picked on him too much in the voyage from Malacca. That was done; nothing could change it. The factor which had saved him was simply that he had falsified his name in the ship's log in the first place. It remained for him to ship quickly on a mail packet, the *Dominic Luger*, for the Marquesas. He had money and he used his own name. A beard changed his face.

But money doesn't last forever. LeFevre found that expenses in the island were nothing. Yet, one could spend. There was Moy Jack's liquor shop near the copra sheds of Nuka Hiva. There were card games and dice. Sailors from other ships which put in now and then, ready to gamble. They were shrewd gamblers, LeFevre had found. Within a year, he was dead broke.

AT FIRST, there were women at Nuka Hiva too. He knew he was not without charm. He had a confidence regarding women which made them like him. But soon they were the same women. Soon they came to know him. It was difficult to know which tired first, LeFevre or the native girls.

Beachcombing was a filthy life. LeFevre had laughed at beachcombing jokes with the other sailors of his

ships. He had never expected to live the rest of his life as a beachcomber himself, sleeping on the white sands at Nuka Hiva, working at the copra sheds for wages the natives sometimes spurned, spending the hard-earned money to pay his eternally mounting chit at Moy Jack's bar.

There would be a reckoning some day. LeFevre knew it. He used to lie on the sand in the shade of a tree and run his darkened hands through his red beard while he contemplated what Moy Jack might have in mind. Moy Jack, whatever the size of the liquor debt, was no philanthropist. Moy Jack was half-caste Chinese and very ambitious. He knew how to throw a knife and there were no brawls in the bar shed. LeFevre had once seen Moy Jack pinion a man's hand against the wall with a well aimed *kris*. The man, a sailor, drunk, had been about to swing on somebody else. The wound sobered him quickly.

LeFevre sighed again and dropped his eyes from the rockhead into the bright blue cove which lay ahead of Nuka Hiva. There were small boats in the cove, native proas, and other craft. There was also a copra-ship, the *Flying Wind*. She came in every three months, laid over for two days, then sailed south by the sun for Saturday Island to drop supplies, thence northeast for Hilo. She was as regular as a clock. She sometimes carried passengers who could pay their way.

To her port floated a small thirty-foot schooner, the *Temori*. She was a one-man boat. Her owner and captain was Honest John Farrar, a giant of a man with clean, unpenetrable eyes and a brown beard. No one knew much about Honest John. They were all agreed that he was the squarest white man in the Sporades. They were all aware that he played at pearls, putting in at the various islands, trading for pearls, sometimes hiring native boys to dive for him. He paid well. He was liked by white and native alike. He was honest, like his name, and yet he trusted nobody. That was why he sailed his ship alone. That was why

the *Temori* was a one-man ship. She was rigged to be handled singly.

LeFevre clenched some sand between his fists and let it trickle slowly back to its beach. Two hopes there. The *Temori* and the *Flying Wind*. Two hopes as dim as two old pennies. LeFevre did not have the money to buy passage on the *Flying Wind*. And he did not have the face to work passage on the *Temori*. He had asked Honest John Farrar once to let him ship out of Nuka Hiva and work his way. Honest John would have taken a man in trouble and been pleased with the arrangement. But Honest John knew men and could read eyes. So he said no to LeFevre, politely.

Sand whipped into LeFevre's skin and stung. He turned angrily and saw a native boy standing beside him, panting. The native said: "Moy Jack see you urgent, sah."

"Me?" LeFevre said, his eyes half-shut. "Now what does Moy Jack want to see me about? He knows I haven't a penny."

LEFEVRE rose and wiped the sand off his dirty white ducks and then ran his hand through his beard. His eyes became clouded; a frown fell upon his face. He picked his way slowly up the sands, grunting at the effort of each suck at his feet, until he reached the matted earth of the copra sheds. He continued to Moy Jack's store, hesitated a moment at the front, then entered.

Moy Jack did not look clever. He had a round funny face with a small button mouth and short-cropped black hair. He grinned. He was always grinning. It showed the two decayed incisors in the front of his mouth and made him ludicrous. But his eyes stopped the impression. There were things in the eyes, sharply almond-shaped and set close together, which were not funny. His skin was not yellow, but more of a tan. He was half-caste.

Moy Jack nodded his head in greeting; he beamed placidly. "Honored friend have drink today? Have drink with Moy Jack?"

"Thanks," LeFevre said. Then, "You want something, Moy. What's up?"

Moy Jack's smile was the distillation of innocence. He shrugged, and his eyes narrowed just slightly. He poured a jigger of rum and watched LeFevre down it in one great gulp. His gaze seemed to fasten on the trembling of LeFevre's hand.

"I think you ready to go home—to States," he said. "I think Islands no longer much good for you. It is so?"

"Home?" LeFevre said it warily, but then he had to add fiercely: "God, yes!" He knew he was a fool to let Moy Jack see how much he wanted it, but he couldn't help the outburst.

Moy Jack nodded. He appeared to be brooding deeply about something, and then, almost reluctantly, he began to speak.

"You know Captain Farrar, not so?" LeFevre nodded. "He have much luck with pearls this trip. Just now he was here. Pay for rum with pearl—very fine pearl. Take from pouch with plenty other pearl—enough pearl to pay passage back to States many times over. Too bad Captain Farrar should have pearl when there are so many others in the Islands who could use them. . . . I know a man who wish very much to go home but he owe Moy Jack big debt—have no money to pay passage. Maybe better he have pearl than Captain John." He paused, almost apologetically. "Moy Jack but speak in dreams," he said. "Think only it is very nice Captain Farrar have so good luck and find so many pearls."

"Don't be a fool," LeFevre said. "I couldn't get away with it. Don't you think I've figured it out before when Honest John came in with his pearl-pouch full? No . . . They'd find the pearls on me. I couldn't risk it."

Moy Jack smiled his Buddha smile. "Moy Jack not say you take pearls. Would not even venture to suggest it. Only say if someone had so many pearls, Moy Jack be happy to pay cash for them. Even fifty-fifty split. Then this person could take money, could pay off what he owe Moy Jack,

could buy passage home on *Flying Wind*. But even so—these are only small dreams like wind that blows no ships to sea. . . .”

“Stop talking in circles—*how* could I do it?” LeFevre demanded in desperation.

“Not so very hard for smart man to find easy way to much riches,” Moy Jack pointed out. “Honest John come here for drink tonight. Smart man swim out to *Temori*, hide and wait. Then Captain John come back drunk. Smart man hit him on the head, take the pearls. . . . Oh, yes, it would not be so hard to do—if this man want very badly to go home.” Moy Jack spread his hands.

LeFevre’s brain was racing ahead of Moy Jack’s tongue. Moy Jack’s plan had suggested another and a better one—better, that is, for LeFevre. There was no reason why he should split the pearls with Moy Jack. Why shouldn’t he keep them all for himself? The only danger was having them on his person in Nuka Hiva where they would be evidence against him. But why go to Nuka Hiva?

“All right, Jack,” he said quickly. “It’s a deal. I’ll bring you the pearls in the morning. . . .”

Moy Jack smiled. “LeFevre know Moy Jack would do even as he has said. Anyone would be fool to try to cheat Moy Jack. We say no more—of dreams. . . .”

LeFevre rose. Moy Jack would slit his throat if there was a doublecross. But then, the only kind of doublecross LeFevre could pull, would take him out of Moy Jack’s range. Here was a real chance for freedom. Honest John Farrar would sail in the morning on the flood tide. The *Flying Wind* would sail the following morning—south by the sun. He would swim out to the *Temori* tonight, wait for Honest John to return. But instead of stealing the pearls then—

THE darkness brought surcease from the tropic heat. A cool wind curled down into Hakatea Cove from the crests of volcanic rock. Beneath the dinghy which lay topside down on

the stern of the *Temori*, LeFevre clung, wet, exhausted, wary. The *Temori* swayed slowly and gently in the swell. There was a strange quiet on the waters. LeFevre waited anxiously for Honest John Farrar’s return. The captain stayed out late. The moon had vanished when the native proa which had taken him ashore returned Honest John to his schooner.

LeFevre shrunk in the shadows under the dinghy and scarcely breathed. He heard Honest John stomping around the decks. He had expected the captain to go below for the night to sail early in the morning, but Honest John was getting sail up on the ship then.

Half an hour later, the *Temori* headed out of Hakatea Cove, through the thin channel, and into the open sea. Beneath the dinghy, LeFevre eased his crouch and smiled. The change in sailing time had been a help instead of a hindrance to his plans. Honest John might very well have spotted him in daylight. What he had to do was better done without even a moon.

He listened while two hours slipped by. Honest John sat at the helm just fore of him, bellowing hearty songs in the voice of a wild bull. He was a little drunk, and his deep bass voice was muted thunder.

Soon they left the swell and reached the steady motion of the waves. The *Temori* abandoned her fore-and-aft motion and began a transverse roll. It was sailing. It was not uncomfortable. Honest John stopped singing and half dozed at the wheel. LeFevre stirred. They would be due south of Nuka Hiva now and out of sight of land. He crawled slowly out from under the dinghy and hid behind it on the counter.

Risking a swift look over the upturned keel of the dinghy, he saw Honest John, his hands on the wheel, his head lolling drunkenly to and fro with the motion of the ocean. No songs now; the stupor had come upon Farrar. LeFevre slipped a hand to his hip and pulled up his knife. It was a small thin blade, a woman’s dagger

really. But it was inconspicuous. That was why he owned it.

He stepped quietly over the dinghy, raised his arm, and then slashed down with terrific force, burying the knife in Honest John Farrar's left breast and then stepping back quickly as the blood spurted. He watched Honest John die with the satisfaction of knowing he had struck the heart. There was a lot of blood. Honest John didn't make a sound beyond that first grunt from the terrible impact. He made no move either, just sat there, transfixed by the blow and the thrust of steel. He died at the helm. He even looked alive. LeFevre came around in front of the corpse and marveled at it. Except for the blade in his chest, you'd think the skipper was asleep.

REPUGNANCE came upon LeFevre then. He didn't like handling that body. It was bloody. He could see that even in the dark. He tugged once at the knife but it wouldn't come away. He left it there. There was no way it could be traced to him. He wiped the handle with a rag from his shirt. Then he unstrapped the belt around Honest John's stomach. In the belt he found the pearl pouch. He opened the pouch and gasped. It was loaded with pearls. A hundred of them at least. And some were huge. He gasped again, closed the pouch. He tucked it into another pouch which he wore around his neck.

There were the little details now—the important little details upon which his own life would depend. He filled a jug with water, stowed it in the dinghy on the stern. With it went some hardtack too. He had to work fast. The *Temori* kept her weigh with a dead man's hands on the helm. LeFevre had to get off her. A sea anchor came next. Matches? Yes, in his pocket. All set then.

Working the ropes from their cleats, he swung the dinghy out over the stern and lowered it from its davits until it had worked into the wake of the schooner. He pulled the bow of the dinghy in close to the stern then, stepped into the dinghy,

and the *Temori* splashed away from him with the wind in her canvas and a corpse on her counter.

In the boat, LeFevre sat astride the center thwart and cast his sea anchor off the bow. He raised his head, watched the white sails of the *Temori* vanishing in the night, diminishing slowly in size until finally they were puffs of cotton upon a black sea. Soon they were gone completely.

LeFevre took out the pearl pouch and poured the pearls into his hands. He felt them, clenched his fist tightly around them. Then he placed them carefully back in the pouch. He was a rich man. He knew it. The contact of the pearls told him that. They sent an expectant tingle through him. He replaced them around his neck.

And now began the tedium of waiting. Waiting required three things: patience, courage, stamina. LeFevre knew he had none of them. But desperation was something synonymous with courage. Desperation would have to do the trick. It was simple really. Nothing to get the wind up about. There was the *Temori*, gone into oblivion with a dead skipper. Here was LeFevre, rich with the weight of pearls around his neck. There, north, lay the Marquesas. Out of sight in the night, but not too far away. And tomorrow at noon, the copra ship, *Flying Wind*, standing out for Saturday Island, would come due south by the sun.

It couldn't miss. LeFevre knew he lay in the path of the copra ship. He would rig a shirt on one of the little dinghy oars. They would spot him five miles away in a sea as flat as this one. They wouldn't turn back. He'd go on with them to Saturday Island and then to Hilo, not paying his fare either. He'd work his way. If they got difficult, then he would pay. But it would be better not to let anyone know he had pearls. They were damning evidence, those pearls, in case Honest John's body were discovered somewhere. LeFevre mentally thanked his stars that the *Flying Wind* carried no wireless. That was a safety valve, at least.

THE dawn was yellow and with it came a southeast wind. There were clouds too. Not black-and-olive squall clouds. There was no storm in the making. They were wet clouds, smudged on the underside with soot, and they ran briskly before the wind and cut off the sun and brought sprinkles of rain now and then.

LeFevre watched them anxiously for a while, then realized that they were only the progeny of the wind. He was enough of a sailor to read weather signs. The wind was moderate. It would blow out in a day or two. And those clouds kept the sun off his head. He had been afraid of that mostly, the burning sun from which there was no relief when you sat upon a thwart alone at sea. A ship was one thing; a dinghy quite another. LeFevre thought to himself that he had never considered the smallness of a dinghy before. It rode well, squatting there and floating like a duck. But it was small. Very small. It couldn't stand a real sea.

With the wind came sudden swells. They were long and very deep, but not particularly rough. Their crests remained placid enough. But he felt the drag of wind and water on the boat. He wondered in quick horror whether or not he was drifting. Sea anchors were not iron hooks. You couldn't dig into the bottom and hang there despite the waves—not with a sea anchor. You drifted. The one thing on God's earth which LeFevre did not want to do was to drift. But there was nothing he could do about it but wait.

The motion of the dinghy soon made him listless. He realized that he was tired. The events of the preceding night had sharpened his consciousness enough to keep him awake until dawn. He had not slept at all. And the reaction soon absorbed his remaining energy. The wind upon his eyes, the muted voice of its blow, the rhythmic bobbing of the boat down into the swells and up onto the crests, the humid heat of the sun through the mists which covered its fiery face, all combined to make him utterly sleepy.

His eyes closed. He fought to keep them open but they drooped in spite of him. He fought them in a panic. He had to stay awake. That was the one thing he had to do. And it was terrifying not to be able to control your own eyes. They drooped steadily. He would open them again. Then they would close again, each time remaining closed longer than they had before. Without knowing it, LeFevre dozed . . .

He awakened sharply, aware of pain and a blow. He put his hand to his head where it had struck the gunwale. Asleep, he had pitched forward. The blow hurt. It sobered him, awakened him again. He peered up where the clouds had a brighter luminescence than anywhere else. The sun would be behind there. About ten a. m. from the look of it. Lucky. The *Flying Wind* had not departed from Nuka Hiva as yet.

He relaxed in the thick heat, feeling the taste of it in his mouth. He climbed down from the thwart and sat in the bilge, resting his head on the thwart. It was a concession to his weariness but he made the excuse that it was more comfortable there because his back would not ache from sitting upright.

Drowsiness found him again soon. It crept up on him quickly and surreptitiously. He fell asleep. This time he stayed asleep. . . .

SOME sixth sense deep in LeFevre's brain prodded him. He groaned sleepily, stirred, did not awake at once, tried to turn, hurt his elbow against the dinghy's ribs. He opened his eyes and saw the spot of sun again. It was past the noon meridian. Not much but past it. One p. m. LeFevre stared at it stupidly, then yelled wildly once and sprang to the thwart.

The *Flying Wind* went south by the sun, far to the west of him. He had drifted, much too far. But still, in his frenzied hope, he thought they might see him. Her long hull was misty and gray across the waters, and the swells were running too deep.

Sometimes he could only see her set sails, then the whole ship would pop up on a crest and vanish away again.

Madly, LeFevre stripped off his shirt and wrapped it around the blade of one of his oars. He stood erect atop the center thwart, unmindful of the dangerous rocking of the dinghy, and he waved the shirt frantically, screaming all the time. The *Flying Wind* held to her course southward. She did not sight him.

LeFevre forgot sanity. He kept waving the oar and crying shrilly. He lost his balance and nearly went overboard. The oar dropped out of his hands as he plunged into the bottom of the boat, grasping at the gunwales. It startled him into reason. He saw the oar start drifting away with the swells.

He had to get that oar. He would row now. The *Flying Wind* had missed him but he could still row back to Hakatea Cove. Moy Jack would still cash in the pearls. He could fake a story for Moy Jack, tell some yarn about how he got stranded in the dinghy, how Honest Jack had fought him. That could be fixed all right. But he'd need that oar to get back. It was a long row.

He grabbed his other oar and began to fish out for the one which floated away swiftly. He hit it twice but couldn't hook it enough to bring it in close to the stern. In desperation, he hooked his feet under the stern seat and leaned way out.

There was a sodden splash as he went in, head-first, off the stern. The water was cold. He came up out of it in green terror. He floundered madly, grabbing out for the bow of the dinghy and pulled himself aboard with an effort. The closeness of his escape terrified him. He wasn't a good swimmer at best and just now in the water his arms and legs had felt too heavy to move. . . . He sat down in the bow, crying and panting alternately. Both oars were gone now.

The day was eternal after that. LeFevre's eyes grew blood shot. He kept peering around the horizon looking for a ship but he saw none. His imag-

ination painted terrible pictures. He saw himself a week from now, water and hardtack gone, a scarecrow of a man, all skin and bones, haggard, unable to move, squatting in the bottom of the boat waiting to die. Starvation, exposure, thirst: no worse way out than that. And all the time, a wealth of pearls around his throat. A lot of good they would do. A lot of help they would be when his mouth got dry and his tongue fattened with oedema and got too big and pushed itself out of his mouth to hang limply down over his lips.

There was nothing to do but wait. Desperation was stronger now. LeFevre had plenty of it. It was all that kept him going. So he waited . . .

SOMETIMES he fancied he saw sharks. He didn't really. It was jetsam from some distant land, the Marquesas, most likely, and it floated enough out of the water, black and shiny, to resemble the dreaded triangular dorsal fin. Once he had the fright of his life. He could feel the hair stand straight up on his neck. A giant broadbill marlin — four hundred pounds if he weighed an ounce — broke out of the sea without warning, and went skittering over the surface, walking on his tail and missing the dinghy in the splendid splash of his reentry by a margin so narrow that the commotion all but swamped the little boat.

But the only thing to do was to wait. The land lay north, not too far away. There would be other ships; native proas came out this far often. Those proas could go from island to island over incredible distances. If one met up with him . . . LeFevre set his teeth grimly. There was water and there was food. So he waited.

In late afternoon, the wind dropped a little. The skin of his face and arms stung from the burn of the sun, a burn which, through humid mist, is far worse than direct sunlight. But he knew he could stand that all right. His skin was thoroughly tanned. The burn on top of it would only be uncomfortable, not serious. He waited.

He should have slept. The lapping of the waters against the hull was a quiet, musical sound after awhile. It made you dreamy. But he couldn't sleep. He felt that he could never sleep again. A night of emptiness was looming up before him, twelve hours in which the darkness would hide his life from any would-be rescuer. He sweated in terror at the prospect and fought to keep his head. The pearl pouch around his neck itched where it rubbed against him. He groaned, remembering it. He didn't give a damn for those pearls now. He wanted a ship. A Ship!

He got his ship. Twilight was dropping down when he saw it. The pastel beauty of the evening sky was wasted upon him. He saw none of the ephemeral color in that sky. His eyes, taut, tired, dreading, watched the blob take shape, saw the sails come into being, saw the bow evolve, white water flying from below the bowsprit. That meant he was looking at her head-on. That meant she was coming in for a landfall at the great rockhead above Hakatea Cove. That meant she would pass him so closely that she could not fail to sight him. And night would hold off for more than an hour!

He waited. This was the hardest waiting. But he had to sit still, not wreck his chances now by jumping around in a tumbly boat and perhaps falling overboard again.

She grew into a real ship, small, no more than thirty feet or so but staunch and plump and seaworthy, and running northward fast under a mainsail and foresail. How quickly she grew! In minutes, she was close off. At three hundred feet, LeFevre stood up and waved his arms and belled his plea for rescue. There were sobs in his throat and somehow he felt that all the resonance had gone out of his voice; but she seemed to sight him for now she veered a trifle.

LeFevre sank onto a thwart, speechless with joy. He lost sight of the schooner, burying his face in his hands and crying at the sheer ecstasy of rescue. To be plucked from this infinitude was the most beautiful thing that had ever happened to him. All his repressions of fear poured out as he openly cried.

He glanced up again, his hands wet with his own tears. The joy in his eyes exploded and a black curtain covered his irises. No more than twenty feet away, the boat thundered down on him through the swells, water boiling at her bow which was held on the beam of the dinghy. In moments, if she struck—LeFevre shrieked: "Sheer off! Sheer off!" and knew that he was not heard because the wind flung the words back into his throat amidst the splintering crash of the broad, strong bow against the fragile port-gunwale of the dinghy.

The world seemed to detonate. LeFevre felt himself lifted high, flung into space. Then the sea wrapped itself around him but he fought clear of the embrace and struggled to the surface, stunned, just in time to see the white hull of the ship swish rapidly by, sails flapping above it, white water all around it, the skipper at the helm with a knife stuck deep in his chest.

And as she passed with the southeast wind bellying her canvas, he discerned her name in black paint under the transom stern: **TEMORI**

The flying wreckage of the dinghy struck him and he began to sink, moving his arms feebly, uselessly, aware that the universe was rushing out to meet him faster than life could die, and when it struck, his brain seemed to explode in a glittering blinding brightness, after which he could feel nothing at all, not even the itch of the pearl pouch where it went around his neck.

Another story by Richard Sale in the next issue of **ALL-AMERICAN FICTION**, plus all-star tales by Max Brand, Theodore Roscoe, Borden Chase and others. The best is yet to come!

I'm not doing this because I'm sorry for you."

"All right, let's have it! Anything you say. You're holding the aces."

She began to smile and it was a terrible thing to see. Poisonous . . . the pure distillation of evil . . . like a gargoyle-mask.

"Listen," she began. "My husband—there is a half-a-million dollar insurance policy on his life—and I'm the sole beneficiary. I'm sick of him—he's a hick—never will be anything but a hick. I've got to be rid of him—got to. And I want that money. I've earned it. I'll never get another chance as good as now, on this boat. I don't want that half-a-million when I'm sixty and no good any more. I want it now, while I'm young enough to enjoy it. But even if there wasn't any insurance at all, I'd still want to do it. I hate the way he talks and the way he walks and the way he eats his shredded-wheat and the way he always is getting colds and talking like a trained seal! I hate everybody there is in the world tonight, but him most." And she gave the handcuff-key one final fillip, caught it again, blew her breath on it—just beyond his manacled reach.

He rubbed his strained shoulder, scowled at her. "What do you have to have me for?" he asked. "Not that it means anything to me to put the skids to a guy, even a guy that I've never set eyes on before; but for a dame that can get Fisher's stateroom—and bracelet-keys out of his pocket right under his eyes—why do you have to have help on a simple little stunt like that?"

"I'll tell you why," she said. "You see, mister, I had him with me when I came aboard, and so I have to have him with me when I go ashore tomorrow. That's why I need you. You're going to be—Hiram, bundled up in his clothes, with your neck bandaged, and a great big handkerchief in front of your face. You won't have to speak. I'll do all the talking. If I just report that he disappeared at sea, I'll never be able to prove that he's dead, I'll never get the half-a-million. . . ."

"But suppose I do go ashore with you, how you gonna prove it then?"

"I'll—I'll find something—I don't know just yet. Maybe a—a body from the morgue—or something." She gave him a peculiar searching look.

Steve Belden was no fool. That look made him think that maybe he was slated to play the part of the "remains" in question, when the time came. But he was in no position to bargain. The important thing was to get these cuffs open and get off the ship. And he'd need her help for that. Then later—

"And do I get a cut of the five hundred grand?"

She laughed mirthlessly. "Why, no," she said. "I don't think so. I'm saving your life, you see, and I think it's enough. Your life—for his . . ."

"All right," he said. "No harm in asking. Now get busy with that key."

A quick twist of her wrist, a click, and the manacle dangled empty from the bed-rail. The murderer of Frank Fisher's brother was free again. His first words, as he chafed his wrist and stamped back and forth like a bear on a rampage, were not of gratitude—the underworld knows no gratitude—but low growls of revenge.

"A week in that filthy pig-pen of a French prison! Four days in this coop, chained up like an animal. Chained to him while I ate, chained to him while I slept, chained to him even while I shaved. *He's* never getting off this ship alive—!"

"Of course he isn't," the woman agreed. "How can we let him? The whole idea would be spoiled if he does. That'll be your job. I'm attending to—Hiram myself."

Belden waved his fists in the air. "If I only had a gun!"

"There's one in my cabin, in a cow-hide suitcase under the bed—" Then as he turned toward the door: "Wait a minute. You can't do that. You'll bring the whole ship down on us, the moment you show your face, and there'll be a general alarm raised. Now if you go into my cabin next door, you can hide in the bath. I'll go up and find a way of bringing him

down there with me—after I— Somehow your—Mr. Fisher—we have to get him in there before he comes back here and finds you gone. Now wait a minute, we can fix this bed in case he takes a quick look in here first.”

She pushed pillows together under the covers, made a long log-like mound. “Give me your coat,” she said. “You’ll be wearing Hiram’s clothes, anyway.” She extended the empty sleeve out from the coverings, locked the open manacle around its cuff. “You went to bed fully-dressed, waiting for him to come down and tuck you in!”

“Hurry up,” he kept saying. “We ain’t got all night! We must be near Ambrose Lightship already.”

“No. We mustn’t rush,” the lady from Dubuque, who had been afraid of strangers and weapons and violence, said quietly. “Follow me, and I’ll get the gun out for you and rig you up in Hiram’s things.” She eased the door open, advanced to the mouth of the foyer, and glanced up and down the long passageway. “Come on.”

She joined him a moment later, unlocked her door for him. She crouched down, pulled out the valise, found the gun and held it up. “You’ll have to use this through pillows,” she said, “or you’ll make a noise.” She was handling the weapon almost caressingly. It pointed at his chest for a moment, and her eyes grew misty.

Belden jumped aside out of range, pulled the gun angrily away from her. “What’s the matter with you anyway?” he barked. “You kill-crazy? I thought it was Fisher and your husband you were out to get!”

“Yes,” she said sullenly. That was the greater treachery, so it had first claim on her. “But I told you, I hate everyone in the world tonight. Everyone—you hear?”

“Yeah? Well, we need each other, and until we’re out of this squeeze, let’s hang together. Now go on up there and get that dick down here. I’ll be just behind the bathroom-door there, waiting for him.”

She grabbed up a long gauzy handkerchief and sidled out of the room.

Behind her Belden wiped his beaded brow. He’d never run into a woman like her before and—hard-bitten as he was—he never wanted to again.

Chapter V

Collusion

TRAVIS looked up from a deck chair at the shadowy figure looming before him on the unlighted deck. “That you, Sarah? What took you so long? I don’t think it’s so good for my cold, staying up here in the wind so long.”

“This is going to cure your cold,” her voice promised him raspingly.

He motioned to the inert form in the chair beside him. “Hasn’t opened his eyes since he came up here. Sure must be dead for sleep. Guess he ain’t been getting much rest, chained to that fella down there—” He tittered inanely. “Wonder what they did when they wanted to turn over in bed?”

She bent over Fisher, shook him slightly, ever so slightly, one hand above his breast-pocket, the other at the tab of his vest. Then she straightened again. “I didn’t know they ever slept like that—did you?”

She turned toward the rail, went and stood beside it, outlined dimly against the stars. The wind fluttered her gown about her. She held the long gauzy handkerchief in one hand like a pennant. “What a lovely night,” she said. “Come here and look at the water.”

There was no one on this unroofed boat-deck, but the two of them—and Fisher.

“I can see it from here,” her husband answered. “’Twouldn’t be good for my cold to lean way out into the wind like that.” He blinked fearfully into the gloom. “You look just like—some kind of a bogey-man standing there like that, with the wind making great big bat-wings grow behind your back. If I didn’t know it was you, I’d be scared out of ten years’ growth—”

She opened her fingers and the handkerchief fluttered downward like a ghostly streamer. A wisp of cloud passed over the new moon just then.

"Hiram," she called in a silvery voice, like the sirens on the rock to Ulysses, "I've lost my handkerchief. Come quickly, it's caught around the bottom of the railing. Hurry, before it blows loose—!"

Hiram Travis heard the voice of the woman he had been married to for eighteen years, asking him a common favor, and the obscured moon and the simulated bat-wings and the chill foreboding at the base of his skull became just the playthings of an overwrought imagination. He got up awkwardly from the deck-chair, waddled across to the rail beside her, peered down. His eyes were watery from his cold and blurred from unaccustomed liquor.

"You sure it's still there?" he said uncertainly. "Thought I saw it go all the way down."

"Of course it's still there, can't you see it? Bend over, you can see it from here—" Then as he prepared to squat on the inside of the guard-rail and peer through it from there, she quickly forestalled him with a guiding hand at the nape of his neck. "No, lean over from above and look down on the outside, that's the only way you can see it. I'll hold you."

On the deck-chair behind them the unconscious Fisher stirred a little, mumbled in his drugged sleep. He seemed to be on the point of awakening. But the stupor was too strong for him. He sighed heavily, became inert once more.

"Blamed if I can see a dratted thing!" Travis was piping. He was folded almost double over the rail, like a clothespin, with his wife's hand at his shoulder. He made vague groping motions with one hand, downward into space; the other was clasped about the rail.

"You're nearly touching it. It's just an inch away from your fingertips—"

"Get one of the stewards, Sarah, I'm liable to go over myself first thing I know, doing this—"

It was the last thing he said in this world. The last thing she said to him was: "We don't need a steward—for *this*, darling."

She crouched down suddenly beside him, took her hand away from his shoulder. She gripped his bony ankles with both hands, thrust viciously upward, broke their contact with the deck, straightening as she did so. He did a complete somersault across the guard-rail; the arm that had gripped it was turned completely around in its socket, torn free. That was the last thing she saw of him—that momentary appeal of splayed white hand vanishing into the blackness. His screech was smothered in the sighing of the wind.

She thrust out her arms wide, in strange ritual of triumph, as Mimi Brissard had in Paris. She was a black, ominous death-cross against the starlight for a moment. Then she turned slowly, her eyes two green phosphorescent pools, toward where the helpless secret service man lay.

FISHER blinked and opened his eyes. He was still groggy from the dreams he had been having. Dreams in which long, skinny black imps out of hell had pushed people over the side of an immense precipice down into a bottomless abyss below. He'd been chained down, unable to help them, though they screamed to him for assistance. Over and over it had happened. It had been the worst form of torture, the most ghastly nightmare he had ever had. Then toward the end the imps had concentrated on him himself. They had tugged and pulled, trying to get him to the edge of the precipice, and he had held back, dug his heels in, but inch by inch they had been overcoming him. . . .

He saw that he was partly off the chair he had been sleeping on. One leg, one arm and shoulder, hung down over the side, as though somebody had actually been tugging at him. But the lady from Dubuque, the harmless, inoffensive, eccentric middlewestern lady from Dubuque was the only person around, stretched out there in the chair beside his. His mouth tasted like cotton-wool, and everything looked warped, like an

image in a corrugated mirror. He fell down on his knees when he tried to get off the chair.

Instantly she was all solicitude, helping him get to his feet. She said, "Well, whatever happened to you? My husband and I have been taking turns watching over you. We didn't like to call any of the stewards, because—well, because of your position. People talk so on these ships—"

He could feel the drug-dilated pupils of his eyes slowly contract until they were normal again. The lines of the things he looked at resumed their straightness. But even then, the "kicks" wouldn't go away altogether; he had a regular hangover from them. There was cement on his eyelids and it took all the strength he could muster to keep them open. He said surlily: "Where is he? I remember vaguely coming up here with him, leaning on him the whole way—"

She said, "He went below just a few minutes ago, to fix you up a bromo-seltzer. It's just what you need, it'll clear your head marvelously. Come on down with me a minute, and let him give it to you."

He could feel a sense of resentment toward her stir through him, as when you rub a cat's fur the wrong way. Yet she wasn't doing or saying anything to antagonize him. "Why don't you stay out of my business?" he blurted out uncontrollably, "What is this? I never saw you before until tonight—" And then as though the word *business* had reminded him of something, he stabbed his hand toward his watch-pocket, then upward to his breast-pocket.

"Did you lose something?" she asked innocently.

"No," he scowled, "and it's no thanks to myself I didn't, either! I ought to be shot!"

She bared her teeth momentarily at that, as though she found the phrase privately amusing, for some reason of her own.

He stood up abruptly, stalked toward the faintly outlined white staircase leading to the deck below. She came hurrying after him. "Will you

help me down the stairs please? They're hard for me to manage on these high heels—"

Grudgingly, he cupped his hand to the point of her elbow, guided her down the incline after him. Yet at the contact his antagonism rose to such a pitch it was all he could do to keep from throwing her bodily down past him, to break her neck or back. He took his hand away, jumped clear, to keep from giving in to the impulse, and a moment later she had gained the safety of the lower deck.

HE didn't wait. The muscular lethargy that had gripped him was slowly wearing off. Suddenly it broke altogether, and he was normal again. By that time he was hurrying along the inner passageway toward his stateroom, to see to his prisoner. Behind him, like something in a bad dream that couldn't be shaken off, came the rustle and the slither of Mrs. Travis' dress as she followed him.

He unlocked the door, threw it open, turned on the light-switch. Belden lay there sound asleep. The covers up over his head, one arm stiffly held in place by the manacle. Fisher let out a deep breath of relief.

Before he could get in and close the door after him, the rustle and the slither had come to a stop directly behind him. He turned his head impatiently. This woman was worse than a burr.

She said, "We're right next door. Won't you stop in a moment and let Mr. Travis give you the bromo-seltzer before you retire? He came down, specially to mix it for you."

"That's good of him," he said shortly, "but I could get one from the steward just as well." An odor of musk enveloped him, at her nearness. Again his early training intervened in her favor, wouldn't let him slam the door in her face and end her importunities once and for all.

She suddenly reached past him and gently closed the door. "He's all right," she purred. "He'll keep a moment longer. He's not running away." She took him by the hand, began to

lead him gently but persistently down toward the next foyer.

The contact, as on the stairs just now, again inflamed with nearly uncontrollable and entirely murderous anger. His hands on her throat . . . He pulled his hand away, face whitening with the effort to overcome it. "I can walk—"

She threw open her own door, called out loudly: "Hiram, here's Mr. Fisher for that bromo. Did you mix it yet?"

The stateroom was empty. A cowhide valise had been pulled partly out from under the bed, allowed to remain there with its lid up.

"He's in the bathroom, I guess," she said. She moved unobtrusively around behind Fisher and closed the stateroom door.

A frog-croak from the direction of the bathroom answered, "I'm mixing it now." Fisher glanced over that way. A blurred reflection created a flurry of movement across the mirror-panel set in the bathdoor, which was turned outward into the room.

She distracted his attention by standing in front of him, turning him around toward her, smiling that same saturnine smile that had been on her lips so often tonight.

He gave her a searching look, wary, mistrustful. "There's something about you—" The back of his hand went out and flicked her shoulder. "Where'd you get that dress? All night long it's kept reminding me of—"

"Paris," she said. "It's a Maldonado. . . ." The blur on the mirror-panel had become a shadow that lengthened as it crept out over the floor into the room. "See, I'll show you." She turned an edge of the shoulder over, revealed a little silk tab with lettering on it. "Can you read what it says?"

He bent his head, peered intently, off-guard.

I'm Dangerous Tonight

HER arms suddenly flashed around him like white whips, in a death-embrace, pinning his own close to his sides. "Now, Belden, *now!*" he heard her cry.

The lurking shadow in the back-

ground sprang forward, closed in. The white oblong of a pillow struck Fisher between the shoulders, as though this were no more than a friendly pillow-fight. Then through it came a muffled detonation.

Fisher straightened suddenly, stood there motionless. The woman unclasped her arms, and he collapsed to the floor, lay there at her feet, eyes still open.

From over him came Belden's voice: "Go tell your brother you weren't so hot yourself!"

"Close his eyes," she said, "you've only stunned him!" as though she were talking about some insect.

The pillow fell across him again, and Travis' revolver and Belden's fist plunged into the soft middle of it. There were two more shots. Little goose-feathers flew up and settled again. When Belden kicked the scorched pillow aside, Fisher's eyes were closed.

"They don't come any deader than that!" he said.

She was crouched beside the door, listening.

She straightened up finally, murmured triumphantly: "We did it! It could have been champagne-corks, or punctured party-balloons. Half of them are drunk tonight, anyway!" Her lip curled.

"Let's get going," Belden answered impatiently. "We must be passing the Narrows already. We dock in a couple hours; we want to clear off before they find this guy—"

"All right, get in there and put on Hi's things, while I'm changing out here. Better put on two coats one over the other, he had more of a bulge than you. Turn your collar up around your face and hold a big handkerchief under your nose, you've got a bad cold. I'll pin one of those cloths around your neck like he had. I've got the passports and everything we need."

Belden disappeared into the bath with an armful of Travis' clothing. She stood before the mirror, started to tug at the dress, bring it down off her shoulders. It looped at her waist, fell down to the floor with a slight

hiss. She stepped clear of the mystic ring it had formed about her feet, and as she did so the contact between it and her body broke for the first time since ten the night before.

She staggered against the wall, as though some sort of galvanic shock had pushed her. Her mouth opened like a suffocating fish out of water, slowly closed again. She was as limp and inert as the bullet-riddled man bleeding away on the floor.

Her hands went dazedly up to her hair, roamed distractedly through it, dragging it down about her shoulders. She was just Sarah Travis again, and the long bad dream was over. But darkness didn't give way to light, darkness gave way to perpetual twilight. Something snapped.

She had one more lucid moment. Her eyes found the opened closet door, where some of Travis' things could still be seen hanging on the rack. "Hi," she breathed soundlessly, "My husband." Then she began to shake all over. The shaking became low laughter, that at first sounded like sobbing.

Belden came out, in Travis' camel-hair coat, cap pulled down over his eyes. "Are you nearly—? What's the matter, what're you giggling about?"

The laughter rose, became full-bodied, a terrible thing in continuous crescendo.

"I'm getting out of here, if I gotta swim for it!" He could make it, he told himself; they were far enough up the Bay now. And he knew just where to go to lie low, until he could get word to—

The door closed behind him, muffling her paeans of soulless mirth, that throbbed there in that place of death.

When the ship's doctor was summoned, shortly after the *Gascony* had docked and lay motionless alongside one of the new piers at the foot of the West Fifties, he found her crouched on her knees like a Geisha, back to the wall, one arm extended, pointing crazily to the motionless form lying outstretched on the floor. The rise and fall of her ceaseless wrenching laughter was unbearable.

The doctor shook his head. "Bring

a straitjacket," he said tersely, "she's hopelessly insane."

"Is he gone?" they asked, as he examined Fisher.

"Just a matter of minutes," was the answer. "He's punctured like a sieve. Better call an ambulance. Let him do his dying ashore."

Chapter VI

The Chain Snaps

FISHER'S nurse at the Mount of Olives Hospital, Miss Wellington, was a pleasant young person with sleek auburn hair and a small rosette of freckles on each polished cheekbone. She wore rimless hexagonal glasses that softened, instead of hardened her eyes. She came down the gleaming, sterilized corridor in equally gleaming, sterilized white, carrying a tray containing a glass of milk, a cup of cocoa, and a geranium. Every convalescent's breakfast-tray in the hospital always had one flower on it. Miss Wellington remembered, however, that it had had a queer effect on the patient in Room Ten. He had growled he was not dead yet, the last time she had brought one in, and heaved it out of the open window with so much energy that his scars had reopened and begun to bleed again.

Miss Wellington wisely removed it from the tray, hid it in her uniform-pocket, and replaced it with two smuggled cigarettes. Fisher was a favorite of hers; she disliked tractable, submissive patients, and she was something of a philosopher anyway. A hundred years from now it would be all the same, whether the poor devil smoked or didn't.

She freed one hand to turn the knob and was about to enter Ten, when an alarmed, "Hold it! Just a minute!" was shouted at her from inside. Miss Wellington, undeterred, calmly barged right in.

"Oh, so that's it," she remarked, setting the tray down. "And where do you think you're going, young man?"

Fisher was hanging onto the foot of the bed with one hand, to keep his balance, and belting his trousers

around his middle with the other. He had on one shoe, one sock, and his hat.

"Listen," he said, "I got a job to do, a report to make, and you can have my bed back. You can keep the slugs you took out of me, too; I'm generous that way."

"You get back there where you belong," she frowned with assumed severity. "D'you realize that they could put a new roof on this entire wing of the building, just with the lead that was taken out of you? And there was enough left over to weatherstrip the windows, at that! You don't deserve hospitalization, any of you young huskies, the way you crowd your luck—"

He sat down shakily on the edge of the bed. His knees had gone rubbery. "I certainly don't," he agreed. "Any guy that falls down on his job—what good is he, tell me that? They should have left me where they found me, bleeding to death on the *Gascony*. That's all I had coming to me. That's all I'm worth."

"That's right, cry into your soup," she said. She struck a match, held it for him. "Here, smoke this—on an empty stomach; you've broken every other rule of the place, you may as well go the whole hog."

"You don't know what it means. The men I work with—not to be able to look any of them in the face—to have to go around tagged a failure for the rest of my life. That's all anybody has, Wellington, his pride in his job—"

She sighed. "I guess we'll have to let you go. It's better than having you die on our hands. If we try to keep you here you'll probably pine away. And I'm getting worn to a shadow pushing you back in bed every morning at eight, regularly. I'll get MacKenzie in, have him look you over. Put out that cigarette."

MacKenzie looked him over, said: "I'd strongly advise you to give it a week more—if I thought it would do any good. But if you're going to be rebellious and mentally depressed about it, it might do you more harm

in the long run. There's really no reason for keeping you here any longer, only try to stay off your feet as much as you can—which I know you won't do anyway."

"Sure, and stay out of drafts," Fisher smiled bitterly, "and live to be a hundred. What for?" He put on his coat and tie. "Where's my gun?"

"You'll have to sign for that downstairs, on your way out."

At the door he turned and looked around the room, as though he was just seeing it for the first time. "Who paid for all this?"

"Somebody named Trilling."

Fisher nodded glumly. "He's my boss. Why did he bother?"

MacKenzie and the nurse exchanged a look.

Fisher picked up his hat and walked out, head down, staring at the floor. Along the corridor outside he had to steady himself with one arm against the wall, but he kept going until he'd stumbled into the elevator.

Miss Wellington touched the outside corner of an eye with her finger, stroked downward. "We didn't do that boy any good," she murmured. "The bullets were in his soul. Wonder what it'll take to get 'em out?"

AT the local FBI headquarters half an hour later Fisher's face was ashen, but not entirely from the effort it had cost him to get there. He stood facing Trilling across the desk, a proffered chair rejected in the background.

"I haven't come to make excuses," he said quietly, "the facts speak for themselves. He got away. I hashed up the job. I let you down. I begged, I pleaded with you to give me the assignment. I not only put you to considerable expense with nothing to show for it; but through me Belden even got back into the country, which he never could have done by himself."

He laid it down before him on the desk. Jealously close to him, though, as if afraid to have it taken from him. "You want this—back?" he said huskily. There was almost a prayer in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Trilling said, and drew it the rest of the way across the desk. It fell into an open drawer, dropped from sight. "I don't, but Washington does, and I take my instructions from them. They seem to want results. What damned you was, not that he got away, but some story about a woman being involved—"

Fisher just stood there, his eyes on the desk where the badge had last been visible. His Adam's apple had gone up just once, and stayed high. After awhile, when he could speak again, he said: "Yes, I wonder what that story is, myself. I wonder if I'll ever know."

Trilling had turned his head away from the look on Fisher's face. He was on his way to the door now, his former superior knew. The voice came from further away. "There's no use standing here," it said. "I never did like a guy that crawled, myself. I guess you know what this means to me, though."

Trilling said, "I ought to. I'm in the same outfit. I'm you—a couple of notches higher up, that's all. Let's not consider this irrevocable, let's just call it temporary. Maybe it will be straightened out in a few months. And again I say, this isn't me. This is word from Washington." He fumbled embarrassedly with a wallet inside his coat-pocket. "Fisher, come here a minute—" he said.

But the door had opened already. He heard Fisher say, to no one in particular: "That was my whole life. This is my finish now." The frosted-glass panel ebbed shut almost soundlessly, and his blurred shadow faded slowly away on the outside of it.

Trilling resignedly let the wallet drop back in his pocket. Then he caught sight of a wire-wastebasket standing on the floor beside his swivel-chair. He delivered a resounding kick at it that sent it into a loop, with the inexplicable remark: "Damn women!"

THE honkytonk bartender, who doubled as bouncer, waiter, and cashier, was in no mood to compro-

mise. Mercy was not in him. He came out around the open end of the long counter, waddled threatening across the floor in a sullen, red-faced fury, and began to shake the inanimate figure lying across the table with its head bedded on its arms. "Hey, you! Do your sleeping in the gutter!"

If you gave these bums an inch; they took a yard. And this one was a particularly glaring example of the *genus* bar-fly. He was in here all the time like this, inhaling smoke and then doing a sunset across the table. He'd been in here since four this afternoon. The boss and he, who were partners in the joint—the bartender called it *jernt*—would have been the last ones to claim they were running a Rainbow Room, but at least they were trying to give the place a *little* class, keep it above the level of a Bowery smoke-house; they even paid a guy to pound the piano and a canary to warble three times a week. And then bums like this had to show up and give the place a bad look!

He shook the recumbent figure again, more roughly than the first time. Shook him so violently that the whole reedy table under him rattled and threatened to collapse. "Come on, clear out, I said! Pay me for what you had and get outa here!"

The figure raised an unshaven face from between its arms, looked at him, said something.

The bartender raised his voice to a bellow, perhaps to bolster his courage. There had been a spark of something in that look. Just a spark, no more, but it had been there. "Oh, so you haven't got any money! So you think you can come in here, do your drinking on the cuff, and get away with it! Well, I'll show you what we do to bums that try that!"

He gripped the figure by his coat-collar, took a half-turn in it, brought him erect and held him that way, half-strangled. Then, treacherously, he began to pump short jabs into the man's unguarded face, the muscles of his great beefy arm tightening and pulling like knotted ropes. Blood came, but the man couldn't fall; he was held

tight by the nape of the neck. Heads in a long row down the bar turned to watch in idle amusement, not a hand was lifted to help him.

Then something happened. The bartender was suddenly floundering back against the opposite wall, the line of his jaw white at first, then turning a bruised red. He held it, steadied himself against the wall, spat out pieces of tooth-enamel. The figure across the way—the width of the narrow room separated them now—was holding onto an edge of the table for support, acting as though he'd fall down in another minute. He was holding, not his face where the barman had pummeled him, but his chest as if something hurt him there.

The bartender shrieked, "You will, will ya? Sock me, will ya? *Now* ya gonna get it! *Now* I'll cut ya to pieces!" He reached behind the bar, caught up an empty bottle from one of the lower shelves. Liquor dispensaries are supposed to break their bottles once they're emptied. This was the kind of place that didn't.

He gripped the bottle by the neck, cracked the bottom of it against the bar so that it fell off, advanced murderously upon his victim with the jagged sharp-toothed remainder in his hand for a weapon. And even yet, no one in the place made a move to interfere. He was only a bum; what difference did it make what happened to him?

The bum made no move to try to bolt for the door and get out of the place. Perhaps he sensed an outstretched leg would trip him if he tried it. Perhaps he was unequal to the effort. Perhaps he didn't care. He even smiled a little, adding fuel to the blazing fire of the bartender's cowardly rage. "Matter, can't you use your hands?"

The bartender poised the vicious implement, to thrust it full in his face, grind it around, maim and maybe kill him.

And then suddenly a girl stood in between them, as though she had dropped from the ceiling. No one had seen where she had come from. A

beautiful girl, shabbily dressed. Cheap little blouse and threadbare skirt; golden hair like an angel's, cascading out from under a round woollen cap such as boys wear for skating. She set down the little black dressing-case she'd brought out of the back room with her, caught the bartender's thick wrist in her slim fingers, pushed it back.

"Put that down, Mike!" she said in a cold, angry voice. "Let this man alone!"

THE bartender, towering over her five-feet-four of determination, shouted wrathfully: "What do you know about it? He's a bum, and he's going to get what's coming to him! You stick to your canarying and I'll handle the front room here!"

Her voice was like a whip. "He's not a bum. You're the bum. So much of a bum that you can't tell the difference any more! *I* still can, thank heavens, and I'm going to get out of here for good before I lose the ability to distinguish!"

The bartender retreated a step or two, put the shattered bottle shamefacedly behind his back. A sallow-complected, chunky man, with his hair all greasy ringlets, was standing at the entrance to the inner room. The girl turned her head toward him briefly. "Find someone else to do your canarying, Angelo. I'm not showing up Wednesday." She faced the bartender again. "How much does he owe you?"

The latter had had all the ground cut away around him. "Couple dollars," he mumbled indistinctly. "He's been riding along all evenin'—"

She snapped open a ridiculous little envelope-sized bag. There were five dollars in it; she'd just been paid tonight. She took two of them out. She didn't hand them to him, she dropped them disdainfully on the floor before him, with a million dollars worth of contempt.

Somewhere in back of her, Fisher spoke. "Let him use the bottle. You're only pushing me down a step lower, doing this."

She said without turning her head, "You're sick. Your mind's sick. I've watched you every night. No one's pushing you down, you're pushing yourself down."

The ringleted man in the doorway said, "Don't do this, Joan, what's matter with you? Why you quit?"

She didn't answer. She picked up the kit-bag standing at her feet, put two fingers behind Fisher's seedy coat-sleeve, said: "Come on, shall we? We don't belong in here—either of us."

Behind them, as they went out into the darkness side by side, the crest-fallen bartender was saying to anyone who would give him an ear: "She must be crazy, she don't even know the guy, never saw him before!" And then with a guilty look at his partner: "She was the best singer we ever had in here too."

A block away they stopped, in the ghostly light of an arc-lamp. He turned toward her. "A man doesn't thank a woman for doing a thing like that," he blurted out. "That was the finishing touch you gave me in there just now. Hiding behind your skirts. Letting you buy them off for me."

She said, almost impatiently, "You're so easy to see through! Looking at you, listening to you, almost I know your whole story—without actually knowing any of it. A code is doing this to you. A code of your own that you've violated, or think you have. You'll go down under its weight, let it push you down into what that mug mistook you for. But you won't, you can't, slur its weight and responsibility off you." She shrugged as though that was all there was to be said. "Well, aren't you worth saving—from bottle-glass?"

He smiled derisively.

She went on, "You didn't see me slowly walking around that inside room with my mouth open, from table to table, three nights this past week. You didn't hear me. But I saw you. I watched you through the cheap music. You sat there at that little table just outside the door, looking my way but seeing ghosts. Your eyes were the

only ones in the place turned inward. You drank until your head fell down, but you weren't drunk—you couldn't get drunk."

She picked up the little kit that contained her costume, made to move on once more. "My name's Joan Blaine," she said, "and I like people with personal codes, because I've got one, too. But handle it right. Don't go down under it; make it push you, lift you up, instead. Come back with me awhile and I'll make you a cup of coffee. I can see that you've been ill recently, and you've probably been sleeping around on park benches lately."

He moved weakly after her, shaking his head. "You're a funny girl. How do you know I won't turn on you, rob you, maybe even murder you?"

"Faces don't lie," she answered. "Why didn't you run out with your tail between your legs when he came at you with the bottle? A real bum would have. You faced him, hardly able to stand up. Besides, something, someone's, got to come out right for me."

"Most of it didn't?" he said, in the pitiful little threadbare room, with its single fly-blown bulb, its white-painted cot with the iron showing through.

"Most of it didn't." She handed him a chipped cup of steaming black coffee. "I didn't come to New York to sing in a Third Avenue honkytonk at five dollars a throw. You'll never know how many tears and busted hopes this room of mine has seen. I was letting it get me down, too. The sight of you pulled me up short. That's why I quit my job so easily just now. Don't blame yourself for that. You've helped me, and perhaps I'm going to be able to help you before I'm through. Fisher—that what you said your name was?—you're going back and tackle this thing that threw you, all over again."

"Yeah," he said slowly. "Yeah, I am." There was a steely glint in his eyes that hadn't been there before. "It isn't over, Why didn't I see that

before? Just round one is over. But round one's never the whole fight. Even though I'm on my own now—"

She didn't ask him what he meant. "Then the credit and the glory'll be all your own too, look at it that way."

"I'm not doing it for the credit and the glory. I'm doing it because it was my job, and I can't find rest or peace until my job is done. And even though it's been taken away from me, I'll see it through—no matter what—!" He balled a fist and swung it with terrific emphasis around him where the shadows had been. Shadows that a man could fight, even though he couldn't understand them.

She smiled as though she'd gained her secret point. "All right, then," she said. "Tonight—there's a vacant room, little more than an attic, over me. Without a stick of furniture in it, without even a lock on the door. I'm going to give you one of the blankets from my bed, and you roll yourself up in it on the floor up there. No one needs to know. Tomorrow you and I are going out. You're going to get a shave and a necktie, and you're going after this thing that threw you, whatever it is. And I'm going to find the kind of a singing job I came to New York for, and lick it to a standstill when I do! Tomorrow—the world starts over for both of us, brand new."

He looked at her and he said once more what he'd said out on the street: "You're a funny girl. But a lovely one, too."

IT DIDN'T work itself out in no time at all, in an hour or a day or even a week, it never does. He'd slipped further down than he'd realized, and there were certain realities to be met first of all—to keep his head above water; to keep a roof over his head; to get his gun back out of hock. But he had to have money. He wasn't on the Bureau's payroll any more. So to have money he had to have a job. He knew he could have gone to Trilling or any of the other men that had worked with him, and written his own ticket. But his pride

wouldn't let him. He would have worked for nothing, without salary, but—"Washington wants results," Trilling had said. He would have swept streets, waded through the filth of sewers, if only he could have had one thing back again—that little metal disk that had dropped so emphatically from the desk top into a drawer that day, pulling the sun and the moon and the stars down out of his sky after it.

So he sought Sixth Avenue and the melancholy Help-Wanted cards tacked up so thickly on its doorways, that usually mean only an unproductive agency fee. There was plenty that he could do—and agent's training is nothing if not painstaking, but most of it was highly specialized and in the upper brackets; there seemed to be more demand for waiters and dishwashers along here than for deadshots, jiu-jitsu experts.

As he moved from knot to knot of dejected employment-seekers gathered before each doorway to scan the cards, he became aware of a face that seemed to keep up with his own migrations from group to group. Which was not unusual in itself, since scores of people were moving along in the same direction he was. But this particular man seemed to be studying him rather than the employment-cards. Was it somebody who had recognized him from the old days, when he was with the Bureau? Fisher had a good memory for faces. He studied the man stealthily at first—he was a slimy, furtive-looking customer; but his clothes were both flashy and expensive. Fisher took care to keep his glance perfectly expressionless, to see if he could get the man to tip his hand. The man returned the look in a sort of questioning way, as though he were trying to ask him something.

Fisher took a chance, gave his head a slight nod in the affirmative. The man instantly left the group, strolled slowly on for a few yards, then halted with his back to the window of an empty store, obviously waiting for Fisher to join him.

Fisher moved as he had moved,

with seeming aimlessness and unconcern, and stopped by him. The man turned his head the other way, away from him, then spoke through motionless lips even while he did so.

"Could you use any?"

FISHER understood instantly. A peddler, the lowest cog in that devil's hierarchy whose source of supply had been Belden, and whose capstone was lost somewhere in the nebulous clouds overhead. There had been a day when Fisher had hoped that pulling Belden out from under would bring the top man toppling within reach; that hope had been blasted. Fisher had to start over, single-handed now, at the lowest pier of the structure, work his way up. This slimy individual who tramped Sixth Avenue pavements probably no more knew who the ringleader was than Fisher did himself. But he was a means to an end.

Fisher understood the reason for the mistake the peddler had made, that only a short while before would have been so irretrievable. But then only a short while before, it wouldn't have been made. Now he, Fisher, still had the telltale pallor and gauntness of his wounds and hospitalization. A misleading pallor, coupled with a suit whose cut suggested that he was not altogether penniless. So the peddler had jumped to the wrong conclusion. But then if anything backfired, the *could-you-use-any* gag could always be switched to shoelaces, razor blades, or anything equally harmless. Fisher knew many peddlers carried just such articles around with them in their pockets, just for an out. They never had the real thing; peddlers always traveled clean, to guard against sudden seizure and search. A second appointment was always necessary, no matter how well known both parties were to each other.

He answered the surreptitious question in a manner equally covert. "I could," he said, and saw to it that his hand trembled unnecessarily as he lit a cigarette. That wasn't wasted on the peddler.

"Who's been handing it to you?" he said, "I never saw you before."

Fisher pulled a name out of his mental card-index as you do a card in a card-trick. Someone that he knew had been rounded up while he was in Paris, was in a Federal pen now. "Revolving Larry," he said.

"He's at the Boarding House. So are half the others," the man told him. "What's your dish?"

Fisher knew the different underworld abbreviations for the deadly stuff—usually a single letter. "C," he said promptly.

"We're getting forty for it now. The lid went down something fierce six months ago."

Fisher whistled. "I'll never make it."

"That's what they all say. Ain't you got some gold teeth in your mouth or something?" Then he relented a little. "I'll get it for you for thirty-five, bein' you're an old buyer of Larry's."

Things must be pretty tough, Fisher knew, for it to come to that; Trilling and the rest must be doing a grand job. Only he—he alone—had fumbled.

"I'll raise it somehow," he said. Ironically enough, he wasn't any too certain of being able to. Which was just the right attitude; too ready a supply of money would have immediately raised the other's suspicions.

"Go to Zillick's down the block. It has three booths at the back. Go in the middle one and wait. When you lamp me turning the pages of the directory outside, shove your money in the return-coin slot and walk out. Take it easy. Don't let the druggist see you. Your stuff'll be there when you go back for it. If you're even a dime short don't show up, it won't do ya no good. Twelve o'clock tonight."

"Twelve o'clock," Fisher agreed.

They separated. How many a seemingly casual street-corner conversation like that on the city's streets has just such an unguessed, sinister topic. Murder, theft, revenge, narcotics. While the crowd goes by around it unaware.

HE DIDN'T have thirty-five dollars. Go to Trilling or any of the others for it he could not and would not. Not because of any possible risk attached—he'd played and looked his part too well just now for the peddler to bother keeping him under observation.

He'd looked his part too well—that gave him the answer. He went back to the Mount of Olives, asked for MacKenzie. "So you want to borrow a hundred dollars?" MacKenzie said. He insisted on giving him a thorough physical examination first, as part of the bargain. Probably figuring it was the only way he could have got Fisher to submit to one. The results didn't seem to please him any too much.

"What've you been doing to yourself?" he snapped. "Not eating, and by the looks of you— See here, Fisher, if this is for liquor, you don't get it."

Fisher wondered what he'd have said if he knew what part of it was actually to be for. He said, "If it was for that, why would I have to have a hundred? Ten would be enough. I don't go around giving my word of honor these days. All I can say is, it's not for liquor."

"That's sufficient," MacKenzie said briskly, and counted out the money. "For Pete's sake, soak a finn of it into a good thick steak. And don't be in any hurry about returning it. You working?"

Fisher smiled. "I'm starting to again—tonight at twelve." The full story of how he had been shot on the *Gascony* had of course never been divulged—either at the hospital or to the newspapers. Trilling had seen to the former, the *Compagnie Transatlantique* to the latter.

Wellington, who had been in the room watching him closely, said after he had gone: "He had a close shave, but it looks like somebody's beginning to probe for those bullets in his soul I spoke about."

"I think you love the guy," MacKenzie said testily, perhaps to get the fact that he'd loaned a hundred dollars out of his system.

"Sure I do," was the defiant reply. "You just finding out? I love every slug we ever took out of him, but what good does it do? He doesn't know a woman from a fire-hydrant."

But he was beginning to, even if he didn't know it himself yet. There was a difference to her knock on his room door that evening, as though she too had had a break that day. It was the twenty-third day after they'd met in the honkytonk. He had his gun out, was sitting there cleaning it and going over it lovingly. It was like a part of him. He'd got it out about an hour before, with part of the hundred. He jumped nervously, thrust it out of sight under his mattress. The door of his room didn't have a lock yet, but she wasn't the kind would walk in on him, luckily, or she might have wondered, jumped to the wrong conclusions. He hadn't told her anything about himself yet, out of old habit and training that died hard. What he'd been, nor what it was that had thrown him. He'd tell her everything when—and if—the second payoff came. And he had a long way to go yet before he reached that. Until then—

He went over and opened the door. She was standing there glowing. It always surprised him all over again, each time he looked at her, how beautiful she really was. Blond hair, blue eyes, and all the rest; somehow it all blended together into a gem. But that was for other men, not for his business. A shield in Trilling's desk-drawer—that was *his* gem.

She said, "I brought in a can of spaghetti with me. Come on down. I've got news for you." And down in her room, while he pumped a can-opener up and down and—of course—gashed his knuckle, she asked: "What luck?"

"I'm on my way, that all I can say."

"Great. Looks like I am too. It's been on the fire for several weeks now, but I'm superstitious; I didn't want to say anything for fear I'd jinx it. Some fellow—he's new to show business—is opening up a road house tomorrow night. He has a spot for a specialty singer. Lots of backing and

he doesn't care what he pays for his talent. I've already auditioned for him three separate times; I'm beginning to wonder if it's my voice he's interested in or if he just likes to have me around. He's not using a floor show, you see—just a band, and a combination singer and hostess. So by tomorrow I'll know definitely whether I've clicked or not."

"You'll click," he assured her, "unless the guy's stone-blind."

She opened her mouth in pretended amazement. "The great block of ice is actually beginning to thaw!"

Chapter VII

Hot Spot

THE phone-booth was cramped and stuffy, so small that the pane of glass kept clouding with his breath. He cleared it off each time with the point of his elbow, holding a dead receiver to his ear for a stall. At 12:10 the peddler was suddenly standing there at the little rack outside, wetting his thumb as he busily flicked the leaves of a city directory. He didn't look up.

Fisher took out the three tens and a five he'd prepared, wedged them tightly into the return-coin slot. He came out, walked by to the front of the store, lingered there by the door. The peddler seemed to find the elusive number he was looking for just then, went in the booth, came out again a moment later, and brushed by Fisher without so much as a glance.

It wasn't really necessary for Fisher to have the little package that was back there in the booth now. This was not a decoy sale for the purpose of getting enough evidence to make an arrest. Fisher no longer had the authority to make an arrest, and even if he did have, he lacked witnesses. But he retrieved the packet nevertheless, to prevent its falling into the hands of some innocent person. He pocketed it and turned the corner in the same direction the peddler had.

Fisher walked on, then turned to glance quickly over his shoulder.

The peddler was still in full sight. Fisher plunged into the nearest doorway, lingered a moment, and came out—not exactly disguised but with a sufficiently altered silhouette to be mistaken for someone else at a great enough distance along the dimly-lighted streets. His snugly buttoned coat was open now, hanging loosely from the shoulders; instead of being bareheaded he had a disreputable felt hat jammed down on his head. A pair of heavily-outlined but lenseless eyeglass frames were stuck around his ears. He set out after the distant figure using a purposely altered gait and body-carriage.

When he returned to his room at three that morning, he knew where this minor bird-of-prey lived, what his name was. What remained to be found out was where and to whom he turned over the accrued profits of his transactions. That was tomorrow's job, for the peddler had made no further sales that night after leaving Fisher. Undressing, he left the little sealed packet in his coat-pocket. It was probably three-quarters bicarbonate of soda, anyway.

He didn't see Joan in the morning, but he knew she had performed her usual self-imposed chore of brushing his suit before leaving, for it was neatly folded across the back of a chair just inside the door. He went back to where he had left off last night, resumed his vigil on the street-corner near the peddler's room. They were ripping up car tracks on that street, and the presence of the WPA workers covered him beautifully. He dawdled on the curb, coatless, smoking and chatting with them, indistinguishable from the rest to a casual observer. Occasionally one would go out to the middle and strike a few lethargic blows with a pickaxe, very occasionally.

It was well past midnight again when he wearily climbed the rooming-house stairs, but the day hadn't been wasted. He knew now where the peddler forked over his intake, where he secured his stuff. He was creeping back up the ladder again, at least as

high as when they'd sent him over after Belden.

There was a dim light still on behind Joan's door and he thought he heard a sound like muffled sobbing coming from inside, as he went by. Her hopes of landing the job she had spoken of must have been dashed, the thing must have fallen through. He stopped and rapped lightly, thinking he might be able to cheer her up.

She didn't open for a minute or two. Then when she did, her eyes were bright and hard, like mica. She didn't smile.

"Did you land the spot?" he asked tentatively.

To his surprise she nodded, almost indifferently. "Yes," she said coldly, looking him up and down as though she'd never seen him before. "I signed the contract this afternoon."

"You don't act very happy about it," he remarked uncertainly.

It was obvious something had happened to change her. "Don't I?" she said hostilely, and prepared to close the door in his face.

He threw out his hand and held the door open. "What's the matter, Joan? What's the rub? I thought I heard you crying just now—"

She flared up at that. "Don't kid yourself, mister!" she cried bitterly, "I don't waste my time crying over—over snowbirds!"

"So that's it!" He forced his way into the room, closed the door behind him.

She kept her back turned to him. "Go ahead; lie about it! Say that what I found in your coat-pocket this morning was sugar to feed the horses, or chemical to develop films! Go ahead, alibi why don't you?"

"No, it isn't," he said grimly, "it's cocaine. Now you listen to me, you little fool!" He caught her by the shoulders and swung her around to face him, and none too gently. "If you were a man I'd part your teeth in the middle—"

THERE were tears in her eyes again, tears of rage. "This crazy town's got to quit playing tricks on

me! I can't take it any more! No wonder something threw you, no wonder something got you down! And I wasted my time feeling sorry for you—"

"I wasn't going to tell you," he said, "but if you're going to go around making noises like a kitten left out in the rain, then here goes. I was a Department of Justice agent. We were cracking down on the ring that imports and sells this stuff. They waylaid my kid brother, got him alone and unarmed, and shot him down like a dog. I got myself put on that job—I was in Texas going after marihuana-smugglers at the time—I followed the man that did it to Paris. I got him, and I started back with him. What happened is too long a story to go into now. I made the worst hash of the assignment that anyone could make. He got away from me almost in sight of the dock, left me for dead. My badge was taken away from me. That was the thing that got me, that had me down when I first met you. I'm trying to come back now, trying to lick the thing singlehanded. I bought that stuff you found in my pocket purposely, from a peddler, as a means toward an end. Through him maybe I can get to the higher-ups."

He glared at her. "Now you either take that or leave it. I'm not going to back it up with papers and documents—to try to convince you. Believe it or not as you choose."

He could tell by her face she did. It was radiant again. "I might have known you had some perfectly good reason. The mere fact that what I found hadn't been opened—Why, I remember reading about your brother. It was in all the papers the day I first came to New York; it had happened that very day. Fisher, the lady begs your pardon."

"The lady's going to make some guy a hell of a wife," he assured her grumpily, "the way she goes through pockets. Now tell me about yourself."

She had the signed contract right there with her. Six weeks at fifty a week, and, if she went over, it would be renewed for another six at seventy-

five. Graham was the man's name, and the formal opening was set for tomorrow night. Luckily she wouldn't have to rehearse much, she was using most of the same numbers she had at the Third Avenue place, only one new one. She had to supply her own costumes, she rattled on, that was the only part of it she didn't like. And, oh yes, it was a little out of the way, hard to get to, but she supposed she'd get used to that. Chanticler was what they were going to call it, and they had a great big rooster set up on the grounds, outlined in electric lights, and fixed so that its head swung back and forth and it seemed to be crowing—

She broke off short, stared at him. "What are you looking at me like that for? You're all—white."

He said in a strained voice, "In Westchester? Just within sight of the Sound? A low white rambling place?"

"Yes, but how did you—?"

"I followed that peddler there and back today. On the return trip he was carrying several little parcels he hadn't had when he went in. I suppose if they'd been examined, they'd have been found to be samples of favors and noisemakers for the festivities. He poses as a toy- and novelty-maker. You've signed on as singer and hostess at what's really a dope-ring headquarters."

They were very still for awhile. Finally she said, in a small scared voice: "What shall I do, Frank?" She'd never called him by his given name until now. "How'll I get out of it? I can't—really I can't."

"You take the job anyway," he told her. "Nothing'll happen to you, you'll be all right. They're just using you, and the electric-lighted rooster, and the white rambling roadhouse, as a front. If you back out now, after wanting the job as badly as you did, you may be endangering yourself. It's safer if you go through with it. Besides, I'm going to be there—tomorrow night—within call of your voice."

She went white herself this time. "But suppose they recognize you?"

"It'll be a ticklish spot," he admitted, "but it's a risk I've got to take. Trilling never exactly handed out publicity-photos of any of us around town, so I'm probably safe enough. Belden would be the only one would know me, and I hope he does!"

"But you're not going to walk in there alone, are you?"

"Certainly I'm going alone. I have to. I haven't been assigned to go there, because I'm not a member of the Department any more, and accordingly I can't ask it to back me up. I'll either bring them this Graham, and Belden and the rest of the outfit too, or I'll end up a grease-spot on one of the Chanticler's tablecloths."

She said, with almost comic plain-tiveness, resting her hand on his arm, "Try not to be a grease-spot, Frank, I—I like you the way you are!"

At the door he said, "I'll see you there, then, tomorrow night. Don't let on you know me, try not to act nervous when you see me, or you'll give me away. Little things like that count. I know I can depend on you." He smiled, and faked a fist, and touched her lightly on the chin with it. "My life is in your hands, pretty lady."

She said, "I had my costumes sent up there ahead, to the dressing-room. My agent's smart as a whip, he dug up some notice about an auction-sale they were having—the wardrobe of some wealthy Iowa woman who went out of her mind and had to be committed to an asylum. I went there today and picked up just what I was looking for, for that new number I spoke of, and dirt-cheap. Wait'll you see, you won't know me in it."

GINGER ALE, the little gilt-edged folder said, was a dollar a bottle. You had to pay five dollars just to sit down, anyway, whether you ordered anything or not. Fisher'd had to pay an additional ten, at the door just now, to get a table at all, because he wasn't known. Twenty dollars to rent the dinner-jacket he had on, five dollars for cab fare to get out here—and oh yes, twenty-five cents for the crisp little white carnation in his button-

hole. He smiled a little when he thought of the old days and the quiz-zical look Trilling's face would have worn if he'd sent him in an expense-account like that. When tonight was over the only coin he'd have left would be the six bullets in the gun under his arm. He hoped tonight would bring him something; he didn't see how he could come back again in a hurry.

He was up to his old tricks again—and it felt swell, like a horse must feel when it's back between the wagon-shafts—staring idly down at the little silver gas-beads in his ginger-ale glass, yet not missing a thing that went on all over the big overcrowded room.

They were drinking champagne, and most of them, he could sense, were just casual revelers, drawn here unwittingly to front for Graham, to aid a cause they would have shuddered at. Graham must have decided it was high time he had some enterprise to which he could safely ascribe the money he pulled out of the air—if he were suddenly pinned down. Awkward to be raking in money hand-over-fist and not be able to explain what it was derived from. By the looks of this place tonight, and the prices they were charging, he needn't worry; it could account for a big slice of his profits, with just a little juggling of the books. And it made a swell depot and distribution center, Fisher could see that with one eye closed.

That gigantic electrically-outlined rooster outside, for instance, that towered high above the roof of the building, must be visible far up and down the Sound on the darkest night. It could come in handy as a signal and beacon for, say, small launches making shore from larger ships further out, sinister tramps and freighters from Marseilles or Istanbul, with cargoes of dream-death.

What gave the whole plan away to him, what showed that it was meant for something more than just a way-side ad to motorists going by on the Post Road, was that the sign was un-

necessarily outlined in bulbs on *both* sides, the side that faced landward, and the side that faced the building—and the Sound. The people around him didn't need to be told where they were, they knew it already. He had a good view of the sign from where he was sitting, through a ceiling-tall French window. The side that faced outward toward the highway was illuminated in dazzling white bulbs, the side that faced the building—and dwarfed it—was in red. Red, the color that means *Stop—Danger*. White, the color that means *All Clear—Go ahead*.

Here and there, spotted about the room, were quiet watchful individuals, whose smiles were a little strained, whose laughter rang false. . . . They sat and minded their own business, while the rest of the guests raised the roof. They kept their heads slightly lowered, making geometric arrangements with the silverware or drawing designs on the tablecloths; they were taut, waiting for something.

Ten of them in all—no more than two at the same table. And no fizz at those tables, just black coffee and dozens, scores of cigarettes, chain-lighted, one from the last.

That stocky man standing beaming just inside the main door must be Graham, for he had an air of proud ownership, and he looked everyone over that came in, and twice Fisher had seen the maitre-d'hotel step up to him for unobtrusive instructions.

Suddenly the lights went down all over the place; the lighted rooster outside peered ruddily through the window-outlines. People shifted expectantly in their chairs. Fisher murmured to himself: "Here she comes now. What a chance I'd be taking, if I didn't know I could count on her!"

He settled back.

There was a rolling build-up from the drums. Twin spotlights, one red, one green, leaped across the polished floor, found the door at the rear that led to the dressing room. Joan stepped out into the green spot, and a gasp of appreciation went all around the big silent place.

Chapter VIII

When Satan Sings

HE thought he'd never seen anything, anyone, so weirdly beautiful in his life before. But something like a galvanic shock had gone through him just now, had all but lifted him an inch above his chair for a moment. As though some forgotten chord of memory had been touched just then. Something about Joan reminded him of someone else, made him think he was seeing someone else. Before his eyes, a ghost from the past came to life and walked about in full sight.

Wait, that French mannequin, Belden's girl in Paris—that was it! No—that woman on the *Gascony*, that Mrs. Travis, that was who it was! But could it be both? And yet it seemed to be both. Stranger still, Joan didn't look in the least like either one of them, not even at this moment.

The red spot remained vacant, yet followed her around the room; the idea—and a fairly clever one at that—being that it contained the invisible tempter whom she addressed in her song, over her shoulder.

Slowly she circled the room from table to table, filling the place with her rich, lovely voice, making playful motions of warding-off, equally playful ones of leading-on. Then as she reached Fisher's table, suddenly she wasn't playful any more. She stiffened, seemed to glare; there was a noticeable break in her song.

The perimeter of the green spotlight fell across him too, revealed his face like a mask. He smiled up at her a little, admiringly, encouragingly. She answered—and yet there seemed to be menace, malice, in the parody of a smile that pulled her lips back clear of her teeth more like a snarl than anything else. Unaccountably he could feel the hairs at the back of his neck bristling. . . .

Get Thee Behind Me, Satan—

Stay where you are, it's too late!

Her bell-like voice, singing the Irving Berlin tune, throbbed down upon him; but its tone wasn't silver any

more, it was bronze, harsh and clanging. He could see her bosom moving up and down, as though rage and fury were boiling in it.

She started to move backward toward the door by which she had entered, bowing to the thunderous applause that crashed out. But her eyes never once left his face as she did so. They were beady and hard and merciless. And that smile was still on her face, that grimace of derision and spite and undying hostility.

The lights flared up and as she stood there a moment by the exit door, her eyes finally left his face to travel the length of the room to the opposite doorway. He followed their direction, and saw Graham over there, pounding his pudgy hands together to show that he liked her.

Fisher looked back to her just in time to catch the beckoning toss of the head she sent Graham's way. Then she slipped through the door.

It was so obvious what that signal meant, and yet he couldn't believe it. No, not Joan. She wanted to ask Graham's advice about an encore; something like that, that was all. For more thoroughly than he realized, he had, in Nurse Wellington's words, learned the difference between a woman and a fire-hydrant these past few weeks, and he couldn't unlearn it all in a flash, couldn't teach himself to mistrust something he had learned to trust—any more than Belden could have in Paris, or Travis on the boat. Men's loyalty to their women dies hard—and almost always too late.

Graham was making his way around the perimeter of the room, to follow her back to her dressing room where she had called him. The background music kept on vamping, waiting for her to return and pick up her cue. A pale pink and a faint green ghost of the spotlights hovered there by the door, ready to leap out into full strength again as soon as the house lights went down.

The quiet, sullen men he'd noticed before didn't move their palms, their heads or their eyes. One of them glanced at his wrist-watch, without

raising his arm. One of the gaudy women with them yawned in boredom. Outside, the rooster's red beak kept opening, closing, as its head and neck wavered back and forth, current passing from one circuit of lights to another, then back again.

Fisher kept pinching the bridge of his nose, groping, baffled. Why had Joan reminded him of two other women—one dead, one vanished into limbo—as she stood before his table a moment ago? Why had he thought he was seeing Mimi Brissard, and the Travis woman, when she didn't in the slightest resemble either one of them physically—nor had they resembled each other either, for that matter. Why had she seemed to be evil incarnate, the spirit of all wickedness, when he knew her to be just the opposite? It was more than just clever acting to go with her song; the very pores of his skin had seemed to exude her animosity, her baleful hatred. They couldn't be mistaken; that was an instinct going far back beyond man's reasoning power to the jungle ages.

ONLY a very few seconds went by; how hurried her whispers to Graham out there must have been! Graham came out again, sideward, his head still turned to where she must be standing, unseen behind the door. His face was whiter than it had seemed just now. His glance, as he turned to face the room again, arched over Fisher, purposely avoiding looking at him directly. He didn't return to where he had been. He went casually to the nearest table where a group of those silent, waiting men was. He lingered a moment, then moved on to another table. The flamboyant woman who had been the tablemate of the man he had spoken to, stirred, got up, moved slowly toward the entrance as though she had been told to leave. Her companion kept his eyes lowered; but as the woman neared the door she couldn't resist throwing a casual little look over at Fisher.

He didn't see it. Graham had signaled the band, and Joan had come

back. The lights went down again and Graham's movements, and the mass-exodus of the lady-friends of the "deep thinkers," were concealed by the darkness, while she sang.

She started her routine in reverse this time, began at his table instead of going around the other way and ending up at it. Began, yet ended there too, for she didn't move on, stayed there by him while the sultry, husky song enveloped him.

He sat there motionless, while she moved in closer, came around the table to his side. Slowly her bare arm slipped caressingly around his shoulder, inched affectionately down the satin-faced lapel toying with the white carnation in his buttonhole.

And again Fisher saw Mimi Brissard writhe her snakelike way up the stone steps of the *Bal au Diable*, the tiny little train wriggling after her—saw her stop and look back at him after she had betrayed her man. Again the heady, musk perfume of Mrs. Travis was in his nostrils; she seemed to stand beside him in the *Gascony's* deck. . . . Was he going crazy? Had those bullets done something to his mind? Was it just the colors of the dress—red and black—the cut of it—or was it something more?

The caressing hand had traveled a little lower than the flower now, was turning insinuatingly in under his coat. And the audience chuckled, thinking she was pretending to be a gold-digger, playfully pretending to pick his pocket. There was a momentary break in the spotlight-beam, as though the switch had been thrown off then on again. For an instant or so they were blacked-out, he and Joan. Then the green glare came on again. Her hand wasn't inside his jacket any more, it was held stiffly behind her back, hidden from the room at large. A white shirtfront gleamed there in the dimness as Graham approached her from behind, then ebbed away into the dimness again.

Fisher's hand reached upward, came to rest on her shoulder. He touched the fabric of her gown. A surge of un-

reasoning hatred welled through him. That too seemed to be a memory out of the past. He remembered doing this, turning his hand back like this, turning the lining of a gown—

She tried to pull away, and he held her fast. The shoulder of her dress turned over as he pulled, and on it was a little silk cachet. In the flickering green light he made out dim lettering.

I'm Dangerous Tonight—Maldonado, Paris.

THE yell that came from his throat drowned out the music, silenced it. His chair reeled backward with a crash, and he was erect, facing her. "It's the same one!" they heard him shout. "Now I know! Now at last—!"

The green spot sputtered out. The lights flared up. People jumped to their feet all over the room, staring petrified at the incredible sight taking place there in full view of everyone. For the man the girl had been teasing seemed to have gone suddenly mad, was growling like a hydrophobic dog, tearing, clawing at her gown. It came off in long, brutally-severed tatters, revealing strips of white skin that grew and grew before their very eyes, until suddenly she stood there all but nude, trembling, statuelike.

They were shouting: "Stop him! He's crazy. . . !" But a mad, panic-stricken rush for the door had started on the part of all the other celebrants, that couldn't be stemmed, that hampered those who were trying to reach the attacker and his victim. Other women were screaming while their men pushed and jostled, trying to clear a way for them.

She alone hadn't screamed through the whole thing. She stood there facing him quietly now, given a moment's grace while Graham and all his silent men tried to force their way to them.

He took his coat off and threw it around her. The tattered remnants of the dress lay on the floor behind her. There was a look on her face impossible to describe—the stare of a sleep-walker suddenly awakened—then she let out a low, fearful cry.

"I've betrayed you, Frank! I've killed you. I told them what you were—and what you were here for—"

His hand instinctively jabbed toward his exposed shoulder-holster. It swayed empty at his touch.

"I took that too," she gasped, "while I was singing—I gave it to Graham just now—"

She was suddenly thrust aside, and they were ringed about him—ten of them and Graham, their guns bared and thrusting into his body.

Outside, the enormous rooster was slowly pivoting on its base, turning its white-lighted side inward, toward the roadhouse—and the Sound. White—that meant *All Clear—Go ahead*. Far across the water sounded the faint bleat of a steamer's whistle, two short ones and a long one, that seemed to end in a question-mark: "*Pip? Pip? Peep? Are you ready?*" Some lone night-bound vessel, furtively prowling these inner waters of the Sound instead of sticking to the shiplane that led up through the Narrows.

"No, not in here."

Graham's crisp command stopped death, forced it back from the very muzzles of ten guns. "Take him out where he can get the right treatment," he said and grinned a little.

Through the encircling ring of his enemies Fisher had eyes for only one thing—the face of the girl who had done this to him. She was wavering there in the background, like a sick, tormented creature, his coat still around her. He saw her clasp her hands, hold them out toward him in supplication, unseen by all the others. As though trying to ask for pardon. The coat slipped off her shoulders, fell unheeded to the floor.

He stared at her without emotion. She might have been a stone or a tree-stump. She was beneath his anger. To them, scathingly, he said: "Well, get it over with. Make it fast. . . ."

One of the guns reversed, chopped down butt first, caught him across the mouth. His head went back, came forward again. A drop of blood fell, formed a splashy scarlet star.

Graham said with almost comic anxiety: "Not on my floor here! What's the water for?"

"Who's so smart now?" the girl behind them shrilled vindictively. "Use me for a stepping-stone, will you! You're going to get it now, and I hope you get it good!" She had changed again. The tattered dress was nowhere near her, its remnants lay kicked far out on the deserted dance-floor, and yet she had changed back again—to all she had been before, as though the very core of her being had become corroded with hate and malice.

Graham patted her commendingly on the shoulder. "You're worth your weight in gold, honey. You wait for us here, put something over you so you don't catch cold. Graham's going to get you a mink wrap for this, and a diamond bracelet, too, if you want. You're riding back to town tonight in my own private car. We won't take long. If you hear any screaming out on the Sound, don't pay no never mind. It'll just be the wind coming over the water. All right, boys."

As they hustled him toward the entrance, in what was almost an exact replica of the old "flying wedge" at Jack's, he glanced back over his shoulder. Again she had clasped her hands, was holding them out tremblingly toward him.

They hurried down a long slope to where black water lapped whisperingly against the gray sand. "Okay, left," Graham said tersely. They broke up into Indian file, except for the pair gripping Fisher grimly each by an arm bent stiffly backward ready to be broken in its socket at the first sign of resistance. The Sound was empty of life, not a light showing anywhere. Their footsteps moiling through the soft sand were hushed to a hissing sigh.

"Flirt a little," Graham's voice came from the rear.

Somebody took out a pocket-torch, flicked it on, off, on, off again. There was an answering firefly-wink straight ahead, on the shore itself. "There they are. They landed a little off-center."

THE white blur of a launch showed up, seemingly abandoned there at the water's edge; there was not a soul anywhere in sight. But a human voice crowed like a rooster somewhere near at hand. *Kri-kirri-kri-kre-e-e-e-e*.

Graham called out impatiently, "Yeah, yeah, it's us, you fools!"

Dark figures were suddenly swarming all over the lifeless launch; their trousers were rolled up to their knees. They started passing small-size packages, no bigger than shoe-boxes, to those on shore.

"Come on, reach! Come out closer. Don't be afraid to get your feet wet."

Fisher spoke for the first time since they'd hauled him out of the clubhouse. "Pick-up and delivery. Nice work."

There was a sudden stunned silence, tension in the air. "Who's that? Who you got with you?"

"Dead man," answered Graham tonelessly. "He's going out to the ship when we get through."

"Wait a minute! I know that voice!" One of the men jumped down into the water with a splash, came wading in, stood before Fisher. A torch mooned out, upward, between them, illumining both faces.

Fisher said, almost inaudibly, "Belden. So you came back, couldn't stay away. Glad you did. You came back to your death. They can kill me ten times over, but I'm still going to get you, murderer, somehow!"

Belden lunged, grabbed Fisher by the throat with both hands, sobbing crazily: "What does it take to kill you? What does it take to make you stay dead?"

They had to pry him away. Graham yelled: "No, no, no. Not here. On the boat. C'mon. Break it up."

Eight of those that had come with him were toiling back, Indian file, each with a shoe box under each arm.

"Tune her up!" A motor started to bark and cough, the boat to vibrate. Graham said something about his fifteen-buck patent-leathers, went wading clumsily out, scrambled aboard. Fisher was dragged floundering backward through the shallow water,

caught at the hands and feet, hauled up over the side. He watched for the moment when his legs were freed as his spine slipped up over the rim of the boat; buckled one, shot it out full-length into one of the blurred faces.

The man dropped like a log, with a long-drawn exhalation that ended in a gurgle. They floundered around in the water over him. A voice exclaimed, "Holy—! He's busted Mickey's jaw and nose with that hoof of his! Pull him up out of there!"

Vengeful blows from the butt of a gun were already chopping Fisher down to his knees; in another second he'd gone flat on his face. He went out without a sound somewhere at the bottom of the little launch. The last thing he heard from far off, was Graham's repeated cry: "Wait, can't you—and do it right? I got ideas—"

BELEDEN was saying, in the lamp-lit cabin of the motionless ship, "You can give the instructions, but I'm laying it on him personally. You can even take it out of my cut if you want to, I'll pay for the privilege, that's how bad I want it!" Fisher opened his eyes with a groan.

"So you're awake, stupid!"

Fisher said, trying to stem the weakness in his voice: "Just how personal do you want it, louse? 'Cause I want it personal too. You remember Jimmy Fisher, don't you?"

"Yep," Belden said, "we made him run the gauntlet down the stairs of an old five-story brownstone house. On every landing we put another bullet in him, but not where it would kill him. He started to die on the fourth landing from the top, so we rolled him the rest of the way with our feet."

Fisher's eyes rolled idly upward to the oil-lamp dangling on a hook. "Jimmy's all right," he said thoughtfully, "all a guy can do is die once. The big difference is whether he dies clean—or dirty—"

His arm suddenly swept out from the shoulder in a long downward arc. The hoop of the oil-lamp sprang from the hook, there was a tinny crack and

a crash of glass where Belden's face had been, and then he was lathered with lazy little flame-points, giving off feeble light as if he were burnished with gold paint.

They tried to grab him, hold him, beat the flats of their hands against him. He gave a hoot-owl screech, turned and bolted out the door, and the cabin turned dark behind him. Fisher sprang after him with a quickness he hadn't thought he'd be able to muster; left all his contusions and his gun-butt bruises and his aching human weariness behind him where he'd been, and shot out to the deck after that flickering squawking torch like a disembodied spirit of revenge.

Belden was poised on the rail, like a living torch. He went over with a scream, and Fisher went over after him, hurdling sidewise on one wrist. They must have both gone in at about the same spot. He got him below the surface, collided with him as Belden was coming up, and got the hold he wanted on his neck with both arms. They came up again together—not to live, but to die.

Fisher sputtered: "Now this is for Jimmy! This!" The throb that came when Belden's neck snapped went through him. They went down again together.

When he rose to the surface again he was alone. The launch was chugging around idly near him, and angry pencils of light from torches came to a focus on his head, as he threw it back to get some air in. "There he is!"

"It's taken care of, Jimmy," he panted. "You can sleep tight."

"Save it till you get to him—you'll be right down to hell yourself!" The pencils of light now were suddenly orange, and cracked like whips, and made the water spit around his head.

Graham's voice said, "I can get him. It's a pushover," and he stood up in the bow of the circling launch. Fisher could see the white of his shirtfront.

A violet-white aurora borealis suddenly shot up over the rim of the water—behind the launch—and Graham was an ink-black cut-out against it. Then he doubled over and went

in, and something banged in back of him. A voice megaphoned: "Throw 'em up or we'll let you have it!"

Distant thunder, or a high roaring wind, was coming up behind that blinding pathway of light.

Fisher wished it would get out of his eyes, it was putting the finishing touch to him. He flopped his way over to the near side of the launch to get out of the glare, caught the gunwale with one hand, and hung there like a barnacle, tired all over.

THERE were shoe-boxes stacked up on the tables next to overturned champagne-glasses, and a line of men were bringing their hands down from over their heads—all but Graham and a man sitting back-to-front on a chair, wrapped in an automobile-laprobe, watching everything, looking very tired, very battered—and very eager. And, oh yes, a girl crumpled forward over one of the little tables, her blond head buried between her arms. Outside the rooster was black against the dawn; the current had been cut and they were pulling it down with ropes. Chanticleer would never crow again to dream-laden ships out on the Sound.

None of it mattered very much to the bundled-up man in the laprobe just then: the questioning or the taking-down of statements or Trilling's staccato machine-gun firing of orders right and left. Only two things were important: an ownerless badge lying there on a table, and the tortured, twisted fragments of a dress huddled on the dance-floor.

They came to the badge first. Trilling took time off between orders to glance at it. Then he brought it over, held it out. "What're you waiting for?" he said gruffly, "It's yours."

Fisher took it with both hands and held it as a starving man would hold a crust of bread. Then he looked up and grinned lopsidedly. "Washington?" he said.

"Washington wants results," Trilling snapped. "Well, look around you. This whole job is yours. Don't try

to act hard about that hunk of tin either, I know you're all mushy inside." He glanced at the girl and said, "What's *she* crying about? She got us out here in time, didn't she?"

They came to the other thing last. "Fire-extinguishers?" said Trilling as he was ready to leave in the wake of the captives, "What do you want fire-extinguishers trained on the floor for? There's no fire."

"There's going to be," said Fisher.

He stepped forward with a tense, frightened face, struck a match, dropped it on what lay coiled there like something malign, ready to rear and strike at whatsoever ventured too near it. He retreated and put his arm around the girl, and she turned her face away and hid it against his chest. "I think I—see," she said.

"Never mind. Just forget it," Fisher murmured, "That's the only out for both of us."

A glow lit up the dance floor of the Chanticleer. There was a hissing like a pit of snakes or a vat of rendering fat. There wasn't any smoke to speak of, just a peculiar odor—a little like burnt feathers, a little like chemicals, a little like sulphur or coal gas. When the flames they had fed on were reduced to crumbling white ash, the fire died down again, sank inward. Then at the very last, just as it snuffed out altogether, a solitary tongue—thin as a rope and vivid green—darted straight up into the air, bent into the semblance of a question-mark, poised motionless there for a split second. Then vanished utterly without a trace.

A gasp went up. "Did you see that? What was it?" A dozen pair of trained eyes had seen it.

Trilling answered, after a long horrified silence. "Some chemical substance impregnated in the material the dress was made of, that's all, A dye or tincture of some kind—"

Fisher just stood there lost in thought, without saying anything. There is always a rational explanation for everything in this world—whether it's the true one or not. Maybe it is better so.

THE END

Death Waited While He Hovered in the Sky!



**Crowd Waits
Electrocution
As Falling Balloon
Wafts toward Wires**



was going to set me none too gently down in a nest of hot, high-tension wires!

"I never did like jumping from balloons," writes G. W. de Grange, professional daredevil of Martinsburg, West Virginia, "and this time there was a mean wind to make matters worse.

"We finally got the hot air bag filled, and I took off in the dark from the fair grounds at Emmitsburg, Md., intending to make a parachute jump into the town square.

"But the balloon was soggy. She wouldn't give me altitude. I passed about 300 feet over the treetops of the town square, and didn't dare to jump... and then the big bag began to slowly settle.

"I ripped my 'Eveready' flashlight from its straps on my chute harness and snapped it on to see what was below me. To my horror, the balloon

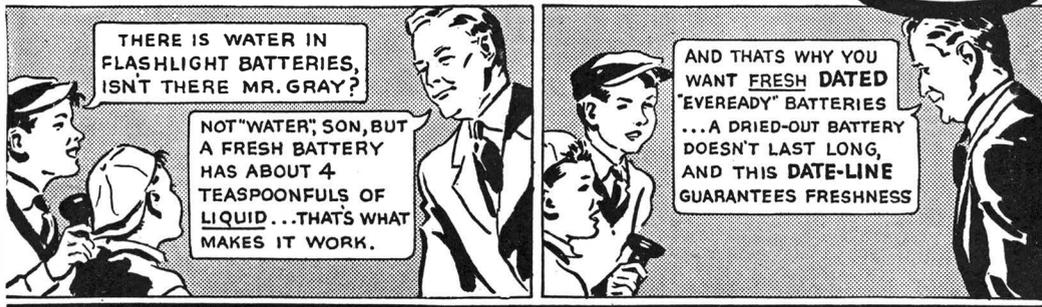
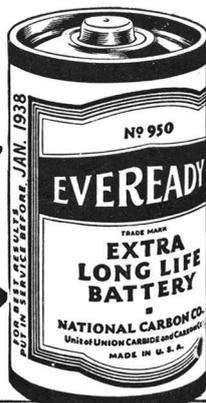
"I've sideslipped by these death-dealing wires with a 'chute many a time... but just imagine steering a lollopy big dying balloon by pulling on the shrouds. But I pulled with everything I had while the crowd waited for an aerial execution... and because those faithful, fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries were on the job, and showed me the wires in time, I slid by certain death by inches! Without light the instant I needed it, that crowd would have got more than its money's worth. (Signed)

George W. de Grange

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