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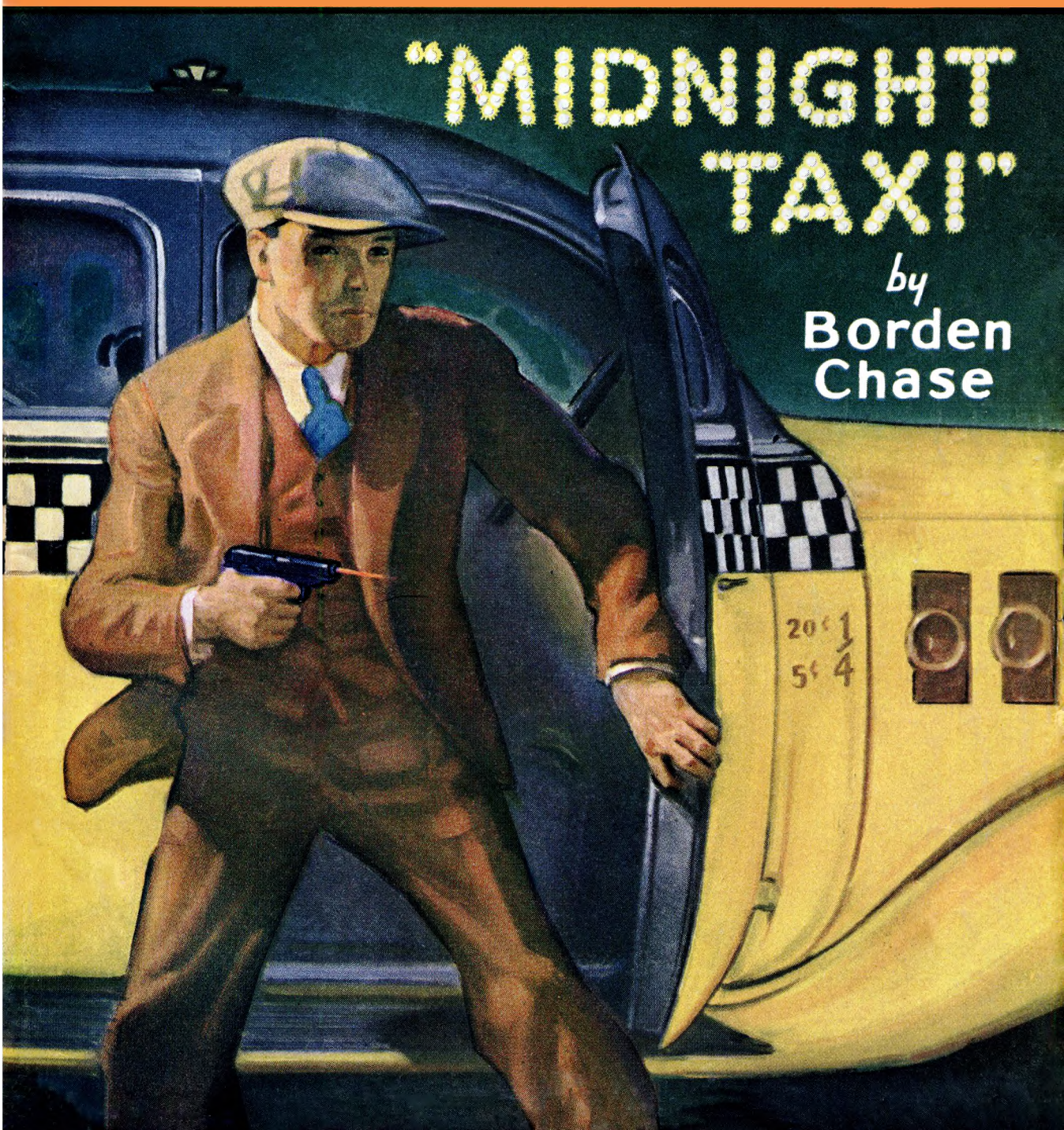

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Volume 259 CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 12, 1935 Number 2

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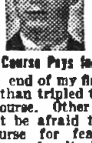

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Midnight Taxi

By BORDEN CHASE
Author of "Bedrock," "Heading Boss," etc.

Smooth Kyle, Federal Operative, was once a hack driver, so the rôle suited him well in his fight against a New York narcotic ring

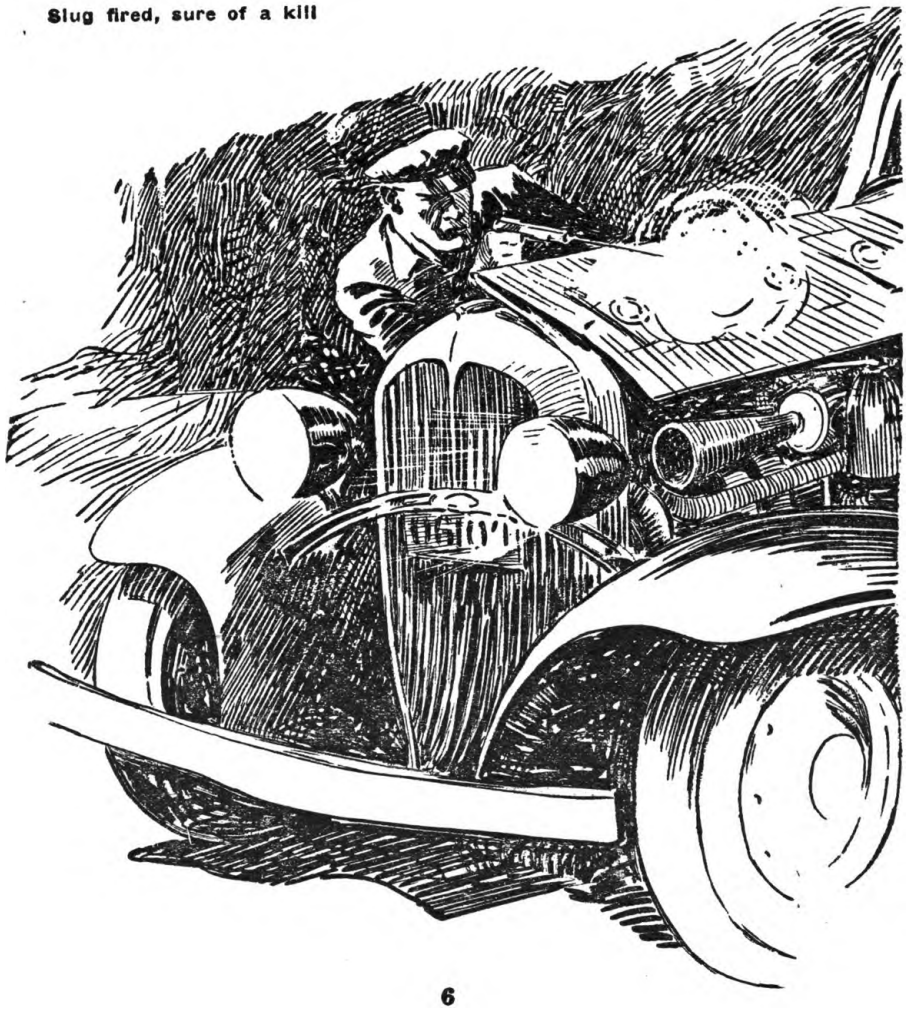
CHAPTER I.

ROLLING AGAIN.

HE hooked both thumbs in his belt and stared at the dirty brick front of the garage. Same old dump—same noises, same smells. It might have been yesterday rather than ten years ago that Peter Kyle had rolled his cab into place and walked down the ramp.

The Ninth Avenue elevated trains still rumbled along the dust covered structure. Beneath, scampering in and out between pushcarts piled high with fruit and vegetables, were a dozen or

Slug fired, sure of a kill



more poorly dressed youngsters. Same shrill voices, torn and patched clothes and impudent grins that made them lovable in spite of their dirty faces. Yes, Hell's Kitchen at four in the afternoon was just as he had known it when he unpinned his hack badge for what he thought was the last time.

And then Peter Kyle smiled. He had noticed one slight difference. Propped against the garage wall, legs sprawled out upon the sidewalk and his head resting slackly against a barrel of refuse, was Old Squint. His mouth was open and he snored—and it was the first time Kyle had ever seen him without Slumpy the Bum.

He reached down, prodded the limp shoulder and was rewarded by a growled curse and a vacant stare from a pair of bleary gray eyes. The lids flicked. A thousand wrinkles gathered about them.

"'Lo, Smooth," said Old Squint. "Gotta dime?"

Kyle flipped a coin into the filthy

upturned palm. Here, at least, was one who remembered him and called him by a nickname that had been known in every taxi garage in New York. Smooth Kyle—it was like a page from yesterday. A day when he had "rolled 'em hard and rolled 'em fast"—swinging a hack through the midnight streets of Manhattan—taking in the dimes and dollars and taking a chump whenever the opportunity arose.

"How are they treating you, Squint?" he asked and moved back a little. Squint smelled better at a distance.

"Lousy," said the derelict. "Ain't no money out any more. When a guy books less'n two pounds on a Saturday night he don't flip no dimes away."

That tore it. The present disintegrated—Peter Kyle dropped like a plummet into another world. A world of screaming brakes, clicking taxi meters and cursing drivers who talked a jargon unintelligible to the riders who leaned back against the soft cushions of their cabs. Five dollars became a pound—a taxi cab was a load, a crate or a rig—old tires were chewing gum and a meter was a clock.

"Where's Slumpy the Bum?" he asked.

"The morgue wagon got him. Must 'a' been the booze, Smooth. Slumpy's stomach wasn't never much good."

"Tough luck," said Kyle and started up the ramp.

A wave of smoke rolled down to meet him. A score of cabs vomited acrid fumes from their exhausts, motors roared and coughed, rubber shrieked against concrete as the drivers tested the brakes, men shouted and mechanics cursed. A short, dark faced man with a protruding stomach leaned against the door of a small office close to the top of the ramp. He rolled a well-chewed cigar between his teeth and watched the confusion before him through half closed eyes. When he caught sight of Kyle the cigar slipped from his mouth and splashed upon the floor.

"Smooth! Well, I'll be damned!" he grunted.

"You will—sure as hell," laughed Smooth. "But don't let it worry you. How's chances to roll one of your crates tonight?"

"Where you been—doin' time?"

Smooth grinned and searched his pockets for a cigarette. The owner of the garage had answered his own question. If Harry Tone, one of the wisest of taxi fleet operators, wanted to think that Smooth Kyle had been in jail for the past ten years it was all right with Smooth. Others would probably think the same.

"How about a rig?" he asked.

"What'd they get you for?"

"Playing marbles," said Smooth. "And now do I go to work?"

"I'd like to put you on, Smooth. But things is different now. The cops are runnin' this racket and they're crackin' down plenty hard. Everything's got to be on the up and up. Got a hack badge?"

SMOOTH drew a square of metal from his pocket and a glazed card upon which was his picture and name. He extended them to Tone and the garage owner examined them closely. He held the picture to the light and compared the printed features with those of the man before him: a heavy jaw, wide-set eyes that laughed, a good forehead and thin lips. The likeness checked. He fingered the hack badge.

"Phonies?"

"They're legit," said Smooth. "Call

the Commissioner if you think I'm kidding."

"How'd you get 'em? The cops ain't handin' out badges to ex-cons these days, Smooth."

"Listen, Harry," said Smooth, "I'm asking you if I take out one of your rigs tonight. But I'm not asking how you get your fast clocks passed—that's your business. Suppose you lay off my affairs."

"Smooth as ever, eh?" laughed Tone, and copied the badge number in a greasy notebook. "Okay, pal. Take Number Twenty—over there in the corner. It's a new rig and I expect big money."

"You'll get it," said Smooth, and he pinned the badge to the lapel of his coat.

He crossed the oil stained floor of the garage and climbed in behind the wheel of a new taxi. Tone handed him a ruled card on which to note the time and destination of each call and lifted the motor hood to check the oil. Smooth wrote the readings of the meter upon the card, twisted the ignition switch and started the motor.

"Gas and water okay?" he asked.

"Yeah. Roll it out—and bring in the shekels."

Smooth drove to the ramp and tested the brakes. He glanced about at the faces of his fellow hackmen but recognized none. Each year sees a new crop of drivers coming in to replace the old timers who have moved on and he had counted on this. Hackmen, as a rule, do not pry into the affairs of their fellow workers. They seldom ask questions and are little interested in the life of the average man who works with them. But Smooth was not average. In his day he was known as a high booker, a driver who rolled more money than most, and one who could be depended upon to take any bonus offered by the fleet owners for efficiency.

He drove up Ninth Avenue, stopped in front of a drug store and entered a telephone booth. He dialed a midtown number and waited.

"McNeary," said a voice in the receiver.

"Kyle," he answered. "Forty-fourth and Broadway, in front of the Claridge in five minutes."

"Right."

SMOOTH grinned and hung up. He swung the cab east, crossed Eighth Avenue and Times Square and drew to a stop on a hack stand in front of the hotel. A gray haired man dressed in a blue, double breasted suit was standing at an orange drink counter on the corner. He finished his drink, flipped a coin to the attendant and paused as though in doubt near Smooth's taxi.

"Want a cab?" asked Smooth.

There was a nod and the gray haired stranger stepped into the car.

"Same old Smooth," said a voice at the hackman's shoulder. "Grabbing one off the back end of the line."

Smooth turned. Another driver was standing behind him, hands in his coat pocket and grinning in amusement.

"Hello, Lucky," said Smooth. "Still shoving a hack?"

"Yeah, still at it. See you later."

"Stick around," said Smooth as he threw the flag and swung from the curb. "I'll be back."

The cab rolled into the stream of traffic and Smooth leaned back, waiting for instructions.

"Up through the park," said the passenger. "Sixth Avenue entrance."

"Right."

They swung north beneath the ele-

vated and Smooth was busy with his driving until they were spinning along the quiet roads of Central Park. He glanced about, saw there were no other cars close by and winked into the mirror above his head. An answering wink came from the gray haired passenger.

"Didn't take you long to get a job."

"Why should it?" grinned Smooth. "I'm a damn good hackman."

"You're not bad at a lot of things if the reports from Washington mean anything."

"They tell me McNeary is a tough boss. That right?"

"Well—I'm not so bad as they make me, Kyle. I expect results and I don't like mistakes. Do your job and we'll hit it off great. Did they tell you anything about this assignment?"

"Not much," said Smooth. "I used to drive a hack in this town and I was told to renew my license and report to the Chief of the New York Division. And that's what I've done."

"How about references for the license?" asked McNeary. "Do the police know who you are?"

"Of course not. I spent fifty bucks on a couple of politicians and got the best references they had. They think I've been away for my health—and maybe the country's, too. The cops are satisfied with the references, and that's that."

They had stopped for a traffic light and a blue sedan rolled close beside them. The driver seemed to be staring casually at the scenery but Smooth noticed his eyes were fixed quite steadily upon McNeary and himself. He stalled the cab when the lights changed and allowed the sedan to move ahead. When it was a few yards distant he stepped on the starter and followed.

"Do you know that guy?" he asked quietly and he was careful not to move his lips. The driver of the blue sedan was studying him through the mirror above his seat.

"Yes," said McNeary. "That's Vince Cartwright, gangster and killer. We want him. Somebody must have pointed me out and his men have been trailing me for weeks. Thought I shook them today but it seems not."

"He'll be watching me now. That was a tough break."

"Don't worry about it," said McNeary, and passed a sheet of paper to Smooth. "Here's your instructions. Read them and don't call me unless you have to."

"Fair enough," said Smooth. "And now what?"

"Pull alongside Cartwright. I'm going to take him in."

THERE was a puzzled frown on Smooth's face as he stepped down on the gas. But he had heard enough about this grim faced Federal man not to question his orders. McNeary was tough. He ran his division with an iron hand, expected absolute obedience from his agents, but he backed them to the limit when he got it. Smooth knew that powerful pressure had been brought to bear in Washington to break McNeary and drive him from the service. His agents were uncovering scandals that were front page news, sending politicians on the run and arresting criminals who had enjoyed immunity for years. And as his men fought for him so did McNeary fight for his men.

They had reached the curving incline that led past the upper lake in the park before Smooth sent his car crowding against the blue sedan. For a moment there were no other cars close

by and Smooth took this opportunity to cut in.

"Pull over, punk!" yelled Cartwright. "If you scratch that fender I'll blind you. You lousy hackmen are all alike."

Smooth flicked the wheel. The cab edged closer. It drew ahead and cut toward the curb. There was a scream of rubber and the blue sedan jerked to a stop.

"You dirty—"

"Get 'em up, Vince," snapped McNeary.

He jumped from the cab, gun in hand and eyes steady upon Cartwright.

"Like hell, copper!"

Cartwright ducked below the body of his car. His hand held a kicking automatic that blazed at the Federal man. Slugs breezed past the cab and Smooth ducked. A car, rounding the curve behind them, swung far to the opposite side of the roadway. A woman screamed and covered her face. Her companion gripped the wheel tightly and stepped on the gas. Farther back, another car slid to a sudden stop. There were shouts and curses. And then McNeary's gun jerked.

There were three closely spaced shots and the fire from the blue sedan was silenced.

"Nice shooting, Chief," said Smooth quietly.

"Get out of here—quick!" barked McNeary. "I'll handle this. Fade."

Smooth rolled. His cab hurtled down the incline, rounded the curve at the bottom and streaked west. He spun the wheel, twisted out onto Central Park West and doubled north. Up and across One Hundred and Tenth Street to Broadway and then down town at a leisurely pace. Cars whirled past him; people hurried from subway exits; newsdealers yelled the headlines of evening papers; two girls stood at the corner of Ninetieth Street hopefully eyeing the passing cars and ignoring the taxis.

A gangster, wanted by the Federal men, had decided to shoot it out. He had died just a few blocks away, but upper Broadway was quite unaware of the fact. That was New York—the town in which Smooth Kyle had learned to drag a living from the streets.

He was glad to get back, glad to be part of that swift beating pulse of his home town. The past few years had taken him the breadth of the country — Cleveland, Chicago, Dallas, and then up into Los Angeles and San Francisco. He had followed the path of the novice in the Bureau of Narcotics, learning the trade, taking orders, covering small assignments where there was little chance for excitement and less for glory. It had been a hard grind but as a result he had been detailed to the New York District with a fine recommendation. His first hour's work promised him his fill of action. And it would be in a town where he knew every street and alley—knew them as only a hackman can.

He stopped before a cafeteria on West Seventy-second Street and walked through to the men's room. He locked the door, lit a cigarette and studied the instructions given to him by McNeary. A strange place for privacy, but Smooth wanted no one reading over his shoulder this evening.

The orders were brief. He was on a job that would make him if he succeeded. If he failed—a sack in the river. A syndicate of narcotic sellers had formed a ring that threaded its way throughout the country. Wash-

ington had been given credible reports that New York was the headquarters. That put it up to McNeary, and Smooth's job was to secure information—definite evidence that would break up the ring.

He touched a match to the corner of the paper and watched it burn to a black ash. He gulped a cup of coffee at the restaurant counter and drove toward Forty-fourth Street. Going down Eighth Avenue a hail brought him to a quick stop and a moment later he was on a trip to Washington Heights. He threaded his way through traffic, jockeying into narrow spaces in the stream of north-bound cars, gaining a brief instant on each change of lights and disregarding the speed law completely. To all intents he was a hackman doing a night's work. He accepted a dime tip in addition to the fare at the end of the ride and said: "Thank you." And he sent his cab south again, his ears alert for a hail.

A traffic cop yelled at him on Broadway for passing a light. Another hackman cursed him roundly for stealing a call. There was an argument at Columbus Circle with a truck driver about a scratched fender and another with a pedestrian who did not look before he stepped into the street. Yes, Smooth Kyle was rolling again, grabbing the dimes and dollars.

CHAPTER II.

"SUCKER!"

IT was after ten o'clock when he drew to a stop at the hack stand on Forty-fourth Street — lunch time for the men who drive at night. The first rush of business had thinned out and there would be no calls until "showbreak" — eleven o'clock, when the theaters were emptying their throngs.

He checked over his trip card and counted his bookings. Seven dollars—not bad, he thought, even for the old days. There was still money in New York if a man knew where to look for it. And there were men who sold cocaine and heroin if they could be found. But there was time enough for that. His first job was to establish himself as a hackman, live the part, forget for the time that he was a Government agent and acquire the attitude of the men on the cabs.

He saw a group of them standing beside the first taxi on the line. There was something about their faces that set them apart as different from the average man on the street. Maybe it was their eyes—tired and all-wise. After a man's eyes have looked at the follies and sins of New York each night from sunset until sunrise they are apt to get tired—and very wise. Each face was cynical and distrustful. But when a hackman has seen a spender throwing money away by the handful and then has been left waiting at the front door of a hotel while this same spender slips out the back to avoid paying a two dollar fare, he can't be blamed for his cynicism.

To these men, the average person who made up the night life in Manhattan was a chump. The hackmen had no respect for the New Yorker who would toss five dollars to a head waiter for a table in a drafty corner and argue if the meter dropped an extra dime on the trip home. Nor did he think much of the out-of-towner who winked knowingly and asked to be shown the sights—"not the usual places, you know. Er — maybe we could find some girls?"

Each of the tight lipped men had

heard that story many times. Most of them had shrugged and shook their heads. Some had made the mistake of steering the Romeos to a hideaway and had been stripped of their hack badges by the police when the inevitable squawk came from the sucker who had lost his roll. Yes, they were wise, cynical and silent, these taxi drivers. And Smooth slipped back into the life with little effort.

There was a slight jar as another cab pulled into place behind him and touched bumpers. Smooth looked back and saw Lucky Carmine climb from his seat, stretch wearily and walk toward him.

"How's tricks, Lucky?" Smooth said and extended his hand.

Lucky gripped his fingers and stepped back. He cocked his head to one side and studied Smooth.

"They didn't wear you down much, feller," he said at length. "Or do I guess wrong?"

Smooth grinned contentedly. Lucky was answering his own questions, too. He seemed to take it for granted that Smooth had been doing time in some jail and had just been released.

"Why tag me for an ex-con?" Smooth asked. "Can't a guy quit this racket without going to the pen?"

"Not guys like you," said Lucky. "You're a natural on a hack or I never saw one. Hell—it seems like yesterday when I was watching you take the chumps. Remember when we worked the Village together?"

"Good old prohibition," laughed Smooth. "Those were the days."

"You must have made plenty. I never could figure your racket, Smooth. But it sure was a hot one to get you a long stretch."

"Well, that makes us even. I knew you were smart and I knew you didn't get all your dimes on the front end of a cab—but that's as close as I could guess."

Lucky drew a few bills from his coat pocket and folded them neatly, thumbing the edges in a quick count. He slipped them into an inside pocket of his vest and glanced at a handful of change.

"Coffee money," he said. "That's all there is on the street now. Wanna eat?"

SMOOTH followed him into a nearby cafeteria and selected a meal.

They carried their plates to a marble-topped table and ate without troubling to remove their overcoats. Each studied the other and in the eyes of both was admiration—the grudging admiration of a smart New Yorker who sees a man equally wise.

Lucky knew his way around. There was little that happened on Broadway or any other section of town that got past this thin shouldered, dapper little hackman. He knew the clip joints, knew where the traveling crap games were playing, he was smart enough to keep rolling when a gun went off in a dark alley and he never talked to the wrong people.

Smooth said little until the cigarettes were going and both had started their second cup of coffee. Then he leaned his elbows on the table, drifted a thin stream of smoke toward the ceiling and stared at Lucky.

"Where's the late money?*" he

---

*Late money. Any calls after midnight are late money and a hackman must know where to go to dig them up. Night clubs, bars, midnight shows, Harlem late spots, Greenwich Village, or gambling houses are usually where "late money" is found.

asked. "I'm licked after snowbreak. All the old spots must have folded up with repeal. I didn't see any of them while I was cruising."

"There ain't any late money, Smooth. You won't find a pound on the street between midnight and morning. But if you want a piece of advice, you can have it."

"Give," said Smooth.

"Get rid of that rod."

With an involuntary movement Smooth hunched his shoulders to allow more slack across the front of his coat. They were wide shoulders and his coat was snug fitting, not yet dragged from shape by the pull of the cab seat. He flicked the ash from his cigarette and grinned.

"Good eyes, Lucky. How'd you spot it?"

"Any time I can't see a shoulder holster, you'll know I'm gettin' old," said Lucky. "You must be screwy."

"Maybe. But I need money. It's a cinch I'll never get it shovin' a cab these days—not the kind I need. And now suppose you forget the roscoe and wise me to the Big Town, as of today."

"Aw—you're out of my class," said Lucky. "Me—I'm playing it legit.* Forty percent of the clock, tips, and a few stickups—that's all. Maybe I roll a lush or two, but that's tops. My lungs are goin' sour and I'm figurin' on hittin' the sticks in a year or two. A stretch in the pen would kill me, so I'm not bein' stupid. Besides, I like straight hackin'."

"Is this the same bucker† that shot it out with Fay's men on the docks?" asked Smooth with a slow smile. "Lucky—you've gone soft."

"Maybe—but I'm keepin' out of jail."

A HARD faced youngster with a bundle of papers stepped into the restaurant and made his way slowly past the tables.

"Mornin' paper — *News, Mirror* and *Trib!*" he cried, and flashed a folded sheet before the two hackmen. "Vince Cartwright gets it in de belly. Wanna paper, fellers?"

Lucky flipped him a nickel and grabbed the sheet. He spread it on the table and glanced quickly at the headlines and sub-heads. Smooth twisted in his chair to read with him.

"Know him?" he asked.

"Yeah," answered Lucky. "Just to say hello, that's all. Not a bad guy, but what a sucker to shoot it out with the Feds."

"Who got him?"

"Bloke by the name of McNeary. That guy's poison in this town." He read silently for a moment and then grinned. "Listen to this. An eyewitness to the shootin' says the Federal Agent was ridin' in a taxi and the driver scrammed when the shootin' started. What did they expect him to do—sing a lullaby?"

"Ever see McNeary?" asked Smooth.

"Never want to," laughed Lucky.

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* Hackman's jargon. Playing it legit means being honest. Taxi drivers get forty percent commission on their earnings. A stickup is a call done with the meter in non-recording position —*i.e.*, with the flag, or stick, up. Rolling a lush is overcharging a drunk or emptying his pockets before depositing him at the end of the trip.

† A bucker was a driver whose cab was equipped with a double tariff meter that was painted red. These are no longer permitted. Larry Fay, a New York gangster who was killed in a night club, once put out a fleet of cabs. He took over the railroad terminals, steamship lines and some of the hotel stands where the buckers worked, and the buckers put up a terrific fight before being driven from the streets. Fay's cabs were painted gray with a gold swastika on the door.

"It's none of my business. C'mon, let's get outta here."

They paid their checks and walked to their cabs. A traffic officer motioned them to roll. They nodded and swung from the curb.

Smooth turned north on Sixth Avenue. He picked up a straggler near Fifty-ninth Street and made a short trip uptown. The theaters were empty when he again drove back into the district and groups of cars were parked near some of the stage doors. Rolling slowly and glancing at times from one curb to the other, he noticed a girl standing in the shadows of a theater alley. She lifted her arm and signalled. Smooth pulled to the curb.

He opened the cab door and the girl hurried across the sidewalk, glancing quickly at a man who stood close to an expensive car near by.

"Uptown," she said and put one foot on the running board.

"Wait a minute, Dorothy!"

The voice was harsh, nasal. Smooth turned to see the man who had been standing near the parked car grasp the girl by the arm.

"Please," she said. "I'm going home."

"Aw, why don't you be nice? Loosen up—relax! We're goin' places and do things."

"Do you want a cab?" Smooth asked the girl.

"Yes—yes, I do," she said and tried to jerk her arm loose. "Slug—let go of me."

"Yes, Slug," said Smooth. "Be a nice boy—let go."

"Scram, punk!" said Slug.

SMOOTH slipped from the seat and stepped forward. His left hand gripped the lapels of Slug's coat and jerked down. His right circled in a short arc and landed on Slug's chin. He helped the astonished girl into the cab and closed the door.

"What was the address?" he asked as the taxi started.

"Oh—"

"Sorry to be rough," said Smooth. "But things are so bad lately it would have been poor business to let him steal a call. Now—where to?"

"Eighty-third and West End Avenue," she said. "Hurry—he'll follow us and hurt you. I know he will."

Smooth smiled but said nothing. He was studying the girl in the mirror above the windshield. She was crouched forward on the seat as though to lend speed to the taxi. Her head turned at times as she glanced through the rear window and Smooth nearly passed a light admiring the sheen of her dark hair. Her hands opened and closed nervously and Smooth thought he had never seen fingers so small or so beautifully formed. Once, when her eyes met with his in the mirror, she smiled—a scared, pretty little smile that drew an answering grin from Smooth.

"Aren't you afraid?" she asked.

"Not much," he answered. "But I'm wondering why you are. Who's your playmate?"

"That's Slug Conners—and he's no friend of mine. He's one of a bunch of gorillas that have been driving the girls in the show half mad. His boss is the backer and the mob seem to think that gives them the privilege of annoying the girls. I'm just about fed up with the whole thing and I handed in my notice tonight. They can get another lead. Three more performances and I'm through."

"And then what?"

"I don't know. Another musical comedy, probably."

"Think I'll take tomorrow night off and catch that show. You must look great from the front. Do you sing?"

"You're not very flattering," she said. "I thought all New York had seen Dorothy Manning."

"Are you Dorothy Manning?" he asked in surprise. "Say—I saw you in Chicago, but you didn't look so—"

"So small?" she said.

"No—well—oh, I don't know. Forget it." He glanced at a street marker. "Eighty-third?"

"Just down from the corner. Here—this is it." She opened her purse and handed him a bill. "It's all yours. And—thanks."

Smooth glanced at the bill and saw it was a five. He folded it carefully, stuck it in his vest pocket and reached back to open the door.

"I'll bring the change tomorrow," he said. "'Night."

She hurried across the sidewalk and Smooth did not move until the apartment door had closed behind her. He glanced down the street and saw a car turn the corner. It slowed and drew to a stop. Smooth pulled away from the curb, and the car followed.

He circled the block and spun along Riverside Drive. Behind him the car followed at a distance of one block, pausing for traffic lights whenever Smooth did, increasing its pace or slowing to keep its distance from the taxi.

AT the entrance to a viaduct that leads across One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, Smooth swung right and took a cobble road that led down to the Ferry House. It was a narrow street, sharply inclined, and it curved in under the great supports of the structure along the river front. A single street light on the corner provided scanty illumination and there was a hush in this little backwater that seemed unnatural to Manhattan. Smooth noticed there were no pedestrians about and he pulled up beside one of the steel uprights.

He slid from the cab seat and lifted the hood, apparently tinkering with the motor. Behind him, a car drew to a stop and the driver left the motor running and crossed toward the taxi.

"Thanks for the setup, dope!"

"Hello, Slug," said Smooth. "When did you wake up?"

Slug was facing him across the hood of the cab, peering intently into Smooth's eyes. His hand was thrust stiffly into his right coat pocket and he swayed from the hips.

"Did I ever see you in Cleveland?" he asked suddenly.

"Maybe," said Smooth. "What about it?"

"It don't matter, now. You're going to get one in the chest. Want to pray or cry a little?"

"You mean you're goin' to kill me?" asked Smooth. "Why? What's the idea?"

"Just to teach you a lesson, Wise Guy. For a hackman, you're plenty dumb—sockin' Slug Conners in the chin!" There was a gun in his hand now and it flipped indolently toward Smooth. If the hackman had opened his mouth to cry out, it would have gone off. Conners was drawing the last ounce of enjoyment from a few moments' torture before finishing Smooth. And as he studied the taxi driver his mind was racing back to a time when he had seen this man in Cleveland. Suddenly he stiffened.

"I make you now!" he yelled and the gun leveled. "A Fed. A stinkin' copper! You—"

Smooth dropped to his knees as the

automatic stuttered above his head. His gun was out and making crimson flashes in the darkness. Slug yelled. He crumpled against the taxi and knocked the lifted section of the hood back into place. His arms slid along the hot metal, the gun rattled against a fender and dropped to the ground. Slug followed it and his legs jerked for an instant.

" Sucker!" said Smooth and clamped the hood tight.

He drove east.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE KNOW.

IT was midnight and the neighborhood movie theaters on upper Broadway had emptied their throngs into the near-by restaurants. Occasionally a couple hurried through one of the deserted side streets. The night was cool, brisk with a sharpness that comes in late October. Smooth turned up the collar of his coat, settled himself comfortably in the seat and started to cruise. Down Broadway, across and up West End Avenue, doubling and twisting through side streets and then over to Central Park West.

He had rolled for the better part of an hour, ignoring the occasional hails of pedestrians waiting at street corners. His eyes swept the entrance of each apartment house he passed, and at times he slowed or came to a stop. At length he circled a block twice on the upper West Side and drew close to the marquee of an ornate apartment fronting on the park. A doorman, resplendent in gold braid and visored cap, stood before the wide glass doors leading in from the street. At times he swung his arms or stamped his feet upon the pavement. And Smooth grinned when he saw this military figure spring to attention and touch his cap to an incoming couple.

Smooth slid from the seat and stood beside the cab door.

" Pull that crate outta here!" barked the doorman. " There's a cab line at the corner—play that."

" Okay, general," said Smooth, and drew a dollar from his pocket. " Will you mind this for me?"

" What the—"

" Hello, Mullans. I've been looking for you all night."

" Oh, *hello,* Smooth. Where you been all the while?"

" Bouncing around. How about you —still frontin' for Big Joe?"

" What's your guess?"

Smooth nodded and winked. Mullans was one of the old timers with a big paying specialty at his finger tips. For years he had been in the employ of Big Joe Silva, a gambler who catered to the wealthy New Yorkers with money to lose. To Smooth, the sight of Mullans in doorman's uniform was certain knowledge that a big money game was in progress somewhere within the apartment. For Mullans could recognize at a glance each and every member of the New York detective squads. His memory of Big Joe's customers was equally sound. And as a result of this memory, Big Joe had run a profitable game for years.

It was a foolproof proposition. When Big Joe rented a floor or the penthouse of an apartment building, within a few days Mullans was installed as doorman and with him worked Eddie Drinker as hall boy. If a customer appeared, he was welcomed with a bow from Mullans. Seeing this, Eddie immediately passed the signal along to the gambling rooms.

At times a squad of detectives endeavored to visit Big Joe's apartment, but invariably the guests had departed and the paraphernalia had been disposed of when the raiders were admitted. Mullans had merely winked to Eddie and a very different signal had been passed along.

But Mullans was human. He could not resist the urge to add a few quick dollars to a salary far in excess of that paid the average doorman. He had a graft of his own that fitted in very nicely with his nightly duties. Gamblers were big tippers when the wheels had been kind to them. A man with a few thousands of quickly won dollars in his pockets was apt to toss a hackman the change of a five dollar bill at the end of a trip home. Mullans knew this and so did the taxi men, and as a result the doorman had built himself a following of night drivers that paid him well for the privilege of taking calls from this apartment.

OCCASIONALLY an outsider, a driver who had not paid his dues to Mullans, drifted into the line. He was urged to "keep rolling" and if this failed the men had a very simple cure for such persistence. A phonograph needle was slipped into each of his tires and when he got away on his first call, four flat shoes ended it within a mile. When the flats were removed to be repaired, the needles drew back into the treads and were not noticed by the repair men. As a result, within an hour there were four more flats. Yes, the men who played Mullans' line knew how to keep it exclusive.

"What's new?" asked Smooth. "Any of the old crowd playing this stand?"

"A few," said Mullans. "Slim Bernstein, Chisler Bond and sometimes Lucky Carmine—that's about all."

"How about the customers? Any spenders?"

"Not like there used to be, the—"

A taxi slid to a stop before the marquee and a man, neatly attired in evening clothes, paid off the driver and waved to Mullans. The doorman bowed, swung back the door and murmured, "'Evening, Mr. Rudd." He closed the door and winked to Smooth.

"Remember him?"

"Yes," said Smooth. "That's Bet-a-Grand Rudd, isn't it? I used to ride him but he was 'on the junk.' Didn't think he'd still be kicking around."

"Oh, he took the cure a couple of times, but he's still usin' dope. A good guy, though."

"Save him for me," said Smooth. "It's worth a pound to you if I get him. He used to be a damn good customer and I need a few right now."

"Okay. He never plays more than an hour or two. Roll down to the line and I'll call you. But it's up to you to square yourself with the boys."

Smooth nodded and circled the block. This was the break he had been counting on—his first contact with the narcotic mob. He had no illusions about Bet-a-Grand Rudd. This gambler might be in no way connected with the ring but he was one of their customers and as such he would serve Smooth's purpose.

He pulled to the rear of the hack line and leaned against the door of his cab. The driver of the car ahead stared at him for a moment and flicked a thumb in a gesture of dismissal. Smooth thumbed his nose and lit a cigarette.

"Roll, bum!" said the driver, and walked slowly toward Smooth. "Find another corner for that load."

Smooth flipped a burnt match at the driver and looked him over slowly. He was one of the new crop and he was trying to be hard. Another cab swung into line and Smooth grinned when he saw Lucky Carmine step to the sidewalk.

"Didn't take you long to find a good spot," said Lucky. "Competition is gettin' tough when Smooth Kyle starts rolling."

"No thanks to you, Lucky," laughed Smooth.

"You know him?" asked the driver who had been measuring Smooth.

"Take a walk, chump," said Lucky softly. "This guy was shovin' a hack when you were usin' safety pins for suspenders."

HE turned to Smooth and they talked quietly, pausing at times to pull up their cabs as calls sent the drivers ahead of them away into the night. When Smooth was first out he turned his call over to Lucky and waited for a signal from the doorman. It came at length and he swung up to the marquee. Bet-a-Grand Rudd passed a bill to Mullans and stepped into the cab.

"Bleecker Street, corner of Sullivan," he said. "And while we're going there, tell me about yourself, Smooth."

"Glad you remember me, Mr. Rudd," said Smooth.

"Best driver I ever had. Glad you're back. Meet me tomorrow in the old place and I'll give you a good call."

"Thanks," said Smooth, and launched into a fictitious account of his activities for the past few years.

Rudd listened, asking questions at times and talking of the old days when Smooth had driven him about New York. The car sped quietly along through the dark streets, skirted the theatrical district and headed for Greenwich Village. As they threaded through the narrow alleys of the Bohemian quarter, Smooth wondered what errand brought his rider to this section of town in the early morning hours. When they reached their destination, Rudd made no move to get out but sat quietly in the cab, looking along Bleecker Street.

A dark faced man stepped from the shadows of a doorway and opened the cab door. He said nothing but handed Rudd a small paper package, accepted a bill in return, closed the door and walked quickly along the street.

"Uptown," said Rudd, and Smooth stepped on the gas.

There was no doubt in his mind as to what that package contained. But he made no effort to stop the man who had delivered it to Rudd. In fact, Smooth had glanced but once at the messenger, a single hasty look that had catalogued the face securely in his mind. This was one of the small fry, a runner who made deliveries and collected the price of a small quantity of cocaine. He in turn would contact some one else in a chain of intermediaries and that money would change hands many times before it reached the head of the organization.

It was the old routine of the dope racket. Somewhere in the chain there would be a few breaks that would be impossible to bridge. The men who dealt in this commodity knew the danger of the stuff they handled. The small fry were invariably addicts and must be assured of their supply of cocaine. When the police made an arrest it was unnecessary to apply third degree methods to these weaklings. A few days' isolation with no drugs was enough to make them tell everything they knew. Consequently the heads of

the organization were careful to let them know nothing that could cause trouble.

Smooth congratulated himself upon a good night's work but he was not foolish enough to suppose that he had gone far in the completion of his assignment. In fact, McNeary probably knew that messenger's name and had his record at Division Headquarters, but Smooth cared little about that. As Rudd's driver he had been okayed to a certain degree as one who was "in the know." That, thought Smooth, was a good deal more progress than any other agent would have made in one night.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE THEATER.

IT was not quite three in the afternoon when Smooth walked up the ramp of the West Side garage and entered Harry Tone's office. The taxi owner was checking over the cards turned in by the men who had driven the cars on the previous night. His ever present cigar was turning slowly between his teeth and a blue cloud hung low over his head. Outside, the wide expanse of garage floor was empty save for two cars standing near the mechanic's bench. A Negro was scraping clots of dried grease from the concrete and sweeping them toward a pile in the corner. A few hackmen were grouped about the bulletin board, idly reading the notices and waiting for the day drivers to bring in the cars.

Smooth draped one leg over the corner of the desk and waited for Tone to finish his figuring. When Harry looked up, Smooth pointed to his own card and winked.

"Nice money, eh?" he said.

"Beginner's luck," grunted Tone. "Why so early?"

"I've gotta be on the street at three o'clock. Is there a rig ready to roll?"

"Yeah. But why so early?" Tone repeated stubbornly. "Got a steady rider?"

"A good one."

"Okay. Ask the mechanic. I think he's got one ready. Take a card and check the gas."

Smooth nodded, crossed the garage and flipped a half dollar to the mechanic. This greasy faced individual pocketed the coin, slammed down the hood of a cab and pointed to the seat. Smooth climbed in and twisted the switch.

"Gas, oil and water?" he said.

"Yeah—roll it out."

At three fifteen Smooth stopped in front of a hotel in West Forty-seventh Street. Bet-a-Grand Rudd was standing on the steps and he smiled when he saw Smooth.

"Remember the route?" he asked.

"I think so," said Smooth and headed for Eighth Avenue.

At a word from Rudd, he stopped in front of a cigar store and two dapper, sleek faced men hurried to the cab. Each had a bundle of slips folded compactly against a roll of bills and held in place with a rubber band. They handed these to Rudd and accepted other bundles in return. The transaction was completed in an instant and both turned to walk away when Rudd spoke.

"Hey, Matt," he said sharply. "If I catch you holding out again, you're through. Get me?"

One man stopped, turned as though about to argue, but apparently thought better of it and nodded. Smooth let in the clutch and they pulled away.

Within an hour they had made dozens of such stops. Threading like the lines of a giant webb, Rudd's men spread over the city, taking and paying bets on the horses and turning the play over to the book maker.

IT was a profitable hour for Smooth. He met and spoke to a score of men who were skirting the fringes of the law. None were hardened criminals nor were they big shots. But each was living on his wits and coming in contact with others who had drifted farther over the thin line that divides the law abiding citizen from the crook.

"Can I pick you up at Big Joe's place tonight?" Smooth asked when they had finished the circle and stopped at the hotel.

"Yes," said Rudd. "Er—make it about two or a little after."

He handed Kyle a bill and waved away the change. Smooth grinned his thanks and threw the flag up. He was about to draw away from the curb but paused when Rudd lifted a hand.

"You can do me a favor, if you want," said Rudd.

"Glad to."

"Remember that stop at Bleecker and Sullivan last night?"

Smooth's hands were tight on the wheel. The knuckles were white as he nodded. The break was coming sooner than he expected, and it was a struggle to hold a disinterested grin when Rudd handed him another bill.

"Meet the same guy," said Rudd, "and give him this. He'll slip you a deck and you can bring it to me at Joe's."

Smooth winked and accepted the money. He rolled uptown and stopped at a drug store. A moment later he was talking over the phone to the Chief of the New York Division.

"Sorry to bother you, McNeary," he said. "But I need help."

"Now what?"

"Got a man who can cut junk?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"Bring him with you and meet me at Columbus Circle. Two o'clock near the monument."

"What's the idea?" asked McNeary.

"I'll tell you later," said Smooth, and flipped the receiver onto the hook.

He climbed in behind the wheel of his cab, threw the flag and went for a ride in the park. The nickels dropped steadily on the meter and he grinned. He was building a perfect alibi. His bookings must be equal to those of any of the night drivers or he would not hold his job long. It was all very well to be working for the government but he also had to account to Harry Tone. And when the taxi owner checked over Smooth's trip card in the morning he would find that Smooth had put in a good night's work.

At eight thirty he drove to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, invested a dime for a quick washup in the men's room, parked his cab in a side street off Ninth Avenue and strolled into the lobby of the theater where Dorothy Manning was appearing. An extra half dollar to the ticket clerk got him a seat in the B row and he settled himself comfortably to enjoy the show.

Dorothy was all he had imagined and more. She sang and danced and Smooth wriggled like a contented cat when she noticed him during the second act and wrinkled the tip of her nose at him. The music swelled and throbbed. Smooth forgot about narcotic rings, gamblers and gunmen. He settled down into his seat and watched Dorothy. When she sang of springtime and roses, Smooth built a home in the country. When she danced, he

furnished it and decided to add a nursery. When she blew him a kiss during the finale he said to himself, "Dorothy Kyle — Dorothy Kyle— What a pretty name!" And when the curtain came down he shrugged, shifted his shoulder holster to a more comfortable position and remembered he was an agent in the Bureau of Narcotics. He cursed silently but wholeheartedly and decided it was a rotten job for a married man.

THERE were four men standing near the stage door when he parked at the curb. And when Dorothy hurried from the alley they stepped silently in front of her. Smooth slid from the seat and walked quickly toward the group.

"Want a cab, lady?" he said and grinned.

"No, she don't," said one of the four.

Smooth recognized him as Lunger Trout, a pal of the Slug Conners who had shot too late the previous evening. The others with him were Young Grippo, Eddie Malloy and Fred Scalise —and all four were men who worked for Big Spanish, the racketeer boss of the West Side. They were quiet and serious. Slug had boasted of a date with Dorothy and had been picked up by the morgue wagon near the Fort Lee Ferry House. They wanted to know why—and they intended to make her tell them the answer.

She drew back against the brick wall of the theater and stared nervously from one to the other. Her lower lip was held tightly between her teeth, her hands were rigid at her sides and she was frightened. When she saw Smooth her eyes implored him to go away, and at the same time expressed hope that he would not.

"Don't you mugs ever learn?" said Smooth.

"Take it on the lam, lousy!" barked Lunger. "You're clutterin' up the air. Screw!"

"And what do I tell the boss?"

For just an instant none of the four spoke. They stiffened and looked at Smooth with new interest.

"Oh, the *boss,* eh?" said Lunger. "An' who's the *boss?*"

"Ask *him,*" said Smooth and pointed to a slim shouldered youth talking to a group of musicians who had just come from the stage entrance. He was one of Rudd's men.

"Hey, Humpty," said Lunger. "C'm here!"

"What you want, Lunger?"

The runner was nervous and Smooth noticed that his eyes drifted quickly from one gangster to another and then brightened a little as they came to rest upon the taxi driver. He flicked a hand toward Smooth and grinned.

"Who's this guy?" asked Lunger. "Who's he work for?"

"How could I guess?" said Humpty. "What's up?"

"None of yer business," snapped Grippo. "We're askin' the questions. C'mon—give!"

"Well—if yer figurin' on takin' the lad fer a ride," said Humpty, and he drawled his words with evident pleasure, "I know a guy what might get sore. He's big, too—got plenty of weight."

"You mean Rudd?" said Lunger, and it was almost a whisper.

"I ain't sayin'," grinned Humpty.

Grippo backhanded the runner with a quick swing. Blood welled from between a pair of split lips and Humpty cursed—shrilly and steadily. He wiped his mouth, backed away from the

group and started toward Broadway.

"Fer smart guys," he shrilled, "yer actin' pretty dumb. G'wan—burn him. I hope you do. I'd like to send a wreath to yer funerals."

LUNGER stepped close to Smooth and stared into his eyes. Kyle did not move. One hand was toying with his necktie, the other was clamped firmly about Dorothy's right wrist. He exerted a slight pressure and drew her slightly behind him. He smiled and his gray eyes were as hard as those of Lunger.

"Satisfied?" he said.

"Not quite. It don't make sense. Rudd's too smart to make a play like that with one of Big Spanish's boys. There ain't no quarrel between 'em and I never knew Rudd to go fer a dame. Maybe you and her better come along and talk it over with Spanish, eh?"

Smooth's hand was no longer on his necktie. It had slipped beneath his coat and the eyes of the four gunmen were steady upon it. He backed toward the cab, keeping Dorothy behind him and watching the men closely.

"Sorry—we ain't goin' your way," he said. "Maybe some other night. And don't play stupid—I'm fast with this thing."

"All right, chump," said Grippo. "It's your play, this time. Take the dame and roll."

Lunger and Scalise stepped forward, their hands lifting a little and their shoulders hunched. But Grippo waved them aside with an angry curse and pointed to the cab.

"Get goin'!" he barked.

"With pleasure," laughed Smooth, and helped Dorothy into the cab. He was careful not to turn his back as he slid in behind the wheel and he used only one hand to put the car in motion. The other was still beneath his left armpit.

He streaked north and cut over to the waterfront. It was not until they had reached the lower section of Riverside Drive that he slowed the pace and twisted to smile at Dorothy.

"You were great," he said. "I never liked contraltos until I heard you. And the dancing—perfect!"

"Never mind all that, Mr. Kyle," she said. "I'm waiting for an explanation."

"The name is Peter," said Smooth. "You'll see it on the card—just in front of Kyle. But when people like me, they call me Smooth."

"Oh, Smooth—for Lord's sake be serious. What's all this about?"

"Don't you read the papers?"

"You mean—about Slug Conners being shot last night?"

"Right."

"Of course. I've been frightened ever since and I haven't the slightest idea of how it happened. And now—all this tonight—oh, what is it all about?"

"Nothing much."

"You've got to tell me," she insisted. "Those men thought you were carrying a gun. That little fellow who takes the bets on the horses said that you worked for Rudd. I've heard of him—Bet-a-Grand Rudd! And if you are one of his men, why are you driving a cab?"

"So many questions," laughed Smooth. "You'd make a fine lawyer."

"Yes, so many questions and you don't answer any. And another thing—when you talk to me you speak one way. When you were talking to those men you were—oh, like a hard boiled gangster or—"

"Your eyes are beautiful," said Smooth.

"Does that mean you won't tell me anything?"

"It means your eyes are beautiful. And as for all this excitement tonight—it won't happen again. I promise you that."

"But you haven't told me a thing. I might even stop at one of the hotel grills and have a drink with you—if you'd promise to talk."

SMOOTH glanced up into the mirror and met her eyes. He twisted the wheel and crossed to West End Avenue but he did not answer until the cab stopped at her corner. If there was anything in the world that he really wanted to do, it was to talk with Dorothy somewhere other than from the front end of a taxi. And now she was offering him the opportunity.

Smooth liked things to break fast. But this was one time they were coming too quickly for him. Through his acquaintance with Rudd he had a lead that promised to put him on the inside track to the completion of his assignment. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been grinning and happy. But to follow this lead he must be at the corner of Bleecker and Sullivan Streets before two in the morning.

The assignment was important—part of his job as a Federal Agent. But Dorothy was important, too—very important. He had been slightly interested in her the previous evening, but when he saw her stand tight-lipped and silent before four of Big Spanish's toughest men, and follow his lead without a murmur—Smooth Kyle went overboard. Here was a girl worth twenty of any he had ever known. And a few hours' conversation above cocktail glasses would spell a perfect evening for Smooth. It was a tough break.

"Whatever made you think that a hackman could afford drinks in a hotel grill?" he asked.

"He might be able to—if he could afford an orchestra seat at a musical comedy when he should have been working."

"Oh, that was different," said Smooth, and realized that Dorothy was going to be a difficult little lady to lie to. "Sometime I'll tell you about it—in a hotel grill, if you like."

"That's a bet," she said, and stepped from the cab. She opened her purse to look for a bill but Smooth was drawing away before she found it. "Wait—how about the fare?"

"I'll take it out of the five you gave me last night," he answered, and winked.

CHAPTER V.

CUT DOPE.

HE had been standing at the corner of Bleecker and Sullivan for ten minutes when the runner appeared. The man hesitated a moment, peered into the empty cab and looked at Smooth.

"Where's the big guy?" he asked.

"I'm picking up the junk for him," said Smooth, and handed the runner a bill. "Let's have it."

"Dis ain't regular. How do I know ye're on the up an' up?"

"Call him on the phone at Big Joe's place. I'll wait."

"Aw, I'll gamble," said the runner, and passed a paper package to Smooth. "But tell him Winkie says to be careful who he sends."

"Are you Winkie?"

"Yeah!"

"Okay, I'll tell him. Where can I reach you in case I need some of this for another customer?"

"Margello's Cafe — around the corner. Any time after twelve at night."

Smooth nodded and left him. He rolled up Hudson into Eighth and stopped near the monument in Columbus Circle. McNeary and another Federal man were waiting and stepped quickly into his cab. When they were spinning along the silent drive of the park, Smooth motioned for them to sit forward on the small drop seats and handed McNeary the paper of cocaine.

"I want this stuff cut* and cut plenty," he said.

"What's the idea?" asked McNeary.

"It's going to Bet-a-Grand Rudd and if it doesn't start things rolling, I miss my guess."

"This is a little out of order, Kyle," said McNeary. "Sure you're not making a mistake?"

"I hope not. But how about it—can you cut it now?"

"Henderson will take care of it," said McNeary, and turned to the man beside him. "Meet Kyle—a new man in this division."

The government chemist acknowledged the introduction with a nod and rubbed one finger lightly over the cocaine.

"Pull up for a moment," he said. "And tell me what sort of a job you want."

"Just use a little sugar—not too fine a job but not too raw. Can you do it now?"

Henderson grinned and drew a leather case from his pocket. Smooth watched him for a moment and then turned to McNeary.

"That killing near the ferry—read about it?" he asked.

"Who did it?"

"I did," said Smooth. "Sorry, but it was necessary."

"Include it in your report, said McNeary gruffly. "And watch out for these show girls—some of them are bad medicine for a man in your trade."

SMOOTH did not ask McNeary for an explanation of that remark. It was obvious the District Chief had his own sources of information and little that his agents did escaped his knowledge. But Smooth noticed that McNeary asked no unnecessary questions nor demanded too many explanations. It was going to be nice, he thought, working with a man like this.

He accepted the paper of cocaine from Henderson, let both men out near a cab stand on Central Park West and headed toward Big Joe Silva's place. At the door, he paused to slip a bill to Mullans, the doorman. He told him to let Rudd know he was there and drew into place at the end of the hack line.

Lucky Carmine was chatting with a group of drivers and saluted gravely when Smooth stepped from his cab.

"The boy wonder," he laughed. "He finds money when there ain't any out. How much you got booked, Smooth?"

"Little over two pounds."

"What a guy! And I'll bet you're waitin' for a steady rider, now."

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* Cocaine, like whisky, can be cut. It is seldom peddled in its pure state, but is mixed with powdered sugar to increase the bulk and the profit. As in the days of prohibition when a customer bought cut liquor, there is no legal redress.

"Good guess — waiting for Rudd. And by the way, Lucky, what's Big Spanish doin' now that the booze racket is shot?"

"I wouldn't know," said Lucky. "Maybe puttin' out a little hop or workin' the protection racket. I understand he's backin' a few shows and has a piece of two night clubs. That's about all."

"But you wouldn't know," laughed Smooth. "Not much."

"I might know that you had a run-in with a few of his boys," said Lucky with a thin smile. "Dangerous stuff, Smooth. Why don't you keep in the clear? Be smart."

"Where did you pick that up?"

"Oh, just bouncin' around. And let me tell you, pal—that bunch is mean. Plenty tough."

"Thanks for the tip," said Smooth. "I got let in on that by accident. Didn't know what was happening when Lunger and Grippo ganged up on me but I had to play it through."

"You ain't tellin' all you know, eh, Smooth?" said Lucky quietly.

"I've got nothing to hide."

"It's no hair off my chin," said Lucky. "Just thought I'd put you wise."

Mullans signalled just then and Smooth pulled around to the marquee. Rudd smiled, tipped the doorman and seated himself in the cab.

"Get it?" he asked.

Smooth passed him the paper and started toward the gambler's home. He cut across the park, driving slowly and careful lest he hit any bumps in the roadway.

A glance in the mirror confirmed his suspicions as to what Rudd was doing and as he turned down Madison Avenue he was not surprised to hear Rudd cursing.

"Who gave you this stuff?" snapped Rudd.

"Said his name was Winkie—same guy we met last night."

"It's cut! That little punk never did this job—hasn't the brains." He leaned forward and thrust the paper toward Smooth. "Put this in your pocket. I may want you to take it back and jam it down someone's throat. Now park this rig and come up with me."

THEY had stopped before a towering apartment building and Smooth followed the gambler across the lobby and into the elevator. He knew that Rudd was a very wealthy man but he was amazed at the display of luxury that met his eye when they stepped from the elevator. A silent butler in livery opened a door that led from the private hall into a larger foyer. A Bessarabian carpet with a Georgian design against a black background covered the floor; against one wall stood a beautiful yew commode and above it hung a walnut and gilt Georgian mirror.

Smooth's eyes opened wide as he walked between lace paneled doors into a low ceilinged library. On the walls he saw three famous paintings that would have paid a king's ransom. Rudd hurried to a court cupboard standing solidly at one end of the room and from it withdrew a decanter and glasses.

"Help yourself to a drink, Smooth," he said. "I've gotta make a call."

He snatched a phone from a near-by desk that Smooth guessed to be a priceless Queen Anne, and twirled the dial furiously.

"Grumbach?" he barked. "Is this Grumbach? — Oh, it is, eh? What t'hell's the idea of givin' me cut stuff?"

Smooth sipped his drink quietly and made mental note of the name. He was sure that Grumbach was a few steps farther up the ladder than Winkie, the runner who had sold him the deck of cocaine for Rudd. He might be important, but then again he might only be another of the many smaller intermediaries. But things were breaking fine and Smooth hoped for the best.

"Don't give me an argument!" Rudd shouted into the phone. "You two-bit punks are all alike. Sooner or later you try to put across a fast one—clip out a few extra bucks. But it don't go with me—see?" There was a pause while Rudd tapped irritably on the desk top, then: "Oh, I'm crazy, eh? Well, get this, smart guy—I know more about that racket of yours than you do. And you can tell your boss if he don't watch his step I'll bounce in and take it away from him!"

Smooth refilled his glass and drank silently to the gods of chance. He saw the color drain from Rudd's face and noticed that the first flush of temper had subsided into a cold rage.

He crossed his fingers for luck and waited.

"So I'm clowning, am I?" Rudd continued, and his voice had dropped to a whisper. "If you think so, you're crazy as hell. And you can tell Big Spanish I said so."

He dropped the phone and turned to face Smooth. The taxi driver was standing rigidly, glass poised before his lips and a slight smile playing about his mouth.

"What's so funny?" barked Rudd.

"Nothing much," said Smooth easily. He realized that Rudd was not quite normal, the cut drug had not fulfilled his needs and his nerves were jumpy. He was suspicious and looking for trouble. "Only, I was thinking what a chump that guy is to argue with a customer. In my trade the customer is *always* right. It saves a lot of trouble."

"Too bad those punks didn't spend some time on a cab."

"It might have saved them a lot of headaches," agreed Smooth. "But that isn't helping you any. Do you want me to scram out after some stuff or have you got any in the house?"

"I've got enough—wait here. Take another drink."

RUDD left the room and Smooth walked slowly along the rows of book shelves. As he examined the titles and bindings, he wondered how many of them had been opened since they had found their way into this library. He took a Shelley from the rack, saw that it was a rare first edition and opened it. To his surprise he found marginal notes in a hand that compared with writings that were scattered about the desk top.

Rudd smiled at the puzzled expression he found on Smooth's face when he again came into the library. He glanced over his shoulder at the book and winked.

"Do you like my friends?" he asked, and Smooth noticed that the sudden flurry of anger was gone.

"Very much," said Smooth.

"I've always found them sympathetic. Now this chap"—he thumbed through the book, pausing at times to read a line—"when my political acquaintances bore me or the gutters need washing. My friend Byron"—he touched another rare print—"when the ladies are unkind. Perhaps Fitzgerald when I begin to wonder about the future—good old Omar—"

He seated himself on the edge of

the desk, swung one leg indolently and studied Smooth.

"You know them, too," he said suddenly. "I can tell by the expression in your face. How come, Smooth—what's the answer?"

"There isn't any," said Smooth. "I drive a hack to keep alive. There's two ex-lawyers in my garage and a former professor who once lectured on psychology.

"Sometimes I think there are more brains on the front end of the cabs than there are in the back seats."

"Sometimes I agree with you," laughed Rudd. "And I like you, Smooth. How'd you like to be my guest tonight? The evening is early—hardly three o'clock."

"The carriage awaits, m'Lord," said Smooth, and waved toward the door.

They marched to the elevator, walked arm in arm across the foyer and Rudd insisted upon holding the door while Smooth climbed in behind the wheel. The gambler had entirely forgotten his anger at finding the poorly cut cocaine. He was at peace with the world and an odd quirk had sent him out for a night's enjoyment with a taxi driver. He decided they would visit Big Joe's place and have a turn at the wheels—later they would find bigger and better things to do. Smooth saluted gravely and stepped on the starter.

The wheels had turned but once when a car swept around the corner ahead of them. Smooth caught a glimpse of the driver's face and started. Lunger was crouched over the wheel and beside him was Fred Scalise.

It needed no second thought to know that Young Grippo and Eddie Malloy were in the back of that car, and it was a fair guess that a Tommy gun was resting across their knees.

THERE was a squeal of brakes and Lunger went into a sharp turn. Smooth stepped down hard on the gas and raced toward Park Avenue.

"What's wrong?" said Rudd. He leaned forward, grasped Smooth's shoulder and shook it. "Where are you going?"

For answer, Smooth jerked his head in the direction of the other car. It had completed its turn and was streaking after them. Rudd leaped to the rear window and studied the faces of the men.

Smooth heard him cursing and a light click came to his ears—the safety had been thumbed back on an automatic.

"How'd you spot 'em?" barked Rudd. "Spit it out!"

"I don't make them," said Smooth from the corner of his mouth. His arms dragged at the wheel and he swung wide on a turn into Park Avenue. "The driver came down on the brake when he saw you and it looked like trouble. When they doubled after us, I figured I'd guessed right. Now you give me the answer."

"That's Big Spanish's mob—Lunger's at the wheel. Know him?"

"Yeah—a little. Want to gamble and stop for a talk?"

"Act your age! Those mugs are hot," said Rudd. He looked again from the rear window. "I make it now! Grumbach called Spanish and told him some cockeyed story. Spanish is jittery and figures to bump me — the louse!"

"Two and two make four," said Smooth. "And if that's our number—it's up."

"Any chance of shakin' 'em?"

"I'm doing my best, feller. I don't wanna die—even if I haven't got a first edition of Shelley."

CHAPTER VI.

A TIGHT SPOT.

THERE was little doubt in Smooth's mind as to the reason for this visit by the four gunmen. Rudd had guessed a mile wide of the mark. Even though Grumbach had reported his conversation with the gambler to Big Spanish, Smooth knew that Spanish would not make a move like this. No, there was another reason, a more direct reason, and the name of it was Slug Conners.

Smooth was playing with dynamite now, and he knew it. The cocaine cutting had brought greater results than he had hoped for. It had been done merely to give him a lead that might take him further into the narcotic ring, but when it tied in with Big Spanish, hell started to pop. The various rackets were so closely interwoven that the slightest disruption in one was certain to set off a blaze in others. Smooth was riding the lightning and it was hot.

He twisted back through a side street and raced toward a park entrance. The gunmen's car was drawing closer and Smooth felt a tingling sensation twisting along his spine. He wondered if a burst of machine gun fire hurt very much. The cab leaped across Fifth Avenue, missed the front of a bus with a foot to spare and darted into the park. Behind them there was a scream of rubber biting against concrete, a crash of metal and shouts. Smooth dared not look back but his heart raced with hope.

"Crack-up?" he asked.

"They clipped the bus—not bad. It spun 'em a little but they're still comin'."

"Some fun!"

"What t'hell you doin' in the park?" rasped Rudd. "That was a dumb play, Smooth!"

"Yeah?" said Smooth and kicked at the brake. He spun the wheel, the car leaped from the roadway and crashed through a clump of bushes beside an outcropping of rock. Rudd was thrown heavily against the sidewall of the cab. His elbow splintered the door window and he slumped to the floor, unconscious.

"That helps!" grunted Smooth.

He leaped from the seat and scrambled back toward the roadway. The gunmen's car was hurtling up the drive toward him, dragging each last ounce of speed from the motor. Smooth aimed at the left front wheel, squeezed the trigger—and hoped.

There were five quick shots and the tire blew. The car swerved sharply to the left, hung for an instant on two wheels, then turned over. And even as he jammed fresh shells into the clip, Smooth realized that nothing looks quite so awkward as a car with its wheels in the air.

Grippo was crawling from a shattered window. His face was a red smear and a steady stream of oaths bubbled from his lips. He was flat on his chest, pushing with his feet and bracing himself on his elbows. There was a Tommy gun in one hand and he shoved it in the general direction of Smooth and pulled the trigger.

Smooth buried his chin in the soft earth and wished that he was far away. He expected a staccato stutter of explosions and a stream of lead. For an instant he did not move. Nothing

happened and the instant seemed to spin into an eternity. Then he was up and running toward the overturned car.

The Tommy gun had been ruined in the smash. Grippo had dropped it and was tugging at a shoulder holster with one hand and wiping a smear of blood from his eyes with the other. He got the gun clear when Smooth was three yards distant and raised it. Smooth's hand went up.

"If you gotta have it, Grippo," he said, and squeezed, "here's a quick one."

GRIPPO'S head slammed against the road. From behind the limp body another gun went off. Smooth squatted, swung his gun toward a movement beneath the wreckage and kept it leaping in his hand until the clip was empty. He turned and sprinted toward the cab, yanked open the door and slipped onto the driver's seat.

Two cars had drawn to a stop not far from the wreck. The drivers sat staring and mute as though turned to stone by the sound of the gunfire. Smooth backed onto the roadway, skirted the overturned machine and fed gas to the motor. He kept his right foot tight against the floor boards, screaming around the sharp bend of the East Drive and finally cut over to Fifth Avenue.

Rudd was up now, holding his head tightly between the palms of his hands. He was dazed and mumbled vaguely for a moment about the fifth race at Belmont. Smooth rolled slowly down the Avenue, turned west at the Plaza and became one of thousands of cabs that hummed through the theatrical district. He stopped before Linky's Restaurant on Broadway, dusted the dirt from his clothes and walked around to open the door.

"Think any of your friends will be in here?" he asked and lowered the broken window.

"It's a piece of a dream, still," said Rudd. "Give it to me quick."

Smooth explained in a low voice all that had happened and Rudd stared at him in amazement. When he had finished they stepped into the restaurant and seated themselves at a rear table. Rudd ordered rye for Smooth and milk for himself and fingered the menu silently for a time.

"I didn't know you packed a rod," he said finally.

"Sorry?" asked Smooth.

"Not any," laughed the gambler, and then became very serious. "Smooth—we're in a jam. It's just tough you were let in because of me, but there's no use weepin' about that now. Just sit quiet and let me do the talkin' and we'll see what's what."

He lifted a hand and beckoned to three men sitting at a near-by table. They had nodded when Rudd and Smooth entered the restaurant but had made no move to join them. Now they brought their drinks and seated themselves.

"This is Smooth," said Rudd by way of introduction, "and he's right—a good friend, see? Hoegy Bright, Yitz Cohen and Tout Ender"—he checked them off with a forefinger—"pals of mine."

There were no handshakes but Smooth lifted his glass and drank to them. Rudd leaned forward, tilted his glass of milk and made wet circles on the table top. He looked slowly from one face to the other and sipped the milk.

"Big Spanish sent four boys to gun me tonight," he said quietly. Three

pairs of eyes opened slightly but nothing was said. " I don't quite make it but I'm swell at taking hints. You, Tout—scram uptown and see what they dragged out from under a crack-up in the park. We'll be here for half an hour. If you miss us, call my place. Get goin'."

Tout Ender reached for his hat and coat, nodded and left the restaurant. Rudd was thumbing through a small notebook, pausing at times to check off a name, and at length he left them and entered a phone booth. When he had gone, Cohen and Bright turned to Smooth and their eyes asked questions.

SMOOTH smiled but said nothing and did not take his gaze from the door until Rudd had returned. Then he drew his trip card from his pocket and methodically set down a number of calls that covered the outlying district of Brooklyn.

" What's the gag?" asked Yitz Cohen. " Why the bookkeepin'?"

" The cops will be lookin' for a cab like mine," said Smooth. " They'll be checking over all the rigs in New York —but me?—I'll be in Brooklyn. Get it?"

" Smart," said Rudd. " They named you right—Smooth."

" And where do we go from here?"

" Up to my place for a little chat."

Rudd handed a bill to the waiter and led the way from the restaurant. Cohen and Bright walked silently beside him and Smooth brought up the rear. They were about to step into the cab when Rudd stiffened and pointed to a man standing near the door.

" Bring him along," he ordered.

Smooth turned and his eyes widened. It was Joe Salters, and Joe was right hand man to Big Spanish. It was common knowledge along Broadway that Salters would step into Spanish's shoes when the big gangster went the way of all his kind. And Smooth was surprised to see him here, now that Spanish had practically declared open war on Bet-a-Grand Rudd.

A sudden thought stopped him. Suppose Spanish did not know? Grippo and the boys might not have been gunning for Rudd. In fact, the chances were all against it. Probably wanted to have a little talk with him, thought Smooth, and they brought along the artillery just in case. When Smooth had tried to get away from them their susicions had been confirmed and they had given chase.

Smooth was walking on quicksand. He had started an open breach between two of the largest mobs in the city. If they got together things might be patched up—and Smooth would be found in the river, neatly bundled in a sack.

His hand was on his gun when he moved in on Salters.

" You're goin' places, Joe," he said.

Salters did not move. He was short, heavy shouldered and a little overweight around the hips. There was a noticeable bulge beneath his left armpit and his coat was drawn together by the bottom button only. His dark eyes measured Smooth, traveling slowly from his head to shoe tops. He leaned against the building wall and his lips opened thinly when he spoke.

" How come?" he said.

" This is a murder rap, Joe—and you're it."

" You a copper?"

Smooth grinned and drove an open hand against Salters' cheek. The gunman stiffened but made no move to draw a gun. Smooth knew that Rudd and his men were watching from the cab. They could not hear what was be-

ing said but if he had drawn on Salters with no provocation, their suspicions would have been instantly aroused. It had been quite legitimate for him to emphasize his command with a blow—they could understand that. And if Salters had gone for his gun they would not have blamed Smooth for shooting first. But the gunman had spoiled that play when he took the blow with no attempt at retaliation. It was Smooth's move now.

"Rudd wants to see you—c'mon, move!" he snapped.

Salters grinned and walked to the cab. The door swung open and he seated himself on a drop seat, his back to Hoegy Bright. He turned slightly to face Rudd.

"'Lo, Rudd. Who's the tough punk in the driver's seat? You ought to teach him manners before he gets himself hurt."

RUDD did not answer until the cab was off Broadway and streaking across to Madison Avenue. He studied Salters, holding his eyes steadily. Behind the wheel, Smooth kicked hard at the gas and raced for the gambler's apartment. If Joe Salters could come through with a logical explanation of the night's madness, this might prove to be Smooth's last call. He wanted to have a hand in the questioning. He must have! And he thundered along through the silent streets, sliding past cruising taxis with scant margin of safety and taking the turns on two wheels.

"The guy's a nut!" barked Salters. "Slow him down before he dumps us in a sewer."

"Relax," said Rudd. "He'll get us there in one piece. After that—it's up to you, Joe."

"What's it all about?"

"Suppose you guess."

"Me? I pass. There ain't no quarrel between us."

"No?" smiled Rudd. "Maybe Grippo was just bein' playful with that Tommy gun tonight. Maybe he didn't mean to be rough, eh?"

"This is news to me," said Salters. "When I left Spanish he told me you were sore about some cut junk—but he didn't say it was serious."

Smooth slid to a screaming stop before Rudd's apartment. He leaped from his seat and swung open the door.

"Unload, Joe," he said.

Salters watched him closely as he stepped from the cab. Yitz Cohen had taken Salters' gun and was standing quietly behind the gangster. Rudd walked quickly to the entrance and nodded for the rest to follow him.

It was a weird group that gathered about the Queen Anne desk in Rudd's library. The gambler seated himself and toyed with a few papers, much in the same manner as would a business executive about to open a conference. Salters dropped into an easy chair, lit a cigarette and tried to conceal his nervousness. But his hand trembled slightly as he held the match. Bright leaned against one wall, his narrow cheeks and dark eyes creating a curious likeness to that of a painting of Charles the First that hung in its heavy frame close to the gunman's head. Yitz Cohen was examining an armor, tapping the breastplate sharply with a fingernail and grinning.

"These babies knew their stuff," he said. "The original bullet proof vest—with extras."

Smooth stood so that he faced Salters, but was careful to keep his own face in the shadows. He alone knew that the man before him was not the only one on trial for his life. Cohen

and Bright were amused. Rudd was skeptical but inquisitive. Salters was puzzled and frightened. Smooth kept his fingers crossed.

"Why did Spanish send Grippo after me?" asked Rudd suddenly.

"He didn't," said Salters. "There's something screwy about all this. Spanish didn't want no quarrel with you, Rudd. That's on the level!"

"Then why is he beating up Rudd's men?" asked Smooth.

"What do you mean?" snapped Salters.

"I saw Grippo take a smack at Humpty tonight—a little after showbreak. Why?"

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" asked Rudd and reached for the phone.

IT had been a wild shot in the dark for Smooth and he regretted it instantly. He knew Rudd was dialing a number that would put him in touch with Humpty and he hoped the little runner would not go into too much detail as to the cause of Grippo's blow.

"It didn't seem important," he said. "But now it fits right in."

Rudd nodded and held his eyes squarely on Salters as he spoke into the phone.

"That you, Humpty? . . . Grippo hit you today? . . . He did, eh? . . . *Why?*"

Smooth's breath caught in his throat. The answer to that question would take Salters off the spot and at the same time moved him onto it. A single word about Dorothy would change the entire course of questioning.

Salters' chair was close to the desk. He was hunched forward, arms sprawled before him and one hand was toying with a brass, two-edged paper knife. He lifted the hilt, flipped it upward and caught the point between thumb and forefinger. The hilt swung like an inverted pendulum—moving slowly on a line with Rudd's chest.

Smooth made his move. He jumped toward Salters, crashed into him with lowered shoulder and knocked the knife from his hand. It spun in a short arc, twisting and wobbling, and landed against Rudd's upthrown arm. The force of Smooth's rush carried him against the desk and swept the phone from Rudd's hands.

He was up in an instant and his gun was covering Salters, who was crouching on the floor, staring at Smooth in amazement.

"What the hell!" he barked.

"Hold it," said Smooth, and turned to Rudd. "This guy is a whiz with a shive. You'd have got it in the throat in a minute."

"It was close enough," smiled Rudd, and looked ruefully at the ripped cloth of his coat sleeve. "Thanks, Smooth—that's twice in one night. It's getting to be a habit with you, saving my skin."

"The guy is out of his head!" yelled Salters. "I wasn't makin' a play with that shive."

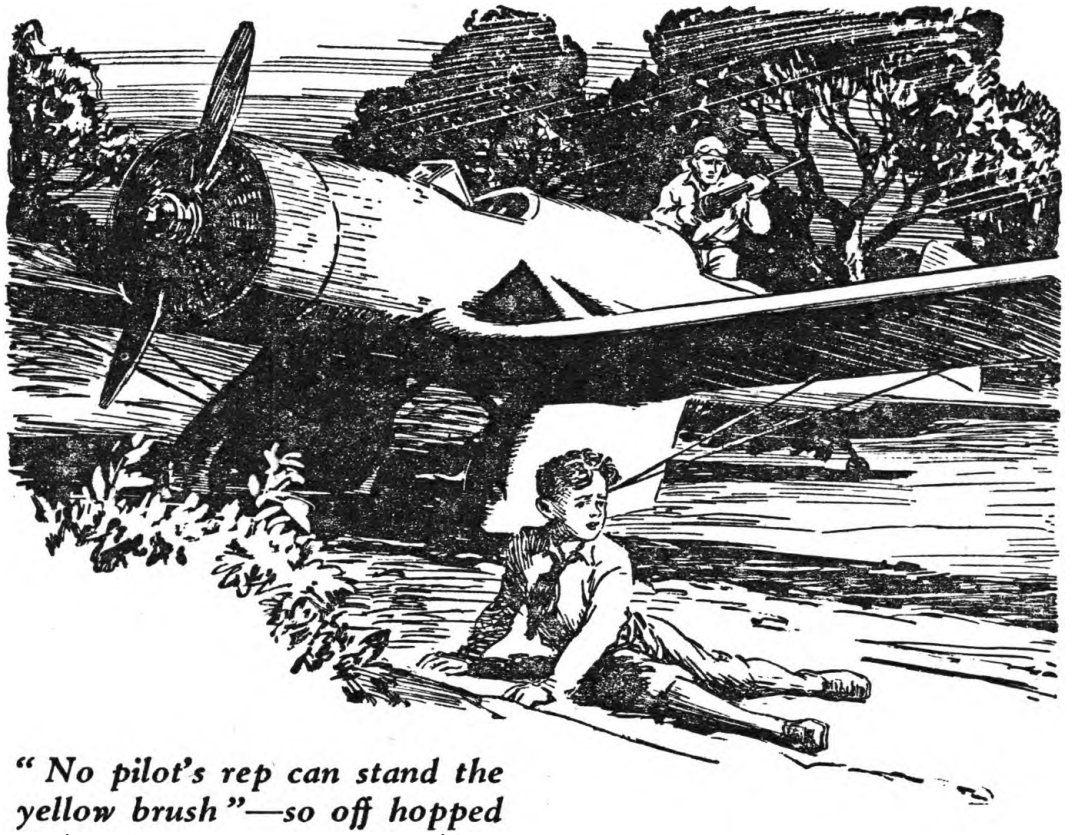
Rudd looked again at his torn coat sleeve and then nodded to Bright.

"Take him to the river," he said, "and show him all the pretty boats."

"No — no — you can't do that, Rudd!" howled Salters. "You've got me wrong—I ain't got anything against you! I wasn't goin' to do it. You can't—"

Rudd said nothing but gestured toward the door. Bright and Cohen prodded Salters along before them and Cohen saluted gravely as they went out.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



"No pilot's rep can stand the yellow brush"—so off hopped Whit Haines on a reckless flight from which there was no turning back

Novelette—Complete

Test Flight

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

CHAPTER I.

ANOTHER CHANCE.

I MUST have been dreaming the same old dream, because I woke up saying, "Keep your hands away from that stick, Drew! We're not turning back. We're going through to—"

But those freckled hands with red hair on them weren't Drew's. I looked up from them and saw the owner. I wasn't in any condition to see anyone. My mouth tasted as if the German army had marched through it wearing shoe-rags; yellow whiskers stubbed my chin; and inside my head someone was thumping on a Chinese gong.

McKenna quit shaking me, and finally I sat up in bed and reached for a

Whit let him have the wrench

cigarette. Inhaling, I took a second look at him and somehow I had a sudden feeling of suspense, of something important going to happen. The big Scot sat down on the edge of the bed and sniffed disapprovingly.

"I never did like a rooming house that specialized in corned beef and cabbage, Whit," he said.

"What do you want for six bucks a week," I asked, "roses and orchids?"

McKenna clucked sympathetically. "As bad as that?"

"As bad as that."

His eyes roved over me. "Ye've been drinking too much bad whiskey, lad." He paused, narrowed his eyes. "But I'm not one to blame ye." His head waggled. "A dirty deal ye got, Whit."

I tried to grin, but my mouth wouldn't lift. You forget how, after eating dirt for three years, or was it four? When you're down on the bottom time ceases to mean much. A lot of difference between the Whitney

Haines that McKenna was looking at now — frowzy, unshaved, broke and without a job — the Whitney Haines who was the fair-haired boy of aviation just a few years ago. Maybe you read about me; the newspapers couldn't print my picture often enough then. It was Lindbergh, Chamberlain and Whit Haines in those days of goofy flights.

That was right after I flew into the Hudson's Bay country and rescued the two Germans who cracked up on an east-to-west transatlantic hop. They were snow-blind and starved and quite mad from privation. That stunt kindled public interest and then, with the two daughters of a United States Senator aboard, I set down at Bennett without a landing wheel. Man, I had the world by the tail in those days and plenty of places to throw it.

Even my engagement to Mary Stark rated a picture and a half column. Not that I wanted this publicity, mind you. It just goes to show how you can be the idol of America one day and its chump the next.

Three transport lines were bidding for me to be chief pilot on their crack transcontinental runs. Now those same lines wouldn't let me inside a hangar.

Why? Surely you remember. About me and Major Ben Drew. Damn him, I'd like to take his slim legs and wind them in a bow-knot around his neck. You probably read about him, too. Plenty. He loved publicity. He was a war-time pilot all right, although I never met anybody that saw him shoot down a kraut. And he was only a lieutenant then, and he claimed to have been a major when he flew with Abd-el-Krim against the French. Nobody ever heard of him shooting down a Frog, but it just goes to show you how a little glamour and lying will build a reputation. You've seen his picture plenty of times, wearing that sea-blue uniform with the medals, the uniform of the Riff Flying Corps, he said it was, but I know he designed it himself.

Drew was a handsome bird, with deep dark eyes, olive skin and a silky mustache. The women went nuts about him. He climbed on publicity and stayed up on it. To him the day was lost when his picture wasn't in the paper.

Why I didn't see through him when he came with his New York-to-Moscow flight I'll never know. I was just a kid, I suppose, bewildered by being a public character, busy signing gasoline and oil testimonials, and helping make America air-conscious. At that, Drew's idea wasn't a bad one; in fact, it was good. And he could talk persuasively.

"It will give us the world's nonstop distance record," he told me, "and put us in line to make the first around-the-world record flight. It won't cost a cent. The Clearoil people will supply a Humpler low-wing job and the Newgas Corporation will furnish everything else, including expense money. With the testimonial stuff and lectures we ought to net twenty thousand each."

DREW didn't know navigation but I did; and being a kid, the idea hit me all of a heap. Why not? We were pioneers in those days and the far skies called long and strongly. At that we would have made it and I'd have been sitting pretty but for the two Russians, Sergei and Makenoff. They had the same idea of going to Moscow, and the newspapers built it into a race between us to see who'd make it first.

But I'm a stubborn bird, and not as

reckless as some. So when the news came Monday midnight that the Russians were going to take off at dawn I sat tight. I'd had a report from Kimball that said fog off Newfoundland and a bad pressure area mid-way to Ireland where we'd be sure to hit head winds and perhaps line squalls. I told Drew to let them go.

The reporters came and I told them the same. "We are not going to *attempt* this hop, we intend to *make* it," I said, "and therefore, we won't go until the air is right."

Looking back now, I think Drew only spoke to make a grandstand play. I know he amazed me. He said to the reporters, "You can announce that we will take off at dawn, too. Any dirt they can go through we can weather."

I said, "Skip that, fellows. I'm chief pilot and I'm telling you we don't go."

That should have ended it. But Drew looked hard at me and said, "You're scared to try it, Whit; then I'll make the flight solo."

That was a laugh. I started to walk out. Carney of the *Tribune,* who liked me, said, "Whit, as a friend I'm telling you to go. Your buzzum pal here has made a story if you don't go. And I'm telling you nobody's rep, even yours, can stand the yellow brush."

I'm stubborn, as I say, but Carney told me I'd be washed up in aviation if I backed out now. I knew the transport outfit was hiring my reputation for courage as much as my skill in flying. I wanted to stay in aviation. So what?

So we hopped off at dawn. And the flight was haywire from the start. Leaving Harbor Grace we bored into fog that weighed a pound to the square inch. The earth induction compass went out and I did an "office" job of flying. And just as Kimball had warned, we hit line squalls five hundred miles out. The first nearly tore the low-wing job to pieces. The second one was a sort of twister and we went spinning down three thousand feet until the foamy ocean was almost washing the trucks. I nearly lost control. And Major Ben Drew, the fearless, glamorous hero of the wars, lost his nerve.

I'll never forget his olive face, bleached green, twisted by a fear that reached his soul. His mouth open, tongue part-way between his lips. His eyes wide with the fear of death as he looked at the tremendous wind-swept rollers reaching up for us. A plane wouldn't live two minutes in that stuff; nor a man either, for the spray would drown him before he could paddle a stroke.

"We can't make it," he screamed. "We'll never get through. Turn back."

I had righted the crate and was trying to get some air under us. "Turn back hell!" I called. "It's as easy here to go on to Ireland as it is to go back." We were five hundred and eighty miles off Harbor Grace by my reckoning.

BUT when a man's nerves go, he can't reason; he can't even think.

I climbed the ship three thousand feet and tried to pick up the course. I should have been watching Major Ben Drew. He slugged me with a Stillson wrench and I went out like a light.

We were over land when I recovered from that crack. Liquor taste in my mouth. Drew, livid and screaming we were lost. I shut his mouth with a right hook and took the stick. More by luck than by management I got oriented over Maine and brought the crate into Bennett.

You probably got the newspaper version of what followed. The reporters were there when I cut the switch and Drew stepped out first. I'll never forget his words.

"I'm sorry to report, gentlemen," he said, "that we failed. Failed, I regret to say, because Whitney Haines insisted on turning back. He forced me to return when we could have gone through."

Probably I would have killed him if the two cops and the reporter hadn't pulled me off. I had sunk my fingers out of sight in his throat. That didn't help matters. Neither did the reporters who had remembered my objections when Drew pulled his grandstand play. I told the truth and showed the bump on my head. Carney believed me. But the public believed Drew. A week later I couldn't get a job piloting a wheelbarrow. The distance between the ceiling and the bottom isn't far when you are side-slipping.

Mary Stark married some guy, and didn't speak to me the night I was waxed in Moriarty's. She loved my reputation and left when it did. At that I owe her a favor; she made me hate women and keep away from them.

I came out of a haze of memory to find McKenna staring sympathetically at me. "How'd you find me here?" I asked.

McKenna said, "I've spent a week tracing you. Don't you read the newspapers?"

"They cost three cents," I told him.

McKenna pulled out a worn pocketbook and handed me fifty dollars. "Get a shave, some clothes and five or six meals, lad," he said, "because you're leaving for California at seven o'clock in the morning."

Now, I knew something big was up, because McKenna thinks as much of fifty dollars as I do of my right eye. But I took the money, jumped out of bed and began to souse my head and shoulders in the wash basin.

"What for?" I asked.

"For a thousand dollars and a new reputation for you," he rejoined, "and maybe a million for me if you win."

"Make it plainer, Mac."

"Haven't you read about the government's desire to have developed a small, safe plane to sell for two thousand dollars or less?"

"Sure," I said, toweling myself, "forty miles to the gallon. A job that won't spin. Has to have wing flaps for a thirty-five-mile-an-hour landing speed, and make a hundred cruising. The Ford of the air. Why?"

"I've such a crate, Whit," said McKenna solemnly.

I WASN'T astonished particularly, because before the big wind of 1929 McKenna had been manufacturing a good high-wing job and I had done some testing for him. The crash took his bankroll but now, apparently, he had another, and being a mechanical wizard he also had a plane.

"And so?" I said.

"Whit, do you know Anson P. Hedges?"

"Sure, the automobile manufacturer! He's got all the money in the world except this fifty dollars."

"He wants to make airplanes," said McKenna, "and he's looking for a design that will go into mass production. He likes publicity himself, and he wants publicity for the plane — a big build-up. He's got three models besides mine under consideration and he's organizing a transcontinental hop for them—a test as well as speed flight. And the ship that has the best speed,

the durability, and the economy of operation is the one he's going to take over and produce."

I saw the possibilities. Aviation stunts with a purpose behind them still make page one. The race would grab public attention and hold it until the finish. And Hedges later would cash in on the build-up. And on the royalties McKenna could buy his ancestral castle in Scotland.

"Swell idea," I said. "But—"

"Unofficially the flight has the government's approval," McKenna told me, "and if you can put my Red Bird into Burbank a winner—"

"But I'm poison to the public and the press," I cut in. "Why don't you get a pilot with a rep? If your crate's got the speed and the economy I know a dozen men—"

"So do I," interjected McKenna, "but I've got to have one I can trust. I want to be sure my pilot can't be bought."

"Bought?"

"Aye, lad, bought. The Airfoil Corporation have a crate in the contest. They want to win—and they wouldn't stop at anything to do it." He looked at me significantly. Then: "They've hired Major Drew to fly their bus."

I came straight up from tying my shoe laces. "Ben Drew!" I said. Then I laughed. "I get it, Mac. Hated rivals meet in cross country hop. All right. I'd fly that crate for nothing to beat—but wait a minute," I broke off, "Drew would hog all the publicity and you wouldn't get a square shake."

"I've arranged for that," said McKenna gravely. "Kathryn Marsh and—"

"Kathryn Marsh!" I cried; "that publicity nut!" I laughed again. "The lone female eagle who soars from column to column and page to page. I admit she has a swell figure and a pretty face, but I'll never believe she can fly until I see her."

"She can and she will," said McKenna sharply. "Let me finish. It's Hedges' idea to show that this plane will be a family crate suitable for three people, a man and his wife and a child. So Kathryn Marsh goes along, and I've hired David Allison, seven-year-old movie actor, to act as the son."

"Man!" I cried. I laughed with real mirth. "A girl and a kid to ferry to Burbank! Me!

"Mac," I said, "it's a natural. Everybody's going to forget the NRA watching that circus. But you don't need me."

"I do," cried McKenna. "I need a man in that cabin I can trust. A man who can make repairs—and ye always were a wizard on a motor, Whit. Kathryn Marsh can take the ship off for the movies, but it's you I'm banking on. And, lad, a thousand dollars is a lot of money! Think of beating Drew! He'd rob a cripple of his crutches."

I nodded. I thought of food, clothes, a new chance—yes, and revenge, too!

"Okay!" I said, finally. "Lead me to this hurdy-gurdy."

CHAPTER II.

"THEY'RE OFF!"

IT was there, all of it, the glamour, excitement, confusion, hero worship. The thrill of a flying field when a big event is under way. The intoxication of big crowds. The exploding flashes of photographers; the reporters with cards in their hats. The excited cries of "There he is!" "There she is!" The great vast hurdy-gurdy

that surrounds those who are kings of public favor.

It used to make me red of face and bright of eye. But not now. I couldn't forget that the crowd drops you like a hot brick when it's tired of you and never looks for the pieces. All this ballyhoo left me cold.

Even if I could have forgotten the past the crowd wouldn't have let me. As the motorcycle policemen made a way through the throng for the open car in which I was riding I heard, "Him? Whitney Haines! Sure, he got out over the nasty ocean and the yellow came up in his back."

McKenna felt me get rigid. He pressed my arm and said, "Keep your chin up, lad, they'll be cheering again when you come back."

"A hell of a lot I care," I said. But that wasn't true. Every human being values good opinion of people. It's only natural.

I was glad to climb down beside the Red Bird. She was a husky high-wing job and you knew by looking at her that in anything short of a storm she could almost fly herself. Twin bracing to the single wing made her fuselage hang like a balanced weight. All metal she was, with a seventy-horsepower motor, wheel pants and brakes and air-flaps. She was streamlined as only McKenna knows how. I noticed the unusually large door in the cabin.

"My own idea," said McKenna. "The trouble with most cabin jobs is if anything *does* happen, it's the devil's own job to bail out. You'll all carry chutes. And on the instrument board is a lever that opens the door wide and back. When you dive out the wind pressure against the door throws the ship to the left, so you can't get hit by the tail assembly."

We went on across the concrete with McKenna telling me that Drew's Avro job—black and chromium crate—was the one to beat. The others, he said, couldn't take it. I learned that it was a three-stop hop. Indianapolis, Wichita, Winslow and the end at Burbank. We could fly only in daylight as if we were a family on tour. Gas tanks were sealed at the take-off and only the checkers at the official stops could break and fill. The same went for oil, and we had to be officially started and reported down.

The first ship in won, but these points could be discounted by excess gas consumption, forced landings or repairs.

I loved the Red Bird immediately. She was going to take me back into the air, and I knew then that most of my misery lay in the fact that I had been grounded. Give me a ship, the sweet drone of the motor—and they could have all the rest. My heart began to pound for the first time.

It slowed down plenty a moment later when McKenna was introducing me to Kathryn Marsh—Lady Kay to you. She was prettier than her pictures; lots of red curly hair and long, greenish gray eyes and an entrancing red mouth. Her glance met mine and I knew what she was thinking.

"So you're the mechanic," she said. "Just to get the record straight, I'm in charge—and we don't turn back if it storms."

I TURNED to Mac. "A little more of that and I'll spank some manners into her."

Mac frowned. "No quarreling," he said sharply. "And if it comes to a decision Whit makes it."

"I apologize for the remark," she said, flushing. "But I wish you'd get some one else, McKenna."

"He can't and he won't," I said. "You and I aren't going to get along. I suggest we keep our mouths shut except in line of business."

"With pleasure," she said.

From around my knees some place a voice piped up. "Aw, you don't look like an aviator."

I looked down at a skinny pink-cheeked boy who wore helmet, goggles and bedford cord breeches and fifty dollar bench-made boots. He was scowling at me.

"This," I sighed, "is little Davey, I suppose. The idol of one hundred and twenty million people. Davey, does your father ever spank you?"

"Naw, he don't dare. I wouldn't act. Say, I thought there'd be an aviator to teach me how to fly."

"I won't teach you how to fly but it's ten to one I teach you how to say sir."

"Yair?" Davey sniffed. "I'll get Kay to show me how to fly."

"She'll have to learn how herself first," I said.

Kathryn, in her jodhpurs and leather coat open to show a white silk blouse, flushed and stared coldly at me.

"Yair," said Davey, "I bet she—"

Before he could say any more his press agents descended en masse and took him away to the cameramen. I strolled off to look over Ben Drew's crate. It was husky, all right, but it didn't have the lines, and I figured then that the Red Bird wide open could take it. At cruising speed I wasn't so sure. It would be a race without doubt.

Drew was carrying two passengers, two of the most beautiful showgirls on Broadway. While I stood there he arrived with them, pursued by reporters and cameramen.

He was still wearing the sea-blue uniform and smiling for the benefit of the cameramen. He stared at me, eyes wide. Suddenly he smiled and rushed at me.

"Whit Haines!" he said. "I didn't know until just now that we were to race against each other."

I merely stared. His smile became forced. Finally he said in his persuasive voice, "After all, Whit, we can still be friends."

It was a job to keep from punching him. I knew he was lying. He hated me with a hatred that only a man can feel toward someone who has seen his true colors exposed. I'd seen Drew yellow with fear, and he hated me for it. He had done me a wrong, and he hated me for that. But for the cameras he could smile, hold out his hand. A grandstander always.

"Surely we can be friends — or friendly competitors," he repeated.

"Why?" I asked.

He frowned and shrugged. "Well," he said, "if you feel that way about it, I—"

"That's the way I feel," I said, "so keep away from me." I walked away.

A HAND tapped me and I turned to see Carney of the *Tribune*.

"It's a honey of a story," he chuckled. "Whit Haines, former ace pilot, stages comeback in mad race against enemy, Ben Drew. McKenna must have had an inspiration to think of dragging you out of mothballs."

"Or brainstorm," I growled.

"They're both the same, aren't they?" Carney grinned. Then the grin faded. "Kid, a little tip. There's big dough behind this race, and dirty work at the crossroads or I'm a liar. Watch Kathryn Marsh."

"Why?" I was startled.

"She's been mooning around with

Ben Drew, and a certain famous newspaper columnist says they are 'that way' about each other. She might like to have him win. See?"

"Yes, I see," I said. "And thanks."

I went back to where McKenna was standing. He gave me a thin roll of money. "Everything's paid for on the way," he said, "this is for emergencies. Only don't have them." He looked a little pale, drawn, and I could feel his nervous tension. "Three to beat, Whit, and I'm banking on you. The bankroll is in the Red Bird. If we don't get Hedges' contract I'm sunk."

I had meant to say something about Kay Marsh but a look at him told that he had troubles of his own. I hit him gently on the arm.

"I'll keep her winging," I said. We shook hands silently.

I waited there, alone, forgotten, looking like one of the crowd in my new blue serge suit. The final confusion before the take-off began. Yells. Cops clearing a way. Four trim ships drawn up on the line to conform to Hedges' silly idea of a simultaneous take-off to stimulate the race idea.

I didn't like it but publicity rules such events. The eternal drum-beating that sells things in this country and makes and breaks popular fancies. At that, Mac got his share with his movie tie-up. We were the only ship to carry a kid and little Davey Allison stole plenty of footage.

I saw one thing, those last exciting minutes. Kathryn Marsh, at the instigation of the American newsreel cameraman, posed with Major Ben Drew, and he bent to kiss her. She hesitated for a second, and then while everybody smiled and chuckled and applauded he kissed her. She'd have stood on her head for a movie break.

She arrived briskly and took the left-hand seat, the chief pilot's seat. Davey sat between us. Inside, the Red Bird was a model of economy and comfort. Room for sixty pounds of baggage in the rear of the fuselage. The seat was almost six feet wide, and by releasing a clamp the backs could be let down to make a sizeably wide bed in case of an emergency landing.

There were two sets of rudder pedals, and the joystick was a U-shaped fixture on a central control so that either member of the family could take over the controls. The instruments were regulation: a turn and bank indicator, a climbometer, oil pressure, gas gauge, altimeter and air speed indicator and mounted against the windshield was a first class compass.

I WAS loving the Red Bird more and more as the motor warmed, a nice solid seventy horsepower in a five cylinder air-cooled assembly. Cheap to keep up, and developing plenty of power for the piston displacement.

"I'm taking off," Kay said and clamped slender fingers on the joystick. I didn't say anything. I was watching Ben Drew.

Davey said fretfully, "Let's get going."

I still watched Drew. The Red Bird's motor was warmly alive, ticking on a nicely-balanced prop. Kay's fingers poised over the throttle.

The starter was yelling, "Fifty-eight—fifty-nine—sixty—Go!"

The gun banged and Kay's fingers cracked the throttle. I was afraid she'd crack it fast and flood the motor but she didn't, and the prop vanished into a white blur and we began to move. I still watched Drew.

The way McKenna had soundproofed that cabin was marvelous.

You heard the underlying drone the way you'd hear the roar of a truck or a subway, but you could hear anyone speak plainly.

Kay got the tail up and we began to make knots. It was a wide concrete take-off and we were heading southwest into the wind. The ship was so beautifully balanced that she'd take herself off. But I saw Kay's hand tighten on the stick. She was apparently going to do a neat climbing turn. I saw Drew, too, the first ship on our left, and he already had a foot of air under his wheels.

Suddenly I said to Kay, "Keep her down."

"Shut up," she cried, "I'm doing this," and started to ease the stick back.

"You fool," I yelled, grabbed the duplicate stick in front of me and pushed it forward. She pulled against me.

"Keep the nose down," I called.

She was pale with fury. She reached over and struck me in the face as hard as she could. The next instant it felt as if the Red Bird had hit a stone wall. Drew's job was ahead and his propeller blast was beating against us. The Red Bird rocked against the controls, almost dusted a wing. Then Drew pulled on up in a climbing turn and we picked up speed. The Red Bird took herself off.

With the hangar buildings a hundred feet down, I tapped Kay's shoulder. "Okay, take her," I said.

My words broke her reserve. "You fool!" she cried. "You insufferable idiot! You might have gotten us killed."

I was pale, I know, for if we had had air under our wheels Drew's deliberate propeller wash would have cracked us up.

"Better I should kill you than Drew," I said. "For that attempt to wash us out I am going to punch him on sight."

I stared at her, realizing how little she really knew of flying. Even now, she couldn't visualize what would have happened if she had hung the Red Bird by one wing in a climbing turn and that hurricane hit her.

"If you ever touch my stick again," she blazed, "I'll use a wrench on your stupid head."

"I'll kick him in the shins, Kay, if you'll let me steer the plane," said Davey.

I shut up and lit a cigarette. This, I told myself, was going to be a madhouse.

CHAPTER III.

TROUBLE IN INDIANAPOLIS.

I BANKED the Red Bird around the Circle in Indianapolis at about four-thirty and we set down on Mars Field some five minutes later. There were reporters from the *Star,* and the *News* and the *Times,* and photographers and the usual line-up of talky newsreel cameramen. The checker broke the seals on the tank, and I waited anxiously to find out how much we had used. The tank took exactly nineteen and a half gallons. By airline it's seven hundred and eighty miles from Bennett to Mars. Averaging forty miles to the gallon with only slight head winds and a little dirt over the Alleghanies around Wheeling. And only two quarts of oil. I was ready to sing. I had come into Mars with wing brakes at forty miles an hour and she didn't run fifty yards after the tail skid hit.

I knew now definitely that speed was going to win this race and contract. I

had a tractor pull the Red Bird down by the repair hangar. Arrangements had been made for us to stay at the Lincoln Hotel on Washington Street, and after the reporters had left Kathryn said coldly, "Davey's tired and so am I. Let's go to the hotel."

"Go ahead," I told her. "I'm sleeping in the bus."

Her eyebrows went up. Davey said, "Aw, I wanted you to read me a story. You've got to. My chauffeur always does when we're on trips."

Kathryn said, "That's nonsense! Nothing can happen to the plane here."

"Nothing is going to happen," I said.

She was going to say something but a sob sister from the *Star* got her and Davey and they went off. I watched them for a moment and saw a tall, red-headed young man stop and speak to her for a moment. She said something and he touched his helmet and walked with a slight stagger to where I stood putting lead seals on the engine cone fastener.

"Nice bus," he offered. "Drew is up a full half hour in flying time on you, and he averaged forty-two miles to the gallon."

I didn't answer. He smelled of Scotch whiskey of which he'd had plenty and he jerked a flask out of his pocket and extended it. "I'm Brick Hallet. I'm ferrying a ship through to Burbank."

He was lying. No ferry pilot could be as loaded as he was and get away with it. And no ferry pilot ever wore a two hundred dollar leather coat, and fifty dollar goggles. I waved the drink aside. I wondered who he was; one of Drew's men, likely. They'd probably been told I had become a souse and thought I'd start again. I didn't like the news he brought and I didn't like him, for all his freckles and red hair and grin.

He said, "Give me Kay's suitcase. I'm taking her and the kid to the hotel."

"On a honeymoon?" I asked.

He straightened up and put away the flask.

"Do you want a poke in the jaw?" he said.

"You won't do it," I told him, "but I take back the remark."

He got the suitcase. He looked hard at me. "Kay's all right, you hear me? She's got plenty on the ball."

"Tell it to her," I said. "She loves it."

I thought he was going to make something of it. But finally he shrugged and went away.

I sent a negro porter for hamburgers, a cardboard container of coffee, and a slab of apple pie, and climbed into the crate to eat it. The interior still smelled sweetly of the delicate perfume Kay used. It reminded me how pretty she was. I got to thinking about her. She'd be sweet if it weren't for this publicity craze of hers. I began to realize how slim and lovely she was to look at, to sit by. "Bushwah!" I muttered. "Carney tipped her, and she and this Hallet are up to something."

I'd finished the chow and was sucking on a cigarette when a short, stout man opened the cabin door. "You Whitney Haines?" he asked.

"Yes."

HE flashed a small gold shield in the palm of his hand. "I'm Corcoran of the D. of J. Listen, where's that kid, Davey Allison?"

I told him the Lincoln Hotel. Corcoran grumbled, "You guys just ask for it, taking a kid like that across the country just for a press agent stunt."

"Right," I said, "but what are we asking for?"

"We got a tip that an attempt might be made to snatch the kid."

I made a mental note to wire McKenna and find out if we were disqualified in case the original three didn't arrive with the crate in Burbank.

"Maybe Superior Pictures just put out the tip to get more publicity for the kid," I said.

"Maybe! That goofy outfit would do anything to make the papers." Corcoran put a small pinch of snuff between his upper lip and his teeth. "But we're to watch the kid. I'm tipping you so that if you're forced down you can wire our agents, who will come out."

I nodded. "Got any suspicions as to who might try it if it's on the level?"

"We're looking for Red Mercer. An aviator. Used to run narcotics in from Canada. He stole a plane from Pittsburgh. That's why we're playing safe."

He went off to the hotel and I sat thinking. Red Mercer! Brick Hallet had red hair, too. Finally I climbed out of the cabin and looked the field over. Mars Field is a big one, and it's on the transcontinental and north and south runs, and planes are coming and going every hour or so except from midnight until about five o'clock. There were police there all night. Always someone around even if this spot I'd picked to park for the night was a little far away from the main buildings.

I got the negro to watch the ship and went to the TWA building and called Kathryn at the hotel.

Her voice was chilly. I said, "Buy four blankets and bring yourself and the kid to the field. You can sleep in the cabin."

"Why?" she wanted to know.

"Because it's safer. There's a tip out that somebody will try to kidnap Davey."

"Nonsense! It's ridiculous, and anyway, the front seat is no place to sleep."

"I'm telling you to come," I said.

"No," she said, "if you're so worried, come here."

She laughed hard and the wire clicked. I shrugged. No matter what happened I would not leave the ship. Too many things could happen to it. I sent a telegram to Mac and went back to the crate. Half-way there I saw someone talking to the negro and began to run. Major Drew turned around as I came up.

"I thought I told you to stay out of my life," I said.

He smiled jauntily. "Don't lose your head, Whit," he said. "I'm here to do you a favor."

I decided to draw him out. "Yes? What?"

"Good, that's the way to talk," he said eagerly. "Now, listen, Whit, the Avro people have got a lot of money sunk into that chromium job — and they're willing to sink more to make sure it wins the contract."

"How much?"

"How much are you getting to fly McKenna's bus?"

"A thousand dollars," I told him.

"Then if we offered you five thousand to make a forced landing somewhere you could make some real money, get your feet back on the ground."

"So I could," I said. "Are your feet on the ground?"

"Yes. And—"

IF I do say so myself it was a neat punch. A right hook that started at the hip and the timing was perfect. The thud of it, combined with

the click of his teeth as they knocked together at the impact, made a small explosion of sound. He went backward so hard he lit on his shoulders, his feet up.

"They're not on the ground now," I said. "That's the poke I owe you for trying to crack us up in New York. Now, get up and take the rest of it."

It's funny how a crowd can gather, out of nowhere when trouble starts. When I came down the field from the dispatcher's office I hadn't seen anyone. And now, after I hit Drew the second time and we clinched there were fifty people around. They grabbed us, pulled us apart. Drew was pale with fury. "He attacked me," he yelled, "struck me when I wasn't looking."

"Then tell them to let go and we'll finish it," I said.

"You always were yellow," he cried.

I saw that there was a reporter present for whose benefit this was said. No use to charge he had tried to bribe me. He was the idol and I was the chump. I knew that the fight would be page one in the morning and might hurt McKenna. I was sorry I had lost my temper. The reporter took Drew away and the crowd dispersed. By this time it was nearly nine o'clock.

I let down the seat backs and got the two blankets from the fuselage locker. I folded one into a pillow and covered myself with the other and lay there in the darkness of the cabin smoking a cigarette. Strings of crimson lights glowed along the horizon marking the position of dangerous electric light wires. Every so often the weird glow of floodlights lit the field and I heard the wind-yammer of a plane sliding in, or the drumming roar of a two-motored job taking off.

I did a lot of thinking and was restless and sleep wouldn't come. I was thinking about Kay and Davey, Hallet and Red Mercer, trying to foresee what might happen. Finally I must have dozed off.

I woke up suddenly. The hackles on my neck rose, my heart chilled and thumped hard and swiftly. I grabbed the wrench and stared out into the night. The red lights along the dangerous wires glowed like a string of illuminated rubies. The field itself was dark except for a few lights in the administration building.

I listened, but couldn't hear anything. Yet something had wakened me. I swung my legs around and silently opened the cabin door. Still no sound. I lowered myself to the gravel. As I crouched there a sound came that was familiar, the sound that had doubtless awakened me.

From the joystick in the cabin, cables ran to the tail assembly fins and to the ailerons. It was a hollow sound they make in sliding in their grooves that I now heard. I peered along the fuselage. Dimly I made out a crouching figure, saw something glitter under the starlight.

I GRIPPED the wrench and tried to spring silently. But gravel crunched under my feet and the man—it was a man—turned and dodged the blow I aimed at his head. It raked his front and he gave an exclamation of pain and something struck me a stunning blow alongside the head. I went down under the impact, felt hot blood coursing down my neck.

But I managed to grab his coat as I fell and hung on tightly. He struck me again. Tried to jerk away, cursing. I dragged him toward me. My wrench thudded in his stomach and a breath of air exploded from his lungs. Using the same leverage, I pulled my-

self upright and swung the wrench again. His hand stopped it, gripping my wrist. We whirled there, fighting savagely, and finally he tripped me and we both went down to the gravel. I turned in the fall and landed on top.

He was a man either of tremendous natural strength or a man made desperate and strong by fear. I had hold of a wildcat. I stopped three punches with my cheek before I tucked my head down. I lost advantage then, and he gave a terrific jerk and got to his knees. He swung the implement he was carrying and it battered my shoulder. But I still clung to his coat and as he pulled upright, I sprang myself, and the impetus of both pulls got me to my knees and then upright.

I battered at him with fist and wrench. The third time my fist banged on his jaw he groaned and collapsed to his knees. I got his weapon away from him and saw that it was a powerful pair of wire nippers with handles a foot long. It could have sliced through inch-steel cable. The fact put me in a murderous mood.

He had been attempting to cut my control cables. Either cut them all the way through, which would have held me up a half day putting in new ones, or cut them only part way so that a heavy jerk in bad air would have broken them and left me without control. That meant a bail-out, crack-up and finish of the race.

I jerked him upright. It was too dark to clearly see his face.

"Who paid you for this?" I asked.

He merely groaned. I slapped his face until he whined and shrank away from me. "Come on," I said, "who paid for this?"

"Don't hit me," he whimpered. "Geez, I just—" He tried to wrench loose. I slapped him plenty again.

"I can give you as much as you can take," I said. "Start talking."

"Oh!" he whined, "my face. It was just—a guy gave me a hundred if I'd—"

"What man?"

"His name's Drew. He—" The mention of Ben Drew's name must have startled me despite the fact that somehow I had expected it. And, too, no man can apply his full strength steadily. His muscles tire and he has to relax to renew the grip. Maybe this man felt my grip weaken. Anyway, he gave a jerk then, quickly drove his head against my chin and when I staggered back he tore loose and ran off into the darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

FORCED LANDING.

I DIDN'T chase him. How did I know there wasn't another man waiting to sabotage the ship? I heard his feet crunch on the gravel as he made for the road that leads to the speedway. But I stayed right there where the cops found me.

I got out a flashlight. When the two policemen arrived I told them what had happened. I didn't give them a very good description. It was dark and darkness distorts appearances. But I told them to look for a man six feet tall and fairly well built.

"He'll have two black eyes," I said. "And see if you can find a man named Brick Hallet and look him over."

Examining the control cables I saw I had been just in time. You could see the marks where the clippers had bitten down. But only two strands of the woven wire cable were hurt, and I wound these with steel thread, taped them and greased the slots good so the

bump my patch made wouldn't stick.

The cops came back in about an hour and said they hadn't found anybody. They wanted to know where to find Brick Hallet. I told them and, after they departed, tried to rest.

But I didn't sleep any more that night. I smoked two packages of cigarettes and thought about a lot of things, most of them unpleasant.

Kay and Davey arrived at half-past six while I was eating a plate of cold ham and eggs and drinking the world's worst coffee. Davey was complaining.

"I'm tired and I don't want to go on unless I can steer the plane."

"You'll go on and like it," I said. "And let's hear no more beefing."

"What's beefing?" he asked.

"Being a poor sport," I told him.

Kay saw the bruises on my face and the cut on the temple. "Why, you're hurt," she said. "What happened?"

"I got dreaming and fell out of the cabin."

While she was there I went up to the administration building and washed up. The two cops said they hadn't discovered any clues, and hadn't found Hallet. The weather man came out with the last bulletin.

"Fair and cloudless," he said, "with a north to northwest wind of about twenty miles. But there was a heavy dust storm last night over eastern Colorado and Kansas and Oklahoma. You may have bad visibility."

I didn't like that. Dust can get into your motor and score the cylinders and wreck a good engine. I had been using medicated gauze on my cut, so I got some more of it and stopped at the TWA repair hangar and bought some fine copper mesh. Putting the gauze between two plates of the mesh I made a filter that would help some and bound it over the intake on the carburetor. By the time this was done the other ships were on the line and it was almost the minute for the signal gun. I had the crate warmed up, and taxied to the line.

More flashlights and cameramen, more statements, and this time sob sisters to moon over brave 'ittle Davey, the ducky darling, and compliment Kay as the raving beauty aviatrix of the universe. I was just something to be gazed at curiously. I saw the G man, Corcoran, but he merely waved and didn't come up.

Major Ben Drew was ogling a couple of local girls and smiling whitely for the cameras. I walked over to him just as he was making a statement into the newsreel mike. He was saying something about fine sportsmanship in racing.

"Tell them," I said, "that the man you paid to murder us by cutting the control cable failed. He told me your name, though."

He sucked in his breath, caught at his lip with his teeth, and his eyes were startled — and frightened. He recovered instantly.

"Whit Haines, the practical joker!" he managed to grin mirthlessly.

How did I keep from slugging him? I don't know. Just a wish not to ruin McKenna by starting a fight in front of the movie cameras. I kept control of myself and said, "Next time, come yourself, and I'll see they pat you on the chest with a shovel."

KAY took the controls for the benefit of the movies. Her window was down so that they could shoot her profile and red hair as we went down the field. I said, "Keep the nose down until Drew is clear."

"You don't have to insult Major Drew because you hate him," she

flashed. " That was an accident in New York."

" You couldn't insult that bird, and it wasn't an accident. Keep the nose down until I tell you to let her take off."

But Drew knew twice wouldn't be an accident. He held his course and Kay climbed the ship, banked over the speedway and headed straight for Terre Haute. Davey didn't look so spoiled this morning. More wistful.

He finally said, " Whit, if I never beef, will you let me fly the plane once?"

" Yes, but you're too tired now."

" I know. But hold me and I'll sleep and get caught up."

I peeked at the compass and took the lad in my arms. He cradled down with his left arm around my neck. It gave me a queer feeling. I'd disliked him as a spoiled brat but he didn't seem spoiled now. He said drowsily, " I like you, Whit, even if you don't look like an aviator."

Kay said, " He complained all night. But you seem to have a way — with children."

I didn't reply but I felt warm inside, and the day seemed more cheerful.

The Wabash River slid under us, a muddy crooked snake of a stream, and we droned over southern Illinois. The motor was purring like a cat, and I dozed for a while myself. I woke up to catch Kay glancing at me. She looked pretty and soft, and she had no make-up on except some lip rouge.

I spoke what I had been dreaming. " What do you want to marry an all-time, all-American heel like Drew for?"

" Who I marry is my business."

" Sure. Skip it. By the way, who's Brick Hallet?"

" A friend. Why?"

" Tell him to stay away from my door."

She didn't say anything for a while but she was mad; I could see it in the way she gripped the stick. After a while she said, " How did you hurt yourself? Really?"

" Your friend Drew sent a lad around to snip our tail controls."

" I don't believe it."

" You wouldn't."

That ended that. I sat there, cuddling the kid, and thinking. It was too early to get tense about the race. What if Drew was up on me a half hour? And up on gas? We weren't half-way there yet, and there was the worst of the trip ahead. Mountains, and dust storms. And flying would count some now. I kept an eye cocked on the compass and made Kay shift a degree to allow for wind drift. I wanted to fly an air-line and save miles.

OVER Booneville, Missouri, we saw the dust cloud. Thin here, just a pale sort of a fog, gleaming yellowish-brown. But it did things to the sun and air. Made the air a weird saffron color as if the end of the world had come. And the sun got to be just a round orange ball that you could look at without squinting.

We had the windows closed, but dust began to settle over us. In face g r o o v e s and in clothes wrinkles. Around Davey's mouth and nose a brownish stain formed and I guess I had it myself. I put a clean handkerchief over his face.

It woke him up. It was after noon and I gave him two peanut butter sandwiches and cracked a pint of grade A milk. " I don't like peanut butter sandwiches," he said.

" You do from now on," I said.

"Is it beefing to say I won't eat them?"

He had me there. I said, "Davey, when you're hungry and need food to get strong and something is good for you, you eat it. That's the way you learn to like things."

He ate quietly and Kay and I got away with a bottle of tomato juice each, two cold chicken sandwiches and an apple. The dust storm was getting thicker. I took the controls and climbed the crate to ten thousand, but the sun looked just as weird and I bet that cloud went up twenty-five thousand. There was nothing to do but fly dead reckoning and pray. So far the engine droned like a coffee grinder.

We began to cough and our voices got hoarse. Davey wanted to fret, but when I told him this was what aviators had to endure he kept quiet. And finally, gesturing to Kay to hold the dupe control I let him handle the stick. It kept his mind off the dust and cough. The dust got so thick we squirmed. It felt dry and dirty against the skin. We had to start the windshield wiper, and I began to worry about the motor. This was fine stuff and no filter could keep it out. My only consolation was that none of the other competitors was any better. Maybe not so good unless they put a filter on.

It was Kay who said suddenly, "Whit, we're being followed."

We were so startled that I guess neither of us noticed she'd used my first name. She pointed back off the port flipper and I could just make out in the dust the silhouette of a ship flying about a hundred feet above us and at least that close.

Instantly my suspicions of her were aroused. "It's probably your boy friend, Brick," I said.

"Don't be an idiot. He's flying a Stamson low-wing and that's a Lockler."

It was a Lockler all right, but she could be lying. Anyway, there wasn't anything I could do, because that Lockler could make one-eighty or better and the tops on the Red Bird was a hundred and ten and I was holding her to a hundred to save gas. I thought of what Corcoran had said. Kidnaping! They could wing whip us, put the slip stream on us and slap the Red Bird out of the sky.

Apparently that was not their intention, for at the end of an hour they held the same relative position. I ceased to worry about them; the dust was getting worse. The later it got the yellower the air became. A blackish yellow, not quite orange. Visibility was zero. The Lockler couldn't be seen any more. I started watching the clock. If the engine held out we might—

The engine stopped at four-twenty. Just quit firing. No start and stop or backfiring to indicate lack of gas. Just the sudden silence that comes when the plugs aren't firing and exploding the mixture. Kay was holding Davey. I saw the blood drain from her cheeks. Her eyes asked a million questions all at once.

"Ignition trouble," I said, trying to make my voice light. "We'll have to set down."

"I'm glad," said Davey. "I feel dirty."

I nosed the crate down to keep the drop thrashing, hoping the engine might pick up. But it didn't. Visibility was still zero. Unless it was better below I'd have to come in blind. And while they'll tell you Kansas is flatter than home-made biscuits, there's plenty of grief if you can't see. Sunken roads, fences, and new-tilled land where you can nose over. Particular-

ly when you've got to set down dead-stick.

Any idiot will tell you what that hell is, sliding down through thick veils of yellow opaqueness, watching your altimeter, wondering how big an error it has, thinking that if you level off too soon you slip or pancake; thinking if you don't level off in time, of the hole you'll make. I had that feeling; I was sweating and the grime was running down my face.

I glanced once over at Davey, and he coughed and grinned. No fear! I knew then you have to *learn* to be afraid of things just as you have to learn to walk. I liked his grin. He and I became friends in that moment.

"I can bail out with him," Kay said quietly.

I shook my head. I didn't trust her nerve on the ring.

CHAPTER V.

SOMEWHERE IN KANSAS.

I HAD the Red Bird in a wide spiral, nosing down just enough to keep the controls sensitive. She said again, "I can do it, Whit. I won't freeze." A lot of people do—get paralyzed and hit with their fingers in the rip-ring. "Sure, you can," I said, "but I can land this crate on a ten cent piece." Just the same I wrapped her in blankets to hold Davey to her so he wouldn't get thrown.

The yellow murk continued, got darker in fact. It was like pawing your way through saffron water. I kept the Red Bird into the wind. I strained my eyes to see something below. The altimeter needle slid past five hundred, and it was still a brown pall. Three hundred feet! Trees now to think about.

Suddenly I saw what seemed to be a streak of white. Faint white. It slid away to the left like a faintly drawn chalk line on a brown board. I kicked the Red Bird over. It meant coming down crosswind, but at least I knew what I was hitting. A road! Or a river creek!

Kathryn saw it too. "Trees to the right, Whit." Common danger buried our dislike. She spoke in comradely fashion.

I nosed steeply and saw the tumbleweed blowing against a fence. Steady wind. Not puffy.

"Hang on," I said.

Silence then except for the wind shrill and the thump of a dead propeller. The road came up. Telephone poles and lines lining it. Fences. Now I saw open fields on the left, but it was too late. I hauled the stick back into my stomach. The wheels hit the concrete road. The skid, too. Three-point. The Red Bird shot ahead. Funny how you are not moving at all until the wheels hit the ground and then you're going like a bat out of hell.

I eased on the foot brakes, gave them as much as she'd take without standing on her head. We stopped with the left wing hanging over the ditch, inches from a fence pole.

I leaned back, suddenly sick inside. I never had that reaction before. But then, I'd never flown with a kid and a girl. We didn't say anything for a while. There came the low drone of a ship. It swooped past us, not fifty feet up. I recognized it as the Lockler, and the sight of it zooming off into the yellow murk drove away the weak reaction feeling. We became normal.

"Your boy friend," I said.

"Dumb," she said. "I told you once it wasn't."

We got down to the road. I said,

"That doesn't make it so," but she didn't answer.

I left her there to flag down any motor car that might crack up the Red Bird's tail, and walked down the road. There was a gap in the fence and a field beyond big enough for a take-off. And a hundred yards farther I made out the outlines of three small shacks along the road and beyond them an old farmhouse with outbuildings and a windmill. A man in overalls stood there near two gas pumps that had no gas in the glass places on top. He stared at me. He looked dirty and discouraged, and jaundiced in the weird light.

"How far to Wichita?" I asked.

"Thirty mile on the slab and you'll run right into it," he rejoined. "'Tain't the main road no more, though. That's north. Nobody much comes this way. ...Say, what made that sound?" I told him, and asked him if he had mules; but his mules had been sold, and so had his cattle, and his Ford was broken, and he didn't have any money to fix it. For a dollar, though, he'd see someone by the name of Meigs and borrow a mule and haul the crate into the field where I could get off. This would take time, though, and I knew we were stuck there for the night. I asked him if he had rooms and food. He started on a long, sad speech, beginning with his name, Asa Carmer.

"When this was the main road," he concluded, "them there shacks was tourist cabins and a man could make a dollar. Still beds in 'em and I can fix you up with blankets. A dollar each. 'Tain't no use to use sheets. They'd get dirty afore you put them on the bed. Damned dust gets in everything."

I reminded him of food. "Well, we got back, and taters and bread and coffee. Cost you fifty cents."

"Back?" I asked.

"Sure, backbone of a hawg. And damned glad to get it."

HE led the way toward the house. It was an unpainted sprawl of clapboard, set in a brown waste of drifted sand, spotted here and there with burned sod. It looked a hundred years dry, and somehow sinister through the pall.

Maybe he felt my emotions. He said without bitterness, "Third straight year I ain't sold a bushel. Land's goin' back to desert, I guess. I'd have to root hawg or die, but I get some money bein' deputy sheriff."

A gaunt, tired woman, with gray-black hair jerked back tight to a knot, thrust a long, lantern-jawed face out of the door and eyed me listlessly. Two dirty children hung to her skirts. I suppose my face was as dirty as theirs. It seemed they had a telephone; one of those makeshift affairs that, instead of wires and poles, run via steel barbed fences from house to house and hook up finally at a small town exchange. I twisted the crank and finally raised the central in Eureka and asked for the Wichita Airport.

I reported a forced landing with ignition trouble at four-thirty-eight. I said I would take off at seven if I could make repairs.

The Wichita checker said, "Okay. The Kinnaird ship cracked up near Kansas City. The other one hasn't reported. Major Drew is here. In at four-twenty. Averaging forty-two miles to the gallon."

I thanked him and hung up. What with the surroundings and the news I felt low. And got lower thinking of McKenna's worries when he heard I was down. Drew still led in gas consumption; he was forty-eight minutes up in actual flying time, and he'd come

in at the right station. I had a forced landing to my credit. I began to feel the way I used to when I was dusting a wing on a pylon in the last lap of a speed race.

The wind was stronger as I walked back to get Kay and Davey. Not a car had passed, they said, and they both looked bedraggled. I told them the situation.

Kay said, "Let's call a cab by phone and go to Wichita."

I said, "No. We want an early take-off to make Winslow."

After she saw the house and the drab shacks, broken-windowed with slatted doors, she cried, "Oh, I can't stay here."

"But you will," I said. "I'm making this decision."

She glared furiously. "You're impossible," she said.

"Sure, but that's the way it is."

Davey dragged away from her and ran to the two children and began to make friends. The tired woman said,

"They're double beds in them shacks, Mrs.—"

"Marsh," said Kathryn. "Miss Marsh."

The woman looked at me, at Davey, then back at Kathryn. "Oh," she said, "well, then you'll have to have two shacks, and I ain't got enough blankets."

Kathryn went off with her to look at them. She came back. She said, "Those beds were new when Napoleon surrendered. But Davey can sleep with me."

The mule came before supper and I got the crate off the road and into the field. The trouble was easy to find. The points in the commutator were dirty, gummy, and I had to take it all apart and clean it. Mostly by feel. I cleaned the gas-line, too, and made sure the carburetor flooded, and the plugs sparked. It was all I could do. The ship seemed safe enough in the field, but I wished it was closer to the house. I was remembering that Lockler. Why had it swooped down if not to find out where I had landed?

THE thought served to keep my mind off the terrible supper. Terrible pork, soggy potatoes with no butter; stale bread and the worst coffee I've ever known. Davey nibbled and quit, and I hadn't the heart to force him.

We made a pretty sad trio, I guess, there in the cabin, with the dusty air looking yellower yet because of the kerosene lamp. Kathryn made Davey ready for bed.

"How do we stand?" she asked.

I told her. She didn't say anything. Davey said, "You hurry, Whit—they told my father I'd be in the winning plane." That made him think about his father and his eyes glistened. He dropped his napkin and took a long time to pick it up.

When he straightened, he said, "Whit, read me a story."

He had his little picture book and I read him a story. He kissed my cheek goodnight and said he was sort of homesick and his lips quivered, but he didn't cry. I went back into the other room and found Kay with an empty beer bottle piling matches criss-cross on top. I watched her and we didn't speak. Finally, I said, "Put one on the right, your center of gravity is shifting."

She deliberately put a match, instead, on the left side of the pile and it cascaded down in a flood of matches.

"One hundred and twenty matches," she said, "and I'd have had two hundred piled up if you'd kept quiet."

I laughed. "You even double-cross yourself."

She got up and so did I, and we stood close together. She said, "It's about time we cleared the board, Mister Haines. Did you stop that motor or did it stall?"

"Meaning?" I said.

"Meaning that there'd be money in it for you to lose this race."

"There probably would," I said, "and Ben Drew would be a famous husband to have if he won it."

She looked at me a long time. "Where did you get *that* idea?"

"The little whispering bird."

She took out a cigarette, lit it, puffed. "You don't trust me, do you?"

"No."

"And I don't trust you. Well, maybe it's the better way. I loathe you."

I looked at her. "I really could like you," I said, "if you weren't such a hog for publicity. Why do you play the celebrities and the newspapers all the time?"

She leaned forward, glared at me.

"That," she said, "was dirty."

"Take it any way you like."

"The only way a girl can—" she broke off sharply.

A knock came at the door and the farmer said, "Excuse me, but that second telephone call is thutty cents."

I looked at him, then at Kay. "Oh," I said, and paid him. When he had gone I said to Kathryn, "Who'd you call?"

"That's my business," she retorted.

"You tipped Drew I was here."

"That's a lie." Her voice rose and her eyes blazed and before I knew what was coming the print of her palm lay pinkly across my cheek. It made my ears ring. "I've been wanting to do that," she panted.

I grabbed her, held her arms tightly. "Still you called somebody," I said. "Who?"

SHE tried to struggle and somehow it aroused me. She was soft and lovely under my hands and anger made her splendid. I found myself wanting to kiss her. When I raised my glance I saw her watching my eyes. She was very still and I knew she read what was in my mind. Our glances held.

She said slowly, "That would be cruel and inhuman punishment."

"Right," I said. "Put me down a fool." I went to the door. "You'd better tip your boy friend to stay away from the crate. I'm sleeping there tonight."

I went out into the dusty night. The wind moaned like a deep orchestral bass. To get to the plane I had to go by the house. As I did a car's pale yellow headlights turned in and stopped. I heard the farmer come out, and waited while they exchanged words. I couldn't hear much except Asa Carmer said, "It'll cost you a dollar—the end shack."

I tried to see who it was that drove up, but I couldn't. Only I knew that nobody in his right mind would drive out here to use those shacks unless there was a definite vital reason. While the man took out a bag and followed the farmer, I waited and after the farmer had come back I made a circuit around to look into the shack. A kerosene lamp was burning and by it a man was unpacking a bag. Finally he turned. It was the red-head, Brick Hallet.

He came out presently and walked toward the first shack where Kathryn was. He had been drinking. I smelled the liquor and he didn't walk any too straight.

She came to the door and was silhouetted against the pale light behind. She put her arms around him and they spoke. I stood there in the path and watched them. Finally I heard Kathryn say, "All right, I'll feel better for that."

"Okay, darling," said Brick.

He did not return to the shack. Instead, he started off in the direction of the plane. That was all I needed. I trotted around in a circle and headed him off near the house. He gave a start as he saw me.

"Ah, Haines, I was just going to find you."

"You've found me," I said.

"Listen, there's a tip out that a bird named Red Mercer is going to try and kidnap the kid," he said. "I think you ought to sleep near Kay tonight. In case anything happens."

"Something would happen—to the ship," I said. "Listen, Hallet, I can't keep you away from the shack you rented.

"But my advice is for you to stay in it. You come near that plane and you'll get hurt."

"Don't be a fool," he said, "I'm your friend. And Kay's."

"Hers you may be. But I don't want any part of you."

He took hold of my arm. "Do as I say," he said, "I tell you—"

I swung my arm and accidentally punched him in shaking it loose. He got mad and took a swing at me. That's the way most fights start. I gave him a shove that nearly toppled him over.

"I'm not starting anything with you now," I said. "But keep away from that ship—and keep away from the kid. What you do with Kay is yours and her business. Otherwise I'll beat your head off."

"Ah, man!" he muttered, "when they make bigger fools they'll have to use you for a gauge."

Asa Carmer called out, "What you two quarreling about?"

Brick Hallet went back the way he had come. I went on to the ship.

CHAPTER VI.

GUNFIRE.

IN my uneasy sleep the sound seemed to be that of a car back-firing. I was awake quickly enough and heard the echo and knew it wasn't a car back-firing, because there wasn't any car droning. A child's thin, plaintive cry followed. A man yelled and a woman screamed. A thin piercing sound that cut the pre-dawn blackness like a knife.

I had sworn that nothing would drag me away from the plane, but I ran then, ran in great long leaps that took me to the sound. I had the wrench in my hand and for once I was longing for a gun. My lungs burned from the dust that hung in the dry air.

Between the farmhouse and the shack I saw the dim light of a lantern dancing through the dust pall. I saw that it was Asa Carmer and he had an old single-action revolver with an enormous barrel. I went straight to Kay's shack. Tore open the door. The blankets were thrown back on the bed and one dragged to the floor as if there had been a struggle.

Neither Davey nor Kathryn was there.

The wide-open window attracted me because I saw the lantern light flooding it, heard the farmer cursing. I ran to it and looked out.

The man called Brick Hallet lay there on his back, relaxed as if asleep.

He had a gun in his right hand. Blood flowed from a wound in his head and dripped over the side of his face and formed a little puddle below his left ear-lobe.

Where were Kathryn and the kid? I remembered Hallet's warning, and the pursuing Lockler plane. They had been kidnaped, but by whom? For a second the thought flashed over me that this was a clever scheme to get me away from the Red Bird while somebody demolished the crate with an axe. But it was only a thought; true or not, I had to forget the ship now.

Asa Carmer saw me and raised his gun. "Come out of there," he yelled. "You got him, but I got you."

"Don't be a fool," I said. "Where did they go?"

"You killed him," snapped the farmer. "I heard you quarreling under my window. Come out here — and keep your hands up."

I came out the window all right, but that was because I saw footprints in the thick yellow dust. Big footprints, then small pear-shaped marks with square holes behind. Kathryn's spike heels.

Little square-toed prints that lasted a yard and then vanished as if the bigger feet had picked up the child. They led off to the left.

"Come on," I said, "they aren't walking to Wichita."

He stood his ground obstinately and I didn't like the way he held the gun-hammer back with the ball of his thumb. Two hundred yards or so down the road lights suddenly gleamed yellowly. I heard the roar of a cranked motor car.

"There they go," I yelled, and forgetting about the gun I started for the car which Brick Hallet had parked on the driveway to the house.

"No, you don't," snapped the farmer. "You ain't gettin' away—"

I SWUNG sharply. He was holding the lantern high in one hand, and the gun was aimed at me. I ducked again and let him have the full benefit of a right hook. The gun roared, but the big slug whined away into the air.

I hit him full on the chin and he went backward and down. The lantern fell with a crashing thud, the glass broke and the light went out. I kept on to the car. The headlight gleam was still discernible when I got it started. The twin beams ahead swung out into the road and turned away from me and I could only see the two red spots of the twin taillights.

I had forgotten to turn on the headlights on Hallet's car, and now I decided not to. The noise of their own motor would drown out the roar of mine. They wouldn't know they were followed. I wished then I had taken Hallet's gun.

I was off the broken, frost-cracked slab more often than I was on it, and only the drought-hardened shoulders saved me from piling up. But I kept the car in sight. This was a good car and I pushed the accelerator to the floor. The chase lasted less than ten miles by my calculation.

The car ahead suddenly swung off into a dirt side road and ran a hundred yards or so and stopped. The headlights playing through the thin dust haze lit up the wings of the Lockler that had pursued us. The car's headlights stayed on. I stopped the car, got out and ran through the darkness. Two men climbed out and one of them carried Davey. I didn't see Kathryn at all. She wasn't with them. They trotted toward the Lockler.

The man ahead leaped into the cabin and a second or so later I heard the whine of the starter. The motor was cold and it didn't catch right away. All this while I was running. I was hoping the damned Lockler motor would start to drown my footsteps. But it didn't. And when I was within ten yards or so of the man carrying Davey, he heard me. He dropped the kid in a heap and he had a gun in his hand so quick it made a flashing metallic glitter as it leaped outward.

He fired point-blank. How he missed me I don't know. I hadn't any time to stop or duck, and to run away was to get killed anyway. So I kept on coming.

"Take it," he yelled. "Ready, Red."

I dove the last few yards, swinging the wrench. It struck his arm just as he fired again and I felt the wind of that slug against my ankles when it dug into the ground. He gave a yell of pain as the wrench hit his arm. He couldn't raise the gun again. I swung the wrench at his face and he dodged and it only skinned his cheek. He slugged me in the neck and I couldn't swallow after that without it hurting me. I went back under the impact, and he came after me, eyes blazing. I went down under the rush. He was big. A powerful man—but not the man who had jumped me at Indianapolis. The fight had knocked his hat off, and his head was shaved. He didn't have any teeth in front and his lips had shrunken in like an old man's.

He pounced on me, striking like a panther. I let him have the wrench again but I missed. He struck to kill me. Half-missing he landed on top of me and his fingers must have sunk out of sight in my throat. I said, "Gah!" and couldn't get my breath.

A man can do a lot of thinking in a fraction of a second. A lot of things swirled through my mind as I tried, in vain, to break that strangle-grip. I never knew a man to pinch down so hard. McKenna had lost, I had lost, and these devils would get Davey. I reared up, trying to throw his body clear.

THE first time I failed. The second I succeeded, for the man suddenly cursed and turned and struck with savage power at something behind him. Before he could straighten out, I leaped up and hit him on the side of the head with my knee. I sprang back, and more by luck than anything else found the wrench. I was coming in again fast when he flung Davey Allison yards with one powerful push and swung on me.

From the Lockler cabin came a shout, "Get clear, Nick, I'll take him. Grab the kid."

The man called Nick turned swiftly but not for Davey. Instead he raced, crouching, for the Lockler. I yelled, "Run to the car, Davey."

Out of the cabin rattled the quick staccato fire of a sub-machine gun. Two bullets burned me, and the dust danced around me where the bullets hit the earth. I did the only thing I could. I raced for the man called Nick and drove a left at his head, grabbed him and held him tight to use him as a shield.

I did, I guess, for the firing ceased, and I jerked him rapidly out of the luminance of the headlights. The motor in the Lockler was turning over now. And Nick muttered, "Red, don't leave me. Don't—"

He twisted in my grasp. His knee must have come up to my groin, for I was suddenly helpless from pain and

Nick jerked loose and ran like mad for the plane. I couldn't move for seconds. Small hands gripped me. An excited voice screamed, "I kicked him, Whit. Hard."

I didn't have a gun. I didn't dare go out there and get the one that Nick had dropped. The Lockler motor roared. The ship turned slowly as the pilot gunned it, and I couldn't do a thing. Its wing lights gleamed as it turned, radiating light downwards. I did the only thing possible then.

I stumbled to where Nick had dropped Davey, got the gun he had lost, and emptied it at the ship. But the motor drone rose to a staccato roar. The lights began to move swiftly off the ground and finally swam upward into the night and were lost to sight before the motor sound was lost.

Still in pain, I picked up Davey and carried him back to the car the two had abandoned. Davey had a bruise on his forehead. He kept saying, "I kicked him, Whit."

Kathryn was inside the car, bundled up in ropes and with a gag tied across her face. Her clothes were messed. I could see that she had put up a fight. I untied her. Before she could speak Davey said, "Gosh, Kay, you ought to see Whit fight, and I kicked the man—"

Gently I stopped him and said, "What happened?"

"You're to blame for it all," she said angrily. "Brick Hallet told you—"

"That can wait," I said. "What happened?"

She glared. "Davey and I were asleep when I heard something make a sound at the window. I woke up and put a hand over Davey's mouth and started toward the door. A man came in through the window. He looked nine feet tall. I screamed. And Davey yelled. And the man grabbed us. He hit me here"—she pointed to prettily rumpled hair—"and he took Davey. When I started to fight, he passed Davey to another man, and grabbed me. I fought, but he was like an ox. Then Brick Hallet came up and fired at them. The man who held Davey fired too."

She paused. Then: "Well, I fainted, I guess."

IT sounded all right. I sat there and lit a cigarette. This didn't seem like Ben Drew's methods. Too openly deadly.

I said, "Come clean, now, who is Brick Hallet, and no stalling?"

"He's a friend of mine," she said without hesitation. "I told him I was in this contest, and that I didn't trust you. You were a drunkard and you'd lost your nerve, and you probably had sold out. I had a tip from McLean of the *Eagle* that you were selling out. So Brick Hallet offered to follow me and help. He is wealthy. He owns that Stamson. I telephoned him tonight."

This made sense, too. If she was telling the truth.

"If you'd obeyed him," she said angrily, "this wouldn't have happened. He warned you that Red Mercer—"

"What does he know about Red Mercer?" I asked.

"Who doesn't know about the latest public enemy Number One? He's killed three men. He's flown oodles of narcotics in from Canada. He broke out of the Western Penitentiary, and stole a plane. Everybody knows that."

"News to me," I said, "but how did Hallet know Mercer was trying to abduct the kid?"

She stared at my cigarette. "He's a rich young man who volunteered on the Committee of Public Safety of the

Department of Justice. He happens to be in love with me. Was he hurt?"

"A little, I guess," I said.

And she must love him. That accounted for them in each other's arms. I decided this was the truth. I threw away the cigarette and noticed that a yellowish light was beginning to filter across the sky. Daylight coming.

"Come on," I said, "we've got a race to win if we can get at it."

Kay could drive, so after I had turned the kidnap car around she drove it back to the farm, and I followed in the other car. Asa Carmer was waiting when I climbed down, and he had a shotgun.

"You're under arrest for assault and murder and resistin' arrest," he howled, "and make one move and I'll put both barrels of buckshot into you."

He looked as if he would.

CHAPTER VII.

STOLEN PLANE.

IT was a quarter to eight and I was still arguing with the immutable force of a shotgun muzzle. Asa Carmer had telephoned for a doctor who was working on Brick Hallet. Hallet apparently was critically hurt and Carmer couldn't be moved.

"You struck me, an officer," he said, "and you're material witness. This gal backs your story up, but I'm the law and you'll stay until the county attorney gets here."

I was in a murderous mood. But what could I do? Minutes sliding away. Already Ben Drew must have left Wichita, and every minute was making it tougher to catch him.

Kathryn came over and whispered the suggestion that I had already refused once.

"You've got to stay here," she argued, "but Davey and I can take the ship and go on. You can use Brick's ship and catch us at Albuquerque or Winslow. As soon as Brick recovers consciousness he can clear you."

I shook my head. Her mouth became tight. "Don't you trust me?"

"No," I said.

"But you're losing the race. Another half hour and nothing can catch Drew unless he cracks up. And he won't."

That was true. I didn't think he could be caught anyway, but certainly another half hour would give him plenty of leeway for any incident.

"Please, Whit," she begged, coming closer. "I'm sure the rules don't specify that we all have to be in the ship. Particularly under the circumstances. If I bring it in we win just as much as if we were all there. You don't want McKenna to lose, do you?"

"I'll take care of Kay, Whit," said Davey. "I'll sock them the way you did."

I stared at Asa Carmer. He sat there grimly with a shotgun and you can't tempt a choke-bore. I thought hard and finally simmered it down to this: I was stuck here. Another half hour or so and the race was lost anyway. So even if she did double-cross me all we could do was lose a race already lost.

She must have seen from my expression that I was wavering. "I'll check in at Wichita," she cried, "and go straight through. Tell Brick I said he must loan you his ship."

Somehow I had to trust her. She seemed finer, here, now, begging for trust. "All right," I said.

We managed it all right. Kay told Carmer she had to get some things out of the plane, and the farmer had

thoughts only for me. She took Davey with her and presently I heard the Red Bird's motor purr. A sweet sound. The farmer started.

"Damn you!" he cied, "you're fixing to let her get away."

"You stop her," I said.

He couldn't take the gun off me. And the Red Bird warmed fast anyway. He yelled to the doctor and the hired hand from the next farm and they ran to stop Kay. But it was too late. She had the Red Bird taxiing and they couldn't catch her. She banked the ship low over the house and I saw her hand wave out the window. Then she headed for Wichita.

THERE wasn't anything to do then, but wait and see what happened to Brick Hallet. And even that chance faded fifteen minutes later when the doctor came and said, "He's got a bad concussion, and we'll have to take him in to the hospital."

That settled it with me. I knew what to do. I said to Carmer, "Drive me in, too. I want this settled as soon as possible."

"Wal," he said, "mebby so."

The hired hand and the doctor moved the body to the physician's car.

The doctor turned over to Asa Carmer the things in Brick's pockets. A bunch of keys was among them. I waited until the farmer stood up and began to prod me with the muzzle of his shotgun. I stumbled then, getting ready to turn and lay one on his jaw. But he was smart enough to suspect. As I went down and half-turned getting up, the gun muzzle followed me.

"Don't try nothin'," he warned. We went to Hallet's car. He sat in the back and told me to drive. "And drive slow," he said.

We wheeled out onto the road to Wichita. The dust was not so bad now. I drove at thirty miles an hour. I watched him in the rear view mirror but he kept the shotgun as steady as a rock on my back. There was nothing to do but keep going.

About five miles out of Wichita, just where the houses began to get thicker, a sharp explosion shook the car and the front end swerved wildly toward the ditch. I wrestled with the wheel to keep from smashing up. I had the car held after the first bad slew, but looking into the rear view mirror I saw that the skid had upset the farmer and flung him against the side.

The gun muzzle described an arc and now pointed toward the roof of the car. It was all I needed. I wrenched the wheel again to throw him the other way. I left the wheel and went over the back of that seat like a rocky mountain goat. He saw me coming and yelled.

He tried to sweep the gun muzzle around, but a shotgun is heavy and you don't whip it that fast. My body got close enough so that the side of the twin barrels hit against my thigh. I didn't hit him. I just pounded a fist down on his stomach. He pulled the trigger and the gun roared like a cannon. It fired again as I jerked the weapon from him, and the side window went out before the hail of buckshot.

He clawed at me, struck feebly. But my weight held him pinned. His back was across the edge of the seat and my knees held him there. I opened the door and threw the gun into the ditch.

"You ought to get a ride later," I told him, as I pushed him out to the roadside.

The words he used then were new to me and I thought I knew them all. I took the key ring away from him. "You'll go to jail for life," he raged.

"We don't let people get away with this in Kansas."

Fortunately there wasn't a vehicle in sight. I backed the car out of the ditch and never stopped to change the tire. Bumping and clattering, the tire slowly dissolving into pieces, I drove the three miles remaining to the airport.

IT was all bad news. Kay had taken off twenty minutes previous, three hours and twenty-one minutes behind Drew. The remaining plane, the Cockerel, was second. We were a very bad third.

I came up to the Stamson and the chief greaseball of the hangar said, "You're not the guy who brought it in."

"No," I said, "but I'm the guy that's taking it out."

"Not while I can swing a pickhandle," he said and he gave a yell and the airport manager came running. The mechanic barred the way with a long club. The airport manager stopped when he saw me.

"Say, you're Whit Haines," he said, "you were supposed to be flying the Red Bird."

I looked at him. It was Conny Achern, who had been grounded and his license taken away from him three years before for cracking up while drunk and killing his passenger. He was hardly sober now.

I said, "Sure, it's me, Conny." I told him a few things. "Brick told me to take the crate and catch Kay."

He wavered. I said, "You know what a raw deal a guy can get, Conny. Give me a break."

He suddenly nodded. "Sure I do, Whit, and you get it. Let Haines have the Stamson and anything else he needs."

The Stamson had two hundred gallons of gas and was purring like a sewing machine in thirty minutes. I figured I was riding with luck again, but I wasn't. That damned deputy sheriff farmer must have thumbed a ride to town. Because as I sat in the cabin, getting ready to wheel the Stamson out, a dark blue car with gold print on the side doors wailed across the field with two cops standing on the running board.

"You don't know anything, Conny," I cried, "and I'll square you after we finish at Burbank. Thanks."

I cracked the throttle on the Stamson. There wasn't a chance of turning into the wind. And the dust haze was rolling gustily. I let her run wide. The wind caught one wing and the Stamson tipped violently. The other wing nearly dusted the ground. I threw over the stick and barely righted her.

How I got that Stamson off I'll never know. I was never really sure I would until the south hangar went under the wings and I picked up five telephone wires that hung like spaghetti from the spreader bar on the wheel assembly.

I wondered what Asa Carmer and the police would do. Wire ahead to Albuquerque or Winslow probably.

But for the moment, anyway, I was going places.

CHAPTER VIII.

MIDNIGHT IN WINSLOW.

THAT Stamson was a sweetheart! Six hundred and fifty horsepower, she was good for one hundred and eighty. North of Amarillo I caught a tail wind and the air speed needle flickered around two hundred

and five. Better still the Stamson had a one-way radio. I picked up the TWA radio beacon and that helped plenty. I must have been close to New Mexico when the beam cut out and the dispatcher at Albuquerque, chatting with the pilot of a tri-motored Ford, said, "Drew took off here ten minutes ago. They say that Whit Haines got pinched and Kathryn Marsh is bringing the McKenna crate across. She checked out of Wichita and was reported over Tucumcari."

THERE was no answer. The beam came on again. I crossed it until the signals weakened. I unrolled the map case and finally got myself located when I went over the Pecos River at Santa Rose. I had left the dust behind and I could now see the table-tops of the mesas and the Sangre de Christo Mountains hanging to the north. I was making knots, but the chances of catching Kay looked slim when the same dispatcher at Albuquerque gossiped about her take-off.

"Kathryn Marsh just checked out at one-ten. She's made up about twelve minutes on Drew, but she'll never catch him. There's plenty of dirt the other side of Winslow."

At three o'clock when I was climbing the crate for the Continental Divide, going over the Superstition Range, the weather report came in.

"Bad storm raging over Southern California. Storm signals out from San Francisco to Matazalan."

The pilot on the tri-motor job, now far behind me, was warned to set down at Winslow and stay there until further orders.

Out of all this I got one comfort. Kay was making a race of it, and she was less than an hour ahead of me. She'd be grounded at Winslow, but so, too, would Ben Drew, though he was doubtless there by now.

At five-twenty I got a shock. The dispatcher said to the TWA pilot, "Keep your eye cocked for a Stamson high-wing sixty-fifty. Whit Haines took it and the Wichita cops want him pinched."

I knew then I couldn't take the Stamson into Winslow. It's just a wide place in the Arizona road that the TWA once used as a point where passengers shifted from the night train from L. A. to the tri-motor job. Winslow is about four hundred and twenty miles airline from L. A. I had to think now how to get to Kay without being caught.

The weather was clear, visibility unlimited when I throttled the sixty-fifty over the gravel stretch of road that runs between Holbrook and Winslow. I nosed into a gentle northeast wind and sat down on a flat stretch of gray greasewood, mesquite and a few giant cactus. The sun was rolling redly along the crests of the bare western mountains and around me flamed the desert sunset colors that make you gasp at the beauty of them. I cut the motor and climbed down. I estimated I was five miles from Winslow.

I got out a crescent wrench and a screw driver and took off the commutator. That tied the ship there for good. There was a canvas jacket for the motor and I put that on.

Then I started to hike to Winslow. Three cars make a traffic jam on the backroads of New Mexico and Arizona. You might not see one all day. Nothing passed me, and I was dead tired, thirsty and hungry when I saw the white flat-topped building at the airdrome. It was quite dark save for a new crescent moon already near to setting and star glitter. No one saw me

arrive; I made sure of that and I worked around silently until I saw wings silhouetted against the sky.

I found the Red Bird. Kay was inside and she had the door open for coolness; the heat hadn't yet evaporated from the desert. Looming against the side of the cabin was a man. He spoke and I recognized Ben Drew's soft voice. I couldn't help but hear.

"Darling," he said, "publicity keeps you alive. Literally, you're not an outstanding pilot. You haven't got any money. And without your beauty and publicity you'd wind up an air stewardess. That's where you will land if you don't help me."

"Go away, Ben, you'll wake Davey," Kay said.

"Well, think of Davey tomorrow," said Drew. "The weather reports are all stormy. You could stay right here and nobody would blame you. And if you do stay, I promise that the Avro people will take care of you. And if you marry me we'll go places fast."

"Ben," Kay said, "what with one thing and another, I'm awfully tired. Go away, will you?"

"I won't let you take off," he threatened. "I'll get the Department of Commerce to ground you because of unnecessary risk."

"Try it," she said.

"Good night—and sweet dreams," he said and laughed quietly.

HE turned and strode off in the darkness. I don't know why I followed him. A hunch, I guess, and perhaps because he did not return to the administration building, but walked to the east end of the field. I moved very quietly. Presently I saw looming against the sky-line the mosquito-like head of the Lockler low-wing. A man stood there. The lower part of his face was reddened by the glow of a cigarette coal. I saw a tough, pointed chin, a hard flat mouth and a nose that had sunburn peel on the ball of it.

I couldn't get close enough to hear what was said. The mumble went on for five minutes. Drew said, turning away, "That will be a cinch, Red, and no harm done."

This time he went back to the administration building. I kept wondering, there in the darkness, how Drew ever got tangled with a man like Red Mercer. And what I could do about it. Nothing for the present.

I had no proof that Red Mercer had tried to kidnap Davey. No proof except my discredited word that Drew was behind all that had happened. And, anyway, until we got to Los Angeles for me to go to the police was to get myself pinched and leave Kay alone to oppose whatever plan Drew and Mercer had conceived. I went back unseen to the Red Bird. The door was closed. I rapped on the window.

"Kay," I called.

I saw her head over the window. She opened the door. "Whit," she said. She made a funny sound in her throat. "Oh, Whit, I'm so glad you're here."

I sat on the floor of the cabin. Davey was sleeping on the inside and she sat there and we didn't say anything for a long time.

Finally she whispered, "How'd you get away?"

I told her, our heads close in the darkness and me whispering. The nearness of her made me hoarse, and I knew then that I liked this girl more than any in the world. More than I thought I could ever like a girl again. Her face looked soft and desirable, and her eyes sparkled as she listened, and somehow a mood seemed on her. A

soft mood, not like anything I had seen before. I had my hands clenched to keep from touching her.

"Whit," she said, "you've got to go on with us."

Something made me say, "You did swell today."

The night and the events and the silence had gotten to her. Before I could say another word she burst out, "Whit, I'm a bum pilot. I would try to go on tomorrow through that dirt, but I'd be afraid. Not for myself. But for Davey. You told the truth about me the other night. I live on publicity and looks."

She stopped momentarily, but went on almost in a rush. "I've been using people because I wanted to be a great pilot. Another Earheart. And I wouldn't admit I wasn't. I figured publicity would do it all. But it can't and it won't."

She ceased to speak. Then: "I just wanted you to know how I feel because—well, because I wanted you to."

She leaned forward and I could have kissed her but I didn't. It was a tremendous effort not to; and if she hadn't just told me what she did I might have. But when you saw her this way—I stopped thinking about that.

I didn't tell her about Red Mercer and what might happen. She had enough to fret about. I just said, "I'll be around somewhere at the take-off. You sit to the right; leave the door unlatched. Once we're off they can't stop me this side of Burbank."

"I won't go without you," she said.

I was just getting ready to leave when Davey stirred drowsily and said, "Is that you, Whit?"

I told him it was. He sat up, yawning. "Kay read me a story, but not as good as you. Hug me, will you, Whit? I want to see my daddy."

I hugged him, and I kissed his cheek. I felt funny all over, and when he said, "We'll win, won't we, Whit?" I told him we would. I knew we wouldn't.

I went out to the field's edge and put in a miserable night.

CHAPTER IX.

FOURTEEN THOUSAND FEET UP.

DESERT thorn can be a terrible bother when you're lying on it. My mouth was so dry from thirst I couldn't spit. My head ached and I was hungry. Storm clouds blackened the west. The rain would be here in an hour. I saw the Red Bird drawn up, nosing straight for the thunderheads. The wind was blowing cold; there was a humidity in the air rarely noticed in this climate.

I circled behind the administration building. What few people were there were grouped around the dead-line waiting for the take-off. I didn't see the black and chromium job of Drew's. Neither did I see the Lockler high-wing.

The Cockerel, the only other ship in the race besides us and Drew, was standing there, but her motor wasn't spinning. As I came at a brisk stride across the field I met a greaseball and asked him what time it was.

Ten minutes past seven! I went out to the Red Bird. A man was arguing with Kay and she was pale, harassed and glancing every few seconds at a wrist watch as if it would do some good. The man was saying, "But it is dangerous, Miss Marsh. A regular cloudburst over Los Angeles and we're going to get rain here. That ought to tell you how bad it is."

" Drew took off, didn't he?" she said impatiently.

" Yes. But if it's bad he intends to set down."

" He'll go through, you mean," she cried, " and the stories will say I couldn't trust the ship."

" But I can't permit a woman to take off," he said, " and that's final."

I pushed forward and over his shoulder Kay saw me. The most marvelous smile illumined her face. I said to the man, " I'm handling the crate. We'll try to go through, but if it's bad we'll hit one of the emergency air fields."

He turned, saw who it was. " Whit Haines! Say, the police—"

I was past him, into the seat, slamming the door. Through the window I said, " are looking for me. Tell them I'll be available in Los Angeles."

The crate was warmed. I jazzed the motor and since the chocks were pulled, she got under way at once. He made a grab at the tail assembly, why I'll never know. I poured the gun to her and we made knots. Tail up, ship getting light. And then the west end of the field drifted beneath the wheels and I closed the windows to shut out the motor-thrash.

Kay said, " Drew left at two seconds past seven. He means to go through."

Davey said, " Let me sit on your lap, Whit. I'm tired."

" You just got up."

" Yeah, but I dunno. I guess I'm homesick."

I tossed the stick to Kay and held him for a while, watching the storm. I had that tense feeling that comes when you're way behind in a speed race and wheeling the pylons close trying to make up. Davey felt it, and said, " You're nervous, Whit."

I said I was, and finally asked for water. Kay got the thermos. I drank and watched the scenery below. We were sliding down hill all the time now, losing altitude as the ground sloped to sea level and below where it dipped to Death Valley. Beyond the earth climbed to the Coast Range, but just now we had nothing to breast but a tough head wind. A wind that slowed us down plenty and the only comfort was that it delayed Drew, too. Flagstaff, Kingman and Needles! Getting blacker and almost steady rain against the cabin windows. Slashing like sharp lances of steel.

I was holding the stick and Davey, too, when Kathryn suddenly gasped. " The Lockler. Look, Whit, it's coming right up on us."

It was bearing down on the Red Bird from the right. I had been wondering what Drew and Mercer had planned and now I found out. That damned ship began to dive on us the way we were taught in combat school at Kelly Field. Swooping in until I thought we'd collide, sheering off just in time and then the Red Bird beating feebly against the terrific slipstream of the Lockler's backwash. We went spinning down once and lost a thousand feet before I got her righted.

IT'S easy for a faster ship to ride herd on a slower one and wing slap it down. I think now that the Lockler and Red Mercer had intended to do this over Kansas and the only reason they hadn't was because of the dust storm. A bad crack-up or losing us in a storm, or the possibility of forcing us down close to a town had made them delay. But there were no towns here on the edge of the Mojave Desert. There was a black storm growing immense by the second.

" He's got us," I said when the Lockler shaved our wings and the back

blast of air sent the Red Bird reeling in a bad side slip.

The Lockler dove straight down from above, just glanced ahead of us and as it did so leveled off so that the full benefit of the propeller blast caught us square on. What with the wind of the storm it was enough. I was down now to a thousand feet. And one more blast like that would send me slipping into the ground.

All the way down the Lockler rode herd on us, slapping us with air whenever I attempted to level off. Kay sat there breathless.

I saw a stretch of mesquite that must be well north of Barstow. The Coast Range was behind the storm clouds ahead. As I coasted down under retarded gun I did some thinking. I couldn't go on this way, risking disaster over the mountains. I had either to settle with these birds once and for all and try to cut straight through the storm, or else I had to admit I was licked.

Kay said, "I've got a gun."

She knew what I was thinking all right. "Stout fellah," I muttered and took the weapon, a thirty-eight that balanced well in the hand. The Lockler wheeled around in a tight spiral. We went on down.

Kay said, "We've lost now, haven't we, Whit?"

"Aw, what you talkin' about?" cried Davey, "sure we ain't lost. You ain't going to lose, are you, Whit?"

"Never say ain't, say aren't," I said.

Kay laughed, a peculiar high-pitched sound.

The grayish brown surface came up at the nose and I flattened the crate out and put on the air brakes. The wind was so strong that when we set down the plane it didn't run thirty feet. I thought I came in fast, but the Lockler was right behind me, fish-tailing to kill forward speed, and it taxied alongside.

I didn't want any shooting around Kathryn and Davey, so I eased out the other door. I had the gun. I said as I went out, "If anything happens to me, Kay, go straight in. This crate will outride that storm."

She looked at me strangely. "I will, Whit," she said.

That was all I had time to say. I ran around back of the plane just as the man called Nick leaped down. He had a sub-machine gun in his hand. It was a long shot, forty yards, maybe, but I chanced it. The arm I'd hit with the wrench must have still hurt, because he was awkward and slow in getting the gun lined. I threw two quick slugs at him before he cut loose. I got him with one. I saw him jump and half-fall. The sub-machine gun muzzle lowered.

I'd have been all right if it hadn't been for Red Mercer. He fired out of the door of the Lockler and I felt the iron going into me before I heard the report of the gun. In the thigh joint just below the abdomen. If I had had any doubt he meant to kill me I lost it then. He was a target leaping down from the door and I squeezed the trigger. You have to stand and shoot it out like that when there isn't any covering except a few greasewood trees.

I HOPPED a few feet closer. And I fired again, but this time at Nick.

The gun was buzzing in his hand like an armful of snakes. And the slugs whipped my clothes. But the bullet got him. I was looking at him when it hit. Squarely between the eyes, just above the spot where the nose begins.

I didn't take a second look. Red Mercer was firing, and he got a square shot that should have finished me. It hit my shoulder and the impact spun me so I lost my balance on the game leg and went down. I was too weak right then to get up.

He was cursing and yelling and coming straight at me. I did all a man could. I aimed the thirty-eight square at his belt buckle, pulled the trigger and held it. The hammer went up and down four times. The gun leaped four times. Four smashes of sound thumped from the muzzle. I saw him twitch twice.

That was the end of the firing. One of my slugs, in some strange manner, had hit the barrel of his gun, ricocheted up his hand and tore it badly.

He was wheezing and I saw that another slug had gone in one side of his jaw and out the other, taking about five teeth of his lower set along with it. I wondered how I could aim at a man's belt buckle and hit him in the hand and face. I finally decided that I was so weak from shock that the gun jumping four times had raised the aim at each shot.

There was a flash of color and Kathryn was across the ground and had picked up the pistol Red Mercer dropped and held it aimed at him. He spat blood and loosened teeth.

"Call off your dame, Haines," he said. "I'm bushed."

"Keep him covered." My voice seemed a long way off, and, when Davey came in sight, pale and staring fearsomely at me, I said, "Davey, get back in the plane." He went. I said, "Kay, see if there's whiskey in the Lockler."

She found a bottle. Her face twitching, she looked down at me. "Is—is it bad, Whit?"

"I don't know about bad," I said, "but I wouldn't want it worse." I drank a big shot from the bottle. It was good Scotch. I said to Kay, "Find the pencil and the paper in the map case, and bring them to me."

Kay said, "Why?"

"Bring them."

She came running back, held out the paper sort of cringing and I saw that blood had run down my arm from the shoulder and dripped off my fingers.

"It looks worse than it is," I managed to grin and told her to give the paper and pencil to Red Mercer.

Red said, "What's the big idea?"

"You're out here alone, Red," I said. "Nobody knows anything about this except us, right here. If you'll sign a statement that Ben Drew paid you for this job, I'll hop the Red Bird and let you alone."

"And if I don't?"

"I'll stay here and Kay will fly to El Centro or Brawley and bring back the law. It's up to you."

"How'd you know about Drew?" he asked. He spoke very funny, breath whistling out of his cheeks and making it appear he was talking around an all day sucker.

"I saw him talking to you last night. Come on, write it all down in the presence of witnesses." I sent Kay to bring Davey. I wanted a witness who would be believed. "Talk aloud as you write, Red."

HE wrote and talked in that strange gargling manner as he did so.

The story was simple. Red Mercer, when he had escaped from jail and had stolen a plane, flew to New York, abandoning the ship in the Catskills where it would not be found for a while. He sought out Ben Drew. Drew had backed him in a narcotic

smuggling scheme the previous year when he had been caught.

Mercer's system of dope-running was simple. He got a ship and used it until its silhouette was familiar and "hot." Then he quit and lay low, abandoning the ship and letting it be confiscated. When his money was gone he got some one to back him for a new ship. Drew had backed him, so now, needing money, he had sought out Drew.

Drew bought the Lockler through a long series of phony names and corporations. He turned it over to Red with the order to stop the Red Bird from winning. When Drew found out that Davey Allison was aboard he said to snatch the kid, fly him into Mexico and hold him for ransom. Drew himself was going to be the intermediary, and he and Red would split the ransom.

All simple. But I said, "Put down why you tried again this morning. You'd tried the kidnaping stunt once and it failed. With Drew having nearly three hours over me why try to stop me from winning when he's already practically won?"

"Drew said he wouldn't go through if the storm is bad. And he wanted me to try the snatch anyway. We figured a quarter of a million."

Either the liquor or those words put new life into me. Drew's yellow streak, his fear of storms! I'd forgotten all about it. But there was still a chance to pull this race out of the fire. That is, if I could get through myself.

I had Kathryn pick up the sub-machine gun. She helped me to my feet and I leaned one arm on her. It must have been some weight, because she tried to stand straight but couldn't. Between us I got to the ship. Soaking wet. Light in the head.

At the door I called back, "Get out of the United States, Red. With those permanently dimpled cheeks you'll have a tough time dodging the G men."

He cursed, but didn't move. Maybe another slug had hit him. I wouldn't know about that.

Getting into that Red Bird was a man-sized job. The rain came in torrents. The sky was so black it was twilight, as if the world had closed up shop. But I got in. And I said I could take the crate off. Maybe I did. I wouldn't know about that either. Sometimes I knew what I was doing; the rest was a blank. Liquor wasn't helping now. I remember once Davey crying, "Whit! Whit! Don't die, Whit. Oh, dear Whit."

"Who's going to die?" I said. "Lemme have that stick."

I held it, too, now, and my brain had one of those perfectly clear spells when you are aware of even your heart beating. We were over the mountains, so Kay said, and I kept the Red Bird climbing, though it was all I could do to hold that kicking stick. There were all sorts of currents kicking her tail, so that I was using rudder all the time.

It got worse. Utter blackness it seemed, save when a lightning flash split the sky in a blinding, searing radiance. The thunder roared and reverberated around us. The rain streamed in torrents off the windows. The propeller threw it back in a regular flood.

Gusts of wind hit us and the Red Bird bounced and dropped sickeningly as if she was never going to catch hold and fly again.

I remember hearing a voice that must have been mine saying, "I never turned back. It was Drew. They'll never say I turned back."

The Red Bird bored ahead and it

got worse. I couldn't see anything. Almost utter blackness and clouds boiling down around us. The lightning flashes made green sparks leap from the engine. The whole ship was electrified. I guess I was a little crazy. I caught myself yelling at times.

Finally, I couldn't push on the rudder pedals any more. My one leg was absolutely numbed. I weaved in the seat. Then I heard Davey sobbing.

THE sound went through me worse than the thunderclaps. I turned and just could see him. He sat there, rigid, fists clenched, staring straight ahead with eyes wide. His teeth gritted on the sounds.

I said, "Are you scared, Davey?"

He turned and didn't seem to know that tears glistened on his long lashes like jewels. He actually smiled.

"Who"—he caught his breath "—me, afraid? With you, Whit? Not me."

Hours later, it seemed, the clouds parted for a second. And I saw we were over the Coast Range. But I didn't know where. We'd been heading a flat due west, but with these wind currents there was no knowing where we'd bring up. But I saw flat land and houses now there, less than a thousand feet below, and tried to haul back on the stick. A fury of wind swung us broadside and the wing strained to the impact. I looked at Kay. She sat there, and then for the first time I saw why I had been able to handle the stick and the rudder pedals. She was flying that ship, too, easing the strain on me.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"I guess around San Bernardino," she said. Her voice was steady.

The weakness got me again. Another sweep of wind struck the Red Bird and the ground beneath spun. I fell forward with my head against the instrument board.

"Set her down," I said; "no use getting you and the kid killed."

I don't remember anything after that, not anything, I mean, that happened. There were dreams that seemed reality. Fantastical nightmares in which I beat up Ben Drew and shouted into a radio mike that he had turned back and not me. That he had knocked me cold with a Stillson wrench. Dreams in which Red Mercer chased me and I was desperately trying to save Davey, who swam through the air and never quite let me catch up.

There was a dream about Kay, too, and I told her she couldn't marry Drew. She ought to marry Brick. Anyway he was a man and he'd quit drinking if she'd marry him. She told me to be quiet.

Out of all this came a sudden calm that ended by Kay appearing in a sunlit room. "Go away," I said, "you shouldn't stay around torturing me all the time."

She stayed there and I reached out a hand, left hand, and poked at her. "You're just a dream," I said.

"Well, if you push me off this bed," she said, "I'll be only a memory. This is a hospital bed and it has some altitude from the floor."

Then I knew this wasn't a dream and I got a glass of water from her and drank it.

"Who won?" I asked.

"Who do you suppose?"

I frowned. "Drew. Well, I'll fix his clock. That—"

"But he didn't win. He never got past Mecca. We won hands down—well, look"—she held out a newspaper and I read. "Air Flivver Conquers

Cyclonic Storm to Win Transcontinental Derby." There was a lot more about my being the hero who held the stick, but not a word about Kay.

"You brought the ship through," I said. "I couldn't have pushed a pound on a rudder pedal."

"And look." She ignored my comment. There was a telegram from Aylesworth, chief of the All-American Lines, saying I could have the crack run from New York to Miami on the New Douglas two-motored job at six hundred a month.

I handed them back. "What do you get out of it?" I asked.

"Publicity," she said, "which means a chance to risk my hide again sometime somewhere. Oh, by the way," she jumped up, "Davey wants to see you. He's been here every day for the past three days."

THE kid came in wearing an Eton suit, short socks and a broad smile. He kissed my cheek. "I told my daddy," he said, "you were the bravest man in the world."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He said you were a darned fool and idiot. He was nearly crazy, because he thought I'd get killed and not be in pictures any more."

"Your daddy speaks wise words," I told him.

"He's not wise," cried Davey indignantly. "Kay told me you were the wisest and the best—"

"Here, young man," said Kay.

"But you did, when you kissed him yesterday," cried Davey.

Kay was as red as a beet. I said to her, "Well, is Brick Hallet—"

"Brick is just a rich playboy. I don't love him, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean," I said. "Well, if you don't love him, why did you kiss him?"

"Because he's just a big teddy bear—he's just—well, Brick is Brick."

"And why did you kiss me?" I asked.

"Don't be so impertinent."

"That's the answer. Unless you're promiscuous with kisses you must love that old air pilot, Whit Haines."

"She sure does," said Davey contemptuously. "She told me she did."

"Will you keep quiet?" cried Kay. "You—I promised—"

"You're promising me now," I said, "so let little Davey play Cupid and have a good time." I kissed her.

There is only one thing more to record. A month later, after I'd read about Red Mercer being apprehended and held in El Paso, I came on Ben Drew out at the Burbank airport.

As usual he was talking with a couple of reporters. I never did find out what he was telling them. He gave a start when he saw me. Then he smiled, and said, "Well, Whit, you came through. I want to—"

"Save it for the newsreels," I said. "What I want you to tell these two gentlemen of the press is that it was you who got yellow off Newfoundland and turned back after socking me on the head."

He started to blither and protest; said I was crazy, mad, insane, stupid and a liar. I looked at him. "Red Mercer is in the coop at El Paso. I've got a little note he—well, shall I show these boys this note?"

Ben Drew actually reeled. I said, "Speak your piece."

Did he tell them? Sure, he did. He was a rat at heart. He always was yellow and a lousy pilot.

THE END

WONDERS OF THE WORLD

Florida's "SINGING TOWER"

"The Taj Mahal of America"

ON a sandy hill near Mountain Lake, Florida—the highest point (324 feet) above sea level in the state—stands a majestically beautiful tower which many people call "The Taj Mahal of America." A gift to the American people from Edward W. Bok, "The Singing Tower" was dedicated on February 1, 1929.

Construction on this magnificent campanile, which had for its inspiration the tower at Malines, Belgium, was begun in January, 1927. The granite base, 51 feet in width, is constructed upon a web of concrete piles sunk 24 feet below the surface of the ground. Above this, to a height of 205 feet, soars the beautiful tower of pink Georgia marble and tan ocquina stone from Florida, changing its form by graceful lines at the height of 150 feet until it becomes octagonal. Its eight windows, each 35 feet high, are of Gothic lace pattern worked in faience, and above them the crown is elaborately sculptured. The main portal to the tower is of hand-wrought golden bronze.

The carillon atop the tower fills the air with a golden melody that blends with the notes of birds echoing across one of the loveliest parks in all the world. "The Singing Tower" gets its name from the fact that it holds within its sanctuary one of the largest carillons in the world—61 bells.

Bowie Knife

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Hemmed in on all sides—tricked and betrayed at every turn—Hugh Kenly faces the cruel problem of his menaced future

Don Rodrigo's pistol belched smoke

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HUGH KENLY, former Mississippi River pilot (bearing a distinguishing scar on the bridge of his nose), becomes embroiled with a party of ruffians at the Hotel Beausejour in New Orleans. In 1835, this hotel was one of the roughest, toughest joints in town. The ruffians had been assaulting Señorita Conchita, who is seeking a map of the San Saba mines, which were once in the possession of Jim Bowie. During the fight—in which Hugh kills a man—he also saves the life of the pock-faced Pablo, who warns him of the *señorita's* uncertain character.

The *señorita* takes Hugh to the house of Captain Don Rodrigo. There he learns that the man he killed in the brawl was Jim Bowie, famous bad hombre of Mexico and the frontier. Because he has killed the well-known Bowie, Hugh cannot go to Texas as he had planned—to help in the establishment of Texan independence. And circumstances practically force him to ally himself with the Mexicans, who offer him an officership in the army and other honors.

They are glad to welcome him, not only for his resourcefulness, but for his killing

This story began in the Argosy for October 5

of the Bowie, who has been a traitor to Mexico's interests. So, with a small number of recruits gathered in by the Mexicans, Hugh sets off on a ship with Captain Rodrigo and the *señorita*.

CHAPTER IV.

DARK ATTACK.

THE squalid fishing-village of San Blas sprawled in a glamor shamelessly borrowed from the morning sunlight. This white blaze of radiance softened the sandy shores and sparkling blue of the long, land-locked Matagorda Bay of southern Texas. Palmettos broke the level lines of shore and sky.

The schooner, skimming down the broadening Mississippi, without event had gone swinging on long reaches across the white-tossing Gulf. During the traverse Kenly had seen little of the *doña,* who had kept to her cabin; had seen no more than the little of the *señor capitán,* who shared the cabin with her; had exchanged few words with Devore and two companions of like stamp. To put it bluntly, he had been seasick. Still, he fared well enough, with sleeping quarters to himself. His meals, such as they were, the solicitous Pablo fetched him.

Obviously, the cabin was to be regarded as inviolate. His first surprise and even shock at the situation passed into a shrug; then he laughed at himself, at the whole thing.

It was only in this last hour, when the palmettos and pines of the low shores were growing larger in the view, that Pablo bore him the invitation: "Doña Maria and the *capitán* would be pleased to have the *señor* join them."

So Kenly left the midships rail and went aft to the stern. A homeless man, he had been feeling a bit lonely; the slanted glance and the flitter of a smile from the girl heartened him like a lighted window for a wayfarer. Whatever her actions might imply, he was content to read her with his eyes and accept what good they saw.

Don Rodrigo turned to him with words of courtesy.

"Welcome to Mexico, *señor*. Our apologies for what might seem neglect; but Doña Maria is a poor sailor, and I am worse. Ah, what a sickness it is, this of the accursed sea! We haven't stirred from the cabin the whole time. Thank heaven, we'll soon be where our legs are of use. We land yonder; it is only a few days to San Antonio de Bejar—or, in the common parlance, Bejar."

To an American ear the word sounded exactly like "bear," the soft guttural being almost unheard; had it not been for his conversation with Crockett, indeed, Kenly might have thought the name of the town to be "Bear." In the Spanish, an accent makes all the difference.

"Surely Don Hugo will forgive us," lisped Doña Maria, with an arch look of mock sadness. "Has not he himself, perhaps, been ill also?"

"*Viva Dios!*" cackled old Matilde. "I smell the blessed land; indeed, I vowed a candle or so—but what matter? It is well known that when danger is past, God is always forgotten."

There was pleasant talk, and Kenly warmed toward the girl he had been cursing for a slut and a decoy. Seasickness? It might well be true, and the thought banished the rankling suspicion, or rather lessened it.

The schooner slid through the narrow channel of the long sand-reef that framed the bay, and anchored off

the village. By swaying ladder and fishermen's ready boats, transfer from ship to shore was accomplished. *"Viva Dios!"* again, from many a throat, and Kenly grunted with relief at the feel of the dry sand. A riverman was not a seaman by a good deal.

The worthy Don Rodrigo was a man of foresight; a man, evidently, of far influence. Mules and horses were in readiness here, as though stationed to await his coming. Doña Maria mounted side-saddle. Matilde, with vows renewed for journey's end, was packed into a pannier balanced by baggage. Now they were a party of eight who set forth. Don Rodrigo, Kenly, Pablo armed with a flintlock musket, bell-mouthed on the blunderbuss order, the two women, Devore and his two companions.

Don Rodrigo brooked no delay.

"This is no good place for us," he said truly. "We shall reach Goliad tonight. It is garrisoned; we shall rest in comfort. Bejar is then within three days, for any like us who travel light and fast."

He spurred forth. Doña Maria fell back to rein in beside Kenly. Matilde and the others trailed along, with Pablo and his bell-mouth closing the rear. Don Rodrigo twisted his mustache and pointed.

"You see, the road is well made for us!"

A broad trail, evidently trampled down very recently, led straight to the northwest. The liquid eyes of Doña Maria sparkled as they followed it across the low, hillocky prairie, and a gay laugh broke from her lips.

"Reinforcements for Bejar came this way—*viva!* Once in Bejar we shall be safe. And tonight we shall reach the old presidio of La Bahia; Goliad, they call it nowadays. The second fortress in Texas, my Hugo! Bejar is the first. Well, we shall find Colonel Sandoval at Goliad. He is a true caballero, a conquistador—"

Perchance finding Kenly's eye a trifle inattentive to her chatter, she came stirrup to stirrup with him, so that her foot touched against his leg and struck him out of his reverie. Her smile was witching.

"Ah, my friend, you are not angry with Conchita? How I longed for one word from you, for a touch of your hand, during those days of savage sickness! But with so many other men about, it was impossible. The saints forbid! There would have been talk. Yet I was so miserable, my caballero—"

No, Kenly was not angry, and he found words to say as much, though at the back of his head he found himself laughing at the effrontery of her excuses. What he said, he scarcely knew. That confounded golden haze limited his horizons. Conchita indeed! The very nickname might have told him enough, yet he rode on, foolish with the present moment, compassed about by a girl with a sly alluring smile, a purling voice.

THUS a mile or two, no more, of the march. Then the girl's face changed, hardened, as her gaze swept out. A word broke from Don Rodrigo in front; she echoed it under her breath. The men behind echoed it.

"Tejanos! Tejanos!"

A squad of half a dozen riders were cantering in upon the trail ahead. They dipped below a rise, surmounted it, and then spread out into a ragged front as they drew challenging rein across the trail. Their leader came to meet the party, one hand lifted in signal of parley and peace.

"*Buenos dias* to you, gentlemen and ladies!" He was of erect, shapely figure, a man of perhaps twenty-five, of sharp face, hazel eyes, reddish stubble showing brightly against a skin that did not tan. He had an unsmiling mouth, and revealed light sandy hair when he swept off his wide wool hat. Closely fitting gray shirt, belted trousers tucked into high boots, sheathed knife and holstered pistol. His address had been in form, but careless, cool, somewhat cavalier. His thoughtful eyes ran over the party and settled upon Don Rodrigo, who made him answer.

"The same to you, *señor*. And what is your pleasure?"

"A word with you. My name is Travis. William Barrett Travis."

"And well known," said Don Rodrigo, a trifle grimly. "But not favorably known to Mexico, *señor*. I believe that your arrest has been ordered as a rebel."

The Texans grinned at this response, whose frankness pleased them. Travis shrugged. His hazel eyes glinted with a certain mirthless satisfaction. He was not a man of gay humor; his manner held an earnestness, a disturbing intentness.

"Possibly. I am one of those damned Texans who are bent upon getting Texas her rights as a state. You're heading for Bejar?"

"If so, why not?" demanded Don Rodrigo coolly.

"No objections," Travis said, again carelessly. "But don't figure on a long stay. We let General Cos and his column pass through. You might tell him in the name of Texas that we'll call on him later. I see you have Americans with you." He glanced at Kenly and the others, and broke into English: "Are you men for Bejar going along with this Mexican outfit?"

Devore had ridden up.

"What's it to you if we are?" he demanded aggressively. "This is Mexico, ain't it? A free trail and good company if it suits us."

"Yes? Just take care you're not found on the wrong side when the time comes," and Travis regarded him coldly, appraisingly. "If you men are Americans, there's only one place for you; that's with Texas. Hell, would you go for Mexico when a free Texas is in the running?"

"Every man for himself is my motto," Devore growled. "Where I'm going or what I'm thinking to do is my own business, mister."

"I reckon you're the kind that has no choice in some matters," said Travis, and his cold stare looked Devore down. He turned his attention to Kenly. "You're a different stamp, I see. I can't object to your trail partner, sir; she's any man's reason for riding to paradise or the devil, but—but—"

He started slightly, and his voice died. His eyes suddenly focused upon Kenly's person; Kenly was as suddenly aware that his coat had swung open in the breeze. It was the knife, whose haft protruded from a crude leather sheath hastily stitched together aboard the schooner, and now looped to his belt.

"I'd admire to know, sir," and Travis lapsed into the easy drawl of his native Carolina, "how you traded Jim Bowie out of his knife."

A cold hand clutched at Kenly's heart. Then he managed to iron out the stammer of his tongue, and forced a thin smile.

"This knife? It was presented to me, sir. You may be mistaken in it."

"Not I; that handle I'd know among a thousand," said Travis coldly.

" Special made, handle and blade, and I don't reckon Jim Bowie was likely to give his choice knife away, without you're a special friend of his. Your secret, maybe his, since you're not inclined to talk. When I see him again, I'll ask him who out-traded him, and tell him where I saw that knife of his. I'm not likely to forget your face. Your servant, madame. *Adios,* all."

TRAVIS reined his horse aside, and the Texans separated to let the travelers pass. Kenly caught a half mocking word from one of them: " Hope you sleep well in Goliad, you hombres!" but he thought little of this until later.

He did think considerably upon William Barrett Travis, and inwardly cursed the whole episode of the knife. Jim Bowie seem to be tailing him clear into Mexico; that was to be expected of such a man, alive or dead. This meeting, the clean-cut ominous words of Travis, the business of the knife, all left Kenly moody and dark, so that even the gay chatter of the lovely Doña Maria failed to inspirit him.

The sun crossed the zenith, and there was brief halt for rest and luncheon. The sun dropped steadily into the west, and they quickened their pace. With twilight they were riding a trail of beaten gold, but Don Rodrigo was cursing their slowness, for this was the rainy season, and with night all these lowlands would be hazy with fog.

No fog tonight, however. The moon in its first quarter succeeded to the twilight, and the moon itself was dropping from sight when, at this, the end of the long march, the feeble lights of the old presidio of La Bahia, now the military post and town of Goliad, twinkled through the darkness.

This place, founded in 1722, like many others in Texas bore more than one name, due to the ancient custom of secular authority being separate from the mission establishment. Bejar itself had been San Antonio de Valero, San Fernando de Bejar, and other such names.

Challenge of sentries, gates acreak in the fading moonlight, a glimpse of walls and uniforms as lanterns bobbed; this was all Kenly saw of old Goliad on the San Antonio river. Unaccustomed to riding, he was stiff and sore and weary. Don Rodrigo and the two women disappeared into headquarters. Kenly and the rest were served with food and given lodging in an adobe attached to the presidio buildings.

" Hope you sleep well in Goliad, you hombres!" The jibing, sinister words came back into Kenly's mind as he sank away, engulfed by the snores and gurgles of his companions. Then all was forgotten.

Suddenly he wakened, with upward lunge like that of a diver blindly bursting into the air again. He found himself on his feet, ears ringing, senses wide awake. A gunshot had burst close by. Now came another, with a wild tumult of yells, hails and replies, shouted orders, the scuff-scuff of running feet, and more shouts.

Devore and his fellows were up.

" An attack!" yelled Devore. " We're trapped here—make a slope for it!"

Running feet paused at their door, and it was banged open as a man entered. The wild clamor outside was redoubled; then, with inward rush of fresh night air, came the quick announcement of Pablo.

" With me, *señores!* The Texans are taking the town—come swiftly!"

They stumbled out, jostling each other. Kenly caught Pablo's arm.

"The women?"

"Safe, *señor;* they will come. Horses are waiting."

Everything was dark, strange, confusing. The tumult of fighting increased; gunfire, yells and shouts, the reiterant splintering of planks under axes. But ahead, where quiet still ruled the night, horses and mules were being saddled. The voice of Don Rodrigo leaped forth.

"*Valgame!* No time to lose; all here? Get aboard and off, then. The place is taken. To me, Pablo! In the lead."

There was mounting and riding, the gasping plaints of old Matilde stabbing the darkness. Don Rodrigo was keeping his whole party intact, Kenly observed, and the devil take anyone else!

Out of the hapless town now. A cannon exploded somewhere behind, then another. The fight died away upon the night, and Kenly was aware of Doña Maria once more at his side, her silvery laugh ringing out. Now, when he could not see her glamorous eyes and face, he began to be a little afraid of this lovely creature. As though something intangible reached forth and touched him, waking a queer revulsion in his heart, making him recoil from what he knew not. Then he laughed the feeling away.

"So, *Hugo, mio*—what a night!" said she, gaily enough. "They are the rebels; but our good Rodrigo was ready. He had prepared everything. And Colonel Sandoval had been warned of an attack."

"Who is it? That man Travis?"

"God knows. Are names exchanged in a night assault?" She laughed again. "And what lies ahead of us is hard to say. The settlements are safe, but the wide chaparral holds Tejanos, raiding Comanches, outlaws, plunderers. To ride this road without a cavalry escort is sheer madness—no time for escort now, though. A wild place, this state of Texas for which you are come to fight!"

KENLY said nothing. He was getting no great joy of his company; but the thought of that knife under his belt, of the dead face of Jim Bowie, held him fast bound.

Presently Don Rodrigo slackened the pace from flight to common sense, and they rode on under the paling stars. Here was no beaten trail of reinforcements marching for Bejar, but a rough prairie route taken at venture. It would not be long now to morning.

With graying sky, they halted. Somewhere behind them rose a mad drumming of hoofbeats; Pablo shouted, and a voice made response. A rider came up with them, a private soldier sticking somehow in the saddle of a dragoon horse, white with foam, staggering with exhaustion.

"What killing, what blood!" he babbled in hysteric panic. "The town is taken, the fortress taken. Those Tejanos are not men but devils! The garrison scattered, captured, dead! All the towns on the gulf coast, Anahuac and the rest, are being taken."

The party halted here. Kenly approached Doña Maria. With brief, delicious surrender of her soft form, she yielded to his arms for a moment as she slid to the ground. The groans of old Matilde brought laughter. They all made bivouac; Pablo struck fire, to warm hands and feet, and in the chill dawn they huddled about the blaze.

Coyotes sang mournful pæan to the departing stars. The sun flashed through the reddened sky at last. A stream was close by. There was breakfast, of a sort, before they mounted

and rode on. All about was untrodden prairie. The course lay northwest, and San Antonio de Bejar could not be missed. Assuredly a wide, far land, this state of Texas, to lie under whichever hand was stronger, white or brown.

The morning passed, and again it was the noon rest. No other fugitives joined them. Again the onward stint into afternoon. Ever the endless horizon, trees and grassy slopes, unbroken by human touch. Well watered was this country. Suddenly Kenly was startled out of his moody reflections. A wild, explosive cry burst from Doña Maria.

"*Santo Dios*—look! Look!"

All heads turned. Clustered moving dots were sweeping in along the trail; a company of riders. Pursuit? And for what? Kenly felt the knife stir against his thigh as though nudging him: Here comes vengeance for the dead! But Pablo's were the keenest eyes of all. A sharp bleat escaped him.

"*Los Indios!* They are *los Indios, capitan!* Now we are all dead people."

"That is so, *amigo*." Don Rodrigo was prompt, soldierly, cool. "We are not dead yet, however. Gain that knoll ahead. You, Pablo, to the rear with your musket; you," to the fugitive private, "join him. The rest, keep with me." He lifted his mount, with an oath. "Make for that knoll above the stream. There are more of the devils. This land is accursed!"

Another party had appeared, off to the right. Now the horses spurted right willingly, but the knoll was cruelly distant.

Kenly's eye was caught by the girl. Her golden hair had loosened in the breeze, in the shock of gallop; her color was high, her eyes were bright, she rode fearless, a devil of laughter touching her lips. Above the dull pounding of hooves and the gusty panting of the animals, rose the lamentations of old Matilde.

With gleeful yelps, with heels hammering, quirts at work, lances tossing, the Indians upon the flank bore in rapidly. *Los Comanchos!* The dread word was tossed from mouth to mouth. The Comanches! So close were the Indians that the paint was plain upon their grinning visages and swart bodies. Kenly saw the flash of a knife in the girl's hand, saw her lips curl in a snarl that hardened her face until he scarce knew it.

"They've got us. Make the best of it!"

Don Rodrigo's voice rose coolly. He rode with rein free, a pistol in either hand. The angle of chase and pursuit narrowed rapidly; in the rear, the clamor of the first group of Indians sounded louder. In all the wide prairie, the horizon came down to this; quarry and pack, curses and vows, yells and supplications amid the thundering hoofbeats, and the knoll that rose from the stream.

The angle closed. The Comanches split; one squad hammered to the fore, to cut off pursuit, the other squad raced parallel with the whites. At short range, Don Rodrigo's right-hand pistol belched smoke. The horse of the leading Indian lurched and went down, kicking, the rider pinioned beneath it. The other Comanches swerved aside. Arrows glittered and hissed in air.

AN oath burst from Don Rodrigo; a shaft jutted out from his shoulder; Doña Maria uttered a frantic cry; her horse had stumbled, was down. Kenly reined about; ah she was still seated, her horse was struggling up! Then came shock of collision as red

and white came together. Kenly bared his knife and hurled himself headlong into the wild mêlée of tossing manes and striking arms.

Sharp it was and swift. Devore and his two fellows were lashing out with fists and feet, old Matilde was clawing, Pablo was unhorsed but fighting with clubbed musket. At the bridle of Doña Maria was an Indian, another reaching brown arm for her, as her little knife flashed vainly. The fugitive private had fled the Goliad strife in vain, for a lance went through his throat and he died with blood bubbling on his lips.

Kenly's knife freed the girl's horse from its captor, sheared through side and heart; the death-yell stabbed out, and in stabbed a lance-point, slitting Kenly's shirt and searing under his arm. Then he was at grips with the Indian who had clutched the girl, and who clutched him now in desperation, seizing his knife-wrist, glaring into his face. Then the wild eyes grew wider, fastened upon the knife that trembled between them. A shrill, high yell broke from the Indian. He loosened his grip, flung himself away, sent his horse about, rearing. To his yells, the others drew off. The girl's horse sprang forward anew. As by a miracle the struggle was over and they were in flight again.

Thus they made sanctuary and gained the knoll with its trees. Back upon the prairie the groups of Comanches had come together and were milling amid a rise of voices. Here upon the bushy rise, the wounded Don Rodrigo painfully swung from the saddle.

"Here we stay; off, everybody! Our one chance is to hold them from here. So our fugitive is done for, eh? Anyone else hurt?"

"You, Rodrigo," cried out the girl. "That arrow—*Dios mio!* And Don Hugo has a lance thrust. Look at the blood on his shirt!"

"The arrow announces itself, fair cousin," said Don Rodrigo grimly. "Here with a knife, somebody! No time to lose."

"That's work for me, little general." Matilde wheezed forward. "I've done the same many a time ere this. Yes, indeed! Ah, what doings! If flesh and blood can stand a ride like this, I'll live to a hundred. Come, come, let's see your skin! It's no time for modesty, *capitan.* Besides, I'm an old woman."

Kenly stared as he listened. No shrieks, no hysterics—why, there was iron in these Mexican women, and no mistake! The don bared his shoulder and arm. Matilde eyed the hurt, wiped at the blood, fingered the shaft.

"*Chut!* I can feel the point. All we need is a sharp knife. Your *cuchillo grande,* Mister American! It's cut more than cheese already, I can see."

Kenly handed over the knife, still dripping red. The arrow had lodged in Don Rodrigo's shoulder; deflected by the bone, it had penetrated almost through the upper arm. Matilde slashed, and the steel grated on the arrow-head. She slashed at the feathered end, while Don Rodrigo cursed heartily, until the shaft was severed. Then she shoved the point, and what remained of the shaft, through the wound.

"Devil take you!" grunted Don Rodrigo, his eyes sweeping toward the Indians.

"May the devil be deaf," and Matilde grinned. "The devil gave it; you might not be so good a bargain next time. I'll dress the wound with cold water in a minute. Here, caballero!" and she turned to Kenly. "Let's see your touch of the cold steel!"

"It's nothing," and Kenly smiled. "The bleeding's stopped already, the skin's no more than broken. Leave it alone. What's the program, Don Rodrigo?"

"Wait, camp, rest, be comfortable," said the other promptly, but grimly enough. "They'll hesitate to attack this knoll; if we were on the prairie, they'd ride us down in a moment. A fire may gain us help. We're not far from the Bejar road. We can spend the night here, for they'll not attack at night. Pablo!"

"Yes, my captain."

"Water the horses; Don Hugo will take the musket, to cover you. Bring the canteens full from the creek. The Indians are talking; we must get water while we have the chance. One of them, one of us, dead; life for life."

"Your knife, *señor*," and Matilde handed the steel to Kenly, who wiped it on his thigh and sheathed it. Then he joined Pablo, collecting the horses, taking them down to the creek. Devore and his two companions, little hurt, sulked at one side.

"That old woman has a devil in her," Pablo said admiringly. "However, *señor*, I am sure we shall all get safe to Bejar."

"How so?" demanded Kenly, keeping an eye on the Indians.

"I have two there who are praying for me," Pablo responded. "They are my mother and Josefa, my half-sister. They are both good women."

CHAPTER V.

MATT DEVORE'S PROPOSITION.

THE Comanches clustered in talk, unheeding the horses at the stream. Then one of them came forward afoot, unarmed, arm extended in the peace sign. He was a waddling, burly figure; and Kenly recognized his late antagonist. The Indian halted mid-way, fearlessly enough. Don Rodrigo rose to his feet, but Pablo intervened.

"Let the captain not show his wound. I will go down, if I have a knife—"

Kenly handed over the blade. Pablo stowed it away, then descended to talk with the Indian. For some little time he and the Comanche spoke together; then Pablo came back up the knoll. With a shrug he returned the knife to Kenly.

"He is a chief, but only a little one," he reported. "And he respected the knife much, and admires it. So we go on. He says that if we give him Doña Maria we may go on in peace. The young woman with shining hair—"

The girl cried out indignantly. Don Rodrigo smiled and shrugged.

"Bah! You told him no?"

"Not necessary," said Pablo. "He says they will wait. By morning, his *capitan grande*, his head chief, will be here; they await him. It was through fear that the lady might be harmed, that they drew back. We'll have to surrender the lady in the morning, for the head chief is El Lobo Rojo and—"

Old Matilde came to her feet with a wild squeal.

"What's that? Red Wolf, you say? Praise God a thousand times! Yes, we shall wait, we shall see; now all is well!"

"What the devil!" exclaimed Don Rodrigo, staring at her. "Are you mad?"

The old crone cackled excitedly. "Rest easy, little general! Remember, I gave this American a knife of value, and to you I gave the San Saba treasure map; and I may yet give us

all our lives! When one door closes, another opens. We shall see in the morning, so have patience. One cannot hasten the dawn by rising early, so permit me to sit with what I know."

"You talk like a fool," snapped Don Rodrigo angrily.

"To the blind, all cats are black, little general," and Matilde crouched down, chuckling to herself and hugging her knees, while she mumbled like a witch.

The Comanches kept the truce, and the day drew to a close. The sun couched under a canopy of twink, the twilight lessened, the stars flocked into the wake of the westering moon. The last of their food was shared, and Kenly, awaiting his time to go on watch, stretched out under one of the pine trees and fell asleep. His mood was miserable.

He was under no illusion in regard to his companions. Step by step, he had gone down the scale since that steamboat explosion. With each step, he had played in worse luck; and he was assured that his evil destiny was yet far from played out.

Suddenly he wakened and clutched at his knife. A stealthy rustle amid the brush — the thought of Comanches rushed upon him. Then a low voice growled.

"It's me, Matt Devore. Awake, huh?"

Kenly sat up. "What d'you want?"

"Confab." The other squatted beside him. "None of us boys like this mess. With them Texans nabbing Goliad and damn near nabbing us, and these Injuns to boot, the whole business is like that game where the jack takes the ace. We vote to play what hand we have and streak out, and Bejar be blowed. What d'you say?"

"I don't get you," murmured Kenly.

"Give the gal to the Injuns, take the guns, and leave them two Mexicans and the old hag to bargain themselves off. Four of us ag'in one and a half. That pelado with the musket can be easy handled. Two pistols, a gun, your knife and a clear trail. The Injuns will be tickled pink to let us go."

"Well?" asked Kenly. "After that, what?"

"Not Goliad, you bet; that's closed to us, and worse than closed to you, after what that feller Travis said," and Devore chuckled softly. "Not Bejar, and not back to New Orleans. I don't want no U. S. marshal grabbing me. Where, d'you say? Why, for them San Saba mines of Jim Bowie's, you bet!"

"The San Saba mines! What the devil do you know about 'em?"

"YOU might's well ask how I know the Injuns want the gal. I'm no fool," and Devore laughed. "You got Jim Bowie's knife, and I know how you got it. Prob'ly you got his map of the silver mines at the same time. I heard cabin talk on that schooner. The old dame wasn't hushed; you might's well try to clap a stopper on a cannon. I know enough Spanish to tell a few things. Either you or the don has the map. It's for us to take it and light out with the hosses for them mines. Then, by cripes, there'll be gals a-plenty and we can make terms with Jim Bowie."

Kenly started. "Bowie's dead."

"Yeah; we'll make terms with him in hell. What d'you say to it?"

"I say you're a damned scoundrel," snapped Kenly. "I've heard enough from you. Get to hell out of here and don't try any tricks. I'll be watching you."

Devore caught his breath angrily, then growled an oath.

"So that's it, huh? All right. And I'll be watchin' you, mister. I know what you know, and maybe a bit more. I mean to have a go for them Almagres mines, and don't you forget it, you cussed aristocrat!"

Devore went rustling away. Unable to sleep again, Kenly presently rose and sought out the others about the embers of the fire. The figure of Don Rodrigo half rose.

"*Que cosa?* What's the matter?"

"It's Kenly. Just looking around a bit."

"*Alerta!* That's good. I can't sleep with this cursed shoulder. Did I hear talking?"

"Your recruits are uneasy."

Kenly sat down. Doña Maria, covered with her cloak, was breathing regularly. Old Matilde, beside her, gurgled and sniffled. Don Rodrigo laughed softly.

"Uneasy? Naturally; but we are in the hand of God. Why that old woman prates about El Lobo Rojo, I don't know. You bear yourself well, *señor*. I shall remember," and his pistols clattered slightly as he drew his cloak further over himself.

"I can take the watch, if you like," said Kenly.

"Not necessary, *señor*. I'm on the alert," came the voice of Pablo.

By this, and by the readiness of Don Rodrigo, Kenly suspected that it was all over with Devore's proposition. He left the sleepers and made his way to where Pablo was located, on the crest of the rise, musket close to hand.

"How goes it?"

"Well enough, *señor*. The Indians will not attack; we have only the others to worry about."

"Eh? What others?"

"The three Americans. They talk among themselves too much; what is well said is quickly said, eh? But they are like guests and fish; always the time comes when they begin to stink. I sit here, God sends tomorrow, and we'll be out of this."

"Eh? You wouldn't give the *señorita* to the Indians?"

"Never fear; Matilde will attend to it. That old she-devil holds half of hell in her past life. Listen—she sounds as though she had a frog in her nose! Go back to sleep, *señor*. You did not save my life for nothing; in Bejar you will always have a friend."

Kenly dozed off, fitfully. The dawn brightened, and the camp stirred. Old Matilde scuffled around. Doña Maria sat up, somewhat wan and pinched, to luxuriate like a cat in the first warm beams of the sun. Kenly felt her ready smile and glance; she freely adjusted her hair, so that her lifted arms framed her in a glow of beauty. Don Rodrigo cursed the stiffness of his wound. Devore and the other two sidled in, frowzy and lowering. The horses were watered.

The Comanches, down below, stirred and moved. A single figure advanced on foot toward the base of the knoll; not the figure of the previous day, but another in every aspect. An Indian, equipped in form and presence to claim the eye. They stared at him.

Straight and lithe, skin shimmering like that of a new-cast snake, agleam with paint and barbaric ornaments, twin long braids transfixed at the scalp with a bobbing feather, naked but for moccasins and clout, he strode forward like a young god come for tribute, masterful and aware. There was a ruddiness to him, even to his hair—not black but warmly tinted, coppery, verging upon red. High proud nose, aqui-

line visage, cruel eyes; all this was the more plain by reason of being so extraordinary, fascinating the onlooker with its exotic touch.

"By thunder, there's a swaggerin' copper-bottom for you!" grunted an American.

"*Dios!* What an Indian!" exclaimed Don Rodrigo in admiration. Doña Maria had risen, her eyes fixed and kindling, a strange, savage eagerness in her face.

"*Viva!* What a man!" she murmured.

"*Viva Dios,* indeed—it is he!" cried old Matilde, earnestly squinting. "Now everything is very simple. I myself will talk with him."

"You think a chief will talk with a woman?" scoffed Don Rodrigo, and laughed.

"Or are you going to offer your charms to ransom us all?"

"PERHAPS," answered Matilde with some dignity. "Did he not suck life from these breasts? Was not I, when a younger woman, five years among the Comanches? And a girl of parts might do worse," she added. "Yes, he hung to me late; there was none other for him, and none for me, and I liked the feel of him. His mother was an Apache in the chief's tent. She died in childbirth the same time I lost my baby. And now he is a great chief, and will remember me; I'll speak to him in his own tongue.

"*Dios!* What a credit he is to my milk! I'll talk with him."

"Go along, then," said Don Rodrigo in amazement. Doña Maria turned and spoke.

"I'll go with you, Matilde!"

"Stay here with the devil," snapped the old hag, and scurried out. Don Rodrigo spoke sharply at the girl; she looked at him for a long moment as though she did not see him, then turned again to the scene below, her eyes dilated, eager. One would have thought her bewitched by the sight of that young Indian. And he, as his cruel eyes searched those on the knoll, seemed to fasten his gaze upon her as she poised there, bright of hair, breathlessly intent.

He made a gesture with his hand, as though in greeting.

Then Matilde had come down to him, clucking at him in his own tongue. After a swift exchange of words, remembering that his own warriors were watching, he so far broke down his dignity as to lift her hand to his cheek. Gestures, words, rapid and energetic. Then, while he waited, Matilde turned and hurried back up the slope.

"What is it?" exclaimed the tense Don Rodrigo. "What terms?"

"Patience! I am not a gun," she panted as she came up. "Everything is settled. Doña Maria stays. I told him she is my daughter. So—"

"What?" struck in the girl sharply, almost too sharply. "He doesn't want me?"

"No, my pet. After all, it wouldn't be so bad. If I were younger—" then she broke off, at the angry look of Don Rodrigo. "He wishes a present, that is all. He has heard of a certain knife, and I promised it to him. Give it up, and he'll go away and we're free. I'm sure Don Hugo will give up the knife," she added half-maliciously. "He wears it well, but the overload is the load that kills. Eh, *señor?*"

Kenly nodded. He was willing enough to be rid of Jim Bowie's knife. He plucked it out and extended it to Don Rodrigo; the silver inlay glinted

in the sunlight like the cunning slitted eyes of a basking reptile.

"It's yours, captain."

"God forbid!" and Don Rodrigo laughed. "It's something with short legs and a long tongue. Here, Pablo—toss it out to that brown hidalgo yonder!"

"No, no!" Old Matilde snatched at the knife. "He's not a dog to be thrown a bone! I'll carry it to him."

Doña Maria stopped her abruptly, eyes blazing.

"Fool!" cried the girl angrily. "Fool! We need that man as a friend—oh, what folly! If you had let me go down to him, if you hadn't told him that lie about my being your daughter—why, you've jeopardized everything! If he were a friend, and the mines lying in his country—"

With an angry snarl, Matilde scuttled past her and down the slope. Then the girl ran forward a few steps and halted clear of brush, and threw out her arms. Her voice rang down the level sunlight, her cloak flew back, her bright hair flowed down her slender warm body.

She was a picture of allure, of beauty all aglow.

"*Capitan Grande!* Come to me in Bejar, and come soon. It is a lie that I am her daughter. Come soon, in Bejar!"

The young chief lifted his hand. "In Bejar, Bejar!" he repeated ringingly.

Don Rodrigo burst out in horrified protest that she was risking all their lives, and the girl whirled around upon him angrily.

"Am I taking orders from you?" she broke forth hotly. "Have a care, or you'll go a longer journey than you've just gone! We need that chief in Bejar. We can make use of him. I can get him there. I know my business—"

UNDER her storm of passion Don Rodrigo subsided. But Kenly, watching, was startled. Was the girl thinking of luring this glorious wild young chief to San Antonio? So she said; but as to her intent—well, that was another matter. Kenly had not missed the play of emotions in her features. His eyes were opened in regard to her. He thought, a little sadly, a little grimly, that he might ever be made a fool of by her; and yet he would be aware of his own folly, at least.

He turned again to the scene below. Red Wolf took the knife from Matilde, with scarcely a glance at it. From his wrist he wrenched a broad silver bracelet and his voice lifted, as his hand made the peace sign.

"*Plata del almagre,* silver of the red earth, for the *señorita!*"

The girl heard and turned. She raised her arm, returning the sign; the breeze fluttered her dress.

Her eyes widened and a laugh touched her lips.

Plata del almagre. In the long silence, Kenly heard a mutter of talk between Pablo and Don Rodrigo. The Almagres Mines were so called by reason of the red-ochre earth thereabouts, which likened that country to the Almagres district of Old Mexico. The red earth. The words took a sinister turn in Kenly's brain. He found Devore sidling up to his side, insistent.

"Heard that, cap'n? Ain't too late yet. We could treat with them Injuns. That gal ain't unwilling; look at her! Not by a damn sight she ain't—"

"Go to hell," snapped Kenly in an undertone, and followed it with hot

words that rivermen could pour forth. Devore grinned viciously.

"If you won't foller your knife, you can foller your nose. You got something there you don't get rid of so easy; marked, that's what you are! All right. But you'll talk turkey 'fore you're done."

Devore rejoined his fellows. Red Wolf had turned and was striding back to his warriors, who were mounting. The crone was hastening up the hill. She came grinning, cackling, giving the bracelet to the girl, who examined it and then slipped it upon her arm. The heavy metal gleamed like dull fire in the sunlight.

"Almagre silver!" she said to Don Rodrigo. "You heard? Now am I foolish, eh?"

"To horse!" said Don Rodrigo. The Comanches were riding away. "Get the beasts, Pablo. Forward to Bejar!"

Kenly went with Pablo to lend a hand saddling and bringing up the animals.

"How far now?" he asked, as they worked. Pablo snarled a little, baring his teeth.

"One camp more, *señor. Caramba!* Matters have been like horns in a bag; but that knife made one good stroke for us. You may yet wish the lady had gone with the Indio, rather than the knife. Women, like men, are as God made them — and sometimes worse. Believe nothing of what you may see in that direction. She may appear to hold her finger ready, but she takes the ring to the jeweler first."

Later, when he brought up her horse and handed her to the saddle, she laughed gaily at him, brightly, intimately.

"What a dark look, my Hugo! You are sorry to have lost your knife?"

"Perhaps. You're sorry not to have followed it?"

"Oh, la, la!" She laughed heartily. "One must see what one has. I am not for commen men, me—"

Then they were off, striking on after a couple of hours into a traveled road. And Kenly kept to himself that day.

He bedded that night with a pistol borrowed from Don Rodrigo, but nothing happened. And, in the fading twilight of the next day, they came into the city of the many names, past the missions of Capistrano and Conception, past the ditches and fields and the brown monks, and the half-breeds and the descendants of the Canary Islanders who had colonized this place.

Not much of a city, in many ways. Twenty years ago it had been desolate and abandoned, the victim of Mexican massacre and fury, and it had scarce recovered now. Yet, for Texas, it was a great place. Shabby scattered huts gave place to poplars and thicker growths, then grew a low jumble of flat-roofed buildings sentineled by the noble tower of a great church showing on before. Bugles sounded on the right, and Don Rodrigo waved his hand gaily, with eager word for Kenly, beside him.

"The old Alamo mission, now a strong fortress, *señor.* The guard is being changed. *Viva Mexico!* We have arrived. General Cos is on the alert. All is well. The tower yonder is the great church of San Fernando de Bejar."

"Which may expect those two candles which I vowed," muttered old Matilde. "But having come this far, I'll wait to buy them with silver from San Saba."

They crossed the bend of the river, curving and curving sharply, and Don Rodrigo touched spurs to his horse.

"I must find a surgeon. Pablo, take charge of the three Americans and Don Hugo, until I see you again."

Then he was gone, veering quickly away, with the two women riding after him. And if Kenly sought a look, a wave of farewell, from the girl, it was in vain. He heard Pablo coming up beside him, speaking in confidence.

"I know not what will come of all this; the dog wags his tail for what you'll give him. But I am Pablo Saccaplata, and my sister is honest as I am; she's no Conchita, any more than the latter is the *capitan's* cousin. I shall say nothing about the knife, my *señor*. Don Santiago Bowie was well liked here in San Antonio."

Kenly's eyes warmed. There was something in that earnest pocked countenance which was comforting as a coin in the pocket.

So they rode into San Antonio de Bejar, for well or ill.

CHAPTER VI.

DOÑA MARIA.

AN older, wiser Kenly paced the streets of Bejar, a man desperate, hemmed in on all sides by fate, tricked and betrayed and schooling himself to patience, to waiting. Gone was Hugh Kenly, riverman. The old life lay dead behind him, dead as Jim Bowie.

A visored cap whose leather was flimsy as pasteboard, cotton jacket, ill-cut cotton trousers, coarse and clumsy brogans—his own stout foot gear promptly stolen—orders and drill which he knew already but must learn over in Mexican style. He was close to the bottom now. Officer's rank? It was to laugh. A private, and lucky to be that. He took satisfaction from the burning curses of Devore, whom he met at times.

"A dollar and a quarter a day, is it? Yes, and keep yourself in food and liquor, with every stitch you wear sold ag'in your pay so you never have a copper coming. And for this I gave up eleven dollars a month, United States, and keep! To hell with it. But I'm keeping an eye on you, all the same. We're due to make a bust, you and me."

To which Kenly said nothing. He was beyond curses, even. He had seen not a soul he knew, save Pablo occasionally.

The street called Acequia, fronted on one side by the solid façades of the tenements called Zambrano Row, on the other by the walled premises of two handsome gardened residences, lay sombre and silent this night. Kenly, assigned to service, was pacing out his period of sentry go, guarding the dark street.

The moon, now at the half, should be shining; but dank mist so dampened it that light and shadow was all one silver gray. The street itself never had a glim. The deep windows of Zambrano Row were shuttered closely. The embrasured doors were closed to eye and ear. What passed within those walls, Kenly knew not; the privacy of rank was to be upheld by a soldier walking guard.

Kenly strode forth and back on blistered feet, galled by the clumsy brogans. Ahead of him, a door of the Row suddenly opened; a black-shawled figure issued from the entrance. Its scuttling step rang familiar to his brain. With quick impulse he clumped in pursuit, overtook it, spoke swiftly.

"*Señora!*"

"Out with you, rascal!" came the

indignant squeak. "The old cat prefers young mice, it is true, but I am a bit toothless to make good play." She demonstrated with a grin from the gathered canopy of her shawl; a grin that changed into a gape of astonishment and recognition. "Oh, it's you, is it! Shameless, to accost an old woman in the very street."

Matilde it was, and to Kenly at this moment she was beautiful enough.

"You mistake, *señora.* I confess that—"

"God save you from disappointment!" she gabbled on. "I know nothing for you. I care nothing for you. Confession is for the priest."

"I want to ask about Doña Maria. She is well?"

"But you have seen her, of course?"

"No," snapped Kenly, with anger rising at her tone of mockery.

"What a strange thing!" and she cackled as she surveyed him. "I thought you were dining with her at this moment. You are, of course, a general at the very least?"

"Answer my question. Where is she? Where's Don Rodrigo? Where can I find them?"

"You have something to say to them, perhaps?" Her hag's laugh rang out again. "No doubt you'll find Don Rodrigo where he is, when he sends for you. And she likewise. To be sure, the *capitan's* whereabouts is none of my affair. As for her—well, watch the second door from here, and you'll learn more than I can tell you. *Adios.*"

She went shuffling away. Kenly, on his reluctant beat, kept eye and ear for the door. Perhaps twenty minutes later, it opened abruptly. Two figures came out; military cloak, woman's cloak. Kenly recognized her figure at once. He halted, turned.

"*Señorita!* Doña Maria!"

"Out of the way, you dog," exclaimed the officer angrily.

"Wait, Leon, wait!" broke out the voice of Doña Maria. "He means no harm; he is one of our recruits from Louisiana. Walk on; leave me a moment with him, Leon. I will follow." She turned to Kenly. "Well, *señor?* What is it you wish?"

"Merely to remind you that I am here, and to ask after Don Rodrigo."

Her foot tapped impatience on the stones.

"I know very well that you are here. Don Rodrigo? I have forgotten him; ah, yes, the brave *capitan,* of course!" She laughed a little, then softened. "Wait, *señor;* I cannot talk with you in the street. You see, I have not yet spoken with General Cos. I am going now to the Veramendi house; he is there. Maybe tonight, *Hugo mio;* who knows? You are not an officer; I understand. Well, I'll take care of that, never fear. *Adios!*"

And with a twinkle of white ankles she hastened on across the street to the corner where her officer escort was posted.

Kenly looked after her, then with an irritated oath shouldered his musket anew and kept to his beat. He had just reached the other end when he himself was accosted by a figure emerging from a shadowed nook. It was Matt Devore.

"What are you doing here?" Kenly demanded. The other spat, and laughed.

"I've broken bounds, if you want to know. Me and this hombre," and Devore jerked thumb at a companion in the shadows. "I seen you talking with cloak and hood; the same doxie, eh? She had the ankles anyhow: had a deal more for you, mebbe, or will have. I

wish they'd put me on this beat—I'm ripe for anything! What'd she tell you?"

"Nothing for you," rasped Kenly. "Get to hell out of here."

"Come, you wouldn't report a pardner," and Devore stepped in close. "Listen, Jim Bowie used to hang out here in the Veramendi house—married into it. His friends'd like to know what I know, see? And they ain't Mexicans neither." Suddenly his tone changed. "Hey, d'you know them Texans are a-raising hell? Cos is going to fort the place ag'in 'em; he's doing it now, if you've seen the work. We're like to be ketched on the wrong side of the fence. Then what?"

"Clear out, you drunken roustabout. Your talk doesn't scare me—"

"You're scared plenty or you wouldn't be here," gibed the other. "There's been fighting, I tell you, and the damned country is up. They'll be coming. Let's clear out, Kenly; we can sneak guns and powder, and slide for the San Saba country. By cripes, if I could lay hands on that gal once, I bet she'd talk! She knows where that map is—I know good and well you ain't got it. All right, surly shanks. I'm having a fling tonight if I hang for it. This *amigo* knows a place or two. See you later."

DEVORE, obviously, had been imbibing freely. With his companion, he went lurching on down the street and both of them were swallowed up by the treacherous gloom. Kenly resumed his beat, scowling. He had another hour of it to serve out. From the Veramendi mansion came the drifting sound of music, a chorus of singing. Those damned officers were having a good time, eh?

Mischief was abroad this night, and every night, for discipline was a ghastly joke in these barracks. But things had tightened up in the past day or so, for some reason hard to say. Rumors were abroad on all sides—wild rumors of fight and flight, of Texans who slew and slew, of armies moving north from Mexico, of strange sights and sounds. One man swore he had seen the face of the President and Dictator, Santa Anna, at the window of a rolling carriage. But Santa Anna was far south—

Abruptly, the false peace of the street was broken by a woman's high and frightened voice. Kenly swung around. He saw her figure break forth from the shadows into which Doña Maria had vanished. With a glimpse of white ankles, a flutter of draperies, she ran desperately across the street, ran on with intent aim. Kenly followed. She was Doña Maria, of course; he had no other thought. He broke into a run, to intercept the pursuit that bayed up after her.

She darted for a street, a side street that was no street after all. It was only a short blind lane, ending at a wall set with a door. She flung herself at it; a hard-latched or locked door, for she beat at the planks vainly, then turned at the sound of Kenly's steps.

"No, no, for the love of God!" Then she fell to her knees, suppliant and exhausted. Kenly had one glimpse of her white face, then swung around.

The passage echoed to exultant oaths and the hot breath of oncoming beasts, the scuffling tread of their running feet. Anything might be expected in a frontier town garrisoned by famished men. In the murk of the lane, a glint from the moon gave just a ray of light. Figures like slinking wolves slipping forward. A heavy fragment of stone fanned Kenly's cheek and

crashed resoundingly against the door.

The tall hammer of his musket had already clicked a warning. His voice was drowned in a torrent of oaths. Another stone splintered at his shoulder. The air was filled with them, men were howling at him—he threw his musket to his cheek and pulled trigger.

With the roar, came the concussion of a terrific blow as though between the eyes. It toppled him upon his knees, blinded him with blood and sickening pain. For a little he was aware of things. Shouts and oaths growing fainter, murmurings and quick soft words above him.

Then he went floating, floating, conscious only of his bursting head, of agony under the exploration of distant fingers. Then darkness.

Darkness, for a long while, and dull, merciful numbness. Time interminable; full years, it seemed. Soup and water introduced between his lips now and again, dressings and bandages changed, low murmurs and cool, soft fingers. But always darkness, until the day that the bandages were lessened and his eyes freed.

The daylight blinded him for a while, so that he kept his eyes closed until he could bear it. Then he looked up at her, at the girl watching him. A pallet in a small, whitewashed room where other pallets lay crowded. No, it was not Doña Maria.

"Be quiet, *señor,* if you please. You're getting well."

Kenly stared at her. He spoke thickly, for his throat was dry.

"And you? Who are you?"

YOUNG dark eyes, soft with tenderness, bent above him; cool fingers touched his forehead, the rough stubble of beard on his chin. The smiling glory of her face was a lovely thing to see. Then she straightened up, leaned back on her stool, and laughed aloud.

"I am the señorita Andrea Josefa de Candelaria, *señor.* It is Pablo Saccaplata who is my half-brother. You know, the soldier Pablo—"

"Josefa! You are the Josefa he mentioned—yes, yes. Where am I?"

"In my room and my mother's, *señor.* There is no hospital in San Antonio. We owe you so much—I owe you so much! Do you remember the other night? Ah, those white Apaches!" Her dark eyes blazed in a face that was suddenly white. "The door was locked; I had nowhere to run. And they would have killed you had you not fired."

"What did this?" Kenly lifted his hand, touched the bandages, winced. "A stone?"

"No; the gun burst, *señor.* It shot, but it burst, also. And you did not hold it tightly to the shoulder. The bullet went, it is true, but the stock was dashed into your face."

"My nose is broken?"

"So the surgeon said, *señor;* much broken. He came and looked at you, and did what he could; it was not much. Then he tied you up and left you to my care, which is as should be. At least, God guided your bullet; you can rest easy with that! Ah, if it had been a cannon loaded with grape!" And she flared suddenly with anger. "If I also had but had a musket!"

"You mean I shot one of those rascals?"

"Yes, you did. *Viva!* Only you did not kill him; you shot him through the leg. A soldier named Mateo. An Americano."

"Mateo? Oh, Matthew! Matt Devore, was it?"

"Something like that. He won't chase another girl in a hurry. He made a bad error; I'm not the kind for him and his friends. But on these streets at night a girl should carry a knife as big and long as the knife of Don Santiago Bowie."

The name jerked at Kenly. So Devore had dropped to that bullet! He had stood between Devore and his spoil of lust; another score chalked up for settlement with an animal already vindictive. Now another score was brought to his mind; that chalked up in red to spell Jim Bowie, dead in New Orleans.

"You know—you knew Santiago Bowie?"

"Of course, *señor*. He lived her in the Veramendi house. *Que lastima!* What a sorrow was his! Wife and two children, all carried away by the pestilence. I remember him in my prayers as I shall always remember you. He is a good man, too—"

"You spoke of a knife."

"Of course; his own, *señor,* and what a knife! Handle set with silver from the mines he found and lost again, and a blade that would stick an ox. A knife well used, too. With it he once saved me as you did with your gun and body. A true caballero and my friend—for my blood is as good as those of the Veramendis."

As she spoke of Bowie, her lovely features glowed with animation. Then she caught up basin and cloth from the floor.

"I must bathe your poor face again, my brave one, and wet the bandages."

"My brave one!" Tartly, shrewdly, were the words echoed. "And in her very bed!"

The girl turned in surprise. Someone had come into the room with a quick inrush like a burst of hot sunshine when a door is opened. And like sunshine she was; Doña Maria, no less, radiant and sparkling, with old Matilde peering in from the entrance. The visitor's voice rang out again, acidly.

"So here I find you, Don Hugo—a pretty scene, indeed a scene that goes to my heart. Well, you are of the ranks, not an officer. True and doubly true, so make the most of her bed and her pretty self, my American—"

Josefa straightened up, white where the other was flushed. She grated:

"You mistake, Doña Conchita," and the name held a biting scorn. "The bed is not mine, but his; I share my mother's bed. There is other report of you, I believe."

"He, he!" The cackle of old Matilde rose quick and sharp in glee. "One who goes fishing must not mind a wetting. He, he! That was a good one, that was."

"Silence, gutter girl!" Doña Maria remembered, no doubt, that she was a lady; the hand thrust into her bosom came out empty. Her brows lifted. "What can such as you know of me? You are ignorant. Because Santiago Bowie once was kind to you, your head was turned." She swung around to Kenly. "You know who she is? A servant, a camp woman, a girl who follows the soldiers and washes their dirty shirts and hopes that some day an officer will notice her—"

"You seem to know the way of it," said Josefa. Doña Maria ignored her.

"And for such as this you left your post and got injured, squabbling over a girl of the streets!" She brushed forward and bent over him, her hand touching his brow, her face suddenly alluring, radiant. "Or did you mistake her for me, my Hugo?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Cleveland's batters found the answer

The Tuba Pitcher

By HOWARD R. MARSH

Pete Peters looked crazy— maybe he was — but his pitching was harder to hit than greased cannonballs

SKEETS MORAN held his head high as he guided the yellow cab out Michigan Avenue. He hoped fervently that pedestrians and other less fortunate drivers would notice his moment of glory; he hoped they would realize that to the care of Skeets Moran had been entrusted the greatest celebrity in Detroit, not excepting Henry Ford. The grim-faced, stocky passenger behind the glass partition was none other than Skipper Kane, and every loyal Detroiter would tell the world that Skipper Matt Kane was the greatest catcher and greatest manager since baseball began

The cab stopped for the traffic light at Trumbull Avenue, then slid ahead again, passing the huge overall factory across the street. Skeets Moran, notorious for reckless driving, was carrying his famous passenger as if the latter's stalwart bones were made of porcelain.

"Hi!" called Matt Kane, knuckling the window of the driver's compartment. "Pull over to the curb!"

"What's the matter, Mr. Kane?" demanded Moran anxiously. He jerked the cab to the curb, leaped down and poked his smudged, freckled face into the compartment. "Forget somethin'?"

Matt Kane groaned and tugged at his left ear. "Forget something! That's just the trouble. I'd like to forget something. I'd like to forget I ever saw Detroit. I'd give a million smackers if I'd never seen Detroit. Or if baseball had never been invented. Or the nurse had choked me at birth. Or if I'd been club-footed or addle-brained. Well, I'm addled like an omelet now, all right, all right!"

"Aw, Skipper!" In his sympathy the taxi driver permitted himself the pleasure of becoming familiar with the great manager. "Wasn't your fault you lost them last three games. Course a lot of grand-stand managers, they say you oughtn'ta have jerked Dodge yesterday; but, hell, it's easy to pick 'em when—"

"Or if I'd been born a girl," muttered Skipper Kane, twisting his ear and letting it go again. "Before the Bloomer Girls were invented, then I couldn't be manager for a bunch of broken-down prima donnas, pastry cooks, and hearse drivers who lose seventeen out of nineteen games to tail-end clubs. Could I?" he demanded viciously and almost pulled his ear from his head. "And every half-wit in the city screaming for a pennant, when we're lucky to be allowed to stay in the league."

"Well, you won it last year and—"

"And I had a ball club last year," completed the manager, "not a Home for the Aged."

"If you want somethin' from the ball park," suggested the driver, throwing a blackened thumb toward the pavilion of Navin Field, which thrust its large, squared rump above Michigan Avenue, "I'll trot across and get it, if you'll let me. What you wanta get?"

"Out," snarled Kane.

"Out?" Skeets Moran moved to open the door.

"No, no! Out of the park. That's the only thing I want to get from that park. Get out. See? And stay out!"

THE noon whistle of the overall factory shrilled mournfully. Workers began to pile out to the vacant lot beyond, many carrying lunch boxes. The taxi driver threw his thumb toward the massive bulk of the Michigan Central station, which loomed above houses and stores ahead and to the left.

"Better be movin', ain't we, Skipper?" he suggested. "The gang'll be there by now, waitin' for the Cleveland train and lookin' for you."

"So what?" demanded Kane. "So what? Say, why do you think I'm waiting here? I'm waiting here just because my so-called club is down there at the station, and if I look at their ugly mugs, if I listen to just one more alibi, I'll commit murder and mayhem and infanticide."

"But you'll miss your train if you ain't careful."

"You know," agreed Skipper Kane, "that's an idea I've been considering all morning. Miss my train. Or take one in the wrong direction. Or let a sixty-car freight run over me."

"Jeese, but you are feelin' low, Skipper! Listen, it ain't so bad. You're still in third place, ain't you? You still got a chanst for the old pennant, ain't you?"

"Just as much chance as Dodge had of winning every game he pitched this season, and he's lost twelve already. And now we haven't even got Dodge."

"What happened to Dodge?"

"That galoot went out to a roadhouse last night. To celebrate his de-

feat. To cook up new ways to lose ball games. To manufacture an alibi for giving seven hits in one inning. To figure how to throw 'em straighter and softer up to the batter. Well, he got in front of a fast one himself last night."

"Yeah? Say, you better leave your ear alone. It's gettin' like a radish."

Kane twisted harder. "And Dodge took my last two rookie pitchers with him, the soft-head! Got a little load aboard. Then about 4 A.M., *wham!* The ditch. Dodge and Evans and Hornburger in the ditch. Four-twenty A.M., and Dodge, Evans and Horny in the Receiving Hospital. At 4.30 A.M. Skipper Kane learns he now has a ball club consisting of eight sieves and one glass-armed pitcher."

"Jeese, but that's tough, Skipper! That wrecks you sure. Lefty Norcabbage still has scarlet fever, too, eh?"

"Yep, the lovely little darling. And my only right-hander with a torn tendon. That's Bridgeley. So out of six so-called pitchers I got one left. That's Bartlett. And by the time I get to the station some one will come running out and say, 'Oh, have you heard the dandy news? Bartlett got tangled in a buzz saw and lost both his arms!' Umph! A little accident like that wouldn't do Bartlett's pitching much harm."

"You'll have to call on some of the minors, eh, Skipper?" Moran asked consolingly. "Your farms, I mean?"

KANE was silent a long minute, his frosty eyes fixed on the vacant lot where the factory workers, their luncheons gobbled, were indulging in their usual mid-day sport of throwing baseballs. Perhaps the proximity of the ball park across the road influenced them; anyway, one half the male workers produced catchers' mitts and the other half dragged out finger gloves and baseballs.

"Farms?" said Skipper Kane, frowning at the baseballs which flew back and forth in front of him. "So at 4.45 A.M. I began wiring our farms at Toronto and Beaumont, Texas, and to our scouts and every man I ever knew in baseball, asking for pitchers. Called in every hurler we had a string on, and checking them all over I find two are high school boys, three have glass arms which grew on them about ten years ago when they became grandfathers for the first time, and one was dead, God rest him. That's the assortment of bonbons I get," Kane asserted. "And even they won't be here for a couple of days, and the rules say we have to play Cleveland tomorrow and put nine men on the field and one of them is miscalled a pitcher. . . . Hello! Who's that gink? Tarzan the Ape!"

Skipper Kane jerked upright in the cab. His hand ceased torturing his left ear. His eyes showed interest in life again. He pushed open the door. "Well, if he ain't the damnedest—"

DIRECTLY across from the taxicab a tall, gangling fellow had stepped from the sidewalk over the single rail of the fence, picked up a loose baseball and thrown it at a squat guy behind a huge catcher's glove. The smack of the ball in the mitt rose sharply above the traffic sounds on Michigan Avenue.

The squat catcher jerked off his glove and shook his hand in the air to cool it, then stared at this assailant who had used a baseball as a deadly weapon.

"Wow!" he said, his eyes bugging. "What zoo did you escape from?"

The fellow who had thrown that

bullet shook his head and signalled for the ball. He was huge, muscular, hairy. A small blue cap perched on the back of his head, which was strangely peaked. From broad shoulders arms dangled almost to the ground, which was a good six and a half feet from the top of his matted head. The fellow was twenty-three, perhaps, yet with his unshaven face and loose, apelike posture, he might have been any age. His clothes were dirty, nondescript, gray.

"Give it here," he rumbled from the cavern of his chest.

The catcher tossed back the ball, held up his glove. Smack! The ball was burning the catcher's hand again. The anthropoidic pitcher had barely moved. His arm merely shot out from his side in a little half circle, his wrist snapped, and the ball made a gray streak through the air.

"Hold your glove somewhere else," the fellow mumbled. His enunciation was heavy, slow, but when the catcher held the glove in front of his knees there was nothing slow about the ball reaching it. It hit right in the center.

"A curve," announced the strange pitcher.

Again that queer little side-arm twist, the snap of the wrist. The catcher made the mistake of reaching to his left for the ball. The curve broke so sharply that the catcher missed it altogether and it hit him in the leg.

"Ouch!" he yelled, throwing his glove on the ground and starting away. "Listen, monkey face," he ordered over his shoulder, "you stay right here. I'm going to get the manager of our factory team." He stopped suspiciously. "You ain't signed up with some one else in the Industrial League, are you?"

The big fellow shambled forward and picked up the baseball, studied it. At the same moment Matt Kane climbed over the rail fence and made for the catcher's glove.

Carefully he paced off sixty feet.

"All right, Tarzan," Skipper said. "Let's see what you got."

Skeets Moran piled over the fence after his fare.

"Listen, Skipper," he begged, "you will miss that train!"

"Right here," Kane said, and held the glove in front of his belt. "Ouch!" he said, for the ball had already hit and bounded away. He couldn't believe that with so little effort, such a slight twist of the arm and wrist, a ball could travel with such lightning speed.

Moran tugged at Kane's arm.

"Come on, Skipper," he said. "You can't play no corner-lot baseball. It's train time now."

"To hell with the train!" barked Kane. This time he held the glove out to one side. He didn't care to get his body in front of one of those projectiles. "Hit it," he said.

The ball smacked into the great mitt and half spun him around. "My God!" he muttered, picking up the ball and tossing it back. "Curve," he ordered.

"Don't you move that there glove this time," the gorilla said. "Else you'll get hit."

WHEN a man who has caught major league baseball for six years sees a ball a foot to his left he reaches for it instinctively, involuntarily. Skipper Kane made that mistake. The ball broke too sharply for the eye to follow, passed inside the glove and glanced off Skipper's ribs.

"Told you not to move that there glove," the gorilla said, ambling for-

ward to pick up Kane. "Told you you would get hurt."

"Hurt!" said Skipper Kane. "Only three or four ribs broken. That's all." He was gasping for breath. "Who do you pitch for?" he demanded.

The gorilla shook his head and mumbled something about "Jus' back behind the house."

"You mean you aren't signed up with any team?"

The giant looked over his left shoulder; he looked over his right shoulder; he stared searchingly ahead of him.

"Naw, I ain't signed up," he said.

"Ever had scarlet fever?" demanded Kane. "Do you tear your tendons easy? What's your name?"

"Name's Pete," the big fellow rumbled. "And I don't tear nothin' much any more."

"Night clubs?" Kane demanded. "Do you run around to night clubs and get yourself wrecked in a ditch?"

The big fellow brightened immediately.

"Yeah," he said. "That's why I came to Detroit. Know where there's a good one? I been thinking about night clubs for years and months and days. I sure want to find a good night club. That's why I'm here."

"You're wrong, Pete," Kane said. "You're here to be the great white hope. Come on!"

He caught the fellow's arm below the shoulder. It was a huge arm, big as a ham and hard as bone.

Pete drew up as if to resist. Suddenly his head fell abjectly and his feet dragged as he allowed Skipper Kane to lead him to the taxicab. "I'll come," he said humbly.

"Good! You're in the American League, Pete. You're a pitcher. You're going to Cleveland. In an airplane."

Pete brightened immediately.

"Do they have good night clubs in Cleveland, boss?" he said. "A night club with a tuba?"

"With a what?"

"With a tuba. In the orchestry—a tuba?"

"Sure," Skipper Kane promised. "Listen! This afternoon after we land in Cleveland you're going to practice pitching with me. If you're as good as I think you are, you're going to pitch against Cleveland tomorrow. Even if you're pretty terrible you'll probably have to pitch. If you win, Pete, tomorrow night I'll take you to the swellest night club in Cleveland."

"With a tuba in it?"

Skipper Kane studied his queer protégé. The fellow was apparently hipped on tubas.

"Do you play a tuba, too?" he asked.

Pete's eyes shifted right and left; he glanced over his shoulder suspiciously. Then he leaned close in the cab to Skipper Kane.

"I gotta try my trick with a tuba," he said.

BASEBALL records toppled right and left in Shibe Park, Cleveland, the next afternoon, and all because of a man mountain listed officially as Pete Peters. An inverted Pyramid of Cheops, this fellow was, broad at the shoulder and narrower all the way down to his long, pointed feet.

He stood out in the center of the diamond as impervious to the jeers and laughter of the crowd and the opposing players as any real granite pyramid and he flicked the ball over the plate with a queer side-arm snap which brought a *smack* from Skipper Kane's glove before the surprised batter could swing. His baseball suit may

have been three sizes too small; he may have been herded on and off the diamond like a cow in a pasture by Skipper Kane; but that long, half-naked arm which projected so grotesquely from his jersey was making baseball history.

In the first eight innings Pete struck out nineteen men and made seven errors, and the worst was yet to come. Of his strike-outs, nine had to be thrown out at first base by Skipper Kane, who was yet unable to hold the third strike which flashed so bullet-like from that huge, snapping wrist of his protégé.

Skipper Kane was getting gray-haired trying to win the ball game. For five hitless innings his main task had been to hold his glove correctly to receive alternate strikes and balls; but in the sixth inning the Cleveland players had awakened to the futility of trying to bust the ball out of the park and had changed their strategy.

From the Cleveland bench it had become apparent that something was just as queer in Skipper Kane's catching as in Pete's pitching. Suddenly the answer dawned on the Cleveland manager—Kane never moved his glove after he signalled for the ball.

"Go in there and take a look over your shoulder at Kane's glove!" he ordered his next batter. "Stick your bat in front of it. Bunt that big orang-outang out of the box!"

The next ball pitched came bounding back from the loosely held bat to Pete. He stepped aside and watched it go past. By the time the second baseman scooped it up, Brooks of Cleveland was on first.

After two fouls the next batter repeated the maneuver, step for step, putting two men on base.

"Listen, Pete," begged Skipper Kane, coming out to the center of the diamond, "you pick those balls up when they come your way, and throw them to first base. Understand?"

"I'm a pitcher," Pete protested. "I ain't no fielder. What you got all those other men for? And why you twisting your ear like that?"

Skipper Kane thought rapidly.

"If you want to go to a night club tonight—"

"With a tuba in it?" Pete amended.

"Then you gotta field those balls," finished Skipper.

Pete tried to obey on the next bunt, but he got his long legs tangled and sat down on the ball, to the great glee of everyone except the Detroit players. The bases were filled. The next batter, even with the advantage of watching Skipper Kane's glove, struck out. The fourth man, however, bunted perfectly to the pitcher's box. Pete got hold of that one.

"Here, here!" screamed Skipper Kane, holding up his glove. "Here!" yelled the second baseman, smelling a double play.

But Pete whirled toward first base. His arm shot out in that queer side motion. A flash of white traversed the diamond. The first baseman ducked that bullet just in time to avoid decapitation and the ball bounded off the pavilion many yards behind him.

BEFORE the inning was over Cleveland had made four runs and tied the ball game, four runs on measly ground-hit balls that didn't get as far as second base. Skipper Kane was groaning aloud; the Detroit infielders were midway between tears and laughter; the crowd was wild with mirth, noisy with Bronx cheers and catcalls.

" Charlie," Skipper ordered his second baseman as the next inning opened, " you stand beside the pitcher's box and get those bunts. I'll tell Pete to keep out of your way."

But Pete already had his orders—with the promise of a night club with a tuba if he obeyed—and one set of orders at a time was all Pete could understand. So the seventh inning became a race between Pete and Charlie for the batted balls. Twice Pete bumped headlong into the second baseman and sent him sprawling. With the aid of a fast double play, however, engineered by the fleet Charlie with the bases full, Detroit avoided being scored upon. In their half of the inning the Tigers managed to pound over a single run which gave them the lead, five to four.

Before the next inning Skipper Kane called the third baseman to him. " Red," he said, tugging at his swollen ear, " we got to put another man in the center of the diamond. The Tribe is pulling their bunts away from Charlie. You stand on the other side of the box, toward the third-base line. But keep out of the way of that rhinoceros. Rather lose the ball game than have my whole infield in a hospital. I'll try to get the bozo to stand still this inning, but I ain't promising. Once he gets an idea in his head it takes a stick of dynamite to blow it out again."

Skipper Kane's plan—three men in a row in the center of the diamond—worked in the eighth inning; but during the last half of the ninth the crisis came.

The first Cleveland batter glanced over his shoulder at Skipper Kane's glove—and at last Skipper was moving it as much as he dared to confuse the batters—swung at the first ball pitched, and sailed it into center field for a line single. The next man also connected, pulling the first pitch down the line out of reach of Red Keenan, who had taken his place near the pitcher's box.

SKIPPER KANE removed his mask and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Roughly he twisted his abused ear. He felt gingerly over his body, caressed all the bruises and black-and-blue spots where those bullet-like pitches of Pete's had bounded from his anatomy. He shook his head sorrowfully. To lose any ball game was bad; to lose this one, for which he had shed blood—that would be too awful. He walked out to the pitcher's box. His right knee, from which the ball had just bounded, shrieked at him, but he spoke gently.

" Pete," he said, " what about that night club?"

" All right," Pete said, dropping his glove. " Is it time?"

" No. And you aren't going. I'm going to lock you in your room. Yes, sir, unless you get out these next three men. If you do, I'll take you to the night club myself. If you don't, no night club. Get me?"

Pete nodded slowly like a boy who has been reprimanded and hurt. " I'll give 'em all curves," he said loud enough for both teams to hear. " You just stop the ball, that's all."

So Pete Peters fed them curves, twelve successive curves, and nine of them were strikes, each one a little faster, a little more erratic in its course than the other. Skipper Kane managed to stop them all, sometimes with his glove, sometimes with his protector or bruised legs. The Cleveland rally was stopped; Detroit had broken its losing streak in the queerest major league ball game ever played.

Pete, both hands loaded with baseballs, trudged to the clubhouse on the heels of Skipper Kane, who limped along, counting his bruises.

"Let's hurry," Pete rumbled. "Night club. Tuba."

FOR three hours Skipper Kane had been suffering at that front-row table in the College Follies. His bruised muscles and swollen ear hurt him less than the laughter and whispered mockery of the dancers and diners, directed at him and that gigantic misfit named Pete who sat with his long legs stretched in front of him, his bugging eyes fixed unwaveringly on the orchestra.

Pete's pockets, for some reason known only to himself, bulged with the baseballs he had collected from the diamond that afternoon.

"Listen, Pete," said Skipper Kane, "let's be going." It was the fifth time he had made that suggestion; but this time he was ready to argue. "We ought to get some sleep. Tomorrow you and me are going to have a long practice. We're going to work up some signals and practice fielding bunts together. The next day I intend to pitch you again if your arm ain't sore."

To Kane's surprise, Pete shifted his eyes from the orchestra to his manager.

They were very mild eyes, and in them was the hurt surprise of a child deprived of a toy.

"I been waitin' and waitin' for that tuba," he said. "This orchestry ain't got no tuba. Let's go to another night club."

"Not on your life," Skipper Kane declared. Suddenly he had an inspiration. "Pete, do you know where there are more night clubs than any other place in the world? In New York City, that's where. Out here, tubas ain't popular in the orchestras any more, but if you pay attention to your baseball and practice your pitching and fielding every day I'll take you to New York with us.

"First we go to Washington and then Boston, and then we have four games in New York. Say, in New York you can find a hundred night clubs and at least fifty of them ought to have tubas."

Pete brightened.

"Honest, boss? Fifty night clubs with tubas?"

"Just like I said," promised Kane. "Only you have to practice a lot. And when you get out there on the diamond you'll have to pitch your head off. Else you'll never get to New York."

"All right," said Pete, getting to his feet and lumbering toward the door. "I'll show you. I sure want to get to New York and them night clubs."

Pete Peters lived up to his promise. In the third game in Cleveland he managed to follow two simple signals from his catcher, who dared move his glove occasionally; also he made only three errors. The strike-outs were fewer, but Detroit won, three to two. In Washington he pitched, and won two games out of the four played, leaving the Senators dazzled and helpless before that bullet speed plus the twisting, side-arm motion which released the ball at the most unexpected moment.

Skipper Kane had long since given up his privacy. He roomed with Pete, ate with Pete, trained him long hours on the ball field, never let him out of sight. Pete was unfailingly patient and quiet; his attitude was that of one waiting for some great treat. Every time he heard New York mentioned, his eyes brightened and his lips formed the word "tuba."

BY this time the whole baseball world knew that Skipper Kane had uncovered a new phenomenon. Pete Peters' name was in headlines on every sports page. Howling mobs turned out to watch him pitch, crowds whose derision of the awkward behemoth changed to wonder. Mystery was added to the sensation. Skipper Kane, for good reasons of his own, persistently refused to tell where he had uncovered his baseball marvel, and Pete refused to be interviewed by the simple expedient of turning on his heel and slouching away.

New York City at last—and a four-game "crucial" series. Skipper saw only one game of that series—the first, during which Pete Peters shut out the hard-hitting Yankees and struck out fifteen batters. Never had the gigantic Pete pitched so well.

That night, when Skipper Kane was not looking, Pete walked out of the hotel and disappeared.

For three days the frantic pilot of the Detroit Tigers combed New York City for his lost pitcher. During those hours his left ear swelled and reddened under constant torturing until it looked like a full-blown rose. He searched night clubs, questioned their attendants; he visited every hospital, and the morgue. He called up jails. He enlisted the aid of police detectives and private detectives. To newspaper reporters he stated that he had sent his phenom away for a rest, pointing out that the big Pete had pitched and won seven games in sixteen days; but, once free of the newspaper men, he plunged into his search again.

The owner and the secretary of the Detroit club arrived in answer to wires from Skipper. Behind them they left a city clamoring for sight of Skipper Kane's new find, a city ignorant of the fact that the great Pete Peters, who had flashed to fame in one night, had completely disappeared in another.

A private detective found Pete on the fourth night while the Detroit team was packing to return to their home city.

"He's in the hoosegow out at a little joint called Edgewater," the detective informed Skipper Kane. "Been there for three days. No one out there is wise to who he is."

Skipper Kane grabbed his hat and made for the door.

"What's he in for?" he called over his shoulder.

"Some kind of a brawl. A brawl in a night club. Something about a tuba player and teeth knocked out and—Hey, you promised three hundred dollars' reward for finding—"

But Skipper Kane was already taking the hotel steps six at a time. Two hours later he had bailed his huge protégé from behind the bars and had him in tow. The two caught the midnight train for Detroit, a city which was completely baseball mad. Hadn't the Tigers risen to second place on their road trip by winning twelve out of eighteen games? And didn't they have a new pitcher, the greatest pitcher of all time?

"Now tell me how you got in jail," Skipper Kane pleaded while the Pullman porter made up a berth for the giant above his manager's on the midnight train.

"The orchestry didn't like it," Pete mumbled. "The tuba player particly. I wasn't so good as I thought. Guess my arm was tired. No, he didn't like it."

"Didn't like what?"

But Pete only shook his head.

"That was a nice jail," he said, "and good things to eat."

SKEETS MORAN bunched all his tip money for the past week and bought two front-row box seats at Navin Field. He sat in one; beside him sat Marigold Delancy. Around them, in grand stand, pavilions, and outfield bleachers were twenty-six thousand other baseball fans, all more or less insane, a stamping, cheering mob as wild as a bush-league southpaw.

Across the field marched a thirty-piece band blaring triumphantly to its place in the grand stand. From under the stand trotted the Detroit team. The crowd began to roar. Skipper Kane and the gigantic Pete took their places directly in front of the box seats to warm up. The crowd roared louder.

"It's him!" shouted Skeets Moran to his Marigold. "That's the guy that me and Skipper picked up. Jeese, look at that speed!"

At sight of that queer side-arm motion of Pete's, the white flash of the ball and sound of the smack in Skipper Kane's glove, the crowd roared again.

Lefty Norcabbage, recovered from scarlet fever, was out there, too, warming up with Stringer Downs. Evans and Hornburger, two sadder and wiser rookies, tossed the ball back and forth. The pennant aspirations of the Tigers were soaring.

"Batteries for today's game, Torres and Caldwell for St. Louis; Peters and Kane for Detroit."

The umpire's announcement was greeted with another wild burst of cheering above which rose Skeets Moran's shrill voice. Pete strode out to the pitcher's box and Skipper Kane behind the plate.

Four practice pitches, and the first St. Louis batter stepped up. He struck out on four pitched balls.

The second batter was just as helpless, then the third.

Skeets Moran stood up and pounded Marigold Delancy on her flowered hat.

"What a guy!" he shrilled. "What a guy!"

And Marigold knew now that Skeets really loved her; he had never beaten her before.

The Detroit batters also went out in order, but Skipper Kane wasn't worried. With Pete pitching that way, it was just a matter of time. St. Louis couldn't score; Detroit would eventually. No, Skipper Kane wasn't worried about the outcome of the ball game if Pete were allowed to finish it. But the old manager was all a-twitter from other causes. He constantly watched the entrances to the field, the doors under the grand stand, the front row boxes. His left ear, temporarily normal, was beginning to show signs of abuse again.

In the third inning, while Pete Peters was at bat, Skipper's fears became justified. While the behemoth flinger stood at the plate and nonchalantly watched the ball go past him, Skipper Kane on the bench began to receive visitors.

The first was the private detective from New York.

"Listen, Mr. Kane," he said, planting himself squarely in front of the manager, "I've come out here in the sticks to glom my three hundred bucks. You forgot to pay me off. For finding Pete, I mean."

"Sure," Skipper Kane agreed. "The secretary will give you your check. Say, tell me what Pete did in that night club."

"Well, as the dicks gave me the dope," the detective said, "Pete was at a front-row table. You see, this here

night club orchestra had a tuba player. He was putting on a solo, and all of a sudden Pete stood up and began to pull baseballs from out his pockets and—"

THE private detective was pushed brusquely aside. Two husky men stood in front of Skipper Kane. The manager looked at them and nodded.

"'Lo," he said, pulling at his ear. "Here you are, eh? I've been expecting you. Where you from, Kalamazoo?"

"Pontiac," the spokesman said.

"Sure," Skipper agreed, "only I didn't know whether it was Pontiac or Kalamazoo or Ionia. They got asylums in all those places, ain't they?"

"Yep. Sorry we got to take Pete back with us, Kane. He's been doing a good job for you. But—"

At that moment the grand stand broke into laughter and good-natured catcalls. Pete Peters had watched the third strike flash past him. The band in the front rows blared forth raucously to shorten the wait between innings.

For the first time Pete Peters noticed the musicians. He turned and studied them carefully. Suddenly his huge, awkward form straightened. He hurried to the little sunken box behind the plate, opened it, took out half a dozen new baseballs and jammed them in his pockets.

"Hi! Stop him!" yelled the guards. "He's after that tuba player!"

The two men ran diagonally to head off the mammoth pitcher, but he was too fast for them. He climbed the wooden barrier. Between him and the orchestra was protective wire netting. He tore it aside with his great powerful hands and legs. Up there in the air he looked like a huge orangoutang tearing aside jungle creepers. He dropped into the private boxes, piled over them.

"Hi, Pete!" shrilled Skeets Moran. He made a grab at Pete's great legs, missed him and fell over Marigold Delancy's new hat.

Pete was among the bandsmen now. The music had stopped; the musicians quailed before the wild-eyed giant who climbed over them in a bee-line for the tuba player.

"Put that tuba up again!" he yelled. "Give me a shot at it!"

The tuba player cowered dumbly. For a second Pete hesitated, then he grabbed the huge tuba, jerked it over the man's head, out of his hands. Down to the baseball diamond climbed Pete Peters, bearing the shining horn. Behind him trailed Skeets Moran, protesting, swearing. The two guards were waiting for their charge. One stepped on each side of him.

"Listen," said Pete, "don't you screws try to stop me now!"

His eyes were flashing and his jaw was hard.

The two guards, long trained in handling such men, remained quiet.

"What you going to do, Pete?" one of them asked.

"I got me another tuba at last," Pete said. "I'm going to try it again. I've been waiting two years for a new tuba so's I could try my trick." He shook off the men and marched toward the diamond.

The guards moved back to the bench, Skeets Moran following.

"We won't interfere now, Mr. Kane," one of them said. "He's wild. When he gets this out of his system he'll be all right."

"Gets what out of his system?" demanded Kane.

"Well, you see, when he came to the asylum over five years ago, they tried to get him interested in playing a tuba. Something to take his mind off his mania. He thought he was Christy Matthewson and Walter Johnson and Ed Walsh, all rolled up in one."

"And he is, by Jeese!" interrupted Skeets Moran.

THE guard ignored the little fellow. "So Pete used to practice pitching by the hour, the day, and the week. Well, he pretended he wanted to play the tuba, but the first morning he got his instrument what do you think he did with it? He took it out behind the big house and—"

"Look at him now!" cried the other guard. "That's just what he did in Pontiac!"

Directly behind the home plate Pete Peters had propped the tuba with bats and gloves. The mouth of the gaping horn was almost exactly the size and shape of a catcher's glove, with its hole in the center.

Pete strode to the pitcher's box. Carefully he sighted the tuba. His arm went up, flicked out. A metallic clang sounded, and the ball disappeared.

"Got that one right in the center!" one of the guards cheered, walking out to take his place beside Pete.

"Don't bother me now," mumbled the gigantic pitcher. Again his arm flicked out, again a ball disappeared down the throat of the tuba. A third and fourth followed.

Utter silence had descended over Navin Field. Baseball teams, fans, vendors, musicians—all were completely mystified by the strange performance.

Carefully Pete wiped the perspiration from his hands on his trousers. He pulled his funny little cap down over his peaked head. He took long, careful aim; then he threw. The fifth and last ball disappeared cleanly into the tuba. A triumphant bellow came from Pete. He pounded his huge chest with his fists; he danced; he capered.

"I done it!" he roared. "Five in a row! First time in my life! I knowed I could do it!"

He shook off the guards, both of whom were at his sides now, strode over to Skipper Matt Kane.

"Listen, Skipper Kane, I want to thank you. Sure I do. You made a great pitcher out of me. Up there behind the big house I throwed at a tuba like that for three years, and that's the first time I ever got five balls straight in it. Course my practice tuba was all smashed to pieces before long, but I knew I'd find a tuba again and—"

"The last time he tried that trick," announced the private detective to the guards, "was at a night club near New York. The tuba was in a fellow's mouth, and it knocked out plenty of teeth. He wasn't so good in that night club, neither, 'cause he hit the bassoon player with a wild pitch and—"

"Not Pete," denied Skeets Moran. "He never made no wild pitch, nowhere."

Marigold Delancy appeared from nowhere and tugged at Skeets' arm. She was weeping. "First you hit me, and then you spoil my hat, and then you run away from—"

"All right, Pete," one of the guards suggested. "We'll be going now."

Pete nodded. A guard fell in on each side of him. The three walked toward the door under the grand stand. Pete's happy face turned back over his shoulder.

"Thank you, Skipper Kane," he

called again. " You sure made a pitcher out of me, throwing in that tuba five times like that."

" Listen, Skipper," begged Skeets Moran, " that ear of your'n looks like it's comin' loose again. Don't twist it!"

WHEN it came to distributing the World Series money, Skipper Kane's word was law with his players. " Now," he said, when he had included the ground keeper, the trainer, and the mascot in the division of spoils, " what about old Pete up there in the Pontiac asylum?"

" What about him?" demanded Red Keenan and Stringer Downs.

" We won the pennant by only two games, and old Pete won seven for us," Skipper Kane reminded them. " He pulled us out of a slump, too. We'd have been in the second division if it hadn't been for Pete."

" What can you do for a loony guy like that in the asylum?" demanded Dodge.

" My idea," said Skipper Kane, " is to draw down about three hundred dollars from this pot. With it we'll buy Pete two new tubas and a few dozen baseballs.

" You can't tell, boys, Pete might escape again some time and win us another pennant."

THE END

What's in a Name?

LOUIS LODENITT of Denver, Colorado, was fooling with a gun which he announced was unloaded. In a playful mood he placed the gun to his head and pulled the trigger—to prove to his admiring friends that he was right. The gun was loaded, and it exploded with a fearful noise. The bullet barely missed Lodenitt's head; but Lodenitt died instantly from a heart attack by the shock!

At the Salton Sea in California, James Bullit laughingly told his hunting companions that his 12-gage shotgun wasn't loaded. He, too, foolishly demonstrated by pulling the trigger with the muzzle against his body. Bullit's body was nearly blown to pieces!

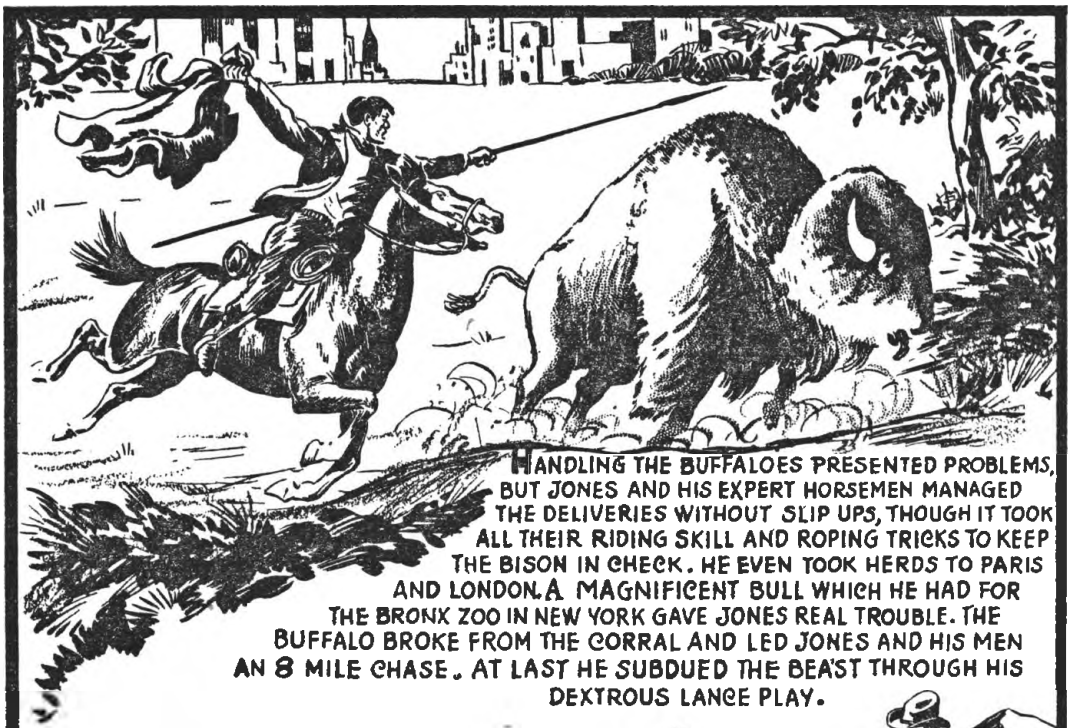
Sergeant John M. Wolfe, a Boston policeman, was bitten three times in the line of duty. A mad dog bit him; a cat chewed him; a drunken man fanged him. But virus from these bites did not harm him. Then Wolfe bit himself and died from the resulting bloodpoison!

A beautiful San Francisco model cut her lover's throat from ear to ear. First, she warmed the razor blade. She explained: " I knew Marsh couldn't stand the shock of cold steel!" Perhaps she knew that a hot knife cuts butter better. For the throat she cut belonged to Ole O. Marshreen!

Joe Mare, a patriarch, aged 77, was arrested recently in Philadelphia for stealing horses! Mare testified in court that he had partaken of numerous and sundry ponies of brandy before the rustling job.

—*Joseph W. Skidmore.*


MEN of DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
WIZARD OF THE WILD
COWBOY, BREEDER OF BISON, AND THE LAST OF THE PLAINSMEN, CHARLES JESSE "BUFFALO" JONES WAS THE MAN WHO CONCEIVED THE IDEA OF RESCUING THE BISON FROM EXTERMINATION. HE ROPED THE FEW ANIMALS THAT REMAINED AND ANSWERED THE CALL OF THE WILD WITH LARIAT, CAMERA AND CORRAL.
"BUFFALO" JONES
ALTHOUGH A YANKEE BY BIRTH, JONES WAS TYPICALLY EASTERN BY EDUCATION AND TRAINING. BORN IN NEW ENGLAND IN 1844, HE GREW UP IN ILLINOIS, AND WHEN HE TOOK TO ROVING THE WEST HE BECAME A CATTLE RANGER AND WAS SOON AN EXPERT SHOT AND A LARIAT THROWER. GOING INTO POLITICS, HE SERVED 8 TERMS IN THE LEGISLATURE OF KANSAS.
DEPLORING THE SLAUGHTER OF THE BUFFALO, JONES PLANNED TO SAVE IT FROM EXTINCTION. IN 1885, HE WENT TO TEXAS AND ROPED 14 BISON, 4 OF WHICH HE MANAGED TO BRING BACK TO HIS KANSAS RANCH. DURING THE NEXT 4 YEARS HE ADDED TO HIS HERD AND BY 1889 WHEN THEY HAD MULTIPLIED TO 200 HE BEGAN SELLING THEM TO PARKS AND ZOOS, SOMETIMES GETTING $1000 APIECE FOR THEM.



HANDLING THE BUFFALOES PRESENTED PROBLEMS, BUT JONES AND HIS EXPERT HORSEMEN MANAGED THE DELIVERIES WITHOUT SLIP UPS, THOUGH IT TOOK ALL THEIR RIDING SKILL AND ROPING TRICKS TO KEEP THE BISON IN CHECK. HE EVEN TOOK HERDS TO PARIS AND LONDON. A MAGNIFICENT BULL WHICH HE HAD FOR THE BRONX ZOO IN NEW YORK GAVE JONES REAL TROUBLE. THE BUFFALO BROKE FROM THE CORRAL AND LED JONES AND HIS MEN AN 8 MILE CHASE. AT LAST HE SUBDUED THE BEAST THROUGH HIS DEXTROUS LANCE PLAY.

IT WAS JONES WHO PRODUCED THE CROSS BREED OF BISON AND GALLOWAY CATTLE KNOWN AS THE "CATALO," A HYBRID, THE FLESH OF WHICH WAS AS TENDER AS VENISON AND WHOSE FUR WAS AS SOFT AS A BEAVER'S. THIS, TOGETHER WITH HIS CROSSING OF THE HARDY MOUNTAIN SHEEP AND THE PERSIAN SILK-WOOL VARIETY, WON HIM FAME AS THE "LUTHER BURBANK OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM."

JONES ACTED AS GUIDE FOR PRESIDENT "TEDDY" ROOSEVELT ON THE LATTER'S FAMOUS HUNTING TRIP IN YELLOWSTONE PARK. LATER TEDDY APPOINTED HIM GAME WARDEN OF THE PARK.

JONES, IN 1911, AT THE AGE OF 67, TOOK A BAND OF COWBOYS TO AFRICA. THERE, TO THE AMAZEMENT OF THE NATIVES, THEY **LASSOED** GIRAFFES, LEOPARDS, CHEETAHS, A **LION** AND OTHER ANIMALS. THE MOVIE CAMERAS OF THE OLD BIOGRAPH COMPANY MADE FILM RECORDS OF THIS UNUSUAL HUNT.

JONES DIED IN 1915 FROM FEVER CONTRACTED IN THE JUNGLE. A DOZEN YEARS EARLIER HE HAD HAD THE ODD EXPERIENCE OF READING HIS OWN OBITUARY, BASED ON A MISTAKEN REPORT OF HIS DEATH.

Next Week: Maj. Herbert Dargue, Pioneer Army Airman

The Sheriff of Tonto Town

By W. C. TUTTLE

Henry's enemies were ready to use any weapon to get him out of Wild Horse Valley—including kidnaping and murder

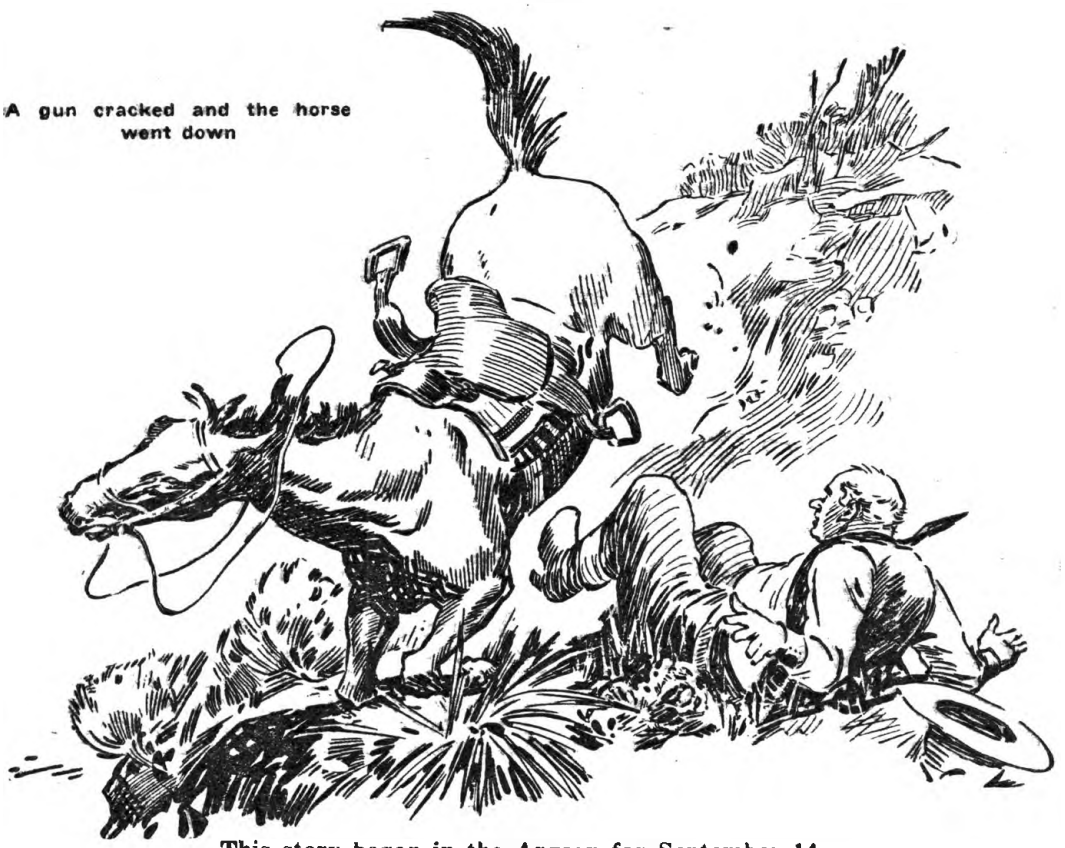
LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HENRY HARRISON CONROY went West to Arizona to claim his inherited J Bar C ranch in Wild Horse Valley, and soon found himself elected sheriff. He didn't last long at that, however, because of the crooked manipulations of Jack West, proprietor of the Tonto Saloon in Tonto City, and a wealthy man. West had Lou James, one of his fellow crooks, appointed sheriff.

Henry, with his friends, Judge Van Treece and Oscar Johnson, retired to the J Bar C, where Danny Regan was foreman. West didn't even want Henry to ranch, though. His men began killing and stealing Henry's cattle. When Henry discovered a rich vein of gold, West tried to jump the claim, but failed.

Meanwhile, in Tonto City, Tom Silver, who had been wronged by West many years before, obtained a job as swamper in West's saloon, and laid plans for revenge.

Lola, a girl who dealt faro in the establishment, also hated West.



A gun cracked and the horse went down

This story began in the Argosy for September 14

CHAPTER XV.

A WILD NIGHT.

THE following afternoon, while Danny and Slim were inspecting the water holes, Oscar and Frijole went to work on building a new corral. Oscar had failed to kill anybody at Antelope Springs; and was quite disappointed, after spending a chilly night, sans blankets.

"Ay don't like das ha'ar yob," he told Frijole, as he piled poles into a wagon-box. "Ay van't to be a detacktive."

"Yea-a-ah?" queried Frijole.

"Yah, su-u-ure. Ay had a ha'al of a good yob, as a yailer. Ay hope to be de shoriff of dis county, Free-holey."

"Yeah, that'd be fine. I ain't easy to tickle, but I'd shore laugh myself plumb to death."

"Su-u-ure. Ay would make you de onder-sheriff."

"That breaks m' laugh right off in the middle, and sends me into hy-steericks," remarked Frijole. "I reckon that's enough poles for this trip. Say, do yuh know it, we've gotta take this wagin to a blacksmith-shop pretty soon, and have a couple tires set. Them two front ones is almighty loose."

"Yah, su-u-ure," agreed Oscar. "Das a good idea, Free-holey. Ay vould like to go to town, too."

"Yeah. I'll betcha them girls in the Tonto shore miss you."

"Su-u-ure," grinned Oscar sheepishly. "Yosephine miss me, too."

"Huh! The only time Josephine ever missed you was when you ducked that chair and she crowned the drummer. She's a fighter."

"Yosephine," declared Oscar, "is de heavyweight champion of Minnesota."

"She is, eh? How do yuh figure that?"

"V'al, she licked das Lars Svensen, Norvegian champion of Minnesota."

"Yeah, that's right. But that makes her the Norwegian champion."

"V'al—Ay suppose so, Free-holey."

"Well, we better git home with this load of poles, so I can cook supper."

As Frijole explained it to Henry:

"I've got to have flour and beans and a lot of other stuff from town, and that wagon won't stand another day of pole haulin'. Me and Oscar will take it in this evenin', and have the blacksmith shrink on them tires, and I'll load up the stuff I need. We ort to be back here by—oh, ten o'clock."

"You should," nodded Henry. "Keep Oscar sober, and both of you keep out of trouble. You know how belligerent Oscar gets after a drink or two."

"I shore do. Well, I'll keep him as sober as an angel."

"Are you sure that angels keep sober, Frijole?"

"Well, I reckon they have to keep sober."

"I see. Perhaps, when the poet said, 'Oh, Death, where is thy sting?' he didn't think of sobriety among the angels. Or was it a poet, Frijole? I'm just a little vague."

"That's the way I look at it, too," agreed Frijole.

"We both need to brush up a little," said Henry.

"Yeah, I reckon so," nodded Frijole, "but I ain't goin' t' town to do any struttin'."

"In my opinion," said Judge, as the two men rode away on the wagon, driving a half-broken team, "no good can come of those two going to town in the evening. You should have insisted on Danny and Slim making the trip."

"Danny and Slim have been in the saddle all day, Judge. Frijole needs flour, beans and a lot of stuff."

"Indeed? I happen to know that there are two sacks of flour and one large sack of beans in the store-room."

"I know there is, Judge. But," Henry smiled slowly, "that may not be enough. Those two men are of legal age. Who am I to tell them to stay here? I am merely their employer—not their keeper."

FRIJOLE chuckled on the way to town. "That's the advantage of workin' for a feller like Henry, Oscar. I told him what I needed, and he said to go and

git it. He never checks up on the stuff in the store room."

"Hanry is a good yigger," declared Oscar.

"They jist made *him,* and then busted the mold," stated Frijole. "And lemme tell yuh somethin'; he's smarter 'n he looks."

"Yah, su-u-ure," agreed Oscar heartily. "Sometimes Ay almost believe Hanry has Svedish blood in his body. Das feller is smort as ha'al."

"Well, if he has," grinned Frijole, "it's a hell of a long ways back, and he's outgrowed the handicap."

They arrived at Tonto City and took the wagon to a blacksmith shop just off the main street. The smith was ready to close his shop, but Frijole pointed out the urgency of the job.

"All right," said the smith. "Tie the outfit around at the back, and when I'm through I'll drive it around and tie up in front of the general store. They'll be open until nine o'clock."

That was quite all right with Frijole and Oscar, who went to the Tonto Saloon, where they absorbed several drinks apiece, before looking around.

"I heard you was having trouble with somebody poisoning your water holes," said the bartender.

"We ain't had the trouble yet," replied Frijole. "That's still comin' to 'em. Yuh heard about them gallinippers tryin' to jump our Golden Calf mine, didn't yuh?"

"I heard a little talk about it. Have you really struck gold?"

"Ay skal ta'al you!" exclaimed Oscar expansively.

"Have you got a lot of it?"

"We figure," stated Frijole, "that the vein is about sixty feet wide, sixty feet tall, and runs plumb to China. And," Frijole grew very confidential, "she runs over a million dollars a ton."

"That's a pretty fair prospect," admitted the bartender.

"Well, we can tell more about it after a little diggin'. It may be bigger than we think."

At nine o'clock, when the general store was due to close for the day, Frijole had forgotten the flour and beans. He and Oscar were trying to dance with the girls in the honkytonk, but with little success. Later, Frijole missed Oscar for a while, but finally found him at a table in the honkytonk, weeping briny tears.

"Whazzamatter?" asked Frijole.

"Ay am hort-sick," declared Oscar. "Ha'r Ay am, vasting my time vit scorlet vimmin, and poor Yosephine—"

Oscar broke down again.

"Of all the cockeyed Swedes, yo're the worsht," declared Frijole. "What about Josephine?"

Oscar waved a huge paw in the general direction of the wall behind him, where there was a huge lithograph, advertising a certain brand of whisky. It depicted a very beautiful young lady, caressing a huge Percheron horse, bedecked in full harness.

"Das reminded me of Yosephine," sobbed Oscar.

Frijole braced himself against the table and managed to focus his eyes on the picture. He squinted at Oscar, blinked his eyes, shook his head violently, and looked at the picture again.

"Oshcar, you shore got 'magination," he stated.

"Looks yust like Yosephine," sobbed Oscar.

"Yeah, there's a shertain reshemblance," agreed Frijole, "but you'd have t' take that bridle off, t' be sure 'bout it."

OSCAR'S period of mourning was short, but his memory was long. He saw Jack West in the gambling room, and decided to make an example of him. But in making a drunken stalk, he neglected to observe a poker game, between him and West. No one ever knew who owned which poker-chips, because Oscar, tank-like, went over the table, lost track of Jack West, and stumbled out of the place, during the confusion.

Frijole found him out in front, clinging to a porch-post, and talking Swedish to the post.

"Leggo the posht," ordered Frijole.

"The sheriff's lookin' for yuh, Oshcar. Anyway, 's time t' go home."

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning, and the town was in darkness, except for the Tonto Saloon. Arm in arm they stumbled across the street to the team and wagon, where Oscar, after several futile efforts, managed to get up on the seat. Frijole untied the team, but was unable to climb up to the seat. There was no endgate in the wagon; so he was able to enter from the rear.

"Let'r go!" he yelled at Oscar, who emitted a raucous war-whoop.

A moment later the team twisted wildly, cramping the wagon so badly that it narrowly missed turning over. Then, with a lurch of the frightened team, a bang and rattle as the wagon-box settled back on the running-gears, the equipage went out of Tonto City, with both horses on the run. Frijole was bouncing around in the wagon-box, several times in imminent danger of being thrown from the rear.

"Hol' 'em, Oshcar!" he yelped. "Hol' 'em down, you crazy Swede!"

"Yee-e-e-e-minee-e-e-e!" shrilled Oscar, "Who de ha'l's got de lines, Free-holey?"

"Ain't you got 'em?"

"Ay have not!"

Frijole Bill managed to get to his feet, clinging to the back of the seat. The team was running full-speed, and the wagon was swaying and bouncing over the rutty roads. The truck-loads of machinery for the Smoke Tree Mine had cut up the road badly, and at every chuck-hole the wagon went completely off the ground.

The seat came off the side-boards, and Oscar landed in the bottom of the box, along with Frijole.

"Ve better yump!" yelled Oscar. "Das ha'ar t'ing is going to ha'al in a minute."

But Oscar's time-limit was too generous. He had no more than declared the destination of the equipage when there came a terrific crash, a general upheaval, and both men landed in the brush beside the road. For several moments the air was full of sand and dust, which blew away on the night breeze. Oscar's voice piped weakly:

"Ay bet ten dollar Ay am deader'n ha'al."

A bush adjacent to the voice of Oscar jerked violently for a moment, and then Frijole said weakly:

"If yuh lose—will yuh come over and help me? I come down here upside down, and I've got a mesquite snag up inside my boot."

"Ay am badly hort," wailed Oscar. "Everytime Ay move, Ay squeak."

"Well, take yore time," said Frijole resignedly. "I'm still hangin' upside down from one boot. Are yuh still squeakin'?"

"Ay guess Ay am oll right, Free-holey."

After much grunting and groaning they were both out of the brush. The team had swung off the road a short distance beyond and was tangled up in the brush, but the wagon seemed intact. The runaway and accident had sobered them sufficiently to allow them to climb to the seat. But this time they held the lines.

Oscar had a quart of rye in his coat pocket, which had escaped injury; so they each had a big drink before going on to the ranch, where they left the wagon beside the stable, unharnessed the team and put the horses in the corral.

In the bunk-house Danny Regan opened one eye and looked them over. As long as they were sober enough to undress, they must be all right, he decided.

"Nothin' happened to you fellers, eh?"

"What could happen to yuh in a dead town like Tonto?" countered Frijole.

"Das right," agreed Oscar. "Das town is yust like graveyord."

"Well, it took yuh a long time to find it out."

"We ain't the kinda fellers that pass snap-judgment on any man's town," replied Frijole.

BREAKFAST was ready at the J Bar C, and Frijole Bill, red-eyed and sleepy, was about to hammer the suspended triangle of steel at the kitchen doorway, when two horsemen rode in through the main gate, and went slowly down to the stable.

Danny Regan and Slim Pickins were coming from the bunk-house.

"That's the sheriff and Lem Schuyler," said Danny. Schuyler owned a small ranch several miles north of Tonto City.

Frijole turned from the triangle and watched the two riders. Henry came through the kitchen and stood in the doorway.

"Who is it?" he asked. Danny came over to him.

"That's the sheriff and Lem Schuyler," he replied.

The sheriff and the rancher were looking into the wagon-box. After a few moments, the sheriff climbed into the wagon and leaned over, looking closely at something. Frijole spat dryly, and looked toward the bunk-house, where Oscar had put in an appearance.

"Seem to be lookin' at somethin' in the wagon," said Slim.

The sheriff got out of the wagon and both men came up to the kitchen porch, leading their horses. Both men looked very grim.

"How are yuh, Lem?" called Danny. "Long time I no see yuh."

"Hyah, Regan," replied the rancher.

They stopped, and the sheriff eyed them coldly.

"What's on yore mind, James?" asked Danny.

Lou James ignored the question, as he looked keenly at Oscar Johnson, and said:

"Would yuh mind tellin' us about it, Johnson?" he asked.

"Yust what in ha'al do you vant to know?"

"What time did you git back here last night?"

"It was right close to two o'clock," interposed Danny. "They woke me up and I looked at the clock."

"That bunk-house clock is five minutes fast," said Frijole.

"What time did you leave town, Johnson?"

Oscar looked helplessly at Frijole. Neither of them knew what time. Henry came out to the edge of the little porch.

"What is this all about?" he asked.

"In case yuh don't know," replied the sheriff, "I'll tell yuh. Last night, somewhere between midnight and one o'clock, some men drove a team up to the Gold Plate mine. They're buildin' a new mill up there, but they's got a one-shift crew takin' out high-grade ore.

"There's a night guard on duty up to twelve o'clock, when he's relieved by another man, who stays until mornin'. This first guard went to find out who was comin' in the wagon, and he got popped on the head. The other guard comes along a little later, and they jumped him, but he shot a couple times.

"This mornin' they found both guards tied up tight, and sixty sacks of high-grade ore missin'. Yuh know, they put it in them small, canvas sacks—but each sack is worth a hell of a lot."

"Interesting—so far," agreed Henry. "But where do we figure in it?"

"You figure in it like this," replied the sheriff. "Them sixty sacks of ore are down there in yore wagon."

"That—that is incredible, sir!"

"Yea-a-ah? And more than that, there's a dead man in there with them sacks."

Judge came out in time to hear the last remark. Frijole took a deep breath and looked at Oscar, who was wide-eyed in amazement.

"Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed Henry. He looked accusingly at Oscar and Frijole.

"You—you—well, do not gawp! What happened?"

"Let us see the evidence," suggested Judge.

THEY crowded around the wagon in silence. The sacks of ore were there, and the dead man, staring at the sky with lifeless eyes, was there, too.

"Who is he?" asked Judge.

"His name's Hardy, I think," replied the sheriff. "He was shift-boss at the Gold Plate."

Oscar leaned dejectedly against a wagon-wheel, trying to puzzle things out in his own mind, which was more or less of a blank.

"Are you the new deputy, Lem?" asked Danny.

"Hell, no!" exclaimed the rancher. "I'm lookin' for a team and wagon."

"Didja lose one?"

"Somethin' happened to it. I left that team tied in front of the general store last night, while I played me a little poker; and when I came out, the team was gone."

"Huh—how late was it there?" asked Frijole anxiously.

"I don't know. I come out about two o'clock, and it was gone."

"Wait a minute!" exploded Frijole. "The blacksmith was to leave our team there, too! Somebody stole our team and wagon—and me and Oscar got the wrong team. That's it, by golly!"

"Well, what the hell didja do with my outfit?" roared Schuyler.

"That—that's a question. I—I remember—yeah, that was it! Oscar didn't have the lines, and the team ran away. Why, by golly, I'll betcha we busted up right where the road forks to the Gold Plate. Take a look at the side of that wagon and the wheels. Yuh can see where somethin' hit it."

"What hit it?" asked the sheriff.

"The wagon we was in. The team ran away, and when we hit this wagon, me and Oscar was throwed out. Then we found this team and wagon, and came home with it, thinkin' it was the same one."

"Yuh mean," said Schuyler, "that my team kept on goin'?"

"They vars going like ha'al, yust before we hit, Ay know that," said Oscar.

"I reckon that's the answer," growled the sheriff. "Yuh see, about the time this robbery was takin' place, that big Swede was fallin' over a poker-table in the Tonto; so they couldn't have had any hand in it. Would yuh mind hitchin' up a team, so we can take this wagon-load back to Tonto City?"

"I've got a damn good notion to have both of you pelicans arrested for stealin' my team and wagon," growled Schuyler.

"It would furnish plenty of laughs for a jury, sir," said Judge.

"Oh, I ain't exactly a damn fool," said Schuyler, grinning. "Yuh see, I was in that poker game last night, when the Swede done his high-dive. I was seven dollars loser, when he went over the table, and when I got back on my feet, I had thirty-seven dollars worth of blue chips. I quit the game a hundred and sixty dollars to the good."

DANNY and Slim hitched up the team turned it over to the sheriff. Then they all filed back to breakfast.

"The town," said Danny, "vars yust like a graveyord."

Oscar smiled foolishly.

"You gallinippers dang near got yourselves in jail, don'tcha know it?"

"Yah, su-u-ure," admitted Oscar.

"Draggin' in here at two o'clock in the mornin', with sixty sacks of stolen ore and a dead man in the wagon. Not only that, but yuh prob'ly busted up Schuyler's wagon and killed his team. Well, ain't yuh got anythin' to say for yourselves?"

"Yah, su-u-ure," replied Oscar blandly. "Ve had a ha'al of a good time, Danny."

"Of course," smiled Henry, "that settles the argument."

"Henry, you never understand the gravity of things," said Judge. "You are too lenient. Why, I believe you could excuse the devil for tormenting lost souls."

"Hardly that, Judge. You see, I do not believe in the devil—and it has never been proved that a soul ever gets lost."

"I'm jist a wonderin'," said Frijole, bringing a fresh platter of bacon and eggs, "what became of the driver of that wagon. He must have lit a-runnin', when we hit him."

Henry placed his knife and fork on the table, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"Did anyone examine the dead man?" he asked. "I mean—to determine how he was killed?"

"I didn't see any blood on him," said Danny. "The sheriff didn't say what killed him."

"Judge," said Henry, "I believe we will ride to Tonto City this morning."

"The sheriff took the only team we've got caught up," said Danny.

"We shall ride on our trusty steeds, Daniel."

Judge groaned audibly.

"Was that an expression of anticipation?" queried Henry.

"It was advance sympathy for your horse, sir," replied Judge.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THREAT.

DOCTOR BOGART'S examination of the dead shift-boss showed that the man died from a broken neck. The sheriff explained to Jack West about Oscar and Frijole, and the extra team and wagon. West listened grimly.

"Hardy got what was comin' to him, Lou," he said. "He must have been drivin' that team when the crash came. They tried to steal that load of high-grade ore. My own men—stealin' from me."

"I thought for a few minutes that I had the deadwood on that J Bar C outfit," said the sheriff. "Damn 'em, they seem to wiggle out of everythin'."

"Don't worry about that layout; I'll handle them, Lou. One of these days I'll have this whole damn county right under my thumb. I'll own everythin' worth ownin', elect my own officers, and tell 'em all what I want done."

"I'm with yuh, West," said the sheriff. "Anythin' yuh want done—jist yell."

"Mebbe I'll call yuh on that one, Lou—some of these days."

"Anythin'," repeated the sheriff.

"That's fine."

"I was talkin' with a bartender last night," offered the sheriff, "and he was tellin' me what the J Bar C cook told him about that mine they've got out there. He said their gold vein was sixty feet wide, and sixty feet high."

"Yea-a-ah? That's quite a vein of gold, don'tcha think?"

"I reckon so. How wide is the vein in the Yellow Warrior?"

"The richest vein is about twelve inches, Lou."

"My God, they must have the world by the tail out there!"

"Yeah, I reckon they have. They'll probably flood the world with gold."

"Well, why don'tcha buy it, West? He told the bartender that it assayed a million dollars a ton."

"Lou," smiled West, "do you know anythin', about gold mines?"

"Only what I've heard."

"Well, you better stick to wearin' a sheriff's badge, and forget what drunken cowpunchers and ignorant bartenders tell yuh."

"I guesss prob'ly that's the best thing to do."

WEST walked to the doorway with the sheriff, and they saw Henry and Judge arrive in town; two queer-looking riders on two old horses which were about ready for the glue-factory.

They dismounted heavily in front of the Harper millinery store, and walked stiffly inside the place. West smiled grimly, his hands shoved deep in his pockets.

"I heard," said the sheriff, "that Henry Conroy was goin' to marry the Widder Harper."

"Yuh did, eh?" smiled West.

"Uh-huh. Her daughter is engaged to Danny Regan, too."

"I heard about that one."

"I'd shore like to git the deadwood on that J Bar C outfit," said the sheriff. "I had two of 'em—once—for a few minutes."

"Well, keep tryin', Lou; yuh never know when yore luck might change."

"That's right; yuh never do. But it might git worse."

"Yeah, that might happen. Well, how about ridin' up to the Lucky Stake with me, Lou? I'm goin' to pull all the men off that job and put 'em on the Gold Plate. I reckon I'll suspend operations on the Lucky Stake until I get the Gold Plate producin'."

"Shore, I'll ride up there with yuh," agreed the sheriff.

"Lou, yuh don't happen to know where that Golden Calf mine is, do yuh? I mean, would yuh be able to ride to their point of discovery?"

"No, I couldn't; I've never seen it."

"All right. I believe there's a man at the Lucky Stake who can take us there. I'd like to take a look at the thing."

"I'd like to see it, too. After what I heard about it."

"Who wouldn't?" smiled West. "After what *you* heard."

They found a man who could guide them out to the Golden Calf, and Jack West was amazed at the prospect.

"Except for the size, you wasn't so far wrong, Lou," he told the sheriff as they rode back. "I wonder what kind of a deal I could make with the outfit."

"Take it away from 'em," suggested the sheriff callously.

West looked thoughtfully at the sheriff.

"How far would you go in backin' my play, Lou?" he asked.

"Jist as far as yuh need me. Hell, I don't like that J Bar C no better than you do. I'd like to punch lead into every damn one of 'em."

They stabled their horses in Tonto City and had a drink at the saloon bar. There were two of West's gunmen in there, and they joined in the drink.

"C'mon back to the office—I want to talk to you fellers," West said.

Lola was at the foot of the stairs, talking with one of the girls, but she went quickly upstairs, entered her room and locked the door.

IT was siesta time at the J Bar C, next day; but Henry was the only one to enjoy it. The cowboys were all working, and Judge had gone to town; so Henry stretched out in an easy chair on the old porch and took a nap. He dreamed that someone had exploded a dynamite load in the Golden Calf, and blown all the gold away. He was still shaking from the force of the explosion when he awoke to find Leila Harper shaking him.

He looked up at her, blinking foolishly, wondering at the sudden turn in his dream, when he suddenly realized that he was not dreaming.

"Where is Danny?" panted Leila. "Where is he, Henry?"

"My gracious!" exclaimed Henry. "You seem agitated, Leila. Where on earth did you come from? I must have been asleep."

"I must find Danny," she replied. "Judge stayed with mother, and I rode his horse. Read this; it came in the mail today."

She handed him a small sheet of paper, on which was written:

> Your life and your daughter's life in danger. Would advise that you leave Tonto City at once. Do not delay.

"Why—why, this is ridiculous!" exclaimed Henry. "An anonymous note, anyway. I don't see—well, what does it mean?"

"Who knows?" replied Leila. "Mother is worried sick. She doesn't know what it is all about. We don't know what to do."

Henry studied the note again.

"Leila, I wonder if this is a bluff. You remember they tried to buy out your hat shop. It might be—and still, as you say, who knows? What did Judge say about it?"

"He is worried, too. Can't we find Danny?"

"I believe they went to Crazy Woman Springs. Yes, we might find them. At any rate, we can try."

"Let's hurry."

Henry looked with sad eyes at the only two horses in the corral. His ancient steed had been accidentally turned out, and the two in the corral were not Henry's type of saddle-animal. He had heard Slim speak of that blaze-face sorrel as a jug-head that tried to bite his own tail. The other one, a tall bay, was, according to Danny, fifteen years old and had never felt a rope since the day he was branded.

"Please hurry," begged Leila.

Henry took a lariat from the fence,

opened the gate and entered the corral. He had seen Slim and Danny rope their own horses every morning—and it looked simple. The two horses crowded into a corner, twisting and turning, only to suddenly whirl and dash past him along the fence. His loop was so big that it got both horses around the neck, but the bay sagged back and tore loose from the loop, leaving Henry with the blaze-face sorrel.

"You certainly are improving," said Leila.

Henry managed to tie the rope to the fence, while the blaze-face eyed him malevolently. Henry did not bother to put on a blanket, but cinched on the bare saddle. Strangely enough, the horse did not fight away from the bridle. Henry led the horse out of the corral and closed the gate.

"That isn't the horse you ride to town, is it?" asked Leila.

Henry sighed and looked at Leila.

"You are worried, too," said Leila.

"I—I feel a complete physical letdown," said Henry grimly.

HE held the reins tightly, managed to set his left foot in the stirrup, grasped the horn with both hands—and started up. The blaze-face started going sideways, away from Henry, who was clinging with both hands, one foot in the stirrup, and the other foot half-over the saddle.

They crashed into the corral fence, and the jerk threw Henry into the saddle. The sorrel bounced away from the fence, but Henry's sharp jerk on the bit drew the animal up quickly. Fumbling with both boots, Henry managed to find the stirrups.

"I didn't realize that you could ride that well," said Leila.

"Needs must, when the devil drives," he quoted, and much to his surprise the sorrel moved in beside Leila's mount, and they rode out through the main gate.

"Leila," he said, "can you or your mother think of any earthly reason why anyone should harm either of you?"

"Why, no, we can't. There isn't any reason."

"Is there anyone who would want to prevent you from marrying Danny?"

"Not a soul—that I know about, Henry."

"Leila," he said gently, "there is something I haven't told you yet. You see—well—"

"About you marrying mother?"

"Did she tell you?"

"Would I have to be told? I am not blind."

Henry rubbed his nose and looked at the bobbing ears of the sorrel.

"It will be the happiest day of my life," he said. "You see, I don't want anything to interfere with that—not anything."

"I hope we can find Danny," said Leila anxiously.

They came into the old trail to Crazy Woman Springs, and Henry took the lead, bobbing along under his huge sombrero, and wondering how long the sorrel would wait, before "trying to bite his own tail." Being in single-file there was little chance for conversation.

It was six miles from the ranch to Crazy Woman Springs. Henry was merely guessing that the boys were at the springs. As far as he knew, they might be over at Antelope Springs, miles east, or at Moses Well.

They were about three miles from home, traveling slowly along the brushy trail, when several head of young cattle drifted across the trail ahead of them. As they reached the spot where the cattle had crossed, a yearling steer trotted parallel to the trail, and Henry noticed that a rope dragged from the animal's neck. Its knees were skinned, too, and a patch of hide was off its left hip.

Apparently this yearling had been roped and thrown, but in some way had escaped with the rope. The J Bar C mark was plain on its left side. Henry merely noted these things, but gave them no serious consideration.

A SHORT distance farther on, the trail swung sharply to the right, around the head of a brushy cañon. As they came out in the open, Henry saw a rider,

far off to the left, silhouetted against the sky for several momoments as he drove several head of cattle over a sharp ridge.

Henry knew that all the cattle had been taken off the Crazy Woman range and thrown on the ranges farther east; but it meant nothing to him that these cattle were heading west, and going away from Crazy Woman Springs. He drew up and called back to Leila:

"We will turn and go back a ways, Leila. I saw one of the boys over that way."

They retraced their way around the head of the canon, where Henry took the lead, going toward the spot where he had seen the rider.

"I only saw one of them," he told her. "But I am sure they are working together."

There was no trail now, and Henry was obliged to steer by dead reckoning. A heavy mesquite growth made it impossible for them to follow a direct route until they struck an old cattle trail, which seemed to lead where they wanted to go.

Henry was scanning the country for another glimpse of riders, when the sorrel stopped short at the edge of an arroyo, which was at least twenty feet deep. As Henry jerked around to see what had stopped his horse, he got a kaleidoscopic view of four men, going into swift action. He saw a little fire, a bound and struggling animal, and the four men, scattering like quail.

A gun cracked wickedly, and the sorrel went down, as though something had jerked its legs from under it, pitching Henry aside and into a thick bush. He was dazed and stunned for the moment. Dimly he heard more shots, but they meant nothing to him just now. He squirmed loose from the bush, but in the wrong direction, and pitched head-first into the arroyo. He made a half-turn and landed, sitting down in the soft sand, and with hardly a sound.

"Circus stuff," he muttered foolishly, and got to his feet. His gun had fallen from his holster, but he gave it no thought. There was the little fire, and the struggling yearling. There was not a sound now. Henry stumbled over and looked at the yearling. It was lying on its right side, and there, in bold script on its left side were the combined initials "LJ." A running-iron had been cast aside, and Henry picked it up, only to drop it quickly.

"That's hot!" he announced to the world.

His big hat was at the foot of the sharp bank; so he went back, picked it up and went hunting for a place to climb back to the top. Fifty feet down the arroyo he found the cattle trail, and went up to the top. He stopped and scanned the country.

"Leila!" he exclaimed sharply. "Where on earth is Leila? She was with me."

He took off his hat and mopped his brow. As he dropped his hand to his side, his head jerked from a blow, and he went flat on his back, while from across the arroyo came the whip-like snap of a rifle.

HENRY had no idea of time or space. Only his sense of hearing remained. He could hear voices, above the buzzing in his ears. They seemed far away, but very distinct.

"I told yuh I got him cold—right between the eyes.".

"Yuh shore did; damn good shootin', too, if yuh ask me. Well, he's out of the way. There's his horse over there, too. Didn't I tell yuh I seen that horse go down? That's why I wanted to Injun back here and git that fat pelican."

"I reckon you was right. We better cut that yearlin' loose and high-tail it out of here, before somebody comes to investigate them shots. I'll be damned if that fat jigger didn't almost ride off that bluff, right into us. It shore scared me."

"Scared all of us," chuckled the other. "Well, let's git goin'."

Henry had not moved a muscle, for the simple reason that he was incapable of any movement. The statement of his demise registered on his brain as a cold, hard fact. He had heard them walk away. Suddenly his head began to ache. His muscles twitched back to life, and he opened his eyes. That is, he opened one. The other seemed heavy with something.

"Dead men do not ache," he told himself, and then chuckled aloud.

After some effort he managed to get to a sitting position, where he felt himself over and looked around.

"They say that souls have no substance," he muttered. "If that is true, I am not dead—because I am most certainly substance."

His exploring fingers found that the bullet had glanced off his forehead, digging considerable of a hole, which had spewed blood all over his face, and especially into his left eye. He mopped some of it out with a handkerchief, and got drunkenly to his feet.

His sorrel was sprawled on the edge of the arroyo, drilled through the head, killed instantly. It was after he looked at the horse that he remembered Leila again. The roped yearling was gone, the ashes of the fire had been kicked into the sand.

"Maybe she went for help," he said hopefully as he picked up his hat, but found his head too sore to bear its weight.

The outlook was not bright. It was about six miles back to the ranch, and those high-heel boots were not made for walking. He left his spurs on the saddle and started out, hoping to strike the old trail back.

"Henry," he said aloud, "you, sir, are a hell of a rancher. You were a disgrace as a sheriff, a failure as a cattle raiser, and—and—damn it, you can not even die gracefully. Your head is so hard that it turns bullets. You should join a carnival and get a job, putting your head through a hole in the canvas, and let the yokels heave baseballs at you, at five cents a heave. I am, sir, so thoroughly disgusted with you, that I could even enjoy watching you drink yourself to death."

CHAPTER XVII.

NO SALE.

JACK WEST spent much of the afternoon in his office, conferring with the foreman of the Gold Plate mine. West had suspended operations at the Lucky Stake, and sent the men all over the Gold Plate in order to speed up the work on the mill.

After the foreman left the office, West sat at his desk, deep in thought for several minutes. Suddenly his eyes focused sharply on a tiny shower of dust, which sifted down to the polished top of his desk. Lazily he got to his feet and stepped over to a cabinet in the corner of the office, where he took a drink from a bottle, his eyes keenly searching the ceiling.

He walked back to his desk, glanced over a few papers, and walked to the door, which he opened, held it for a moment or two, and then closed it. There was a soft, rustling noise at the ceiling, and an envelope dropped like a plummet to the top of his desk.

For fully a minute he stood there. Then he opened and closed the door again, after which he walked over to the desk. It was some kind of plain envelope, sealed; and inside was the funeral notice of Mrs. Jack West, clipped from a newspaper. West merely glanced at it, shoved it in his pocket and stepped back to the door, which he opened quickly.

Lola was standing, half-way down the stairway, talking with two of the girls from the honkytonk, while Tom Silver, mop and bucket in hand, came down the stairs past them, and went into the gambling room.

"Lola's room," said West to himself. "That swamper goes there every day to clean up the room. Which one dropped that envelope?"

His teeth gripped his cigar tightly, his agate-hard eyes watching Lola, laughing at some joke. He cursed her under his breath. The scar-faced man came from the rear of the gambling-room, and walked past West, intent only on his duties.

"One of 'em," West told himself, "but which one? There's just one safe move—get 'em both—cold."

He left the door of his office and walked out to the street. Judge Van Treece was standing in front of Harper's store, looking down the street. West looked at him and smiled grimly. He crossed the street to

the front of the general store, and Judge came up there.

"HOW'S the gold mine?" asked West.

"My opinino may not be worth a cent, sir," replied Judge, "but I believe it is a bonanza."

"You've got six claims out there?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll give yuh ten thousand dollars for the mine, sight unseen."

"You must have seen it," replied Judge, "because you would not pay that amount of money for the Mother Lode—without inspection."

West laughed and shook his head.

"Just another of my foolish deals," he said.

"Like the Three Partners Mine?"

West's eyes hardened quickly.

"What do yuh mean?" he asked sharply.

"Merely a remark to show you that I know just how foolish you are."

"Oh, I see. Well, how much do you want for that prospect, Van Treece?"

"We haven't decided on a selling price, because we haven't considered a sale, Mr. West. Offhand, I would say that we might consider one hundred thousand dollars. I say, we might."

"Hell!" snorted West. "Why, it's only a prospect!"

"So was the Three Partners when you sold it."

"What do you know about the Three Partners?"

"The selling price was no secret—or was it?"

"Exaggerated a little, I'd say."

"But still—only a prospect, if my memory does not fail me."

"It was worth all they paid for it."

"I feel the same about the Golden Calf, Mr. West. It appears so rich that we would have no trouble in interesting capital, in case we wish to develop it. By the way, wasn't it some of your men who tried to jump it? I heard they were in your employ."

"You know damn well what happened!" snarled West. "One of your gang stole a page out of the records. Yeah, that's what I said—stole it. The J Bar C took that page out, and nullified my location of the Lucky Hunch."

"As Mason to Mason," smiled Judge, "what did it cost you to get page two hundred removed from that same book?"

"I don't know what yuh mean, Van Treece."

"Think it over," smiled Judge. "It may come back to you."

JUDGE turned on his heels and went back to the millinery shop, where Mrs. Harper was waiting anxiously.

"I don't see what can be keeping Leila," she said. "She said she would be right back. Judge, you don't suppose anything has happened to her, do you?"

"My dear Mrs. Harper," soothed Judge, "nothing would happen. She is a good rider, and that horse is perfectly reliable. In fact, even a gallop is as foreign to that horse as—as wheels on a goose."

"But that warning note, Judge."

"Yes, yes. But it merely warns both of you to leave Tonto City. Oh, I am very sure that she will be home soon. You must not worry."

But Leila did not come home, nor did anyone come in from the J Bar C until well after dark. By that time Mrs. Harper was frantic from worry. Judge was standing outside the shop when Danny, Slim and Oscar rode in. Judge called to them, and they dismounted in front of the shop.

"Where is Leila?" blurted Judge anxiously.

"Leila?" queried Danny. "What about Leila, Judge?"

"Where is Henry?"

"Ain't he here?" gasped Danny. Mrs. Harper came out, but Judge took her arm and they all went into the house, where they listened to Judge telling all he knew about it.

"But she wasn't at the ranch," said Danny, white-faced now in spite of his copper-like coat of tan. "Henry wasn't there either."

"I thought something was funny," said

Slim. " I accidentally turned Henry's horse out this morning. I meant to pick it up again, but forgot it. Before supper I noticed that Henry's saddle was gone, and so was that blaze-face sorrel."

" He couldn't ride that sorrel," said Danny quickly. " Why, he couldn't even saddle that jug-head."

" Don't fool yourself," said Oscar gravely. " Das Hanry is smort yigger."

" I know, Oscar," nodded Danny wearily. " But that horse is as wild as a wolf. Slim can tell yuh that."

" He stuck my nose in the dirt twice, hand-runnin'," said Slim. " He's *mucho malo caballo*, that feller."

" But where on earth could they be?" wondered Judge. " They must be together —and Henry riding a wolf."

" Yah su-u-ure," agreed Oscar. " Ay bet tan dollar they are oll right. Hanry is smort yigger."

" But what about that note?" asked Danny. " What did it mean?"

" Nobody knows," replied Judge. " Leila took the note. She wanted to see Henry and Danny."

" Do yuh reckon they got lost in the hills?" queried Slim.

" That old knot-head that Leila was ridin' would come home, if she'd let him," said Danny. " God knows what happened, if Henry was ridin' that sorrel. Oh, I can't believe he'd ever be able to rope him. Henry can't use a rope."

" Don't fool yourself," stated Oscar again. " Hanry is smort yigger, you bet."

" Can't you think of anythin' else to say?" asked Slim testily.

" Aw, let him talk," said Danny. " We're all more or less crazy, I reckon."

" Das oll right," agreed Oscar. " Ay am smort, too."

" Listen, Oscar," said Danny. " Do you realize that Leila and her mother got a note in the mail today, which told them that their lives were in danger? Leila came out to find me—and where is she?"

" Ay don't know," replied Oscar blankly.

" Yuh might as well try to talk sense to a wooden Injun," said Slim.

" V'al," said Oscar, " Ay never went to school a ha'al of a lot, but it seems to me we could do more by honting den by yust talking."

" I reckon, at that, you've got more brains than we have," said Danny. " Let's go back to the ranch. If they ain't there, we'll head into the hills. God knows what good that will do—in the dark—but we'll be doin' somethin'. You stay here, Judge; we'll bring yuh word just as soon as we have anythin' to report."

FRIJOLE BILL had washed the supper dishes, and was sitting in a corner of the kitchen, reading a year-old magazine, when Henry came up to the doorway. Frijole took one look at him in the lamplight, dropped the magazine and gasped:

" What the hell's this?"

And well he might remark. Henry's shirt and pants were nearly torn off his body, his feet were bare and bleeding, and in addition to the dried blood on his face, his forehead was swollen badly. He was at the point of collapse when Frijole grabbed him and eased him into a chair.

Then the cook ran for the prune whisky jug, filled a cup and held it for Henry to drink. When it was empty he filled it again, but Henry motioned it away. The potent liquor brought renewed life to Henry. Frijole looked at Henry's feet, drank the cup of whisky himself, and started a fire under the teakettle.

" I am rather a mess, Frijole," mumbled Henry.

" You set there and take it easy, Henry. I'll need a lotta hot water for you. But how in hell didja lose yore boots?"

"Couldn't walk—had to take them off."

"Gawd, yore feet are full of cactus! I don't see how yuh walked at all. Hell, you must be tougher'n I thought."

" Yes, I am rather remarkable," admitted Henry. "I was killed today."

Frijole looked queerly at him.

"Where is Leila?" queried Henry. "She came back all right?"

" I ain't seen her, Henry. Here—drink another cup of this chain-lightnin'."

"You—you say she hasn't been here?"

"No, she ain't."

"She was with me, when they shot my horse," he said slowly. "That was before they killed me—I believe. Yes, I'm sure it was."

"Now, that's all right," assured Frijole. "You have a drink, and it will be all right."

"Locoed as a sheepherder," he told himself. "Got to humor him."

He poked more wood into the stove and tested the water with his finger. Henry drank the second cup of that liquor.

"Where is Danny?" he asked.

"Danny and Slim and Oscar went to town, Henry. Where's yore hat and gun?"

"I don't remember losing the hat, Frijole. I believe I lost the gun when I fell into the arroyo. They killed my horse on the edge of the arroyo, and I fell all the way to the bottom."

Frijole came from the stove, looking keenly at Henry.

"They shot yore horse? What horse?"

"That blaze-face sorrel. The one Slim said tried to eat his tail."

"You was a-ridin' that sorrel, Henry?"

"Yes, I rode him today."

"Worse'n I thought," sighed Frijole, and turned back to the stove.

"Who shot yore horse—the sorrel?" asked Frijole.

"Cattle rustlers."

"Cattle rustlers, eh? How'd yuh happen to select that sorrel?"

"He was the only available horse," replied Henry slowly. "Leila came on Judge's horse. She—she wanted to find Danny; so I—I had to saddle that sorrel."

FRIJOLE looked thoughtfully at Henry. Something terrible must have happened to put him in this condition. Perhaps he wasn't crazy after all.

"Why did Leila want to find Danny?" asked Frijole.

Henry felt gingerly of his sore forehead.

"Something about a note," he said dully. "It was some—" and Henry toppled off the chair.

Frijole half-dragged, half-carried him to his room, where he put him on the bed.

"Your string kinda frazzled out, Old Timer," said Frijole. "I'll git me some hot water and a towel, and kinda fix yuh up. Daw-goned, if that don't look like a bullet scrape on yore forehead! Kinda deep, too. Huh! I wonder what about Leila? I don't sabe what this is all about."

The house reeked of carbolic acid and horse liniment when the three cowboys came back to the ranch. Frijole was seated on the foot of the bed, pulling cactus thorns from Henry's feet, when the boys came bursting into the bedroom. They stopped short, staring at Henry, who struggled to sit up. That last thorn was very deep, it seemed.

"What in the devil happened to him?" gasped Danny.

"He walked home in his bare feet," replied Frijole. "How are yuh, Henry?"

Henry blinked at the light, turned his head and looked all around.

"It looks very much like a wake," he said huskily.

"Henry, where is Leila?" asked Danny anxiously.

"Leila? I don't know, Danny."

"She was with you, wasn't she?"

"That is right—I forgot. Danny, I don't know where she is. I tried to find her."

Danny sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Take it easy, Henry," he said patiently. "You've been hurt pretty bad. Don't try to talk fast. But for God's sake, tell us what happened."

"It is like a queer dream, Danny; but I believe I can tell you all I know."

He told them about Leila coming, and how he saddled the sorrel, in spite of the fact that he knew that the animal was an outlaw. Slowly, and in detail, he explained their trip. He even told about seeing the young steer with the lariat around its horns. He remembered where they turned back, after seeing the rider on the sky-line.

His description of the four men was vague. He could not identify the voices, which had proclaimed him dead, and he could tell them little about his return jour-

ney, except that he was unable to find the old trail, and was obliged to discard his boots in order to walk at all.

"Six miles through mesquite thickets and cactus," said Frijole.

"He's a tough yigger," declared Oscar.

Danny got to his feet and leaned against the bed.

"You boys go to bed and get some sleep," he said. "You can't do anythin' in the dark."

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Slim.

"I'm goin' out there," said Danny dully "I've got to look.

"There'll be two cowboys with yuh, feller," said Slim.

"Three," corrected Frijole.

"You've got to stay with Henry," ordered Danny. "You've got to be here—if she does show up, Frijole."

"Yeah, I reckon I have," nodded the little cook.

ALL night long the three riders combed the hills in the dark. At daybreak they found Henry's dead sorrel and removed the saddle and bridle. A hundred yards away Slim found the horse Leila had ridden. It had been shot twice through the neck, one of the bullets killing it instantly. At the bottom of the arroyo Oscar found Henry's revolver.

Wearily they went back to the ranchhouse. Henry, his head bandaged, his feet encased in an old pair of moccasins, was sitting on the porch with Frijole. Oscar gave Henry his gun, and Henry thanked him gravely. Frijole prepared a breakfast for the three cowboys.

"We found Leila's horse," said Danny miserably. "It wasn't but a little ways from your horse."

"Dead?" asked Henry huskily.

"Shot twice through the neck. But where is Leila?"

"I'm afraid, Danny. Maybe she recognized them. That—that would be fatal. They couldn't let her tell."

"Yuh better come in an eat somethin', Danny" called Frijole. "I've done poured yuh out a cup of prune whisky."

"It will do you a world of good, Danny," advised Henry. "I drank two last night, and passed out entirely."

After breakfast the boys decided to go to town and tell Mrs. Harper that they had failed to find Leila.

Henry insisted on going; so Frijole hitched a horse to the old ranch buggy and went with Henry.

Danny, Slim and Oscar arrived in Tonto City far in advance of Henry and Frijole. All three of them went into the Harper shop, but the place was empty. Danny led the way to the living quarters, but there was no one in sight.

"Well, that's shore peculiar!" exclaimed Danny. He opened the door to the kitchen and gasped audibly.

In the middle of the kitchen floor, bound and gagged, was Judge Van Treece. Swiftly they cut away the ropes and the gag, which had been made from an old towel. Judge's muscles were cramped, and his jaw was nearly paralyzed. He tried to talk, but it was only a mumble.

Slim gave him a drink of water while Oscar rubbed his wrists to restore circulation. Henry and Frijole arrived before Judge was able to give a coherent account of what happened.

"It was about midnight," he told them painfully. "Mrs. Harper was too worried to go to bed. I had been out on the street a dozen times, looking and wondering. The last time I went out two men stepped from the alley. One grabbed me, while another put a gun in my face. They made me back into the shop, which was unlighted, and then they gagged and bound me on the floor. A little later they dragged me back to the kitchen, where they left me alone in the dark. That is all I know."

"You—you don't know what happened to Laura?" asked Henry hoarsely.

"No. Henry," replied Judge miserably. "I never saw her again after I was captured by those two men."

"Masked?" asked Danny.

"I suppose they were—it was too dark for me to see."

They all walked out to the street. The

three commissioners had been to breakfast, and were coming past the shop, going back to the court house. Henry and Oscar were crossing the street, going toward the Tonto Saloon. Henry was limping badly in his ill-fitting moccasins. John Calvert, one of the commissioners, looked at the four men, and the disheveled appearance of Judge caused him to stop.

"Is something wrong, Van Treece?" he asked.

"I could choke the three of you," replied Judge savagely. "Since you turned control of this valley over to Jack West hell has broken loose. Robbery, murder—and now, damn your narrow souls, two women have disappeared. Henry Conroy was shot down yesterday on his own range, and Leila Harper either killed or stolen. Last night masked men gagged and bound me, while they took Mrs. Harper away."

The three commissioners stared blankly at their accuser.

"Why—why, that isn't possible!" exclaimed Albert Rose.

"Does the sheriff know about this?" asked Edward Harris.

"I was released fifteen minutes ago," replied Judge.

"This is terrible!" snorted Calvert. "I can't believe—"

"We don't care what yuh believe," said Danny. "*We know.*"

Frijole spoke softly to Danny:

"I'm goin' across the street. Henry's got a six-gun inside the waist of his pants, and he looked as crazy as a sheepherder when he left us."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Tides

IN most parts of the world normal procedure is to have two tides per day. In a very few sectors, one in the United States, only one tide a day is recorded. On a stretch of southwest Florida coast, from the vicinity of Cape San Blas westward some miles toward Pensacola, the tide is high but once a day. With most all the world experiencing two, some very, very high as in Newfoundland, what is the reason for this? Authorities tell us that the tides consist of a small tide and a big tide. As the small tide sweeps in toward this section of the coast, it strikes a long hook of land, and "hangs up" there until the big tide comes along and swallows it. The two come in together, although their highest rise is more usually a matter of inches than feet. This phenomenon must be considered by shipping, as it makes coming in or going out with the tide a sometimes tedious procedure.

—*Betty Wood McNabb.*

The two gangs milled around

Throw 'em Down McClosky

By H. H. MATTESON

Just back from a stretch in the pen, Cultus Kennedy, fish pirate and thief, starts a fight that has a strange ending

WHICH this was all ways the activest entertainment ever pulled in the Aleutian Islands. While the object of the show was worthy, to raise money to send little Dan Barlow back to Minnesota for surgical treatment, we was all amazed at the size of the crowd. The big warehouse of the Thunderbird Packing Company was jammed plumb full of folks.

Right away I had the feeling something unusual, other than the object of the entertainment, had fetched out such a mob. They was fish hands and driver crew from as far away as Puffin Bird, and Squaw Duck. I'm commenting on them hands coming from so far, when the party setting next to me whispers the secret.

"Them hands coming from so far," this party says, "is account of they is going to be a number on this here program unexpected entire. This Cultus Kennedy, he's just back from doing two years in the federal penitentiary down in Puget Sound, and Cultus give it out cold over at Puffin Bird where I come from, that he aims to leave Hoh Hoh Stevens sing his number, as per the program, and then drag him offen the platform and beat him to death front of everybody."

Natural, them hands from Puffin Bird and elsewhere figure it's worth a dollar anytime to witness this here combat. I kind

of squinches over and there I see this Cultus Kennedy setting up front, and along with him is five-six of the sculpins that belonged in his gang former.

Now the object of this here spectacle is to raise money for little Dan Barlow. Three years before, Dan's father was killed mysterious, leaving little Dan all alone and him then only seven or eight years old. Folks everywhere offered to take Dan in, but he was the independentest, stanchest little gent you ever seen. Joe has me fetch him in, and we aim to send him to some government school, but this little Dan says no, he don't aim to go to no school.

"I'm doing very good," Dan says. "Simiak gives me a kiak, and I'm fishing, and I just sells my fish over to the Thunderbird, and I got three dollars."

Though he is just a little boy, this Dan pitches hisself a little camp on the beach, and he fishes, and folks is terrible good to him when he'll allow of 'em to be, and he does get along first rate.

Now what fetches Dan low is he goes squandering over to one of the reef islands, aiming to spot a good fish run, and he goes ashore, and he stumbles onto a sea lion sleeping in the rocks. This here lion, terrible peevish at getting disturbed in his slumbers, gives little Dan two-three terrible slashes, and dives off into the salt chuck.

Some fish hands finds Dan and fetches him in, and Joe wirelesses the Coast Guard, and it comes in full speed, laying a flat plume of black smoke astern, and the C. G. doctor he examines Dan careful, and says how he's hurt grievous in his spine and has to go back to Minnesota for treatment.

Now some one will have to go along with Dan back to Minnesota, and the expense of two folks, and the treatments and so forth will amount to about two thousand dollars. And that's why we're giving this entertainment, for to start the fund.

It just do seem like them Barlows, father and son, was doomed for grievous troubles. Barlow, senior, he gets murdered. While the territory offers a thousand-dollar reward, we don't know no more about the killing now than we did then.

Well, seeing how worthy the object was, and the news that Hoh Hoh Stevens is to get licked as a extra number on the program fetches out a mob. Now the reason this Cultus Kennedy was so sore at Hoh Hoh is as follers:

This Cultus was and is a low-life and no good, though he do have plenty energy and *tumtum*. He was always a fish pirate and a waterfront thief, and him and his gang give us plenty trouble.

Hoh Hoh he gets a tip that the fish trap at Devil Bend is to get pirated, so Hoh Hoh he goes on over just at dark, and he hides hisself very cunning in the watch shanty.

Sure enough along about midnight here comes the pirate outfit, and they climb bold up onto the watch deck, and they knock the watchman cold, and it's then that Hoh Hoh comes a capering out of the shanty and busts into 'em.

Hoh Hoh knocks two or three of 'em into the spiller, and then him and Cultus mingles ardent all over the watch deck. They fell off into the water final, and even then Hoh Hoh keeps belting this Cultus, and he drug him up the ladder, and gives him two or three more and licks him emphatic and complete. Then Hoh fetches him in, and he's sent up for two years for pirating and assault.

Oh, this Cultus goes away to prison, very bitter ag'in' Hoh Hoh. Cultus says getting arrested and sent to the pen hain't no ways the disgrace that getting licked is. He says Hoh Hoh has hurt his prestige account of it was generally always accepted that no one in all the North could lick Cultus Kennedy.

Well, when his two years' time is up, this Cultus comes surging back to the islands, and he lands at Puffin Bird. That there is where Moos Moos Lacey runs an asbestos camp, though they is fishing plenty there, too.

This Cultus, gathering back some of his gang, he reveals out to them, that while he was in prison he practices constant. In this prison they allow of the convicts, on good behavior, to play base ball, and rassle,

and do box fighting. Seems that amongst them hundreds of convicts was two or three good rasslers and box fighters, and Cultus practices with them assiduous.

SO this Cultus he announces to his gang and others, how he comes back in the pink of condition, and with plenty new fighting tricks in his bag, and he aims to make a public example of Hoh Hoh Stevens no one won't never forget.

The gang of beach rats, they applaud this notion emphatic, and they say how they'll all accompany along to this entertainment to see no one interferes.

Now some of this *wauwau* comes to the ears of Moos Moos Lacey. Him and Hoh Hoh is terrible good friends. So Moos Moos he organizes five or six of his asbestos miners, and they come along to the spectacle to see Hoh Hoh don't get no ways fouled, or the worst of it.

Mind you now, this Moos Moos hain't sickly. As a fighting man and *skookum*, he's almost in Hoh Hoh's class, and is to be numbered amongst the best warriors we got like Bigpaw Cinnamon, Bump Manning and Capstan Culberson.

Well up in front sets Cultus Kennedy and his gang, and off to one side sets this grim-faced Moos Moos Lacey and his asbestos boys.

Into a little wheel chair at one side, but well up in front, sets little Dan Barlow. He's plumb amazed at the size of the crowd, and while he don't like to accept charities, he's got sense enough to know that the grievous way he's stove up, he's got to. Plenty people shakes hands with Dan, and tell him how he'll soon be well, and Dan is terrible touched and grateful.

The cannery superintendent's woman had moved her piano over into the warehouse, and she plays onto it, and sings very sweet. Then some Aleuts, wanting to help, too, one of 'em bangs on the *tintin*, and three of 'em do the Devil dance, which this here is all ways a terrible lively exhibition.

Then Hoh Hoh Stevens he gets up, and he plays onto his accordion, and he sings a song, and this here Hoh Hoh is a bard and a minstrel if ever they was one, and this crowd just beller for more, more.

One of Hoh Hoh's activest tunes is a song they call it "Throw 'Em Down McClosky." Hoh Hoh is famous for rendering of this McClosky ditty, and after his first number, hands all over the house is just roaring for him to execute McClosky. So Hoh Hoh sucks the squeeze box full of wind, and he lets go a roaring chord, and he sings,

"Throw 'em down McClosky,

"You can lick him if you try," and you could a heard him clean to the Puffin Bird.

Well, Hoh Hoh concludes up this number in the midst of tumultuous applause, and folks is yelling for still some more, when this Cultus Kennedy he stands up, and he lifts a hand for silence.

Instant that big place goes dead calm and ominous. "Which I'm terrible indebted to Mister Stevens for the theme of the evening," says Cultus. "Special the concluding lines of this chantey appeals to me, wherein the song says, '*and future generations, with wonder and delight, will read on history's pages, of the great McClosky fight.*'

"Well, folks, ladies and gents, for the space of likely it won't take me more than a minute, I aim to emulate the example of Mister McClosky, and lick this here songbird of a Hoh Hoh Stevens, till his tongue hangs clean to his belt."

Cultus, he shucks off the tarpaulin coat he's wearing, and he steps into the open space front of the rows of seats, and before the platform.

Hoh Hoh, who's dressed up good, he stands up and he lays his accordion onto a chair. He kind of looks out over the audience then, and he yells out, "Dode! Oh, Dode!"

I stands up, and I goes for'ard. I figure maybe Hoh Hoh seen Cultus had his gang with him, and he thinks it is just as good if I am in front where I can shoot a leg out from under any of them sculpins that interfere.

I should have knew better. This Hoh

Hoh he never figures they's any odds ag'in' him, and that he's always got the world by the tail and a down hill haul.

" Dode," Hoh Hoh says to me, " I just requests that you wheel little Dan there back out of the danger zone. I figure maybe this combat will cover territory, and him being stove up grievous all ready, we don't want to run over him and tromp him. As for the able-bodied ladies and gents in the audience, they'll have to look out for theirselves."

With that, Hoh Hoh takes off his coat, and folds it, and puts it onto a chair with his accordion, and he steps down and faces Cultus Kennedy.

" I'm announcing now in advance," growls this Cultus, " that everything goes. No holts is barred. And they hain't no such thing as a foul."

" Seeing how I get terrible careless in combat," says Hoh Hoh, grinning out aimiable over the crowd, " them liberal interpretations suits me exact."

THEY hain't a doubt but this here Cultus, who is a terrible big *skookum* man, has learned right smart about the box fighting there in the penitentiary. He dances around very agile, and fancy, and side steps, and he jumps in nimble, and he do get the first lick in on Hoh Hoh, though it lands high on Hoh Hoh's head.

Hoh Hoh he kind of wallers along after Cultus, and it seemed to me I never did see him so slow in action before. Why he hain't even pertecting hisself good. Hoh Hoh takes three or four more licks offen Cultus who then dances away.

The crowd is just yelling now, and special exultant is them outcasts Cultus has fetched along with him. Moos Moos Lacey he sets there and he's plumb disgusted with Hoh Hoh for taking all them licks and not making no returns.

This here applause that Cultus gets every time he lands a *chukkin*, just stemmed him up more and more. Similar, it makes him a little careless. He jumps in fancy, and slides in a lightening quick larrup, only it goes acrost Hoh Hoh's shoulder, and Hoh Hoh, who has been endeavoring very cunning to coax this Cultus in clost, he's got one started from just abaft of his right hip, and he releases it out, and it takes this Cultus under the chin, and it knocks him clean over in amongst the audience.

Then the roaring of that crowd was something terrible. In a jump, Hoh Hoh is after Cultus, and before Cultus can get up, Hoh Hoh has drug him to his feet, and gives him a *chukkin* side of the head that would broach a fish scow.

Now, while Cultus hisself announces they is no rules, and no fouls, and everything goes, the Kennedy gang begins to yell " foul! foul!" and they raise up in their seats, and two of 'em jumped over behind Hoh Hoh, and one starts a swing at Hoh Hoh's head.

It's then Moos Moos Lacey comes careening to the front. This here member of the Cultus mob has got his *chukkin* started very good for Hoh Hoh's head, when Moos Moos ketches him with a belt under the ear that raises him clean offen the floor, and slides him on his face plumb up ag'in' the platform.

Well, in just no time then, it looked like everybody was fighting. Only it was just Moos Moos and the asbestos boys ag'in' the Kennedy gang.

While them two gangs just milled around, tromping in and over the audience, and women is screaming, Hoh Hoh had drug Cultus back into the open before the platform, and them two was fighting like two Kodiak bears.

Now this Hoh Hoh hain't allowing of Cultus to use his science much. Hoh Hoh he keeps in clost, and he slams in his *chukkins*, belting Kennedy's ribs, which it sounded like you whack a rain barrel with a club.

It don't take long for Moos Moos to clear up the Kennedy gang, though it do take longer for Hoh Hoh to manage his personal conflict. This Cultus, a terrible big man, and *skookum*, with plenty *tumtum*, and him in prison two years without no liquor, he's in terrible good condition.

And he must of been to take the belting Hoh Hoh give him.

It seemed kind of plain after a while, though one time I was worried Hoh Hoh was going to take him.

This Cultus is swinging weak, and wild, and, final, Hoh Hoh plasters in a lick that took Kennedy right on the jaw, and down he went—and out.

Hoh Hoh he sets Cultus up onto the edge of the platform, and there he sets, kind of weaving back and forth very weak. I'd walked over to where this little Dan is setting in his wheel chair, looking on very absorbed in this here fight.

He turns to me, this Dan does, and he asks me will I wheel him up to the front where Cultus is setting still, and Hoh Hoh is putting on his coat. So I done it, and little Dan just sets there and stares searching at Cultus Kennedy.

It's then that Joe Allbright, who had charge of the entertainment, comes for'ard, and announces how, with many generous contributions at the door, the receipts of the evening is twelve hundred dollars.

"We require two thousand dollars to send Dan, and a companion, back to Minnesota," Joe announces. "We will devise ways and means to raise the remainder soon as possible."

Then Joe goes on and apologizes for the fight that had took place, though I see he is tickled stiff that Hoh Hoh licks Cultus Kennedy, and that Moos Moos and the asbestos boys had cleaned up them beach rats.

LITTLE Dan he sets there in his chair, regarding steady at Cultus who is still kind of weaving around on the platform. Dan he tugs at my sleeve, and whispers, and I calls Joe over and similar I call Hoh Hoh.

Joe he leans over the wheel chair, and little Dan talks to him low but emphatic.

Then Joe raises up. "Ladies and gents," he announces clear and loud, "a way has been found, sudden and providential, to raise the rest of the money required to send Dan back to Minnesota. Yes."

Joe he pauses and looks over the audience.

"Yes," he repeats. "Little Dan here has identified positive this Cultus Kennedy as the man who murdered his father. Dan here seen it. The territory reward of a thousand dollars is still good, and little Dan Barlow will get it."

This here Cultus Kennedy, when he hears this here, he comes out of his stupor very prompt. He's up, and he's acrost that floor in a flash, and he makes for a window. He's just crashing through this window when Hoh Hoh, who is just astern, he ketches him, by the scruff and the pants, and he drags him back in violent. And when once this Hoh Hoh fastens his holt, you can't no more escape away from him than if he was Goliar.

THE END

The Worst Earthquake

NO greater upheaval than the quake of July 21, in the year 365, has been known in the history of man. All shores of the Mediterranean were raised, most of the seaports destroyed. Several islands of the Ægean Sea sank with all their population.

—*J. W. Holden.*

The Dew of Heaven

By GEORGE CHALLIS

Ivor Kildare, leader of buccaneers, defies the malignant forces of man and nature and uses new magic against his enemies

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN Ivor Kildare (sometimes known as Tranquillo II) and Louis d'Or set foot on the island of Tortuga to dig for buried treasure, they were suddenly surprised when their small band of followers became mutinous. After a very gory battle, and much slaughter, the leaders found themselves still among the living; and discover that the treasure which they are seeking is actually in Panama within the Church of San Francisco.

Ivor, Louis, and the Irishman, Padraic More, sail to Porto Bello, and make their way across the Isthmus, entering Panama by covert means. There Ivor sees his lady, the charming Ines Heredia, for a short time. Meanwhile, Louis and Padraic have fallen into the hands of the Spanish and are imprisoned. Ivor himself is jailed trying to free them. They are sentenced to die when Ines pleads that they be placed aboard a galley. Her request is granted and all three suffer the brand of the galley slave.

The galley meets a small English ship and engages it in battle. During the ramming, the English sailors throw hammers and chisels to the slaves chained at the oars, so that they may free themselves to fight against the Spanish. The captain of the galley is killed and the Spanish are massacred by the Negro galley slaves.

Kildare and Louis free themselves, Kildare assuming command of the galley, and sailing her near the coast of the Panama Isthmus. He decides to visit Captain Henry Morgan, notorious buccaneer, and convinces him that their combined forces can successfully attack the city of Panama. So under the commission of the Royal Council of Jamaica and the leadership of Morgan, three

Kildare's sword was already dulled with red

This story began in the Argosy for September 7

thousand pirates set off to sack that city.

Only after suffering from starvation and the stings of forest insects do the pirates finally come in sight of the fabulously rich Panama. While Morgan makes a frontal attack on the city, Kildare, with the help of Captain Bartholomew, leads the sea forces, which storm the harbor. It is then that the Santo Spirito containing whole tons of silver in her hold is captured. After a long struggle, the Spaniards are completely routed on land and sea. And Kildare goes in search of Ines.

Kildare finds her in the Church of San Francisco. Meanwhile Padraic More breaks the sculptured peacock mentioned in the treasure-cipher, and out of a little sack of brown leather lodged within the peacock pours a stream of crimson and white jewels of great value.

Because of a murderous fight fatal to one of Morgan's men, Ivor Kildare is forced to bargain for his life. When Ines sees that Ivor may be killed she gives herself up to Morgan. Later Luis, Padraic, Kildare contrive to ride away from the building in which Morgan has trapped them. Ines goes with them, also.

They beat their way northward across the Isthmus and come to the Atlantic. As a matter of temporary expediency, Kildare's party surrenders to a party of Cuma Indians, who have halted their advance, for the time being.

CHAPTER XXVII (*Continued*).

SURRENDER.

BETWEEN a pair of torches there now came forward a tall Cuma Indian who carried himself with a great deal of dignity. It was a gold plate that covered his lip, and more gold pulled down the lobes of his ears.

Kildare and his friends stood in a close group as they were surrounded, and Luis said: "That is the great chief—that is Lacenta—"

Here the chief raised his hand in a sign of greeting and spoke a few words with a very lofty air, Luis translating them in this manner: "He says that he is the great-grandson, and grandson, and son of a chief; he wants to know who is the chief among you all."

"You shall be chief," said Kildare to Louis d'Or. "You have the magnificence the Indians love."

"I haven't your wit to carry the thing off," answered the Frenchman. "You are our chief, Tranquillo. You always have been, I should say."

Here Luis, the Indian, stepped well out into the torchlight and made a little speech, after which he pointed to Kildare. Lacenta, at its close, strode up to Kildare, gripped his hand and gravely pumped it up and down; after that the party started on through the woods with the torches to guide them, the light springing up through the dark intertwining of branches to the thicker gloom of solid foliage overhead.

There was enough light and noise to start the monkeys gibbering and swinging down through the branches to examine into the cause of this disturbance. Then the forest fell away, a series of clearings opening before them; small plantations of tobacco and of corn appeared, and thatched huts of a surprising size.

A number of other Indians came running out from these houses, and with no need of torches to light them, because once out of the thick shadow of the forest there was a moon shining which gave a clear silver light over the entire clearing of the village.

It was not like cleared land in another country. The forest which had been beaten back struggled to spring up again from the ground, and raised little hedgerows of green that presently were sprouting into big shrubs. And grass and weeds flowed in on the cultivated ground, so that there would be constant work for the women with their hoes to keep the weeds back and give the corn or tobacco a chance.

The whole throng of the villagers now poured about their war-party, a tide of coppery nakedness, prancing and leaping and howling with pleasure.

"I think we shall be safe, father," said Luis to Kildare. "I have told Lacenta the truth about you, and only the truth—that you carry a magic knife which kills a man when you point it at him, and that weapons cannot hurt you. Lacenta is very pleased and a little frightened!"

It was hardly strange that the Cuma chief was a "little frightened" about a guest who could kill men by pointing at them and who could not be injured by weapons. But that Luis had said these things in perfect good faith Kildare had no

doubt, and it threw a sharp light on the entire Indian mind. Luis had seen that slender splinter of steel, in the management of Kildare, kill many a man, and perhaps he thought the touch of it was incapable of slaying unless there were magic attached.

He had seen Kildare dance through many a battle unscathed. And though he had seen Kildare wounded, also, his main impression was apparently one of invulnerability. But what if Lacenta required his guest to merely point his sword at an enemy and thereby cause the man to drop dead?

They were going up a mild ascent which brought them to the highest point of the village, where they found a great hut a hundred feet and more in length and a roof ridge at least seven yards from the ground, with the thatch running down to ten foot walls of sticks and mud.

"The war-house!" said Luis.

And now, the entrance to the hut being opened, they passed inside and found that the entire building was one great room, with loopholes the size of a man's fist cut through the walls all around the chamber, sides and ends. This was the "fort" which the fighting men would attempt to hold as a last resort in time of attack.

A fire was already burning in the middle of the floor, sending up clouds of smoke, some of which wandered out through the hole in the middle of the roof, and the rest made a mist through which gleamed the low rows of drying peppers and corncobs and all sorts of other edibles, including smoked meat. For benches, there were logs of wood.

Many hammocks strung here and there offered the only tokens of real comfort. The voices went up into the confusion of the smoke. Around the fire moved the women, all in decent white dresses which covered their bodies very modestly. They worked at the cookery and made a great rattling as they stirred, because they wore around their necks strings of teeth and shells and beads to the weight of five and twenty pounds.

Here a number of the women entered the war-house carrying among them a large trough, and staggering with the weight of it in spite of the number of their hands.

"Good!" said Luis. "It is to be a happy feast. They are bringing in the beer—and now they will soon be drunk!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WAR-HOUSE.

INES HEREDIA, sitting on the log close to Kildare, kept her hands locked about her knees and her eyes busy with the wonders of this scene. Her bright hair, now fluffed by its shortness, shone like gold by the firelight, and all the dinginess of the soot had been scrubbed from her skin.

All of Kildare's group seemed to be very happy except Louis d'Or, who sat with his chin on his fist and gloom in his eyes, which he turned now and then and fixed rather grimly on the girl. So that Padraic More murmured at the ear of Kildare: "Louis is eating his heart out because of your lady, Tranquillo. Watch yourself!"

"Nonsense!" answered Kildare. "We are sworn brothers, Pat. He'll never turn against me."

Hunger was growing in them as they watched the cookery proceed and smelled the savor of the stews in the pots. It was a hit or miss sort of cooking. Into the pots went the flesh of the warree, peccary birds large and small, a quantity of peppers—enough to have seasoned ten times that quantity of food for a European palate—and then plantains and bananas, and the cassava, bitter and sweet, and fresh venison, and smoke-hardened meat of all sorts, and fresh fish and dried fish, together with handfuls of green herbs.

A queer humming noise rolled through the room steadily, and Kildare asked what it could be. "They are humming," said Luis. "When they are happy, the Cumas hum—or at least, all the men do. It means that later on they will want to sing."

Here several of the women began to clap their hands. At once others laid out on

the beaten earth of the hut floor a number of fresh-green palm leaves, covering a long strip of the floor. Around this tablecloth the men gathered, while the women served them, placing a calabash of cold water at each man's right hand and another great dish of the stew to each half dozen of eaters.

The food had been reduced by long cooking to a sort of paste in which all the ingredients were inextricably mingled—the whole was like a soft mash of potatoes, but it contained fowl, deer, peccary, warree, cassava, and all the other ingredients of the dish hotly seasoned with peppers.

"The women are noticing me, Ivor," whispered Ines Heredia. "Do you think that it will make trouble? They're noticing me and they understand very well that I'm not a boy, as I seem to be."

"Will it make trouble?" asked Kildare. "The women understand that Ines is one of them."

"Then don't let her sit to eat with the men," said Luis. "Let her go back and wait with the other women, and they cannot make trouble at all."

She went at once, Kildare looking anxiously after her. But there was a shrill little murmuring when she came to the brown-faced Cuma women who were ranged along the sides of the great hut. Kildare saw some of those dingy hands patting and stroking the metal brightness of her hair, and he understood by this that she was being well received.

Luis, the Mosquito Indian, assured him again: "They are happy to have her. I have seen, father, that the women of many races wear different clothes or no clothes at all, but in their smiling they are always the same, and they can understand one another simply by the smiling. But this is a very great marvel!"

They were placed, all four of them, opposite Lacenta and three of his chief warriors, all men of a good deal of dignity, and at once they began to dip their hands into the central dish. It was done with a reasonable degree of decency, the two first fingers being curved to make a natural spoon.

But after every mouthful the fingers were rinsed in the calabash of water which stood beside every man, and Kildare felt no loathing whatever. For his own part, he was glad to dip his fingers in the water, both for cleanliness and to cool them, because the meat mash was steaming hot.

He found the people a prepossessing lot, a little blunt and rounded in the face and features, and in age given to gross flesh, but the children and the younger people straight-limbed, active, and graceful. Above all, they maintained an amiable expression as they talked.

LACENTA wanted to know a great deal about Kildare and his magic sword, which had to be drawn and admired, Lacenta wondering at the slenderness of the steel and declaring, according to the translation of Luis, that it shone by its own light, like a ray of sunshine.

When they had finished eating from the great pots, there was a store of bananas passed around, and after these everyone started drinking whole calabashes of the liquor from the trough.

The few swallows Kildare took seemed far weaker than beer, but he noticed that the effect of it was very potent. It seemed at least as strong as a double ale, though perhaps some of this was due to the heat of the atmosphere in the war-house.

As the drinking began, a message arrived from a late hunter that he had seen a whole party of armed Spaniards in the adjoining ravine, not a great distance away—so short a distance that, except for the fact that white men are incapable of movement in the forest at night, it might have seemed well to be on guard. As it was, there would be plenty of time to arm the men in the morning, and with the dawn go to plague the Spaniards and cut off their stragglers.

This news was greeted by everyone with greatest pleasure. They hated the Spaniards with a consummate passion. As for the English and other whites, they had no reason to love them except on account of the common enemy, Spain. The thought of war made the young men very brisk. They

began to drink more heartily. And Lacenta himself pointed out to Kildare, with Luis always as translator, the youths of the tribe who had distinguished themselves in recent months. These had their heads shaved in token of triumph.

With the deeper drinking, the women began to move in closer to the fires and help themselves rather furtively from those eat-pots after their lords and masters had sufficed their appetites with eating. And, at the same time, the music began.

They had flutes and pan-pipes made of reed, and whistles which had been carved out of the hollow bones of the pelican and the king buzzard. Now and then someone drew a long, mournful, thundering note from a great conch shell.

The music had not continued long before a circle of the men formed and they began to dance, each man with his hands on the shoulders of his companions while he kept the time with a wriggling shake of the whole body and all the limbs.

AFTER a good bit of this dancing and singing, Kildare drew back against the wall with Ines Heredia and found her a very tired girl indeed. Forthwith, he lifted her into a hammock and stood beside her. She looked up at him through half-closed eyes. "When shall I be able to sleep, Ivor?" she asked. He looked curiously around him.

Already a number of the Indians had taken to the drink in such a headlong fashion that they were overcome, and one after another they staggered towards the hammocks or were carried to them by the women, who then stood by to moisten the faces of the drunken sleepers and fan them with great palm-leaf fans.

It made a rather foolish and fantastic scene, those prone sleepers, groaning as they took breath, their bodies shining with paint and with oil, and the women plying the rustling fans.

The smoke eddied in clouds; the mosquitoes sang in between; and as Kildare smiled he said: "Go to sleep as soon as you please, but I have to find Louis d'Or first. He's left the war-house—I don't know how long ago—and he may get into mischief."

"I never could trust that man," said the girl. "He has a way of looking—"

"Never doubt Louis d'Or," said Kildare, "because we've sworn ourselves to one another."

He left her, muttering to the Irishman to keep an eye on her, and went outside the great hut.

The night was amazingly brilliant, and all the villagers who were not inside the war-house were gathered about it, peering through the loopholes at the merriment within.

Kildare made the round of the house, saw the tall form of the Frenchman nowhere, and then wandered down the hill anxiously, wondering what could have become of his friend.

He reached the tall, dark frontier of the jungle without having made the discovery that he wished; and he was still standing there with his hand against the trunk of a great tree when he heard a murmuring such as comes when the wind passes through the forest, and after that he was aware that a number of figures had entered the clearing. He was astonished and rubbed his eyes to look again. But certainly the moonlight glistened on the armor of soldiers. Some two score of them were advancing softly into the clearing, but most staggering of all was his recognition of the lofty form that walked at their head.

For it was Louis d'Or.

They were surrounding the war-house. Before he could so much as shout, they were charging with a rush!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SPANIARDS AGAIN.

KILDARE started running, and then checked himself. There was nothing that he could do. His single hand was perfectly helpless, and he knew that everything he could conceive was useless as he saw the armored men break into the war-house from the front and from the rear.

He could understand what had happened. The devil had entered the mind of Louis d'Or and induced him to go to the Spaniards and tell them where the village lay. To the men from Panama, the possession of the village meant a great deal—food, shelter, and all the comforts until the buccaneers retired from the ruined city and the wretched remnants of the old inhabitants began to regather.

Why had Louis d'Or brought them?

It seemed to Kildare that he could see, again, the way the Frenchman had sat with his chin on his fist and his eyes lifting, now and then, towards the face of Ines Heredia.

Had not the Irishman given a warning? Had not the girl herself spoken? A singular blindness had struck the eyes and the brain of Kildare or he would have guessed everything long before.

Now, held still with hopelessness, he saw the Spaniards charge into the war-house. He had a mad desire to rush into the battle. But he could do nothing. The drunk or half-drunken Indians would be helpless. The wits of Padraic More himself were sadly addled. And the Spaniards were winning without a blow.

Kildare could tell the ease of the conquest by the noise of the outcries from the war-house. For the screaming of women was chiefly what he heard, hardly mixed by the shouting of angry men ready to fight to the last.

For long minutes that screeching lasted, and then there was quiet.

What of Ines? She must be the prize that the Spaniards would pay to Louis d'Or. What of her now?

Presently, some of the Indians began to scurry out of the war-house and run here and there, returning presently with their arms laden

Of course they were bringing fresh supplies to the conquerors. There was no need for the Spaniards to so much as post a guard, since they held in their hands such an ample supply of hostages of the best men of the tribe, and the chief of it among the rest. They could sit at their ease, unwatchful.

It was this consideration that led Kildare gradually forward. He reached the corner of the war-house which was nearest to the jungle, and there, crouching, he was able to spy through a loophole and make out the entire scene.

It was as he had expected. Some thirty or forty of the Indians had been tied hand and foot and put under guard in a corner. Padraic More and Luis were beside the Indians, but the Lady Ines sat near the central fire, and tall Louis d'Or stood behind her with his naked sword in his hand.

The Spaniards had begun to eat, hungrily, the remains of the feast, and drink the last of the beer. But a nucleus of them remained around the central fire.

Padraic More was at this moment picked up and dragged before the inquisitors. And the old white-haired knight, Vasco da Herta, was the one who led in the questioning.

" What is your name?"

" Padraic More."

" How long have you been in this land?"

" Not many weeks."

" Is it true that you were condemned to the galleys?"

The Irishman turned his head and gave Louis d'Or a long look.

The Frenchman bowed his head aside and said nothing.

" I was in the galley," answered More.

" Then you were one of those who rose against your commanders and murdered them and set the Negroes free?

"Answer!" shouted the old man in a rage.

" You have heard what you'll believe from Louis d'Or," said More. " Why should I talk now?"

" With you," persisted the old knight, " there was a leader who guided your hands. There was an Englishman who took an Italian name. There was that famous pirate and murderer of Christians, Tranquillo?"

MORE shrugged his shoulders.

" Answer," shouted the old man, " or we shall find ways of making you speak!"

" If you can make me talk against my blood-brother," said Padraic More, " you'll have to turn me first into a Frenchman—like that dog I'm seeing."

He stared at Louis d'Or again.

" We know enough," said the old man, " but we wish to know where Tranquillo is now."

" I can't tell you," said More.

" You lie!" shouted the Spaniard. " Isn't it true that you sighted from the hills, today, the masts of his ship anchored in the mouth of the lagoon?"

Kildare started.

More, saying nothing, shrugged his shoulders.

" Isn't it true," said the old man, " that this Tranquillo has now gone down to the ship?"

Here Luis d'Or broke in to say that in fact none of them had seen the masts of the tall ship and had thought that it must have sailed straight from Panama to make the long passage around southern America, and so for the shores of England.

" Frenchman," said da Herta, " you have given us a good service, and God knows in His mercy that you are receiving a treasure for it. The lady remains in your hands, to be duly and honorably married by you, but can we trust you when you say that this Tranquillo has not gone down to the ship to rally the armed slaves and to attack us?"

" I can say that," said Louis d'Or. " He knows nothing except what I know."

" At any rate," said Vasco da Herta, " we shall make sure that the Negroes from the ship and the Englishmen who command them do nothing which we fail to observe. You, Juan Oñate—take Pedro and Jose and the three of you go down the river at once until you reach the head of the lagoon. Spy on the ship at anchor there. If the men come armed to the shore and start to advance up it, then we know you can give us warning in time. Be swift, and be vigilant ".

He turned back.

" Take the heretic away," he said, " and in the morning we will have the daylight to help us devise certain ways of entertaining him. For the good of his soul—for the good of his soul! Ines Heredia, you come from an old and a noble family—but you have thrown yourself into the hands of an enemy of your people, a pirate and a traitor—"

She stood up and said: " My mother's blood was English. It is as much a part of me as that of my father. The man you call a pirate is more kind and honorable than all the best men of Panama and Porto Bello!"

Kildare heard her speaking on, and heard her voice rising, but also he saw that same Juan Oñate leave the door of the warhouse with his two companions, big, formidable-looking men. Kildare heard the soft clinking of their armor as they crossed the village clearing, and he stole softly after them.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER QUEST.

THAT Juan Oñate and his two compeers, Jose and Pedro, were as good men as could be found among the Spaniards. They were fighters with gun or with sword, and they carried, as they went down the narrows of the river toward the lagoon, muskets, swords, daggers, and, many of them, body armor in the form of excellent steel cuirasses. On their heads were morions, like iron hats.

They walked abreast where they could. As the way narrowed along the edge of the water they had to move in single file, and at times the roughness of the way stretched several paces between them, man to man.

The moonlight which struck the forest sometimes slanted brightly down through the cleft above the stream, and at times it merely emphasized the depth of the shadow, contrasting with the brilliance of the moonlight that struck the tops of the trees. The Spaniards had the noise of the water to guide them even when they could not see it, for the stream rushed with a great force down the declivity always towards the sea, the huge South Sea of Balboa.

They had traveled for some time, and the head of the lagoon was not far away,

appearing as a narrow edge of moon-brightened water, when Juan Oñate paused, for something appeared in the rush of the river beside him, something whirling with the current and giving out a strange flash like that of steel under the moon.

It was in fact steel; and it was the morion and the breastplate of an armed man that Juan Oñate saw.

With arms stretched out, the body, supported by the speed of the current, kept turning and turning in slow evolutions, and then Juan Oñate saw that the face of the dead man was that of his friend Jose, that excellent warrior and good companion who could sing a song so well when once his whistle was well wetted with wine. There floated Jose, dead.

Had he slipped into the stream as he walked along, the rearmost of the three, and, knocking his head against a stone, had he been hurled down the furious current senseless, unable to utter a single cry?

No, for as Juan Oñate, and his breathless companion Pedro beside him, stared at the corpse, they saw, clearly, the wound that had slain him—a great gash across the throat. The wound that had reached for his life also had throttled him perfectly.

His head thrown back against the force of the stream, the great gash across his throat showing clearly, Jose floated there for a moment and then was caught away by the strength of the current.

Juan Oñate turned to Pedro and murmured: "What hand could have struck poor Jose?"

"It is a miracle! Can a jaguar have followed and struck him down? Is one of the brutes behind us now?"

"A jaguar strikes with five claws, not with one," said Juan Oñate.

But both of them turned and stared into the steep, dark shadows thrown by the trees around them.

"Let us get forward into the light," murmured Pedro.

And it was then that a voice said, in very good Spanish: "Turn this way, my friends, and let me try to send you after your Jose!"

They jerked about and saw, emerging from the black of the trees, a slender man, not very tall, not more than the average height, in fact, without armor, and with only a thin-bladed sword in his hand, like a stiff ray of moonlight.

Pedro cried out: "Down with you," and tried a great side-stepping blow with his sword.

The stranger did not attempt to parry the stroke. He merely ducked under it with a quick flexion of the body.

He stepped in. His sword already was a little dim with red towards the point. When he stepped back his sword was dimmer than before, and Pedro fell dead, thrust through the heart.

At this, Juan Oñate cried out: "Magic! But my heart is clean. You cannot use magic on me! Have at you!"

He came in with a good fencing stance, and a very proper lunge such as was taught by the best fencing masters in Spain. His sword blade slithered down a soft, a yielding blade that was like the touch of a clinging hand to divert the thrust.

Juan Oñate felt that something was wrong. He tried in haste to recover his proper position of defense. He threw up his long, heavy rapier and his dagger also, to establish his guard. But between them flashed a ray of bright moonlight. A sting lighter than the sting of a wasp touched the breast of Oñate. But it was a sting that reached his heart, and he fell dead.

OVER him Kildare leaned and stared for a moment. It was a great mystery, this ease with which the giant life could be plucked out of the body of strong man.

He was a practical fellow, and therefore he took a wallet from each of the dead men. Then he cast their bodies into the stream, to be hurried down to the sea. Afterwards, he followed along the course of the river towards the lagoon, and saw it broadening and brightening before him.

A moment later he could see the great ship on the water. It held up its gaunt masts and yards; its shadow was black as ink on the silver sea.

And Kildare, standing on the pure white of the beach, shouted loudly, and shouted again and again.

There was a great pause, and it seemed to him that he was crying to a picture inside a frame, a dead image—except that the ripples of darkness and of light kept traveling toward him across the lagoon. Then, suddenly, a great, obscure voice shouted from the deck of the galleon. He recognized—dimly, as though a ghost had been given speech—the voice of Bartholomew.

And a moment later men were dropping into the small skiff which was tied astern of the great ship.

Three pairs of oars strained at the water. He saw the thin shadows of them swaying and the bright flash of the water that lifted with the blades. Then they were close. Then the prow of the little boat was crushing into the sand of the beach, and next he was aware of Bartholomew himself, lisping out a cry as he bounded up the ascent of the shore; and after Bartholomew poured the eight rowers, all crying out.

He gave them his hands.

It was strange to see the Negroes kneel in the sand and take those hands like benedictions. He gripped the horny fist of Bartholomew himself.

"I would be half way to England, by now," said Bartholomew, that honest pirate, "but the black fellows would not leave without you. They swore that you would come back to this place to meet them."

Here the Negroes leaped up and began to dance and yell. And as their black shadows lengthened and shortened on the beach, Kildare heard a great shouting begin from the decks of the Santo Spirito.

There were the fellows of the black men and the whites also.

AFTERWARDS he was in the skiff with the others, and rowing out to the galleon, while the black men gave way heavily on the oars, and sang for every stroke, keeping a strong cadence. They were happy. They were so happy that they stood up to their full height as they leaned on the oars. And the water rose at the bow of the small boat and gushed down the sides with a swift gurgling noise, as of continual, rhythmic swallowing.

When they got to the ship a hundred blacks were dancing on the deck. A hundred hands were reached for Kildare.

He stood there at last under the moon and saw the signs of the great battle had been removed. There was the carpenter, and here were all the ship's crew laughing and yelling about him.

"Now hoist the sail!" cried the carpenter. "We have the king of the Negroes! They'll be willing to make away from this place!"

Kildare then held up his hand.

He said: "Brothers, Padraic More is still alive, but he is in the hands of the Spaniards. Have you forgotten how he used an axe in the fight to win this same ship? Besides him, there is the lady I love. They are hardly an hour's march from this place. The spies they have set to watch you are dead. Who will go up with me to set on them?"

Bartholomew was a very cold-minded man, and he insisted on sitting on the bulwarks and saying to Kildare: "How many Spaniards are there?"

"Why, forty or fifty," said Kildare, honestly.

"Rabble or good men?" asked Bartholomew.

"Good fighters, every one. The bad ones were cut off by the men of Morgan."

"How armed?"

"Breastplates and morions. Muskets, swords, and everything that a man would have."

"Those damned steel breastplates," said Bartholomew, sucking his thumb, "they make a crowd of trouble. I've turned the edge of a dozen cutlasses on breastplates so that the sword turned into nothing more than a club with a blunt edge. Forty or fifty, Tranquillo? I tell you that we have only twice that many men, and the most of them are Negroes."

"They will fight, though, these Negroes," said Kildare.

"They will fight, but these dark skins will never fight like white ones," said Bartholomew.

"That is true," agreed Kildare, and was silent.

"Here," said Bartholomew, "we have a hundred thousand pounds of value in silver and gold and jewels. We have combed the hold and found a good ballasting of treasure. Enough to make us all gentlemen, after we have landed the black men in Africa and sailed home."

Kildare was silent still.

Bartholomew continued, with his toothless lisp: "You think of the Spanish girl, but you can find great ladies who'll be damned glad to have you, when they know what lines your purse."

"This girl," said Kildare, "is half English."

"Can you trust the English in her?" asked the buccaneer.

"I have crossed the Isthmus for her three times," said Kildare.

After this there was a moment of quiet, and then Bartholomew murmured: "Well, the blacks will never sail unless you consent; and we can't man the ship without them. What am I to do except to say 'Yes'?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

VOYAGE'S END.

LOUIS D'OR could not sleep. He had watched the night wear on and he had seen the Spaniards, one after another, begin to slumber, but there was no peace for the big Frenchman. And he felt himself hemmed in and attacked from either side, for if he turned in one direction he found the burning eyes of Padraic More or Luis the Indian glaring at him, and if he looked another way he met the still, calm look of utter hate from Ines Heredia.

He could not sleep; he could not remain still. He had to rise and go up and down the war-house, thoughtful, grim of face.

And once he stopped near the girl to say: "Ines, do you curse me in your soul?"

She only watched him, saying nothing.

"There's nothing unfair in love or war. You've heard that," he told her.

She was still silent.

"Ines," said Louis d'Or, "the truth is that if I have done wrong, it was love for you that made me."

She continued, silently, to stare at him. And at last he realized that nothing he could say would win words from her. So he stared gloomily over the sleeping Spaniards, and then resumed his pacing back and forth.

The night had worn away for hours. The fire which had died down was replenished at last by some of the poor Cuma women who crept about the big room, only kept at a distance from the place where the Cuma hostages were kept tied hand and foot.

And immediately after the fire began to blaze up an Indian runner came into the room and fell on his knees close to the place where Lacenta the chief and the rest of his warriors were held.

The runner babbled a few words; there was a silence; and after that the newcomer said in very bad Spanish to the two sentinels who had been selected to guard the hostages: "Up the river are coming many men with long lances. They are black men, with white men to lead them along!"

That was news which easily could be interpreted. And the Frenchman cursed as he remembered how stoutly the Negroes had fought at sea against heavy odds. How would they fight now, after they had been so much longer accustomed to the use of the weapons of white men?

Vasco da Herta, however, the moment he heard the story was ready for hot action. He left three men in the war-house with orders to kill the prisoners instantly, in case the battle began to go the wrong way. The rest of his forces, including Louis d'Or, he drew out at the foot of the village, where the river crossed the clearing and plunged again into the lofty darkness of the forest.

The clearing itself was brightly lighted

by the moon, and here Vasco da Herta arranged his soldiers in a semicircle facing towards the gateway which the river clove through the woods. The troops were made to lie down at ease, with loaded muskets ready for the attack, which they were to deliver with a roaring volley and then push in to engage, sword in hand. For that sort of fighting, as Louis d'Or well knew, they would have the inestimable advantage of body armor and morions. Even the leadership of Kildare, it seemed to Louis d'Or, hardly could manage to drive home a Negro attack against such advantages of position and equipment.

The long wait now began, and Louis d'Or found a wildness in his heart and in his brain while he endured the silence.

He could see the Spaniards handling their guns, now and then. And he took his own place near a fellow who wore a divided beard and an air of dignity that did not leave him even when he was lying on the ground. But the man said quietly, contemptuously: "Find another place. I cannot fight at the side of a traitor."

Louis d'Or, rising suddenly to change his position, heard old da Herta exclaim: "Dog of a Frenchman, down to the ground! Do you wish to betray us as you betrayed your own men?"

Louis d'Or, compelled, dropped down behind a bush and waited there, a burning heat in his heart. And it was immediately after this that he heard a faint sound, more like the waking of a single man than of a hundred, and finally saw the head of the Negro column march out from along the course of the river into the open. And at the head of them strode Ivor Kildare, his slender sword like a twinkling bit of moonlight in his hand.

Louis d'Or gathered himself, raised—he almost had shouted a loud warning, when the voice of da Herta called out; and there followed a great roar of guns as the Spaniards poured in their volley.

The effect of it was terrible. The whole head of the Negro column was blown away—but that man of miracles, Kildare, remained standing. Almost alone, he waited for the attack of the rushing Spaniards, as they came in, sword in hand; Louis d'Or was swept along with the rush of the rest.

HE saw the charging line meet Kildare. He saw the slender fellow turn into a flicker of agile shadow. Two of the headlong Spaniards were down. A gap was made in their line through which the Negroes might have charged the next moment to gain a decisive advantage—and when that happened, all was lost!

Louis d'Or, with a great shout, hurled himself into the breach and attacked Kildare with his long sword with all his might, shouting.

No man could have fought better than Louis d'Or. But twice in a single moment he found the darting sword of Kildare inside his guard so that only a chance gesture with the dagger managed to parry the danger.

Louis d'Or, sweating with fear and desperation, fell back a step.

All around him he could hear the clashing of steel against steel as the Negroes valiantly fought the Spanish swordsmen. Their long-headed spears were by no means despicable weapons in such a war as this; but they could not win. Already thrusts which should have driven straight through the bodies of Spaniards were shattering against the strong steel of the breastplates. The fight could not go on forever between the skill of the trained swordsmen and the valor of the Negroes.

But as long as Kildare was there at work, the black men would not fail his leadership. And that said nothing of Bartholomew and all the other buccaneers, who were laying on with a hearty good will, shouting and cursing as they fought. But it was a losing battle, certainly—a battle which would be ended the moment that Kildare went down—for the rout of the blacks would follow.

So Louis d'Or flung himself at his enemy with a great cry. A downsweeping blow of his rapier was caught as by a hand; a long lunge was foiled, also; and then some-

thing stung his sword arm with agony. He had been run through the forearm; his rapier dropped from his hand into the rank depth of the grass and he dropped to his knees to regain it.

He was down in that matter, helpless, with the flash of Kildare's blade in his eyes, and he heard the other say: "I cannot kill you, traitor; but be sure to keep clear of me tonight!"

And the Frenchman, rising to his feet, sword in hand, saw that lithe, shadowy dancer already at work among the armored Spaniards, parrying, ducking, twisting, spinning, leaping in and out until it seemed a certainty that the man was only a silhouette operated by another force.

Louis d'Or felt the hot blood trickling down his sword arm, and went slowly back into the war-house. The three Spaniards there were shouting and cheering from the loopholes through which they overlooked the fight in the lower village, but all that Louis d'Or could see was the bright, cold, hateful eye of the girl he loved.

And still he could not believe the thing that had happened to him. It could not be that Kildare had spared him.

He went, deliberately, to where Padraic More was lying.

"Keep from the prisoners!" shouted one of the Spaniards, instantly on the alert.

THE Frenchman, with a touch of his sword, cut the ropes that bound More hand and foot, saying: "Set the Indians loose! Quickly, Pat."

"My God," whispered Padraic More, "is there the blood of a man in your heart, after all?" And he caught at the dagger which Louis d'Or had dropped beside him.

All that had been seen by the Spaniards of the guard; and now a pistol boomed. It drew a loud wail of terror from the Indian women in the room; but the bullet merely knocked a hole through the wall of mud and sticks beside Louis d'Or.

At him came the three Spaniards of the guard. He parried one savage stroke, dodged a second, and then received a frightful blow across the head. The shock of the impact knocked him to his knees, but luckily the blade of the Spanish sword had turned as the blow fell, otherwise his skull would have been split like a chunk of dry wood.

Louis d'Or, still on his knees, tried to lift a feeble guard against the next attack, but most certainly he would have died if help had not come to him. A bowstring twanged; a little feather-headed arrow struck right through to the butt in the groin of the central one of the three Spaniards; and as that fellow dropped, yelling, in agony, big Padraic More came into action, howling his joy of battle.

The first weapon was the best one, so far as More was concerned. He had used the edge of the dagger to cut loose the nearest of the Indian captives; then he leaped into the fight, catching up a great war-club with a painted head. The wood of that club was tough, but it shattered to bits against the morion of the second Spaniard; the skull beneath that steel cap was crushed, nevertheless, by the sheer weight of the blow. And now Louis d'Or, getting staggering to his feet, saw the spear of Luis the Indian fly past him, the point accurately driven into the throat of the white man.

So, all in a moment, they were the masters of the war-house and of all that was in it.

They had good help, furthermore, because the Cuma hostages were no sooner free than they caught up weapons, every one, and began to do an aimless dance of exultation.

Padraic More, reaching the girl in the same first rush that had taken him through the Spaniards, had her free and on her feet at once.

Louis d'Or noted that bitterly, and then he shouted: "Outside with me, Pat! They're murdering the Negroes and Tranquillo with them!"

So they ran from the war-house and saw — all the little group of them — how desperate the plight of Kildare was.

For the Negroes, fighting very valiantly, had left a score of their number dead on

the ground. Still they fought on, but more wearily, more blindly. They had blunted their spears on helmets and breastplates; the white man's magic was too strong to be overcome. Even of the buccaneers there remained standing only Bartholomew, who gasped and shouted in the thick heat of the night, and the carpenter.

But still Ivor Kildare was dancing in the thickest of the battle like a shadow, a thing that grows small or great on the wall as the firelight flickers.

Louis d'Or, when he saw this, cried out with a great admiration: "Charge, Pat!—Tranquillo, we come!—Luis, stay here with the girl!—*Ahai! Ahai!* Tranquillo! Tranquillo!"

And he was already striking in the middle of the fight, using that sword of his which was heavy enough to carve through armor if the cunning of the point did not find its way more easily to the life.

IN a moment he had broken through to the side of Kildare, and as he came closer, tall Louis d'Or was astonished by the haggard exhaustion in the face of the Englishman. Kildare, certainly, had almost danced his last step in that battle. He carried at least half a dozen wounds, and blood was running fast from all of them. He looked to Louis d'Or like a man already dead. And yet there was still the spirit in Kildare to make him cry out: "Welcome, Louis! Good lad, Pat! Now at them all together—ah ha! the Indians come in from behind—"

The Cumas had seen enough of these white men to fear them heartily. And after they were liberated from the warhouse, they hung back for a moment until Lacenta, the chief, could organize them. Now, however, they made a very determined charge—against men whose backs were turned!

A sweep of arrows preceded them and did a great deal more damage than the spear-casting which followed it. That volley of arrows, coming as it did from the rear, ended the fight instantly.

Old Vasco da Herta went down at that moment with one of the arrows stuck through the back of his head. The whole force of the Spanish soldiers wavered, broke, and ran to save their lives.

Not many of them got as far as the woods. Louis d'Or and Pat More were after them. The relentless spear of Luis the Indian marked down human prey, also, as actively as ever he could have speared fish; and Bartholomew with one mighty cutlass stroke shore through the steel ridge of a morion and the skull that was beneath it.

But the Indians were the matchless ones for the pursuit. And every Spaniard who broke away into the forest went attended by a little cluster of the red men.

That was the end, so quickly, with such a mere gesture to end what had been contested so hotly. Ivor Kildare, dropping down on one knee because suddenly he was unable to stand. He saw the darkness of the forest and the sheen of the woods mingling together; and the roar of the river was growing louder and louder, a sound that engulfed all his senses.

He began to cry out the name of Ines Heredia. But his wits were so far gone with exhaustion and effort and the loss of blood that he could not understand when she had come to him, running. He kept crying out for Ines Heredia, and yet the girl was already on her knees and in his arms.

SLOWLY they drifted down the coast of South America, an unexciting voyage except when once they were chased for three days by a Spanish fleet. But they got away from that danger because the Santo Spirito sailed very well, even with only two masts standing; and yawing about as the leading frigate of the Spaniards drew close, Kildare and his friends put such a broadside into her that she was left standing, leaking blood through her scuppers into the sea.

Kildare himself gave orders, but he did not share in the fighting on this day. This, said Louis d'Or, was a pity, because if he had entered the fight he might have made

the forty-nine battle scars which now could be counted on his body an even fifty.

They picked up, near the Horn, a tall Spanish ship which looked to be a most excellent prize; and for two days they were in sight of one another, but never once did the sea stop jumping like a nervous horse, and never once did the wind cease screaming in its highest pitch.

So they had to let that prize go, after having it securely under their guns for forty-eight hours.

This, as Bartholomew vowed, was enough of a penance to make up for every sin that they ever had committed in the past or that they ever would commit in the future.

The next day, when the sea had dropped to such a point that a boat could be launched and live in it, the tall ship was hull down in the distance, and they never were able to speak it again.

They got around the Horn quickly on one of those long slants of westerlies, and so they went up the Atlantic into warm weather.

They had the luck to pick up a Portuguese boat loaded with salt fish and salt pork, and five men aboard the little frigate all so weak and far gone with scurvy that they were glad to desert their worthless little ship.

Kildare took on board what provisions could be used and sank the useless boat; and a few days later the Portuguese were pulling and hauling and entering in the most lively manner into the work that was done on board the Santo Spirito.

They made a priceless addition without which the ship never could have been sailed home, for Kildare had made up his mind to land the Negroes in their own Africa, and in fact he did so. Into the broad mouth of a river the Santo Spirito sailed, and there were placed on the shore fifty-eight black men, all in good health.

To each man were given a pair of excellent muskets, some of the best knives, a considerable quantity of that good Peruvian cloth of which so much had been taken out of the prizes when the ship was beating about off the coast of Panama; and to every Negro were given also powder and lead, three axe-heads, two anvils, and a set of tools for a blacksmith—since two of the men had learned from the ship's smith the art of iron work—and finally whole pounds of the gaudiest beads that could be wished.

For these gifts the Negroes blessed the white men as though they had been gods from heaven, and as the Santo Spirito sailed down the river again, the black people ran along the green of the shore for more than an hour, waving, dancing, leaping, weeping. At last a strong breeze picked up the ship and sailed her rapidly away.

The Portuguese addition to the crew was very welcome from here on until at last Bristol harbor was reached and the voyage ended.

They were still in tropical seas on a night when Kildare and Ines Heredia sat in a cabin with big Padraic More, who had laid out his share of the loot from the Church of San Francisco and was telling what he would do to dispose of his money. Each jewel had to be translated by Padraic into a separate possession.

The big emerald would buy the farm; the little one would build the stone house; the two rubies should make him master of a fine stable of English runners; the flawed diamond he would give away to charity.

Padraic More, having carried on for some time in this manner, suddenly fell silent and began to shake his head.

"What's the matter now?" asked Kildare. "You have everything to make you happy so long as you live, Pat."

"I have everything," said Padraic More. "But think of him that hasn't! Think of the heart that's in poor Louis d'Or!"

He lifted his hand to call their attention, and then they could hear the regular step of a man walking the poop deck above the cabin. "Listen to him!" said Padraic More. "Now, I call it a damned thing that with all the women there are in the

world, the both of you would have to fall in love with the same face."

He added, grinning: "Not that I'd want to change the face, Ines. But there's poor Louis d'Or that can't so much as look at you without turning pale. Can't you look kinder on him, Ines?"

"I cannot," she said. "He betrayed us all; he betrayed Ivor!"

"Aye, and how would a woman forgive a thing like that?" said the Irishman. "But God help poor Louis. He'll be apt to begin some bad work when he gets on shore. He'll want to have his hands full because his heart will be so empty. Well, God pity him."

"Amen," said Kildare. "Say a good word for him, Ines. Except for him we all should be lost."

"Do you think that I should try to forgive him?" she asked, her face still hard as stone, and as cold.

"I know you must before the voyage is over," said Kildare. "Today, I hope!"

"Today, then," she agreed.

"*Hai!* Wait!" called Padraic More. "I'll run and bring Louis here and have the good news."

He jumped up with a start that jarred the table, and as he slammed the door, the land, the buildings, the church, the very charity of Padraic More were all left trembling uncertainly as thoughts in the mind.

THE END

How to Reduce Your Weight

GO to the exact center of the earth; there you will weigh nothing. Or go up in the stratosphere 24,000 miles; there your two hundred pounds will weigh only four pounds. Or leap from the airplane, and after you have been falling for three seconds, you will weigh nothing. Or, if you could speed up the earth's rotations seventeen times faster than now, at the equator you would weigh nothing.

A ton of coal weighed at the north pole on spring scales would register 2,000 pounds. The same coal and scales would register only 1,994 pounds at the equator. Centrifugal force of the earth's rotation is responsible for this phenomenon.

But the earth's rotations are slowing at the rate of 1-1000th of a second every hundred years!

—*Alton Trues.*

Nature's First Invention

THE cockroach is one of nature's earliest inventions. He infested the caves of prehistoric man. He is found fossilized in the oldest rock formations. He lives anywhere and eats anything, but exists most happily under your kitchen sink or bathtub. A million years ago, his black, beady eyes watched the predaceous and mighty saurians come and go.

Now he watches the plumber come and go!

—*James Meeker.*

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

A Taxi Driver Sounds Off

WHENEVER I turn to the back of the magazine and catch a writer talking about how he came to write his story, I usually skip that explanation. Somehow, it seems to take the edge off the yarn to be told that " such and such a thing is fact, and from this fact came the story." Maybe I'm a kid; maybe I just like to be fooled. But when I've waded through a yarn, lived and laughed and maybe cried with a set of characters, I want those characters to keep on living for a while in my memory. I don't want the writer to kill them by telling me that *John Smith* wasn't really John Smith. That in real life he was Oscar Jones, and that he didn't do all the things he did in the yarn—only some of them.

So let's not talk about *Smooth* and *Lucky* or any of the people who burn up the streets of New York in " Midnight Taxi." Let's listen in on a conversation between the editor of ARGOSY and Borden Chase. It took place in a downtown restaurant, and Chase was polishing off his third or fourth Scotch-and-soda. The editor was drinking coffee — editors *have* to drink coffee.

" You used to drive a hack, didn't you, Chase?" said the editor.

" Yeah—plenty," said Chase. " I hacked when hacking was good. In those days, there was money on the street. Why, I remember the time when—"

" Why don't you write it?"

" I'd like to, but I don't think I could get away with it."

" Why not?" asked the editor.

" Too tough. The boys I knew played marbles for keeps. Shoving a hack is a tough game, and when you have to climb down off the seat and go into a waltz with another hackman, the story wouldn't make very nice reading. For instance, you might use a jack handle and wrap it gently around the other fellow's skull. You might even lean over and give him a few additional taps—just to make sure. A hero can't do that, and so—"

" That's what *you* think!" said the editor. " Get this, Chase—ARGOSY readers can take it. They don't want their heroes tied up in blue ribbons, and they don't want them to lisp."

Of Interest to You!

WHAT do you consider the best story (of any length) published in ARGOSY since June 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which name the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others the magazine will give twelve full, yearly subscriptions. Literary style or skill will not count, for what the editors want to know is exactly what stories readers like best, and *why*.

Letters selected will be published from week to week, but ***not all letters published will be rewarded with subscriptions.***

Your letter must reach us not later than January 1, 1936. Address it to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

You see, editors aren't so very clever. I'd been wanting to write a taxi yarn for months, anyway. I knew it was going to be a hard-boiled affair, and I expected plenty of grief in the telling of it. I expected the editor to say, "Sorry, Chase, but your hero is an out-and-out murderer. Try it again."

But thanks to the courage that comes from Scotch-and-soda, I had now maneuvered Friend Editor into a spot. If he said, "Too tough, Chase," I could say, "I told you so."

And so, people, here it is—rough, tough and dirty, like the streets of New York at four in the morning. That's the reason I've called it "Midnight Taxi," because the dirtiest time of the day in New York is after midnight.

Next, if I may, a few words to you readers who are New York hackmen. If any of you old-timers remember the Mogul Checker strike of long ago, when we were getting thirty-three per cent of the bookings and wanted forty per cent, you'll surely remember the meeting we staged at 125th Street. You may remember the fellow who jumped up and said, "Don't be a bunch of saps! You're yelling for a lousy seven per cent when you should be fighting the rates. Get rid of the thirty-cent clocks and go back to the old double tariff. Make 'em pay *forty* a mile and *sixty* on the double!"

Well—they kicked me out on my ear; but now they're riding 'em for *twenty* in New York, and if things keep on it may be a charity proposition soon.

While we're remembering — how many of you can recall the Red Tops, the 20th Century cabs (Ham-and-Eggers that handed out coupons instead of money), the old Yellows (Shaw cabs with plenty of southern exposure around the driver's seat), the Mogul Checkers, the Paramounts and Luxors, and those screwy rigs that opened at the front? Do you remember the fight we gave Larry Fay when his gray cabs tried to grab the docks? Do you remember the battles with the Yellows' lump squad?—And Captain Finn at the hack bureau!—Do you remember when a trip to Coney Island was worth two pounds, and a trip to Jersey anything you could get?—The closed lines in front of Rector's, the Pekin, the Tokio, Murray's on 42nd Street, and Reisenweber's at the Circle?—Then later there was the Terminal Club that paid thirty per cent for suckers, and the other spots that handed out a sawbuck for each chump.

Say, I'll bet three or four of us old-timers could sit over coffee in a cafeteria and bat out yarns that would burn up this damned magazine. About the time when the fifty-forty's tried to crash the lines that only played red sticks. And when a dime tip was tossed to the paper boy on the corner.

Oh, well—

Here's hoping the old days come back again, and that the old-timers can show the buttonhole makers what *real* hacking meant!

BORDEN CHASE.

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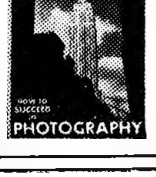

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This startling invention has been built into a line of beautifully colored Art Lamps for the home, which are now ready for general distribution at a price anyone can afford to pay.

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I am willing to send one of these Lamps for 30 days' trial, or even to give one FREE to the first user in each locality who will help me introduce it. Send in your name today—also ask for details of how you can get the agency and without experience or capital make BIG MONEY.

Agents Wanted

J. C. Steese, Inventor, 160 Steese Bldg., Akron, Ohio

MAKE *Spare Hours* PAY BIG $

Take orders for attractive Christmas Card Box Assortments. Unequaled values. 21 Beautiful folders retail for $1. Exceptionally fast sellers. 7 other assortments, 50c. up including Religious and Humorous Cards, Gift Wrappings and Everyday Greetings. 100% profit. No experience needed. Free sample offer. Act now.

ARTISTIC CARD CO. 145 Way St. Elmira, N. Y.

WHO'D BELIEVE I WAS SKINNY AND LONELY A FEW WEEKS AGO

Posed by professional models

Thousands Are Quickly Gaining 5 to 15 lbs. This New Easy Way

DON'T think you're "born" to be skinny and friendless. Thousands with this new treatment have gained normally husky pounds—*in just a few weeks!*

Doctors now say the real reason why great numbers of people can't seem to gain an ounce is they fail to get enough health-building Vitamin B and iron in their daily food. But now with this new discovery which combines these two vital elements in little concentrated tablets, hosts of people have put on pounds of firm flesh—*in a very short time.*

Besides, thousands have also gained a naturally clear complexion, freedom from indigestion and constipation, new pep.

7 times more powerful

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from specially cultured *ale yeast* imported from Europe, which is the richest known source of Vitamin B. By a new process this yeast is concentrated 7 times—*made 7 times more powerful.* Then it is *ironized* with 3 kinds of strengthening iron.

If you, too, are one of the many who simply need Vitamin B and iron to build them up, get these new Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist at once. Day after day, as you take them, watch skinny limbs and flat chest round out to normal attractiveness. Skin clears to natural beauty, new health comes — you're an entirely new person.

Results guaranteed

No matter how skinny and rundown you may be from lack of enough Vitamin B and iron, this marvelous new Ironized Yeast should build you up in a few short weeks as it has thousands. If not delighted with results of very first package, money back instantly.

Only don't be deceived by the many cheaply prepared "Yeast and Iron" tablets sold in imitation of Ironized Yeast. These cheap imitations cannot possibly give the same results as the scientific Ironized Yeast formula. Be sure you get the genuine Ironized Yeast. Look for "IY" stamped on each tablet.

Special FREE offer!

To start you building up your health right away, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results guaranteed with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 379, Atlanta, Ga.