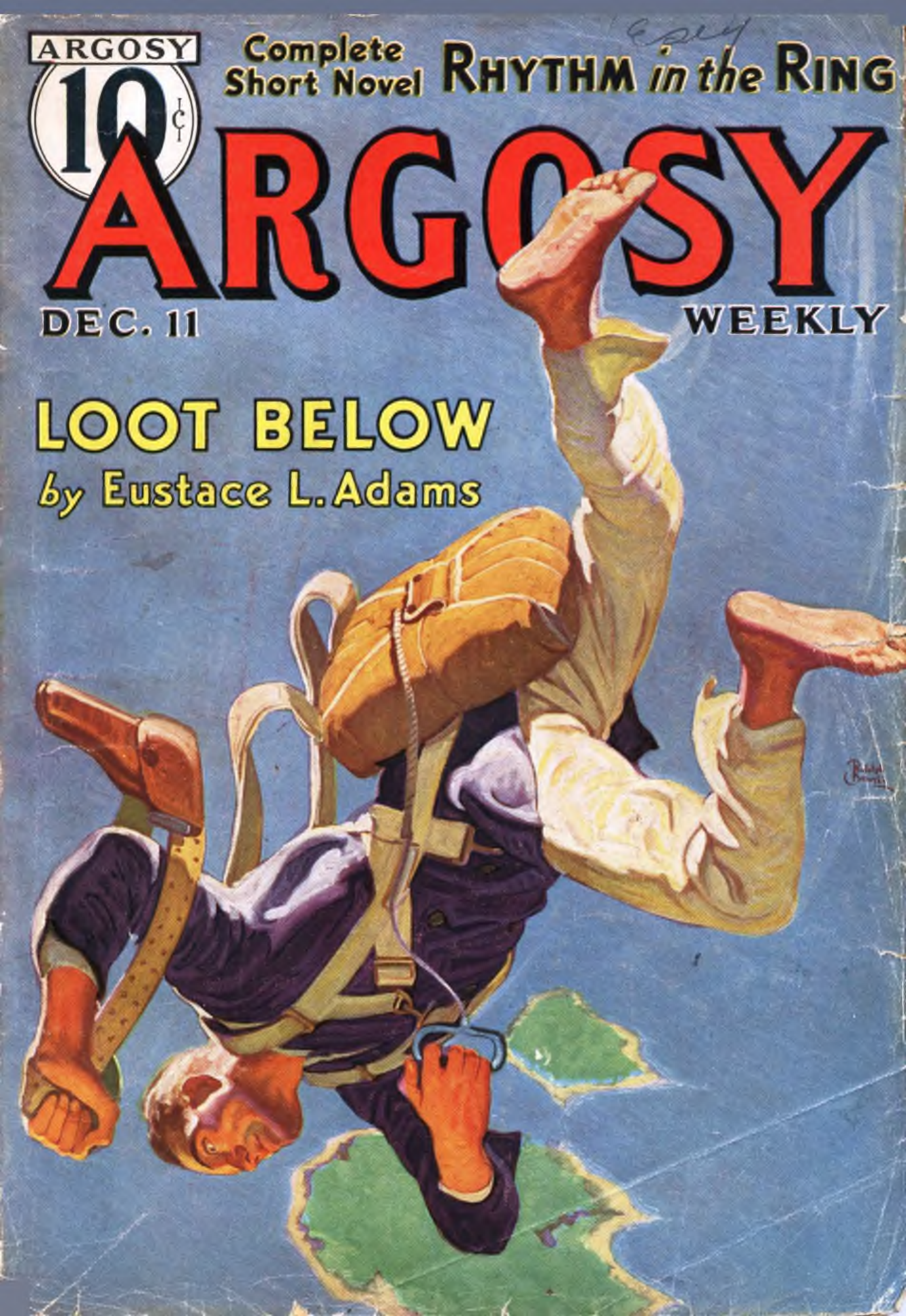
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ARGOSY
DEC. 11
WEEKLY
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by Eustace L. Adams

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

VOLUME 278 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 11, 1937 Number 1

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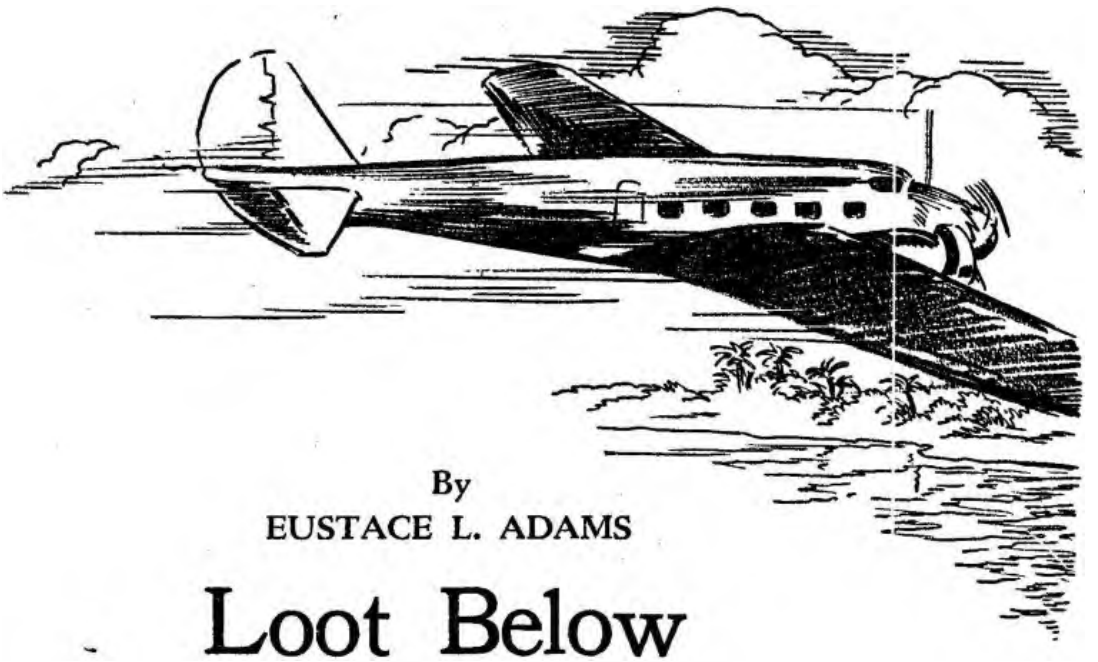


By
EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Loot Below

Author of "Stunt Man," "The Big Wind Blows," etc.

CHAPTER I

UNREPORTED

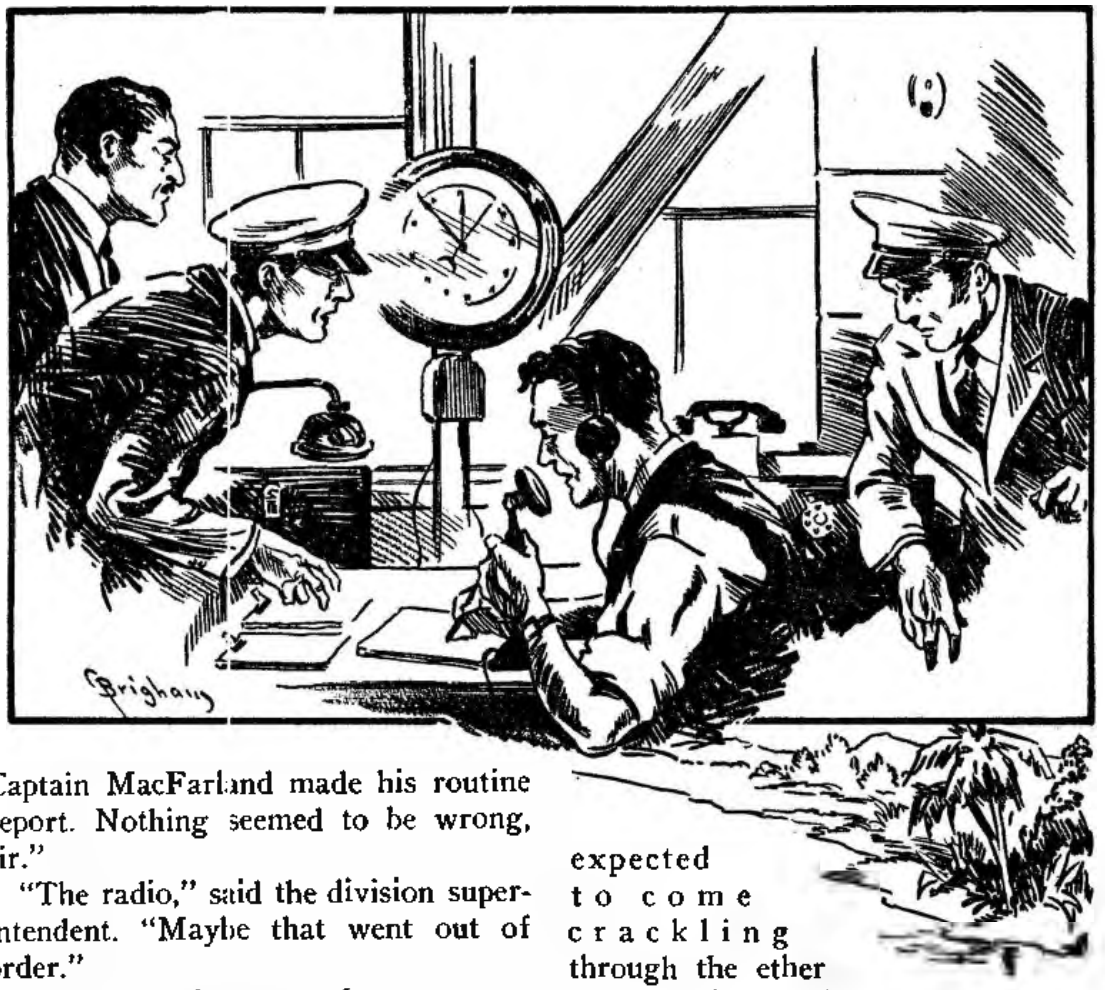
WHEN the noon report failed to come through from the *European Cruiser,* newest and biggest flying boat in the world, the radio operator at Miami whose duty it was to keep in constant touch with her pounded anxiously on his key. Ninety seconds later he notified the division superintendent of Trans-Caribbean Airways that he had lost contact.

Four minutes later the division superintendent, standing behind that operator in the quiet of the big radio room at the Air Terminal, telephoned the operations manager. And for the next ten minutes that long room was a thing to see. A dozen operators sat at their instruments, maintaining routine contact with the twenty or thirty giant flying boats which were in the air between Miami and Buenos Aires, to the southeastward, and between Valparaiso, Panama and Miami, to the southwestward. But their anxious eyes were watching Mike Hennesy, who had been following the *European Cruiser* through the ether ever since she had begun this, the first passenger flight on her temporary run from Miami to Buenos Aires and return.

Behind Mike Hennesy stood the division superintendent, the chief pilot of the division and the operations manager, all watching and waiting. As if the same dragging heartbeats controlled them all, color faded from their taut faces as the seconds inched past and no word came from the gigantic air liner, pride of the Trans-Caribbean fleet. Time and time again Mike Hennesy pounded his brass, trying to get a response from the great ship, but there was no answer. No answer at all.

"Where was she last time you got a fix on her?" the chief pilot demanded harshly.

"Off Barima Point, sir, at the mouth of the Orinoco," replied the operator. "That was at eleven-thirty.



Captain MacFarland made his routine report. Nothing seemed to be wrong, sir."

"The radio," said the division superintendent. "Maybe that went out of order."

"Have you forgotten the two emergency sets?" snarled the operations manager, white-lipped. "I've got to notify the head office in New York."

Forty passengers, all of them prominent in one way or another, some of them world-famous. . . . A crew of ten, the pick of the entire Trans-Caribbean system. . . . A cool million dollars worth of plane. . . .

To an organization less experienced, less perfectly run, a matter of seventeen minutes might have been of little importance; but the second hand of the electric clock ruled the destinies of Trans-Caribbean. When a plane's schedule called for a report at twelve noon its call letters were expected to come crackling through the ether at *exactly* twelve o'clock.

Pirates Take The Air! The Captain Kidds of Today Ride The Cloud-Ways in This New Novel of Sky-Plunder and High Heroics

THE operation manager's thoughts were spinnning as he turned reluctantly toward the telephone. Even the slightest mishap to the *European Cruiser* would shake the entire line to its foundations, for this was the first of a fleet of three giant flying boats scheduled to open up the New York-to-London service and had been put on the South American run only temporarily while her sister ships were being built. To have anything happen to her on this, her very first round-trip in passenger service—well, it was unthinkable.

He reached for the

telephone, hating to pick up the instrument and to pass the shocking news on to New York that the leviathan of the air was unreported for—now—eighteen minutes and twelve seconds. He cast one more glance at Mike Hennesy, praying he might see that homely Irish face light up as some reassuring message hissed into his head-set. But the operator's face was tight with strain; his expression increased the manager's sense of foreboding. With a sigh the official closed his hand around the telephone which would give him, through the switchboard, direct connection with the New York office.

And then the thing buzzed unexpectedly. Instinctively he jerked his hand away. Then he lifted the receiver.

"Garland speaking," he said, his eyes still on Hennesy's worried face.

"This is Jarratt, Garland," replied the president of Trans-Caribbean Airways, speaking from his office in New York. "Is the *European Cruiser* all right?"

Garland gasped. "Why, no, sir," he said, astonished. "I was just reaching for the phone to report that she's now twenty minutes overdue on her noon position report. How did you happen to ask, sir?"

Distinctly he heard a sound he had not believed possible from Alexander B. Jarratt. A groan came clearly to his ears.

"Where are you now? Can anybody hear you talking to me?"

"I'm in the radio room. All the operators are here and the chief pilot and the division—"

"Then don't answer in a way that will let them know what we are saying," the president snapped. "Have you told anybody outside our organization that the plane is late in reporting? The Coast Guard, for example?"

"Not a soul, sir. We've been expecting her to report at any moment and—"

"Listen, Garland," the official cut in. "I've just this minute put down the receiver after talking to a man whose voice I never heard before. A local call, it was, from a New York pay station, because our operator here heard the man put a nickel in the slot. The man told me that the *European Cruiser* would not be heard from again until we paid his associates in Miami exactly two million dollars in cash."

The room with its busy operators and its staring officials seemed to whirl around the operations man. He held tightly to the phone and listened.

"The thing," said Jarratt's voice, "is incredible. It simply must be a coincidence. But the man told me if we did not pay up by tomorrow noon, the *Cruiser* would be destroyed with all aboard."

"But—but she can't stay in the air that long!" Garland said.

"Who said she was *in* the air? Even if I don't believe this thing, I've got to treat it seriously. Keep it quiet. Call me if you hear a word from the *Cruiser*. My operator is at work now getting the directors of the line together for an emergency meeting. Don't tell anybody, even your assistants, until you hear from me. Don't notify the Coast Guard, and above all, don't let a whisper leak out to the press. As soon as we've had our directors' meeting I'll call you and tell you how to handle it at your end, then I'll jump down there by chartered plane. We—"

"But, sir," Garland protested, "she's due to land at Port of Spain, Trinidad, at two-forty today. If she doesn't do it, there'll be the devil to pay."

"There's the devil to pay right now!"

There was a click in Garland's ear.

The wire was dead. Slowly he put the instrument back on its prongs. Every eye in that quiet room was fixed upon him.

"Jack!" cried the chief pilot. "Tell us, will you? Has she crashed?"

The operations manager dragged in a long, deep breath. The silence stretched until the others could have screamed for him to break the news, however bad.

"She hasn't crashed," he said, at last, "and that's every last word I can tell you. Not one of you is to mention a word of this until I get permission from the head office. You operators—you have twenty-odd ships to keep in the air. Do it. Hennesy, turn the *Haitian Cruiser* and the *Dominican Cruiser* over to Mahoney Don't you do anything else but listen for the *European Cruiser*. And telephone me the instant you get a call. Hewett, come up to my office with me."

The operations manager and the chief pilot of the division marched out of the room and slammed the door behind them.

CHAPTER II

MIAMI TO BUENOS AIRES

THE *European Cruiser*, at 11.20 A.M., was skirting the jungle-covered coast of Venezuela at 6,000 feet. Her forty passengers were, for the most part, dozing in their comfortable compartments, or gazing down at the vast panorama of green and brown desolation. But in compartment B four quiet men were at that moment studying the synchronized dials of their watches, counting off the minutes and seconds before 11.32, when the radio operator would have finished sending off his 11.30 position report to Miami.

On the bridge, a many-windowed compartment whose interior was painted black to reduce the glare from the dazzling sky and sea, sat First Pilot Anderson and Second Pilot Williams. Neither man was touching the dual controls. They sat comfortably relaxed, one with his arms folded, the other with his hands idly clasped in his lap, for the gyro compass was flying the ship and all they had to do was to watch—and to be ready to jump into action should anything go wrong with the automatic pilot.

Flight Engineer Colson had just left his desk in the radio and navigation room and had climbed the stairway leading up to the gangway which led within the interior of the wing from one to another of the four 1,500 horsepower engines. The imposing array of dials and gauges over his desk had informed him that everything was fine with his four throbbing motors, but it was his habit to inspect them himself every half hour to confirm with his own eyes and ears what the instruments had told him. Along that narrow and well-lighted gangway he marched, stopping behind each motor and listening with utter absorption to the thunder of the throbbing masses of steel, sorting out of that roar various small noises which told him that everything was as it should be.

Busy in the big room behind the bridge were Flight Navigator Weymouth and Radio Officer Stevens. The former was just working up the ship's position, jotting intricate figures on a pad of paper at the chart table. The latter was at ease, idly watching the navigator as he waited for the information which he would shortly send to Mike Hennesy, at Miami.

Asleep on a cot in the crews' quarters aft of the cargo hold was Third Pilot Gray. On the deck below, Stew-

ards Lopez and Segurdo were busy preparing lunch for their forty passengers.

And in the small office on the port side of the navigation room Captain McFarland was laying down the law in no uncertain fashion to Purser Bronson, a tall, broad-shouldered young man just three years out of Dartmouth Veteran of a million miles of overseas flying, the captain had about him an air of quiet competence, of entire self-sufficiency, which was wholly in keeping with his record, and with his character, too. In all the world there was probably no man better qualified to take a giant plane across a sea.

"You've been with this line ever since you left college," Captain McFarland was saying, incisively. "You're supposed to know your duties. Do I have to go down to the main deck and straighten things out for you?"

"No, sir," said the purser, his face very red. "But this Señorita Alvarez says somebody has stolen her jewel case and—"

"And she wants that naval attache to hold the crying towel for her, eh?" the captain said, his tone heavy with disbelief. "And I'll bet he's right there in her compartment with her now, doing just that. Is he?"

"He's been in her compartment off and on all day since we left Belem, Para, sir," Purser Bronson said.

The captain stared unseeingly at his paper work for an instant. Then he said:

"Look, son"—his voice was very quiet—"Rosita Alvarez hasn't lost any jewel case. It's probably under the divan in her compartment right now. That is, if she owns one now with anything in it. I want you to do two things. Tell Commander Halsey I want to see him in the anchor and gear room just as soon as I've made my noon altitude sight. You take him up there and wait with him until I come down. Next, tell Rosita—tell Señorita Alvarez—I said for her to behave herself or I'll spill her beans no matter what happens. On this first flight everything's going to be fine if I have to get tough to make it so."

"What do you mean, sir, behave herself?" Purser Bronson said, his freckled face faintly flushing.

"Just tell her that," snapped the captain, grimly, "and she won't ask you to spell it out. Now what else is breaking into your sweet young dreams?"

"Miss Hall, in the de luxe compartment. She—"

"Let me guess," the captain cut in. "Last night at Para she stayed out almost all night cafe-ing with that fat man in compartment H. And you think she's too young to be staying out that late with anybody, especially that one, and you wonder if something can't be done about it. Well, it can't. What she does before take-off time is her business. All we care is that she makes the plane."

"How did you know that, sir?" Toby Bronson grinned.

He had been running up and down this coast for nearly three years with other captains and in smaller ships, but this was his first trip with Captain MacFarland. He was just beginning to learn why that small, quiet-faced man had been appointed to command of this new giant liner.

"I know more than that," MacFarland went on brusquely. "Every morning you and the stewards have an awful time getting her out of her hotel room in time to make the plane. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir," Toby Bronson said.

"Listen. This line is supposed to see that all its passengers get to their des-

tinations right side up and with their skins whole. Mostly it's wealthy passengers we carry because the fares are so high. It's the rich ones, always, who cause the trouble. It's your job to take trouble and like it. That girl—know who she is?"

"Yes, sir. T. G. Hall's daughter," the purser said. "I've seen her picture in the rotogravures."

"Right. She could buy this plane and use it for commuting between Long Island and Palm Beach. That's how much money old T. G. has. Keep her satisfied, because if she ever complains about the service, the President of the United States couldn't save your job. Anything else?"

"Just one more thing, sir. At Para this morning four men came aboard. Together, I mean. They're in compartment B. I don't like their looks."

Captain MacFarland stared. "You don't, eh? Why don't you?"

"They look—well, hard, sir," Bronson said, uncomfortably. "There's something about them you just can't put a name to. But they look as if they could chew up stove bolts and digest them."

"I didn't see them come aboard," MacFarland said. "We were having trouble with the oil pressure on Number two engine and I was watching Colson fix it. Are they Spanish?"

"No, sir. Americans."

The captain glanced at the chronometer on the bulkhead. In half an hour it would be time to get ready for the noon sight. He had dozens of reports to make out concerning the performance and fuel consumption of his great new ship in addition to the regular paper work which had to be handled by the captain. He almost longed for the day when being in command of a flying boat had been a matter of sitting behind the controls, flying to Havana and back, and calling it a day's work. Now he practically never touched the controls, but he had ten times the worries. He glanced with distaste at his littered desk.

"Look like tough eggs, do they?" he murmured. "I'll have a look at them."

He sat back in his chair and considered briefly. And then he did the thing which so many pilots do sooner or later—he made the one mistake he would never walk away from. "I'll go down and have a look at them right after the noon sight."

TOBY BRONSON looked at his wrist watch. It was 11.25 A.M. Making his way down through the anchor and gear room to the main deck below, he felt low in his mind. Taking care of forty passengers was, apparently, about ten times as hard as taking care of twenty, which had been the number carried by his last ship, the *Caribbean Cruiser*. Clearance papers, manifests, passenger lists, the passengers' passports, vaccination certificates, health and police papers; these and numberless other things were all in his charge. But he knew the routine and had it well organized. It was the passengers themselves who bothered him this trip, and had, ever since leaving Buenos Aires.

He must not, he told himself, earnestly, let them get his goat. Of all the ambitious young pursers on the line, he had been chosen for the magnificent new *European Cruiser*. He knew that the company intended this same crew to remain aboard during these shakedown trips to Buenos Aires while her sister ships were being completed. If he watched his step he would remain aboard when she was transferred to the trans-Atlantic run. Then, after a

year or two of shuttling back and forth across the North Atlantic, he would be in line for the next step upward in the company, to the traffic department. Beyond that, promotion would be as fast as his ability justified. He was, when he came to think about it, sitting very pretty indeed. But he still felt low in his mind and it occurred to him he might be coming down with something.

Walking down the passageway on the main deck, he almost ran into Steward Segurdo, who was hurrying toward him, carrying a wireless form.

"Mr. Bronson," said the steward—a Cuban who had been with the line since the days when it owned only two land ships and made one round trip from Miami to Havana each day—"the young lady in the de luxe compartment wants this message sent right now, this minute."

"I'll take it," Bronson said. "You'll be late with lunch. Get into the galley and help Lopez."

Inattentively he glanced down at the written words. It was a strange message:

"Arthur Hall," was written in a fashionable finishing-school perpendicular. "I thought I could go through with it, but I can't. I simply can't. Ann."

But Bronson was accustomed to strange messages. Most messages were strange, unless you knew the story behind them.

"Arthur Hall where?" he sighed. "China? New York? Paris?"

Reluctantly he marched aft along the carpeted passageway. The door to compartment B was closed, so he could not see the four hard-faced men who had come aboard at Para. If he had seen them, he might not have noticed anything amiss, for all they were doing was sitting still and staring down at their watches. Possibly he might have noticed the obscure air of alertness about them, but it is not likely. He had a lot on his mind this morning.

He marched aft through the dining lounge with its modernistic chairs and table. He walked past compartment doors, opening to right and to left. They were mostly closed, but with regret, he noticed that the door to compartment F was opened, and he attempted to hurry by without being noticed. This morning he had no luck at all. A voice, smooth and soft, hailed him.

"Señor Bronson," Rosita Alvarez called. "One little moment, please?"

It was queer, he told himself, what a pull that voice of hers had. It reminded him, with its very faint Spanish accent, of guitars playing under high, bright stars, of grilled balcony windows in whose shadows mysterious *caballeros* sang pulse-stirring songs to dim white faces above. It reminded him of fragrant patios, of high mountains that seemed to hold the sky from falling, and of long black beaches, pounded by the rollers from six thousand miles of Pacific Ocean. Oh, he knew better than this, when he stopped to think. He had been on the South American runs long enough to realize that at twenty most *Latinas* were fat. But Señorita Alvarez wasn't—yet. Nevertheless, while his brain told him to hurry on past that door, his feet dragged him to a halt.

"Si, señorita?" he said.

HE tried not to look at Rosita Alvarez. He had been trying not to look at her ever since she had come aboard at Buenos Aires. Her eyes were a dense and smoky brown and she had a way of glancing up at him through incredibly long lashes that made his pulses hammer unevenly. Her lips were

very bright—too bright—and there was a golden glitter when the sun struck down on her inky black hair. Sometimes she looked as demure as a chaperoned school girl; sometimes she took fire and flamed into anger like a Caribbean hurricane; sometimes she glanced up at him with an expression in her sultry eyes that sent all Toby Bronson's thoughts askew. Each of these moods she had displayed in the three days since she had come aboard. Acts, Toby told himself. But good acts. In her way Rosita Alvarez was a great actress.

"Did you find my jewel case, *señor?*" she asked, and now her pose was one of quiet resignation.

She gathered in Toby's expression with a sweep of her dark eyes, then glanced at Commander Wayne Halsey, who was sitting beside her. The naval officer was a good-looking man in his early forties, and it was evident to Toby Bronson that he was entirely overcome by Rosita Alvarez.

"*Señorita,*" Toby said, politely, "would it be possible for you to step out into the passageway? I have a message from Captain MacFarland."

A curtain seemed to drop far back in the girl's eyes and, for a very small instant, she seemed to have gathered years, seemed not quite so youthful, so vibrant. Her gaze shifted instantly to Commander Halsey, then away.

"*Bueno,*" she murmured. "It is a bore, this," she explained to the navy man, "but the captain, he has a suspicion, perhaps."

Commander Halsey frowned and stared at Toby Bronson with no apparent enthusiasm.

"Either you've found her jewels or you haven't," he snapped. "So why the secrecy?"

"We haven't found them," Toby answered, a little too politely.

In the passageway, with Rosita Alvarez standing so close to him that it made him a little dizzy, Toby Bronson said:

"I hate to tell you this, *señorita,* but Captain MacFarland ordered me to tell you to behave yourself or he would—well, he'd be angry. He said you would know what he means."

Dull color stained her smooth dark cheeks. But entirely contrary to Toby's expectations she did not fly into a rage. She rummaged Toby's eyes, but found no more information there.

"A hard man, *el capitan,*" she murmured. "It was stupid for me to buy passage on his ship. Could I see him, *señor?*"

Her eyes flashed liquid fire through him. She smiled.

"Sure," Toby Bronson said. When he looked down at her, he felt awkward, all hands and feet. "He'll be down just after noon. He's busy on the upper deck now"

She put her slim hand on Toby Bronson's blue uniform sleeve and that fragile contact warmed him, sent warmth through all his being. Trying to act as if he had not noticed it, he moved away.

"I'll bring him to you, *señorita,*" he said, his voice queerly shaky. "That's a promise."

And he had taken no more than a dozen more steps toward the de luxe compartment before he was cursing himself for a fool. He had never seen the Alvarez girl before in all his life, but in three years wearing a groove in the sky between Miami and Buenos Aires, he hadn't been entirely blind. He had seen plenty of adventuresses of one sort and another, and he had no illusions at all about this one. But still . . .

HE WAS just passing the door of compartment H when a man stepped out into the passageway.

"Just a moment, Purser," said the man.

Politely Toby Bronson paused. Politely, but entirely without enthusiasm. Somehow he did not care for this passenger, whom he had come to know from the passenger list as Mr. J. Henderson Crouch, New York. He was fat, this Mr. Crouch, and his face, full and round, was constantly wreathed in a smile—a smile which failed entirely to reach his eyes. Like two blue, flat-headed screws, his eyes were pushed hard into the doughy flesh of his face, and they never changed expression. This was the man with whom the rich and spoiled girl in the de luxe compartment had gone cafe-ing last night in Para.

"Sir?" Toby Bronson asked.

Mr. Crouch pretended to scratch his glistening chin with his fingers and between the thick fingers Tony Bronson saw a folded twenty dollar bill, its corner sticking out exactly far enough so he could identify the amount.

"I want a little information, Purser," the man said in a fat, suave voice.

"Certainly," Toby Bronson said. "What can I tell you?"

The man let his voice drop. He pitched it precisely to reach Toby's ear.

"Did Miss Hall just file a wireless message to New York?" the man asked, flatly.

Toby Bronson sighed. "Sorry, sir," he said, his tone professionally polite. "We can't give out information like that."

He waited.

Mr. Crouch glanced meaningly at the purser's left hand, and Toby suddenly realized that Miss Hall's message was right there, for all to see. Inconspicuously he moved the sheet behind his tall and rangy figure.

"All I would need," the passenger said in an ingratiating whisper, "would be just one quick look. Not for a double sawbuck?"

"Why not ask Miss Hall, sir?" Toby said, his voice becoming thin.

He held himself very stiff and very straight and kept his eyes as impersonal as he could.

"For two double sawbucks?" Mr. Crouch asked, smoothly.

It was in Toby Bronson's mind to take a full swing at that fatly glistening jaw, but he remembered just in time.

"Sorry," he said as politely as he could manage, "but I happen to like my job here."

And he moved aft along the passageway so swiftly that the passenger's ugly answer came but faintly to his ears.

"It's a wonder, then," called Crouch, "that you wouldn't make friends who could help you keep it—and improve it!"

He did not even look back. He tramped up the three metal steps which lifted the floor of the passageway in conformity with the upward-sloping line of the hull and came to a reluctant stop before the door of the de luxe compartment. He hesitated a moment, then knocked. A voice, faintly husky and with a timbre to it like that of a torch singer, called lazily for him to enter.

He did, and this was a break for Toby Bronson. Had he been in that passageway another ten seconds the chances of his living through the next hour would have been very slim indeed, for at that moment it was exactly 11.33 A.M.

CHAPTER III

PIRACY AND DEATH

IT WAS at this precise moment, 11.33 A.M., when one of the four quiet men in compartment B looked up from his expensive watch.

"This," he said on an outgoing breath, "will be it."

Without a single word the four stood up. With motions so much alike that they might have been trained by a chorus master, they reached, first with one hand, then with the other, into armpit holsters concealed under their coats. An instant later each man was holding two guns.

Silently the man who had first risen to his feet stepped to the door and opened it. They split up there. The second man to leave the compartment turned aft, the other three went forward, moving briskly. Past the galley door these three tramped. The first jerked his head toward that open door and the second in line slipped into that small, compact room just long enough to press his gun hard against the back of Steward Lopez's head. The gun exploded and the steward, who had been reaching up for a coffee cup, fell forward among his serving trays. The murderer did not even watch him fall. He turned swiftly, so swiftly that he caught up with his companions in three or four quick steps.

Walking single file they entered the anchor and gear room in the extreme bow of the flying boat. Past the patent folding anchors, chain and neatly coiled lines they made their way and climbed the short flight of metal stairs in perfect silence. Having reached the bridge they again acted in well-trained coordination.

The first to enter the bridge found himself staring into the startled eyes of the two pilots. Calmly he sidestepped out of the way of his companions. And even as his feet moved to prevent him from blocking the narrow passageway, he lifted his gun.

First Pilot Anderson was not, however, even looking at him. His unbelieving eyes had shifted to the second of those three silent men who had come trooping up the stairs into his sanctuary.

"Voss!" he exclaimed, "What are you—"

"Give it to him," snapped the heavy-set man he had called by name.

The first of the gunmen fired instantly. A ragged hole appeared directly between the pilot's eyes. He stiffened convulsively, opened his mouth to cry out, then slumped loosely in his seat.

Second Pilot Williams gasped. He grabbed wildly for the holstered automatic hanging by his elbow. But the bandit who had just murdered Anderson was prepared for that. He jammed his gun into Williams's temple so hard it slewed the pilot's head sidewise.

"Come away from that," he snarled, "or I'll let you have it."

For only an instant did Williams resist the lethal pressure of that weapon. Then his figure went limp.

"Okay," he said, almost in a sob. "I've got to fly this plane. We have forty passengers aboard."

The other two gunmen scarcely glanced at the man who had just taken over the bridge. Silently they moved through the door which gave into the navigation and radio room. The radio officer was on his feet, his hand on the sending key, his incredulous face turned toward the door whence had come the sound of the shot that had murdered Anderson.

The man called Voss shot him in-

stantly and the dying man's hand fell away from the sending key as he plunged to the floor. The flight navigator swiftly reached for a desk drawer. A .45 slug ripped through his heart and he flopped across his chart table.

He lay still.

Captain MacFarland burst through the doorway of his office. His eyes widened at the sight before him—his two officers dead or dying and two men eyeing him, already lifting their smoking guns.

"Hugo Voss!" he burst out. "You wouldn't do a thing like—"

Voss's reply cracked like the burst of a hand grenade.

"Not much I wouldn't!" he snarled. 'And I'm glad to do it!"

Captain MacFarland spun swiftly around as a bullet smashed into his chest. He went down on hands and knees. Patiently he began to crawl toward the two men. He was hard to kill. Four shots they fired into his body, and still he crawled onward in an attempt to reach Hugo Voss before he died. After the fourth shot Voss sidestepped, put his automatic against the captain's left ear and gave him the *coup de grace*. That did it.

"I told you he was tough," Voss said.

Third Pilot Gray came plunging out of the crew's quarters, his young face white with anxiety.

"He's mine," Voss said, and he fired just once, which was enough.

THEY walked up the short flight of duralumin stairs which led to the gangway running inside the wing from one motor to another. The flight engineer was standing by a motor, his ears deaf to all other sounds but the explosive roaring of the great engine.

"Colson!" Voss shouted through the noise.

The flight engineer turned his head, saw the two men standing there. His gaze shifted and he saw the guns they were carrying.

His voice cut thinly through the layer of sound. "I always knew you were a rat, Voss" he said. "But you'll never get away with this. We aren't in China now."

Before the last word was out of his mouth he had reached behind him, yanked a heavy end-wrench out of his hip pocket and charged down that narrow gangway. But he did not charge very far. The first bullet from Voss's gun staggered him; the second one dropped him. He tried to push himself to his hands and knees, but could not make it. A long sigh ran out of him and he died.

"I guess that's all," said Voss, turning away. "All right, Nitze, take over here until we land. I'm going down."

Nitze pocketed the two guns, pushed the dead engineer to one side and walked quietly along the catwalk, stopping behind each thundering motor and letting his eyes sweep knowingly across its massed dials and gauges as if here, not in piracy and bloodshed, was his real interest.

Voss marched back to the stairway, his heavy body swinging easily to the slight motion of the ship through the air. The white blaze from an unshaded drop light struck down on his face. His blocky features were all quiet, as if the material out of which they had been chipped had set itself into stone. His black eyes were hard, too, and the light glanced off them as from polished basalt. His lips were small and thin and pulled down at the corners. A stranger, seeing him, would at first have thought him of better than middle age; looking

again, he would have said forty to forty-five. It was the things Voss had crowded into those years that made him look so old.

He went down the stairs, not bothering to touch the guard rail as the plane stirred uneasily in her 150 mile-an-hour flight. He knew exactly what he wanted to do. He sat down before the radio table and with exquisite care turned the wave length dial of the receiver. He glanced at the hands of his watch, waited until the second hand had crawled around twice to 60. Then, sending out no call letters at all, he tapped:

O K O K O K O K O K O K

Then he cut the switch, ending his curious message without a signature.

He reached into a small tool drawer beneath the table and extracted a pair of cutting pliers. He ran his hard eyes accurately over the complicated mass of wires before him. From certain of these he cut two-inch lengths of wire and put the severed pieces in the drawer. Other wires he did not touch. He moved to the two emergency sets and out of each took a length of wire which led to the sending key.

MEANWHILE, on the bridge, the gunman who had murdered First Pilot Anderson pocketed the automatic which is standard equipment on every Trans-Caribbean cruiser. Not moving his own gun an inch away from the junior pilot's head, he glanced at the compass.

"All right, punk," he snapped. "We'll head due east. Set your gyro pilot."

The young flyer bent forward and adjusted the setting for the automatic pilot. Intently the bandit watched the master compass until the letter E came to a stop just behind the lubber line. Then he turned his eyes upon Williams, whose lithe, slim body was oddly poised in his seat, every muscle straining through the blue and white uniform.

"Relax," he said. "You haven't got a chance. I could shoot your ears off before you ever got out from under that wheel."

Young Williams glanced at the limp body of his flying mate, sprawled back in the left-hand seat. Little by little the alertness went out of Williams' muscles. The bandit watched him for a moment. Then, satisfied, he went over to the other side and callously hauled Anderson's body out of the seat. He let it fall to the floor near the door to the navigation room. Williams winced as he heard that muffled sound.

"*How many hours you had?*" demanded the gunman.

"Twenty-two hundred in the Navy," the young pilot said in a choked voice. "And three thousand with this line."

"Now, look, sweetheart," said the other. "The big guy, Voss, was flying the big ships when you didn't know the difference between a wing flap and an oleo strut. Me I been flying eight years myself. We got an engineer in our outfit who could take one of these engines apart, put the pieces in a bag and assemble it again, blindfolded. We don't need you, see, and we're only letting you live so you can take this crock home when we're through with it. But we ain't particular about whether it goes home or not. So behave yourself, or with this gun I'll slap your head to a jelly. You can't hang any higher for killing six or seven men than you can for killing one."

He stood there for some moments, studying Williams carefully. He looked out of the window, glancing back at the low-lying coast of South America. A few minutes ago it had been slipping

astern under the left wing. Now it was behind the cruiser's tail, and there was nothing ahead but horizon.

His expression was that of a man who considered his work well done as he sat down in the first pilot's seat and gave his full attention to guarding Williams.

ON THE main deck below the pale-haired young man who had turned aft as the others went forward moved along the passageway, his elbows slightly crooked, his two guns at waist level. He held the guns loosely, expertly, as if they fitted comfortably in his hands. His yellowish eyes, beneath pale, almost invisible lashes, were wide and expanded; the whites were plainly visible all around the pupils. And about his slight figure there was an air of scarcely controlled savagery, as if he looked forward to the immediate job at hand.

The door to compartment C was closed; he knew who sat behind that door, an elderly woman and two middle-aged women of the spinster type. He walked right by it, moving on the balls of his feet. Into the dining lounge he went, his lips widening a bit as he heard a dull thud somewhere in the passageway behind him.

Steward Segurdo, neat in white monkey jacket and blue uniform trousers, was setting the tables for lunch. The Cuban looked up, saw the two covering guns. All the blood ran out out his swarthy face.

The slender man came to a full stop. The guns moved only fractions of inches and their muzzles converged exactly upon the steward's belly.

"Señor Roope!" the steward croaked.

"We've taken over the ship," said the man with the slicked-down hair. "Already we've killed the other steward. We need somebody to cook. Do you help us or shall I throw it into you right now?"

"I—I'll cook, *caballero,*" said the steward, faintly.

"Where's the purser?" asked Roope.

Segurdo swallowed hard. He looked at those two guns. He looked at the man's pale, thin face, and what he saw in the other's expression convinced him.

"Aft, somewhere."

"Have you a key that'll lock the compartment doors from the outside?"

"Yes, *señor.*"

"Go on aft ahead of me, then. Stop at every compartment door, make some excuse and lock it. Make it a good excuse, kid, because I'll have my gun right on your backbone."

The Cuban steward licked his lips. There was something about this sinister little man that horrified him—something more than the guns. He knew what it was: the man was a killer by trade and instinct. He could see it on his face, in his washed-out eyes, in the way his thin, sensitive hands cuddled the butts of those two guns. Segurdo knew that his own life balanced on a razor-sharp edge, that the man would really enjoy pulling those triggers.

"*Si, señor,*" he said. "I go."

He turned, and the muscles of his back crawled. He could not hear Roope behind him, but he could feel him there.

"You will excuse for three minutes?" he said, very politely, pushing his sleek dark head into compartment E, where four women sat drowsily reading and looking out of the window. Quietly he closed the door. More quietly still he locked it with his master key.

He turned toward compartment F, with Roope right behind him. But just then Commander Halsey came out the door. He glanced at Roope inattentively. His gaze sharpened. He saw the

guns in the bandit's hands. Almost instantly he jumped. But he was a split second too late. The gun in Roope's right hand lifted high and came down with wicked force. There was only the smallest sound as the barrel struck the officer's left temple and raked down across his cheek bone, leaving a deep runnel of torn flesh behind. Without a groan Commander Halsey pitched forward on his face and lay still on the carpeted floor.

"*Madre de Dios!*" the steward whispered, crossing himself.

Roope glanced at his wrist watch. 11:35—exactly two minutes since he and his three companions had filed out of compartment B.

"Get those doors shut," he snarled at Segurdo, "and find me that purser. Think we got all day?"

The mammoth plane, heeled slightly as she changed her course to head due east. Then she continued to fly on through the tropic sky, while shot after shot on the bridge deck above was blotted out by the deep-toned roaring of the motors.

CHAPTER IV

BRIBES AND BRIGANDS

PURSER TOBY BRONSON wished this arrogant girl in the de luxe compartment weren't quite so lovely to look at. Watching her as she scribbled an address beneath the name Arthur Hall on the wireless form, he told himself seriously that she was a grade A pain in the neck. Eyes like hers—deep violet beneath lashes that were even longer, even heavier, than those of Rosita Alvarez—ought really to show some interest when they looked at a presentable young man who wasn't more than three or four years older than herself. But they didn't. Her eyes slid across his face and away as if he were one of the stewards instead of a young man entrusted with all the business details of the ship and by virtue of that fact an executive of no small importance.

It was, he decided, money that was the matter with her. He knew who she was, all right. Everybody who knew her name—and read the newspapers—knew she was the daughter of T. G. Hall, the millionaire radio manufacturer and amateur sportsman whose name had been so much in the news lately.

But Toby Bronson, who could use money as well as the next man, was not impressed because she was a millionaire's daughter. As Captain MacFarland had said, millionaires were a dime a dozen on this run. And besides, her money didn't seem to have brought her happiness, for her bright lips were quirked down at the ends and there was a somberness in her eyes.

Now she fumbled in her purse. She handed the wireless blank to Toby Bronson and a fifty-cent piece slipped into his palm. Ordinarily he would just have grinned in that shy, infectious way of his and returned the proffered tip with thanks. But something in the way the girl gave it to him made him mad.

"Thank you," he said, putting the half-dollar down on the modernistic table. "But I'm not a steward. Officers of this ship don't accept tips." He wondered how a girl of her background could do such a stupid thing and decided that she had given the tip purposely to bait him.

For the first time on the flight she seemed to look directly at him. Her strict inspection took in his steady blue eyes, his prominent nose and his chin, strong boned and with a scar on the

point of it which was a souvenir of his last game with the Big Green Team when he had blocked a Harvard kick. with growing interest she noticed his shoulders, and the strong, easy taper of them. She saw that his waist was slim and flat like that of a boxer. And she came to some definite conclusion about him.

"At Trinidad," she said, "I'm going ashore."

"Very well," he said indifferently. "But this ship doesn't spend the night there, like the smaller cruisers do. You'll have only fifty minutes."

"I'm not planning to go on with you," she said, in that deep voice of hers.

Toby Bronson still didn't get it. "That's all right," he said, quietly. "I'll return your passports and medical papers to you and give you a stop-over ticket. But I'm not sure what accomodations you can get on the next northbound plane. This is the only one with a de luxe compartment."

The ship banked on her right wing. By the electric clock in its modernistic setting against the wall, it was precisely 11.34. Toby frowned slightly and glanced out of the window just in time to see one of the many islands in the delta of the Orinoco swing slowly out from under the lifting left wing and take it place beneath the tail of the speeding plane. He remembered to arrange his face into a careful smile. No matter what might be the reason for this unusual change of course, no passenger must know of anything untoward in the ordered routine of the flight.

"I must be getting forward now," he said, apologetically. "The stewards will be almost ready with lunch and I—"

But the girl's next words cut him short. "Could you use ten thousand dollars in cash?" she asked him.

With his hand on the doorknob, he stared at her.

"I'll give you my check on a New York bank made out to cash," she said in a rush of words, "provided you won't tell a soul aboard that I've left the ship at Trinidad. I'll give you another five hundred to divide between the stewards—there are two, aren't there? And I want you to keep me on the passenger list all the way through, so the records will show I got off at Miami."

TOBY BRONSON was only human, and ten thousand was ten thousand, in any man's language. Although pursers of Trans-Caribbean cruisers have positions of responsibility, their pay is small, for the line regards them as being in training for important executive positions in the future. At this moment, due to a calamitous crap game in Buenos Aires, Toby was the proud possessor of exactly twenty-six dollars, and the first of the month was ten days away.

He stood quite still, gazing down at her lovely face. He tried, swiftly, to remember the destination of the fat and smirking J. Hamilton Crouch, who had taken this girl around the sidewalk cafes of Belem, Para until morning. Was he, Toby Bronson wondered, planning to disembark at Trinidad, too? Suddenly, as he stood there looking at her, a suggestion of something sinister seemed to drift through the air of that luxurious cabin. It touched him lightly, but he felt it, definitely, and it worried him.

"So you'd pay me ten thousand to help you fade out of the picture, would you?" he asked, trying to resolve this

thing into the understandable simplicity of words.

"And never to tell a soul where I got off this ship," she specified in that compelling voice of hers

"I might do it," he said, slowly, "as a favor. But ten grand makes it different. How come it's worth that to you?"

Emotion stirred all the smooth curves of her face, brought darkness to her vivid eyes. She hammered against the table with her two fists.

"I won't be under obligations to you," she cried, stormily. "I won't be under obligations to anybody. I pay as I go."

"With money?" he asked.

"What's better than money?" she demanded, hotly. She looked full at him and something in his gaze brought flaming color to her cheeks. She took a deep breath. Her lids dropped for an appreciable instant. Then, on an outgoing breath, "All right," she said, "you name your price."

Toby Bronson's hand closed around the edge of the table. White showed on his knuckles with the strain of his grip.

"First," he said in a strained voice, "let me ask you where Mr. Crouch fits into the picture?" And when she made no answer, he continued, "Does he go ashore there, too, with a stop-over ticket?" And still she did not speak. After a while he said with more gentleness than he knew he had, "Listen, I'm not trying to drive a tough deal with you. I just want to know what—"

"You want to know too much," she said in a voice of utter finality. "Forget I ever said anything. Send that wireless, please. And unless it's beneath your dignity, will you ask one of the stewards to bring me my lunch on a tray?"

The old arrogance had come back into her voice. Toby Bronson felt as if he had been picked up by the slack of his pants and heaved bodily from the room. He flushed an angry red and swung his tall body toward the door.

"It's part of my job," he said, "to see that even the most disagreeable passengers are made comfortable."

He reached for the knob, but there was no need to twist it. It turned under his hand and the door flew open right in his face.

Segurdo, his face as white as his mess jacket, came marching in. And behind Segurdo there was a slick-haired, pale-eyed young man who instantly pointed two guns at Toby's stomach.

FOR a moment there was complete silence in that luxurious compartment. Toby Bronson and Ann Hall stared unbelievingly at the slender young gunman, trying to comprehend the full measure of the thing that had happened—was happening.

"Let's have 'em up, mug," said Roope, hardly moving his thin lips. "Up high!"

And Segurdo, who had learned a lot in the past two minutes, said in a begging voice, *"Senor,* please! This man will kill you if you don't lift your hands!"

Toby Bronson was no fighter, no swashbuckling brawler experienced in barroom melees. The fact of the matter was that never in his life had anyone pointed a gun at him, nor had he ever imagined that anyone ever would. In the quiet, elm-shaded town of Saco, Maine, where he had always lived before going to Dartmouth, nobody carried guns except the policemen, and they only because regulations demanded it. So there had been nobody to warn him, nobody to give him lessons in what to do when faced by a

thin-lipped young man with two guns.

But instinctively all his muscles pulled themselves into tautness. It was unendurable that anyone should desecrate the orderly routine of a Trans-Caribbean ship by going around pointing guns at people and it was, he told himself, his job to do something about this right away. If he had to ring the alarm bell and get Captain MacFarland down to disarm the man, it would be a black mark on his record. He knew just what MacFarland would do. He would walk up to this hard-eyed gunman, smacked him just once, take his guns away and order him locked in a compartment.

"Are you putting 'em up, guy," snarled Roope, his voice thin-edged, "or do I throw a slug into you?"

Slowly Toby raised his arm, while he measured with his eyes the distance across the taupe carpet which separated him from the guns. He could see Segurdo, standing against the port gunwale, shivering as if with a malarial chill. And just within his range of vision on the left was Ann Hall, straight and slim and unmoving, her high-bred profile showing neither fear nor astonishment, only curiosity.

"Take it easy, Purser," rasped the man through his tight, almost bloodless lips. "You wouldn't have a chance." His pale gaze shifted to the girl. "Would this be the Hall dame?" he asked.

"Si, señor," Segurdo chattered.

"A nice little item," Roope said, his frozen eyes warming slightly. "I'll be seeing more of you, baby." Then, to Segurdo, "Does this purser pack a gun?"

"N-no, sir," Segurdo said. "He owns one, but it's in his little office up by the cargo hold and mail room, on the upper deck."

Toby's eyelids lifted and his contemptuous gaze struck full at the steward, but Segurdo's frightened face was turning away from him.

"All right, Purser," Roope said, "bring one hand down, slow, and fish out your keys. All of them."

And suddenly, while Toby was making up his mind what to do, it occurred to him to wonder where were the other three men who had occupied compartment B with this Roope. Certainly they were busy about something; they weren't just sitting there and letting Roope hold up the ship alone. And in that moment of self-questioning, he got a mental picture of them trooping up to the bridge, with two guns apiece, like this one. And he remembered that just a few moments ago the ship had, for no apparent reason at all, changed her course and headed directly out toward mid-ocean. Could it be that these four gunmen had captured the bridge?

"The keys!" Roope snapped.

Anger warped Toby's judgment. His native New England sense of caution was swept away in a high tide of fury.

"You can go plumb to hell!" Toby said.

"Purser!" cried the girl. "Don't be a fool! If he kills you he can get the keys anyway, can't he?"

But it was too late. Breath had whistled through Toby's set lips. His muscles had been ready a long time ago. As if he were taking off from a springboard Toby dived at the man Roope. Two quick steps, then he launched his lean, hard body straight through the air, aiming for Roope's knees. He saw the gun swinging up, but it was like a Harvard straight-arm. The thing was to get under it.

It was queer how long it took his plunging body to slant through those few feet of cabin space. Still in the air,

Toby realized that he wasn't going to make it in time. That gun arm had been up and out of his sight too long. So when it seemed that a jagged-edged club struck him tearingly on the head he was not surprised.

Dimly, and fading in the distance, he heard a girl's scream. It cut like a sword through the explosive bark of a gun—and through an explosion in Toby's brain, too. He saw, vaguely, the taupe carpet coming up to hit him and he tried to put his arms down to break the fall, but they seemed heavy as lead, and he had no muscles to move them. In those infinitesimal parts of seconds while he was falling, Toby knew an immense regret. There had been, at least for a moment or two, an opportunity to save the ship—and he had not done it. His fine brave hopes of climbing rapidly up the ladder of success in Trans-Caribbean, of being purser on the first trans-Atlantic commercial flight—all those were now as unreachable as any mirage. And this girl, this arrogant Ann Hall . . For a minute or two he had seen through her veneer of arrogance, seen the girl herself beneath it, troubled and desperate and frustrated, despite all the things that money could give her, only to disappear from the face of the earth. Had he not failed now he might have learned what it was that had made her like that—and then, perhaps, she might not have been so cold, so arrogant.

These things flashed with incredible speed through his dimming brain as he fell, face first, toward the carpet, toward a pool of blackness which came up and enveloped him.

And the mammoth plane continued to fly on through the tropic sky while on the bridge deck all but one of the finest crew of Trans-Caribbean Airways lay silent in death.

CHAPTER V

DUE EAST

IT WAS 1:10 P.M. and the radio room of Trans-Caribbean Airways had resumed something approaching its normal calm. The eight operators, each assigned to the slightly varying wave lengths of two planes apiece, followed their winged charges as they droned across stretches of placid seas all the way from Buenos Aires to Miami. The officials of the line had left despondently and were now sitting around Mr. Garland's desk, not saying much, not doing much—just waiting.

The telephone buzzed. They all sat up straight, eying the instrument expectantly as the operations manager lifted it from its prongs.

"This is Jarratt, Garland," said the strained voice of the president of the line. "I'm speaking from New York. We've just finished our directors' meeting. We've decided to pay the two million dollars."

"You've decided to pay?" echoed Garland incredulously.

"What else can we do?" shouted the usually calm Mr. Jarratt. "We're convinced that the man on the telephone told the truth. How else could he know that the *European Cruiser* hadn't made her noon report—and wouldn't take any more reports at all? Two million dollars? Listen, it would cost a million to replace that ship and ten millions to build up lost prestige. The British and French and German planes would all have the jump on us in establishing trans-Atlantic service."

It seemed to the listening Garland that his superior was talking almost to persuade himself that he was doing the right thing. But the tense voice went on.

"Five minutes ago," Mr. Jarratt was

saying from New York, "that same man telephoned me to ask if I had made any decision. I told him that we'd lay the money on the line and the sooner the better so they would release the ship to us and—"

"Suppose they take the money, sir, and don't release the ship?" Garland asked, tight-lipped.

"Then we'll have lost two millions—unless the police can find it. But be quiet and listen to me—you'll have to handle the whole deal until I get down there by plane. The man told me to furnish you with two millions in one-hundred-dollar bills—twenty thousand of them—if that many can be found in Miami. If not, in bills of smaller denominations. The treasurer of the company is talking to our bank here in New York now, requesting them to arrange it through the Miami branches. Somebody is going to telephone you in a little while there in Miami and tell you what to do with the money—who to give it to. And do it, just as fast as they want it done."

"Yes, sir," said Garland, a troubled frown on his forehead, "but just as soon as you hang up the phone, please dictate a telegram to me confirming those instructions. You say you want me to give two million dollars to anyone who says he wants it?"

"The man who telephones you will say, 'Two or nothing.' That'll be his identification. I'll be down there with you in six or seven hours. But you'll have to act before then—if they give you a chance. We want that flying boat to resume her flight as soon as possible. Then, on the Q.T., we'll notify the authorities."

"The *Cruiser* is due at Trinidad in about an hour," Garland said. "It won't take more than another hour before the newspapers will all be on our necks wanting to know why she is overdue, where she is—everything. What do you want us to tell them?"

"Here's your story: She developed engine trouble and has made a landing on smooth seas to effect repairs. Not so good, but the best we can do. Anyway, let your public relations man give that out and stick to it."

"Yes, sir," Garland said. "Anything else, sir?"

"Only this—keep everybody quiet. Don't let the police or the Coast Guard get a sniff of this trouble. After it's over we'll get them on the job, but right now what we want is quiet, and lots of it. What did you say?"

"Nothing, sir," Garland murmured into the 'phone. "I was just wondering what would stop them—if they get away with this—from doing the same thing over and over again."

Jarratt's voice became as hard and sharp as the thin edge of a razor blade.

"The penalty for piracy on the high seas," he snapped, "is hanging. Right now I offer a reward of ten thousand dollars apiece for the arrest and conviction, or the death, of any of the criminals participating in this thing. Personally, I'd rather pay it over their dead bodies."

"Look, Mr. Jarratt," said Garland, harshly, "MacFarland and I flew the first boats this company ever owned. We have an apartment together now, on Brickell Avenue. I—I— Well, never mind, sir. I want to see those birds lying on a cold marble slab, that's what I want. Anything more, sir?"

"From now until I get there, it's up to you, Garland."

PAIN lanced through Purser Toby Bronson's body. Dimly, penetrating a fog of unconsciousness, he heard a girl's voice screaming:

"Oh, don't! Don't! You'll kick him to death!"

His body rocked violently as something smashed cruelly into his ribs. New agony shot through him. Instinctively he rolled away from those shocking impacts. Just as instinctively he pushed himself to his hands and knees and tried, blindly, to strike out at the man who was kicking him with such cold ferocity. But all he hit was air. He lost his balance, fell flat on his face and endeavored painfully to push himself up again.

Obscurely he became aware that a girl's slender figure put itself between him and the man who was kicking him. Slow, hot anger surged along his veins, carrying away some of the pain that racked his body and his bloody head.

"Go away!" he mumbled, and tried to push the girl aside with his hand.

He heard her voice, husky with emotion. "Haven't you done enough?" she cried. "What is it you want? If you are going to kill him, why don't you do it and get it over with?"

"I'll do that, sister," said Roope, "in my own good time."

Toby felt hands patting his pockets, running across the breast of his blue uniform coat. He tried to sweep the hand away, but the gunman put his palm against the purser's blood-streaked face and pushed. There was not enough strength in Toby's battered body to withstand the weight of that straight-arm. He rolled over, coming up with a bang against the divan at the after bulkhead of the compartment.

"No gun on him," said Roope's hard voice. "Steward, trot out everything in sight and see if there is a gun in this cabin. If there is, and you don't bring it to me, you'll wish I had killed you right off, see?"

Toby, lying with his eyes closed, heard Segurdo moving about the cabin, heard an overnight bag being opened, heard the rustling of fabrics as the steward emptied the contents of the bag. Now Toby's head was clearing. Slowly he began to realize that he could accomplish nothing—except to lose his life—by rushing around and trying with his bare hands to beat a man who had a gun—two guns—and was perfectly ready to use them. What he had to use now was not his bare hands but his dizzy, aching brain.

He took a long breath and opened his eyes. The gunman, Roope, saw him and the man's gaze sharpened as he watched for a moment to see what Toby intended doing. And when Toby did nothing at all, some of the strain went out of Roope's slight figure.

"Decided to behave?" Roope snarled.

Slowly Toby worked himself to a sitting position. With the back of his hand he wiped from his face the blood that was welling down from a cut on his scalp. He waited a moment for a wave of dizziness to pass.

"What else," he asked, thickly, "is there to do?"

His half-dazed eyes went to the steward, who was reluctantly dragging lovely things of sheerest fabric out of the girl's overnight bag. For an instant Segurdo met his glance and unmistakably the Cuban made a gesture of warning. A pursing of the lips, a sidewise dart of the dark eyes, a faint Latin gesture of negation with a forefinger. And at the same moment Toby saw him let something small and shining drop out of his other hand. It fell without a sound into the silken folds of a lavender negligee which he had just shaken out to make sure there was no gun concealed underneath.

"Okay," Roope said impatiently. "No gun. Come on, steward, we got

work to do." He turned his hard and hostile gaze on Toby. "We'll be needyou after a while when things have calmed down. So I leave you here till then." His eyes swung to the girl, who was standing pale and motionless against the port bulkhead. He grinned. "Good of me, hey?" he asked Toby. "For two cents I'd swap places with you. Well, there's plenty of time, plenty of time."

Segurdo had started toward the door but was not moving fast enough to suit the gunman. He gave the steward a push that sent him crashing against the duralumin frame of the door. Segurdo's slender figure went rigid. He looked around, met the steely gaze of the bandit.

"Segurdo!" Toby cried.

"Pardon, *señor,*" the steward said to Roope. "Clumsy, I am."

And he smiled apologetically, but there was pure bright murder in his eyes.

Segurdo moved out of the cabin. The man Roope followed him. The metal door shut with a solid thump and the two in the room could hear the scratching of a key being turned in the lock outside.

THE compartment seemed to spin around him as Toby Bronson pushed himself slowly to his feet. He ached all over and his head was far from being clear. Drops of blood ran down his face and dripped from his chin. Painfully he made his way across to the girl's overnight bag. Segurdo had deliberately dropped something in there and Toby wanted to find it.

The girl stood right where she had been when Roope and the steward had left the room. Her violet eyes were wide and round and unbelieving as she saw the sick and bloody young man who had, but a few minutes ago, been so entirely different. She watched him drop to his knees in front of her luggage. He steadied himself with one hand on the floor while, with the other, he rummaged through the soft and silky things in her bag. He pulled the negligee out and shook it.

He knew he had to hurry. Whatever he was going to attempt must be done quickly. His fingers flew with a sort of desperate fury.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He did not answer her. The plane dipped to an uneven spot in the air and Toby Bronson almost fell flat. He had to put both hands on the floor to steady himself. And when he again shook the negligee there was a long smear of blood on it.

"Go away!" she cried. "What are you doing?"

Toby Bronson tried to answer her, but his head was whirling so he couldn't find the words. And besides, it was too much trouble to talk.

Then Ann Hall was upon him like an outraged fury. She pulled at his shoulder, but he leaned against the pull of her arms and she could not move him. And his hands went on, searching. She grabbed two handfuls of his blood-stained hair and tried to haul him over backward. That was the wrong thing to do. The pull of her fingers on his torn scalp was too much.

He whirled around and, with a wide sweep of his arm, pushed her. He did not realize he had so much strength left. She staggered back on her heels, lost her balance and plunged to the floor, rolling over and over until she brought up with a crash against the starboard bulkhead.

And suddenly it seemed to Bronson that he was reeling through some crazy meaningless nightmare. . . .

CHAPTER VI

OLD FRIENDS

HUGO VOSS, certain that nobody could transmit wireless messages from the giant plane, put the operator's headset on and flipped a switch. Instantly he heard Mike Hennesy, at the terminal in Miami, rapping out a routine traffic order to the Puerto Rican cruiser, south-bound from Miami to Kingston, Jamaica.

The hard lines of his face shifted into an expression of satisfaction. He slipped the headset off and tossed it on the radio table. Striding over to the porthole, he peered out at the shimmering expanse of sea and sky. He searched for, and found, the coast line of South America, now only a fading dark streak behind the plane. He went to the chart table and carefully studied the penciled course drawn in by Captain MacFarland at 11 o'clock. He picked up dividers and parallel rules and with the swift accuracy of a skilled navigator, plotted out a new course at right angles to the old. He drew a lightly penciled line straight eastward into the South Atlantic, letting it fade into nothing a third of the way to the jutting shoulder of West Africa. With his dividers, then, he stepped off exactly three hundred miles and made a dot on his penciled line.

Not once, during all this time, had he even glanced at the four inert bodies which lay in spreading pools of blood on the floor. Now, however, he gave them his attention. One at a time he dragged them to the emergency door on the starboard side. Unlatching the door and putting his heavy shoulder against the panel, he forced it open against the hurricane of wind which flowed past outside. Even his great strength could not push the door open more than a foot or so, but this was enough. Captain MacFarland was first to be jammed through that V-shaped opening and go whirling over and over through more than a mile of emptiness. Flight Navigator Weymouth, Radio Operator Weymouth and Third Pilot Gray followed. Voss wiped his hands on the curtain which swayed at the doorway to the captain's little cabin.

From the wing station came the gunman who had remained up there to watch the engines. His eyes went to the great splash of blood on the floor where Captain MacFarland had fallen. Frowningly his eyes followed the red trail which led to the emergency door. He saw those other two trails and turned away abruptly, putting his back to them and to the stories they told.

His face cleared slightly when his gaze fell upon the instrument board over the engineer's desk. His eyes lightened as they traveled across the familiar dials and gauges and across the throttles, the carburetor mixture controls and all the gadgets which would permit him to control the engines while sitting in a comfortable swivel chair, beautifully upholstered in red Spanish leather. How different this was from the old days, he told himself, trying to keep his mind away from those crimson streaks on the floor. Once the pilots had to watch all these dials, gauges and instruments which had grown in number until they exceeded in number the human ability of the pilots to observe them—and to fly, too. So now the flyers were relieved of all this responsibility. They merely telephoned their orders to the flight engineer who, sitting at his instruments, gave them the exact number of revolutions they demanded.

"Nitze," said Voss, calmly, "you'll have to be radio operator, too, you'll

remember. Miami'll begin calling for our noon position report in a few minutes. Listen to see if they begin right away to send out alarms. I don't think they will, unless the Chief has fallen down on the job. And of course he won't fall down— Listen for him, too. It'll probably be two or three hours before we get his Okay, but in case of trouble he might want to warn us."

The man called Nitze nodded. Reluctantly he turned away from the fascinating messages delivered by the faces on the instrument board. Two steps took him to the radio desk. He stared hard at some severed ends of wires he saw there.

"Why?" he asked Voss, pointing. "Why disable the transmitter?"

"Why not?" Voss countered. "Our plans don't call for sending messages, only receiving them. So why take a chance?"

"Take a chance on what?" Nitze retorted.

"On anything," Voss snapped. "On anything at all. Any complaints?"

There was only the very slightest hesitation. Nitze almost turned to glance again at the bloodstained floor, but he didn't.

"No," he said. "Of course not. Everything went off very smoothly, boss."

"How could it help going off smoothly?" Voss exulted. "Didn't we rehearse it for three weeks with a stop watch and a floor all painted out with the plan of this ship? If it hadn't gone off smoothly there wouldn't have been any place in the world so far away that the Chief couldn't have found us and tacked our living skins against a wall!"

A faint shiver went over Nitze's body. He looked at Voss for a moment or two and the steady pressure of the other's eyes laid a heavy burden on the engineer's nerves.

"You wouldn't be jumpy, would you, Nitze?" Voss asked, his voice cold and brittle.

"No," Nitze said, his tone breaking into harshness. "As long as I can watch these engines, I'm all right. I like engines better than I do humans, any day."

"With a couple of hundred grand," Voss snapped, "you can buy a truckload of engines to play with. Meantime, see to it that nothing happens to these. If they should stop, for instance, you'd better pray that your heart would stop beating just a second ahead of the engines, see?"

VOSS marched forward into the bridge, where Second Pilot Williams, his face ashy gray beneath its tan, sat watching the compass as the gyro-pilot steered the plane on its easterly course. And beside the pilot sat the gunman, his automatic in his lap, paying strict attention to everything.

The body of First Pilot Anderson lay sprawled in the narrow gangway. Matter-of-factly, as if he were handling a sack of potatoes, Voss picked it up, trudged back to the navigation room and disposed of it as he had disposed of the others.

Again on the bridge, Voss said, "Dessar, keep sweeping the ocean with binoculars. The one thing that might spoil everything would be a ship sighting us and reporting. There are no trade routes from here on. Not for five or six hundred miles and we're only going four. That's the reason we picked this spot. But there's always the chance. The minute you see the smoke of a vessel, turn sharp away from it. I'll feel us bank and I'll be right back

here to see what the trouble may be."

He bent his hard stare upon Williams. The pilot's tragic gray eyes met his without fear, but the boy looked as if he had been shell-shocked by the knowledge of the things that had happened to his world in the past half hour.

"You wouldn't be thinking of trying anything, would you, kid?"

Williams glanced hopelessly around the circle of the horizon. Now even the faint line that had been South America was gone.

"What would I try?" he asked in a despairing voice.

Voss nodded gently. "That's just it. What would you try?"

And with that Voss turned deliberately forward, to march down the stairway to the main deck. Turning aft through the anchor and gear room, he squinted down the long passageway which led all the way back to the de luxe compartment that occupied the entire athwartships length of the fuselage. Two doors down, and on the port side, was the galley, from whose open doorway projected the feet of Steward Lopez, limp and unmoving. Midway along the passageway were the gunman Roope and Steward Segurdo, dragging into a compartment the inert figure of the man who had rushed out of the door just as Roope had been going aft.

Quietly Voss moved down the passageway, paying no attention to the closed and locked doors of the compartments. At compartment E there was the sound of women's voices, high and shrill. Voss paused and tried the knob. It did not turn under the twist of his hand. He nodded to himself and went on. At compartment F he halted.

Segurdo and the slickhaired Roope had just let the arms and legs of Commander Halsey flop to the floor. Rosita Alvarez, her oval face dead white, was sitting on the edge of her chair, staring down at the officer with wide, incredulous eyes. The commander's color was bad. The chalky-white of his skin was accentuated by the trickles of blood which wormed their way down from the furrow that ran from scalp to cheekbone across his face. He was breathing harshly, almost in a snore, and beneath half-closed eyelids his pupils were rolled up until they showed nothing but the whites underneath.

Rosita took a long breath and glanced up at the three men who stood in the doorway. Her gaze slipped swiftly across Segurdo's face. She met Roope's pale stare with complete hostility and swung to Voss's face. She blinked, opened her eyes very wide, and her entire figure stiffened.

"So you gnaw at the hands that fed you when you were hungry, Hugo?" she asked with downbearing contempt.

Voss tipped his heavy head to one side, his sultry stare pinned full upon her.

"Where the carrion is," he quoted in Spanish, "there gather the vultures. And what brings you here, my sweet Rosita?"

BOTH Segurdo and Roope came to attention and looked from the girl to Voss as the two brought their wills into conflict across the unconscious figure of Commander Halsey.

Suddenly Rosita gasped. She leaned swiftly forward and said in a choked voice:

"Hugo, where is Don Hank? El Capitan MacFarland?"

Voss, taking plenty of time, grinned at her. "I had forgotten, beautiful one, about you and Hank MacFarland. I was touched by that romance when I was his co-pilot on this run. He was

really in love with you, I think. How careless of you to let him find you in the arms of—"

"Pig!" she cried on a rising note. "Where is he now? This minute?"

It seemed that Voss was enjoying the situation. He let his gaze run over her, appreciatively.

"At this moment, *querida?*" he purred in Spanish almost as good as hers. "A mile below us, my beautiful, and forty or fifty miles behind us."

Rosita closed her eyes. For the space of a dozen heartbeats she said nothing at all.

"You killed him, Hugo?" she asked in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper.

"Yes, I killed him," Voss said, smoothly.

A tiny thread of a pulse began to twitch on Rosita's smooth neck. She turned her face away from Voss and looked unseeingly at the corrugated expanse of sea a mile below the boat-shaped hull of the big plane.

"Remember the time they were going to stab you in the back, Hugo?" she murmured, apparently to the window itself. "At that cafe in Montevideo? And Don Hank caught the knife blade in his arm?"

"Chica," Voss said smoothly, "knowing what you do of life, you become sentimental?"

She looked up at him and there was wild fury in her eyes.

"Pig!" she raged. *"Gallego!* Son of a thousand generations of Gallician swine! You never had a better friend than Don Hank and—"

"So, my little lily of the gutter?" he purred. "Was he not in Shanghai when I was arrested? Did he do anything to save me from being sentenced to that Ward Road Prison?"

"And for that you murder him?" she blazed. "For the gold fillings in her teeth you would rip the windpipe of your own mother! For the pennies in his pocket you would strangle your own father, if you knew who he was! For—"

She came up out of her seat and went at him, her fingernails reaching for his eyes. Roope grabbed for her, but it was not necessary. Voss rolled his face out of the way. He took a single rearward step. Then he gave her a backhand slap across the mouth with such force that it snapped her head back.

She staggered, caught her balance and stood looking at him while the clear imprint of his open hand began to come out pinkly on her smooth skin. A single drop of blood seeped down from her bruised lips and fell unheeded from her rounded chin. Her blazing eyes lifted and held his in a look that was dreadful in its bright hatred.

"For that, *yanqui,*" she breathed, "I will one day open up your throat!"

The moment's silence after that was an odd thing. The others in that compartment stood stock still, their eyes darting from the big, thick man to that slim and trembling girl. Hugo Voss was looking full at her. His heavy shoulders were pulled forward and his face was bleak—yet somehow vaguely uneasy. They stood that way for a long moment. Then Voss shrugged and turned away with a laugh that was not wholly convincing.

"Chica," he said, "I will one day lose my temper and twist that pretty head off your shoulders."

And deliberately he put his back to her.

THAT broke the spell. Roope dragged a long breath through his colorless lips. Segurdo relaxed, yet his

thoughtful gaze lingered upon the girl, whose bright lips were swelling rapidly.

"Roope," Voss said restlessly, "where's the purser?"

"Locked in the de luxe compartment with the Hall girl," Roope said. "I—I had to hit him with my gun. He'll be all right in a little while. But I have his keys. Here."

Voss accepted the keys, but his look was dissatisfied. "That wasn't in the plan," he said, "to hit him. We were to put him to work."

"I had to hit him," Roope said, shifting his feet. "He rushed me."

Voss's heavy eyebrows lowered. "I was in doubt about having you along, Roope," he said, flatly. "You are too handy with your gun. You like to use it too well. Don't let it get you into trouble."

Faint spots of pink showed in Roope's waxen cheeks. He opened his thin lips to speak, but the expression in Voss's down-tilted face stopped him. Voss waited for him to speak, but Roope said nothing. Then:

"We won't search the passengers and the compartments," Voss said, "until we have made our landing. Then we can all help. But the steward will serve sandwiches for lunch as soon as he can get them ready; it'll help keep the passengers contented. Roope, take your station at the door of the gear room, at the forward end of the passageway. That's the only way they could rush the bridge, and you'll have no trouble in stopping them if they should start. And Dessar is on duty at the upper end of the stairway."

"The emergency ladder, boss?"

"I've locked it already. Remember the plan for letting the passengers circulate?"

"After the frisking, boss," said Roope, in the manner of one who recites a well-learned lesson, "they can mill around all they want here on the main deck, because there won't be any way for them to get up to the bridge deck."

"Right," said Voss. He looked intently down at the unconscious figure of Commander Halsey, who had not moved since they had brought him in. He turned his head and stared at Rosita Alvarez, who had seated herself by the window and was watching him with a fixed intensity while she dabbed at her lips with a fragrant bit of lace.

"I'll be seeing you again, my beautiful hell-cat," he said, slowly.

"Without a doubt," said Rosita.

For another moment he looked steadily at her. Then he turned away and marched out into the corridor. Roope and Segurdo followed him. Segurdo closed the door quietly and fumbled with the key.

Rosita cocked her dark head in an attitude of listening. Then, with amazing quickness, she bent forward toward Commander Halsey's body. Her slim fingers darted to his chest, slipped expertly under his coat and pulled out a long envelope, heavily sealed with red wax. Without an instant's hesitation she jerked down the silken window curtain. She slipped the envelope between the curtain and the roller. With a quick twitch she sent the curtain rolling up to its former position, with the envelope concealed within the turns of the fabric.

Immediately she was on her feet, walking toward the washstand. A moment later she was carefully swabbing the blood from Halsey's ruined face with a dampened towel.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Rhythm in the Ring

I

OLD FATTY FLYNN squinted his bright blue eyes against the glare of a setting Georgia sun. Through the dirty windshield he saw a red flag, propped in the middle of the road. He yanked up the brake, brought his rattling old car to a stop.

Jarred out of a sound sleep in the back seat, Iron Joe Mann sat up suddenly, swung out wildly with both gnarled fists.

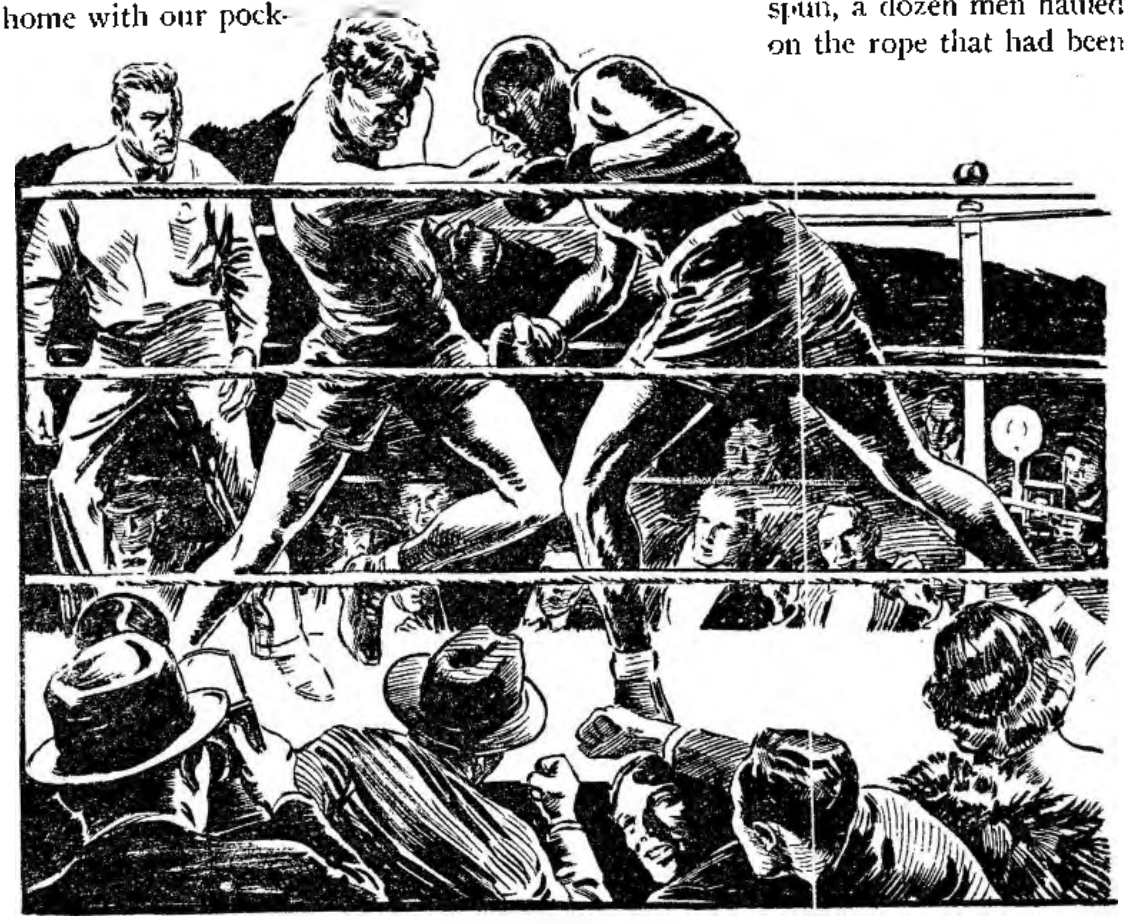
Fatty Flynn chuckled: "Yuh should have thrown some of them punches at Kid Kane in Miami last week; then we wouldn't be ridin' home with our pockets so empty they rattle."

The broken-nosed giant in the back seat gazed sleepily out the window. He pulled reflectively at one of the great cauliflower ears that decorated his bullet-shaped head.

"Where are we now?"

"Another detour," grunted Flynn, carefully tamping tobacco into the bowl of his stubby briar. "Truck stuck up ahead."

He lit the pipe and settled back in the worn seat. Ahead, a big truck had run off the road; and while its motor roared and its wheels spun, a dozen men hauled on the rope that had been



By ROBERT GRIFFITH

hitched to its frame. The men were Negroes. An iron ball and chain was shackled to the right ankle of each man. Each wore the black-and-white striped garb of convict laborer. Two hard-faced white men, armed with shotguns, watched the workers from the sparse shade beside the road.

As they tugged at the rope, the convicts grunted, chanting in strange harmony: "Hup-ah-ha-ho! Hup-ah-ha-hi!" The first syllable came always from a small, skinny Negro at their head. And as the others strained and yanked, each added another, different note, making an odd and tuneful syncopation.

Iron Joe Mann stared at them. "Now why would they chain them poor boogies up like that?" he asked; and, answering his own question, added: "Prob'ly a bunch of murderers."

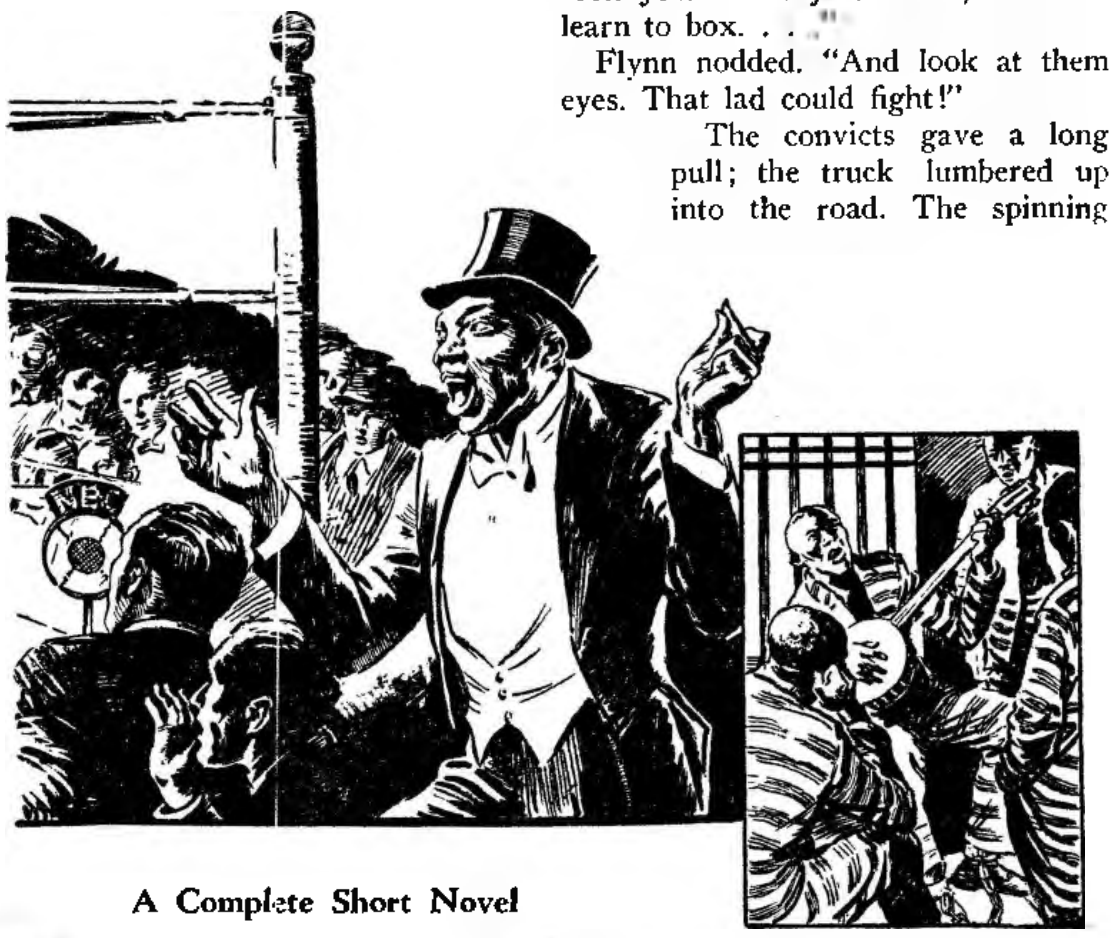
"More likely they're chicken thieves," grunted Flynn, squinting with one bright blue eye. He pointed with his pipe. "Mind that big lad on the end: how'd he look with a pair of six-ounce gloves on him?"

Iron Joe appraised the big Negro that Flynn pointed out. Wide of shoulder and tall, he stood out from his ragamuffin fellows. Smooth, elastic sinews played beneath his black skin. When he bent himself to the rope there was grace and power in his sweat-glistening black body; it seemed that he alone was dragging the truck, foot by foot, back into the road. He was young and he lacked the servile manner of the others. His head, like a masterly sculpture in jet, was held high. His eyes were quick and proud.

"He'd go ninety easy," muttered Iron Joe. "He's just a kid; he could learn to box. . . ."

Flynn nodded. "And look at them eyes. That lad could fight!"

The convicts gave a long pull; the truck lumbered up into the road. The spinning



A Complete Short Novel

wheels found traction; the Negroes picked up their iron balls, scrambled out of the way as the truck lurched toward them.

The guards came up, hustled the convicts together with prodding gun barrels. The big black boy had stopped to help a fallen mate, and one of the guards kicked him viciously in the rump.

"Git along there, nigger!"

The big one whirled. The guard was startled by the fierce gleam in the Negro's eyes. He stepped back, swung the shotgun in a violent arc, smashed it down on the convict's head.

Fatty Flynn gasped: "My gosh—look at him!"

The convict dropped his iron ball and straightened up. His black arm flashed out; the gun was torn from the guard's hands, dashed to the ground. The burly white man lashed out with frenzied fists; the convict knocked him to the road with one short clublike blow to the head. The other guard ran up, and the giant Negro turned on him savagely.

"Hup-ah-hup!" Grunting, half singing, he drove both fists deep into the man's body. The guard stumbled; he twisted and turned, trying to escape the flailing fists. The convict clutched him about the shoulders, flung him to the ground.

Then, grabbing up his iron ball, he leapt for the ditch. One of the fallen men recovered his gun, fired from the hip. With the booming detonation, dust spurted at the convict's feet. His knees buckled; he faltered, but he did not stop. With the iron ball dragging, he plunged into the thick brush that bordered the roadway. A roaring barrage of shotgun fire followed him. Buckshot spattered the leaves at the spot where he had disappeared.

Cursing and reloading, one of the guards sprang after him. Old Fatty Flynn started his car, edged around the big truck and drove slowly down the curving road.

"That poor laddie-buck'll have himself a rope necktie before supper."

"You mean—" gulped Iron Joe; "you mean they'll hang him?" He pulled at his cauliflower ear, his scarred face distressed. "Look, Fatty: if he cuts right across through them bushes, he'll come back onto the road. Why couldn't we kinda wait around and—"

"And get twenty years in jail for it?" Fatty Flynn shook his head.

The old car rattled along over the dusty clay. A hundred yards ahead was the concrete road. They had just turned off the detour, when the runaway Negro burst from the brush, started to limp across the road, dragging the iron ball after him.

Fatty Flynn kicked at the brake pedal, yanked the door open, jumped to the ground. The convict started to run.

"Hey—stop!"

The Negro saw the big gun in Flynn's hand. He stopped. Panting, he glanced over his shoulder into the brush. The noisy footsteps of his pursuer came closer. Dejectedly he turned to Flynn. "Mistah," he moaned, "Ah'm gwine hang fo' this."

"Maybe," grunted Fatty Flynn. "And maybe you'll have company!" He pulled open the back door, signaled with the gun. "Get in there!"

Wild hope gleamed in the Negro's eyes. He threw himself into the car. Iron Joe shoved him to the floor, slammed the door. Flynn was behind the wheel. The old motor roared; the car lurched forward crazily. Low gear—second—high; Fatty Flynn kicked the accelerator to the floor. The speed-

ometer was spinning around 65 when he glanced into the rear-vision mirror. Far down the road he saw the guard emerge from the brush to stare about in bewilderment.

IN THE Manhattan Gym, three days later, old Fatty Flynn ambled up to a group that was gathered about the training ring. Flabby-faced Sam Pandor, matchmaker for the Metro Arena, scanned Flynn's unshaven face and wrinkled clothing. He loosed his pendent lower lip to sneer: "What's the matter; ride in on a box-car?"

"Nope." Smiling, Flynn sat down beside the matchmaker. "Just drove up from Florida. Made it in three days." He leaned forward, tapped Pandor's shoulder.

"Sam, I got a fighter you'll want to see."

Pandor was digging at his yellow teeth with a tortoise-shell toothpick. He stopped long enough to snort: "Iron Joe Mann?—I wouldn't let him past the turnstiles without a ticket!"

"Not Iron Joe," smiled Flynn. "I got a new fighter—"

"Don't want him." Pandor made the gesture of pushing something foul away. "If you ever had a good fighter, you ruined him before he got anywhere. No business."

A voice behind them asked a sudden question: "Hey—who's that?"

The *wackety-wack* of punching bags stopped; fighters, managers, hangers-on: all stared. From the dressing room, with long, easy strides, a big Negro, swathed in a black robe, stalked silently through the crowd. He jumped to the ring platform and in the same movement vaulted without effort over the top rope. Battle-scarred Joe Mann climbed into the opposite corner. Attendants began lacing big training gloves on the men's hands.

Skinny Leo Levis, Pandor's right-hand man, tilted the derby hat back on his head. "Hey! Who's this guy? Gosh!—look at the build on him! That jig looks like he could fight!" Levis grinned into Flynn's face. "Here's where your Iron Joe gets his head beat off!"

Fatty Flynn smiled to himself. In the ring the black boy was more impressive than he had imagined. His smooth black skin gleamed beneath the ring lights. He seemed taller; his shoulders seemed wider. And despite his wiry leanness, there was an unexpected bulk of muscle about his chest and arms. The chiseled negroid features were devoid of expression. But his luminous brown eyes glittered as he looked out over the gaping crowd; eyes that were proud, and conscious of power.

Leo Levis turned excitedly to Pandor. "Sam, you should get a piece of this jig!"

Pandor's colorless eyes were on the Negro. He grunted: "Humph. I don't want him—not even if he's the champ of Africa."

"Hey—what a gag!" Leo Levis was excited. "Champ of Africa! Look, Sam—suppose you should sign him up; bill him as a brother—no, a nephew—to this now Emperor of Ethiopia! Call him Prince Selassie—Tiger Prince Selassie! How's that?"

"Rotten," said Pandor.

"Sam, listen. Listen—call him Tiger Prince. Send him in there dressed up like a cannibal. Stick a brass ring in his nose, and have him do a war dance before he fights! It's perfect! It's good for a million bucks!"

"Humph. You get excited about this black boy; and you never even seen

him work. You don't know his name. You don't know who's handling him—"

"That's my boy," said Fatty Flynn softly. "You like him?"

"Your boy?" barked Levis. "What's his name?"

"His name's Barney Bimms."

Pandor and Levis stared. Pandor got to his feet. "If he's your boy, he's a bum!"

Flynn pulled the matchmaker back to his seat. "Sam," he said seriously, "stick around. I tried every club in the city; nobody'll even look at the boy. Give us a chance."

A sour smile came to Sam Pandor's flabby white face. "Sure," he said. "I'll give you a chance." He turned to Levis. "Get Ricci," he said.

Levis stared. Then he turned to whistle shrilly. A hulking, flat-nosed fighter turned from the heavy bag he had been belaboring, swaggered over to Pandor.

"LISTEN, Tony," said the matchmaker. "Flynn claims this jig can fight. I don't think he ever seen a glove before. Get in there and give him the works!"

The fighter spat on the floor, stared up at the Negro with black, brutish eyes. "Okay," he grunted with a broken-toothed grin. "He'll make me a nice target."

Pandor called to a gym attendant: "Give 'em the light gloves."

Old Fatty Flynn scratched his gray head uncertainly. "Now look, Sam," he began hesitantly; "this boy's just a kid. He ain't in a class with Ricci. Give him a chance—"

"Sure," grinned Pandor. "You said give him a chance. He's getting it. If you don't want him hurt, drag him outa there!"

Flynn turned abruptly, climbed into the ring. He walked over to the Negro. "Barney," he said slowly, "did you ever take a good beating?"

The boy's eyes were puzzled.

"Because," Flynn went on, "you're in for one right now."

Barney Bimms turned quickly to the other corner. His luminous brown eyes stared into the shantied black ones of Ricci. And something about his stare wiped the cocksure sneer from Ricci's mouth. The black boy stared a long moment; and a faint smile moved his lips. He turned back to Fatty Flynn.

"Ah don' therk so," he said.

The bell rang. Barney Bimms stepped forward one quick pace. With teeth bared and head low, Ricci ran across the ring, feinted quickly, smashed a terrific left hook to the Negro's mouth. Bimm's head skewed sidewise violently with the blow. He backed to the ropes in awkward haste. From ringside he heard Sam Pandor's ugly laugh. Ricci lunged in savagely. He grunted as he rammed both fists hard into Bimm's stomach.

The Negro grunted too: "Hup!" His gloved right hand clubbed down on Ricci's neck. "Hup-ah-hup!" With every rhythmic grunt a black arm flashed downward, machinelike; a fist smashed into the snarling face. Ricci stumbled back. A scarlet stream painted his mouth and chin. His eyes were wide in panic.

Like a man of wax, Sam Pandor sat at ringside, his motionless hand still holding the tortoise-shell toothpick to his open mouth. Leo Levis stared incredulously. So did old Fatty Flynn.

Barney Bimms stalked forward. Mouth agape, Ricci cringed in a corner. Catlike, Bimms circled him. Ricci wrapped his left arm about his head, hurled a desperate right hand punch

as a boy hurls a rock. The Negro stepped in. He drove his right fist deliberately to Ricci's jaw. The man's head jerked back with the impact of the blow. He thumped heavily to the canvas and lay there floundering grotesquely.

While Sam Pandor goggled in amazement, Flynn turned to him. "How d'ya like him?" he chuckled.

Pandor's manner changed suddenly. He slapped Flynn across the shoulders in affected friendliness. "Fatty, my friend, you got a very sweet boy there. A very sweet boy. Maybe I *can* throw a little work his way—if you and me can get together . . ."

"Meaning what?"

Pandor shrugged, spread his hands wide. "Well, the jig needs building up. It takes money to make money. You got a couple grand you can invest in him?"

Fatty Flynn shook his head. "I'm busted."

"I thought so. But that's all right. You asked me to give this boy a chance, and I'm going to do that. Drop over to my office about half past two; I'll have a little contract fixed up . . ."

II

IT WAS quarter past two when Fatty Flynn and his fighter walked into the ornate offices of the Metro Arena. Sam Pandor got up from his desk hurriedly.

"Sit down, Fatty. Sit down—ah—Bimms. Everything's all set. All we need is your signatures."

"What's the hurry?"

"Look, Fatty," said Pandor, his flabby face forced in a smile, "we got a break. I got an offer to use your boy in Cleveland tomorrow night. I told 'em okay—"

"*You* told 'em okay?" Flynn's brows went up. "Sam, I ain't gonna throw this boy in there with somebody I never heard of—"

"Don't worry, my friend," put in Pandor hastily. "I wouldn't take no chances. He's fighting old Oz Abbey—a setup." He glanced at his watch, picked up a sheaf of papers from the desk. "Here's the contract. Look it over and sign it—both of you. Then I'll drive you to the station. You got about fifteen minutes before the train leaves."

Flynn picked up the papers. His ruddy face bore a quizzical expression as he began to read. Barney Bimms, dressed in a cheap new suit, twisted uneasily in his chair under scrutiny of Pandor's strange colorless eyes.

Pandor pursed his protruding lips in an affected smile and patted Bimms' shoulder. "How long you been in the ring, boy?"

Bimms caught Flynn's warning eye. He said: "Ah done a right smart lot o' fightin' the las' couple yeahs, suh."

Flynn looked up suddenly. "Hey, Sam, what's this? It says here Barney can't take any fights exceptin the ones Leo Levis books for him. Where's Levis come in?"

Pandor spread his soft white hands assuringly. "Levis always handles that stuff for me. The commission don't let a matchmaker manage fighters—see?"

"But, look: it says all the dough Barney earns is to be made payable to Levis!"

Sam Pandor opened a desk drawer, withdrew two compact packages of twenty-dollar bills. He tossed them to Flynn. "There's two grand. It's yours—for expenses and so forth. I give it to you now, and I collect from the jig's end—okay?"

Flynn scratched his gray head. "It looks like Levis and you was managin' Barney instead of me—"

"The contract only holds for six months," Pandor explained hurriedly. "You know yourself that your boy won't make no two grand fighting prelims around the country. And here—" He shoved another sheet before the puzzled Flynn. "Just sign this receipt for the two thousand bucks . . ."

"You say Barney's gonna fight prelims around the country?"

"Sure, sure—" Pandor glanced impatiently at his watch. "Here's the idea: I'm going to break him in right; see? I'm booking him for a string of easy fights—tankers in Columbus and Toledo, and then working West. I'm billing him under the name of Tiger Prince—he's supposed to be a prince out of the Ethiopia royal family—get it?"

Pandor shoved a pen into Flynn's hand, pushed the papers toward him. "All you got to do, my friend, is sign this contract—and see that your boy keeps in shape and wins fights—okay?"

"Just a second. I'm takin' Barney out barnstormin' for six months to build him up?"

"That's right." The forced smile was on Pandor's face, but it did not hide the greed in his eyes. "I'll book him for twenty or thirty fights. If he gets by all right, Metro Arena hangs him up for one of the big outdoor shows—maybe even a shot at Mexican Joe Monte. That means inside of a year you and the Bimms will be splitting twenty percent of a million dollar gate."

Flynn stroked his round face thoughtfully. Sam Pandor took the tortoise-shell toothpick from his mouth, turned to Bimms with his artificial smile. "How'd you like that, boy? Thousands of dollars—more money than you could spend! You could buy yourself a new suit every day! You'd have a big car and"—Pandor smirked—"think how the women would fall for you! But you got to do like I say!"

Barney Bimms gazed unsmilingly into Pandor's queer eyes.

"Ah don' crave no big cars or no suits. Mist' Fatty he'ped me out'n a mess o' misery, suh, an' Ah'm gwine do like he tell me . . ."

"Of course, of course." But a scowl of annoyance crossed Sam Pandor's flabby face.

FIFTEEN minutes later, Fatty Flynn and Barney were on a train headed West; and Sam Pandor had a signed contract in his office safe.

In a Cleveland armory the next night, old Oz Abbey shuffled out casually to meet a wide-eyed and nervous Tiger Prince. Abbey didn't waste time; he knocked the Bimms boy to his haunches with the first smacking punch. And for the next two rounds he knocked the Bimms down as fast as he could get up. From ringside glum-faced Fatty Flynn stared up into the ring with puzzled and disappointed eyes. But in the third round, when the Tiger got up without a count after the eleventh knockdown, it was Oz Abbey who was puzzled; and the smile was back on Flynn's face.

For three more rounds the Cleveland fans hooted and jeered, as Abbey cuffed the Negro from corner to corner. In the seventh round they started a loud and regular pounding of feet on the floor. It was intended as a protest at the one-sided fight, but it had a curious effect on Tiger Prince. For, in time with the angry feet, he began to hum and grunt to himself. His head began to bob, and his shoulders began

to swing. And, smoothly, with surprising speed, he started to punch. The blows came in pairs: left hook, right hook, straight left, straight right, accompanied always by those strange, rhythmic grunts.

Abbey's battered face was streaked with blood when the referee broke his desperate clinch. He blinked and backed away fearfully. But he stopped the retreat abruptly to hurl his last punch, a murderous right that started from the floor.

It never landed. Tiger Prince stepped in, beat him to the punch with a left hook that knocked the veteran into the ropes—knocked him right into the path of a zooming right hand wallop that had a hundred and ninety pounds of rhythm behind it. Abbey spun completely around and fell flat on his face. The referee took one look at his twisted jaw; then he raised the right hand of the Tiger Prince in acknowledgment of his first official knockout.

That knockout was the first of twenty-four that followed in the next five months. The ravaging fists of Tiger Prince punched out a zig-zag trail; Detroit, Chicago and St. Louis, down to Tulsa, on to El Paso and Juarez. Then up to Denver, westward to Salt Lake and Reno.

But at the end of the trail, the fans saw no bewildered and hesitant novice edging out to take the punches of some battered old trial horse. Tiger Prince, alias Barney Bimms, had become a cool and steady ringman; and his opponents were the best fighters to be got for the the price. But the results were the same.

On the night of July twenty-sixth, in Sacramento, Tiger Prince ended his barnstorm tour by knocking out Bull Bazik in the ninth round. In the dressing room afterward, Fatty Flynn was jubilant.

"Twenty-five straight knockouts! And now, no more touring for us! No more easy dough for Pandor! We'll head East tomorrow, and see if we can make a little dough for ourselves!"

But next morning Flynn got a telegram:

J J FLYNN
HOTEL AMADOR
SACRAMENTO CAL
HAVE BOOKED TIGER AUG TWELFTH SHOW SAN FRANCISCO COLISEUM FIGHTING YOUNG YAQUI STOP SENDING LEVIS TO HANDLE BALLY

PANDOR

Flynn frowned when he read that. "Pandor wants to clean up before our contract runs out," he growled to the fighter. "But he's rushing us. You ain't ready for Yaqui; he's tough and he's a tough puncher—"

The black boy said quietly: "Ah see him wukkin' in Sain' Loo. Don' need worry 'bout him, Mist' Fatty."

Flynn laughed. "Okay, boy; we'll go through with it. But you just give Yaqui a boxin' lesson; see? You be careful and you can beat him; but don't give him half a chance to work on you . . ."

IT WAS eleven o'clock at night. In a shadowy street at the rim of San Francisco's Darktown a fifty foot column of roseate neon letters advertised: "The Calliope Club."

A florid poster announced: "Now—Boogy-Woogy Wellington and His Band!"

Inside, the Calliope Club was garish, noisy, bizarre. Above the screams and shouts and laughter, weird, pulsatile tomtoms blended with blattering brasses, and a thin, tremulous clarinet piped disconsolately. Dim and changing prismatic colored lights played strangely on a writhing maze of dark-

skinned men and women in embrace.

The music stopped abruptly. The lights went out. The glare of a spotlight cut the darkness, splashed a bright disc of green light about a large Negro man at a piano. A gleaming white smile broke his face. Without change of posture, he placed big, clumsy-looking fingers on the keyboard. His beringed fingers twinkled; a sudden tintinnabulary prelude burst out. He closed his eyes, opened his mouth wide and sang in a husky, crooning voice: "Boo-oou-oogy Woo-oou-oogy . . ."

The place was still. The audience listened with held breath, as Boogy-Woogy Wellington sang the weird, rhythmic tune with the meaningless words that had made him famous.

At a table near the orchestra a huge Negro with regular chiseled features sat with half a dozen men and women. His head was thrown back; his eyes closed. His lips moved, unconsciously repeating the band leader's words. His shoulders swayed, his big hands pattered on the table top in time with the thumping bass of the piano.

When the song ended and the crowd howled and whistled and stamped, begging for an encore, one member of the party tugged at the big Negro's shoulder.

"It's after eleven, Tigah-boy. Better be scrammin'."

Barney Bimms nodded absently and got to his feet.

"Just a minute, yo' Highness!"

Bimms turned in surprise. The spotlight had returned to Wellington; he stood with one hand upraised for silence.

"Folks—" he began. "Folks—we got a celebrity with us tonight: a sure nuff scion of a African royal family!"

The crowd stared. The band leader pointed. The spotlight moved across the floor, encircled the big man who had just risen.

"Folks—" cried Wellington, "y'all heard about the great Tiger Prince Selassie—meet him in person!"

A wild yell of acclamation burst from the surprised thousands. Tiger Prince gazed out into the noisy blackness. His head was high; his eyes were proud, shining with pleasure. He bowed shyly. The roar of tribute grew louder and louder. A slow smile came to the fighter's face. He bowed again.

And then from the gloom, a small, derby-hatted figure thrust itself suddenly into the glare of the spotlight. Thin-faced Leo Levis stood scowling up at the startled Prince.

"So!" he snarled. "This is how you spend the night before a fight! You get going! Get outa here!"

The spotlight went out. In the instant of darkness before the house lights went on, Fatty Flynn had stepped forward, touched the Bimms' arm gently.

"Come on, Barney," he said. "Let's go."

The orchestra had begun to play; the crowd was dancing as the three men left by a side exit. Outside, Leo Levis climbed into a waiting cab. Flynn and Bimms followed him.

Levis turned to Flynn. "So that's how you been tossin' Sam's dough away? That's why the Prince's been lettin' them stumblebums go eight or ten rounds when he shoulda stopped 'em in one! Out playing the hot spots every night—is that your idea of training a fighter?"

Fatty Flynn's bright blue eyes glinted dangerously in the dim light; but his voice was quiet. "Leo," he said patiently, "I already told you: I got the boy figured out. I ain't lettin' him do anything that would hurt him—"

"No?" Levis' voice was shrill with anger. He turned to the Negro savagely. "And you!" he snarled. "Even if Flynn don't know nothin', ain't you got no brains? What's the idea steppin' out the night before your toughest fight?"

The luminous brown eyes of Tiger Prince gazed steadily down into Levis' twisted, pock-marked face.

"Tell yuh, suh; it's mah las' chance t'see Boogy-Woogy Wellington—"

"Yeah?" grated Levis. "We spend two grand to build you up—and you take the dough and throw it away in some night spot."

"Ah jus' went to heah the band, suh . . ."

"Yah!" Levis spat in disgust. He turned to Flynn. "Lucky Sam sent me out here before this Yaqui fight," he rasped. "If he'd known how you was gonna waste the dough he give you, you wouldn't a'got that contract. From now on, I'm takin' charge!"

Fatty Flynn clamped his jaws tight and said nothing.

AT TEN o'clock next night eighteen thousand massed humans waited restlessly within the bowl-like structure of the Coliseum. In a dressing room beneath the stands Tiger Prince lay quietly on a blanket-padded bench. Under scrutiny of Young Yaqui's silent manager, Flynn was bandaging the Negro boy's fists. He worked slowly and carefully, laying overlapping strips of tape from knuckle to forearm and about the thumb joint at every turn of gauge. The job done, Yaqui's manager grunted and left the room.

Leo Levis hurried in, a large package under his arm. He ripped it open and took out what appeared to be a sort of masquerade costume: horned headdress, a spangled scarlet robe, and two shining brass bracelets. Fatty Flynn stared.

"Now what are them things for?"

"Ballyhoo," grunted Levis. "It's supposed to be a Ethiopia chief's outfit."

Flynn frowned. "Barney ain't gonna wear that."

"I told you last night," barked Levis, "I'm takin' charge now!" He tossed the headdress to Flynn. "Here: put this stuff on him. I'm gonna call the photographers. Come on, make it fast!"

As Levis hurried out, Tiger Prince raised himself to his elbow. "Ah gotta wear them things, Mist' Fatty? Look lak a fool trick t'me."

"Huh!" Flynn's face was red. "Takin' charge, is he?" He threw the stuff to the floor, kicked it angrily into a corner.

A club attendant thrust his head into the room. "All ready, Tiger Prince. Yaqui's coming down now."

"Warm up, boy," said Flynn quietly. He gathered his between-round paraphernalia hastily, walked to the door and stood listening to the many-voiced roar that resounded above. Bimms danced about the room, shadow-boxing energetically. After a minute, Flynn nodded: "All right, boy." He wrapped the black robe about Bimms' shoulders.

Down the ramp they walked rapidly; up the short stairway and into the ring. Swarthy, scowling Young Yaqui, San Francisco favorite, glowered at them from the opposite corner. The crowd stared, impressed by Barney Bimms' appearance. There was a brief spatter of applause.

When the gloves were fitted, and while the fighters were waiting the signal to go out for instructions, wild-eyed Leo Levis climbed through the ropes. "Hey! What's the idea?" he demanded of Flynn. "Didn't I tell you

to wait for the photographers? And where's the Ethiopia stuff I told you to put on him?"

Flynn walked away without answering.

Levis dropped to his knee beside the fighter's stool. "Now listen," he said, punching a long-nailed finger into Barney's chest. "You win this fight, and it's gonna mean a big-money shot in New York next month—maybe even a match with Mexican Joe Monte! But you gotta do like I tell you. You gotta work like I say!"

The fighter glanced up uneasily at Flynn, in mid-ring, talking with the referee.

"I don't want no stallin'," Levis went on. "I want you to get out there and punch—see? This Yaqui is a bum. They ain't no need to carry him six or seven rounds. I want a knockout—see? And I want it in a hurry!"

Tiger Prince nodded slowly, but his eyes were still on Flynn. The referee beckoned from mid-ring. Flynn came over to take the Negro's arm and guide him out. Fighters and seconds listened, nodding, as the referee talked rapidly. Yaqui and Tiger Prince touched gloves, returned to their corners. Yaqui was grinning as he pulled at the ropes.

III

FLYNN noticed that Tiger Prince seemed unusually nervous; he patted the Negro's broad shoulder. "This Yaqui's a good tough guy, Barney. You got to watch him. Remember: don't let him get to you. Don't work no harder'n you have to. Keep your hands high. Keep movin' around . . ."

"Mist' Fatty, tha' man done tol' me—"

"Listen, boy!" It was Leo Levis, pulling at the fighter's arm. "Do like I told you! Get in there and sock with him! Get in there and stop this bum in a hurry! Understand?"

Fatty Flynn's face was suddenly very red. The good humor left his bright blue eyes. His right hand fell heavily on Levis' shoulder. "You get outa this corner! You—"

Levis twisted away. Snarling, he swung wildly, hit Flynn a glancing blow on the nose. The referee rushed over, pushed both men toward the ropes. "Come on," he barked. "Outa the ring!"

Tiger Prince's face was uncertain. He beckoned Flynn, leaned through the ropes to speak to him. The crowd yelled suddenly; the Negro realized that the bell had rung. He turned to find the charging Yaqui on top of him. He tried frantically to block the wide right that Yaqui threw; it smashed into his jaw, slammed him to his haunches on the canvas!

The crowd was on its feet, screaming. Bewildered Tiger Prince rose before the referee had sent Yaqui away. As his knees left the canvas, two murderous fists pounded into his face. He faltered; a stunning right hand wallop crashed against his jaw, sent him hurtling through the ropes!

Fatty Flynn jumped up with a choked cry. The referee began to count. Tiger Prince scrambled to his feet, shoved newspapermen roughly aside in his wild attempt to get back into the ring. At the count of "eight" he climbed through the ropes, stumbled across the canvas toward his opponent.

Yaqui lunged in; he stopped, feinted low, drove two terrific right hand punches to Bimms' head. Tiger Prince sagged. He was confused; he backed away. Yaqui pounded a vicious right to the body and the Negro clinched desperately.

For the rest of that round Tiger Prince held and stalled and covered, while the excited Yaqui drove him from corner to corner, trying to score a one-punch knockout. When the bell rang Fatty Flynn leaped into the ring, ran over to help his reeling boy to his corner.

"Keep stallin', Barney," he said quietly as he sponged the fighter's face. "Let the chump wear himself out if he wants to."

On the other side of the corner post, the derby hat of Leo Levis appeared.

"He's gonna knock you out!" he shrilled hysterically. "Get in there and punch! Punch—punch!"

Fatty Flynn's eyes glinted; his jaws clamped tight. But his voice was quiet and soothing in the fighter's ear: "Keep your shirt on, Barney. It's just another fight. Let the other guy do the work. You got all night to beat him."

And at the bell, Tiger Prince went out to stall. He refused to lead at Yaqui's sneering invitation. Fatty Flynn's face showed relief. The Negro settled down to a slow, safe pace. In savage spurts Yaqui bulled him about the ring. Tiger Prince backed away, stabbing occasionally with a long, straight left. The crowd began to boo.

Leo Levis screamed from ringside: "Fight, jig! Punch—punch!"

Tiger Prince smothered a flurry of hooks from Yaqui. He boxed himself out of a corner and stood waiting. The jeers of the mob grew louder. Eighteen thousand pairs of angry feet began to stamp in unison. The Negro's expression changed curiously. He straightened up. His fists began to rotate. Young Yaqui charged.

An anxious expression came to Flynn's face as he saw the black boy's shoulders begin to sway. He jumped to his feet in apprehension when Young Yaqui plunged in with a wide-swinging left. Tiger Prince was short with the right cross he tried to counter with; and Yaqui's punch smashed full into his mouth. Yaqui followed up with a pounding right to the ribs. Tiger Prince stepped back. His head bobbed; in time with the stamping feet, his shoulders swayed rhythmically.

Yaqui lunged in recklessly. Tiger Prince met him, grunting, "Hup-ah-hup!" And with every grunt, a shoulder jerked and a clubbing fist smashed down into Yaqui's face! Surprise was in the swarthy one's eyes. Head down, he swept forward.

"Hup-ah-hup!" A barrage of short hooks sent him floundering to the ropes.

He recovered, whirled furiously to rush again.

"Hup-ah-hup-hup." Grunting, socking, driving steadily in, Tiger Prince went to work. A left hook snapped Yaqui's head sidewise.

A terrific right crushed the ribs over his heart.

"Hup-hup-hup!" Three bludgeoning blows battered Yaqui's stomach. He doubled up suddenly and flopped to the floor.

The great crowd sat in stunned silence. The referee picked up the count at "three," barked into Yaqui's unheeding ear: "Four . . . five . . . six . . ."

The swarthy giant tried desperately to get his feet under him. At "ten," he was still down. The thrill-shocked crowd found its voice, exploded in a deafening roar of homage. Fatty Flynn wiped the cold sweat from his round face. He clambered into the ring to throw the black robe about Tiger Prince's wide shoulders, as the referee raised the fighter's right glove in victory.

LATER, in the dressing room, while Flynn was giving Bimms a rubdown, Leo Levis pushed through the crowd that milled about them.

"You see?" he crowed. "When the nigger's got somebody in his corner to make him fight, you get *action!*"

Flynn glanced up briefly. "It's the last time you'll work in my boy's corner!"

Levis laughed: "Yeah?" He pulled a yellow envelope from his pocket, waved it before Flynn. "Read this wire from Pandor before you start talking!"

Flynn snatched the telegram and read:

LEO LEVIS
COLISEUM CLUB
SAN FRANCISCO
CONGRATULATIONS ON YAQUI KO STOP PUTTING YOU IN FULL CHARGE TIGER PRINCE HEREAFTER STOP HAVE HIM IN NY TUE AUG NINETEEN TO SIGN FOR SEP BOUT WITH MEXICAN JOE MONTE

PANDOR

"See?" sneered Levis. "You ain't runnin' this show!"

Flynn lurched forward angrily. He grabbed Levis by the coat collar, swung him around violently, planted a heavy boot on his rump. Levis' face went white. He struggled free and scuttled to the door.

"You big-mouth low-life!" roared Flynn. "I'll show you who's runnin' this show! From now on, I'm gonna handle this boy; and I ain't gonna need no help from you or Pandor!"

"Yeah?" screamed Levis from the doorway. "I guess you forgot them two grand Pandor give you for signing!"

"I ain't forgot!" bellowed Flynn. "And I ain't forgot that me and Barney earned more'n than two grand in the last month—and we earned eleven thousand tonight; and I ain't forgot that Sam Pandor grabbed it all!"

With angry pointing finger, Fatty Flynn strode over to face Levis. "But you forgot something! You forgot that your gyp contract is gonna run out in a few days! And listen: if you get to New York before I do, you can tell Sam Pandor he'll pay plenty if he wants to use my boy!"

Flynn kicked the door shut in Levis' face. In the hallway the wizened one straightened his derby hat, shook his bony fist at the closed door.

"When you get to New York," he raged, "you'll find out that *you'll* have to pay to even *see* that nigger fight!"

IV

THE morning of August nineteenth found Fatty Flynn and his ebony bruiser in New York, housed in a shabby hotel, two blocks west of Metro Arena's pretentious headquarters. While the Negro boy slept on a battered enamel bed, Flynn went through a stack of morning papers.

On the sports pages were pictures of the scowling, hairy, two-hundred-forty-pound savage that was Mexican Joe Monte. There were pictures of Tiger Prince too; all action shots from the San Francisco fight. Eastern sports editors had not taken the "Ethiopian" fighter seriously until his impressive two-round knockout of Young Yaqui.

But it wasn't the pictures that brought that quizzical expression to Fatty Flynn's face. It was the headline:

LEO LEVIS AND AFRICAN BATTLER IN TOWN TODAY

Tiger Prince Selassie, Ethiopian Sensation, Will Meet Monte

Has Scored Twenty-three Straight Knockouts

Negro and Mexican to Sign for Metro Bout At Commission's Office This Afternoon: Winner May Get Title Shot, says Pandor

Flynn studied the write-ups, one by one. Only once did he find his own name mentioned: " . . . Fatty Flynn, the Ethiopian's trainer, may accompany Levis." He smiled sardonically, muttered: "Wonder what Sam Pandor had to say when Leo blew in from California without his battler?"

He glanced at his watch; it was quarter of two. He shook the Negro's shoulder, awakened him. "Come, on, Barney," he chuckled. "We're goin' down to meet the big shots. And there's a fella called Mexican Joe wants to see you."

Tiger Prince groaned, sat up, rubbed his eyes sleepily. "Mist' Fatty," he yawned, "who this Mex'can man Ah hear so much talk 'bout?"

"If you read the papers, you'd know. He's the original wild man from Borneo."

"Wheah Bo'neo at? Some li'l ol' countreh town?"

Flynn sat down beside the fighter. "Barney," he said seriously; "I see this Mexican fight just once. That was enough. He's a real tough customer. He's a killer."

"Sho 'nuff? Who he evah whup?"

"He's licked everybody you did—only he did it quicker. He stopped Gunner Coleman, the Englishman, in a round; it took you eight. He beat the brains outa Teddy Paul in three rounds—put poor Teddy in the booby-hatch. He's so tough the champ's gonna retire so he won't have to fight him. The other big shots don't want no part of him—and neither do you!"

"Me?" The black boy smiled. "Don' yuh worry 'bout me, Mist' Fatty. Ah whup that Mex'can man somehow. You get me that fight, suh—"

Flynn laughed. "You'll beat him some day, Barney. Maybe you could do it now; but they ain't no need of takin' chances. We'll wait another year . . ."

And then Fatty Flynn's voice dropped; his round face seemed a bit worried. "There's another reason. If you're matched to fight Monte, your picture's gonna be plastered in every paper in America. You're gonna have a gang of reporters pryin' into your business, tryin' to find out where you come from—"

Understanding came to the fighter's face. A desperate, hunted look filled the luminous brown eyes. Flynn pointed mutely to the Negro's leg; to the odd scar that encircled his right ankle, the shackle scar of the chain-gang convict.

"Some day," he went on in a low voice, "somebody's gonna ask questions about that scar; and some wise guy is gonna guess where it come from . . ."

He mused a moment. "We'll wait awhile. We need dough. Then I'll go back to Georgia. I got a good friend down there. I'll tell him how you was railroaded. He'll see everybody from the governor down. But first, we got to have dough . . ."

Then his face brightened; he pulled at Barney Bimms' arm. "Come on—come on, Tiger! Prob'ly the commission's waiting for us. Get into your clothes."

"Whaffo' we gwine to the 'mission, ef'n we ain't fightin' this Mexican man?"

Hard lines came to Flynn's mouth. "We're goin' down," he said slowly, "just to put the newspapers and the commission and a couple of other guys straight on where I fit in this picture."

FORTY-FIVE minutes later the two walked into the office of the boxing commission. Conversation stopped abruptly as they entered. Fatty Flynn's face was calm, but his jaw

jutted suspiciously as he walked over to the group gathered about the desk of the commission chairman. Tiger Prince hung close behind. His face was impassive, but his uneasy eyes roved about the room.

Huge, bushy-haired Mexican Joe Monte stared curiously over the heads of the dozen reporters who surrounded him. Leo Levis jumped to his feet and a queer grin twisted his thin, pock-marked face. Fatty Flynn wondered about that grin.

Sam Pandor rose, too, when he caught sight of Flynn. He had been plying the tortoise-shell toothpick nervously; now his flabby white face showed relief. He walked over with outstretched hand. "Well, well, Fatty, my friend," he called out with affected cordiality. "I was afraid you was taking a powder on us."

Flynn ignored the matchmaker's hand. "No danger of that," he said shortly.

"Come on, gentleman," called the chairman. "Let's get this business over with!"

He beckoned Tiger Prince, shoved three typewritten sheets toward him. "Just sign your name to these. Then we'll pose for the boys, and the thing'll be done."

Fatty Flynn stepped up to the desk. "Just a minute, there," he said deliberately. "My fighter doesn't want this shot—"

"*Your fighter?*" barked the commissioner. "Just who are you, anyway?"

"My name's Flynn. I handle this boy's business."

The official snorted. Reporters crowded closer, eyed Flynn with new interest. Leo Levis laughed aloud. And Sam Pandor's protruding lips were fixed in a sly smile.

The commissioner fished a paper from the pile on his desk, tossed it to Flynn.

"I don't know what your racket is," he said curtly, "but here's an agreement, signed by you, transferring all your interest in this fighter to Leo Levis for two thousand dollars. And here's your receipt for the money—"

"But it's only a six-month contract! It ran out a week ago!" Flynn protested. "Sam Pandor gypped me outa ten thousand bucks on that deal. I'll be darned if I'll let him steal my fighter!"

The official sneered, handed the paper to Flynn. "You signed this agreement. If you didn't read it, you're a fool! There's a clause in there that gives Levis the option of extending the time period a year. He's done that, and as far as this board is concerned, he's Tiger Prince's manager till next August fifteenth. And now" — he waved Flynn away—"you haven't any business here. Move along!"

Fatty Flynn's bright blue eyes were blazing. He wheeled, walked up to Sam Pandor, pushed him roughly back against the desk.

"D'ya think you can get away with this? D'ya think my boy'll fight for you?"

"Oh, he'll fight," sneered Pandor. "He'll fight all right."

"The devil he'll fight!" shouted Flynn, losing his temper. "All you're gonna get for your dirty work is a busted face!"

He shoved Pandor away, drew back his clenched right fist, drove it violently into the big-lipped mouth. Pandor fell screaming to the floor, both hands over his bloody face.

Flynn turned to the Negro boy. "Come on, Barney; let's get outa here!"

He strode toward the door. Tiger Prince started to follow him. But Leo Levis blocked his way.

"Just a minute, big boy. Where vuh think you're going?"

The Negro put out a big hand to push Levis aside. And then the thin-faced man said something; just a few, low-voiced words. But those words had a startling effect on Barney Bimms. He stopped dead still. His eyes rolled; his big fists clenched. The hunted look came to his eyes as he stared down at Leo Levis.

"Come on, Barney!" snapped Flynn from the doorway.

Flynn stood there waiting, a sudden chill of doubt seeping down through him, warning him of defeat.

The Negro turned slowly. He sent a helpless glance to Flynn.

"Mist' Fatty," he groaned, "reck'n Ah better do lak he tell me. . . ."

Flynn cursed and started toward Barney. The commissioner jumped up, signaled a policeman that stood near the door, barked: "Get that man out of here!"

The policeman grabbed Flynn's shoulder, hustled him outside, slammed the door.

Standing in the hallway, Fatty Flynn stared at the closed door. The anger left his face. He scratched his gray head, his blue eyes filled with bewildered dismay. Then he turned and shambled slowly down the corridor.

Inside, Tiger Prince was scrawling his signature to the fight contract. Sam Pandor and Leo Levis posed triumphantly as photographers' flashlights flickered.

Levis nudged Pandor, whispered from the corner of his mouth: "I was only guessin' where the boy got that scar on his ankle—but the gag sure brought him around!"

TWO weeks later, Sam Pandor nosed his big yellow roadster through the narrow, pine-bordered roadway that led to Art Dupre's famed Adirondack training camp. He stopped the car and got out before the great log house that served Dupre's headline clientele as gymnasium. Inside, he found a dozen fighters working at skip-rope and punching bag. At the other end of the room Tiger Prince shadow-boxed listlessly. Leo Levis leaned against the wall nearby, watching him. Pandor caught Levis' eye, beckoned him.

"Well," he grunted, without further greeting, "How's he going?"

"Lousy. I can't make him work. He mopes around all day without sayin' a word. And—"

"How's his boxing?"

Levis shrugged. "He ruined them two bums you sent up to work with him. They run out on me yesterday. Don't know how he'd go with a good boy."

"I got to find out. I got a chance to take a nice bet he can't stay the route with Monte. . . ."

Prying at his yellow teeth with the ubiquitous toothpick, Pandor watched the Tiger Prince as he moved sluggishly around the floor. Nearby another heavyweight: a burly, cabbage-eared fellow with close-shaven head, shadow-boxed before a long mirror. Watching himself intently, he stepped back, bumped into the Negro.

He whirled, shoved Tiger Prince away with a quick left hand. "Keep d' hell off o' my feet!" he snarled. "What's d' matter; you ponch dronk already?"

Tiger Prince looked the man up and down, went back to work without replying.

Pandor nudged Levis. "Hey; ain't

that—what's his name—Harry Navin's new heavy?"

Levis nodded. "Yeah, his name's Seljuk—Turk Seljuk. Him and the nigger don't get along so good. He's been askin' for a chance to work, but I figure he's liable to cut the jig up."

Pandor was scowling as he watched the shaven-pated Seljuk pounding the heavy bag. He turned to Levis suddenly. "Get that guy to work with the nigger this afternoon!" he ordered. "Tell him if he knocks the Prince off his feet, there's a C note in it!"

Levis stared blankly.

"Get him!" barked Pandor. "I'm going to find out how tough our Prince really is!"

Fifteen minutes later, Tiger Prince and Turk Seljuk faced each other across the diagonal of an eighteen-foot training ring. They waited the bell; Seljuk crouched, with narrowed black eyes and sucked-in lips. The black boy frowned as he pounded one big training glove heavily into the other. Pandor rang the bell.

Turk Seljuk thought the Negro was just a ballyhooed bum. With the bell, he bounded across the ring to drive both hands deep in the Tiger's belly. But the big black absorbed those punches without change of expression. He danced back a pace, stood erect, ready, his hands held high.

Seljuk came in crouched, shot a looping swing for the Negro's jaw. The faintest of sneers flitted across the Tiger's face as he chopped downward savagely with a jolting blow to the mouth. Seljuk straightened, pounded a pair of hooks to the Negro's jaw. Tiger Prince snorted. He stepped quickly back, and then in again, feinting with both hands.

Seljuk lashed out again with two furious hooks; the Negro grunted as he smashed a murderous right-hand sock to the Turk's jaw: "Hup!" With startling speed his two fists battered the other man's head and body in a whirlwind barrage of deadly punches.

"Hup-hup-ah-hup!" Two vicious right hand drives slammed the Turk into a corner. He slunk away along the ropes, blinking, in dazed wonder. He wiped the blood from his nose with his left hand — and hurled the right straight for the Negro's head!

"Hup-hup-hup!"

The black boy's grunts were loud and unrestrained. And each was followed by a jerk of the wide shoulders and a tearing, red-smeared glove. Turk Seljuk crumpled suddenly. He flopped to the canvas and lay there staring about in stupid perplexity.

Leo Levis gasped. "That boy's a killer! Did you see the look in his eyes? Hey, Sam, can you get me a piece of that bet?"

But Pandor was digging irritably with the tortoise-shell toothpick and scowling. "Look," he said, "didn't I tell you to make him cut out that grunting? It's like telegraphing his punches. A good smart fighter could beat him to the punch every time. And besides, he don't sound like no African—he sounds like Harlem! He's got to stop it. If the papers find out he ain't a legit Ethiopia nigger this fight won't draw flies!"

"I told him cut it out a hundred times."

"He's got to cut it out," repeated Pandor. "Who ever heard of a Ethiopia prince making noises like that?"

"Leave it to me," said Levis. "I'll take them grunts outa his system."

AND that night, after Pandor had gone, Levis went up to Bimms' room. He stopped in the hall outside

the door, his face suddenly puzzled. He kneeled warily, put his ear to the keyhole. From within came the muffled sounds of slow-timed syncopic music, and a throaty, crooning voice: "Boo-oou-oogy Woo-oou-oogy . . ."

Levis grasped the doorknob, opened the door stealthily, peered inside. Naked, Tiger Prince was stretched out on the bed. His hands were slapping rhythmically against his bare legs. He was grunting ecstatically, half singing, in time with the tinny blue melody of Boogy-Woogy Wellington's band that came from a small, cheap phonograph on the bed beside him.

Leo Levis stepped into the room. "So!" he snarled. "That's where you get that grunting!"

Tiger Prince was on his feet in a single startled movement. Levis snatched the record from the phonograph, hurled it across the room. There were a dozen others stacked on the bed, and, one by one, he smashed them on the floor. Tiger Prince gazed at the broken pieces. He turned piteously to Levis, one big hand held out as if to stop him.

"Mist' Leo," he moaned; "don' break mah music lak that, suh. Ah need that music . . . Ah cain' whup that Mex'can man 'thout mah rhythm . . ."

Levis shattered the remaining records, picked up the little phonograph and hurled it out into the hall. He whirled on the black boy. His long-nailed forefinger punched into the broad black chest.

"So you're goin' Harlem on me, hey? After I told you a hundred times you gotta cut out that gruntin'—I come up here and find you *practicin'* it! What's the idea — some gag of Flynn's?"

The Negro didn't answer. He stood with slumped shoulders, staring down at the shattered fragments of his records.

"Talk! Talk!" Levis yelled. "Say something!" He slapped the Tiger Prince, flat-handed across the face.

The fighter's fists were knotted into formidable lumps, there was smouldering rage in his eyes.

"Don' yuh hit me 'gain, suh . . ."

Levis sneered: "What'll you do? You make a pass at me, and I'll have you back on that chain-gang inside of a week!"

The Negro's fists relaxed. The anger in his face was supplanted by uncertainty and fear. But he still gazed down at the broken records.

"Ought not a'done that," he moaned. "Ought not a'busted up mah music box. Ah tol' yuh. Ef'n Ah cain' have no music, cain' whup that Mex'can man. . . ."

V

IT was the night of September twenty-third. A cold moon shone down on a mass of eighty thousand moving faces, packed in the circular bank of the great Metro Arena. In a small room, deep in the bowels of the amphitheatre, sat a lonely and worried Nego boy: Black Tiger Prince Selassie, alias Barney Bimms of Georgia.

Though a heater glowed near him, the Negro felt chilled; he pulled the spangled scarlet robe closer about his shoulders. Through the half-open door, he saw Leo Levis, heard his rasping voice as he argued with a big-bellied man in a black hat.

Finally Levis said: "Okay, Okay—if five-to-one's the best you'll give me. Put me down for another grand on the nigger—to stop Monte. Huh? Well, look, Pony—I forgot my checkbook,

see? Pandor'll go good for the dough. Okay?"

Barney Bimms heard the soughing mutter of the mob that waited above, and his ebony face twisted in a nervous grimace. He stood up, threw off the spangled robe and began to dance around the room, shadow-boxing. He tried to warm up, tried to shake off the numbing lethargy that crept over him lately whenever he sought to drive his muscles to greater effort. Three full minutes he worked, till he was panting and dry-mouthed. But he was still cold.

It was too late for help now. For the past week his training had been forced and spiritless. Levis had driven him mercilessly, cursing and nagging, trying to get the old speed and power from the magnificent black machine that had suddenly gone awry. The fight experts had noticed the Negro's condition, and the betting odds reflected their opinion—Mexican Joe Monte was a topheavy favorite.

But Leo Levis remembered the fearful beatings that Tiger Prince had given Young Yaqui and Turk Seljuk. He told Sam Pandor: "The boy is just sulkin'. Leave this to me. I'll make him fight. He'll beat that Monte's brains out!"

"Okay, Leo. Bring him in. Monte's comin' down already."

He drew a deep shuddering breath, tightened the belt of his robe and walked out.

Leo Levis stood with arms akimbo, sneering up at him. He grabbed the fighter's arm, yanked it roughly.

"Now listen!" he rasped. "I got just one thing to say to you. No matter what Pandor or anybody else tells you, you go in there and sock with this guy—see? Go in there and sock, and keep on sockin' till he's on the floor!"

He paused to note the effect of his words. The Negro stared at him mutely. His eyes glittered strangely, his taped hands clenched and opened spasmodically.

"And," Levis went on slowly, jabbing his forefinger into Barney Bimms' chest with every word, "and if you don't do like I say, and if you don't knock this guy out—I'll turn you over to the cops before you're outa that ring! Now—get going!"

Walking ahead of Levis, Tiger Prince started down the long ramp that led to the ring. Monstrous Mexican Joe Monte was lifting his hairy bulk into the ring as the black fighter pushed his way through the crowded press section. The quiet of suspense was shattered abruptly by a pandemonium of yelling voices. The colossal Mexican raised one huge arm in acknowledgment. Tiger Prince walked to his stool and sat down.

Introductions were bawled unheard in the surging roar of eighty thousand straining voices. The gray-shirted referee beckoned the fighters to mid-ring. He gave his instructions rapidly, in a clear sharp voice.

The referee finished. The fighters touched gloves, turned to their corners. Monte hitched his trunks, pulled lustily at the ropes, took a step toward mid-ring. The black fighter stood with slumped shoulders, staring out into distance.

Leo Levis barked: "Get in there and sock!"

The bell rang.

Monte ran halfway to the other corner, pulled himself up and stood waiting as the Negro came out slowly. A second they eyed each other, then the Mexican giant lurched forward. He pawed with a great clumsy left, crashed a terrific right hand blow to the Negro's jaw. The crowd jumped up

with a mad, explosive yell. Tiger Prince reeled away, stumbled and dropped to one knee.

He took the count of "eight"; then he was up, backing around the ring before the wild-eyed Mexican's flailing fists. With his long left hand chopping ponderously, Monte drove the Tiger to a corner, pounded him brutally to the floor with another of those right hand smashes to the head.

Leo Levis pounded crazily on the ring platform, screamed: "Get up and fight! Punch! Punch! *Punch!*"

TIGER PRINCE rose slowly. Again he backed away before the berserk giant's rush. Crowded against the ropes, he ducked under the clubbing left, covered as the ponderous right battered into his neck again and again. He plowed forward, jammed his head into the hairy chest, drove both fists savagely into the broad stomach. The Mexican gasped and jumped away. Tiger Prince moved slowly off the ropes and stood waiting.

Mexican Joe Monte lowered his shaggy head, swept forward again, the great left arm swinging eccentrically. Tiger Prince straightened, stepped forward a half-pace, drove a wide right hand punch that landed flush to the other man's chin. The crowd yelled, but the Mexican snorted contemptuously and plunged in again, clubbing wildly with both murderous fists. Tiger Prince squatted low, dived in to clutch the giant's broad waist in desperate embrace. As they wrestled about the ring, the bell rang.

Twenty rows back from the ring, Fatty Flynn, his bright blue eyes twisted in anguish, groaned to himself: "What have they done to him? What have they done?"

Leo Levis ran out to drag the weaving black fighter back to his stool.

"Why don't you punch, you baboon!" he screamed wildly. "I told you get in and sock with this guy! I told you—"

But another man had climbed through the ropes; a violent fist shoved Levis suddenly backward. Flabby-faced Sam Pandor pulled frantically at the Negro's arm.

"Don't let him hit you like that!" he gasped. "Stay away from him! I bet fifteen grand he couldn't stop you!"

Tiger Prince sagged back against the ropes. His head whirled, a feeling of nausea overcame him. Pandor sloshed a wet sponge over his face, plucked futilely at his trembling arms. The voice of the crowd had dropped to a grumbling mutter.

Leo Levis shouted at Pandor. "Sam! Sam—lemme handle him! Listen—yuh gotta *make* him fight! *Make* him punch! Yuh gotta ride him—"

Pandor ignored Levis. His flabby face was distorted as he pleaded with the Negro. "Listen—stay away, will you? Hang on. Don't leave him punch you around like that!"

The black boy felt behind him with clumsy gloved hands for the water bottle to slake his burning throat. Levis yelled insistently: "You gotta punch! Punch—punch—*punch!*"

The buzzer sounded, and the referee sent Pandor and Levis from the ring. Tiger Prince got his feet under him. He shook his head, stared across the ring into the scowling, bearded face of Mexican Joe Monte. A sudden, desperate light gleamed in his eyes. His fists clenched tightly within the snug gloves.

And with the bell he was up and plunging across the ring, straight for the huge Mexican! His right arm was

stretched far back; he swung it in a wide circle as he catapulted forward! It crashed squarely into Monte's swarthy face, slammed him back into the ropes. Tiger Prince spread his legs wide, heaved another violent haymaker. But the brown giant ducked the blow, and his right fist chopped viciously downward, crashed solidly into the Negro's neck. Tiger Prince sprawled to the floor, flat on his face.

But while the thrill-crazy crowd shrieked, and the referee counted, the Negro rolled over awkwardly and pulled himself to his haunches. He stared over where the snarling giant strained at the ropes, waiting to charge if he rose.

At "nine" he did rise. And before Monte jumped to finish the fight with a wild-swinging right, the Negro had lunged into him with a reckless barrage of desperate, erratic punches. Mexican Joe sprang back to the ropes, and as the black fighter hurtled into him, he smashed both fists deep to the body, drove a bruising hook flush to the right eye. Tiger Prince cried out in pain. The Mexican pounded another pair of hooks to the belly. The Negro doubled up with a grunt, and Monte knocked him to the floor.

But he was on his feet at once; stumbling forward, still swinging. The crowd screamed hysterically. The Mexican crouched, waited. Tiger Prince reeled in drunkenly. Monte battered him to a corner, clubbed him to the floor with a shocking volley of head punches.

Again Tiger Prince was dragged, half conscious, to his corner. And again Sam Pandor and Leo Levis screamed at him and cursed each other as the fighter lay back on the stool, pawing with his gloved hand, trying to open his blinded, blood-filled right eye.

But he came out swinging for the third round. His charges were weaker, but they didn't stop till the Mexican's bludgeoning fists had hammered him to the floor for the fifth time. And again the bell saved him from a knockout.

THUS went the fourth round, and the fifth. In the sixth the swarthy giant's attack abated. He was panting and arm-weary from five rounds of continuous punching. But Tiger Prince's right eye was closed; his left eye was a mere slit. He was bleeding terribly from the mouth and nose. His efforts to carry the fight to Monte were futile and piteous.

When the round ended, the referee guided him to his stool. "Your boy's caught up," he told Pandor. "Better let me stop the fight. . . ."

"No! No!" Pandor's flabby white face was panic-stricken. "He's all right! He ain't hurt. Listen: you let the fight go; see? Let it go, and there's a grand in it— Okay?"

The referee spat in disgust. "Shove your grand! If the Prince don't go better the next round, I'm stoppin' the fight, see? And fix that bad eye, or get somebody up here that knows how to!"

Pandor squatted beside Bimms, jammed the smelling salts vial into his nose, slapped his face violently. But the Tiger's head lolled drunkenly; his mouth hung open. He was out.

Pandor stared helplessly out into the crowd, then up to Levis. "It ain't no use," he whined, "unless—unless we can find Fatty Flynn . . ."

Desperate hope gleamed in Levis' small eyes. "Yeah! Fatty Flynn! He's here! I seen him when I come in! Wait —I'll get him!"

He jumped from the ring platform and ran down the aisle; way down to the cheaper seats, twenty rows back of ringside. Fatty Flynn saw him coming, and he knew what was wanted. He left his seat and walked out to meet Levis.

"Flynn—listen! You gotta make the Prince win this fight! You gotta tell him what to do! Listen—you win this fight for us, and I'll give you a hundred bucks!"

Flynn's blue eyes were hard, and his face was scornful as he pushed Levis aside and ran down toward the ring. He climbed through the ropes, and white-faced Sam Pandor clutched frantically at his arm.

"Listen, Fatty, my friend, listen: I got fifteen grand bet the nigger will stay the ten rounds! You got to pull him through! They's five grand in it—"

"You want me to take charge, hey?"

Pandor nodded.

"All right!" barked Flynn. "Get outa this corner!"

Pandor scrambled down to the press section. Fatty Flynn knelt beside the beaten fighter. Gently he sponged the bloodied face, tilted a water bottle to the mangled lips. With expert fingers he patched the gashed eye as well as he could in the few seconds of rest that remained.

"It's all right, Barney," he said softly. "Don't worry, boy. It's just another fight. . . ."

Barney Bimms' voice came jerkily as he tried to fix his glazed eyes on Flynn. "That you, Mist' Fatty?" He straightened as Flynn drenched him with icy water. "Mist' Fatty," he moaned, "don' reck'n Ah c'n whup this yeh Mex'can man t'night, suh. Ah'm 'bout all used up. . . ."

The buzzer sounded. Monte jumped to his feet; he crouched like a great cat ready to spring. Fatty Flynn was frowning as he stepped through the ropes. The bell clanged discordantly. The Negro boy lurched automatically to his feet, took one unsteady step toward mid-ring.

Fatty Flynn ducked back through the ropes. He pulled the fighter back to his corner.

"Sit down, boy," he said gently. "It's all over."

And he hurled the towel out into the ring.

WHILE the thrill-sated mob jostled impatiently toward the exits, battered Tiger Prince lay inertly on a bench in the dressing room. Fatty Flynn looked on anxiously as the club physician leaned over the fighter with a stethoscope.

Leo Levis pushed noisily through the quiet group that huddled about the prostrate Prince. He lunged into Flynn, grabbed him by the neck, shoved him back against the wall.

"You double-crossin' thief! That boy wasn't hurt! You done that to get even! You cost me seven grand, you dirty—"

Old Flynn shook the enraged man off, pushed him roughly backward. Open-handed, he struck Levis across the face, knocked him to the floor.

"Levis," he said in a slow, quiet, voice that trembled strangely: "You better go away; because if you ever give me another chance, I'll strangle the life outa you!"

Flynn's round face was drained of blood. Levis cringed before the cold fury of his blue eyes. Flynn muttered: "I could kill you for what you done to this boy. . . ."

"Yeah!" snarled Levis. "You musta had a bet down—on Monte!"

Flynn didn't speak. But a big man in a black hat answered for him. Pony Lefevre, Broadway gambler—the same who had covered Levis' bet in the dressing room before the fight—had entered quietly. He stood behind Leo Levis.

"Flynn did bet," he said in his peculiar soft voice. "He bet forty bucks—on Tiger Prince." He turned to Flynn. "Your last dollar, wasn't it, Fatty?"

Flynn nodded; he turned to speak to the doctor. Leo Levis was backing out of the room when the big man spoke to him softly: "Leo . . . I just spoke to Pandor about that last thousand you bet. He says he don't know anything about it. So pay up."

Levis sensed a threat in the black-hatted man's voice. "Look, Pony," he whined, "I ain't got a grand on me right now. Leave me have till tomorrow . . ."

"If you haven't got a grand on you," Lefevre said, "you couldn't get a grand tomorrow, unless you stole it. But you're going to pay me. . . ." The gambler smiled absently. He glanced down to the bench where Tiger Prince lay groaning in agony. He turned to Flynn.

"Fatty—want to handle a fighter for me?"

"Why—why, of course."

Lefevre nodded. He drew a notebook from his pocket, tore out a page and wrote on it hastily. He passed the paper and pen to Levis.

"Sign that."

"Hey—what's this?"

"It's a release for Tiger Prince. He's going to be my fighter now, and you and I are all square—unless you'd rather I collected another way . . .?"

Levis' pock-marked face twitched nervously. He opened his mouth to speak, but said nothing. Then he grabbed the pen, signed his name to the paper. He sneered: "You coulda bought him for less'n that!" and walked out the door.

Pony Lefevre handed the slip of paper to Fatty Flynn. "Handle the boy any way you want to," he smiled. "And as soon as he's made a thousand bucks for me, he's your fighter."

The gambler walked out of the room. Fatty Flynn sat with speculative eyes scanning the tortured swollen face of Barney Bimms. He smiled grimly as he stuck the slip of paper into his pocket. "It'll be a long time yet, Pony," he muttered to himself. "But some day we'll pay back a lot of people!"

VI

WITH Tiger Prince punched off the headlines, Mexican Joe Monte loomed a still greater threat to the heavyweight champion, Larry Whalon. But the swarthy Mexican giant was handicapped in his claim for a title try. Sam Pandor explained that to him.

"I can win you that title and make you a million bucks. But you got to ditch your manager. I ain't cutting him in."

The Mexican wasn't very bright, but he'd been knocking vainly at the champion's door for nearly two years, and he knew the truth of Pandor's words. Metro Arena had the title on ice. They had monopolized the leading contenders, and they manipulated them as they chose. An outsider didn't have a chance.

A month after his sensational victory over Tiger Prince, Mexican Joe Monte, aided by Metro's cunning legal staff, gained a release from the manager who had found him a peon mule

driver and made him a world sensation. Thereafter, in the records of the boxing commission, one Leo Levis booked as the Mexican's manager. Sports writers commented that this meant only that Metro Arena had tightened its stranglehold on the million-dollar heavyweight racket.

Meanwhile, old Fatty Flynn had left town. His friends said he had gone to Florida, as usual. He always brought a couple of ham-and-eggers to Miami for the winter. This time he had gone alone.

Tiger Prince was seen no more on Cauliflower Alley. He had disappeared as far as the sports sheets were concerned. Only an occasional fight fan turned to take a second look at a tall, wide-shouldered Negro boy who haunted the gallery of Harlem's Zam-Zam Club. Always alone, he would sit for hours, listening with rapt expression and swaying shoulders, grunting strangely, half singing to himself, while husky-voiced Boogy-Woogy Wellington crooned meaningless words to the throbbing accompaniment of his jazz band's jungle-rhythm blues.

* * *

After the court battle in which he ditched his old manager, Mexican Joe Monte went back to Chihuahua for the winter. In accordance with the contract he had signed with Metro Arena, he returned in June to begin training for his scheduled fight with Hans Huber, the hard-punching German champion. Despite Monte's sensational record of knockouts, experts were reluctant to make him favorite over the crafty German veteran. Huber had long been considered uncrowned champion, though he hadn't been able to get a match with Larry Whalon, the fading champion.

On the night of July fourth, nine months after he had beaten Tiger Prnce, Mexican Joe Monte shocked the fight world by knocking out Hans Huber in twenty seconds of the first round. Sam Pandor and his henchmen were jubilant. Metro Arena announced that Monte would fight for the title on August seventeenth.

It would be Larry Whalon's first title defense in three years. The champion, though bound by contract to fight for Metro Arena, had threatened to retire unless his demand for a half-million-dollar guarantee was met. With Mexican Joe Monte a tremendous drawing card, Metro officials offered Whalon a guarantee of three hundred and fifty thousand dollars to meet him.

The champion had agreed. Sam Pandor's plans for the fight were under way, and Monte had begun light training, when startling news changed the heavyweight picture. Larry Whalon, ignoring his contract with Metro Arena, accepted an offer of five hundred thousand dollars to fight Young Yaqui in San Francisco on Labor Day.

In the decorative offices of Metro Arena Sam Pandor plied the tortoise-shell tooth-pick angrily as he read newspaper stories of Whalon's surprise move. Leo Levis looked up from the sheet he was reading.

"So what are you going to do about it?" he asked Pandor. "Stop the fight?"

But Pandor's scowl had lifted quickly, and his face was twisted in a big-lipped smile. "No, no," he said slyly. "We'll let Whalon go through with it. Matter of fact we stood to lose enough dough on account of the guarantee we'd have to pay him. Thing's will work out in our favor. Yaqui's sure to cop the title—and then what's he going to do with it? He'll have to come

to Metro Arena if he wants to cut in on the big money—"

"But—" Levis broke in, "who you gonna use against Monte in August?"

Pandor's face was smug. "That's easy. There's Pillon, the ex-champ. He's scored six quick knockouts in his come-back, and he'll draw plenty. We haven't got him tied up, but he'll play ball with us. And then there's Battling Bjorn; he's been cleaning house in the small clubs, and he's ready for the big shots. . . ."

Pandor scanned the sports page. "Bjorn was supposed to fight some set-up by the name of Bimms in Buffalo last night. See anything about it in the papers?"

Levis glanced through the sheet desultorily. But suddenly his thin fingers clutched the paper. His eyes bulged; his mouth dropped open.

"Tiger Prince!" he gasped. "Hey, Sam—look!"

Pandor's colorless eyes followed Levis' finger to the headlines:

"TIGER PRINCE SELASSIE" IN SUCCESSFUL COMEBACK

Negro Sensation, Fighting as "Barney Bimms", Stops Bjorn in Second Round

Phoney "Prince" to meet Ex-Champ Pillon July 18 in Philadelphia Ring; Wants Return Fight with Mexican Joe Monte, says Fatty Flynn

"That Flynn!" Pandor's clenched fist ripped through the paper. "The Negro has spoiled Bjorn!" He picked up the paper suddenly, smoothed the torn column, and read it carefully. "Yeah! I thought so! Just a lucky punch! Bjorn pasted him all over the ring till the nigger got in that one lucky punch." He paused reflectively. "But he won't get by Eddie Pillon—"

"I ain't so sure," said Levis. "When he's right, that Negro's a bad man. And I ain't so sure he was just lucky against Bjorn. . . ."

Levis pulled the derby down over his low forehead, jabbed a long-nailed forefinger into Pandor's chest. "Sam, suppose Bimms beats Pillon? Why not use him against the Mex? It would draw close to a million. You ain't got time to steam up another fighter—"

Pandor snorted: "I wouldn't give Flynn a break like that; besides, Bimms can't possibly get by Pillon."

"He might. And you don't need to cut Flynn in—we could work the same gag—the chain-gang business. . . ."

"You couldn't bluff Flynn like you did the boy. And you got nothing on him. You don't even know his right name! Anyways, he can't get by Pillon. Eddie'll crucify him!"

ON the morning of July sixteenth, two days before the Bimms-Pillon fight, Leo Levis had a visitor at his hotel room: a large man with guileless blue eyes and a drooping mustache. He doffed his wide-brimmed felt hat and addressed Levis in a decided Southern accent.

"Suh," he said, slowly pulling back his coat to display a large, shiny badge, "my name is Phil Connell. Ah'm sheriff o' Dade County, Geo'gia."

"Yeah," said Levis uneasily. "An whaddya want o' me?"

The sheriff fished some papers from his coat pocket. "Ah have heah a warrant fo' your arrest, suh!"

"Warrant! Hey, bud, you got the wrong party—!"

"The charge, suh, is: aidin', abettin', and harborin a fugitive from justice. and Ah have also a warrant fo' that fugitive: one Barney Bimms, colored, alias Tiger Prince—' "

"Hey! Did you say Tiger Prince?"

"Ah did, suh. Und'stand you're his manager—"

"I ain't his manager," said Levis shortly. A cunning expression crossed his pock-marked face. He eyed the sheriff speculatively; then asked cautiously: "So you want to arrest this Bimms and bring him back to Georgia or would you just as soon make yourself ten thousand bucks easy?"

The guileless eyes of Sheriff Connell studied Levis' face a minute; then the sheriff winked. "Guess we und'stand each other, suh. What you hxin' to do?"

Levis was grinning. He leaned forward, tapped the sheriff's knee. "Listen," he said, "this guy Barney Bimms is fighting Eddie Pillon in Philadelphia day after tomorrow. I figure he's gonna win. And if he does, I can work him right into a shot that'll draw a million bucks—if we can get rid of his manager! You want to play along with me, you and me'll be splittin' twenty percent of that million inside of a month!"

TWO nights later, in the Philadelphia ball park, twenty thousand excited fight fans sprang to their feet in roaring acclamation as Eddie Pillon, battle-scarred ex-champ, ducked through the ropes. Black-robed Barney Bimms, the erstwhile Tiger Prince, came in a moment later. The burly ex-champ swaggered across the ring with gloved hands extended. The mob cheered this apparently sportsmanlike gesture.

Eddie Pillon said: "I'm gonna chase you outa this ring tonight, boy!"

Barney Bimms regarded him with a serious face.

Leo Levis and Sheriff Connell peered up at them from second-row ringside seats. "It's him!" the sheriff whispered. "It's the same Barney Bimms!"

Leo Levis appraised the black boy. "He's bigger'n he was a year ago. Looks like he'll go two-ten easy."

The introductions and instructions were over. The fighters waited in their corners. The bell rang. Both came out slowly; but in mid-ring, Pillon's head went down, he clouted Bimms with the savage left hook for which he was famous. Bimms stabbed a fast jab to the ex-champ's mouth, shot a hard, deliberate right to the heart. Pillon took the punch with a grimace of pain. But he scowled, lunged in to smash a pair of left hooks to the black boy's head. Bimms backed away hastily, and the ex-champ tore after him with a barrage of stinging hooks to the body. Bimms clinched and hung on while Pillon roughed him to the ropes.

For the rest of the round the ex-champ backed Bimms around the ring, punching steadily with both hands. Levis watched the Negro boy with narrowed eyes. He noted that Bimms was boxing better than he had the year before. "He looks a lot smoother," Levis told the sheriff. "But he ain't punchin' like he used to."

The bell had rung; the fighters rested on their stools. From outside the ropes Fatty Flynn talked quietly to his fighter: "Goin' nice, Barney. Just take it easy; yuh got all night. Keep that left hand in his face. . . ."

Levis sneered: "When I get hold of the Prince again, they won't be any of this loafin'. Flynn's spoilin' the nigger. I'll make him fight!"

In the second and third rounds Eddie Pillon kept up the steady attack, scoring heavily with his famed left hook. Barney Bimms' face was beginning to show the effect of Pillon's wallops: his right eye was swelling

and his nose was bleeding. But still he boxed.

The crowd was growing impatient; jeering voices urged Bimms to stand still and fight. Eddie Pillon's charges were more reckless. He lunged in suddenly, smashed a terrific left hook to Bimms' jaw, knocked him into the ropes with a heavy right to the head. Bimms slithered along the ropes, ducked a wild swing and jabbed to Pillon's mouth with a straight left. He came up on his toes, rammed a powerful straight right flush to Pillon's jaw. The ex-champ's knees buckled; but he recovered and lashed out viciously with both fists. Bimms backed away.

Levis snarled: "Why don't he punch? He's dropped every round so far!"

The bell rang. The Negro stepped away, dropped his hands, started for his corner. Up from the floor zoomed a whizzing haymaker to smack solidly in to his chops! He dropped to his knees on the canvas, stark surprise in his wide eyes. The referee was shoving the violently arguing ex-champ to his corner. He hadn't heard the bell. Flynn helped Bimms to his stool.

The referee came over. "I can give your boy a couple minutes rest for that," he offered.

Flynn grunted: "Never mind."

Leo Levis cursed. "Flynn's throwin' the fight! The Prince can't last out the round!"

The bell rang. Eddie Pillon charged, anxious to get the black fighter before he recovered. They met in Bimms' corner. Pillon paused a second, reached far back, hurled a terrific right hand wallop for the head. Bimms slipped it with surprising ease. His luminous brown eyes shone strangely; there was a half smile on his ebon face. Pillon whirled to chase him; the black boy rammed a powerful right hand smash to the jaw. Pillon shook with the punch; his eyes were dazed.

"Hup-ah-hup!" Bimms grunted as he buried both fists deep in Pillon's body. The ex-champ gasped, doubled up suddenly as he tried to get away.

Thereafter the round was very slow. Pillon jabbed, and swung the left hook cautiously. Barney Bimms bided his time. The crowd began to howl for action.

Near the end of the round, Pillon rushed again, hooked both hands sharply to Bimms' jaw. The black fighter stepped back to the ropes. Pillon rushed again.

"Hup-ah-hup!" Bimms' shoulders jerked; his two fists clubbed down with the speed and jolting power of lightning full into Pillon's face. Pillon stumbled away, bewilderment on his suddenly bloodied face. The howl of the mob was hushed.

When the bell rang, Pillon tried to walk jauntily to his corner. But his face was sickly pale, his head was whirling; he started for Bimms' corner instead. The black boy righted him gently; the referee guided him to his own stool.

LEO LEVIS inhaled deeply with relief. But he was scowling as he turned to the sheriff. "That's another thing I'm gonna stop—that grunting! It's a bad habit the Prince got into. Lets the other guy know when he's gonna sock."

The sheriff stroked his drooping mustache. "You may know a lot about prizefighters," he said to Levis, "but you don't know nothin' 'bout niggers. Best way to get work out'n a nigger is to let him sing—let him make these noises—"

"Huh!" scoffed Levis.

"Sho nuff the truth," avowed the sheriff. "Why, man, down South, when we want to get a real day's work out of a gang of niggers, we hire what's called a singin' nigger to work with 'em. When he starts his gruntin' and singin', the other niggers can't help but follow him. It's the rhythm gets 'em. The faster the singin' niggers sings, the harder they work—"

Levis shot a sudden odd look at the sheriff. A cunning grin crossed his thin face. "Hey! Could you get hold of one of them singin' niggers?"

"Why, reck'n Ah could. . . ."

"Listen!" Levis' sharp little eyes were excited. "Listen—soon as we pull our little trick to get the Prince away from Flynn, you're goin' back to Georgia and get one of 'em!"

"Man, what y'all want of a singin' nigger in yo' business?"

"What do I want of him? Listen—I'm gonna stick him in Tiger Prince's corner when he's training. And if it works out like you say, there's gonna be a singin' nigger behind Tiger Prince when he fights Monte! If it works—"

Levis' words were cut short by the clang of the gong. Up in the ring, battered Eddie Pillon lurched from his corner, dived straight for the oncoming Bimms. His two fists flailed wildly, cudgeling the black fighter's head and shoulders. Bimms backed away, ducking and bobbing. He squatted low, worked himself in close as the ex-champ hooked savagely.

"Hup-hup-hup!" Bimms grunted and socked. He riddled Pillon's belly with a crushing barrage of piledriver punches. As suddenly as it had begun, Pillon's rally was over. He cried out in pain as he flopped to the canvas. The referee leapt forward. But the glassy-eyed veteran was already back on his feet, reeling gamely toward Bimms. Bimms started forward, head low, fists ready. Then he stopped, turned to the crowd with outspread arms.

They took the cue. *"Stop it! Stop it!"* The referee signaled Pillon's handlers, pushed the beaten man toward his corner. A thundering roar of acclamation swept through the arena as Barney Bimms' right fist was lifted in victory.

IN a crowded dressing room beneath the stands, old Fatty Flynn laughed and talked with sports writers and friends as he massaged the black fighter's smooth-muscled body. "Now what've yuh got to say about my ten-to-one shot? Could yuh picture Monte stoppin' him tonight?"

A newsman shook his head. "He looks like a million, Fatty. But he'll never get another crack at Monte. Sam Pandor'll see to that!"

Flynn laughed. "I'll bet you a hat on that, Charley! My boy'll be in there with Mexican Joe inside of a month!"

Leo Levis stood in the doorway. Flynn threw a soft blanket about Bimms' shoulders, sent him to the showers. He walked over to Levis. "Lookin' for somebody?"

"No—just come to congratulate you on the Tiger's nice showin'—"

"Thanks," grunted Flynn. "And now that's over—lam!"

But as he took a threatening step toward Levis, Flynn felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. He whirled to face the sheriff, his eyes opened in surprise when the big man displayed his badge.

"Ah arrest you, suh, in the name of the law!"

"Hey, what's this?"

Flynn pulled himself free. The sheriff tried to twist his face into a scowl. "Suh, I have here a warrant chargin'

you with aidin' and harborin' a fugitive from justice. And Ah have a warrant for Barney Bimms. Y' all comin' along peaceful?"

Flynn seemed suddenly alarmed. He pulled the sheriff toward the corner. "Now, look, sheriff," he said in a low, nervous voice. "Can't we fix this up?"

"You offerin' me a bribe, suh?"

"Call it what you want to. I'll give you five thousand dollars to forget the whole thing—go back to Georgia and tell 'em this ain't the same Barney Bimms. Whaddya say?"

Leo Levis stepped forward suddenly, grinned at Flynn. "A little jam, hey?" He turned to the sheriff with a wink that Flynn didn't see. "I happened to hear what you two was sayin' just now. If you want to do business, I'll just double Flynn's offer providin' I get the Prince. How about it?"

The sheriff appeared to ponder. He glanced stealthily over his shoulder, as if afraid of eavesdroppers. He whispered: "Make it fifteen thousand, and Ah might consider your offer—"

"Good enough," snapped Levis.

Flynn grabbed at the sheriff's arm. "You can't get away with this! I'll turn you in for takin' a bribe!"

The sheriff said: "No you won't. 'Cause if you open yo' mouth, you and yo' nigger'll spend the next twenty years behind bars!"

Barney Bimms had finished dressing, and he was staring at the three. He got up suddenly, strode over. "Wha's mattah, Mist' Fatty?" Then he looked up into the sheriff's face, and recognition flashed in his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak. But the sheriff, with a dexterous movement, snapped a handcuff over the fighter's wrist.

Barney Bimms' eyes widened in alarm. He drew back his manacled arm as if to tear the steel ring from his wrist. But he caught Flynn's meaning gesture from the corner of his eye, and his arms dropped limply.

"Big boy," smirked Levis, "you're gonna work for me again. You're gettin' another shot at Monte next month—and this time you're gonna beat him!"

Despite the downcast expression he tried to simulate, there was an odd twinkle in Fatty Flynn's blue eyes. Another shot at Monte!

"You better go along quiet, Barney," he said with pretended glumness.

Levis turned to Flynn. "You gotta turn over the jig's contract and give me a full release."

"We never had a contract," Flynn told him. He reached into his pocket, withdrew a folded piece of notepaper. "But here's the release you gave Pony Lefevre. I never bothered to fix that up with the commission. As far as they're concerned, you're still manager of Tiger Prince."

Levis took the paper, tore it up. His small eyes glittered jubilantly. The trick he had planned with the sheriff had worked perfectly. Levis started out of the room. The sheriff, pulling Bimms after him, followed. But at the door he paused a second, glanced back at Flynn, winked one guileless blue eye. Flynn winked back.

But Leo Levis didn't see that.

VII

IT WAS the fifteenth of August. At the gates of Honus McDonough's training camp, fifty miles from the city, there was a big, red-lettered poster: Tiger Prince Selassie Trains Here Daily At 2:30 P.M.—Last Workout Today.

Within the canvas walls that enclosed the training ring, more than a thousand persons sat staring, as Barney Bimms, again known as Tiger Prince, shuffled about the ring, jabbing, hooking, swinging easily at a burly, panting spar mate.

At the ringside bench Leo Levis nudged the sports writer who sat beside him. "Ever see a heavy move around like that before? Ain't he smooth? Do yuh still think I'm crazy pickin' him to beat Monte?"

"He's smooth all right. But he don't look much like the killer you claim he is. He isn't sockin' like he used to—and he's got to sock to beat the Mex!"

Levis laughed smugly. "Wait a minute. This is his last boxin' session before the fight. I'll let him go an extra round. I'm gonna show you how the Prince's been workin' in secret—and how he's gonna work against Monte!"

Levis beckoned an attendant. "Get Jingers out here," he ordered.

The sports writer asked: "Who's Jingers?" He frowned in puzzlement when Levis answered enigmatically: "Jingers? He's the best singin' nigger in Georgia."

Levis signaled another sparring partner to get into the ring. The other one clambered out with evident relief. The handler reappeared, and behind him strutted a small, yellow-skinned Negro.

"That's Jingers," Levis told the sports writer.

Up in the ring the new spar mate eyed Tiger Prince apprehensively. Jingers, the singin' nigger, seated himself below the black fighter's corner. The bell rang, and the spar mate gave a tug at his headguard, crouched, and came out warily. Erect, with hands low, Tiger Prince stepped out smartly to meet him. He feinted easily, and in the same movement drove left and right to the head with swift precision. The sparring partner spat blood, threw a lusty left swing. The Prince blocked nicely, snapped the man's head sidewise with two fast hooks. They sparred about the ring.

"Looks just like he did before," grumbled the sports writer to Levis. "Where this Jingers come in?"

"Wait," grinned Levis.

The yellow-skinned Jingers had begun to chant softly: "Ho-ah-hup! Hup-ah-ha-ho!" And up in the ring, Tiger Prince was grunting softly, following him. The black fighter's shoulders began to sway. He danced in toward the spar mate, his head bobbing up and down. The spar mate drove a frantic straight left for the head. Tiger Prince bobbed under it; moved in swiftly.

"Ho-ah-hup-hup!" chanted the singin' nigger. "Ho-ah-hup-hup!" followed Tiger Prince; and with every grunt, a gloved fist clubbed down on the spar mate's protected head, or into his middle. The man backed away; Bimms pursued him relentlessly. The yellow-skinned Jingers chanted louder and faster.

The sports writer and the crowd looked on in wonderment, as up in the ring, Tiger Prince danced after his retreating opponent, penned him in a corner. Grunting, he swooped with dynamic speed. His two fists ripped and slashed into the other fighter. There was a single explosive grunt: "Huhp!" Despite the leather helmet that protected him, the spar mate sagged suddenly from a terrific blow to the ear. The singin' nigger stopped abruptly; Tiger Prince pulled the hook he had started. The spar mate dropped to one knee.

Levis shouted: "Okay—hit the showers!"

Tiger Prince helped the spar mate to his feet, guided him to his stool. Then he vaulted the ropes and jogged toward the dressing rooms, while the crowd burst into a roar of excited applause.

SHERIFF PHIL CONNELL had been watching the Prince's workout from the ringside bench. When the Negro fighter left the ring, the sheriff rose leisurely and followed him. He strolled into the remodeled house that served as locker room and gymnasium. From the showers came the melodious voice of Tiger Prince. The sheriff sat down to wait.

A half-dozen other fighters were working at pulleys and punching bags. Jingers, the singin' nigger, accompanied by a group of admiring Negro friends, strutted into the gym. Sheriff Connell heard him talking.

"Yassuh," Jingers was saying pompously, "Ah'm the champeen singin' nigger of Geo'gia; tha's why they hi'ed me to win this fight for Tigah Prince. And Ah'm a mighty 'portant man 'round this yeh camp. 'Cause ef'n Ah ain' in that co-nah Thu'sday night doin' mah stuff, that Tigah Prince ain' gwine be no tigah 'tall; he gwine be a big flop, tha's all."

"Mus' make mighty good money," ventured one of the admiring ones.

"Money? Listen, boy: Ah tol' Tigah Prince ef'n he didn't split fifty-fifty wif me, Ah wouldn't he'p him win this fight. He mighty ca'ful how he treat me, too. 'Cause he can't fight a lick less'n Ah'm he-pin' him—"

Tiger Prince emerged from the shower room, toweling himself vigorously, still singing. He called to Jingers: "Hey, countreh boy, fetch me mah checker pants—and hur'y up 'bout it!"

Jingers swelled indignantly. "Prizefightah, you needn' be o'derin' me 'round! Bettah be mighty ca'eful how yuh speak t'me, ef'n y'all want me wukkin' in yo' co'nah Thu'sday night!"

Tiger Prince chuckled. "Nev' mind shootin' yo' mouf, countreh boy. Fetch me mah pants!" And he grabbed Jingers' arm, pushed him toward the door that led to their adjoining living quarters. Tiger Prince was laughing loudly, and even Jingers' friends were grinning. But Sheriff Connell was watching the sullen face of the singin' nigger as he left the room.

The sheriff beckoned Tiger Prince to a corner. "My car's all ready," he said in a low voice. "Get your clothes on, and we'll leave right away. I told Fatty we'd be in New York before five."

Tiger Prince nodded, smiling. The sheriff indicated the door where Jingers had disappeared. "Sure you want to bring him 'long, Barney?"

"Sho' do, she'iff, suh. Ah gwine need that Jingahs man Thu'sday night, suh."

Connell shook his head. "Don't think you c'n trust him," he worried. "He's mighty fussed whenever you start jokin' with him—"

The fighter chuckled. "Don' yuh wor'y 'bout ol' Jingahs, She'iff, suh. We always funnin' lak that. He don' get really mad at me, suh. We's good friends. . . ."

* * *

Out near the ring Leo Levis, surrounded by a group of sports writers, was making loud and extravagant statements about his genius as a handler of prizefighters, when a camp attendant tapped him on the shoulder.

"Leo, Sam Pandor wants you on the phone. He said hurry."

At the phone, inside, Levis listened

with scowling face to the angry voice of Sam Pandor, speaking from the Metro office in New York.

"Leo? Listen—I just got a call from the commission. They want to know what you're going to do about the Prince's contract."

"Whaddya mean? That contract's all right!"

"It's all right, you fool—but it runs out August fifteenth—today!"

"August—? Yeah. But you ain't gotta worry about that, what with the sheriff right here, and the Prince eatin' right outa my hand—"

Pandor shouted: "You bring that boy down here—now! I ain't takin' no chances on a run-out! I made arrangements with the commission to have him down there to sign a new contract before five o'clock! You get going!"

Levis banged down the phone. "Why should he get excited about that?" he muttered. "I got the Prince eatin' outa my hand . . ."

But he hurried up to Tiger Prince's room. It was empty. He looked in at the sheriff's quarters. No one was there. He ran downstairs to the locker room. A couple of fighters were just getting into their clothes, but there was no sign of Tiger Prince.

"You boys seen the Prince?"

One of the fighters said: "Him and Jingers went for a ride with the sheriff."

"Oh." Levis was relieved. But suddenly suspicion flooded his wizened face.

"Which way'd they go?"

The fighter jerked a thumb eastward. "They was headin' for the main road."

Levis' eyes were suddenly wild. He spat out a curse, whirled and ran out the door. A minute later he was behind the wheel of his car, careening crazily down the road to the city.

IN THE Metro Arena office an hour later, Sam Pandor was picking nervously at his yellowed teeth, glancing time again at the little clock on his desk. The door opened suddenly. Leo Levis burst in. Pandor took one look at his pallid face.

"Hey—what's the matter? Where's the Prince? What's the—"

"He's gone! Him and the sheriff! That rat Connell's trying to pull a fast one on us!"

"Gone!" Pandor jumped to his feet, his flabby face white and twitching. He stood a moment, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Listen!" he snarled. "They can't get away with it! The commisisoner's waiting for us; we'll get that contract down there in a hurry!"

He pushed a paper before Levis. "Sign that!"

Levis wrote his name hurriedly. "How yuh gonna get the Prince's signature?"

Pandor snarled: "That's easy!" He grabbed the pen, scrawled "Tiger Prince" in the blank space. He pulled Levis toward the door.

* * *

Fifteen minutes later Levis and Pandor walked into the office of the commission. The board chairman was at his desk. Pandor slapped down the contract. "There's our new contract."

The commissioner looked up in surprise. He opened the contract, scanned it curiously. "What's this?" he puzzled. "I've just filed one contract for Tiger Prince—Flynn brought him up here. They said you'd understand . . ."

Pandor and Levis stared at each other.

Pandor barked: "Flynn! Why the thief! The Prince must've sneaked away from the sheriff!" He turned to the chairman. "That contract's no good!" he shouted. "You can't approve that—"

The official shrugged. "You can fight this out with Flynn," he said. "I think he's putting up at the Padillac. . . ."

* * *

Meanwhile, in a room at the Padillac Hotel, Fatty Flynn put down his empty glass and smacked his lips loudly. He smiled amiably at the man in the deep chair opposite.

"Sheriff," he declared, "you sure mix a elegant julep!"

Sheriff Phil Connell of Dade county, Georgia, shrugged modestly. "Nex' time you're down to mah place in Geo'gia, Fatty, Ah'll fix you a real drink. Can't do nothin' with this here liquor."

Flynn glanced at his watch, rose. "Time I was goin'. I'm gonna keep my eye on Barney right up to fight time. No tellin' what Pandor and Levis'll do when they find out how we outsmarted 'em. But before I go—" Fatty Flynn stepped up to the sheriff with outstretched hand; "I want to thank you for everything you've done for me and Barney."

The sheriff smiled as he clasped Flynn's hand. "Tell you, Fatty," he said. "Down in Geo'gia we ain't got much use for a bad nigger, any more'n we have for a bad white man. But we got some respect for a good one. I knew Barney Bimms was a good boy, and I figured the state of Geo'gia owed him a little somethin' for its mistake. So it was a dawgone pleasure, suh, to help him out. That's all."

There was a sudden loud knock at the door. Flynn strode over to open it. Wild-eyed Leo Levis burst into the room. Behind him was Pandor.

"Where's the Prince?" snarled Levis.

Pandor shouted: "You can't pull no run-out on me! You can't get away with this!"

"I'm not tryin' to get away with anything," Flynn said quietly. "Barney's contract with you run out. Him and I signed a new one. We ain't runnin' out. We're gonna fight Monte Thursday night, and we're gonna punch his brains out—"

"You turn that boy over to us," Pandor shouted, "or there won't be any fight! I'll call it off!"

"We'll turn you over to the sheriff!" screamed Levis, clutching at Flynn's coat. "You come across with the Prince or you'll be in jail inside of an hour!"

Flynn yanked Levis' hand away, pushed him violently back against the wall. And then the sheriff rose leisurely, strode easily over to the door. Leo Levis gulped, stared at him. Sam Pandor cursed. "Why you double-crossing rat! So *you're* the guy that done the dirty work!"

"You can't get away with it!" screamed Levis. "I'll turn you both over to the cops! You and Flynn'll take a nice ride! Harborin' a fugitive—"

The sheriff's face was calm. "In this case, suh, the fugitive is a free man. I had to tell y'all a little fairy story so's Barney'd be sure to get another crack at Mexican Joe Monte. I was just foolin' you, gentlemen. Barney Bimms was railroaded to that chain gang 'long with twenty-five or thirty other men by a pack o' crooks that were gettin' so much a head for convict laborers.

But the citizens of Geo'gia found out 'bout that, and every railroaded convict was freed. The governor gave Barney Bimms a full pardon more'n six months ago—"

Pandor snarled: "Yeah? Just a gag you two pulled, hey? Well it ain't going to work! There ain't going to be no fight!"

Pandor and Levis bicked out the door, started down the hall.

"I'll outsmart them wise-guys," Pandor was ranting. "I'll cancel the whole thing!"

But Leo Levis stopped suddenly, pulled at Pandor's arm. His little eyes were narrowed and he was grinning. "Look, Sam," he whispered. "We still got time to cancel our bets and lay some dough on Monte—"

"What's the good of that?" whined Pandor. "You claim the Prince can beat Monte now he's got that singin' nigger helping him—"

"Yeah. But there's the weak spot—that singin' nigger!"

"You mean—give him the works?"

"Better than that," Levis smirked. "I mean he can lose that fight for Tiger Prince just as easy as he can win it!"

VIII

IF THERE had been any doubt of financial success for the Monte-Prince fight, the publicity given the black fighter's movements during the three days before the fight erased it. These unforeseen events had news value. They had got the bout more space in that brief time than had the Metro publicity staff in any two weeks.

First, the singin' nigger stunt had made headlines. And next had come news of Tiger Prince's change in managers. Then the big story leaked out. The day of the fight, front pages told how the fighter, as plain Barney Bimms, had been rescued from the chain-gang by old Fatty Flynn.

Thus, on the night of August seventeenth, ninety thousand humans jammed the steep rotunda of Metro Arena. Muttering, they moved restlessly, stared down where glaring klieg lights flooded the empty, roped canvas square.

It was ring time. Down in the dressing room the Prince's handlers waited, ready, at the door. Old Fatty Flynn, his round face tense, his blue eyes serious, studied Tiger Prince, as the fighter danced easily about the narrow cubicle, hooking, feinting, swinging at an imaginary opponent. Jingers, the singin' nigger, watched, too.

Flynn said: "All right, boy. Take it easy."

Tiger Prince stopped dancing a moment; he turned to Jingers. "Hand me m'robe, countreh boy." He smiled. "And, looky heah: you sing t'night lak you never sing befo', else Ah kick you all the way back t'Geo'gia—heah?"

Jingers handed over the robe. "Might 'portant, ain't yuh?" he grumbled sulkily. "S'posin' disyeh Mex'can man whup yuh t'night? Yuh Ba'ney Bimms, same ol' no 'count boy yuh al'ays was. But Jingers still be d' bestest singin' niggah in Dade county—"

Flynn's nerves were on edge; he whirled on Jingers. "Stop that whinin', will ya? Get down there behind our corner. Whatcha hangin' around here for?"

Jingers regarded Flynn a moment with a loose-lipped sneer; then he walked out of the room. A few minutes later, when Flynn and his aides followed Tiger Prince toward the runway, two men engaged in whispering conversation, stepped back into the

shadows. One of them was thin-faced, grinning Leo Levis. The other was Jingers.

The soughing mutter of the crowd was broken abruptly by scattered yells, as Mexican Joe Monte, hairy, scowling, colossal, strode hurriedly toward the ring, attended by five handlers. Incessant screams of the massed thousands burst explosively, reverberating with awful volume about the great amphitheater, as he climbed ponderously up into the ring. He glowered out over the mob. Automatically, he fixed his great arms. The mob's cry grew louder, but the sullen-faced giant sat down without giving any sign of acknowledgment.

The black-robed figure of Tiger Prince appeared at ringside. The Negro's close-cropped head was held high. His ebon face was striking in its contrast to the white towel about his throat. His chiseled face was expressionless save for the suggestion of a smile about his lips.. His red-gloved hands were quiet at his sides. Behind him, old Fatty Flynn waited nervously.

Tiger Prince mounted to the ring, slipped easily through the ropes. The great crowd was on its feet in a surging roar of greeting. They remembered the Tiger Prince's valiant stand against Monte the year before, and the chain-gang stories had made him a glamorous figure. The ovation gained momentum, and Tiger Prince gazed out over the maelstrom of excited faces, his eyes shining proudly. He raised one gloved fist in a shy, brief salute.

While the announcer bawled out the names of ringside celebrities, Fatty Flynn whispered earnestly in Barney's ear. Introductions were over. The referee beckoned the fighters to mid-ring. He gave his instructions quietly. Tiger Prince listened with bowed head, shuffling his feet on the canvas.

The referee finished: "Shake hands now, and come out fighting. And give us a good show, boys." Barney Bimms offered Monte his two open gloves. The swarthy giant ignored them, turned quickly away, scowling. Tiger Prince trotted to his corner, danced stiff legged, back to his opponent.

Flynn patted his shoulder. "Don't take no chances, Barney. But when you hit him—hurt him!"

Tiger Prince glanced down to where Jingers sat in the press benches and nodded. The singin' nigger began his rhythmic song, murmuring: "Ho-ah-ho-ah-hup!" And up in the ring, the lips of Tiger Prince were moving as he grunted softly to himself. The crowd waited in strained silence.

THE bell rang. Monte whirled and ran out. His face was creased in a malignant scowl; his lips parted in an ugly snarl. Tiger Prince danced warily to meet him, head low, hands held high. Jingers chanted softly down below. The big Mexican stiffened, ready to lunge in. Before he could move, Tiger Prince had sprung forward, his two fists pumping pistonlike, smashing deadly blow after blow, full into the snarling surprised face!

Ninety thousand people leaped to their feet with a monstrous gasp. Mexican Joe Monte reeled back with a choking, animal-like cry. He rubbed a glove across his face, stared as if fascinated by the crimson smear he found on it. Tiger Prince sprang upon him again, before his hands were up. And again the Negro fighter's fists smashed into his face.

But this time, the maddened giant would not retreat. He took the Prince's

punches without flinching; he plunged forward with both great arms swinging. The black fighter sidestepped adroitly, stabbed with a hard straight left to the mouth. The Mexican whirled on him, drove him to the ropes with a murderous barrage of wild swinging punches. Tiger Prince danced away. At ringside, Jingers chanted loudly.

Again came the strange choking cry from the Mexican as he hurled himself forward. Tiger Prince waited, grunting, with swaying shoulders and head. He came up on his toes, stepped directly into the giant's path, drove a looping right hand swing straight for the onrushing face

The fighters came together violently; there was a crunching impact of leathern fist against flesh and bone. And suddenly the voice of the mob exploded in a mad yell! Tiger Prince crashed to the floor!

The referee rushed out to shove Monte toward a far corner. He picked up the count and knelt beside the groveling black boy. Behind the corner-post, Fatty Flynn stared with wide and horrified eyes.

Tiger Prince rolled over slowly, pulled himself to his haunches. The count had reached "seven" before he realized what had happened. Then he cast one quick look—not at Monte, nor at Fatty Flynn—a puzzled, accusing look, straight at Jingers!

Flynn saw that strange look, and he wondered. Tiger Prince was getting to his feet. His knees left the canvas an instant before the referee would have counted him out. Monte charged across the ring, sent the Prince reeling with a clumsy but punishing left swing. Jingers chanted on. Tiger Prince recovered quickly; he ducked a wild swing and clinched. The Mexican threw him off, rammed both fists to his midsection. Barney Bimms was gasping as he staggered away; but he flung one desperate left hook, belted Monte flush to the jaw.

The bell rang. Tiger Prince stumbled to his corner. Flynn swung the stool inside and the fighter flopped down on it. He applied a sponge to the gasping mouth.

Tiger Prince inhaled deeply, lay back against the ropes, closed his eyes. "Ah'm all right, Mist' Fatty. Don' know what did happen. Ran plumb in that right han'."

Flynn sponged the ebon face gently. "Jingers helpin' you, boy? Maybe he better lay off—"

Tiger Prince opened his eyes. "He doin' all right, Mist' Fatty. He he'pin' me fine. You let him sing, suh."

"All right, boy. Listen—you try stayin' inside with this guy. He's rough, but he can't sock much in close. And use that left hand."

The ten-second buzzer sounded; and Flynn left the corner. Mexican Joe Monte jumped up, crouched, waited the bell. Tiger Prince regarded him calmly.

THE bell rang. The babble of the crowd was hushed. The singin' nigger began to chant; the lips of Tiger Prince followed the rhythmic sounds. The fighters met. Monte lashed out with a terrible, bludgeonlike swing. Barney Bimms ducked easily. From the floor he heaved a sweeping right hand smash that caught the brown giant squarely between the eyes. He ripped in a volley of hooks to the jaw, and clinched as Monte rushed furiously.

Monte fought madly to free himself; but Tiger Prince clung grimly to the great hairy body, shoving, half-wrestling, taking pot shots with his free fist. The referee tapped the fighters' shoulders smartly, ordered them to

break. Hands down, Barney stepped away. But as soon as his hands were freed, the infuriated Mexican lunged forward, both fists flailing. The Prince threw himself back to the ropes, bounded sidewise to avoid the charge. The pointing finger of the referee jabbed toward Monte: "You! Back on the break! Get me?" His voice was sharp, hard.

Monte scowled. At ringside Jingers' strange chant rose and fell. Tiger Prince edged forward, shoulders swaying, head bobbing, fists rotating. Barely audible was his rhythmic grunting: "Hup-ah-ha! Hup-ah-ho!"

Monte charged again. Tiger Prince rammed a hard swing to the body. Monte only snarled, clubbed viciously with his crude left. Tiger Prince backed away a pace, ducked under the giant's derrick-like right. He came up close inside, battered savagely at the broad, hairy midsection.

Monte's face, blood-streaked and sweat-soaked, was a great leering moon swaying crazily before the black man's half-closed, battered eyes.

Punching, mauling, wrestling, the two fought wildly in mid-ring. The great arena was a bedlam of howling madmen. The singin' nigger chanted on.

The fighters stumbled free of each other suddenly, and a blood-sodden fist shot out, smashed full into Monte's face. He shuddered, staggered backward. Tiger Prince followed him, chin low, eyes watchful, right fist cocked menacingly.

But he couldn't find the opening. Couldn't bring back to shoulders and arms and fists their deadly precision. He floundered, lost, bewildered, groggy.

The singin' nigger changed tempo abruptly; his voice was strident, raucous. Tiger Prince shot a puzzled look out of the ring. But still he ploughed forward. His shoulder dropped; his body twisted as he threw the punch. But it struck only the giant's shoulder. Tiger Prince flung his left wildly; it missed. On the ropes, Monte straightened. His left pawed clumsily; his right clubbed violently down into the Negro's neck. Tiger Prince reached far back, hurled another desperate right punch for the giant's head. He missed again, and the brutish right fist of Monte beat down again and again on his bowed head. Tiger Prince sagged, flopped to the floor.

Old Fatty Flynn stared helplessly as Barney tried to rise, floundered to his face on the dirty canvas. He turned to Jingers, bellowed frantically: "Sing! Blast you—*sing!*" And the yellow-skinned Negro threw back his head, chanted hoarsely: "Ah-ho! Hup-ah-hup!"

And suddenly Fatty Flynn whirled to stare at him! There was a startled, understanding gleam in his eyes. He shouted wildly to sportswriters near the chanting Jingers: "Hey! Shut him up! Shut him up! Stop him!"

The writers stared blankly. But Jingers had heard Flynn. His muddy eyes rolled; his face worked strangely. He jumped up as he saw Flynn start after him. He scrambled atop the press bench, ran to the neutral corner. But he didn't stop singing. His mouth opened wide; he brayed raucously: "Hup-hup-ah-hup-hup!"

Tiger Prince had crawled to the ropes. Laborously he was pulling himself erect. Fatty Flynn jumped to the bench, ran toward the singing one, treading unheedingly on typewriters and heads that fell in his path. A red-faced policeman lunged after him. He caught Flynn's leg, pulled him down roughly.

"Hey, whatsa matter? You gone nuts?"

Fatty Flynn pointed to Jingers. "Stop him!" he bellowed. "Get him outa here! Can't you hear him—?"

The policeman stared from Flynn to Jingers, shaking his head. "Sure, I can hear him. He's crazy, too—but ain't that what he's supposed to do? I read in the papers how—"

Flynn screamed: "But he's off-key! He's off-beat! He's tryin' to throw the fight! He's crossin' Barney up!"

The bewildered policeman loosed his hold on Flynn. Jingers jumped to the ground, shoved through the ringside crowd toward Monte's corner. Flynn leapt after him.

UP IN the ring, Tiger Prince shambled away from the Mexican's berserk charge. He heaved a clumsy right hand swing, as the overanxious Monte missed with a ponderous left. Monte penned him in a corner, clubbed again with both fists. The voice of the mob was stilled as they waited the knockout.

Jingers chanted wildly, eccentrically; his rolling eyes watched for Flynn. But Flynn wasn't chasing him. He was staring up the aisle. Wild hope gleamed in his eyes.

A man was walking down that aisle; a tall, silk-hatted man in resplendent evening clothes, striding leisurely toward the ring: Boogy-Woogy Wellington!

Flynn ran to meet him, shouting crazily, pointing toward the ring. The elegant one listened. He surveyed the arena with white-gloved hand to mouth in a pensive pose. He nodded, swaggered on to ringside. With swift and graceful movement he ascended to the press bench, spread thereon a silken kerchief, kneeled on it. He inhaled deeply, closed his eyes, threw back his head.

Glassy-eyed and shambling, Tiger Prince waited helplessly, hands limp at his sides. The swarthy giant lumbered bull-like into him. A glancing blow to the head spun Barney halfway around. He grabbed at the ropes to keep from falling. In frenzied haste, Monte lurched forward again, wild and clumsy in his effort to end the fight with a single blow.

From Monte's corner came the strained, eccentric, off-beat chant of Jingers. The Prince tried to follow him; he shook his head helplessly as he tottered away. He covered weakly as the giant tore in.

And then, suddenly, he straightened. His head snapped up. His one good eye opened wide.

From his own corner, softly at first, then gaining in volume, came a throbbing, powerful, vibrant and mellifluous voice: "Boo-oou-oogy . . . woo-oou-oogy . . . *boo-oou! woo-oou* . . .!"

Tiger Prince grunted joyously. His lacerated lips grinned into the savage killer face of the Mexican. He grunted: "Hup-hup!" as he leathered the brutish brown body that loomed before him! He rolled under the swinging arms. He came up smoothly, swiftly; his right fist came up with him—came up zooming in a short, deadly arc to crash into the Mexican's jowl—to knock him sprawling to the floor!

The crowd went completely crazy, and above its crashing din still rose the throbbing, savage chant of the Negro singer.

Fatty Flynn ducked and bobbed at ringside. His clenched fists swung and hooked with those of the black fighter, as Monte rose to find himself engulfed in a raging torrent of pelting leather! Dismayed Leo Levis fumed at the

madly bellowing Jingers. Frantically he screamed: "Louder! *Louder!*" And Jingers' throat bulged as he yelled his raucous, off-key beat. But he knew he was beaten. His efforts seemed puny beside the rich, sonorous, thundering outbursts that rolled and resounded from the quivering throat of Boogy-Woogy Wellington.

With triumph in his eye, Tiger Prince leapt after the stricken brown giant. He chased Monte to a corner, belabored his head and body with a cudgeling barrage of swings and hooks that came too fast for the eye to follow. Desperate, the Mexican lashed out with his ponderous, clubbing swings.

Grinning, dancing in and out, grunting, singing, punching with a fury of pounding red fists, Tiger Prince drove him, beat him, from corner to corner.

Monte couldn't cover. He was fading fast.

Suddenly it was all over. The black fighter waited in a far corner, blood-sodden gloves still rotating, bruised lips still chanting, while the referee tolled the long count over the groveling hulk that had been Mexican Joe Monte.

And then, amid the thundering clamor of the ninety thousand, Tiger Prince Selassie, born Barney Bimms, stood in mid-ring, his right fist raised aloft in token of victory.

Two score excited men stormed the ring. Fatty Flynn, grinning, jubilant, struggled through the crowd to reach his fighter. The fireworks of photographers' flashlights flared continuously. The radio broadcaster pleaded for a word to the great unseen audience.

The announcer bawled unheard into the microphone.

Battered but smiling, Tiger Prince made his way to Monte's corner to shake the giant's lifeless hand. He ignored the snarling face of Leo Levis. He barely glanced at Sam Pandor, picking frantically with the ubiquitous toothpick.

But he paused to smile down into the frightened saffron face of Jingers, the singin' nigger.

"Countreh boy," he laughed, "you go back to Geo'gia an' tell folks you met up with a *real* singin' nigger!"

Omit Wreaths

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "West to Siberia," "Sable," etc.

THIS cuss I'm goin' to tell you about came to me about the time the Moose River stampede starts and he says, "You're No-Shirt McGee, aren't you?"

"That's my maiden name," I answers, "what's on your mind?"

"My name's Mart Dowell," he said, "and I hear you're superintendent of an outfit that's sendin' a steamer and a flock of barges up Moose River. How's chances for a job? I'm in love," he adds.

Sometimes young bucks admittin' they're in love sorta simper and look coy as you might say. But this cuss glares, as if I'd argued the point. "You've got to do more'n be able to love a girl if you expect to work for me," I says, very sarcastic.

"I can *read* water," he answers. "Handle a steamer in white water, line her up, run the engine, smash freight or even cook."

Now a man who can read water is a cuss that can tell a river's depth by the color. And an inch of water can make a lot of difference in these Alaska rivers. When you *line* a steamer, you take a line upstream, fasten it to a tree or boulder and the hoistin' machinery, windin' in the line pulls the steamer through fast water. I gives this cuss a long, searchin' look. "You ain't by any chance 'White-Water' Mart Dowell, hero of the Glacier River—" And that's as far as I got. In all my borned days I never heard so much two-handed cussin'. When he pauses for breath I calms him down.

Well, it seems he's spent five years knockin' about Alaskan rivers without gettin' hooked up with a squaw or losin' his sense of humor. Then love comes, as the poets say. Her name is Alice Kelly and she's Irish, pretty as a sultan's favorite and blessed with a bad temper.

Everything goes along finer'n a frog's hair when Alice Kelly learns he saved a lot of lives in a river-steamer disaster on Glacier River, then she goes cold on him. It seems Alice has a brother who was a hero. He won some medals and it went to his head. He wasn't fit to live with. Then she got herself engaged to a man and he turned out to be a hero. It went to his head, too. It took White-Water Mart Dowell a month to convince Alice Kelly the Glacier-River hero business was just so much hog wash.

Since then he's been scared stiff somethin' will happen that'll make him a hero. As it turns out, he's always gettin' into a jackpot where he has to use his head and courage or get hurt or killed. Right off'n the bat people and the newspapers start makin' a hero out of him. Then he has a tough time provin' there ain't nothin' heroic about him.

"I always prove it," he tells me in a mournful voice, "but sometimes the cards are stacked against me, and it's hard to prove what I done was just a routine job. I'm scared stiff for fear that sometime I won't be able to prove it and my girl will bust the engagement. My idea is to make a quick stake, marry Alice and then'll I'll have her tied up in case somebody tries to hang medals on me."

"She might get a divorce," I suggests, bein' in a mood to take the darker view of things on account of my corns hurtin' that day.

"That's where I got her by the tail and a downhill pull," he says, "she don't believe in divorces."

WELL, I gives him a job and he's sure the answer to a riverman's prayer. By the time we've got the *Raymond Locke Gardner* overhauled and in shape to lick a mighty tough river, there's a half dozen ocean steamers anchored seven miles off'n the mouth of Moose River. They can't get any closer on account of sand bars and mud flats.

Knowin' Moose River runs high a few weeks, then drops off to a trickle I figgered we could only make one big trip with a heavy load, but if all went well, we'd pay for the cost of steamer, barges, overhead and leave a snug profit besides. So we loads the Gardner with all she could carry, stacks more freight or the barges and are ready.

We've got a full passenger-list, two barges in front and two more astern. The last barge has a very special and mighty important cargo. One half is drums of gasoline and the other is cases of blastin' powder, which you Cheechakos would prob'bly call dynamite. It's this stuff that comes in yellowish sticks packed in sawdust.

It's White-Water Mart's idear we put this barge last. "Just in case the gasoline catches fire," he says brightly. "All we have to do is cut the barge loose. That is, if we can't put out the fire. If the barge was up front we couldn't cut her loose and the whole works would burn up."

"Let's pray there won't be no grief," I says piously, "if we land that gas and powder at the new diggin' it'll be danged near worth it's weight in gold. Only one other steamer, the *Vivian Gill* is carryin' powder."

This wasn't goin' to be any up-river

race. Sometimes the boat that lands first gets a bigger rate, but ours was already fixed. Our problem was to miss the boulders and bars and land our stuff at the new camp. For that reason, we let the other river-boats pull out ahead of us.

Things moved right smooth from the start, so I fears the worst. You know how it is—you have just about so much good luck, then you're bound to have a run of bad. But nothin' bad happened the first week, and White-Water Mart is entitled to full credit. Plenty could've happened. The second week I'm thinkin' bad luck's mostly poor judgment when we hits a sand bar. We backwater and let the river pull on that steamer and four barges. Nothin' happens. And all the while the sand's pilin' up around the stranded barge. To make things worse we can't cut loose and get around her. She's blockin' the channel.

We backs downstream and ties up. Then we gets a long timber from the cargo, lashes it to the barge so it works like a lever—with the current pushin' on the lever.

One of the passengers is a newspaper man who represents one of the big press chains and he's all eyes and ears. He nudges my elbow and asks, "Who's running this show? He knows his business?"

Sometimes I'm dumber than others and this was one of 'em. Instead of sayin' I didn't know, or sidesteppin' the question, I blurts, "White-Water Mart Dowell!"

"White-Water Mart!" he exclaims, and a gleam comes into his eyes. "That's color. Yes, sir, that's color with a vengeance."

"It ain't color," I argues hastily, "it's plain everyday business—like you poundin' a typewriter. Mart's a plain everyday man doin' a good job. It only seems colorful because you ain't never seen nothin' like it before. If you try to make a story out of a man gettin' a barge off'n a bar, folks will laugh at you."

He looks puzzled, lights a cigarette and walks away. Well, the lever business kinda rocks the barge and starts the sand underneath to washin' out and pretty soon she moves downstream. White-Water Mart has a line on the bank that holds her, so we steams up, makes fast and goes on.

MART comes into the wheel house where I'm standin' and lights his pipe. Somethin' goes click and it's the newspaper man who's just took a picture of Mart. "What'd you do that for?" Mart growls.

"It's a camera study of White-Water Mart," the newspaper man says, "you are he, are you not?"

"Nope, I ain't *he*," Mart answers kinda touchy. "I am plain Martin Dowell." He gives me a kinda suspicious look. "If you're lookin' for color, why don't you work on this buzzard, No-Shirt McGee?"

"I am Sam Powell," the newspaper man says. "Tell me something of yourself, Mr. McGee."

"Later on, Mr. Powell," I answers, "I'm busy right now."

He wanders away and I turns on White-Water Mart. "What'd you set him on me for?" I snarls.

"You know durned well what I done it for," he answers. "That hound was all set to make a hero out of me. There'd have been a lot of bushwah in his paper about White-Water Mart. I can imagine the expression in Alice's eyes when she read it. She'd say, 'So we have Mr. White-Water Mart with us this evening?' And the way she'd

say it wouldn't do me any good. You ain't got any dependents and you ain't in love, so you can afford to be a hero."

Can you imagine a man called No-Shirt McGee bein' a hero, even in his own eyes? And there's lots of time when us men privately think we ain't so bad at that.

There's a white-water stretch upstream and when we're a day away from it pieces of cargo commence to drift downstream. Boxes, bacon, barrels of flour that ain't soaked through yet and can't sink; lumber and the like. "There's color," I says to Powell. "The *Vivian Gill's* hit a rock and is breakin' up. Wasn't built for the rough stuff, I guess."

White-Water Mart comes rollin' out of his bunk about that time and takes one look at the river, then he fairly soars off the freight to the lead barge. "What's got into him?" Powell asks.

"Search me," I answers, "but let's find out. That cuss don't go off half cocked."

We scrambles over the freight piled ten feet above the barge deck and drops down behind Mart. He's got a long pike pole in his hand and an anxious expression in his eyes. "What're you waitin' for?" Powell asks.

"Somethin' I hope don't come," Mart answers. "Dynamite. She had half a ton aboard. If a case comes driftin' downstream I want to turn it away. You can imagine what'll happen if a paddle should smack down on a case. Dynamite is kinda funny, you know, Mr. Powell. Once I was haulin' several cases and the horses ran away. Three cases fell out and nothin' happened. Yet there are times when a little jar will start an explosion."

Mr. Powell busted his neck excusin' hisself about that time. Evidently he figgers his mission in life wasn't to be a hero, but to write about 'em. He didn't stop until he'd reached the last barge. Then rememberin' that was loaded with gasoline and powder he got a full-blown case of the jitters and races for'd again. I could see he didn't know where to go so I suggests he crawl into a hole and pull the hole in after him.

He finally settles on the second barge from the front, reasonin' that'd be the safest place if a paddle hit a case of dynamite. White-Water Mart stays up forward for a fifteen hour stretch and durin' that time he fishes out three cases of powder. But nobody knows it but me. He's afraid of this hero business. The next mornin' we rounds a bend and there's what's left of the *Vivian Gill*—mostly boilers, engine and cargo driftin' in an eddy below the wreck.

It's a problem for us to get by without goin' into the wreck on one side and the bank on the other, but White-Water Mart turns the trick, but he has to do some linin' up.

Naturally the further up the river we went the more our cargo is worth and the surer we are of gettin' our freight money. I'm beginnin' to breathe easy when Hard Luck takes a swing below the belt and connects. A dance hall girl amongst the passengers has just let out a scream that'll make your blood run cold and is pointin' astern.

BLACK smoke is boilin' up from amongst them gasoline drums and a tarp coverin' the dynamite cases is smokin' in spots. I starts for the barge on the dead run when somebody passes me. It's White-Water Mart. "Cut that barge loose," I yells, "she'll strand downstream and blow herself to hell."

"That's our margin of profit," Mart

answers, "and I don't want this company to go busted. I'm needin' a permanent job."

"You'll get a permanent piece of ground, you blasted fool," I bellers, "and it'll be six feet long and six feet deep. A white stone'll tell the world it's yours."

"Courage!" a voice shouts in my ear. I look over my shoulder and my worst fears are realized. It's Powell and he's just took a picture of Mart hightailin' to that barge. "Man alive!" he goes on. "What drama! The stark, primitive river! The forbidding mountains and hills. Nature fighting man to the very last ditch and man refusing to be denied. Then the greatest enemy of man and Nature! Fire! And man still refusing to accept defeat. What a story! What a story!"

He goes on ravin' while takin' shots with his camera. On the way to the barge, White-Water Mart changes his mind. He does cut the barge loose, but he stays aboard. It drifts downstream a ways while he's fightin' the fire. He stops, drops a couple of anchors, then tackles the fire again. The tarp spread over the dynamite is blazin' and he yanks it off and dumps it into the river.

Then he grabs a crowbar and breaks a lashin' that's part way burned through. He takes the bar, gives a heave and over the side goes the blazin' drum. So far, you understand, it's only the gasoline that leaked out that's burnin'. But the deck of the barge is soaked with it and slowly the fire begins to work under the stack of dynamite.

"He'll have one hell of a time provin' he ain't either a hero or a fool," I says to myself. "If . . . he gets out alive."

White-Water Mart turns, catches hold of a case of powder that's burnin' on one end and heaves it into the river, then he picks up a bucket and sluices water over the stack. I can see he's afraid the lashin's holdin' the cases together may burn through and then he'll have a flock of cases adrift.

The fire amongst the cases really don't go entirely out. It just sort of gets discouraged and this gives John time to get rid of another blazin' drum. He gets busy with the bucket and draws sand and water up from the river bottom and pours it amongst the cases. Little by little the barge deck is sluiced off and pretty soon the fire's out, except for some charred and steamin' dynamite cases. While he's watchin' the fire blazes up again, so he climbs onto the blazin' cases and slowly pours water between them.

Him standin' there, with the fire lickin' around his legs makes two lady passengers faint. Of course it wouldn't've made any difference to Mart where he'd stood if there was an explosion but the women didn't think of that. It sure looked heroic, him standin' there on them burnin' powder cases. This man Powell shoots three pictures of Mart and all the time he's mutterin', "What drama! What copy!" Whatever copy is.

The last picture made Powell want to break down and sob with pure joy. A case of burnin' powder had wedged and the only way Mart could get it was to flop down on his belly, take a knife blade, force it between the sides and head of the box and remove a slat. He rakes out the powder a few sticks at a time and tosses it into the river. Towards the last he puts some into his pockets, him bein' a frugal cuss as you might say, and hatin' like sin to waste property.

The burnin' boards come last. He

throws them away, gives the spot a good sluicin' out and the job's done.

You should've heard the cheer that went up. I couldn't hear what Mart was sayin', but I could tell by the expression on his face and the way his lips twisted he was cussin' a blue streak. He'd suddenly realized he was a hero again.

I EASES the steamer and barges downstream, White-Water Mart makes fast and hauls up the anchors and then comes over the freight to the steamer. He's mad clean through. "Cut out that cheerin' and handclappin' you Cheechakos," he bellers.

"That is the most heroic act I have ever seen a human being perform," the newspaper man says, "and I have seen many, in various parts of the world. You are a hero and one of God's noblemen."

"Hog wash!" Mart roars and the echo comes back, "Hog wash!" Mart shakes his fist under Powell's nose. "I ain't a hero and I can prove it. All I done was to toss a little water on a smudge."

"A little water on a smudge," Powell says softly. "Your modesty fits your heroic character."

"Listen, you," Mart says in a frightened voice, "if you put this in your paper, I'll run you until your ankles melt."

Mr. Powell sees that he means it and suddenly he jumps over the side. When the fire had started somebody had launched a small boat. I'd forgot about it, but Mr. Powell hadn't. He lands in the boat and casts off and it took two men to keep Mart from jumpin' in after him. "He'll put that in the paper," he yells.

"What if he does, your girl prob'ly won't see it," I answers. "Besides. didn't you say you could prove you wasn't a hero?"

"Sure I can prove it," he answers, "but maybe not to her. I never won a argument with her yet."

He has to push his way to his quarters. Everybody wants to shake hands. "It looked to me," one man said, "as if we'd have to buy a wreath for you. A wreath and flowers."

"When I kick off," Mart answers, "you can omit the wreath and flowers."

In the days that follow he's kinda moody. It don't affect his work none. It takes us three weeks to get up the river and unload. And we spend ten days fightin' the bars on the way back because the water has gone done. Most of us had forgot about Mr. Powell. Right at the start he'd let it be known he'd stay aboard only long enough to get what he called the *atmosphere* of river steamboatin'. But White-Water Mart hadn't forgot him.

Mart worries more and more as we near home. "If I lose my girl," he says, "I'll beat Powell to a pulp, even if I have to chase him to the end of the earth to catch him."

"I thought you could prove you aren't a hero," I reminds him.

"Yeah," he says, "I can prove it. But it's too late now."

Well, I'm hopeful until the steamer nears her dock. There're several hundred folks waitin' and I spots three men with cameras and several more that looks like inquirin' reporters. I hands Mart my binoculars. "Can you see your girl anywhere?" I asks.

He takes a long look. "No, she ain't there," he groans, "and that means she's got a mad on. But I can see that blasted Powell."

While we're makin' fast to the wharf, somebody hands me a newspaper from Outside. Powell's story and

the picture of Mart battlin' smokin' dynamite cases is spread all over the front page.

AS MART goes ashore everybody cheers. I'll say this much for him, he didn't snarl back at 'em or lose his temper. He looked as if he was sorry because they was ignorant and misled. Mr. Powell comes up all smiles, but I digs him in the ribs with my elbow. "You'd better stay away from him," I warns, "because your story has lost him his girl, and he's havin' a hard time keepin' from goin' hog wild."

Surely his girl wouldn't throw him over because he performed a heroic act," Powell protested.

"You don't know much about wimmin," I says. "You never can tell what they'll do." And right then I feels a cold chill go over me. I'd spoken words worthy of a sage, and found hope in them. I overtakes Mart. "Listen," I says, "You can never tell what wimmin will do. Can't you find comfort in sayin' that over to yourself a few times?"

"Comfort—hell!" he snorts. "I'm goin' to prove I ain't a hero. Wait. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He turns and legs it back to the steamer. Mr. Powell, sniffin' more drama, may be touched up with love, hangs around. Mart don't even look at him when he comes back. "Come along," he says to me. Powell trails us, fussin' with his camera, as he walks along.

White-Water Mart Dowell's feet begin to drag as we near a neat cabin on a back street. It has a fence around it, a yard with flowers and nice curtains at the windows. He almost stops as he nears the gate, and then his jaw hardens. He stalks up to the front door and knocks. Pretty soon the door opens and there's a slim girl, with stormy blue eyes and a firm chin. The chin kinda tilts up. She turns on a stage smile and shows a row of pretty teeth. "Ah," she says softly, "we have Mister Dynamite Mart Dowell with us this afternoon. I don't think we need any heroes today. Our family has been getting 'em a dime a dozen and we have more on hand than we can use."

"Listen here, Alice," he bellers, "where'd you get the fool idea I'm a hero. I'm so yellow I'll run at the slightest danger."

"I read the newspapers, you know," she said coldly. "So glad you called."

She starts to shut the door but he shoves his foot against it, then he grabs her arm and yanks her onto the porch. "Listen," he bellers, "you can't throw me over without a hearin'! I won't stand for it."

"That ain't the way to handle wimmin'!" I warns.

"Shut up, No-Shirt," he yells. "Just because a Yukon squaw smirked at you is no sign you're an authority on women." He turns to the girl. "If I can prove I weren't no hero when I poured water on that smudge, and that the whole business came out of a fool newspaper man's head, are we engaged? And will we be married tomorrow? I've got a steady job, you know."

"Yes," she answers, "but just try and do it!" And then she puts her hands on her hips, with her elbows kinda pointing forward, like women do when they think they've got a man on the run.

"Great!" he exclaims, "I knew you'd be fair. Gents, we'll be married tomorrow at high noon, as the society papers say. Have a cigar, No-Shirt!" He reaches into his pocket, fishes out a fat cigar and tucks it into my face. Then

he hands another to the newspaper man. "You, too, Mr. Powell. You'd better have two—one on account of my approachin' weddin' and the other as a sort of consolation present because I'm about to make a sucker out of you."

Mr. Powell blinks and starts fishin' for a match. "Wait," Mart pleads, "I'll remember my manners and give you a light. Yeah, I'm goin' to give you two kinds of light—one for your smoke and the other will be the light of information." With that he turns his back and strikes a match. He's kinda bent over and we can't see what he's doin' but when he turns around he's holdin' a stick of dynamite in his hand and one end is blazin' right merrily.

Were you ever around a scared, healthy young woman when she opened her mouth wide and screamed? A pack of wolves howlin' can't hold a candle to it. Alice's yell made my blood run cold and it was already cold with fear. "Light?" Mart offers, holdin' the blazin' end of the dynamite stick towards my cigar.

IN a kind of a trance I suck in and taste cigar and dynamite smoke. Just then there are two thuds. One is Mr. Powell's passin' out cold, and the other is Alice meltin' into a temptin' heap.

After a while Alice opens her eyes. At first she's scared, then she's relieved and then she's mad clean through. She starts to say somethin', but there's a muffled cry nearby. It's Mr. Powell regainin' consciousness and findin' he ain't in heaven after all. His legs, obeyin' the law of self-preservation, however, begin to take him away from the scene. He stops, looks at the burnin' dynamite stick on the ground, then comes back. He's so cautious I have to laugh.

I looks at Alice Kelly. She's givin' Mart the dickens, but at the same time she's clingin' to him like women do when they've got a clutch on somethin' they figgered they'd lost forever. "You see, darlin'," Mart is sayin'. "I weren't no hero at all. It takes a concussion to set off dynamite. That is why they use a percussion cap to set off a blast. Fire just burns it, so I was just doin' an everyday job when I jumped onto that scow."

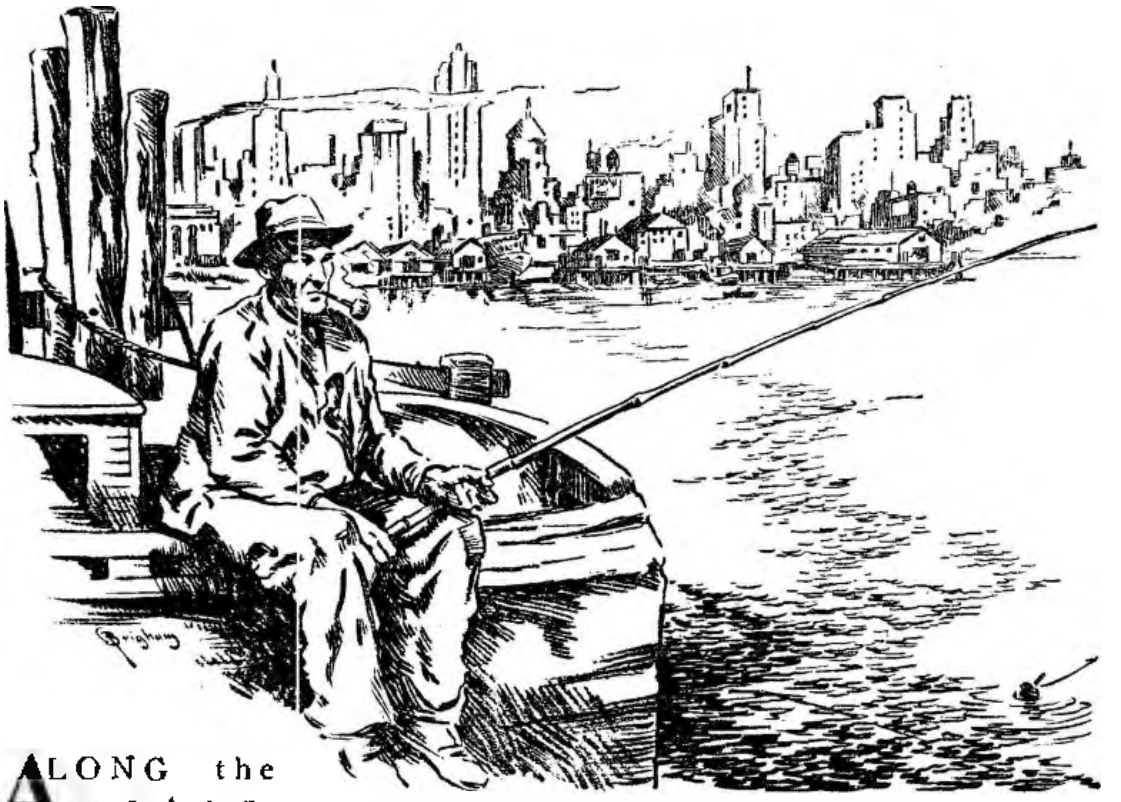
I could tell by the look in her eyes Alice Kelly had changed. In her eyes Mart Dowell was a hero. Not the kind that saves lives and property, but the kind that fills the specifications a girl draws up when she outlines her ideal man. A thousand newspapers could call Mart a hero, but he could prove to her he wasn't.

I looks at Mr. Powell. He's shaky, but he picks up his camera and takes a picture of Alice and Mart. "It's funny," he says, "I don't remember putting a new film in my camera. I thought I had one more exposure to make."

I didn't tell him I'd made that exposure, then put in a new roll of films while he was on the ground. I'm goin' to send it to his editor. It shows him in a dead faint, with Mart lightin' a cigar with a stick of dynamite. And when it's published it'll be an ace up Mart's sleeve when folks start talkin' about the hero of Moose River. Instead of tellin' him what I'd done, I taps him on the arm. "Come along, son," I says, "two's company and four's a crowd. Me and you are goin' to buy some flowers. They're for a weddin' at high noon tomorrow, so we'll omit the wreaths."

Beachcomber

By WALTER C. BROWN



ALONG the waterfront they called him "Skipper" because he lived on an abandoned coal barge which had sunk into the mud beside a rotted wharf.

No man knew his real name, age, or point of origin. No man cared to know, and Skipper returned the compliment. Call him derelict, bum, or river rat—Skipper saw himself as a free man in a world given over to a futile kind of slavery—the job.

"What I ain't got, I do without," said Skipper. "There ain't nothin' I need so bad I gotta work for it."

But no man is entirely free of ambition, and Skipper clung to one lone, gaudy dream—to be a beachcomber on a South Sea isle. A dream born in the long ago from a wandering sailor's lurid yarns in the hobo jungle back of the shipyards.

"How do you get to these here islands?" Skipper had asked the sailor man.

"Set yer course west, matey, an' foller yer nose fur as ye kin go," the sailor had replied, winking to the motley crew over his can of mulligan. "Yer can't miss 'em."

And the spell of his words had been so strong upon Skipper that he had said good-bye to the river, riding the rods of the first rattler headed west.

Somewhere down in Georgia the yard bulls had hauled him up, and the luckless traveler drew six months at

"hard"—which means cracking rocks on a road gang.

"It was like to've killed me," Skipper groaned on his return to the blessed safety of his decaying castle, and chalked up one more black mark against a cockeyed world.

But the dream persisted, glowing with heightened colors when winter gripped the river flats and choking fog rolled in like a smother of wet smoke.

As on this particular night, for instance. Skipper had ventured forth to wheedle a paper of pipe tobacco from Holy Joe at the Open Door Mission.

Now as he trudged bargeward on broken soles, with a safety pin clipping the lapels of his ragged coat, he shivered and thought longingly of the old army overcoat hanging on the nail inside his cabin door.

An invisible tugboat hooted like an angry owl, lost in the vast darkness filled with the sullen *slap-slap* of oily water against the stout piling.

Skipper's feet dodged the rotted holes in his black wharf and carried him unerringly to the cabin door. But when he opened, strong arms jerked him inside. Then the door slammed and somebody made a light.

He blinked at his unbidden guests—five men—city stiffs with fancy shirts and clean collars and shined-up shoes.

"Whatcha doin' on my boat?" Skipper demanded.

"It's *my* boat now, granpop," said a snake-eyed man with a toothpick and a rubbery grin.

One of the men slapped Skipper's pockets fore and aft. "Only an old bum, Smiler. No iron on him."

The fifth man was a prisoner, a huddled, white-faced figure with handcuffs on his wrists and a taped mouth.

Skipper measured the grinning man with frosty eyes. "You fellers get offa my boat! I don't want no cops comin' to mess round here."

"Sap him, Joe!" the Smiler said amiably.

Skipper couldn't see the blackjack swing its vicious arc from behind. He collapsed like a bundle of old clothes.

"Sweep him up and toss him in the drink," Smiler added.

By head and heels they carried Skipper out to the rail. At the third swing they let go. . . .

THE chill impact of water brought Skipper back to life. The old man was as tough and durable as the hickory piling which defied time and tide.

In addition, the water off the bargeside was only two-feet deep. Skipper clung to an open seam in the hull, knee-deep in the soft bottom of silted mud.

He stood there a moment, getting his wind back. Water sluiced from his head and his clothes and made little splashing sounds around his leaning figure.

The city sky was reddened above him by the reflection of the lights uptown—and somewhere a tugboat chugged and clanged its busy, heedless way along the sliding river.

Presently he crawled back over the rail and flopped down on the planking like a half-drowned rat, teeth chattering, sucking in great gulps of air. The back of his head hurt beyond swearing.

"Overcoat!" Skipper thought desperately. "I gotta get hold of my overcoat."

The cabin door slammed. Two sets of footsteps retreated along the wharf, low voices cursing the treacherous boards. That left two inside—and the prisoner.

Skipper thought of the four-foot length of hawser which hung outside

the cabin. Its knotted head was wrapped with baling wire—a weapon he wielded skilfully against the huge, red-eyed wharf rats.

With infinite patience he snaked across the cabin roof and reached down for the cut hawser.

Very quietly, for one of the remaining pair was outside, standing guard at the rail. Skipper aimed about six inches above the red tip of his cigarette. Then he let fly.

The man went down with a deflated grunt. And stayed down. The cabin door banged open and Smiler's voice called "Hey, Joe! What's goin' on?"

Skipper let fly again. The metal-shod knot rapped Smiler's skull, sent him staggering against the rail, cursing. Then he glimpsed the dark shape above him and his gun came up.

But Skipper's desperate blow found him first—smashed full into his face like an iron fist. He howled and fell writhing to the deck.

Instantly Skipper slid down and ducked inside to snatch his precious overcoat. The man with the taped mouth sprang up, making muted noises, eyes popping.

"Better leg it, mister, while you got the chance," Skipper wheezed. They fled up the wharf, Skipper guiding the other's steps.

A challenging hail struck them from dead ahead.

"It's them other two comin' back," Skipper whispered. "This way, mister—quick!"

A pistol shot stabbed the fog with a streak of orange flame. Another. And another. The handcuffed man raced ahead like a scared rabbit—was swallowed up by the ghostly swirl.

Skipper shrugged and trudged on alone.

THE old man dangled his feet over the edge of a sagging jetty, watching the bobbing cork of his fishing line. He had a new refuge now, giving the old barge a wide berth, for Skipper trusted neither the law nor the lawless.

He gathered his overcoat against the sharp wind, eyes cloudy with resentment of the coming winter.

Cold shivered through his skinny frame and his hands clutched the tattered coat more closely around him. His eyes blinked rheumily against the wind.

"Them sunshiny islands must be dandy places," Skipper thought wistfully. "They woulda suited me fine."

He heaved a rattling sigh. Too late now—he was too old. He'd have to buy his way there, and Holy Joe had once told him it'd cost near a thousand dollars.

Then the invisible broom of destiny swept two sheets of newspaper along the jetty. Skipper caught them—if they fell into the water and scared the fish he'd have no supper.

Skipper glanced curiously at the bold, black type. There was a man's picture on the front page. And a caption below:

WARREN S. HAMMOND, PROMINENT LAWYER AND RECENT VICTIM OF A KIDNAP GANG, STILL SEEKS IDENTITY OF WATERFRONT DERELICT WHO EFFECTED HIS RESCUE. $1000 REWARD AWAITS FORGOTTEN MAN

Ah, for the lazy life of a tropic isle, watching the tide come in, and the tide go out. A coral strand warmed by a copper sun, and "a balmy breeze to blow a man's breakfast out of the trees that thick with fruit you wouldn't believe it, matey—"

"That picture looks kinda like that feller they was holdin' down there at the barge," Skipper mused. "Wisht I could read what it says."

MEN of Naturalist

HE'S ONE OF THOSE SAVANTS WHO SPARE THEMSELVES NO PERILS IN ACCOMPLISHING THEIR TASKS. FOR PURE LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE HE HAS VENTURED TO SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST INACCESSIBLE PLACES SCOUTING HIDDEN WONDERS. HIS RECENT SCALING OF THE HITHERTO UNCLIMBED SHIVA TEMPLE IN THE GRAND CANYON WAS TYPICAL.

A NATIVE OF OREGON, HAROLD ANTHONY, AS A LAD HUNTED SMALL GAME BUT HE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN A STUDY OF THE ANIMALS HE TRAPPED. ENCOURAGED BY HIS FATHER, ANTHONY LEARNED TAXIDERMY. ON GRADUATION FROM COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, HE ENGAGED IN FIELD WORK FOR MUSEUMS IN MEXICO AND PANAMA. ANTHONY WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO LIVE AMONG THE JIVARO INDIANS. THIS WAS IN 1920, WHEN, WITH GEORGE CHERRY, HE TRAVERSED A NARROW ANDEAN PASS 12,000 FEET HIGH IN ECUADOR, TO DESCEND INTO THE WILDERNESS OF THE HEAD HUNTERS.

THE TWO WHITE MEN KEPT THE FIERCE JIVAROS IN A STATE OF FRIENDLY TRUCE BY A PLAY UPON THEIR SUPERSTITIONS. THEY CAME BACK ALIVE BRINGING WITH THEM MANY SHRUNKEN HEADS.' IN 1926, ANTHONY LED AN EXPEDITION INTO AFRICA. THE SAFARI PROVED A HIGHLY ADVENTUROUS ONE—UP THE NILE, INTO THE LAND OF THE "FUZZY WUZZIES," THROUGH TRACKLESS JUNGLES, AND FINALLY A LONG TREK INTO THE RED SEA HILLS. AGAIN HE CAME BACK WITH A WHOLE SKIN THOUGH HE HAD MANY CLOSE CALLS.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

DARING

Coming soon: Major Frederick Lord—Ace of Fortune

Genius Jones

By LESTER DENT

ON AN iceberg sat a young man named Jones. He had a machine gun on his knees and when the captain of a German liner tried to get him off the iceberg, Jones let him have it. Later, millionaire Polyphemus Ward's yacht succeeded in effecting a rescue.

Jones, it turned out, was the sole survivor of his father's expedition to the Arctic. He had been brought up on seal meat and dictionaries, and when his tutor died, Jones set out to see the world, via the iceberg route. Believing America was still at war with Germany, he had fired on the German sea captain. Nothing could be simpler, really.

For a young man as uncomplicated and as uncivilized as Jones, the things that happen to him aboard the palatial Ward yacht are little short of murderous. Ward decides that Jones is just the man to distribute the Ward millions to worthy charities, and gives him a hundred thousand dollars to give away to the genuinely needy, just as a test. The lovely, icy Glacia, hearing about this, kisses Jones twice and tells him they are engaged. Lyman Lee, Ward's secretary, becomes resentful at Jones' sudden incursions upon the bankroll Lee had thought to manage and the girl Lee had thought to wed. Lee attacks Jones, first and unsuccessfully, with a knife; later, and more deftly, with a shyster lawyer.

WHEN the German captain, acting upon orders from his government, refuses to prosecute Jones, Lee's lawyer, Shevinsky, hires a chemist to visit the hospitalized captain, poison the open wound, cause the captain's death. So Jones is wanted, technically, for murder.

Meanwhile, Jones, having jumped Ward's yacht, wanders about the city, attempting vainly to dispose of the hundred thousand dollars, and meets a girl—*the* girl, he feels, that he could really love. Oddly enough, Funny Pegger, Polyphemus Ward's publicity counsel, happens along, sees the girl, and addresses her as "Vix." Vix wants Funny to sock Jones for annoying her. Funny, knowing Jones' strength, wisely refuses, and the charming Vix—a nice girl, really, but a shade vindictive—has them both arrested as mashers.

This serial began in the Argosy for November 27th

It is while they are in jail that Funny tells Jones the latest developments in the case of the machine-gunned German liner-captain.

"You, my good fellow, are wanted," says Funny, "for murder."

Jones whistles. "My," he says, "good-[illegible]"

CHAPTER XI

FIT TO PRINT

JONES, due to the strange course of circumstances, had only a limited acquaintance with the customs of mankind, but this nubbin was enough to make him begin to suspect that he would never learn anything whatever about the human race. He knew as much about mankind as a wild camel in the desert of Rub'al Khali would be expected to.

Excellent prospects of spending his first night in New York in one of its jails did not embarrass Jones particularly. He had too many other troubles, and being in the bastille rated among the lesser ones; it was only a lamb in the flock. If stone blocks and steel bars offered sanctuary from his other troubles, he would have actually welcomed them. Being in jail didn't perturb him because there was no point in being bothered about a mouse with so many rats around.

Jones was also somewhat disgusted with himself over the way he had underestimated everything. To give away a hundred thousand dollars had seemed simple. That so many difficulties, none anticipated, could appear, made him feel futile. The increasing complications were undermining his confidence in himself.

The jail cell was five feet wide, seven long, and Jones head came within half an inch of the ceiling when he stood. There was a bed—a hard board-shelf twenty-four inches wide and six feet six inches long. It certainly wasn't there for comfort. Even Jones didn't think it could actually be slept on. Jones tapped disconsolately on the east wall of his cell to get the attention of Funny Pegger, who was next door.

"The word clue," Jones stated, "means a bunch of worms, but it also denotes a thread, or yarn, which one may grasp and follow out of a labyrinth."

"I lean toward the first part," Funny Pegger remarked. "It kind of describes my opinion of a guy who won't use part of a hundred thousand dollars to bail himself and his manager out of the clink."

Jones wished he hadn't promised to tell no one about the hundred thousand. He couldn't explain to Funny Pegger that he was not to use any of the money for himself.

"I am puzzled by something, Mr. Pegger—"

"I am puzzled by that hundred thousand dollars the cops found on you," interrupted the gag man. "Where'd you get it?"

"Er—what I started to say," Jones continued, "was that it seems rather odd that the German liner-captain should have died suddenly from a superficial bullet wound in the leg. At the time I shot him, while under the mistaken impression the World War was still going on, I purposefully inflicted a very minor injury."

"You sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I merely perforated the calf of his leg."

"That," said Funny Pegger, "is something to think about."

Jones cleared his throat. "I have been thinking. A rather grim suspicion has occurred to me. Would you care to hear it?"

"Jones, I find almost anything you do or think is interesting. Proceed."

"Do you suppose someone poisoned the German captain in some fashion, so that the man's death would involve me in serious difficulties?"

Funny Pegger considered this in startled silence. "Ain't that kind of far-fetched conceiving?"

"Perhaps. It is merely deduction on my part."

"Were there," Funny Pegger asked suddenly, "any detective novels on the island where you dug out your remarkable education?"

"Why, yes. A volume concerning a chap named Sherlock Holmes."

"That explains this brainstorm of yours."

"The only trouble," said Jones gloomily, "is that I can not conceive of motive for anyone desiring to place me in difficulties."

"You're stumped?"

"What?"

"You're puzzled?"

"Oh, yes."

"Which brings us back," Funny Pegger said, "to that hundred thousand dollars and where you got it."

JONES longed to put into Pegger's friendly ear the story of the hundred thousand. He wanted the gag-man's advice about how to get people to take thousand-dollar bills as a gift. But Old Polyphemus Ward had directed that the thing be kept a secret.

"I'm sorry," Jones mumbled. "I am not at liberty to impart information concerning the money."

"I can see," snorted Funny Pegger, "that you trust me!"

"But I do!"

"Oh, sure! But maybe you're right. They say you can trust a newspaperman with anything but your money or your woman. In that case—" He broke off, gave a startled grunt. "Speaking of the devil!" he muttered.

Jones pressed an eye to the bars and saw a tall, carelessly dressed young man approaching in the company of the jail guard.

"Psst!" hissed Funny Pegger. "Jones—duck! There comes a reporter I know. Get back in the dark! If anybody discovers you're Jones, the man off the iceberg, you'll turn into a permanent fixture here! Remember, you're wanted for shooting the German captain."

Jones withdrew to the murky rear of his cell.

The newspaper reporter hailed Funny Pegger with a loud laugh.

"Hello, jailbird!" he said. He peered through the bars. "Where's your stripes?"

"Heh, heh," said Funny Pegger nastily. "How'd you get in here, boy?"

"If I recall, it was with the assistance of a cop," Funny Pegger explained. "How'd you know I was in?"

"Oh, word went around, as words will do. Had a fight over a woman didn't you?"

"Uh-huh."

"Where's the fellow you mixed it with?"

"Search me," Funny Pegger said calmly.

"Holmes was his name, wasn't it?"

"So I heard."

The reporter fortunately did not pursue that point, and eventually departed, gloating at every step.

The masterpiece of satiric journalism he turned out was cut to newsworthy proportions by a businesslike copy-desk man, was assigned a relatively inconspicuous position on page fourteen, and ultimately came to the attention of Lyman Lee, who was having fried snails and champagne in a small, smart restaurant east of Madison Avenue. This is known as the power of the press.

Lyman Lee looked up and summoned a waiter, who plugged in a telephone at the table. Shortly, Paul Shevinsky was on the wire.

"Paul, have you read in the late papers about that Pegger fellow being in jail?"

"Just saw it," said Paul Shevinsky. His voice had a meaty sound which seemed to convey over the telephone a picture of his well-stuffed face

"Did you also see that the man Pegger had a fight with was carrying one hundred thousand-dollar bills?"

"I—heaven love us! Then the other man is *Jones!*"

"Obviously."

"But how come the cops don't know it?"

"Jones probably shaved off his whiskers. The police wouldn't know about the hundred thousand."

"We'd better tip them off." Paul Shevinsky chuckled queerly. "The German ship captain died from the leg wound Jones gave him, you know."

Lyman Lee frowned. "I wouldn't talk too much about that."

"Maybe you're right."

"I wouldn't say anything to the police just yet, either."

"No? I don't follow you there, Lyman."

"The hundred thousand."

"Oh."

"A hundred thousand," said Lyman Lee, "is a fairish sum."

"It is, at that."

"Jones," continued Lyman Lee, "is supposed to give it away to needy people."

"Yes, I know."

"I thought you might know some needy people."

Paul Shevinsky was silent for a time, and coughed once before he spoke. "Ever hear of the man called 'Forgetful' Osborn?"

"I haven't," Lyman Lee said, "had the pleasure."

"It's not always a pleasure," Paul Shevinsky chuckled, "to know Forgetful."

"I don't follow you."

"Forgetful Osborn is one of the slickest con-men in the racket," Paul Shevinsky explained.

"So—?"

"Forgetful is the fellow to sic on that hundred thousand. He'll think up something in the line of needy persons."

"Now," said Lyman Lee, "we progress."

"I'll contact Forgetful, then call you back later," Paul Shevinsky said.

"I'll be at my apartment," Lyman Lee told him.

The waiter took the telephone away, and Lyman Lee inserted the miniature fork in a snail with the air of an expert at extracting tender morsels from hard shells. By now, he knew enough about Jones to realize that unusual young man had, for all of his strange mannerisms, a hard shell.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAUSTIC SAMARITAN

JONES and Funny Pegger had had a long period of silence, during which Jones was trying to make mental progress in the direction he considered most important—the matter of the German captain's suspiciously sudden death. His thoughts kept jumping the track and racing to the red-haired young lady, Vix, who was an interesting subject. Jones was having trouble keeping Vix out of his mind. He tapped on the cell wall to get Funny Pegger's attention.

"Mr. Pegger!"

"What," asked Funny Pegger, "is on your mind?"

"To tell the truth, a member of the opposite sex."

"Any particular member?"

"Yes," said Jones. "I refer to the young lady who is responsible for our present circumstances."

"Oh, you mean Vix," said Funny Pegger. "The sparkler who had us clapped in here."

"Er—would she happen to be your fiancee?"

"Vix? The wildcat! Not a chance. She has the idea that nothing in trousers is worth wasting time on."

"Indeed? Then I take it that she is fancy free?"

"You take it correctly," Funny Pegger advised him. "But if you want advice, I'd say lay off Vix."

"Why?"

"You're inexperienced with women."

"But," said Jones, "I shall have to learn."

"They usually tried to get some practice before they climbed in the ring with Jack Dempsey."

"I don't believe I understand."

"Start with kittens," suggested the gag man, "and work up to the tigresses gradually."

"Oh." Instead of being cautioned by the warning, Jones found that he was aroused by it. "I find it difficult to see why she had us consigned to jail, when as a matter of fact she started the trouble herself."

Funny Pegger snorted. "That's an example of what I mean. Women are trouble. They don't like the color of your eyes, so they give you the works."

"You think that she was unfavorably impressed by such a small detail?"

"She was impressed by something. I wouldn't know. By the way, what started her off?"

"Nothing at all, I merely mentioned my intention to kiss her."

A strangled explosion came from the next cell, "Is that all? Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes."

"Thank your stars you're not hanging from the nearest lamp-post!"

Jones considered this.

"The kiss," he announced, "comes from the Icelandic word *koss*, and means to press with the lips, which are compressed on contact, then separated, and is a salute of greeting or reverence. A kiss is also a sweet-meat composed of sugar and beaten egg whites, and baked, also a bit of confectionery, or a sugarplum."

"Which leads up to what?"

"I don't know," Jones confessed.

Keys rattled in a lock, iron doors clanged, and the jailer approached, accompanied by the auburn-haired young woman whom they had been discussing.

"I'm bailing you two out," Vix declared. "I'm sorry I lost my temper."

JONES stepped out of the cell, filled with gratitude so profound that it crowded out of him all memory of her feminine contrariness that was responsible for their arrest. He hunted for words to express his feelings, but saw Funny Pegger scowling at him, which he correctly interpreted to mean that silence was the policy.

"If you've got a rabbit foot, rub it," whispered Funny Pegger, "and maybe the cops won't recognize you."

They recovered their belongings, and Jones placed the sheaf of one hundred thousand-dollar bills in a pocket rather self-consciously, aware that Vix was staring at him.

They marched out of the police station. The three of them entered a waiting taxicab, gave the driver Funny Pegger's address; and the cab rolled through gathering dusk, between elderly red-brick buildings, past fruit stores whose proprietors were putting away wares for the night, past groups of children engaged in throwing balls back and forth across the street. Vix broke the silence first, after they had been riding for sometime.

"Was that a hundred thousand dollars?" she asked, "or am I having that old trouble again?"

"Er—your eyes were all right," Jones admitted.

Vix looked at Funny Pegger. "I can't understand you having a friend who isn't broke."

"He was broke when I collected him as a friend," grinned the gag man. "Where he got that hundred grand is beyond me. But I'm not surprised. Not at Jones. Nothing Jones does will surprise me. Ever."

The red-haired girl, Vix, gave a convulsive start. She stared at Funny Pegger, but she pointed at Jones.

"Jones?" she asked.

"Yes," admitted Funny Pegger.

"Off the iceberg?"

"Right."

The girl made her hands into fists and appeared inclined to poke Funny Pegger. Then she pounded her forehead dramatically.

"Sometimes," she said, "I do the cutest things. All I've done now is get an accused murderer out of jail. It must be a kind of gift."

Her tone distressed Jones, who did not want her getting the impression that he had homicidal tendencies. He wondered if she was, and glanced sidewise at her, but could tell nothing from her face. His inspection accomplished nothing but a great tumult within him—parts of his interior seemed to jump around and other parts go into a cramp. Vix was more than a pretty, red-headed girl. She had dynamic energy; she was a girl who had to be doing something all the time. She bubbled, as it were, over. There was sparkle to her eyes, to her smile, to the quick, graceful movements of her hands and body. She was distinctly what Pegger had called a wow. And Jones decided he liked it.

THEY reached Funny Pegger's rooming house, left the cab, and entered. "Thanks, Vix, for getting us out," said Funny Pegger drily. "Of course, you got us in, too." His grin was wry. "I only hope I can return the favor some time."

The young woman compressed her lips. "If you think I'm leaving now, you have another guess coming. You got me into this. Now you can explain what it is."

"I got you into it? *I* did?"

"Of course."

Pegger snorted. "It seems I remember you telling a cop we were annoying you?"

"Weren't you?"

"Not half as much as you were annoying us."

"Exactly!" said Jones. "I did nothing but say I wanted to kiss you."

"Jones," Funny Pegger said, "you'd better keep your finger out of it. There's sharks in the water."

Jones looked injured

"Mystery," he said, 'was originally a religious rite to which only privileged worshippers were admitted, hence came to mean the wholly unknown, an enigma, beyond human comprehension—leading poets refer to woman as the mysterious sex."

Vix pointed at him.

"Just what kind of thing," she inquired, "is this Jones?"

Funny Pegger sighed, grasped the young woman's elbow, and spoke to Jones. "I'll take her in the next room and explain. Can't do it here. She's allergic to you, or something."

"Allergic?"

"Letting her see you is like showing a hay-fever victim a goldenrod patch."

Their departure to the next room left Jones alone to contemplate something distressing that had just occurred to him. He liked Funny Pegger. Liked him a lot. The last thing he desired was to cause the gag man any trouble. But trouble might be exactly what he would bring Funny Pegger. Jones was charged with a major crime—murder probably qualified as major. Funny Pegger was harboring him. Anyone who knowingly aided a criminal became an accessory, and liable to severe penalty, or so Jones recollected having read in a law book which had been on his Arctic island.

It all narrowed down to this: If he permitted Funny Pegger to help him, he would be getting the friendly gag-man into difficulties. The proper solution for that was for Jones to leave. That would solve the dilemma nicely. Still . . . for two large reasons, Jones didn't wish to leave. First, he needed the tubby gag-man's aid. Secondly, the auburn-haired Vix was beginning to fascinate him—he distinctly wanted to see more of her.

It took almost five minutes of wrestling with the problem to see that the important thing was not to get Funny Pegger in trouble. He must leave.

He walked to the door, opened it silently and stepped out into a street now dark except for illumination from the corner street-lamp.

Automobiles had ceased to be a novelty to Jones, so he paid no attention to the one that drew up beside him until the beam of a strong flashlight sprang out in his face. He looked around and saw a limousine which seemed a block long.

"Hello, Jones," a voice called cordially from the wheeled castle.

JONES had heard the voice before. He threw a glance up and down the street, picking his course if he had to run for it.

"You are Jones, aren't you?" asked the voice, rather anxiously. "This is Lyman Lee, your old friend."

Jones thought it incongruous of Lyman Lee to designate himself as a friend. On the Ward yacht, the fellow had been obnoxious.

Jones went over to the shiny car. "I—hello," he ventured.

"I hardly knew you without the whiskers," Lyman Lee said. "What a change they made. I'll bet there isn't a policeman in town who would recognize you."

Jones winced. "Er—let us hope you are correct."

Lyman Lee laughed pleasantly. "Get in the car, Jones."

"Get in? Why?" This was a reasonable question.

"Because I want to help you," Lyman Lee explained heartily. "You see, I know more than the police do. One of the things I knew was that you and Funny Pegger were very good friends, and I had a hunch you'd go to Pegger. So I came to warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Yes. You should not associate with Funny Pegger. It's the worst thing you could do."

"It is my belief," said Jones sincerely, "that Funny Pegger is an estimable person."

"Of course. They don't come any finer. But you can see that the police may find you with Funny Pegger, and Funny will be in trouble."

"Er—that seems logical."

"You bet it is. But I can help you, Jones."

Distinctly against his better judgment, Jones entered the car, which Lyman Lee occupied alone, and the machine went into motion. The huge car swept along with the impressive effect of a dark cloud, with a radio speaker mounted in the top making quiet pleasant music after Lyman Lee turned it on. City streets at night, the strolling, neatly-dressed people, the sidewalk cafes which were a feature of this section, made an interesting novelty to Jones. He wished he had sufficient peace of mind to enjoy it.

Jones studied Lyman Lee. There was certainly nothing wrong with the latter's profile, at least. It occurred to Jones that he had not seen another man as lovely as this one.

Jones tried to push away doubts. On the yacht, he had disliked Lyman Lee; his impression had been that the feeling was mutual, and furthermore, he'd suspected Lyman Lee had base qualities, but he might be mistaken, although instincts kept insisting to the contrary.

"Character," remarked Jones thoughtfully, "is a sign, sometimes cabalistic, placed on an object or individual, and significant as a mark of some ulterior fact."

"What?"

"I was just wondering if one should disregard signs."

"I see," said Lyman Lee. Obviously he didn't. The large car rolled into a more pretentious part of town. Lyman Lee stopped before an only mildly imposing structure of reddish stone. "I'm going to rent you a room here," he explained. "This is a quiet place. You won't be bothered."

"Why, thank you."

"By the way, how are you fixed for money?"

"Er—I am without personal funds."

"Here's twenty," said Lyman Lee generously.

"But—"

"That's all right."

"I—thank you"

"I'll look you up later," said Lyman Lee.

Jones watched the swanky car leave, and assured himself he must be mistaken about Lyman Lee.

THE room was large, airy, and Jones' first act in examining it was to scrutinize himself in the full-length mirror in the closet door. He no longer looked like a freak off an iceberg. In the glass, he saw a tall, well-built young man with red hair who appeared, if anything, a year or so older than twenty-three.

The room was equipped with essentials: bed, dresser, clothes closet, chair, telephone, a bathroom, items to which he had become accustomed on the Polyphemus Ward yacht. The bed was not as soft as the one on the yacht, he found when he bounced on it. His exploring progressed to the telephone book, which fortunately had a clear explanation of its purpose printed in the front. That seemed to exhaust possibilities for exploration in the room.

He counted the sheaf of thousand-dollar bills. One hundred of them were still there. Giving away that money was going to be

much tougher than anticipated, he was beginning to realize. He put the roll back in a pocket, feeling futile again.

Furthermore, he was hungry. He had not eaten since breakfast on the yacht, and the excitement of approaching New York had caused him to slight that meal. The logical cure for being hungry was to find an establishment dispensing food, so he yanked his hat down to hide his red hair, and left the rooming house, taking however, a carful bearing so as to be able to find the place again. He walked toward a more brightly lighted part of town.

Numbers of people wore evening attire. Brilliant electric signs advertised products of which Jones had never heard. A large glass window marked "Cafeteria" interested him after he saw people eating inside, and observation showed him how they got their food, so he entered, pulled a green ticket out of the contraption by the door and got tray, knife, fork, spoon, paper napkin. He collected enough food to make the other customers stare in astonishment, paid for it with part of Lyman Lee's twenty, and ate. Then he leaned back, imitated a nearby diner in manipulating a toothpick, and felt he was beginning to do rather well.

There is enough animal in man that food seems to equip him with a feeling of spurious well-being. Jones was feeling less like a lamb on strange wolf range.

After leaving the cafeteria, Jones decided to stroll around and make another effort to find a needy man. He felt all primed to make another attempt to give away a thousand-dollar bill. Almost immediately, he saw a likely-looking prospect. What Jones didn't know was that his prospect was one of the tribe of petty criminals that seems to flourish under the nose of New York's allegedly brilliant police department. This fellow was a car-watcher. Actually, he was a petty racketeer, shabby, dirty, vicious, and an outstanding example of what the psychologists call antisocial. He was accosting a motorist and hinting that the motorist might find his tires slashed and paint job scraped with a knife point unless he contributed fifty cents to the watcher—who, of course, would keep such vandals away.

Jones thought the poor man was soliciting alms.

"I say," Jones remarked, by way of introduction.

The small-time crook scowled at the largish young man who had accosted him. "Yeah?" he muttered.

"Are you," Jones inquired, "a needy person?"

"Brother," said the other, as a matter of policy, "I ain't had nothin' to eat for two days. And me poor family is starvin'. I ain't," he added quickly, "been able to get on relief."

Jones felt it advisable to try a smaller amount, since a thousand dollars seemed to do strange things to needy people.

"Would one hundred dollars be of assistance to you?" he asked.

The thug batted his eyes, wiped his nose on the back of his hand.

"I ain't doin' nothin' shady enough to pay that big," he growled suspiciously. "Uh—not until I—uh—know you better."

"Honesty," said Jones irrelevantly, "comes from an old Roman word *honestus*, which at various times has meant a plant known as the satinpod, also a virgin's bower, as well as freedom from fraud or guile, the conventional meaning."

"Huh?" said the other.

"Honesty," added Jones, "is the best policy."

"Oh! Well—sure."

Jones extracted a thousand-dollar bill from a pocket, presented it to the man, and commanded: "Have this changed into currency of lesser denomination, if you please. Bring the money back to me, and you will receive your hundred dollars, in return for which I will expect you to give me some data concerning yourself for my records."

The man seized the banknote, probably with the same avid gesture he had used to snatch a few purses in his time.

"I'll be right back, buddy," he said unconvincingly.

He walked away with feigned unconcern until he could not restrain himself, then ran. He rounded a corner, got under a bright light, and peered at the bill. He really saw the denomination for the first time.

"Jeeps!"

He stared at the banknote, eyes protruding slightly. His mouth opened, shut. Suddenly, he put back his head, tore full speed into a dark side street. He stopped. He perspired.

"Jeeps!"

He changed stance from one foot to the other. He took off his hat, put it back on, chewed his lower lip.

Abruptly, he dashed out of the alley, and to the ticket window of a movie. He shoved the banknote at the blonde.

"Ick—ick—is that thing McCoy?" he croaked.

The theater cashier happened to be expert as well as blonde, and she knew, after a few moments of examining the piece of currency, that it was genuine.

"I think it's okay," she said. She shoved it back. "But we don't change anything bigger than a ten."

The small-bore crook snatched the bill, raced down the street. He came to another foolish stop. When he wiped sweat off, his hand shook until his knuckles knocked against his skull.

"Love a duck," he gasped. "I've gone nuts."

His eyes rolled; he mopped his lips with his tongue. He went into a species of trance, and walked stiffly back to Jones, carrying the bill as if it was something venomous held by the nape of the neck. He gave the banknote to Jones.

"Here!" he said.

Jones didn't want the bill. He had ninty-nine others just like it which he had to give away.

But the man dropped the note at Jones feet, turned and dashed down the street.

Jones slowly bent over, picked up the bill and sorrowfully replaced it with the others. It seemed that no one wanted to be given even a hundred dollars.

CHAPTER XIII

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

JONES sprawled on the bed in his room and tried to figure his fellow man. He was baffled by *homo sapiens*. They did not behave according to logic, the men being as erratic as the women, if not more so.

An electric clock on the dresser made a tiny whirring, audible only as there were lulls in the mumbling of the city at night. It was dark in the room, and quiet, and a little stifling as well, it seemed to Jones; almost undesirable when he compared it to the clean air of the Arctic, which he was accustomed to breathing. He began to wish he was back on the lonely island. The place had advantages he hadn't appreciated. There'd been no such things as old Polyphemus Ward, no hundred thousand-dollar bills—in a flash, Jones was wide awake. His face was grim.

He seized the telephone directory, found Polyphemus Ward's telephone number, and got connected, doing it the way it said in the front of the book. A voice informed him that Polyphemus Ward could not be disturbed.

"Get the old rep—er—gentleman on this telephonic device," Jones commanded emphatically. "Tell him this is Jones, the—ah—possessor of one hundred thousand dollars."

That was effective.

"Young man," roared Polyphemus Ward's crusty voice, "I told you I wanted to hear nothing out of you until you had succeeded or failed in your job."

"I wish to make a report," Jones said.

"Report? Report what? Have you lost my hundred thousand?"

"The report," said Jones stiffly, "concerns the state of my feelings."

"What?"

"If you were in this neighborhood," stated Jones grimly, "I should be inclined to give you an—er—sock on the jaw, even if you are an old man."

"By Harry, the door is open! You—you—whippersnapper! Old man, am I?"

"A bullying, cantankerous, squalling old

reprobate of a moneybag,' Jones said additionally. "I do not number you among my friends."

"You don't, eh?"

"You," said Jones, "did a worse trick to me than anybody."

"Worse trick!" Polyphemus Ward yelled. "Giving you a chance to get a million dollars and a job—that's a worse trick, eh?"

"I am sure of it."

"What," snarled the financier, "are some of the tricks the others did to you?"

"Thus far, I have become engaged to a girl I am not sure I want, been accused of murder, been in jail and out, attacked by a thief, pursued by bank guards with guns, sought by police, inveigled into fisticuffs with my best friend by a girl, and the same girl has cast aspersions on my intelligence."

"Look out for that girl," Polyphemus Ward advised.

"I shall continue to endeavor to solve my own problems to the best of my ability," Jones replied.

"What about my hundred thousand dollars?"

"I still have it."

"All?"

"Every cent," said Jones disgustedly. "Which again reminds me that I consider you a cranky, browbeating, insulting old grab-dollars who doesn't care how much grief he makes for other people."

Jones hung up. He felt much better. He made a mental note to berate old Polyphemus Ward again the next time he got to feeling low.

AS FOR Polyphemus Ward, he threw the telephone across the room, kicked a chair over, hurled his cigar at the fireplace and sat down. He was in his chair three or four minutes and began to grin.

A man hadn't dared insult him in a dozen years. He found the novelty refreshing and further proof that Jones was not overawed by the fact that Polyphemus Ward had as many millions as Tammany has politicians. The financier considered himself a judge of character, and he had rated Jones well from the beginning, but there had been a time, after he had given Jones the hundred thousand, when Polyphemus Ward had wondered if one of the world's richest men had gone crazy. Doubts, big ones, had assailed him. He hoped Wall Street wouldn't hear about it. They'd be sure his mind had slipped.

The telephone talk had renewed his confidence in Jones.

"Givens," he growled at his butler, "I think I've picked a winner."

"Yes, sir," Givens said.

Polyphemus Ward scowled. "Givens, you're another yes-man. Don't you know that no one ever got a million dollars by saying yes."

"No, sir," said Givens hopefully.

Shakespeare said sleep was the hand that soothes dull care away, and Jones found this to be correct, awakening in the morning with healthy energy plus desire to be up and at it. He whistled as he dressed, instinctively sang as he swung to the door, bounced out into the corridor —and collided with a man.

"Excuse me," Jones said.

"Oh, to be sure," said the other half of the collision vaguely. "Oh, yes—I beg your pardon. I didn't intend to bump into you."

"No, no. I did the bumping."

"Eh? Why yes, yes, I'm very clumsy."

The man seemed completely absent-minded, and was a smallish, roundish sort of a benevolent-looking sheep. Apparently he had dressed without thinking, for his tie was awry. He wore large horn-rimmed spectacles in front of large soft eyes which reminded Jones of an infant seal.

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Ah—where shall we have breakfast? Mr.— Mr.—?" The nice little man peered at Jones, then looked confused. "Ah, bless me! I'm sorry. I—goodness!—I thought you were a gentleman who was to meet me for breakfast. Won't you excuse me?"

The little man went away nervously, leaving Jones feeling sorry for him because he was obviously such a confused, helpless lamb.

JONES himself headed for the cafeteria where he had eaten the night before, entered, pulled a ticket out of the contraption that rang a bell, and began loading his tray, only to discover he was standing next to the absent-minded little man from the rooming house.

The little man looked blankly at Jones.

"Ah—haven't we met before?"

"About five minutes ago."

"Why—yes. Oh, I remember." The little man chuckled jerkily at his own confusion. "It seems we are having breakfast together after all, doesn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," Jones agreed politely.

They filled their trays, moved to a table and sat down together. Jones was impressed by the extent of his companion's forgetfulness. The benevolent fellow seemed completely distraught—he fiddled with knife and fork, stared into space, then began putting salt in his coffee.

"I believe," Jones suggested, "that sugar, rather than salt is the proper combination with coffee."

"Why—oh, goodness! To be sure!" The other twittered nervously. "You see, I—I'm afraid I'm not completely myself this morning. I'm really at loss to know what to do. You see, a man was to meet me, and he hasn't appeared. Oh, gracious! He hasn't come, and I just know that means he has decided not to give financial support to my poor orphans. I don't know what we shall do, I really don't. But—oh, please excuse me. I didn't intend to bore you."

Jones was thoughtful.

"Orphan," he remarked, "is a child deprived of parentage, and commonly refers to such individuals when in need of care, I believe."

"Yes. Yes, exactly."

"You," Jones inquired, "have some orphans?"

"Oh, a large number. Poor things. I do not know what they shall do, now that we have no money. But—I must be boring you. Please don't pay any attention to me. I'm just distraught."

THE subject of orphans was not boring Jones. When he got back to his rooming house he sat on the bed and thought. The more he thought, the more interested he got. He took the idea of orphans whole-heartedly to bosom, sprang up, went out into the hallway and knocked on the door of the benevolent little man.

"May I come in?" Jones asked. "I wish to discuss the matter of orphans to greater extent."

"Yes, yes—of course. It's very kind of you to sympathize with me. I've noticed that so many people are bored by the troubles of other people. Do come in."

Jones entered a quietly furnished room in which there were some books. "Let us," he suggested, "get down to the basic facts."

"Why—I—of course."

"What is your connection with the orphans?" Jones inquired.

"They are my hobby. Some people collect stamps as a hobby. For my part, I collect orphans. My name is Goodman—Clarence Goodman, and once I had a fairish amount of money. A few years ago, I purchased a large house, and began taking in poor homeless children. The depression came, and soon I had lost my own money, after which I managed to raise small sums from people I knew. But lately, I have been unable to find more benefactors. My last prospect, a rich man, did not show up this morning, as you are aware.

"You gave all your own money to such a good purpose?" Jones inquired admiringly.

"Oh, I was quite glad to do so."

"You were?"

"Charity is wonderful."

"It has been my experience that charity is a hard thing to manage," Jones remarked.

The little man frowned. "Why, I do not believe I understand."

"It's a long story," Jones said, "we'll put it aside for the moment."

The benevolent little man sighed in a broken-hearted way.

"If it were a matter of pennies, it would

be simpler," he murmured disconsolately. "But it isn't. To tell the truth, I have exactly one hundred orphans, and it requires about a thousand dollars a year each to maintain them."

Jones smiled.

"A few thousand dollars would take care of our immediate needs," the other said. "Perhaps kind providence would provide our later needs."

"Hmmm," said Jones.

"Are you interested in charity, may I ask?"

Jones nodded happily

"To tell the truth," he explained, "I have decided that I must go in for charity on the bulk scale."

"Bulk scale?"

"Finding one needy person is too slow. I am already twenty thousand dollars behind schedule."

"Twenty thousand—I do not understand."

"I do not understand, either." Jones shook his head slowly. 'People baffle me. One would think it a simple matter to give away—but I won't bore you with my troubles. I see you have your own."

"I do have, indeed."

"At least," Jones said. "I can fix yours."

"Fix mine?"

"I can provide cash to operate your orphan institution for six months."

"You mean—you—fifty thousand dollars?"

"Exactly. That will put me nearly two days ahead of schedule."

"But—but——" The little man seemed about to faint.

"And later, if things go well," Jones added, "I shall be in a position to aid orphans further."

"Oh—oh—I—" The ittle man swayed. "I feel—oh, so happy!"

Jones suddenly remembered all men are not honest.

"Of course," he stated, "I should like to see this institution and the orphans."

"You can—at once!" exclaimed the benevolent little man.

CHAPTER XIV

IT HARDLY EVER RAINS

THEY drove northward out of the city in a little old rattletrap of a car that was somehow nice and homey like its owner. The benevolent little man seemed to be so happy that he was in danger of driving them into other motorists. He actually shook with joy.

Jones himself was experiencing a pleasant warmth. He was discovering the existence of a fine unconscious quality in the human being that enables him to draw delight from doing good for others, one capacity that makes man different from animal and indicates there may be such a thing as a soul.

The orphanage was a long, two-story, rambling old structure in much need of repair. Jones stepped out of the car and looked at it. It gave him a heart-clutch. There were children running and playing, and the little tikes weren't too well dressed. One little girl, seated on the sagging front steps, was bent over and sobbing gently, and Jones' benevolent companion stooped over the child and patted her head.

"What is wrong, honey?" he inquired gently.

The little girl sniffled. "Hungry," she said miserably.

Jones noted that his companion seemed about to shed tears as they moved on.

"We're actually out of food," the little man explained.

Jones was moved, and as he continued his inspection, he became convinced he would never find a more deserving receptacle for fifty thousand dollars.

"Er—there hardly seems to be a hundred children here, however," he suggested.

"No, no, some of the little darlings are out on a hike in the country this morning," the little man replied. "Ah—sometimes the good people of the countryside give them something to eat."

"Goodness! You mean they beg for food?"

"They—they can't—starve," the little man said, and his voice broke.

Jones became determined. "I will give fifty thousand dollars at once," he announced. "We shall draw up a legal document stating that each of these one hundred needy children is receiving five hundred dollars."

"The money will be in my custody—"

"Of course."

The little man smiled tearfully. "There is a notary public nearby who will witness the document, stamp it and make it legal."

The notary public was a long lean gentleman, notable chiefly for a drooping moustache and a chew of tobacco.

"You're just like an angel," the little man told Jones repeatedly.

BACK in New York, in his rooming house, Jones could not restrain his enthusiasm. He bounced delightfully on the bed, feeling as an angel probably must feel after some conspicuous benevolence. Charity, as the little man had said, was wonderful. Half the hundred thousand disposed of at one lick! The job wasn't going to be so tough. Jones even felt inclined to think of old Polyphemus Ward as a friend.

He desired to share his exultation with someone, and thought, naturally of Funny Pegger. Why not? He could communicate with Funny Pegger via telephone, and at least tell Peggy he was making his own way gloriously.

Funny Pegger was listed in the telephone book. Shortly Jones had him on the wire.

"I—er—thought you might be wondering about me," Jones explained.

"I was!" yelled Funny Pegger.

"You were?"

"Yes. I was at the zoo this morning."

"Er—I do not see why you should be angry with me. You're—ah—barking."

"Am I?"

"However," added Jones hopefully, 'isn't there a saying that a barking dog never bites?"

"How can he," asked Funny Pegger, "when he's biting?"

"I—ummm—just wanted to tell you I am progressing very well."

"Where are you now?"

"In a rooming house, in a room numbered eleven. And I believe the house is number seven on a thoroughfare designated as Cheare Street."

"The combination should bring you luck."

"Yes. I'm very grateful to Mr. Lee for bringing me here."

"Grateful—to who?"

"Lyman Lee."

"To *who?* Whom?"

"I told you—"

"Never mind. I must have heard you. I—oh, my—can you reach your bed from where you're sitting?"

"Why, yes."

"Can you take hold of the bedstead?"

"Oh, yes."

"Do that," said Funny Pegger, "and don't let go until I get there."

JONES contemplated the telephone, squinting one eye doubtfully, reflecting that Funny Pegger had sounded like a man seized with pains. But there was not a great deal of time to puzzle about the phenomenon, because a taxicab slid to a halt in the street in a remarkably few minutes, and Funny Pegger dashed in, accompanied by Vix, in person. Jones stared.

"Won't you come in and take your things off?" he asked politely.

"What kind of a girl," Vix inquired, "do you think I am?"

"Er—"

Funny Pegger said, "Don't mind her, Jones. I forgot to nail her down before I left." He frowned darkly at Vix. "You take a back seat. Keep your nose out of this."

Funny moved nearer to peer at Jones strangely.

Jones became uncomfortable. "Er—is something wrong?" he wanted to know.

"That's what I wonder."

"I don't understand."

"Nobody else does, either." Funny Pegger shook his head in a dazed way. "Boy, this gets me. You say Lyman Lee parked you here? Never mind—that's what you did say. And it ain't the natural ways of nature, at all. Lyman Lee—well, it just couldn't happen."

Vix nodded her head so vehemently that her bright hair flew.

"Lyman Lee never does anything for anybody except himself. He's for number one, always. He even tried to marry—"

"Ahem!" said Funny Pegger.

Vix bit her lip. "Well, he did. He tried to marry Polyphemus Ward's daughter for her money! Can you imagine anything worse than marrying a woman for money?"

"Yes," said Funny Pegger. "Marrying one for beads, like the Indians used to do."

The redheaded girl stamped a foot.

"Some day you're going to choke on one of those mummies you call gags," she said.

"Most cats can see in the dark," retorted the gag man. "But some can talk."

The girl subsided.

"Now that I've disposed of her," Funny Pegger said, "maybe I can satisfy deep curiosity about you, Jones. First crack out of the box, tell me why you skipped out on us."

"Why—ah—I merely thought it advisable," Jones said uncomfortably.

"Come on, come on, why?"

"Well," explained Jones modestly, "it was my desire to keep you out of my difficulties, since you were kind enough to befriend me."

Funny Pegger eyed Vix. "I told you."

"Which makes twice in my life I lose," Vix sniffed. "The other time was when Schmeling smacked Louis. Go ahead. I'm busy catching my breath."

Jones wished she wouldn't act as if he was something which needed pursuing with a fly-swatter.

Funny Pegger scrutinized Jones.

"I've got it!" he yelled suddenly. "You're pleased about something!"

"Why—I—" Jones swallowed.

"Come on. What is it?"

"I have just given away fifty thousand dollars," Jones confessed, and grinned.

"You—to—" Funny Pegger staggered.

"Bear up, my lad," Vix advised. "Remember! Jones has a perfectly level head. You told me so."

"Levity," said Jones in an injured tone, "is a tendency opposite that of gravity, and designates a lack of earnestness in deportment or character."

"Fifty grand!" Funny Pegger croaked.

"Exactly."

"Gave it away!"

"Very successfully," Jones smiled.

"You—who took you?"

"What?" Jones frowned.

THEN he explained about the orphans. Funny Pegger said, "Let me hold onto something," and went over to take hold of the bedstead. He listened, then stared at the auburn-haired girl. "Your car is outside?" he croaked.

Vix dashed for the door. "I'm ahead of you."

Jones found himself bustled outside and shoved into a car which he suspected must be nearly as old as himself.

"Where were these orphans, Genius?"

"Genius?" Jones was puzzled.

"Genius," said the girl, "is you!"

"Genius. That's her idea of a name for you," Funny Pegger explained.

Jones thought it a dubious compliment.

"The orphans are in a northerly direction," he said.

The rambling orphan home looked more dilapidated than ever as Vix brought her car up before the place and made the elderly machine stop by switching off the motor while still in gear.

Jones stared around for orphans. Something slipped inside him.

Suddenly, Jones sprang out of the car, ran to the ancient house, wrenched the front door open and leaped inside. No one in sight. He ran through that room into another. He saw cots in neat rows. None were occupied. The next three rooms were all empty.

Vix and Funny Pegger came and stood beside Jones, but did not say anything,

and he did not look at them. The only audible thing was Jones' breathing.

A long rumbling thump came from the rear of the house and Jones, racing to the sound, found himself looking at a middle-aged fellow, a stranger, who was dragging chairs to one wall and stacking them there, and who at once stopped working and stared at Jones.

"Funny thing," the stranger remarked as if to himself. "Them birds rented this place for a month, but only used it today."

He scratched his jaw.

"They got a lot of child actors up here, and was rehearsin' 'em all morning, or something," he added.

He shook his head.

"Then they all pulled their freight in a dickens of a hurry," he continued.

The man took out a tobacco plug and bit it.

"Anyhow, they paid me in advance, so let somebody else worry," he finished.

Jones walked out and got in the car, and Vix and Funny Pegger got in with him, and Vix started the engine, then Funny Pegger pulled in a deep breath.

"*Genius* Jones!" he said. "Of all the—"

Vix reached out and slapped him.

"Ouch!" yelled the gag man. "What—"

"Only a dog," Vix said grimly, "bites a rabbit after it is caught."

SHE jerked the gears in mesh, turned the wreck by backing into the driveway, then drove toward New York, and all three of them were silent, but Jones managed, somehow, to remain more speechless than the other two. Automobiles that tooted horns behind them seemed to jeer.

They entered Jones' rooming house, and Jones went to the door of the room used by the benevolent little man, and it was locked, but the lock splintered out with very little noise when he threw a shoulder against the door.

He stalked in, gazed gravely at the room's emptiness, then tramped to his own room, sank on the bed, and with a curious kind of interest, contemplated his hand

He blocked the hands into fists. The became formidable. They were capabl fists. Jones stood up.

"My trouble," he said emphatically "has been imitation."

There was new firmness in Jones' voic

"Until now," he stated, "Jones has bee under the impression that he did not un derstand people. Jones wished to lear about people, so he has been imitatin them."

Vix looked interested.

"A notable thing about sheep," Jone said, "is that they follow a leader. On sheep takes the initiative, and the other imitate. I have been a sheep. But a shee who tried to follow many leaders." H hit the bed with a fist. "I have been sheep!"

"Check!" Vix agreed.

"I have changed."

Vix nodded grimly. "It's about time."

"Instead of imitating people," Jones de clared sharply, "I am going to do thing to people!"

"Try, don't you mean?" Vix inquired

"I mean what I said. Do things!" H repeated this as if he fancied the sound

"What things, for instance?" Vix in quired.

"A variety.' Jones put out his jaw. have thought of several."

"Great! Now you look just like Musso lini," Vix told him.

"You wouldn't," Funny Pegger aske Jones, "be thinking of looking for Lyma Lee."

"That," said Jones, "is my first project."

If Jones had anything additional to say loud banging on the street door kept i back. Vix, bright hair flying, ran out into the hallway. She flashed back inside the next instant, slammed the door, turned the key.

"Lyman Lee is out there now!"

"Excellent!" Jones declared.

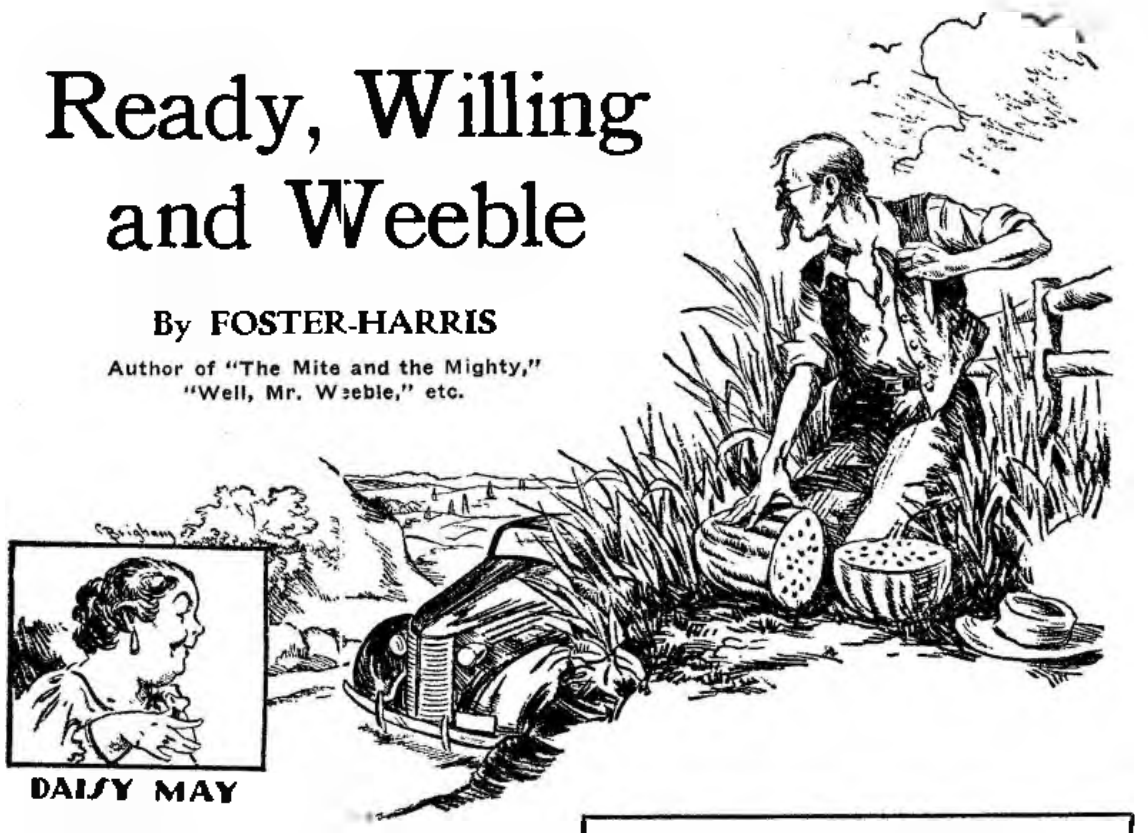
"It's not excellent at all," Vix headed Jones off. "Lyman has a flock of cops with him and they're hunting you."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Ready, Willing and Weeble

By FOSTER-HARRIS

Author of "The Mite and the Mighty," "Well, Mr. Weeble," etc.



In which Mr. Weeble, that demon mite of the oilfields, steals a melon and wins the favors of an heiress

CRIME, confound it, meditated Mr. Weeble, really doesn't pay. With a dejected sigh, he ooked down at the wages of sin before him. Fully forty pounds, that watermelon must weigh. It had been the biggest in the patch; and he had run at least a half mile with it, to reach this hiding place of crossroad weeds.

And here the darn thing was green enough to kill a pig.

Shaking his head mournfully, Mr. Weeble took off his glasses, and, for the millionth time, wiped away the blurring sweat. He was as hot and thirsty as he had ever been in his life. Since mid-morning he had been trudging up this blazing, Oklahoma oil country road, hopefully raising a blistered thumb that had elicited only derisive dust. No wonder the inviting sight of that melon patch had riddled his moral training in a twinkling.

But, look at it! Resignedly, Mr. Weeble cut off a sliver and thrust it into his mouth, chewing for the moisture at least. It made him a little homesick, for it tasted kind of like the watermelons back in Mr. Weeble's native Indiana. That is, kind of like a cross between a gourd and a board. Still, if Pottsburg, Indiana, couldn't raise everything, why it was still the garden spot of the earth, Mr. Weeble thought loyally. Its kindly citizens weren't the kind who'd let a man die and fry before they'd pick him up, either. . . .

The sound of an approaching motor reached his ears, and Mr. Weeble started to jump up, then remembered his currently criminal status and sank guiltily back instead. That might be the farmer who owned the melon patch. The car was coming on the country lane crossroad, too, he noted, and not the highway.

His horse weeds hiding place was on top of a ten-foot cutbank, right at the corner. The weeds weren't high. If he sat up to see, inevitably he would be seen. So he lay doggo, listening, while the car raced up to a spot almost directly below him.

There it stopped!

"You see him? Got your gat ready?" asked a hard voice, and Mr. Weeble almost had a cold chill of swift terror. If he hadn't been so hot, it would have been a chill. "Naw, but we're ahead of him, sure," answered another voice instantly. "Watch the road, there. He'll be comin' along any minute."

Then there was silence—in which Mr. Weeble could feel his heart riveting his ribs.

Somehow, they didn't quite sound like enraged farmers seeking a melon thief. But Mr. Weeble couldn't be sure. He didn't dare run, anyhow. Impending violence for somebody throbbed in the very air of this peaceful corner. Quivering, little Mr. Weeble wished fervently that he hadn't stolen that melon, wasn't up here, and, in fact, never had even thought about visiting Pinnfield, Oklahoma.

He was not given long to wish. Almost immediately he caught the racing roar of another car, this time on the highway. "There they come! Okay, bo, tail onto dat roscoe!" said the savage voice below.

The waiting car surged forward a few feet, there was the scream of brakes, a thump, and then a shrill, angry shout.

"Why, you pie-eyed apes!" a new voice said. "What you mean, blocking the road with that wreck! Move it, or I'll—"

"You'll do what, Picklesnoot?" That was Savage Voice, chopping High Yeller off right over the tonsils. "Shut up! This is a heist! A holdup! Climb outa that boat, hellity quick! Move!"

Mr. Weeble waited to hear no more. He was a man of peace, but even a pacifist loves other people's troubles. Besides, jutting from mild, little Mr. Weeble's upper lip was that astounding mustache. Prima facial evidence, you might have called it, that within him ran the red blood of fight fans. Quivering with horrified curiosity, Mr. Weeble arose for a gander.

Almost directly below him, a great, shining sedan was stopped with its right wheels perilously near the ditch. It had missed collision with the blockading bandit car by about two feet. The outlaw with the bulldozing voice was already jerking open the door, swearing raucously and waving a pistol. The second bandit was just coming around beside him, with a sub-machine gun.

"Come on, sprawl out, you cat-whiskered runt!" The first heister snarled. "Yeah, and you too, skirt! Git out, yuh hear me? Why, I'll sock yuh, yuh big cow!"

The high treble of a woman's scream split the breeze then—and Mr. Weeble saw scarlet.

If there was anybody on earth he liked less than some hijackers, it was other hijackers. Brutes who would manhandle a woman, for example. Viking whiskers aflare, Mr. Weeble went into action.

THE only weapon at hand was the watermelon Whirling up the heavier half in both hands, Mr. Weeble took swift, deadly aim at the head of the outlaw below, and let fly.

Punk! said the melon viciously, and knocked the hijacker cold. With a wild, Norse battlecry, Mr. Weeble whirled up the other half, bombing for the second heister. That unworthy whirled about, saw it coming, and swung his weapon like a bat.

He would have done better to have dodged, for he missed; and the melon did not.

Face to face, it met him, and the result was weirdly horrible. Down went the bandit, in a ghastly welter of gore, or watermelon, or maybe both. It looked awful. Like one of those horrors du combat he'd read about, Mr. Weeble thought.

Suddenly aghast at his own brutality, he started to scramble down.

But the second outlaw wasn't dead yet, and the occupants of the car, apparently, were just starting to fight. A gorgeous pair of cowboy boots came kicking out. There were pipestem legs in those boots, but for the instant, Mr Weeble didn't notice. All he could see was flashing, Mexican spurs with wicked rowels. Those rowels went to work.

"E-e-e-yow! Buck, you hellion!" screamed the high voice. With an unearthly yowl, the second bandit complied. A deftly hooking spur lifted a foot of hide and shirt as he made his first pitch. His second was a lulu, throwing his rider, turning in midair, and actually sailing toward his own car.

He hit it headfirst, and he must have worked clutch and accelerator with his hands, for the car shot away with a roar.

Peace descended, along with a cloud of dust. Pulse pounding, Mr. Weeble adjusted his glasses and peered again at the shambles.

"Are—are you all right, now?" he inquired solicitously.

"Huh?" The wearer of the cowboy boots lifted a red-leather face. He was about five four, Mr. Weeble judged, even in those high heels. He had perhaps four feeble hairs, catfish effect, on each side of his nose. But undoubtedly he was Somebody Important, for his voice, like his car, instantly said so.

"Was you the one heaved them melons? You was? Well, for creep's sake, then, why yuh stayin' up there? Come down! You've just saved our lives!"

Blushing modestly, Mr. Weeble slid the rest of the way down. The booted midget gave Bandit No. 1 an experimental spurring, to prove beyond doubt he was out. Then, with vast enthusiasm, he caught both Mr. Weeble's hands.

"Pinn's my name, sir!" he roared. "Colonel Carter Pinn. That was the prettiest melon th'owin' I ever saw in my life! I want to thank you, for both my little girl here and for my—"

For the first time, then, his eyes really registered Mr. Weeble's remarkable mustache. He stopped short, with a gulp, and a sort of awe came into his face. "Uh, my —my gadflies, pardner!" he whispered dazedly. "Is them whiskers really home growed?"

"Sir-r!" Mr. Weeble stiffened, with a angry sparkle. The rest of him might be indeed deceptive, but that mustache wasn't fooling. A foot from tip to tip, it was his pride and joy, a firebrand, a fighting badge such as any two gun sheriff would have envied. And the scraps it had gotten Mr. Weeble into . . . !

"Forty years I been tryin' to sprout handlebars like them." Colonel Carter Pinn's tone was disarmingly wistful. His hand crept to the pathetic bristle on his own lip. "And, dangit, look!"

"I see." Mr. Weeble felt his ire ebb in a rush of sympathy. Forty years' effort in that Mickey Mouse! Mr. Weeble groped for consoling words. Before he could find them, the colonel had turned, and had flung himself into the car with a sudden shriek.

"Great gallinippers, my baby! My little girl! They've shot her! They've murdered her, the scoundrels! She's fainted! Do something! Water, quick! Get a doctor!"

"But—but, good heavens, sir! Where shall I—"

It was Mr. Weeble's turn to gulp. From the Colonel's tone, he had expected an infant there on the back seat, or anyway a small child. But the baby instead was a buster, a full grown woman and then some. To Mr. Weeble's astounded eyes, she looked to weigh easily two hundred and fifty pounds, just what he could see.

"I—but she can't be shot. They didn't shoot," he managed, in a helpless flutter. Dreadfully skirt-shy all his life, Mr. Weeble knew nothing about resuscitating fainting females, especially not on such a large scale as this. He caught up a fragment of the shattered watermelon, and leaned into the car.

"Perhaps if—if you'd just let me wash her face with this," he suggested. "It—the juice you know—wet—" He started to press the dripping mess against the lady's face.

Apparently it was the right treatment. The lady shuddered violently, pushed it away and sat up.

"Where—where am I?" she asked. "Oh —those awful men—"

"There now, honeybunch, there!" The colonel cradled her head fondly against his breast. "You're safe. Don't cry. The

nice man here has just plumb ruint those men, that's all. The dirty scuts! Don't cry, now, Daddy and the nice man won't let anybody hurt our Daisy May. Will we, Mister—Mister—?" He paused inquiringly.

"Weeble is the name, sir," supplied Mr. Weeble politely. And the effect was miraculous, for Daisy May sat up with a wide-eyed gasp.

"Oh!" Her cry was ecstatic. "It—it is! Mr. Weeble! Look, Daddy, just like his picture in the paper! He does look like Granddaddy Pinn! And I—I just said—" She broke off, with a billowing blush, dropping her glance shyly.

"You're name's Weeble!" The colonel stared, then exploded. "Why, hail Columbia, of course! That mustache! Why on earth didn't I recognize you! Why, we've felt just like you were kinfolks, man, ever since we saw your picture in the paper! That time you buffaloed that lynch mob, down in Texas. I said to Daisy May at the time you looked the spit and image of my grandfather, Captain Lynch Pinn, of the Texas Rangers. And you do, you do!"

THE colonel leaped out and shook hands again, with tremendous enthusiasm. "This is a mighty happy moment, sir!" he roared. "Get in, get in! You're going home with us."

"But—wait a minute, Colonel!" protested Mr. Weeble. "The bandit here! Er—are we just going to leave him?"

"That scoundrel!" The colonel snorted. "You should have just slain him, sir! But here, help me heave him into the front seat, I'll take care of him. There! Now you, sir, in the back with my little girl. And I'll just let you take charge of the skunk's machine gun, too. All right, here we go."

With a deft flick of his spurs, the colonel sent the great machine hurtling on. Settling back in the corner, Mr. Weeble poked the machine gun gingerly out the window, for safety.

"Why, you—you're really just like a knight errant, aren't you?" cooed Daisy May, with coy eyes. "Dropping right out of the sky and rescuing poor little me! Oh, Mr. Weeble, I'm so thrilled!"

"Er, ah, huh?" said Mr. Weeble, and realized he was embarrassedly holding that machine gun by the trigger. He let loose as though the thing had suddenly grown red hot.

The speeding car topped a low rise, and there ahead were oil well derricks, many of them, like pencil markings against the hot sky. Huge storage tanks dozed in herds here and there, like prehistoric mastodons. Still farther on, Mr. Weeble saw a town. With a proud chuckle, the colonel twisted.

"Well, what you think of my little oilfield, Weeble?" he demanded. "Just four wells, so far, that ain't on my land."

Behind their thick lenses, Mr. Weeble's mild eyes bulged suddenly to the size of full moons. "You—you mean—you own that whole oilfield?" For the first time he was connecting this magnificent midget's name with the name of this oil pool. Pinn-Pinnfield. "Why—why, my gracious, sir!" said Mr. Weeble feebly.

"You never even heard of me before?" The colonel looked slightly hurt. "Well, by hayrakes, you're hearin' now! My little girl here and me, we not only own this field, but we got another, down in Texas, almost as good. Did you think you was just savin' a couple of tourists?"

"Father! How crude!" gasped Daisy May, and gave Mr. Weeble an apologetic, melting glance. "Of course Mr. Weeble didn't know whom we are! I'm sure it wouldn't have mattered a particle to him if he had. Mr. Weeble is a gallant gentleman, aren't you, Mr. Weeble?"

Burning to the ears, Mr. Weeble gulped. "Well, anyways, fer two Pinns, he shore puts up a good fight," grinned the colonel. He beamed approvingly, and shot the car roaring on.

In the boom town, he paused briefly to turn the still unconscious bandit over to an obsequious marshal. Then when Mr. Weeble also would have gotten out, he

laid a swift, detaining hand on Mr. Weeble's sleeve.

"Hey, where you think you're goin'?" he demanded. "Git back in! You ain't gittin' away!" And before Mr. Weeble could protest, he had slammed the door.

Just outside the tumultuous town, he swung on two wheels through an elaborate gateway, heading toward a huge, white stone building. "The new dump," informed the colonel. "Snooty, huh? Cost more'n the state capitol." With a proud chuckle, he pointed to the luxuriant vegetation carpeting the 40-acre front yard.

"And that's the best alfalfa in all Oklahoma, by dogy! Ain't it pretty? Makes more hay than—" He broke off suddenly, with a pleased grunt, as they rounded the corner of the mansion. "Hey, Daisy May, look, they've delivered that new boiler I ordered!"

Mr. Weeble gasped. If the front yard had seemed slightly unique for a multi-millionaire's palace, this back yard was extensively colossal. It looked like a junkman's dream.

Wagons were there, buggies, a combine thresher, cultivators, trucks and cars, oil well equipment, of all shapes and sizes. There was even a gigantic separator, and a complete steel derrick. To complete the picture, over to one side was a huge cage full of very lively squirrels.

The great car swung to a velvet halt, and a man in butler's garb came leisurely to open the door. Probably he was a combination man, Mr. Weeble judged. On his head was a Carlsbad Stetson, and below his knee pants were very attractive cowboy boots.

"Now, Papa, don't you dare let Mr. Weeble escape!" commanded Daisy May archly, and went skipping into the house. That was quite a sight too, Mr. Weeble thought. Two hundred and fifty bounding pounds. The little colonel took him firmly by the arm, ushering him in.

THEY passed through a gargantuan kitchen, up a hallway and entered the colonel's study. It was breath-takingly magnificent, Mr. Weeble saw with awe. There were even great, shining, Grecian urn looking things which were filled with sawdust, and which Mr. Weeble realized at last were cuspidors. Solid gold spittoons!

But the colonel's desk itself was an ancient, scarred, homely affair, worth perhaps all of seventy-five cents. Intuitively, Mr. Weeble knew the little man must have clung to that relic, as to an old friend, through all his rise to fortune. And somehow, its presence amidst all this luxury was reassuring.

With a genial wave, the colonel assigned Mr. Weeble to a red leather lounge chair, and cocked his own spurred feet on the desk. "Pardner, you look dry," he commented with discernment. "What'll it be? Kentucky Special?"

"Just water, please," dissented Mr. Weeble modestly. But the colonel was already shouting the order.

"Sam! Hey, Sam! Where the double hitched hangnails—oh! Two long, tall, cold ones, pronto! Oh yeah, and some water, too."

"Comin' right up, boss!" waved the butler in boots.

Almost immediately, he reappeared with clinking pitcher and glasses, on a silver tray. "Service, huh?" he asked cheerfully.

"Yeah. But you're a helluva lookin' butler," commented the colonel, without animus. "Ain't you ever gonna wear them fancy slippers Daisy May bought you? Hand the gent his poison."

The butler obeyed, and Mr. Weeble gave the frosty, inviting innocence of the glass one suspicious look. But a prairie fire would have compared with the thirst in his throat by now. He took a long gulp.

He had the instant impression of having swallowed a bolt of lightning.

"Chaser?" inquired the colonel. "Those Pinn wheel specials sure make you go round and round, huh? Well, Sam, dangit, water the gent!"

With some difficulty, Mr. Weeble got that lightning properly dampened and grounded. The colonel, meantime, had

taken his own punishment without a quiver. He waved the butler out, and got solemnly down to business.

"You know, Weeble, I've a suspicion you did us an even bigger service than you realize. If those polecats weren't something more than just hijackers—" The colonel broke off abruptly, reaching for his pocket. "I'm going to give you a thousand dollars."

"Sir!" Mr. Weeble got to his feet, looking like an indignant little owl. That iced lightning was still doing things to his insides, and perhaps also to his virtuous pride. "I don't take pay for er, uh, aiding ladies in distress, sir!" he snapped stiffly. "I will bid you good day!"

He started toward the door—only to be stopped short by the colonel's imperious bellow.

"Hold on there, you hear! Sit down!" The colonel gestured ferociously, but with high approval in his eye. "That's better! Weeble, by the ding doorbells, the more I see of you, the more I like you! Uh, by any chance you looking for a job?"

"Why, er, yes." Mr. Weeble nodded dubiously. "But I don't—"

"Fine! You're hired!" The colonel banged his desk. "Hundred a week and your keep, okay? Fine! Here's your first week's pay. Take it!"

"But—good gracious, sir! I—I can't—that is, you don't—" The amazed Mr. Weeble jerked hurriedly back, to avoid swallowing that hundred dollar bill the colonel was thrusting at him. "What I mean is, I don't know whether I can fill the job or not unless you tell me what it is," he went on more firmly. "And you—why you don't know a thing about me—"

"Is zat so!" The colonel bounced to his feet, ramming the money into Mr. Weeble's hand by main force. "Shut up! Sit down! You tryin' to tell me I don't know a good man when I see him! Why, happy, howling hellos, you dumb dogie, you talk, look and act just like us Pinns! You might be one! Take a look, take a look!"

His arms waved wildly, and for the first time Mr. Weeble noted the portraits lining the walls. They were all life size or larger, all real oils, although copied obviously from faded daguerrotypes or photos. And the ferocious forest of whiskers . . ."

"That'n there with the red handlebars, just like yours, is Cap'n Lynch Pinn, my granddaddy," informed the colonel, with fierce pride. "If he'd just been at the Alamo, why Santa Ana wouldn't of won. Santa Ana admitted it. That's my father there, Grizzly Bar Pinn. Joined the Comanches, he did, when he was a boy, and when they come to settle the tribe here in Oklahoma, why he was so wild they had to give him a reservation all by himself. And that'n in the corner with the beard, old Necktie Pinn, my great uncle—"

THE little colonel broke off suddenly, with wistful eyes. "They were men, Weeble," he breathed humbly. "He-men, with hair on their chests, and whiskers! They'd turn over in their graves, I reckon, if they knew they'd spawned a dang Mexican hairless, like me. Why, I'd give fifty thousand dollars for a mustache like yours—"

He shook himself, cheerful again, before Mr. Weeble could find words. "Well, anyway, you're hired." He pawed through the desk, to produce a huge, single action Colt. "Stick this in your pants," he directed crisply. "I'm goin' back to town awhile now. You hang around. I'll be back in an hour or so."

"But—my dear sir!" The colonel had gotten almost to the door before flabbergasted Mr. Weeble could let out his wail. "What on earth are you hiring me to do? To—to be an ancestor or something?"

"No, I ain't hirin' you for no ancestor." The little colonel barely hesitated in his exit. "Got some. I'm hirin' you as a fightin' bodyguard for Daisy May. I got a hunch those hijackers you conked were really kidnapers."

The door slammed and he was gone. Holding the huge pistol timidly in one

gand, and the bill in the other, Mr. Weeble sat down. He would have to think this over. Much as he needed a job . . .

After about ten minutes' thought, he put the bill in his pocket. He would try anything once, he had decided. Even to guarding Daisy May. Considering how much there was to be guarded, why doubtless such a job was worth a hundred a week.

He stowed the pistol in his hip pocket, upside down, and stalked over to look at the pictures. Even with his glasses, Mr. Weeble was still a bi: near-sighted. But a man can't have everything, he reflected contentedly. Unless the painter had erred, for example, that mustachio on the redoubtable Captain Lynch Pinn really had been nowhere near as good as Mr. Weeble's own. It was lopsided, and furthermore—

A girlish giggle sounded behind him, and Mr. Weeble whirled, with a blush. It was Daisy May. But she wasn't laughing at him. She had changed her dress, and her eyes were wide, soulful, innocent.

"Oh, Mr. Weeble, I'm so pleased!" she breathed rapturously "Daddy told me. You're going to take care of little me?"

"I'm going to do my very best, Madam," assured Mr. Weeble stoutly, and set his jaw, like the ferocious Ranger captain there in the picture.

Daisy May clasped her hands in delight.

"Oh, but you do so look like Granddaddy Lynch, Mr. Weeble, you do! The same Pinn eyes! Yes, and mouth, and head!"

"Huh?" said Mr. Weeble, with a somehow uncomfortable feeling. But Daisy May was rattling on.

"It's perfectly amazing! And you mustn't call me Madam. Call me Daisy. And I'll call you—what is your first name, Mr. Weeble? . . . Wallace? Now isn't that just too remarkable! Granddaddy Lynch's real name was Wilbert! W—just like yours! I'll call you Wally, may I? But I do hope you don't carry this resemblance too far, Mr. Weeble. Oh, Wally, I mean! Because—"

Perforce, Daisy May paused for breath, with arch lashes. "You see, Granddaddy Lynch was a perfect devil with the ladies! Oh, in a gentlemanly way, I mean. But they used to say he'd break a girl's heart before breakfast every morning, isn't that awful! Do—do you believe in love at first sight, Mr. Wee—Wally?"

"Before breakfast?" echoed Mr. Weeble faintly. "My heavens!"

He was beginning to appreciate that this job wasn't any mere reward. It was work. . . .

BEFORE the colonel returned from town, an hour later, Mr. Weeble was sure of it.

With unconscious kindliness, the colonel gave him a respite by calling him into conclave. "Been down seeing about that bandit you busted, Weeble," he explained worriedly. "And I got some bad news. That jughead marshal took him to the hospital, y'see, and then went and looked him up in the files. And—well, look."

He handed Mr. Weeble a smudgy reward notice, from which glared what was unmistakably the photo of old Savage Voice himself. *Shark McShue, alias Snatcher Mike Gore, alias Joe the Chopper,* chattily informed the description. *Wanted on murder, kidnap and racketeering charges. This gangster is very dangerous, and all officers are warned. . . .*

Mr. Weeble shuddered, and read no more. "Whew!" he breathed. "How very, er, interesting! But now that he's safely behind bars—"

"That's just it!" Broke in the colonel, with an excited wave. "He ain't. While the marshal was over findin' out who he was, why McShue, he just got up and walked out. He's loose again! McShue, the kidnaper! Didn't I say that wasn't no hijacking, didn't I?"

"And I—I hit him with a watermelon!" gasped Mr. Weeble feebly.

But the colonel was driving on, in a swift, bleak voice.

"That was an attempted kidnaping you busted up, Weeble, that's what it was.

Either my little girl or me, or both of us. I'll take care of myself hereafter, but you —I want you to guard my little girl every minute. Those polecats may try again. You'll have plenty of help, of course, a dozen armed men right here in the house. But I'm depending on you, particular."

"You—you say there are a dozen other guards here, besides me?" Like a drowning man, Mr. Weeble caught at the straw. It was not very gallant, perhaps, but a man who has bashed a gunman on the head with a melon may need guards.

The colonel nodded vigorously. "There sure are. The yardmen, the cook, the butler, the boys out in the garage—they're all old cowhands of mine, all heeled. And they're crack shots, too. All you got to do is yell, if ever you need help, and they'll all come a runnin'."

"Is that so?" Mr. Weeble drew a relieved breath. Why, this wasn't such a bad job after all, he was thinking. Cowboy guards, crack shots—with abrupt reassurance, Mr. Weeble nodded.

"Under the circumstances, sir, you can depend on me doing my best," he assured solemnly. "Yes sir, my very best to please."

IT WAS a promise he would recall with regret during the next few days. Not that the McShue came troubling again. The McShue and his sidekick apparently had fled the state, not even leaving behind any tracks. And they had not kidnaped Daisy May; if such indeed had been their intention. But there were times when Mr. Weeble rather wished he had minded his own business and they had. It would have been such a lesson to them, Mr. Weeble was sure.

With boundless enthusiasm and energy, the colonel's darling had taken to her new guard like a kitty to a catnip mouse. She made Mr. Weeble go riding with her, play ping pong, take off his glasses. She even tried to wax his mustache, and when Mr. Weeble flatly rebelled, went into baby talk spasms of submissive delight. For the first time since he had sprouted that oriflamme, Mr. Weeble seriously considered shaving it off.

Why she had taken such a fancy to him, of course Mr. Weeble understood perfectly. There in the colonel's study were the portraits of all the other fellows Pinn women had fallen for. And they all had one feature—not one as good as Mr. Weeble's, though. Whiskers, Mr. Weeble presumed, had just sort of grown on this family, generation after generation, until they had become an obsession or something.

It was the fifth day that Mr. Weeble positively decided to quit, promises or not; and that very evening that the trouble happened. During the afternoon, Daisy May had made him pluck the petals off a sunflower, one by one, for the customary reason. Too late, the horrified Mr. Weeble realized the hussy must have counted those petals in advance.

"She loves me not. She loves—oh, oh, my gracious!" he had faltered, and there was Daisy, giggling girlishly.

Just in time, the colonel had called him over to admire the new ten-ton oil truck the motor company had just delivered.

"Ain't she a beaut, son?" With innocent pride, the colonel started the motor, to set the giant winch on the monster's back unreeling. "Say, hitch that line onto that rotary table over there, will you? Show you how she hoists. By goslin's, this baby could bulldog a battleship, pretty near!"

Obediently, Mr. Weeble caught the hook on the end of the steel cable uncoiling from the drum, and started to walk away. But before he could make the hitch, Daisy May's sweetly frosted voice lifted.

"Father! I want to speak to you! Will you come in the house at once?"

"Huh? What've I done now, honey bunch?" Shoulders meekly bowed, the colonel stopped the motor and went in.

To Mr. Weeble then, sudden, clear and silent, came the summons of the wild.

This job was getting entirely too dangerous. It was becoming just one hideous situation after another. And after all, Mr. Weeble had hired out to fight gangsters,

to be this spoiled heiress' watch dog. But here there were no gangsters, and Daisy May was rapidly converting him into a—a poodle, that was what. A thing like that cowboy, so lost to shame that he would actually flaunt that monkey suit between boots and Stetson—because Daisy May wanted a butler. Mr. Weeble blanched at his own peril.

He dropped the cable and half turned, debating with himself. Prudence was telling him to scram right now. But his conscience was sternly recalling that hundred dollars, still intact in his pocket. The colonel's money, the colonel's gun—and his own promise.

With a sigh, Mr. Weeble started toward the door. It would be risky, he knew, because if they caught him they wouldn't let *him* go. But he must at least leave the little colonel his property, and a letter of explanation. That was but elemental honesty. Perhaps, after all, the colonel had been utterly sincere in hiring him simply as a safeguard for his daughter. But Daisy May . . . Mr. Weeble shuddered violently as he contemplated the deadly deviousness of the female.

He got up to his room without detection, and locked himself in. They had assigned him quarters on the second floor, a gorgeous guest room right across from the colonel's, and within thirty steps of Daisy May's own overwhelming suite. Right where her guardie could hear her softest call, Daisy May had explained. Mr. Weeble shuddered again, and found pen and paper.

He had quite a time, composing that letter. After awhile, Daisy May's voice called plaintively for her guardie to come to dinner, but he paid no attention. The colonel's daughter was safe enough with her own parent, he mused grimly, even if the colonel might not be quite safe just now with her. He went on with his letter, tearing up one sheet after another.

It was dusk when at last he finished. He addressed an envelope to the colonel, tucked the hundred dollar bill inside with the letter, and propped it against the gun on the dresser. They'd see it there. And if this wasn't quite fair, to be quitting without advance notice, why neither had it been very sporting to hire him, without warning, as a woman's plaything, so Mr. Weeble thought wryly. He unlocked the door, peeped down the deserted hall, and slid out.

He intended stealing down the back stairs, and so away. But who can foresee the double dealing of that dizziest of all dames, Luck? Who ever said Luck was any lady? Just as Mr. Weeble was passing Daisy May's door, Luck, the cat, proved her treacherousness.

Without warning, the door whipped silently open. There was a surprised gasp, a curse, and then low, snapping command in a remembered snarl. "Oh, oh! Stop and reach, *you! Reach! One peep outa you*, bozo, and I'll blow yuh so high—"

BLOOD turning to ice water, Mr Weeble reached, like a jack-in-the-box on the bounce. He knew perfectly well whose voice that was, even before he turned. Shark McShue. McShue in the doorway, eyes glaring red murder, and two automatics leveled, point blank.

Behind the crouching gunman was a squirming, blanket swathed bundle in the arms of two more brawny mobsters. That, Mr. Weeble knew intuitively, must be Daisy May, bound and gagged. With incredible daring, the kidnapers were striking again, right in the mansion, right under the noses of the Pinn heiress' parent and guards.

And here was Mr. Weeble, weaponless and quitting, in the very face of emergency!

"Well, go on, cool him, Shark!" rapped one of the mobsmen hurriedly. "We ain't weekend guests. And this damn cow's—Oof!" The insulted Daisy had booted him where it mattered.

"Go on, scram fer the car wit' her!" Shark motioned curtly. "I'm right wit' you. But dis whiskers here—" He snapped forward, jabbing one of the automatics into Mr. Weeble's wabbling ribs. "You, Goat-

phiz!" he hissed balefully. "A guy wit' whiskers, they says—ain't you the wise bo conked me wit' dat watermelon?"

"Hell, they all got whiskers in this jernt, you fool!" broke in the second mobster angrily, before Mr. Weeble could even faint. "Come on, yuh dog! Fix that guy's face shut and come on, or they'll be on our necks! Write him a letter who is he, if yuh gotta know."

"I on'y wisht I was sure you was the bozo, Dogmush!" snarled Shark regretfully, and started to slug with a pistol butt. Changing his mind instantly, he pocketed the weapon instead, and gave Mr. Weeble a rude yank. "Git in dere in th' skirt's bood-war, mutt!" he commanded.

His iron fingers caught the great mustachio, pulling it taut around the edge of the door. And before the horrified Mr. Weeble could even realize what was happening to him, the door had slammed and locked, and McShue was withdrawing the key.

Muffled footsteps faded swiftly down the hall, and the crowning insult of it came home to Mr. Weeble at last. He, the bodyguard of an heiress, not shot, or even hit on the head. Just hung up helplessly by his whiskers, in a lady's boudoir. Like a mewling cat with its tail caught in a crack —the viciousness of it, the contempt, the insult!

With a squalling roar, Mr. Weeble went wild.

Clawing, scratching, bellowing, he reared back to pull that mustache loose from either the door or his face—or die trying. Honor, so to speak, was hanging by a hair. If he couldn't get free and do something dreadful to these fiends ere they fled, why Mr. Weeble didn't want to live longer. He craved to perish, right here.

The first furious yank, he gained nothing save hideous agony. But the Viking spirit within him was one furious flame now. The stiff upper lip—he could keep it, even in extremity like this. The second yank gave him leeway enough so that his frantic fingers could find purchase to aid. The third he was free, leaving a heart rending sacrifice of ragged red hairs behind. Murder in his heart, he whirled like a spinning dervish.

He was still locked in, and there was only this one door to the suite. But he could at least raise the alarm from a window. The far windows yonder looked down on the back yard, and somewhere down there the bandit getaway car would be waiting, he judged He dived forward, snatching vainly for weapons.

He reached the window. Not a sign of alarm in the cluttered yard below, not a single, excited voice. But, yes, there behind the new truck was a light, powerful car, with somebody crouching at the wheel. And here came the abductors, running, with the enwrapped Daisy May still in their grasp.

With a screaming Norse battlecry that would have done full credit to his hardiest ancestors, Mr. Weeble kicked out the window and leaped, fifteen feet to the ground.

HE SHOULD have killed himself. But he didn't. He lit running, roaring, utterly berserk, mad as a March hare. What he was going to do he didn't know, but he was heaven bent to do it. Empty handed, he was charging four desperate, armed criminals.

At least his wild yells were finally drawing attention. The big house was clamorous with alarm.

Spurting flame lanced at him as McShue whirled and fired. The other two gangsters were already heaving Daisy May into the car, diving in after her. But Mr. Weeble was not twenty feet away now. He saw McShue crouch and steady to blast him down.

At that moment something, like a great snake, caught at his flying feet. Head over heels, Mr. Weeble crashed down, sliding, skidding wildly, while screaming hot lead ripped the air above him.

He ended up squarely between the rear wheels of the bandit car. "Y'got 'im," Shark!" he heard the driver's frantic yap.

The snake something that had tripped

him was now across Mr. Weeble's neck, and he realized suddenly that it was the cable he had pulled from the truck winch.

The big hook was caught in his pants. Gears clashed above him, and he caught the colonel's shrill, frenetic scream from the mansion. "Weeble, quick!"

In a lightning burst of desperate action, Mr. Weeble flipped that cable loose, up over the axle just above his skinned nose, and hooked it fast.

The outlaw car shot from over him, like a Hadesian going home. The cable slapped him aside, with brutal, stunning force. Sixty or seventy feet of that cable must have been loose, fully enough to let the light car get going like the wind. . . .

And then, *bam!* Four bad bandits had reached the end of their rope.

The colonel hadn't entered about the brute might of that winch and line. Rear axle, wheels and all tore free from that flying car in one crashing yank. Ploughing the earth with its mutilated rear, the bandit machine skidded to a smashing stop.

Armed men were running from all directions now, Mr. Weeble knew dazedly. It was all over, save for gathering up some groggy gunmen. He could hear Daisy May screaming, high, lusty, full lunged. She didn't sound hurt, Mr. Weeble thought.

The next he knew, Daisy May's great arms were holding him tight, and her frantic voice was sobbing in his ear.

"Oh, my darling! Wally, speak to me! Speak to me!"

"Er—nice day, isn't it?" said Mr. Weeble faintly.

BUT the scene he would really remember was in the colonel's study, an hour later. The triumphant shouting, the tumult, had died. The sheriff and ten deputies had taken the dazed bandits away. Two doctors had looked Mr. Weeble over, without discovering anything surgically profitable. They had patched his bruises; and now Mr. Weeble and the little colonel were alone.

"My boy—" The colonel choked with emotion, and took a hasty swig out of his glass. "That—that's twice you've saved my little girl! Twice in a week, and at—at what a sacrifice, this time! I—I—how can I ever repay you!"

Mr. Weeble squirmed embarrassedly.

"Somehow, I knew the minute I laid eyes on you that you were the man I was hoping for. And my little girl—you can't fool a true woman's intuition, my boy. My little girl is a true Pinn and I always knew she'd choose a man I could be proud of, sir! She—she loves you, son. And it makes me—mighty happy."

With misty eye, the little colonel smiled at the pictured Pinns on the wall. Perhaps he visioned baby faces with long, curling—well, never mind. Who knows, anyway?

"She—we won't talk of money, my boy, but she has ten millions in her own right. And of course, all my fortune when I die. She's in the library now, waiting for you. Go in to her, my boy, with my blessing. Be good to her, safeguard her, tame her, because I—I—Oh, go on! Don't be bashful, Weeble, she loves you!"

With a strangling gulp, Mr. Weeble opened his mouth. But the colonel already was pushing him out into the hall. The door swung softly shut, and Mr. Weeble was alone with the Great Decision.

Ten million dollars waiting in the library up at the front end of the hall. Husband of an heiress, son-in-law of a multi-millionaire. A life of incredible luxury. Yes, but as a Daisy tamer, or more likely a spoiled woman's toy, her pet dog, a—a—just a mere safety Pinn!

At the rear end of the hall, Mr. Weeble suddenly noted a window was open. And somewhere, a clock was ticking.

Being an expensive clock, it ticked accurately on, one minute, two. In the library, an heiress to millions waited. In his study, the little colonel studied the fierce foliage of bygone Pinns.

And out in the darkness, with the wind in his whiskers and freedom in his soul, little Mr. Weeble was running like the dickens.

Sandhog

By
BORDEN CHASE

"Try it!" Blaucher shouted. "Just try it . . ."

WHEN Bert Saxon gave up his well-paying job as tunnel superintendent for the Touchet Construction Company to become business agent for the sandhogs' union, he gave up not only the job, and a chance for a full partnership with Paul Touchet, but his happiness with the girl he loved as well. For Kay McLane is a daughter of the sandhogs' clan. Established as an important New York dressmaker, she is trying to get away from the pain and misery that goes along with being a sandhog's woman. For Bert Saxon, the tunnel-boss, she is willing to forget that. But not for Bert the underpaid labor-organizer. Naturally, she turns to Paul Touchet, to his tact and sympathy, to his wealth and culture and gentleness—and Bert goes on alone, with his feet in the mud but, as he says, his head "in the stars."

Touchet wins the contract for the big East River tunnel job, but to get the capital to swing it he has to take into partnership Gus Blaucher, a grafter who's cheated his way up from the bottom of the ladder by any means he knows.

PAUL may wince when Blaucher trails the Slimy Specks all over his office, but to Bert, Blaucher is a mortal enemy. Every concession he can win from him is a triumph. Blaucher hides his time and then begins to put into practice the chiseling tactics that have always stood him in such good stead.

"From now on," Blaucher says, "Touchet may think he is the boss. But I'm taking over."

Blaucher is as good as his word—or better. Wherever he can, he uses cheaper labor than his contract calls for. When Bert threatens to take the men off the job, Specks pulls a gun on him. . . .

Together, Paul and Bert go to view the tunnel-head and find that the material Blaucher has ordered is rotten through and through. Bert senses that Paul is about to order the dangerous stuff out, to replace it with new—and then a few of the old sandhogs begin to bluster and threaten. Bert vainly tries to silence them; and Touchet, never the man to take a threat, refuses point-blank to lift a finger.

But when they are alone, Paul tries to bridge the gap between them. He offers Bert his old job back. Bert refuses but does accept Paul's invitation to dinner, which is to be a sort of peace powwow.

"It'll probably be the most expensive dinner you ever threw," Bert says. "After the fourth brandy, I'll present my demand for a new wage-scale and—"

"And I'll be much too tight to sign it. . . ."

This story began in the Argosy for November 13th

CHAPTER XVIII

BALANCE OF POWER

PAUL was seated at the grand piano and Bert was stretched on a low divan when the butler announced Kay McLane. The room was long and wide with windows that looked out over the East River. Rich deep-toned rugs covered the floors, beautifully carved chairs and tables of the Italian Renaissance were carefully placed about the music room. There were paintings that harmonized with the period—a Titian, two Tintorettos and at the far end of the room a Michelangelo that Paul had found in Venice and purchased with money that should have been set aside for a bad day. A single statuette by Cellini stood on a low table near the divan.

For the moment the worries of the day had been put aside and Bert rested. He was both glad and sorry Kay would be with them at dinner. Glad, because he wanted to see once again the girl whose slow smile was a haunting mind-picture that seldom left him. Sorry, because these few hours with her would again tear down the walls he had erected and force him to build them anew. As for the talk he would have with Paul about the tunnel, Bert was sure there would be little difficulty in convincing the contractor new material was necessary. They would match wits and bargain for concessions. It would be the game of business played as usual across a dinner table. Paul would concede a point to gain one. Bert would counter with a suggestion that might put a few more dollars into the envelopes of the muckers or iron men. As in each meeting of these two, the result would react in some way to the benefit of the sandhogs. Bert never let that thought drift from his mind.

He was planning the first move when Kay came into the room. She waved to Paul and crossed quickly to Bert. He stood up, took her hand then stepped back as though to study a picture.

"Beautiful," he said quietly. "The suave lady with the black hair. Some day a painter will see you, Kay. He'll dress you in black velvet, put a wand in your hand and seat you on the throne of Inferno."

"Inferno?" laughed Kay. "Good lord! Do I look like the queen of the sinners?"

"That isn't what I mean. Paul might tell you in music but words don't come well to my mouth—not words to express this idea."

"I think you'd better find a few to explain that remark about the lady in black," smiled Paul. He lifted Kay's hand and kissed it. "Just what did you mean, Bert?"

"Well—there's a certain calmness and poise about Kay that would be hers even if she were in the midst of Inferno. I—I used that word because of its association with Dante's work. As a youngster I came across an illustrated copy in which the pictures presented that place as a raging, howling, seething pit of horror. There were flames and billowing clouds of smoke—trees with faces and twisted arms—rocks that groaned and cried aloud. Oh, the whole thing made such a terrible impression upon my mind I was awake for nights."

"And you picture me there?" smiled Kay.

"No—not exactly. But if such a place must have a queen—only Kay McLane could reign untouched by the things about her."

"Too bad your talent went toward steel and sand, rather than toward paint and canvas," said Paul thoughtfully. "People call me a dreamer. Compared to you, Bert, I'm the most practical man on earth."

"Being a woman," said Kay, "I'm still trying to determine whether or not I've received a compliment. That allusion to black velvet may be a subtle dig at this dress. Is it, Bert?"

"Of course not," said Bert. "And let's talk about something else. No more illusion. I'm sorry I started it."

THE butler brought a Sheffield tray upon which were three clear crystal glasses filled with golden sherry. Kay

called him by name, thanked him and touched the wine to her lips. She walked to the wide windows and looked out into the night.

Perhaps, in a few words Bert had told her more than he realized. When Paul had phoned asking her to dine with them—when he had said Bert would be there, a quick surge had come to her pulse. It was as though a tremble had shaken the hand that poured wine into a tilted glass. Kay recognized it—knew it had been the same each time she had seen Bert. While she paused in the selection of a gown for the evening, she wondered if this would always be. And deliberately, knowing the effect she would create in it, she had chosen a clinging gown of chiffon velvet. Black and daring. At her dressing table, she had smiled that slow and provocative smile of which Bert had spoken. Smiled into the mirror and watched the reflection as a person apart—a critic. She studied the slight lift of her lips and the flare that widened her nostrils. She tilted her head and caught the glint that came from her sleek hair. Her eyes, the line of her cheek—Kay looked at each and knew she was beautiful. Knew Bert would find her so.

And when she crossed the long room with her hands lifted to his, she was conscious of the picture she made. Glad she was provocative. Then Bert had spoken. When he visualized her as the queen of Inferno had he not meant his own?—one she had created in his mind? Kay knew he loved her. Knew he wanted her. And wanting *him*, her attack had been merciless. But now, for the first time she was faced with results of this attack. She wanted to be sorry—wanted to be ashamed. But she couldn't. She was glad—viciously glad she tormented Bert. She knew he was suffering. And hugged the knowledge closely to her.

She turned from the window and walked to the piano. Paul was playing again—a Chopin *étude* that raced and laughed and hurried his fingers over the keys. When he looked at her he smiled. Kay thought she had never known a man who could express more with a smile than Paul Touchet. It told her now that he knew her thoughts. Told her he didn't blame her—not for being a woman. And then it went further. It said without words, "But Paul—you were a fool to bring them together again."

"I think so, too," said Kay aloud.

Paul laughed and caught her hands. He stood up and motioned to Bert. "Come on, burglar," he said. "I think I see Thomas making faces at the dining-room door. Time to eat."

"Burglar?" said Bert.

"Well, it's this way," smiled Paul. He took Kay's arm put a hand on Bert's shoulder and started toward the dining room. "Some day a painter will see you, Bert. He'll dress you in rags, put a club in your hand and seat you on a throne that is built in a woman's heart."

He ducked Bert's punch and held the chair while Kay seated herself. The table was long but three places had been set at one end. It was an intimate gesture and one typical of Paul Touchet. With Kay at his right and Bert at his left, he led the conversation along at a rapid pace while the meal was served. They argued heatedly about the date on a bottle of wine they had shared in Chicago.

They talked of inconsequential, painless, unimportant things.

When Thomas had brought liqueurs, Paul asked for pencils and a few sheets of paper. While the butler hurried away to get them the contractor turned to Kay.

"My dear," he said, "you are now appointed judge with absolute power to make decisions while Bert and I argue the cause of labor. Do you mind?"

"Objection!" said Bert. "Not labor—merely the rights of my particular branch of labor."

"Objection sustained," laughed Kay. "It is also the ruling of this court that a fine of one hour under a cold shower will be imposed upon the first attorney to say, 'To hell with that!'"

"Agreed," said Paul. "And now, Mr. Attorney for the sandhogs—what is your first argument?"

BERT took a few sheets of paper from the butler and put them before him. He made boxes and circles in the upper corner, studied them gravely and looked at Kay.

"The attorney for the vested interests —known hereafter as the contractor—is using a derrick that has passed its three score years and ten. It should be retired on a pension until such time as it receives its Social Security checks."

"What do the vested interests say?" Kay questioned, turning to Paul.

"I object," he cried. "On the ground that the attorney for labor is trying to prejudice the case by making snoots and putting his fingers to his nose. I do not represent any interests—vested or without a vest."

"Objection sustained," said Kay. "But what about the derrick?"

"The attorney for the contractor concedes the justness of labor's charge," said Paul. "The derrick will be replaced tomorrow morning."

He made a note at the top of his sheet and Bert did likewise. Both men were smiling but Kay had caught the undercurrent of seriousness in their words. She realized this game went far deeper than the words with which it was played. And as she looked at Paul she saw in him a master strategist. Lightly and with a laugh he had placed her in a position of trust. Trivial though her rulings might sound, they would affect the lives of a thousand sandhogs. Bert might possibly question them. Paul would agree—she was sure of that. In this battle between contractor and labor man, she held the balance of power.

Fear gripped her and she straightened in the chair. As Kay McLane, daughter of a sandhog, she knew the hazards of the trade. As Kay McLane, fashionable Madison Avenue dressmaker, she knew the problems of an employer. And now two men sat facing her across a table to discuss problems that had arisen at the tunnel. Alone, these two might never reach agreement. Prejudice and the desire to win might leave many questions unsettled. With Kay at the table each would strive to outdo the other, yet a third voice had been added that might swing the balance one way or the other. Hers was a position held by few women. It had taken the clever yet thoroughly honest mind of Paul Touchet to arrange such a situation. And Kay wondered what the result would be.

"Next argument," she said crisply. "The court will brook no delays."

"The attorney for the sandhogs charges his opponent with underpaying the miners," said Bert. "He demands an immediate increase."

"Any answer?" said Kay looking at Paul.

"Yes, your honor," said Paul. "I wish to call my opponent's attention to an agreement signed by me and by the members of his local calling for the present scale of wages."

"But that agreement has been broken," said Bert. "This morning men of another local went to work at the bottom of the shaft."

"Quite right," said Paul. "Through a mistake that was quickly rectified. But the men of your local will be paid for the time they lost."

"Granted," said Bert. "But the agreement was broken and the attorney for the contractor admits it. I would like the court to bear that in mind."

"The court will do so," said Kay gravely.

"Objection," said Paul. "The attorney for the sandhogs is trying to becloud the issue. He will now deliberately make a dozen impossible demands to which I must refuse to agree. He will then try to slip over a fast one—or in the language of the court—he will try to catch me with my pants down."

"Objection over-ruled," said Kay. "The attorney for the sandhogs may continue."

"Thank you, your honor," said Bert. "And because my opponent is wiser than a contractor should be, I will—admitting he is right—group my next four demands under one heading."

"Let's have them," said Kay.

"New timber must be used in the

tunnel," said Bert. "The men shall be immediately equipped with decent tools. Also, materials with which they can do a safe day's work. New equipment for the motor and new track. In other words, the contractor can do himself a favor by making this an accident-proof job."

"Your answer, Mr. Attorney?" said Kay.

"Agreed on all counts," said Paul. "The changes will be made immediately."

HE scribbled on the paper and Kay turned to Bert. The sandhog's lips were thin and he wrote rapidly. In less than five minutes Kay had heard drastic changes asked and received. She knew both men were sparring for time—waiting for an opening. Or rather, Bert was waiting to drive a blow—some demand that would improve the conditions or get more money for the clan. And Paul, as a business man, was watching and waiting to parry.

Bert had opened his mouth to speak when the butler came quietly into the room and stood beside Paul. The contractor pardoned himself and looked up.

"Yes, Thomas?" he said.

"Mr. Blaucher and his—er, his friend, are outside, sir. Mr. Blaucher insists upon seeing you immediately."

"You told him I am not at home?"

"Yes, sir," said the butler. "He cursed at me, sir."

"He would," said Paul wearily. "Go back and tell him I'll be with him in a moment. Keep the hall door closed and show him into the den. If he curses at you again try to remember one of you must act like a gentleman."

"Very good, sir," said the butler and turned to leave.

There was a short, harsh laugh that caused the three at the table to turn. Gus Blaucher was standing in the doorway and beside him was Specks. The contractor's face was flushed and his eyes watered as they took in the group.

"So here's where you're hiding, Paul," he said. There was forced joviality in his voice. "For the past three hours I've been running a party for you at my place—and you forgot, I'll bet."

"Oh, yes—a party," said Paul. "Sorry, Gus. It slipped my mind. But suppose you keep it going for an hour or two and I'll join you. Just now I'm entertaining some guests and—"

"That's all right," said Gus huskily. "No hard feelin's, Paul. But why not bring your guests right along to my place?"

He walked heavily into the room and approached the table. He smiled at Kay and extended a large hand. Kay rested hers in it and winced at the pressure of Blaucher's grip.

"Glad to see you, Miss McLane," said Gus. "Ain't run into you since that night at Paul's. Didn't forget you, though. Never forget beautiful women."

"Thank you," said Kay simply.

Gus turned to face Bert. "'Lo Bert," he said. "You're welcome, too. Business is business and I never let it interfere with pleasure. What I do in the office don't mix with what I do at night. Come on up and join the party."

"That's nice of you, Gus," Bert laughed. "But are you sure Specks will approve?"

"Huh?" said Blaucher. "Oh, I get you." He laughed again. "Don't worry about Specks. He don't carry a grudge, either."

"Sporting of him," said Bert.

There was an awkward silence while Specks walked to a chair in the corner of the room and seated himself. As usual, the leather-bound dictionary was under his arm and now he opened it to glance at the pages. He appeared to have no interest whatever in the conversation and Kay thought he was more like a cane or a piece of clothing than any man she had seen. When Gus came into a room he simply tossed Specks aside. The man sank into the background and soon was unnoticed.

"Well, how about it?" said Blaucher. "Are we all goin' up to my place?"

"I'm afraid not," said Paul. "Bert and I are talking over some business. Miss McLane has been kind enough not to mind, but I'm sure she wouldn't want me to for-

get my duties as a courteous host entirely."

"Business, eh?" said Blaucher. "Well—your business is my business, Paul. Suppose I sit in?"

"It really won't be necessary, Gus. Just a few things we want straightened out at the tunnel."

"Like pulling Mathews' men off the job?"

"Oh, no. I took care of that this morning. Mathews' men don't belong at the bottom of the shaft."

"Says who?"

"I say so," Paul said firmly. "I'm not in the habit of breaking agreements, Gus."

"Yeah? There's a lot of habits you've got that need changing."

"Some other time, if you please. I hardly think my guests would enjoy hearing about them."

"Oh, don't pull that high-hat stuff on me, Paul," growled Blaucher. "If you and Bert are ribbing up any deals—I want in!"

Paul turned to Bert "Do you mind?"

"Not at all," said Bert. "After all, he's your partner."

"And will you give us just a few more minutes to finish up, Kay?" Paul asked. "We won't be long."

"Go right ahead," she said quietly. "I'll wait on the terrace."

CHAPTER XIX

COMPROMISE

SHE walked to the glass-doors leading to a balcony that overlooked the East River. And as she walked, Kay realized there would be no more of the half-jesting, half-serious conversation that had done so much to bring together men with opposite ideas. Whatever chance there may have been for a peaceful settlement of the problems of the tunnel had gone when Gus Blaucher came into the room.

She saw Bert's lips tighten and a hard light come into his eyes. He folded the sheets of paper, put them in his pocket and turned to Blaucher.

"Before we go any further," he said, "I think it is only fair for you to know the tunnel-headings are in difficult ground, Gus. Only good miners can handle it—amateurs will flood the tunnels."

"I agree with Bert on that," said Paul.

"You agree with him on too many things," said Blaucher. "If this guy is trying to scare me, he might as well know it won't work. If he takes his men out of those headings in the morning, I'll have Mathews' men *and* a crew of miners working there in the afternoon."

"Suit yourself," said Bert.

"Another thing you should know, Gus," said Paul, "is that to date the sandhogs have been giving us splendid cooperation. When things weren't quite the way they wanted, they didn't let it interfere with their work. They've kept the job going at top speed and as a result, we're well ahead of schedule."

"Say—who's side are you on?" cried Gus. "Are you my partner, or are you another one of these stinking delegates from the union?"

"That'll be enough of that!" said Paul firmly. "If you'd like to be treated as a gentleman, try to act like one."

"Well, I didn't mean to get rough, Paul. But one of us has to talk the same language as these birds."

"Meaning the sandhogs and me?" laughed Bert. "In that case we might try English."

"Sure I will," said Blaucher. "And I'm waitin' to hear some now. What's been goin' on here?"

"We were merely talking over some changes to be made in the equipment," said Paul. "I hadn't realized how bad it was until Bert pointed out the faults. That salvage stuff you bought won't do, Gus. It isn't the type of material with which we build tunnels."

"Then it's time you learned," said Blaucher. "I've built more miles of subway in this city than any man in the trade. And I've done it at a profit. You've built a half dozen lousy tunnels—and you're broke. That ought to be the answer."

"Not a bad one," laughed Bert. "But less accidents have happened on Touchet's

jobs than on any other. He averages about one man hurt to every ten you kill, Gus."

"That's something for the insurance companies to worry about," said Blaucher. "If the sandhogs don't know enough to keep alive, am I to blame? Is it my fault if a guy falls down a shaft and breaks his neck? Do you want me to stand under him with a net?"

"Hardly," said Bert. "But it might help if the men had decent material with which to work."

"We won't go into that, Bert," said Paul. "I think we've reached a satisfactory agreement. The changes will be made."

"Like hell they will!" cried Gus. "I told you once before, Paul, I'll handle things at the tunnel. Any materials, equipment or tools to be bought—I'll buy 'em; And as for Mathews' men—they go back to work!"

"Suit yourself," said Bert casually. "If they work—our men don't."

"Just a moment, Bert," said Paul. "I'm sure we can reach some satisfactory compromise about that."

"There isn't any compromise, Paul," said Bert.

PAUL got up and paced the length of the room. "I've always found a certain amount of clear thinking necessary to the solution of every problem. If we're all going to insist upon the granting of each demand, we're not going to get anywhere."

"Does that mean you take back the things we've already agreed upon?" asked Bert.

"Sure it does!" growled Blaucher. "I wasn't in on that deal and I don't like it—see? Things stand just as they did this morning, as far as I'm concerned."

"Why not listen to Bert's side?" suggested Paul. "I've never found his demands unreasonable."

"Ah, forget it, Paul," laughed Gus. "These union guys like to argue. They never get enough—never know what it means to be satisfied. We're wastin' good time when we could be at my party. That fiddle player ain't goin' to wait all night. He wants to earn his dough and go home."

"Don't you think the tunnel is more important?" asked Paul.

"Sure I do. But why waste all night gabbing about it? The tunnel is driving and we're ahead of contract. You said so, yourself. Now nuts with all this argument. Let's forget it."

"You're ahead of contract," said Bert. "I agree with you. Gus. But if some changes aren't made tonight, you'll start slipping behind tomorrow."

"Goin' to pull the job?"

"Perhaps."

"Just a moment," said Paul patiently. "Don't let's talk strike until we know where we're going. Suppose you tell Gus what you want, Bert, he'll listen."

"Sure I will," laughed Gus. "But that don't mean he'll get what he wants. Go ahead, Saxon—talk. The answer is no!"

"In that case I'd be wasting time," said Bert.

"The answer might be different, Gus, if you found yourself without a partner," said Paul quietly. "If this firm is going to continue, my voice is to carry as much weight as yours."

"Now don't get goaty, Paul," said Blaucher. "We all have our own way of winnin' an argument. Mine happens to be a little tough, maybe—but it usually works." He turned to Bert and grinned. "Tell you what we'll do, Saxon—I'll keep Mathews' men off the job below ground, and by that I mean off the locks. But you forget all this bunk about bad materials. Let Paul and me worry about that—you stick to handlin' the men."

"No good," said Bert. "And while we're at it, you might as well hear the rest. Those electricians from the other local who are working at the shaft heads must be replaced with men from my local."

"Not a chance!" said Blaucher.

"I go with Gus on that, Bert," said Paul. "I think you're over-stepping."

"Do you?" laughed Bert. "Then you're going to be surprised when I tell you we want men from our local in the iron yard and at the concrete mixer."*

Blaucher's laugh was loud. "Hear that, Paul?" he cried. "The guy is goin' nuts. He's drunk with power."

"Are you serious about those demands, Bert?" asked Paul.

"Very," snapped Bert. "If your partner can chisel—so can I. Now let's see who's the toughest."

Paul brought a brandy bottle and set it on the table. He took a rack of small glasses from the sideboard and poured drinks, not forgetting one for Specks. The gunman smirked, bobbed his head and drained the glass. Kay was on the terrace and waved her hand in negation when Paul motioned with a glass. He smiled and turned to the men.

"Suppose we postpone this discussion until the morning," he suggested. "We'll sleep on it, think it over, and then see what can be done. You submit a written list of demands, Bert. Gus and I will talk them over and then give you an answer. Fair enough?"

"Very well," said Bert. "I'll have the list in your office at ten o'clock."

"Swell!" cried Gus. "Now we can hear that fiddle player." He caught Paul by the shoulders and shook him. "Get your hat, partner. Tonight, you and Miss McLane are my guests at the best damn party you ever saw."

Paul laughed and turned to Bert. "Gus has gone in for music," he said jokingly. "He's paying Bertilotti two thousand to play this evening. Like to hear it, Bert?"

"No, thanks. I've got to hunt up Austin O'Toole and type out those demands. We'll be at the hall until after midnight, so if you're going past, look me up and we'll have some coffee and rolls."

Gus had reached for the brandy. He lifted the bottle and watched the liquor pouring into his glass. "You won't find O'Toole at the hall," he said. "I think he's gone over to the Long Island side to see about that guy Galagher."

"Galagher?" said Bert. "What about him?"

"You know—the miner in Wilmer's gang."

Paul looked quickly at Blaucher. "What happened, Gus?"

"Didn't they phone you from the office tonight? I told them to let you know."

"There may have been a call," said Paul. "I told Thomas not to disturb us. He probably took the message. Is it important?"

"It'll wait," said Gus. "But I think we ought to put a new man in Wilmer's place. He's too old for the job of heading boss." He turned to Bert. "Dig up a soft job for the old guy—put him on a lock or something."

"Never mind Wilmer," said Bert slowly. "What happened to Tom Galagher?"

"Oh, the same old story," said Gus impatiently. "Some guy in the heading got careless and they had an accident. The face slid and Galagher was caught. Not much damage, though. When I talked to Wilmer on the phone he said they were breasting down and hadn't lost much ground."

PAUL rested his arms upon the table. His eyes were tired and when he looked at Blaucher they held a premonition of trouble. He spoke quietly. "Galagher is badly hurt?"

"Dead," said Blaucher, and tossed off the drink. "A boulder dropped on him and broke his back, Wilmer said. For a minute they thought the whole face was going to cave, but they stopped it. Everything's all right now—the gang is breasting down and—"

Bert Saxon's hands were gripping the table edge. The skin was drawn to parchment-like thinness across the knuckles. He stared at Blaucher—tried to speak. For an instant the words would not come. He cleared his throat. Wet his lips.

"Yes, Gus," he said harshly. "Everything is all right. The work is going ahead—the tunnel is driving. You and Touchet are still making money. But damn you!—Galagher is dead! Do you hear that, you lice? Tom Galagher is *dead!*"

"Take it easy, Bert," said Paul. "We've all seen these things happen before. They've happened on the Fulton Street job the Cranberry Street—"

"Sure they have!" cried Bert. "But not for the same reasons! Every man that goes into a heading expects to get it some day. But great God—he doesn't expect to have the contractor kill him with lousy material!"

Kay had come in from the terrace. She walked quietly to the head of the table and stood behind Paul. The contractor's face was white and he stared at the floor. Gus was on his feet pacing slowly across the room with his hands clasped behind his back. Specks' eyes were still on the book and his jaws moved slowly as he chewed his gum. Bert was standing—looking at Paul.

"You killed Galagher—you killed him Paul!" he cried. "And that creeping heel over there helped you. You're a swell pair of guys to be building tunnels. Great guys. A miner is dead—but don't let that spoil your evening. There's someone waiting to play a violin at Blaucher's place. Don't keep him waiting. Galagher won't mind—he's dead!"

"Bert — please" said Paul quietly. "Aren't you acting a little foolish about this? You've been in the trade too long for hysterics. I knew Galagher—knew him nearly as well as you. Do you suppose for a moment I feel his death any the less? Do you think I—I—wanted him to die, Bert?"

"What difference does it make what I think?" cried Bert. "As the representative of my local I've made certain demands. If those demands had been met, Galagher would be alive. But instead of jamming them down your throat I've tried to walk gently—argue with you—convince you the men of the clan are right. Because of that, Galagher is dead! He trusted me and I failed him. But as God is my judge—I won't fail the others!"

CHAPTER XX

NO PLACE FOR SENTIMENT

HE CROSSED to Blaucher and faced him. The color was gone from the sandhog's face and his lips were as thin lines of red. His hands were clenched and held rigidly at his sides. When he spoke his voice was hardly above a whisper—cold, dry. It came from a mouth that was bare of moisture. It was as the rattle of stones on glass.

"You've heard what I want, Blaucher. New material— every stick of timber in that tunnel must be new. You've heard the other demands. And unless those demands are met immediately—every one of them—not a man of my local goes into that tunnel."

There was a moment of silence.

"So you're goin' to pull the job, eh?" said Blaucher at length. "Goin' to pull a strike unless you get what you want."

Kay moved to the head of the table. She rested her hands palms down on the smooth wood and looked at Paul. Then she turned and looked at Blaucher. Silence was heavy, and she swung at length to stare at Bert. He felt her eyes upon him and faced her. Kay drew a deep breath.

"I've listened while you men talked," she said. Her voice was low and throaty. Quiet but firm. "You, Bert—you've been talking about God. Using His name. But don't ever forget, Bert—you're not God. You're just Bert Saxon. And you mustn't try to play God—you mustn't!"

"I don't understand, Kay," he said.

"No. Of course you don't," she said quietly. "That's because you're a man—like Paul—like Blaucher. You all sit here and make demands. You talk of men as though they were so many pieces in a game of chess. Perhaps you're right. Perhaps they are poor dumb things to be moved about at your will. You're men—you probably think as they do. But what of the women? What of the wives? Have you ever thought of them?"

"I am thinking of them," said Bert. "I'm thinking of Tom Galagher's wife."

"Are you?" said Kay. "And are you thinking of the other wives who will wait while their men join the picket lines? Are you thinking of the women who must bind and wash the cuts and wounds that come with a strike? Are you thinking—as they

must—of the scanty meals and hungry youngsters?"

"Yes," said Bert. "I am, Kay."

"Then don't you think those women are entitled to their voice? Have you asked them what they want? Or don't they matter in the game you're playing?"

"They matter very much, Kay. But—"

Kay's hand silenced him. It was a gesture imperial in its simplicity. A woman had come to say her word in a game played by men. And they listened.

She turned to Paul. "Don't mistake me, Paul," she said. "I don't think Bert is wrong. I agree with everything he has asked. Actually, I don't think it is enough. But have you perhaps, thought at all of the wives of the sandhogs? Do you know what a strike will mean to them?"

"Yes, Kay," said Paul. "That's one of the reasons I hate the sound of the word."

"But you mustn't let yourself think of that when you're talking business," she said. "It might interfere—keep you from making decisions in a sensible, well-ordered way. And I can see your point of view, too. I agree with you, Paul. Business is a game we both play to win. We all want money—work hard to get it. If we agreed to every demand made upon us in that game, we'd never win. In a few short months someone else would own our business and we'd be working for him."

She turned to Blaucher who was listening as a man might to a story he did not quite understand. There were puzzled creases about his eyes and his mouth was slightly opened. Kay smiled when she faced him.

"And you, Gus—don't you think for a moment I can't see eye to eye with you. You're right—absolutely right. You've always acted in accordance with your own code of ethics, and it's a hard code. But it's the one of a successful business man. You work hard and drive hard bargains. When Bert asks for things you don't think fair, you refuse. And I don't blame you." She paused and smiled again—a slightly tired smile. "Now he has threatened you with a strike. And to you, that means fight. You've always had to fight and generally you've won. Perhaps you'll win this. But don't you realize you're fighting a thousand women who have no quarrel with you? They don't even know you, except perhaps by name. They don't begrudge you the things you've earned in business—money, power, ease. They realize you've fought hard to get them. But now, because you three men can not agree, these same women must become your enemies. You're going to hurt them. And it isn't fair! It isn't right."

"But, lady," said Blaucher hesitantly. "Lady—I ain't starting it? I didn't call the strike."

"Of course not," said Kay. "Nobody started it—nobody ever does. Circumstances start every strike. We all know that—the women know it. But why are we women made to be the greatest sufferers? What have we done?"

SHE turned and walked from the table toward the door. The eyes of the men followed her as she stepped onto the terrace and pointed to the dark waters of the East River.

"Down there," she said, "men are driving tunnel. And across the river their women are waiting for them to come home. Here in this room three men sit and try to play God. And because they are men, they make mistakes. And as a result, a thousand women who have had no voice in the quarrel are made miserable." She laughed. Tears were in her eyes and in the twisted laugh that came from her lips. "Oh, you fools! You poor, weak, stupid fools! Why don't you talk to the women before you tear their hearts to pieces? Why don't you remember you wouldn't be here if some woman hadn't torn her body to pieces to bring you to life? Why don't you *think!*"

Bert had dropped into a chair at the table. A pencil was in his hand and he beat it slowly against the wood. Tap—tap—tap—tap. Over and again in constant rhythm. Close to him Gus Blaucher stared at the woman on the terrace. His teeth were showing between soft moist lips. A rasping

sound came from his mouth as he breathed. His wide chest rose and fell slowly. To his right, Paul had dropped his forehead upon his arms and the gray streaked hair tumbled forward. At length he lifted his eyes and they were bloodshot. Deep in their sockets.

"Yes," he said quietly. "We'll think, Kay. We'll try to remember we're only men—not gods. And we'll meet tomorrow in my office, to talk as men." He turned toward Blaucher. "Do you agree, Gus?"

"Yes," said Blaucher quietly. "I agree."

"And you, Bert?"

"Yes, Paul. Tomorrow morning in your office."

Paul put out his hand and Bert took it. They stood silently for a moment and Paul reached and caught Blaucher's arm. He took Bert's hand and put it within the wide palm of the contractor's. His own hand held them fast. He smiled, and stepped away.

Kay walked in from the terrace and put her arm through Bert's. "I'm tired, Bert," she said. "Will you take me home?"

"Of course," said Bert and turned to Paul. "You won't mind?"

"Not at all. My car is at the door and I'll have the driver there in a moment."

"Please don't," said Kay. "Tonight, I'd rather walk."

The butler brought Kay's coat. There were quiet goodbyes and Bert handed Kay into the elevator. On the street she lifted her head and drew deep breaths into her lungs. Then she smiled, caught Bert's arm tightly and started toward Second Avenue.

"Let's walk fast," she said.

"In a hurry to get rid of me?"

"Goof! I'm cold and I want to get warm."

He put his arm about her waist. "Help any?"

"Heaps."

THEY walked under the elevated structure and paced with long steps toward the next avenue. Kay leaned back against his arm and at times turned toward him to smile. For the moment she was at peace with the world and found it good. Perhaps in the morning the men would find a solution to their problems. Kay didn't know. She didn't try to decide in her own mind which was right and which was wrong. A phrase came to her and repeated itself. "Sufficient unto the day—" She had done what she could, and for this night at least the sandhogs' wives could sleep in peace. She moved closer to Bert and slowed her pace.

"Like me a little?" she asked.

"Too much."

"Think I'm beautiful?"

"More than that."

The questions had come unbidden. Kay hadn't meant to ask them. Hadn't meant to talk personalities on this walk to her home. Her decision to leave with Bert was a simple thing: Had she gone with Paul and Blaucher to the party, Bert would have been left alone. Almost, it might seem she was joining the side of the contractors—abandoning her position of impartial arbiter. And Kay didn't want this to happen. She didn't want Bert to think of himself as a solitary figure. Such thoughts would bring bitterness with a stubborn resolve to gain his demands. She knew Bert to be a fighter. And a fighter who stands alone against odds must throw rules to the wind.

The physical act of leaving Paul's apartment with Kay allowed him some of the honors. The evening was stalemate and Kay wanted it so. It was peculiar, she thought, that a physical action could so react upon the mind. And looking at the tall sandhog who walked beside her she wondered if she, too were not subject to a like result. Tonight Bert had spoken of her calm reserve. He had called attention to her lack of surface emotion. Something of which Kay was constantly reminded.

Bert's closeness was warming the breath in her nostrils. It was putting firmness into her stride and desire into her mind. Reason was fading and Kay did not fight to bring it back. She didn't want to think. Didn't want to weigh the thoughts that came to her. She leaned against his arm and

laughed. He drew her closer, smiling down.

"Happy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Am I holding you too tightly?"

"Fool."

SHE caught the blunt fingers of his hand and held them. She looked at him and her eyes were heavy. Her breasts lifted and fell and tautness came to her throat muscles. She swayed to the rhythm of his stride. It was as though she were a tigress and a striped male had stepped from the underbrush to look at her with possessive eyes.

And Bert was her mate. She wanted him. Meant to have him. What matter if reason and common sense said she was mad? Perhaps she was. But it was a madness that brooked no restraint. Not now. Not on this night when a wild thing walked at her side and held her close. She lifted her head and looked at the stars. A lesser woman might have said the things in her mind. Kay smiled.

"Honestly," she said, "I'm really a very nice person, Bert. I'm not fresh or brazen."

He grinned. "I never thought you were."

"You may in a moment."

"Yes?" he asked. "Why?"

"Because I'm going to ask you to marry me." She looked straight ahead when she spoke, her eyes fixed and her head rigid. "There aren't any strings to it. No demands. Do whatever you like—the union—anything—"

"But, Kay—"

"I mean it," she said. "I love you, Bert. Right now I love you more than any man in the world. Does that mean anything to you?"

He walked a dozen paces before he answered.

"Mean anything?" he said slowly. "You, nor anyone on earth will know how much it means, Kay."

"Perhaps I do," she answered. "I saw a man sitting in a little cafe on Ninth Avenue. There was a bottle in front of him and a glass in his hand. I waited outside in a cab for hours. He didn't come out."

"You—you saw me—then?"

"Yes, dear. I saw you."

"I was tired—sick of the whole mess. I—I wanted to forget, even if it were only for a night."

"Forget me?"

"Yes. Forget you—too."

"But could you?"

He lengthened his stride again. "Kay—stop it!" he said sharply. "It won't work. You told me that night at the Astor and you were right. It *can't* work."

"We'll make it," she said earnestly. "Perhaps we'll be the exception. I'm willing to take the chance. Won't you?"

"I'm—I'm afraid, Kay. With you as my wife I couldn't do the work I've promised. I'd want money—position. I'd want to parade you, flaunt you in front of every man in the world. You'd be mine and I'd be proud of you. Want to dress you and buy jewels for your hands. And then I'd forget the men of my clan—forget the—"

"No, Bert!" she said sharply. "That wouldn't happen. We wouldn't let it."

"We couldn't stop it," he said dully.

"Then let it happen—let anything happen. Only, do something now! Take me while I'm still yours—take me any way you please. I'll be a good wife. Honestly, I will, Bert. I'll never try to change your way of life, never try to—"

"Please—please," he cried. There was a sob in his throat and his eyes were moist. "Kay, do you want to drive me mad?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "Yes—I do. I love you, Bert. I want to keep loving you but—"

"Yes?"

"I'm—I'm drifting, dear. Something is happening and I want to stop it before it is too late."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, can't you understand—can't you realize no woman on earth could spend day after day with Paul and not—"

"You love Paul?" he asked thickly.

"I don't know. Perhaps—yes, I do love him," she said softly. "Inside—I'm all twisted and turned. For years there's been no one in my mind but you, Bert. Then

Paul—he's good and kind and fine. He wants me to love him—tries to make me love him. And at times I picture myself with his arms around me and his head against mine. It's grown to be a pleasant thought—lately."

"I think I understand," said Bert.

"But you don't!" she said. "I don't want to love Paul." She stopped and caught his arms. Faced him and held him while she spoke. "I'm drifting away from you, Bert. And I don't want to drift. Oh, my dear—can't you hear what I'm trying to say? Don't let me want Paul—don't let him take me away from you."

Bert's arms were around her. He drew her close and held her lips to his. A woman leading a small dog on a long leash, turned to smile. A hackman laughed and sounded his horn. People on the low stoops grinned and winked wisely. Still Bert held Kay in his arms.

"I won't let you go," he said, whispering it close to her ear. "I'll never let you go, Kay."

AND hearing him speak, Kay knew happiness. She pushed him away, smiled and straightened her turban. Pulled her mink coat closer about her shoulder. Her gloves had slipped to the street and Bert bent to pick them up. He hailed a cab and opened the door as the grinning driver came to a stop.

"Up through the park," said Bert, and smiled.

"As though I couldn't guess," said the hackman.

Kay recalled the time in Brooklyn when a group of youngsters had caught Bert kissing her as they sat at the end of the dock. Her face was flushed but with the exception of this single sign, her outward composure was the same now as when she had turned and stared haughtily over her freckled nose at her tormentors.

Bert loved her. Nothing else mattered. His arm was about her shoulders holding her close. His breath was warm on her cheek and he was saying foolish little love words over and again as he drew her closer. The dark city streets slipped past and soon Kay saw the bare branches of trees in the park. But to her there were leaves and bright flowers and all the warmth of summer. She rested her head against Bert's shoulder and closed her eyes. And again the phrase came to her, "Sufficient unto the day—"

She said it aloud and Bert turned to smile. He kissed her eyes open and put a heavy blunt finger against the side of her nose.

"Mascara," he said. "It's all over you."

"I don't care," said Kay.

"And I've smeared your lips, too."

"Don't care about that, either."

They rode quietly for a time and Bert played with the long thin fingers of her left hand. He touched the ring finger and drew an imaginary circle about it.

"Soon," he said. "Soon we'll have a round thin circle of platinum on this finger."

"How soon?"

He looked away. "When this job is over—the day it's finished."

"So long?" she said. "That's a year or more, dear."

"It won't be long going," he promised. "I've started something—something I've got to finish. You wouldn't want me to quit, dear."

"No—I wouldn't," she said. And she knew she was lying. "Go ahead with your work. Finish it—and then—"

He was eager. "I'll break in another man to take over, Kay. I'll teach one of the younger men the tricks of the trade—teach him to handle contractors and deal with them. A year—eighteen months—it won't be long. Then we'll be free. We'll go away—to Europe, the South Seas—anywhere."

"Not the South Seas," she smiled. "I'll take no competition from grass-skirted ladies, thank you."

"The North Pole, then," he laughed. "Just think of married life in an igloo. Isn't that worth waiting a couple of years to get?"

Kay's smile was fading. "A couple of

years?" she said. "Bert, dear—so long?"

"No arguments, lady," he laughed.

"No arguments," she repeated, and lifted her lips.

CHAPTER XXI

BIG MEDIC'NE

IT WAS a few moments before ten in the morning when Bert and Austin O'Toole turned into the polished-stone entrance to the building that housed the offices of the Touchet & Blaucher Construction Company. The union secretary was neatly dressed and carried under his arm a briefcase and newspaper. He limped when he walked—a halting stride that was the result of long years in compressed air. Paralysis—a shortened leg and a stiff joint had come when Austin left a heading without taking his full time for decompression. But the sandhog's smile was still the brightest in the local. He grinned now as he pointed to Big Jerry Harkness, the union president. Jerry was standing near a newsstand looking at his huge gold watch.

"Bet he's been here since seven," said Austin. "Big Jerry sure is a hound for keeping appointments."

"This one, especially," laughed Bert. "He wants to tell Blaucher what he thinks of him and I'm going to have my hands full choking him off."

"I'll sit next to him and kick his shin when he tries to talk," said Austin. "We don't want any yelling and fighting today."

"Not if we can help it," agreed Bert. He motioned to Jerry and pointed to a nearby elevator. "Ready for the party? If you are, let's go."

Big Jerry lumbered toward the car. He was a giant of a man. His hands were great wide things, thick-fingered, and strong although Jerry was well over fifty. His square face was clean shaven and a pair of dark eyes looked out from beneath bushy gray brows. When he spoke, his voice rumbled up from his throat in the deepest of bass tones. And as he stepped into the car, Jerry limped. Like many of the old-timers he too had felt the bite of compressed air.

"Yeah, Bert—I'm ready," he said slowly. "What floor is the office on?"

"Thirty-fifth," said Bert.

"That ought to do it. I saw Mathews go up a few moments ago, and if I get the chance I'd like to drop him out a window. Just wanted to be sure we'd be up high enough."

"No picking on Mathews," said Austin quickly. He followed Jerry and Bert into the elevator and reached to shake a finger under Jerry's long nose. "This is going to be an orderly meeting. I've drawn up a set of demands and we're to present them. But no fighting!"

"Austin is right, Jerry," said Bert. "We're not looking for trouble—just a fair break, nothing else."

"With Mathews there?" growled Jerry. He braced himself as the elevator raced upward. "That sneaking punk is a chiseler for your life. He'd steal the whole job if he could."

"I'll handle him," promised Bert. "He'll never send a man of his below ground while I'm the business agent for this union."

THE doors slid open and the three men walked into the outer office of the construction company. Bert smiled to the girl at the desk and called her by name. She winked and spoke through the interoffice phone. A moment later the sandhogs walked into Paul's large office. Gus Blaucher was there, and not far from him was Specks, reading as always the finely printed lines of his dictionary. Blaucher nodded but said nothing. He was seated in an easy chair near the head of a long table and next to him was Mathews. The business agent nodded to Austin, waved a careless hand to Bert and looked quietly at Big Jerry. The giant sandhog stared at Mathews as though he might be some strange bug that crawled out from under the rug.

Paul hurried toward Bert and put a friendly hand on his shoulder. He led him to a chair at the head of the table and then turned to Austin.

"Will you sit here, Austin?" he said.

"Next to me, so I can read your requests." He was careful not to use the word "demand." He slid a box of cigars across the table and pointed to a chair. "Help yourself, Jerry. Both to a chair and the cigars. If anyone can stand a drink at this hour of the morning, there's plenty in the buffet."

"Thanks, Paul," rumbled Jerry. "None of us are drinking just now. But I'll try one of your smokes."

He dipped into the box, selected a cigar and bit through the end. When he blew the tip from his lips the tobacco barely missed Mathews' ear. The business agent turned and stared. Big Jerry stared back, his eyebrows lifted in question.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

Austin O'Toole's shoe whacked against the giant's shin. The secretary drew some papers from his case and handed them to Paul.

"Bert tells me you've heard these demands," he said. "And as they only concern our local and your company, I see no reason for Mathews to be in on this meeting."

"I agree with Austin," said Bert.

Paul smiled. "You may be right," he said, "but as our agreements may concern Mathews' local I thought it only fair to let him say his piece. Surely we're not trying to hide anything?"

"Don't apologize," said Blaucher gruffly. "Mathews is here because I asked him to come here. That settles it."

"Can't he speak for himself?" asked Jerry.

"I'll do that later," said Mathews. "And you may not like what I have to say."

Bert looked at Jerry who had half risen from his chair. The sandhog shook his head and Jerry sat down. Bert turned and studied Blaucher—looked at him for a full minute without speaking. The contractor was in sullen mood and his watery eyes were bloodshot. Undoubtedly the party had lasted into the small hours of the morning and Gus had found little time for sleep. He was restless, moved constantly in his chair and glanced at his wrist watch. Paul offered him a cigar which Blaucher refused.

"Too early for you, Gus?" he smiled.

"Not at all," said Blaucher. "I'm up early every day. Go for a ride in the park before breakfast, too. Doctor's orders, curse him."

"What do you use for a horse?" laughed Jerry. "A ten-ton truck?"

"Don't kid yourself," said Blaucher. "I'll bet a grand I'll ride better than any guy in your local."

Bert handed Jerry the matches and laughed. "You're safe, Gus," he said. "We can't bet thousands. You don't let us accumulate that much."

AS HE spoke, Bert realized whatever good Kay had done the previous evening was lost insofar as Blaucher was concerned. And trying to examine his own mind honestly, he was conscious of a stubborn desire to jam the union's demands down these contractors' throats. Perhaps it was the presence of Mathews, or that chance offer of a thousand-dollar bet by Blaucher. Whatever the cause, Bert found himself waiting anxiously for the discussion that would start when Paul finished reading the papers Austin had given him.

As for Paul—Bert found him the same smiling, easygoing friend as always. His smile was even more patient this morning and Bert wondered if Paul were still thinking of Kay's words about the women of the clan. It might very well be. Paul was an artist and lived upon emotion. A scene such as that of the previous evening would live in his mind for many days. Just now he was nodding as he read, holding his finger upon a line.

"I like this idea, Austin," he said. He turned to look at Blaucher. "Austin points out that poor materials are slowing the work. In addition to being a hazard they cost us money in time wasted. Ever think of that, Gus?"

"Baloney!" said Blaucher. "The materials aren't that bad and O'Toole knows it. These birds are kicking just to have something to yell about. I've been in this

racket a good many years but I never met a workman that worried about his boss losing money."

"Haven't you?" asked Bert. "Then step over to the job today and meet a thousand. Every sandhog in the tunnel works his guts out to make speed. Races himself out of a job."

"Bert is right about that," said Paul. "The hogs are working fools in a heading. The gangs race against each other, the muckers race the iron gang, and the iron men race the miners. They set records and boast of them—every gang in the tunnel wants to be known as tops."

"All right—all right," growled Gus. "I've heard all about that, but what's it got to do with these demands?"

"Why don't you listen and find out?" cried Austin.

"Yeah," said Jerry. "Listen and learn."

"Learn from you guys?" laughed Blaucher. "That's good! And what can you teach me?"

"How to build a tunnel, perhaps," said Bert firmly. "How to build one at a profit without killing a man for every hundred foot of iron."

"That's putting it rather high, Bert," said Paul. "The figures don't show any such accident rate."

"They will, if we let the men keep working in that rat trap."

"Which we won't do," grumbled Jerry.

Mathews laughed. "Maybe you ought to let them wear life-preservers."

"Keep out of this," said Jerry. He leaned toward Mathews. "And don't think you'll put your lice to work if our men walk."

"I wouldn't dream of such a thing," laughed Mathews. "I'd be afraid you might bite me."

"I think we'll let it stand right there," said Paul sharply. "I don't recall hearing any suggestion by Bert that his men would walk. In fact, I don't know why the subject was mentioned."

Bert looked at him thoughtfully. Yes—Paul Touchet had listened to Kay. He was thinking of those thousand women. Every word and move on Paul's part was toward peace.

"We were talking about replacing the materials," he said. "What is your answer, Gus?"

"Very simple," said Blaucher. "I'd rather replace the men."

"We know that," said Austin. "But what you'd like to do on this job doesn't count, Blaucher. You've made an agreement and you're going to keep it."

"How you goin' to make me?" laughed Blaucher.

"Try breaking it, and you'll learn."

PAUL lifted his hand. "There's no question of breaking an agreement," he said. "If we've stretched a point in our own favor, you've done the same in your direction. Personally, I think we're about even."

"That's right," said Blaucher quickly. "You guys have been getting away with plenty. And it's time you found the contractor can pull a fast one, too."

"Meaning what?" asked Bert.

"That if you don't like the way things are bein' run on this job—get off! We've got plenty of men to finish up."

"Mathews' men" asked O'Toole.

"Sure—Mathews' men," said Blaucher. "And what are you goin' to do about it?"

Paul stood up. "Just a moment—please. There's no need for that sort of talk." He reached for the papers on the table and glanced at them. As he did so, the interoffice phone buzzed and he flipped the lever. "Yes? What is it?"

"Miss McLane is here to see you, Mr. Touchet," said the secretary's voice. "Can you step out for a moment?"

"Certainly," said Paul and touched the lever again. He turned to the group. "Pardon me, gentlemen. I won't be long."

He walked quickly to the door of the office and closed it carefully behind him as he left the room. Bert leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. Austin busied himself looking at some papers and Big Jerry got slowly to his feet. He leaned on the table and stared down at Mathews.

"I thought you were waiting for some-

thing like this," he said slowly. "You call yourself a union man. Ha! That's a laugh! You and your local are nothing but a bunch of scabs—strikebreakers with a union charter. But let me—"

"Hold it, Jerry!" cried Bert.

"Hold, nothin'! If this punk puts his men to work on those locks they'll need tin drawers and steel hats. And he doesn't want to come within reach of my hands, either!"

"Nuts!" said Mathews. "You guys talk big but if headquarters gives me an okay—my men go in!"

"Have you asked for it?" snapped Bert.

"Sure. Why not?"

Bert swung toward Blaucher. "Is that the deal you're trying to make?"

"Don't like it, eh?" laughed Gus. "Thought you'd catch me nappin' but you didn't. When I do things I do 'em right."

"You're not doing this right," said Bert slowly. "Orders from headquarters or not—if you send Mathews' men to work on those locks, I'll pull the job." He leaned back in his chair and looked at the ceiling. "In fact, as long as you want to be tough about it, if you don't agree to our demands today—there won't be a man working in the tunnels tomorrow."

"Right!" said O'Toole. "Not a man!"

"And as the president of the local," said Big Jerry, "I make it official."

BLAUCHER leaped from his chair. His face was a dull red and his lips trembled. He ran around the table and shook his fist under Bert's chin, trembling as he did so.

"Try it!" he shouted. "Just try it, Saxon!"

He pointed a finger at Specks who sat quietly in the corner. The eyes of every man in the room followed the direction of his hand. Blaucher's voice was high—wild.

"See that guy, Saxon?" he cried. "He's just out of jail. I got him out—me, Gus Blaucher. And I could send him back again for life if I wanted." He leaned closer to Bert. "He's got a gun—one I bought him. And if you pull that job tomorrow your life aint worth a nickel—see? He'll shoot you dead, Saxon!"

Bert smiled. "Take it easy, Gus. You're talking like a fool."

"Maybe I am," cried Blaucher. "But I've got a bellyful of you! You hate my guts and you admit it. But that's all right with me. We're even." Again he shook his fist under Bert's face. "But I'm warning you—if you pull that job, you die!"

Bert stood up. He looked at Blaucher steadily and there was an easy grin on his face.

"I don't scare worth a damn, Gus," he said. He turned to O'Toole and Big Jerry. "Come on, men. We're all finished here."

Austin gathered his papers and walked to Bert's left side. Big Jerry walked quietly at his right. He pushed open the door and they went into the outer office. When Bert saw Kay talking with Paul he bowed slightly but said nothing. The contractor turned and faced him in surprise.

"Where are you going, Bert?" he asked. "What's the rush?"

"No rush," said Bert. "But we've got to call a meeting today and hold a strike vote. That takes time and so—"

"No, Bert!" said Paul quickly. "Don't do that. Come on back and let's talk this over sensibly. If Gus said something foolish, we'll get him straightened out."

Bert shook his head slowly. "That's your job, Paul—not mine." He turned to Austin and pointed at the briefcase. "Leave a copy of those demands with Mr. Touchet. If he agrees to meet them he can notify us at the hall. The vote won't come until after supper."

He started toward the elevators and Big Jerry went with him. O'Toole handed some papers to Paul, bowed to Kay and hurried across the outer office. Kay lifted a hand.

"Bert!" she called. "May I see you for a moment?"

"Not just now, Kay," said Bert. "Call me at the hall this afternoon if you get time. I'm going to be rather busy."

He waved, turned and followed his friends into a waiting elevator. As the door moved, Paul and Kay heard him say,

"Eight o'clock tonight, Austin—every man in the hall for a strike vote."

The door closed and Kay caught at Paul's arm to steady herself.

AND for the moment, while Kay wonders and waits, let us sit with a man—a thin, silent and bespectacled man who reads constantly—the least member of the group. Moving a slender finger along a printed line of type, Specks Metcalf was thinking, not of the words before him, but of the man who had laughed at his boss.

He was a peculiar creature, this Specks. A full-bosomed mother had brought him into the world, the third of seven children. Specks was the smallest of the brood and had been duly christened with a name he hated and soon lost. Constantine Metcalf. A name that brought a smile to the big Irish desk-sergeant when young Metcalf had been hailed before him charged with stealing fruit from the corner stand.

There had been other trips to the gray building around the corner—charges of petty thefts and times when Metcalf had swung a piece of lead pipe in neighborhood gang fights. For a time his punishment had been administered by his mother's heavy hand. But when the police caught him at midnight at the till of a grocery store, reform school had taken up the remainder of his education. Graduated again into the world at twenty-one, Metcalf had learned a new philosophy. He looked about at the people he knew and saw them as fools who worked long hours for small pay. His father, older brothers and sisters—all of them working in one factory or another with never a cent left at the end of the week.

He laughed. Work was all right for dopes. But guys with brains could make easier money. He bought a gun for five dollars and learned most people would rather hand over their money than argue with a bullet. When he picked a detective for a customer one evening, Metcalf went to Sing Sing. Walking in the yard of the huge prison, he studied the faces of the men about him. Hard. Cold. Stamped with the look of a criminal, most of them. Any judge or jury would mark them off as dangerous. Metcalf remembered the words of the judge who had sentenced him, "A hard case—safer behind bars than at large."

Metcalf smiled when he realized he had deliberately tried to look like a hard guy. He'd even tried it in jail. As a result he drew the dirty jobs while mild-mannered killers were entrusted with the care of prison gardens. And again Metcalf learned. He combed his hair differently, cultivated a flat bland smile, and as a final touch feigned nearsightedness. A prison doctor recommended glasses and "Specks" Metcalf was born. He was a model prisoner and was working as assistant librarian when his term was up.

Prohibition put him into the liquor business and Specks learned to handle a machine gun. There were arrests but no convictions. The men who employed him could afford high-priced counsel. And in court Specks was the ideal witness. Respectful, courteous to the prosecuting attorney, he sat with folded hands and wide eyes that looked blandly from behind his spectacles. The words used by the lawyer in his defense proved a fascination and Specks bought a dictionary. For a time, people laughed. His friends kidded him and poked fun. But Specks was too wise to mind. Someday—he didn't know when—but someday he would know every word in this book. He'd know how to use them. He might even become a lawyer.

Repeal sent him out into the night once again with a gun under his arm. And when a careless killing brought him before a judge and jury, his apparent innocence, bland smile and carefully worded phrases failed to keep him from a first-degree conviction. Specks was headed for the chair. He was waiting with six others for the day that would send him through the little green door, but that day didn't come. A reprieve changed the sentence to life imprisonment. And again Specks was back with his friends in the Big House—back for good.

STRINGS were being pulled on the outside. Specks wondered but said nothing. Someone—a very important someone was fighting to push through a pardon. And at length it came. When Specks walked through the big gate and headed toward New York, a lawyer was waiting.

"Know why you're out?" asked the attorney.

"Suppose you tell me?" said Specks.

"Ever hear of Gus Blaucher?"

"No."

"Too bad. He heard of you when you worked for Big Louie in the wet days. You did him a favor, I think."

"Did I?" said Specks cautiously. "So—?"

"Mr. Blaucher doesn't forget favors. You're out because he likes you and has a job for you."

"Who gets killed?" laughed Specks.

"Mr. Blaucher is a business man," said the attorney meaningly. "He also likes to do a little gambling on the side. And—he usually carries a great deal of money." The attorney walked with Specks to a car and opened the door. "Sometimes he makes enemies who might like to take a quick shot at him. He thinks you might be able to prevent this."

"Lucid and explicit," said Specks gravely. "I understand."

The attorney smiled. "He also has heard of your fondness for large words. Take my tip, Specks—use them often when Mr. Blaucher's friends are about. The boss enjoys a laugh."

Specks nodded and asked the attorney to stop at a book store when the car reached the city. He borrowed a few dollars and came back to the car with a large leather-bound dictionary under his arm. From that day on the dictionary became as much a part of Specks' equipment as the flat automatic he carried in a shoulder holster. He was both guard and court jester—and he knew it. But during the months with Blaucher, Specks acquired a dog-like devotion to the man, surprising even to himself. He liked Blaucher—sincerely liked him. As they became better acquainted, Specks learned a good deal of Blaucher's business—his method of handling men and money. Specks' code of ethics matched that of his boss. Blaucher had bought a body guard, and found a friend.

Specks had listened quietly to the discussion in Touchet's office. For weeks he had been annoyed by the stubborn persistence with which Bert Saxon made his demands. All that stuff about the union was so much nonsense to Specks. He knew about unions—knew men who made a nice living working that racket. It was the old protection stuff of the prohibition days. An employer paid if he stayed in business.

When Bert had made his first demands, Specks saw him as a racketeer who picked Blaucher as a soft touch. During the argument at the table, Specks had not been at all surprised to hear his boss threaten Saxon. That was old, too. Of course, he thought the boss might have been more careful with his words—no use looking for trouble. But to Specks, it was fair warning Blaucher would stand for no chiseling. If this mob from the union wanted money, they'd have to get it somewhere else.

He put aside his book and looked at Mathews. Here was another guy on the make. But the boss seemed to like him—that is, he liked to do business with him. Specks couldn't see much difference between Mathews and Saxon. But that was Blaucher's worry. Not his.

HE DREW his chair closer to Mathews and nodded toward Blaucher who had walked to the window and was staring out across the river. "Are you in agreement with the boss?" he asked quietly.

"Am I what?" said Mathews.

"Do your thoughts coincide with his—about Saxon?"

"Yes, Specks. I think Bert Saxon is a louse."

"Well, I wouldn't say that," said Specks thoughtfully. He took a cigarette from Mathews. "The boy has plenty of courage, and outside of business he appears to be very regular. Personally, I can understand why the sandhogs like him. But he ought

to know he's over his head in this deal."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that."

"Preposterous!" said Specks. "No one can compete with the boss."

Mathews leaned closer. "If Bert Saxon takes his men out of the tunnels, your boss will find himself with plenty of headaches."

"You mean, the boss has to use Saxon's men?"

"Some of them."

"So that's it," said Specks wisely. "Saxon is holding the aces and he's puttin'—I mean, he's putting on the pressure."

"Looks like it."

Specks was silent for a moment. Reducing the business at hand to the field of operations in which he had been schooled, he realized Saxon was in a position to hijack his boss. Like many of the local robber barons of the prohibition period, Saxon was holding up a small but vital part of the deal. Specks recalled a time when he had been commissioned to remove such an obstacle in the old days. He shrugged and tapped Mathews' shoulder for attention.

"If Saxon quit the union," he said, "would those guys settle down and be nice?"

"Without Saxon the sandhogs would find their union splitting apart in a month."

"You're sure of that?"

"Certainly."

"Isn't it annoying," said Specks, "that one guy has to make so much trouble? Wouldn't you think he'd take his cut and shut up?"

"You mean let Gus buy him off?"

"Yes."

"Don't be stupid," said Mathews. "How can you buy a man who doesn't want money? Saxon quit a six-hundred-dollar-a-week job to work for a quarter of that amount."

"He did?"

"Sure. You can't touch him with money."

"Too bad," said Specks wistfully. "He seems to be such a regular guy . . ."

From Golf to Worse

By

CLARK BODEY

JUDY was lying there asleep in the shade of the old elm on the Ninth green at Municipal, when I came over the hill. "Hey!" I yelled. "What's the idea?"

Judy sat up. "Oh, hello, Phil," she yawned. "What's what idea?"

"You know darn well," I told her. "What happened to those ten practice balls I just pitched over the hill onto this green? Silver Eagles, stupid! All with Phil Cole stamped on their covers—*p* as in poor —*h* as in hell—"

"Tch! Tch!" she said, patting her taffy-colored hair. "Such language!"

Judy propped herself back on her tanned arms and watched me poking around in the underbrush with my putter. The spikes on her golf shoes were worn down to mere nubs. I guessed she had been playing plenty while I'd been away.

Pest, her mongrel terrier, came out of the woods and watched me too, his pink tongue dripping in the June heat.

"I thought," Judy said, "that since you won the Florida Open all you had to do was snap your fingers for a hole-in-one."

"Wise crack, eh?"

She said, "You're conceited, too. Otherwise, you'd not come along and accuse me of petty larceny."

"Petty?" I yelled. "Ten Silver Eagles *petty?*"

"Petty, because they belong to Phil Cole who used to be caddy master at Municipal before he got famous and began playing in plushbottom foursomes and got his picture in the Sunday gravure sections along with Mary Bain!"

I stuck my fists on my hips. "Oh—so you're jealous of her!"

"I'm not!" Judy shouted. She put her hands on her hips too. "Personally, I thought you looked like a baboon in your

There was Judy snagged good and tight in the fence.

pictures, the way you were grinning. But then, Mary may like bab—"

"Keep still, brat!"

It gets her, usually, to be reminded that she is three years my junior. Just because I went South last winter as house guest of a solvent Deke brother, and entered the Florida Open and won it, is no reason for Judy to get sore. Could I help it if Mary was standing beside me when the pictures were taken?

"Just Mary's little lamb," Judy hissed. I couldn't take it.

"That's funny, I suppose," I said. "Well, let me tell you that Watley Bain is president of Exeter Hills and may make me pro there next season!"

Pest made a dash for my heels but I beat him off. Judy yelled: "So you'd give up your chance to practice law with Jeff Driggs?"

"For four grand a year I'd give up anything!"

She really got mad then. She said, "Golf is just a game to you. That's why you won't ever make a good pro!"

"Sweetheart," I reminded her, patiently, "I won the Florida Open didn't I? From obscurity to fame in 36 holes—"

"From golf to worse," Judy wisecracked.

THAT made me sore. "I've got my eye on four grand,' I shouted. "If I made that much as a lawyer I'd think I was my own client."

"You'd rather be a pro than a lawyer, is that it?"

"That's the idea," I said patiently. "When you and I get married we can't live on love and kisses. I like steaks—thick ones, too."

Judy snapped, "Plenty of pros eat bacon and like it. You won't ever be in the steak money. You haven't got that certain something. That—that—"

I interrupted. "I'm going to be a pro and nobody can stop me!"

"Then," said Judy calmly, "we won't get married."

She said it just like that. But I was mad too, so I said, "All right, we won't!"

Since these fights of ours are more or less regular, we might have gone on fighting until we made up. But just then we heard a shriek off across the neck of woods between Municipal and Exeter courses.

There was Pest, in mad pursuit of a little long-haired dachshund named Gretchen, with Mary Bain herself screaming behind. I could see they were doing that three-thousand-dollar Exeter green no good. So I jumped the fence and racked off across the woods. Judy followed, but I heard her go down at the first barrier.

It took ten minutes to catch up with Pest, though I must admit that Gretchen was leading him on somewhat.

"There," I said. "No harm done!"

Mary grabbed Gretchen and began to coddle her.

"No harm done?" she choked. "You didn't see what I saw—the nasty little brute!"

Just then her caddy came pounding up. Mary whirled on him, her eyes snapping. "Where were you, Getho?"

"Lawdy, Miss," said Getho. "I was jest waiting' down in that ol' gully, like you tol' me to—"

"Go away," snapped Mary, shoving Gretchen into his arms.

"Yes'm."

When Mary turned to me again she was smiling. She changes quick that way. She looked up from under her long, dark lashes and said:

"I've just come from the clubhouse, Phil. You've been made assistant pro for the rest of the season at Exeter Hills!"

"That's just swell!" I grinned. "What a break!"

Mary said, "I'll go out for the Women's State Championship now. We'll win, won't we?"

"We?"

"Certainly. You'll work on my game," Mary smiled. "Watch this drive, will you Phil?"

She teed up and drove. Her drive is good, but not accurate. I inferred that it would improve under Phil Cole tutelage.

But just then I heard a wail and remembered Judy.

"Excuse me," I told Mary. "Somebody's hanging around for me over at Municipal."

When I got back, there was Judy, snagged good and tight in the fence. Pest sat there watching her. I heard her say:

"Pest, unhinge me. Damn this fence!"

I said, "Tch! Tch! Such language!"

Judy squinted up at me. "Unfasten my skirt, you brute!"

"Where are my ten Silver Eagles?"

"I—don't—know!"

I lit a cigarette. "You may be interested to know that I am to be pro at Exeter Hills next year, if I make good this summer."

"Please!"

"In fact," I added, "I'm going to coach Mary Bain for the Championship."

Z-i-i-ip!

Judy's dress gave way. But I didn't notice—for I'd just seen Pest coming out of the woods with a mossy relic in his mouth. He dropped it at the mouth of Judy's bag. The ball wobbled down the bunker and out of sight.

I let out a yell and jumped the fence. When I up-ended that bag two dozen old balls and my ten Silver Eagles rolled out. Pest gave one look at me and started running for tall timber.

When I got back, Judy had gone. But my ten Silver Eagles were all there waiting for me in a little sand-trap—stamped down good and tight.

YOU must not get the idea that Judy had done anything unusual. As far back as I can remember, she has been losing her temper at me. But this time it was different.

It all started when I won the Intercollegiate Golf Championship. When I got back home that summer none of the business men around town had a job that was good enough for me—or so they said. Would I come around again next Tuesday?

It got so bad that when Jeff Driggs offered me back my old job as caddy master at Municipal for the summer, I took it. He mentioned a job in his law office at twenty-five a week, but what's that compared to being pro at Exeter Hills? It's easy money, playing golf all day long. But Judy couldn't see it that way.

She didn't like the idea of my winning the Florida Open either. Those pictures of Mary and me had made her break out in a mild rash of poison ivy.

I was still sore at Judy when Jeff Driggs walked into the locker room at Municipal that next afternoon. He mopped his head, sat down and watched me cleaning out my locker.

"Hi, Phil!"

"Hello, Jeff," I said.

Jeff is a big, red-faced man—the kind of a man the Gazette calls "our distinguished citizen and leading lawyer." We sort of understand each other, Jeff and I.

"Leaving us?" Jeff asked.

"Yep," I said, and then told him all about Exeter Hills. And added, "I'll be made pro there next year, if I make good."

Jeff coughed. "Sounds like there was strings to it."

"I'm going to help Watley Bain correct a few things about his game," I admitted, grinning.

"Son," said Jeff, "there are some things about Watley's game no pro will ever straighten out."

I knew what he meant, of course. Watley Bain is not averse to taking advantage of every lie. He plays golf like he handles his bond-and-mortgage business. So that the right hand knows not what the left doeth.

Jeff began paring an apple with his jack knife. "The law is out then?"

"Sorry," I said, "but I'm afraid it is, Jeff."

"Any other duties to his position, Phil?" he asked.

"I will coach Mary Bain for the Women's State, if that's what you mean."

Jeff ate a sliver of apple without looking at me. "Watley usually gets his money's worth," he went on. "I suppose your being pro next year more or less depends on whether Mary wins that Championship?"

It wasn't easy to admit it. "More or less."

"Hmm!" said Jeff. He picked the seeds out of another Jonathan. "Does Judy know this?"

"What Judy knows is no concern of mine," I told him. "She is a very good little golfer and a nice girl, but she can't tell me what to do."

"No," said Jeff, shutting his knife and standing up. "I suppose not."

He walked to the door and stood there. "By the way, what is the best Mary Bain ever shot on Exeter Hills?"

"A seventy-nine now and then," I told him. "But I aim to cut it down to less."

"You better," said Jeff. "Because Judy shot it last summer in a seventy-six."

"Judy?" I yelled.

"Yep. She just made up her mind to enter the tournament."

Jeff pocketed his knife and began walking away.

"But why?" I called after him. "What chance does she think she's got?"

"I dunno," said Jeff. "You might ask her."

Can you tie that? Here I had devoted a lot of time teaching that brat how to play golf and now she is going to try to queer my chances for success! The only answer is that Judy is trying to teach me a lesson. Right then I decide to give her one.

EXETER HILLS is the richest club in our part of the country, with a pretty view between the elms right down to the eighteenth green below the clubhouse.

But I didn't enjoy it. Every time I saw that green I thought of Judy. With one putt, at just the right time, she could sink a promising career—my career.

In three weeks time I had Mary's drive finally ironed out into practically a straight line. One day Watley Bain came out to watch. He is a short, chipper little man with sharp blue eyes.

"I like your technique, young man," he told me. "Maybe if I play around with you a little oftener, I'll get over that bad habit of mine. How about a game?"

Since I did not know which bad habit he was talking about, I just grinned. It was my afternoon off, but a pro never says, "No." Especially not to Watley Bain—he's little tin god Number One at Exeter Hills.

"All right, Mr. Bain," I said.

Watley went off to get up a foursome while Mary linked her arm in mine. We were standing there behind the canvas and the way she looked up at me then made me a little dizzy.

"I'm going around with you," she said. "You must be careful not to tell Daddy too many things at once about his game."

"Sure," I told her. "I'll play along with him."

Mary cooed, "You're a sweet boy—" and then she lifted her lips and sort of closed her eyes.

Since we were all alone there wasn't much I could do but kiss her. Mary's lips were cool and sweet, and for a minute I forgot all about golf lessons.

But just then there was a terrific clatter out front, and there went Judy Hoyne, scooting down the road toward Municipal. Her clubs were in the back of the flivver and Pest was sitting up beside her, nosing the wind.

"It's only Monday afternoon," I puzzled. "How did Judy get off from work to play golf?"

Mary Bain smiled lazily and said, "Oh, hadn't you heard? Jeff Driggs has given her afternoons off from the office to work on her game—she actually thinks she can win the Women's State. Isn't it too funny for words?"

"Yeh," I grunted. "Isn't it?"

Right then I saw it would have been better for me if I'd never helped Judy out of her first sand-trap.

THERE were white clouds piled up behind Exeter Hills clubhouse, and a fair wind blowing far enough off the ground not to toss your ball around, when Watley came back with Mel Jessup, our Mayor,

and a lean, tanned fellow I'd never seen before.

"Hello, Cole," said Mel, wringing my hand. "Nice game you played in Florida this spring!"

"Thanks."

Watley said, "This is Hi Jones. He's something of a golfer himself. Mel and Hi will take us on."

Hi Jones nodded to me and asked, "Low ball, low total?"

"Suits me," said Mel.

"Okay," I agreed, thinking that this fellow with the golfy name of Hi Jones was out to show me up. I didn't like his eyes. Besides, he was too handsome.

Watley held up his fat little hand.

"Wait," he said with a cagy grin, "I'll have to have a stroke on twelve and sixteen. Cole is still working on my game."

It is wonderful what a pro gets blamed for. But I nodded. Mel coughed and wrote on a score card. Hi Jones looked at Mary who was flipping a coin.

"Heads," said Hi. It was heads when he took her hand off the coin. She gave him a long look. He was still holding her hand, I noticed.

"You tee off, Mel," said Watley.

Mel Jessup can poke a ball almost a mile, and now he did just that. Hi Jones followed with one straight down the fairway beyond Mel's ball and hole high. Whew! A drive like that wasn't just beginner's luck.

Watley turned to me. "You'll have to go some to beat that, Cole. Personally, since I'm off my game this season—"

He waggled his club, just enough to get himself off balance, and then drove. The way his ball curved made you feel like ducking, in case it came sneaking up from behind.

"Hmm," said Watley frowning. "You haven't entirely corrected that slice of mine, Cole."

"That'll come," I assured him. "Look at the distance you're getting."

I didn't add that most of the distance was out in the rough. A pro just can't be a human being. And I thought of what Judy had said when I teed up my ball and stood back to drive—something about golf being a pro's business and not a game.

There was that polite, strained silence that a pro always hears: it's terrible. Sometimes you see your club missing the ball entirely. Or dubbing a drive. But you can't ever, because you're a pro. I drove.

Crack!

It felt good, that drive. And it was good. My Silver Eagle stopped rolling within an easy chip shot of the pin.

Genius struck Watley at this point and he took a mashie shot out of the rough to drop his ball on the green along with Mel and Hi. We tied the hole with two 3's and two 4's.

If the next sixteen holes did not make golf history, Watley's language did. Some of the words he used were not in Webster's Unabridged.

"Daddy's so impatient," Mary whispered to me. She was keeping score.

Watley looked up from the pit where he was working. "What the devil club do I use now?"

Since he had used all the clubs in his bag, I handed him my favorite Number 8 iron. He managed to pop his ball out and skip it near the pin.

"Nice work," I said, cleaning off the club-head.

"How much do you want for that iron?" Watley asked.

I said, "Oh, it's my favorite club—" and then stopped. Watley's face was getting red. Mary squeezed my arm. Danger signal.

"How much?"

I shrugged. "It's old. Take it if you want it. I'll get another."

"Thanks," said Watley, handing the club to his caddy. I swallowed hard, because that Number 8 was my luck club and it had pulled me out of a tough spot in the Florida Open.

When we came to the eighteenth, Hi was just three strokes under me. Mel got lost in the woods. Watley crept up to within a half dozen strokes of the mayor. He was grinnning like a cat.

"We'll take 'em," said Watley. "Watch your putting, Cole."

When we came down along that strip of woods near Municipal, you would have thought Watley Bain was winning the Amateur Open. He takes his golf that seriously.

We pitched onto the green. When we came up there sat all four balls, as pretty as toadstools after a rain.

Watley was two and a half feet from the pin. Mel was an inch from the cup. Hi Jones had a four foot putt, while mine was stymied a foot from the cup by Mel's ball.

Hi sighted his ball, putted. It ran in a slice and dropped dead in the cup.

"Bravo!" said Mary.

"Nice shot!" somebody said behind me.

THERE was Judy, hanging over the fence, with Jeff Driggs beside her. She was looking perfectly innocent. I scowled. It began to look as though my past would rise up and haunt me wherever I went.

My ball was a foot from the pin so I stepped up to putt. I've seen plenty miss even at that distance. But Watley cut in ahead of me.

"Take it, Cole," he said. He tossed Mel his ball, fished Hi's out of the cup and pocketed his own.

"Just a minute," I said. "I'd better hole out."

Watley got red in the face. Mary interrupted: "Three 5's—and Phil takes a 4. That gives Phil and Daddy the match!"

"Okay," I grunted. I stooped over quick-like, palmed my ball. Could I afford to make a fuss over one putt?

But I didn't look back as we walked away for I had heard a noise which shouldn't be made in polite society. It was a Bronx cheer. Judy made it.

Within eight weeks, I had Mary's troubles reduced to a seventy-seven, which is as pretty golf as you'll care to witness any day at Exeter Hills. I was pretty sure I could keep Judy from wrecking my career without resorting to murder—but then you can never tell about Judy.

The papers made quite a fuss over the Women's State Tournament at Exeter Hills. By the time registration day came around, the clubhouse looked like a meeting of the D. A. R. The women were pouring in from every direction.

About nine o'clock, Judy came rattling up with Pest beside her.

"Hello," I yelled. "Jeff tells me you've been shooting pretty good golf. How good?"

Judy looked at me like I was a New Zealand bushman and then she turned to Pest. "His face is familiar," she said. "Do you recognize him?"

The little mutt almost grabbed my hand. Judy patted his head. "He's very choosey," she told me. "Pest, what would you say I was shooting?" Pest yipped at me. "That's right," said Judy.

At this point, Mary Bain came up at the wheel of the yellow roadster with Gretchen in her lap. Pest gave one yip and jumped. I had to shag that little devil all over the yard before I caught him. Mary was stamping and shooing him away.

"From all appearances," I said to Mary, "you'd better let Gretchen have rest and quiet for a few days. The little lady isn't herself."

Mary pushed me into the roadster and shoved Gretchen into my lap. She gave me her nicest smile and said:

"Please take her home, Phil! That's a good boy!"

There are angles to a pro's job which can't be foreseen. This was one of them. But just then I saw Watley coming down the walk from the clubhouse. I was afraid he'd collar me and start talking about his slice—so I slid under the wheel and started off.

"Get ready for your match," I told Mary. "You're playing at nine-thirty. And remember your wrist action—"

Judy was sitting in her fliver, watching.

"Goodbye, Mr. Pro," she said with her best little-girl stare.

"Nuts!" I said, pushing Gretchen down out of sight beside me and pushing the gas pedal to the floor.

THE card which had Judy's scrawl on it bore an eighty when the elimination matches were over, which left her in championship flight. Mary had turned in a seventy-eight. I sweated a little, because I had a hunch that Judy's score was due to a new course and not to nerves.

By this time the chatter and noise around Exeter Hills would drive a person crazy. Every time the spiked heels dug into another green I saw red. Mary came up with Hi Jones. I remembered I'd been seeing them together a lot of late.

"You've got to watch your slice," I told Mary. "On number three and seven, particularly. Try to remember all I told you—"

"Nobody could," said Mary too sweetly, "so I'll just forget everything except letting my grip come further under—"

"Over, over!"

"I know. I just said it to hear you yell." She turned to Hi and smiled. "He has the most adorable temper!"

"All right!" I snapped. "You play your own game. But not during this tournament—I'm going to make you State Champion!"

Just then Watley came up. "That's the spirit," he told me. We watched Mary and Hi go off together. I mopped my neck.

"Wilson turned in his resignation this morning," said Watley with a cagey smile. "You're slated for the pro's job next year. That is, if everything goes right"—and I knew he meant if Mary would win—"for myself, I can't see much competition."

"I can," I growled, remembering the seventy-seven which Judy turned in last summer. What Judy has done she can do again.

You may have guessed that Mary and Judy were matched in the finals on the third day. It happens that way in books, and I'm sorry to report that it happened that way at Exeter Hills.

Just when I began to wonder if Judy couldn't maybe slip and sprain an ankle just a little, or get a bad case of sunburn, up she popped with her taffy-colored hair shining and her little round face smiling. Her blue eyes were as innocent as sin when she looked at me.

"Hi, Judy," I grinned, because I didn't want her to think I was nervous. "You can't be aiming to win today?"

"Sic 'em, Pest," she said.

I puzzled over the queer look she gave me as she went off to the locker room. You've seen people who have to go through with something they wish they were well out of? I wondered if Judy was scared.

Jeff Driggs coughed behind his hand.

"How's your entry?" he asked. "Judy shot a seventy-seven at Municipal yesterday."

I said, "Ain't that just dandy!" and went over to where Mary had just driven up with Hi Jones in the yellow roadster. Gretchen was curled up in the rumble seat.

Mary slipped her arm through mine. She said, "I have a hunch we're playing in luck today."

"I certainly hope so," I said. "Your dad had business in his eye when he said you'd win today—or else. I'm the 'or else'."

After the photographers were through snapping Mary in her new sports outfit, they tried to get Judy to pose. But she just shook her head and said to wait until the match was over, it would save negatives. The boys got a laugh out of that.

The gallery liked Judy too. By the time they were ready to tee off, there were at least fifteen hundred pairs of heels ready to tear up the Exeter Hills greens. There was the girl with the dog-eared rule book. Caddies. Reporters. And, of course, Watley and Hi Jones.

Mary came up and grabbed my arm. "Where's Gretchen?" she asked.

"What a swell thing to be thinking about now!" I growled. "You got a golf match on your hands. Let Hi hunt for her."

The referee said, "Quiet, please!"

Judy won the flip of the coin. She teed up her ball and the way she cracked it out made me proud—and then scared. Because I'd trained Judy, just as I'd trained Mary. I knew how good she was too. And now

she's putting the skids under me just to prove she was right about steak and bacon.

MARY waited until the gallery quieted down and then she drove. Her ball climbed like a Drummond fighter and stopped about five yards this side of Judy's ball.

"Bravo!" said Watley.

"Splendid," said Judy, and meant it.

While the gallery spread out and headed for number-one green, I saw Judy looking for Pest. He was her mascot—and he wasn't here!

When Mary played her iron shot she switched from a number 4 to a number 5 and back again. She dropped her ball with a little skid and backspin within two feet of the cup.

Judy's approach was high and clean. But she was five feet away from the pin on a down roll when she squinted at the cup and putted. Her ball trickled up to the edge and dropped while the gallery clapped. They all fell for Judy.

Before Mary putted, she tested the grass with her fingers. She said: "This green was badly mowed this morning."

Watley squatted down, looked, then turned to Wilson.

"See that the men are instructed how to mow a green properly, will you, Wilson?"

Wilson's face got very red. "Yes, sir," he said. I felt sorry for him.

Mary sank her putt. But she got only a spatter of applause.

On number two, Judy's ball rimmed the cup and skipped out again. She lost that hole, 5-4. But she just tossed her ball in the air and caught it like it didn't matter.

Judy could grin about it; but Mary wasn't smiling. She was figuring how she'd take the next hole. She was plenty serious. I remembered what Judy had said about golf being just a game to some people—and a business with others.

By the end of the first eighteen holes, Judy was six down to Mary and my nerves stopped registering high C. It was Judy who looked worried and a little hopeless when we went in to lunch.

Watley came prowling out to the pro-shop where I was eating a sandwich. He winked at me, and patted his little round stomach.

"Well, Cole," he said. "It begins to look like you know your business."

"Thank you," I said. "But a lot can happen on the last eighteen."

Watley nudged me in the ribs. "I've got a plan if things get too close."

"A plan?"

"Strategy, son, strategy," he whispered. "If you'd kept your eyes open this morning you'd have seen what to do. Just watch Mary if things get too close—"

That was all he said. At the time I thought he meant Judy was off her game because Pest wasn't along. Mascots are funny things. Some golfers like an old sweater, or a certain pair of gloves. Personally, I won the Florida Open because I had on an old felt hat—it was shot full of holes and luck.

Pest meant that to Judy. He was her four-leaf clover. A rabbit's foot. So long as he stayed away my chances were good. But I felt a little sorry for Judy.

By one o'clck the wind was stronger. The elms were swaying in the breeze as the gallery lined up at Number-one tee.

When Judy came along with Jeff Driggs I said:

"Good luck, kid."

"Thank you," she said, and gave me a funny look. Just then I saw Pest trotting along beside her. It gave me a turn. Where had she picked that little mutt up?

On the first hole Mary was on in three and sank her putt for a four. Judy missed hers for a five.

Mary said something to Watley who looked around until he saw Pest sitting up on his hind legs at the edge of the green. The little mutt was watching the match while the crowd grinned at him.

"Get that little tramp off the course!" Watley ordered. "He's spoiling my daughter's game."

Judy came up and said, "I'm sorry. I'll see that Pest stays back of the gallery after this."

"He'd better," growled Watley. For a minute everything was dead quiet. And then Judy laughed and everything was all right.

ON THE next green, Judy staged a come-back with a long putt. In quick succession she took four more holes. She was three down coming up to the Sixth green.

A bad case of jitters got me every time I saw Pest in the background. As a rabbit's foot he carried an awful punch! Mary began to get panicky and finally she came over to me and said:

"What'll I do? Think of something!"

"Watch your wrists," I told her. There was nothing else to say.

They halved the sixth. Mary was tightening up again, but she was still worried. Watley called her over and whispered in her ear. She nodded once or twice. Maybe you've guessed what it was.

Right then, Mary began to play Watley's kind of a game. She complained about everything. The greens were too fast; they were too slow. Somebody hadn't raked the sand-traps right; whoever had mowed the rough was a felon.

She played eenie-meenie every time she took a club from her bag. On the greens she waited until the crowd was so quiet you could hear the wind in the grass. She even put a saw-tooth edge on my nerves.

They halved the next four holes. Judy began to look a little desperate. For sheer mental cruelty you can't beat stalling on a golf course—and yet it's perfectly legal.

When Mary hauled a brassie in and out of her bag five times I blew up. "Stop stalling and play golf!" I growled in a low voice. "You know what'll happen if Judy wins."

"You'll lose your job," said Mary sweetly.

"All right. But play golf—"

"I am," Mary answered. "My kind. Yours doesn't get results."

On the eleventh, Mary got lucky and sunk a long approach shot. That left Judy four down and seven to go. But that didn't break her spirit. She came back on the twelfth and sank a long putt to make it only three down.

My shirt was soaked with sweat. Every time we came to a green, I dug my nails into my hands and held my breath. You could feel the gallery tensing as they halved the thirteenth and fourteenth.

Mary was babying her three-hole lead; Judy held on grimly, waiting for a break. She got it on the fifteenth. It was a brassie shot to the green for an eagle. Then Judy began pulling tricks out of her bag.

She used a wood out of the rough and a putter in the sand-trap. She snagged the sixteenth from under Mary's nose while the crowd went wild. And she did it with a gleam in her eye that made me want to strangle and kiss her at the same time.

"Hey! Why take chances like that?" I asked her.

"Why not?" asked Judy right back. "It's fun."

Fun! And she had a chance to beat Mary Bain for the Women's State Championship! But I knew just how she felt. I'd been that way myself when I won the Florida Open.

ON THE seventeenth, Mary stooped to sight her ball, then got up with her face growing red. Somehow she looked like Watley then. "Do I have to put up with seeing that little mutt every time I putt?" she asked Wilson.

I dropped down and looked through the crowd. There sat Pest, squinting between their legs at me. He'd been doing this every time Mary lined up her ball.

Watley yelled, "Get that dog off this course!"

Maybe it was the sight of Judy's face, white and desperate, that got me. Or maybe it was the way Mary was playing. Anyway, I got mad.

"Wait a minute," I said "That dog isn't a hazard—you can't do that!"

Watley whirled on me. "Keep out of this, Cole. Your job is teaching golf. Not rules!"

Before anybody could say anything

more, Judy grabbed Pest and shoved him into a caddy's arms. She was grinning now, and all at once she acted like herself again. Cocky—and happy.

"Take Pest away" she said. "I'm sorry if he interefered."

After that, the gallery tumbled all over itself trying to get to the eighteenth tee. I went alone, because right at that minute I had a lot of mixed-up thoughts.

They were tied!

The eighteenth is a dog-leg. It runs two hundred yards down past some woods, then breaks and doubles back for another three hundred.

Judy stepped up, but instead of lining up for the fairway, she faced that neck of woods between her and the green.

A cold hand grabbed my insides, when I saw that Judy was going to try to lift her ball across that woods. A hundred and ninety yards carry across to the fairway!

Why didn't she play it safe? Because that was just Judy. It wasn't showing off—she just wanted to do it. "I've always wanted to try this shot," she said to nobody in particular. "It looks like a good idea."

She settled her scuffed toes into the turf. I felt a thrill shoot up my spine. And when her club-head cracked that ball something tingled inside me. Even a dub golfer feels it. The sound of a perfect shot.

Her ball climbed, climbed—it looked as if it would land on that distant spot of green. When it did drop, the gallery just stood holding its breath. Somebody shouted over beyond the woods, "She made it!"

Then everybody was applauding and talking at once. I yelled at Judy: "That was a honey!"

"A real pro," said Judy giving me a funny look, "would call that taking too big a chance."

Mary played the safe way with a neat drive down the fairway. The crowd watched, but they trotted along after Judy across the woods. When we got there after Mary's second shot, I saw that Judy was in trouble. Her ball was on the fairway all right—but it was only about three feet from a tree.

"Well, here goes," Judy said, and she tried a brassie out, using a shortened grip. But she caught a limb on the backstroke.

"Too bad," said Mary, trying not to seem too pleased.

The gallery groaned out loud. The game was practically over. And when Mary stepped up and took a par five to win the Championship they cheered just enough to be polite.

It was Mary who wheeled on the referee and said:

"I thought you said that dog would be kept away!"

"What dog?"

Mary stooped and pointed across the green toward the woods. There, in line with her last putt, was a pair of beady eyes staring out at her. I made one jump and pulled back the bushes. Mary shrieked.

"My gosh!" said Watley.

There in the middle of a nest of leaves was Gretchen. Beside her were three squirming pups. She was looking as pleased as Punch. But Mary wasn't.

All the pups resembled Pest.

TEN minutes later, Watley came into the pro shop with Hi Jones trailing behind. I knew I had that four-thousand-dollar job in my pocket, but somehow I didn't feel so good.

"Great work," chirped Watley. "You'll be recommended, Cole. We'll all go to Florida this winter and play golf. Hi and Mary too."

"Yes," said Hi, "we'll take the pro along," and he grinned.

That one word did it. All at once I saw that a pro was just a fancy hired hand—to Hi Jones and people like him. And because the whole afternoon had me on the ropes I snapped, "So what?"

"Mary's announcing our engagement," Hi shot back. "I just wanted you to get it straight—"

I didn't like his sneer. And then it dawned on me that he thought I'd been making a play for Mary.

"I got it," I said, and let him have it on the jaw. Hi went over backward across a bench. Watley yelled:

"Hey, you can't do that! That'll cost you your job!"

"Take your job!" I snapped. "I'm not going to be a pro. I'm sick of telling you you're good. You're lousy—"

"Young man," shrieked Watley, "you can't say that to me!"

It felt good to be able to yell again. I had been cramped in my style for the past eight weeks at Exeter Hills. "You're not only lousy, but I never want to see your kind of a game again either. You've even got Mary playing it. She just crabbed her way to a championship!"

"Will you shut up?"

"No," I yelled, "and furthermore—"

A voice drawled from the door, "Can I carry your bags down Phil?"

It was Jeff Driggs. He didn't even look surprised when he caught up with me down at the car.

He said, " I heard."

"I've been a fool, Jeff. Will you please kick me?"

"Lots of folks don't know when they've been fools," said Jeff. "Bend over."

He kicked me, hard. I straightened up.

"Where's Judy?" I asked. "I got to see her. She was right about a lot of things and—I'm no pro."

Jeff drawled, "Maybe you're a lawyer. Would fifty a week be enough for two?"

"For two?"

Jeff nodded down the driveway. There sat Judy in her flivver, waiting. She got under way when she saw me start running. But I caught her at the end of the drive. Pest was yipping like mad.

"I tried to win, honest I did!" Judy squealed. I gave her time to catch her breath, and then I kissed her again.

"You were right," I told her. "I'm not a pro."

"You're not exactly an amateur, either," wise-cracked Judy. "Kiss me again."

"Ouch," I said.

Pest was tearing my pants to shreds. Judy picked him up by the scruff of the neck and dropped him overboard. He gave one yelp as he disappeared.

Just then Jeff honked behind us.

"Get going," he called. "This is a public driveway!"

Judy got under way. I looked back and saw Pest trotting grumpily behind.

"Come along, Casanova," I said. "You're eating steak tonight."

Muzzle Your Sea Food

THE hazards and perils of preparing lobsters for cooking have long been a handicap to the amateur chef. Heretofore the danger has been partially offset by driving a wooden peg under the movable "jaw" of the lobster's claw. This is all right as long as the peg stays in place, although a few kindly souls have worried about the distress caused to the lobster.

However, the latest method of rendering the lowly lobster hors de combat not only makes the job perfectly safe for the rankest skillet-novice but is painless for the lobster. It is a sea-food handcuff which clamps around the claw, making it immovable. That solves the problem of losing a finger to your potential dinner while cleaning it, providing you can find some way of placing the handcuffs without mortal wound. —*Ken Howard*

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WE WERE looking back fifty-five years the other day, to 1882. In that year Chester A. Arthur was President of the United States. Thomas Edison inaugurated the first commercial electric lighting in the New York Central Station. There were a lot of strikes. And Bob Ford shot Jesse James, and they "laid pore Jesse in his grave." All in all, a fairly interesting year (we forgot to mention that the Venezuelan legislature passed a Patent Law) but we rise to boast that among the most interesting of events was the appearance of a little four-page magazine, on December 10th of that year, called THE GOLDEN ARGOSY.

Fifty-five years, and ARGOSY, though changed in size and shortened in name, is still going strong. Not half a dozen magazines now extant can point to such an enviable record. And we believe there is a reason. ARGOSY, we think, has had fifty-five successful years because we have throughout that time continued to print the best in fine fiction; because we and our predecessors in the editorial chair have always kept in mind the fact that we were printing a magazine for readers with imagination, not dullards; and lastly, because we never tried to stick to outmoded standards, but welcomed new blood and new talent whenever and wherever we found it. Many a writer whose name is now a household word first appeared in the pages of ARGOSY.

We are proud of ARGOSY's record. And on this, the magazine's fifty-fifth anniversary, we trust you'll all rise with us and sing, "Happy Birthday to ARGOSY."

And don't forget the emeralds! (We looked it up—that's what we get.)

ALTHOUGH it may seem a little odd, you'll really have to take our word that the author of the following letter is not known to this department personally. However, from this moment on, he is one of our nearest and dearest friends. Thanks so much for the delphiniums, Mr. Bird. Won't you sit down and have a slice of birthday cake?

WESLEY S. BIRD

More stories about human beings instead of human fiends is making ARGOSY a better magazine. There is too much trash on the newsstands now. We who enjoy good yet live fiction are glad you are realizing that fact. Stories like "County Fair," "McCluskey's Lucky Day," "I Was The Kid With the Drum" are examples.

At thirty-one I have a record of reading ARGOSY for over nineteen years and I will say that recently the magazine has not only improved in looks but in quality of fiction. I hope you will allow new writers a chance now and then, as the present crop will not live forever and while the old favorites are welcome, so are the newcomers.

More humor could improve many of the stories. Why not let the man who writes the clever Argonotes editorials give us a laugh with a story once a month? He certainly should be able to pen some comic ones. The world needs some slapstick and less sordidness, and I believe you have tried to give it what it needs.

A word about the covers. They are 100% better than the old red-stripe type. But why spoil a good one like that Boy with Drum cover by spreading type over the whole front. Sure, I know you want to sell the magazine and sometimes authors' names help, but that cover should sell anything. It brings back memories to most any man. . . . Give the artists a break too and don't ruin their covers, please.

Gosh, I've sure used up a lot of space trying to tell you how to run your magazine but after such a long association with it as a reader I feel I am part of it too.

Columbus, Ohio

AND what would the birthday party be without at least one guest who knew us in the good old days? Move over, gilded youth. 'Way for

L. R. CONGER

I have never missed an issue of the ARGOSY since the old days of the "Golden Argosy" therefore am an old-timer with your charming magazine.

I agree with you that a straw vote is a headache, furthermore as has been shown by other straw votes it does not always indicate the majority.

Your new cover arrangement is excellent and attractive and people often purchase a magazine by the looks of the cover.

Your ARGOSY is a home-lovers' magazine and for people who like to sit down in an evening and have a book-length serial to read for the whole evening or for several evenings, not a lot of short stories.

There are hundreds of short story magazines for transients, but only one ARGOSY.

Why not use your own judgment and disregard straw votes. You built your reputation up on a serial magazine, why lose it? After all, isn't that the answer?

There isn't another magazine on the market, of that kind, insofar as I know with as many serial stories. I don't know what I would do if I had to read a lot of short stories that ended before you got to know and enjoy the characters.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

ADD ARGOSY-Authors-Make-Good department: Otis Adelbert Kline's *Jan of the Jungle*, that alert young liana-acrobat and lion-tamer who was running wild through these pages not many Congo moons ago, has been neatly placed between book-covers by the astute publishing house of Edward J. Clode, Inc., who obviously know a potential best-seller when they see one. The title has been changed to: *The Call of the Savage*, under which name Jan was leaping from bough to bough before the movie cameras as a cinema-serial hero last season.

POETRY CORNER

After tremendous and arduous toil to say nothing of privation and exposure, the following work of art is wrenched from the perspiring brow of genius and *is* herewith tendered to posterity:

EPIC OF AN EPICUREAN

I et . . .

—J. V. PETERSON

AND, at the very bottom of the bag, we find a tiny scallion for our Mr. Arthur Leo Zagat Following Mr. Smith's suggestion, we hurried over to Mr. Zagat's house and examined his head. It turned out to be a nice-well-rounded occiput with a brachi-cephalic index of 7.82. As we observed it, it talked, moved from side to side and smoked a popular brand of tobacco in a large pipe.

ROY F. SMITH

I have been a reader of the good old ARGOSY for a great number of years and enjoy every story until that one "Drink We Deep" and I think that author (Arthur Leo Zagat) should have his head looked after. There sure is something wrong with it, for that is the most crazy story I ever read and it is a shame to spoil a good magazine like the ARGOSY with it.

Petitcodiac, N. B.

Considerably less militant in tone is the communication from

JOE PARHAM, JR.

Five minutes ago I finished Eustace L. Adams' serial, "Stunt Man" and it inspired this letter. Adams is, in my opinion the best writer for your magazine. Any time you publish an Adams story, you can be certain that I will buy that week's ARGOSY magazine.

I am not a regular reader. I buy only about thirty of the year's fifty-two issues. I'm almost afraid to start a serial for I know that I will invariably buy the continuing installments to see how the story ends. And usually these magazines have only one or two stories that interest me.

I have purchased your magazine off and on for about six years.

I notice that many of your readers like "Men of Daring." I do not get as much enjoyment from it as formerly. They are rather monotonous now. The same goes for W. C. Tuttle's "Henry."

You are doing a good job. I only hope you get as much enjoyment from printing the ARGOSY as I get from reading it. Keep up the fine work.

Woodstock, Ga.

Looking Ahead!

ORDERS IS ORDERS

Deep in battle-torn China, 116 Americans cowered in their consulate, dodging shells and disease. Over the radio their plea for aid reached a United States cruiser anchored at Shanghai. And that was where Gunnery-Sergeant James Mitchell of the Marines came in. A complete short novel by

L. RON HUBBARD

GUNS, GENTLEMEN

Once, when the morning mists rose from the Adriatic, a Stephen Botillier had gone out to die upon the field of honor. Today, in a time when such things do not happen, another of that proud name found himself walking in the footsteps of his ancestor. . . . An enthralling, unusual novelet by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

TOBACCO JAMBOREE

It's beginning to seem as if His Excellency can't pat an orphan's head or open a highway without leading that pair of husky but not very mental motorbike patrolmen who are his escort into sundry and spectacular difficulties with the underworld. A short story by

HENRY F. CHURCH

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MEN PAST 40

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Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over $1,600 per month for three months—close to $5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made $55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over $300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from $5 to $60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

Not a "Gadget"—
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

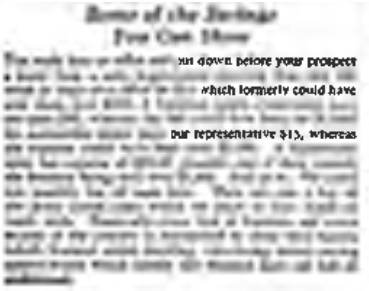
Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a $7.50 order, $5.83 can be your share. On $1,500 worth of business, your share can be $1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth $6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth $67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of



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