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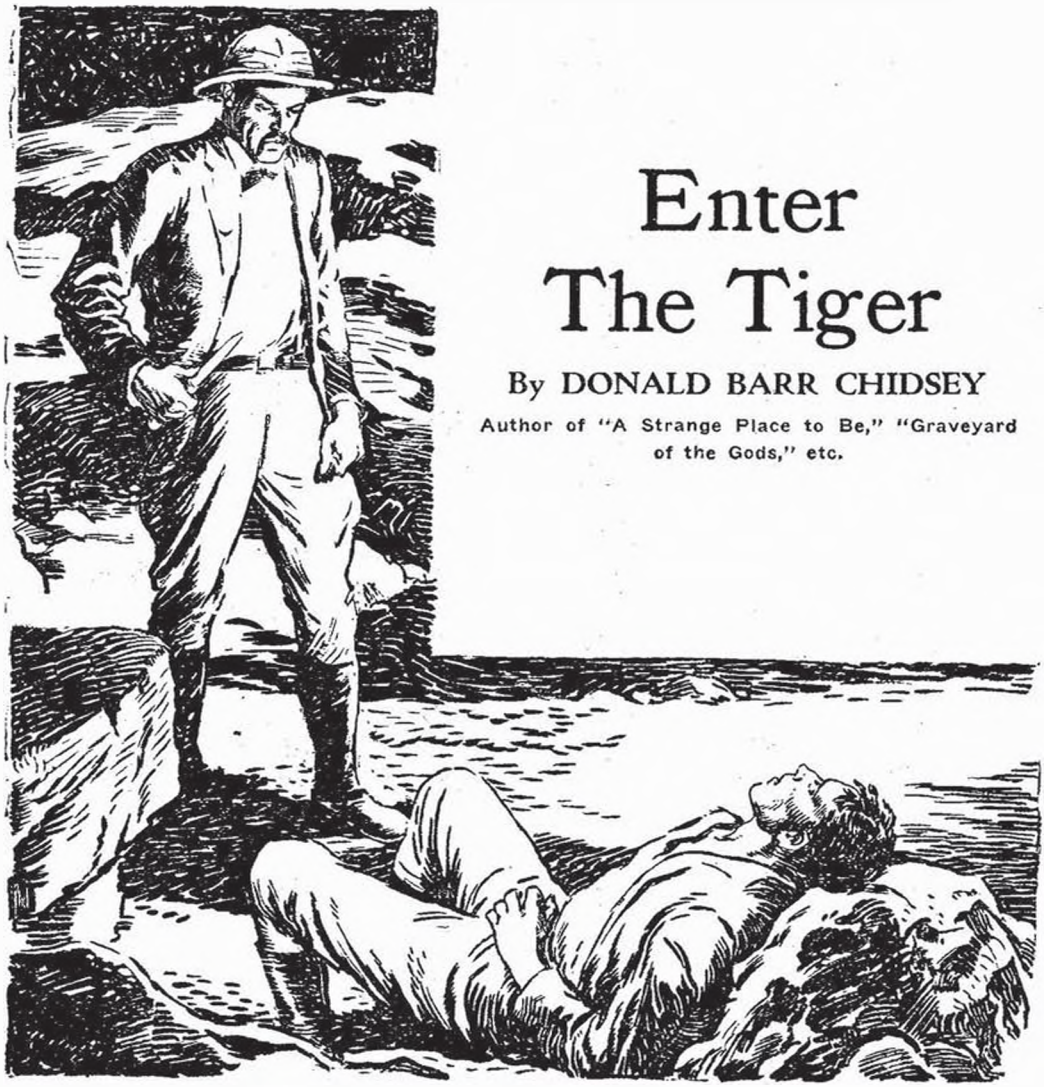
Complete
Fisher-Savoy Novelet

I

EDDY SAVOY sat on an elephant; and since it was late afternoon and the sun was setting behind him, and a breath of the cool of evening was rising from the jungle all around, there was no apparent reason for the sweat which beaded his upper lip, his temples and his forehead. If you had touched it you would have found that this sweat was cold. For Eddy Savoy was afraid.

Certainly the scene itself was peaceful enough. The elephant stood, looking bored, on the top of Phnom Bakheng. Behind him was the temple, or what remained of it, originally called Yasodharaisvara, and also several small shrines, mostly overgrown by foliage, and the ruins of a Buddhist monastery. Before him and on both sides stretched limitless seas of greenery—teak, mahogany, *sao* trees, wild fig trees, *fromager* trees, ebony, and here and there clumps of lower, lighter, exquisitely delicate bamboo. Off on the right, three or four miles away, was the Hotel Grand of Siemreap, where Eddy had a suite of rooms. What other buildings showed—and there were not many of them able to rise above the jungle—were quite different. They were the remains of the ancient civilization of Khmeer kings, immensely impressive ruins buried for a thousand years or more, forgotten by mankind, unknown to Europeans until very recently. Only the youngest and best preserved among them, the grand-



Enter The Tiger

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "A Strange Place to Be," "Graveyard of the Gods," etc.

est too, the world-famous Angkor Wat, was visible in its entirety. It faced the hill where Eddy sat, and the rays of the setting sun showered its towers with blues, purples, oranges, reds.

The whole place was a paradise for an archeologist. But Eddy Savoy didn't happen to be an archeologist. He was not a tourist either, in the ordinary sense of the word, although he was posing as one. He was not thinking of the wonders of Khmeer architecture as he sat there on that elephant. He was thinking of the fact that if he made a single misstep at this stage of the game his life wasn't worth a nickel.

Two other men were on the elephant. A Bengali boy in a dirty red *sarong* and a dirtier white turban, loafed on the animal's head, lighted a cigarette, yawned. Eddy's guide, a massive man in ducks and a khaki sun helmet, stood at the front of the *howdah*.

"Voilà, monsieur! La vue magnifique!"

Eddy said, "Yeah. It sure is pretty."

The guide leaned over the edge of

the *howdah* and pointed out what buildings were visible besides the Angkor Wat itself, naming them, Takeo, the Bayon, Phnom Bok, Phnom Kulen, and reminding Eddy that he had seen them at close quarters earlier in the day.

The guide's name was, or was supposed to be, Mazin. He looked fat, but this was an illusion. In fact he was all muscle, uncommonly tall and strong for a Frenchman, exceptionally lively for one who lived in the tropics. He had a large black mustache, rather terrible to behold, but to offset this he had very small dark eyes which glittered with amiability and were surmounted by tiny black eyebrows; the eyebrows were habitually arched high, giving him an appearance of genial amazement.

Eddy moved closer to him, asked a question. The guide began to talk in broken English, pointing out things.

Eddy's hands went all over the guide's body. The guide did not know this, and the reason was because Eddy Savoy in his day had been one of the cleverest crooks in the United States—a sneak thief as a boy, a pickpocket as a young man, and finally, attaining his majority as a brilliant jewel burglar. He was a little man, Eddy Savoy, and he looked even smaller next to his ponderous guide; his tiny hands could move with the lightness of butterflies, with the swiftness and certainty of the hands of a professional gambler. Within three minutes they had explored every pocket, in both coat and trousers, of the guide's clothes; and the guide never suspected a thing.

The hands had found and felt: an automatic pistol, a small one, probably a .22; a thin sheath knife with a blade about seven inches long; a piece of thin strong cord about eighteen inches long, knotted at each end; and four large rings, jewel-encrusted, though whether the stones were precious and the rings real silver or gold, even Eddy's fingers, of course, could not tell.

Mazin moved slightly, and Eddy's hands went back where they belonged. Had the guide felt anything? Eddy cried, "Good Lord! What's that?"

It was not entirely a move to divert the guide's attention and make him forget his suspicions, if any. Eddy really had something to yell about.

THE last bit of gilding sunlight had gone, suddenly, as it does in those parts. A half moon already had risen, and the top of the jungle below was smeared silver with its light. From out of the many ancient towers of Angkor Wat rose silently a great black cloudlike mass. It could have been smoke, but it wasn't. It almost blotted the vast ruins from sight. Eerily, swiftly, it rose above the ruins, swirled slowly around, and began to break into long streamers, ribbons of blackness; it began to dissolve.

"Bats, *monsieur,*" the guide explained. "You saw them this afternoon when we visited the temple. You saw them hanging by their feet from the ceiling, head down, thousands of them, hundreds of thousands! Every night at this hour, just as the sun sets, they quit the ruins and go forth in search of food. Every morning at dawn they return. It is a familiar sight here, the bats."

Eddy took out a handkerchief, wiped his face, exhaled heavily. "Thought I was seeing things for a second there," he exclaimed, while the guide laughed obsequiously. "Thought I must have been going nuts. This certainly is a funny place, all right."

"Ah oui, monsieur! There is no other place so strange in all the world. If all the secrets of those old kings could be told—" He shrugged, rolled his eyes. *"Souvenez-vous,* they lived here for centuries. Then for centuries more, *monsieur,* there was only the jungle—the wild tigers and elephants and leopards."

"Tigers?" said Eddy. He wiped his face again. Two rubies, each surrounded by flashing diamonds, showed in two rings on his fingers as he did this. He drew out a gold cigarette case encrusted with diamonds, took a cigarette, offered one to the guide. "Do they have tigers here, too?"

"Ah, monsieur, but this is the most famous tiger-hunting country in the world! Greater even than India! Only a few miles away from the Grand Hotel they have killed tigers ten, twelve, fourteen feet long."

"They don't come in *this* close?"

The guide smiled tolerantly. "Not usually, *monsieur.*"

"Umph!"

"But one was seen yesterday, very early, near the East gate of Ankor Thom. A big one. He has been seen there before, too."

Eddy said "Umph!" again, and lighted his cigarette. The Bengali boy, understanding not a word of all this, stirred impatiently and glanced back at the men in the *howdah;* but they paid him no attention. It was cooler now. The bats from Angkor Wat were gone. The moon was riding higher in the sky, and there were a million stars in brave array. Just below, among the trees on the hillside, monkeys were fussing themselves to sleep, making curiously shrill little whistling or squeaking sounds.

"Those are beautiful rubies you have, *monsieur,*" the guide said.

"Yeah," said Eddy. "I like rubies. And I've been hitting the big dough lately, so I'm loading up with them."

"The old Khmeer kings were fond of rubies, too," the guide said thoughtfully, "and of diamonds and emeralds and sapphires."

"Anybody ever conquer them and take all that stuff away? They must have been rich as all-get-out."

"They were richer than Solomon. The Chams conquered them, *ah oui!* But they found no jewels. The Siamese, too, several centuries later. They overran this whole countryside and tore down temple after temple, looking for the jewels. But they never found them."

"Maybe they didn't look in the right place?" Eddy suggested.

The guide leaned closer, and in spite of the fact that he knew the elephant boy could not understand English he lowered his voice. He touched Eddy Savoy's forearm. A shiver ran through Eddy, who in his time had been in and out of many a tight place, whose wits and presence of mind and sheer personal bravery had often saved his own life. Yes, Eddy was no stranger to peril. But ancient Khmeer kings, ruined temples and palaces, tigers, elephants, hundreds of thousands of bats —he was not accustomed to these things, and he was nervous.

The guide whispered: "If *monsieur* is truly interested in rubies, I could tell *monsieur* a very strange story—"

Eddy said: "Let's get out of this place."

"Of course, if *monsieur* is not interested—"

A *kongrang ho,* a snake perhaps four to five feet long and disproportionately thick, slithered past in front of the elephant. It was singularly beautiful, glittering like gold in the moon-

light. The elephant, confident of its thick hide, paid no attention; but one nip of *kongrang ho* would kill a mere man.

"I'm interested, all right, sure," Eddy said. "But how about later? I want to see those native dancers tonight, but that'll be over around half past ten. Suppose you meet me at the hotel?"

"Bien, *monsieur*. It—uh—it may seem fabulous to you—"

"Nothing would seem fabulous in this place. Meet me out on the terrace and I'll buy you a drink. Okay?"

"Very good, *monsieur*."

They started down toward the highway.

EDDY SAVOY was technically a dead man. For many years the terror of cops and the despair of insurance companies, he was too well known to live outside of jail—under his right name. In the records, he was finished—drowned in Honolulu harbor. Actually, under the name of Everard Savage, he had been employed as assistant manager of a sugar and pineapple plantation on the island of Molokai, Territory of Hawaii, where he lived a quiet, lazy, reasonably useful life; making not as much in a whole year as he had once been accustomed to steal in a night; but happy. One man alone knew his secret, and he was the only person who could possibly have induced Eddy to quit the comfortable obscurity of Hawaiian plantation life. He was, in fact, none other than Nick Fisher, admittedly the most brilliant insurance detective in the country and for many years arch-enemy of arch-crook Eddy Savoy. Nick Fisher would not betray him. Eddy—Everard Savage now—once had saved Nick's life; and Nick was not a man to forget. Nick, indeed, would not even endanger his friend's established identity by calling upon him or writing to him in his Hawaiian retreat. They had not met for more than a year. It took a case as strange as the Mansfield ruby robbery to bring them together again and to send both of them across thousands of miles of ocean. But they were not traveling together. That would have been fatal to their plans.

The Mansfield rubies were worth probably a quarter of a million dollars. Nick Fisher's company had insured them for $150,000, and their theft was quite understandably a matter of concern to that company. Nick himself, with an unbroken string of successes behind him, took the case.

Yet for months even Nick Fisher had seemed stumped. His underworld connections, his encyclopedic memory, his long experience, all had seemed to fail him. He had more than a hint of the identity of the man who was responsible for the robbery, but he could not locate him, nor could he find any trace of the celebrated rubies themselves. Rubies like that, enormous and without flaw, would be difficult to market. Broken, recut, reset, they would be worth only a small percentage of their original value. It seemed logical to suppose that they would appear somewhere, and that sooner or later Nick would have something from which to work back. Meanwhile, puzzled but patient, he had waited.

The break had come most unexpectedly. Nick Fisher was not a social soul, and most of his friends and acquaintances were of the underworld; but it had happened that one day he was buttonholed by a friend, a millionaire whose wife's bracelet he had once recovered. This millionaire had recently

returned from a trip around the world, and like all such persons he was eager to talk about it. Nick wasn't interested really; but the man was a good customer. He began to show Nick snapshots. Many of them Nick did not even look at, though of course he pretended to do so. It was sheer luck which prompted him to take a proper look at the one snapped in front of the Phimeanakas.

"Say, wait a minute! Who is this?"

"Why, that's just the wife and myself in front of some of those ruins around Angkor Wat. Those other people are the Simpsons, a couple we met on the ship going down to Saigon from Hongkong."

"Yeah, but who's this man over here on the end?"

"Oh, just a guide."

"A professional guide?"

"Sure. But not a native. He was a Frenchman, I remember, and he talked good English. Hung around the Grand Hotel. He was the best in the business there, from what I understand."

"You wouldn't remember his name, would you?"

"Lord, no! I doubt if I ever heard it. He was just a guide."

"Excuse me," Nick had said. "I just remember some important business."

THE next morning, after having looked up Cambodia in the encyclopedia to see where it was, he started out. On the way he stopped at Honolulu, planed to Kalekakai, and then went by automobile and horseback to the plantation where his old friendly enemy. Eddy Savoy, worked as Everard Savage. He had put a sporting proposition before Eddy.

"You can see how it is. I never forget a face, and I'm absolutely certain that this guide in the picture is Frenchy Martel. I can't make inquiries at long distance, even if it was possible, not knowing his name. Besides, that would tip him off and he'd blow."

"But what under the sun would Frenchy Martel be doing in a place like that?"

"I don't know, but I'm traveling half way around the world to find out. After all, he can't stay in the U. S. It's too hot for him there; and if he should ever get picked up, with his record, he'd be turned over to the federals who would deport him right away as an undesirable alien. He's a French citizen, you know. I've had operatives looking all over France for him, but I haven't been able to locate him. Well, Cambodia is a French protectorate. He could go there without a passport or too many embarrassing questions, just the same as you were able to come here to Hawaii when you were dodging half the cops and insurance men in the States."

"You're not absolutely sure Martel swiped those rubies?"

"No, but he's the only crook in the country clever enough and bold enough to pull a job like that, now that you've dropped out of the business, Eddy."

"Sh-sh! Mr. Savage to you. Even though there isn't anybody around."

"Frenchy knows me by sight, of course. If I put in appearance he's going to scamper for cover right away. After all, I haven't got a thing on him, only suspicion. And he's a French citizen in a French protectorate. But you say he doesn't know you?"

"No, I'm sure he's never seen me or a picture of me. And I've never seen him. I've heard about him, of course, and I'm sure he's heard plenty about me, but we've never met."

"Well then, look. What about giving me a hand? All expenses, of course,

and you can name your own fee, win, lose or draw."

"Nick, it's awfully quiet and nice out here."

"I know, Eddy, but listen—"

THE dancers, in their extraordinary costumes and great high-peaked crowns, fairly clanked with metal ornaments of every sort and with pieces of colored glass. On bare feet, with their ring-splendid hands bent back, their faces hidden by grotesquely painted masks set with rhinestones, they shuffled weirdly across the grass through the patterns of dance movements thousands of years old; while on the right an orchestra of some twenty-five or thirty half-naked natives hammered on tomtoms, crashed cymbals, played strange shrill pipes, and chanted without pause.

It was spectacular. It was also very noisy.

Eddy Savoy, who was a born actor, sat in a large wicker chair. His eyes were glassy. He held a brandy *stengah.* He watched the dancers but didn't really seem to see them. There were eighteen or twenty other tourists present that night, and most of them agreed that Eddy Savoy was just another idling, drunken, rich American. His hair was mussed, his expression fuzzy. In his shirt front glittered two huge diamond studs, and there were diamond rings on two of his fingers. Every time he clapped his hands for another drink, which he seemed to do every few minutes, he passed the waiter two, three, four or five piastres —whatever came easiest to hand—and told him to keep the change. The price of a brandy *stengah* was one piastre.

A large, softly smiling man stood behind Eddy—a slow and lazy-looking man who puffed a pipe. He too watched the dancers. Everybody was doing that, naturally.

Eddy's lips were parted. He said, without change of expression, without seeming to move his mouth, yet in such a low voice that nobody but the large man could hear it, "You see him?"

Nick Fisher answered, "Yes, I saw him. It's Frenchy Martel all right." He never stopped looking at the dancers, never took his pipe out of his mouth. His words, like Eddy's, were lost to everybody but the man for whom they were intended.

"He see you?"

"No!"

For a few minutes the clash of cymbals and thumping of wooden drums was too loud for them to converse. When it throbbed to a lower pitch again, Eddy sipped his drink, still staring glassy-eyed at the resplendent figures on the grass.

"I frisked him, Nick," he whispered. "A gat, a knife, a garroting string and some hardware props. I didn't see the hardware."

"I've been checking on him. Since he's been employed as a guide here he has often taken long walks at night in the direction of the ruins. People aren't allowed there at night, but it isn't guarded. It's a dangerous place then. Poisonous snakes. Leopards. Even tigers."

"I know. He told me about a tiger seen near the Takeo only this morning. It wasn't boloney either. I checked at the hotel."

"He's made three different trips to Bangkok and two to Phnom Penh since he's been here, each time carrying a heavy suitcase. They've got some of the cleverest jewelers in the world in those two cities. Clever at faking antique stuff, I mean."

"I suppose that cord was a stunt he'd

learned in Paris, but why a sheath knife between his shoulder blades with the handle at the back of his neck?"

"He did a term in the French penal colony at Cayenne once," Nick answered. He tapped ashes from his pipe, relighted it. "I suppose he picked up knife throwing there. He's versatile, Frenchy is. Any luck?"

"Perfect. He's waiting for me on the terrace of the Grand right now, and I think he's going to spill the whole story tonight when he thinks I'm drunk as a hoot owl and ought to tumble nicely. He hinted at it this afternoon, and we've got a date."

"Yes, I left him at the Grand," Nick whispered. "I was tailing him. If I hadn't been sure he was there I wouldn't have taken the risk of coming here now."

"He may even take me out there tonight," Eddy whispered. "I hope that tiger isn't hanging around! Maybe you'd better blow, Nick. What the tiger would do to me wouldn't be anything compared with what Frenchy Martel would do if he thought I was working with you!"

"Yeah, I'll blow," Nick agreed. "I've got a car hired already to drive me to Kompong Thom tonight. Telephone me at the hotel there tomorrow."

"Nick, you're absolutely certain Frenchy hasn't seen you?"

"Oh, absolutely! Don't let that worry you, fella! Well— 'luck!"

"I'll need it," Eddy muttered.

II

NICK FISHER was not ordinarily overconfident. It was his habit to check every conceivably checkable detail of a case, and though he played his hunches as a good detective should, he did not count too heavily upon luck. In spite of his size, he was an expert man-trailer. He really meant it when he told Eddy Savoy that Martel, known locally as Mazin, had not seen him in Siem Reap or Angkor.

Frenchy Martel, as a matter of fact, was at that very moment, not on the terrace of the Hotel Grand, but in the back of a small tobacco and grocery shop in the village, conferring with a couple of gaunt, hard-eyed Cantonese. These fellows were hatchet-men in trouble at home. They would not be safe anywhere in south China, nor would they be permitted to land at Singapore. They had been fortunate in picking up a job with Frenchy Martel, who by the same token had been lucky to enlist their services.

"No more pipes," he told them harshly. "How many have you had apiece already? Four? Five?" He pocketed a handful of *chandu* tubes, hauled both of the Cantonese to their feet. They were a bit wall-eyed, he noticed, but he was sure that they could understand him. "We've got work to do. You—" He pointed to the shorter of the hatchet-men. "You remember that big fellow I showed you in front of the pagoda today? Well, he announces at the New Siem Reap that he's clearing out for Kompong Thom tonight. He's got the car and driver hired and all that, but I don't believe him. I won't feel safe until he's dead. *Dead* is what I said, understand?"

The hatchet-man nodded. Orders to kill were no novelty to him. For the murder of a white man, as a rule, the price was much higher in the scale of assassination prices; but the hatchet-man was in no position to complain. Besides, he didn't feel like talking.

"I've got a prospect lined up," continued Frenchy Martel, "and I don't

want Nick Fisher to be in the same part of the world with me while I play it. He's too smart. In another day or so this prospect might decide to move on. So we've got to move fast. All right, you heard me. The big fellow pulls out at ten o'clock on the Phnom Penh road."

He sniffed, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the sickish-sweet smell of opium. He didn't look genial now—didn't look, as he did in the daylight, like a comic character, with his large mustache, his little black eyes and his high, absurd brows so foolishly arched. He looked like the killer that he was, graduate with honors from one of the toughest schools of scoundrelism in the world—the Parisian by-streets and back alleys.

He jabbed a dirty thumb toward the taller hatchet-man.

"You! I want you to trail us tonight, if I do take this American out, as I think I might. Use your judgment. Don't let him see you, but if anything goes wrong, you know what to do!"

He went out, glowering. He went to the terrace of the Grand Hotel, and half an hour later he was beaming upon Eddy Savoy and thanking him obsequiously for a drink.

THE shorter of the two hatchet-men was perhaps a bit higher with dope than Frenchy Martel had supposed; but he was quite capable of understanding an order to kill. He examined his Colt .45 automatic, making sure the clip was full. But he did not plan to use it. There was another way, a way in which he had always wished to kill somebody. His imagination stirred by the narcotic, his courage at top pitch, he opened a small greasy black handbag and took from it two Mills hand grenades.

"He mustn't get there," the Frenchman had said. "I don't know how you're going to do it, and I don't care. But he mustn't get to Kompong Thom!"

The hatchet-man, not altogether steady, climbed on a bicycle. He had no head lamp, but this did not bother him, for the moon, though growing fainter as it climbed the heavens, and encountering there an increasing number of clouds, still shone enough to light the highway. In five minutes he was out of Siem Reap. In fifteen more minutes he was hiding his bicycle behind a grove of rubber trees on the left side of the highway next to a rice paddy.

There was a curve at this point, and from the shadowed vantage of the rubber trees it was possible to see the highway in both directions. So the fact that the moon at this juncture definitely decided to slip back of a large, low, black cloud, was of no importance. A grenade in each hand, he waited.

He did not wait long. The car was easy to recognize, even when it was still some distance away and showed only as a couple of yellowish headlights. It was a large white Renault.

The hatchet-man grunted. He knelt. He put one bomb on the ground in front of him, and with his left hand he grasped the pin of the other one. He had served, in his time, with various Chinese armies, legitimate and otherwise, and he was no stranger to hand grenades.

The car came closer. It was not going fast, and as it approached the curve it slackened speed still more. The hatchet-man drew a deep breath. Staring at the on-coming car, he drew the pin. The bomb began to hiss, softly, apologetically.

A squeal of brakes alarmed the quiet night. The Renault halted.

The hatchet-man saw what had happened, but saw it too late to do anything about it. A water buffalo, slick-flanked with mud and slime from the rice paddies, had in the addle-pated way of water buffaloes, hens and some women, decided for no reason at all, to cross the road. It lurched lumberingly out of its wallow, muck glistening on its slate-gray sides, its nose quivering with brownish-gray goo, its horns literally as dull as ditchwater.

This was why the Renault screamed to a stop.

The hatchet-man saw it, but what could he do? He held an unpegged, sizzling bomb. He had nicely calculated the distance, but because of the water buffalo the Renault could not come that far. If he continued to hold the bomb, it would explode in his hands. He did the only thing he could. He heaved it toward the car, harder than he had intended, and prayed that it would reach.

It didn't. It only reached the water buffalo.

The hatchet-man saw the car stop, saw a large man spring out of the back, saw the glitter of a pistol. That was enough for him. At best he was a poor marksman, and he was never at his best after seven or eight pipes. He turned and ran.

NICK FISHER vaulted a ditch, moving with astounding speed for a man of his size. He reached the edge of the rubber grove. He went to one knee, and there were explosions in the darkness ahead of him.

Nick, unlike the hatchet-man, was a crack shot. But here he was at a serious disadvantage. He was silhouetted against the edge of the rice paddy, whereas the hatchet-man, whom he couldn't see, was safe in the shadow of the trees.

Nick fired twice at the flashes, then slid to his face and rolled completely twice. There were no more shots. Ten minutes later, when Nick took the chance and went into that grove with an electric flashlight in his left hand, his gun still gripped in his right, he missed the unexploded Mills grenade at its edge, but he did find a smear of blood low on the trunk of a tree.

"Looks like I clipped him in the leg," he muttered.

Back on the highway, he found the Cambodian chauffeur completely panic-stricken. The car was not damaged except that it had been badly spattered with water-buffalo, and its front, a little earlier so gloriously white, had been lavishly discolored by blood and by chunks of muddy flesh. It wasn't at all pretty.

"You're afraid to drive?" Nick asked. He laughed. "All right. Get into the back seat. I'll drive myself."

"Monsieur! Monsieur! If we go on—"

"We're not going on! If somebody's interested enough in me to try to brush me off with a bomb, then I want to know why!"

The chauffeur did not understand any of this, but he gathered from Nick's gestures that they were to return to Siem Reap and that Nick himself would drive. He nodded eagerly, and scampered like a squirrel into the back seat, where he lay flat on the floor for the duration, not considerable, of the return trip. Nick dropped him at the New Siem Reap. Half an hour later a tired Chinese bicyclist, without bombs but still toting a Colt automatic, stopped at that hotel long enough to learn that Mr. Fisher had driven off

in his hired car in the direction of the ruins.

So the Chinese took the road to the ruins. He had not dared to return for the unexploded Mills grenade; but he still had his automatic and five cartridges; and when Frenchy Martel said a man must be killed, Frenchy Martel meant it.

III

THE moon, after a long sojourn behind that large, low, black cloud, had appeared only for a celestial flirtation with a horde of other clouds, now peeping out to shine with commendable brightness, and now dodging back again. The air was oppressively hot and wet, and the smell of the jungle was heavy on all sides. The road was deserted.

Nick Fisher had learned that Mr. Savage, together with his guide, Mazin, had gone for a little drive. Yes, they had gone in the direction of the ruins.

Nick drove past the entrance of Angkor Wat. It costs a piastre to enter that temple ordinarily, but after six o'clock at night there is nobody in charge and anyone willing to brave the snakes is welcome to do so. However, Nick did not think Frenchy Martel would take his supposed sucker to Angkor Wat. The temple was too near at hand. It was too well known, too well preserved. It had been too neatly restored by the government, at least as compared with the other temples, and had been visited by too many tourists. No; one of the older, more emphatically ruined, remoter, lesser known piles, of which there were dozens, would be more likely.

Nick was undertaking a lot when he entered Angkor Thom, the walled and moated city which a thousand years ago had housed a great population. Angkor Thom is no mere "sight"—it is an immense place, nine or ten miles in circumference, and though it is bisected both ways by good modern road, the rest of it is only jungle, scattered, here and there, unexpectedly, with demolished temples, some of them so big that a man may get lost in them for hours, wandering around without even a glimpse of daylight.

Angkor Thom is only a part of the Khmeer ruins. The surrounding jungle conceals dozens of other temples and palaces, shrines and burial places.

But a man had to start somewhere; and Nick was worried about his friend. Nick was responsible for Savoy being here in the first place. It was true that Frenchy Martel thought Eddy an American millionaire—in which deception the jewelry lent by Nick himself had played an important part—but it was also true that Frenchy Martel was no fool, and if he learned his mistake, if he learned that Eddy was playing a part . . . Well, the jungle would be a wonderful place to hide a body. There were ant hills, for example—big shapeless masses of dried earth—and a man slung across one of those would soon be nothing but skeleton.

The car itself was too conspicuous, being large and white. Nick left it at the end of the causeway leading to the south gate, and went on foot the rest of the way, watching and listening, keeping a hand always on his gun.

ON his left the *Devas* or gods, fifty-four of them, ancient stone statues two to three times life-size, were pulling a great stone snake. On the other side the *Asuras,* the same in number, in visage more ferocious, were likewise pulling a stone snake. At each

forward end was a *Naga,* seven-headed and very lovely, yet frightening in its arched, cobra-like position.

The *Asuras* were demons, and they glared down at Nick as he passed, showing their teeth in hideous grimaces. Except that some of them had toppled into nothingness, and others had lost a head or an arm or hand through sheer age, they had not stirred, these demons, in their tug-of-war with the gods, for more than nine hundred years.

Above the huge gate of the city one of the four faces of Siva looked out at Nick with no expression.

Nick was amazed at the stillness of everything. Somehow he had expected the jungle to be alive with animal noises, even at night, but he heard nothing at all, not even an echo of the soft thudding of his rubber heels as he walked a modern highway. The wet air swallowed all sounds before they could get far, leaving no whispered trace of any of them.

The first building he came to, in the center of the city, was the Bayon. He had originally planned to search it, but changed his mind when he saw it again and remembered that it had taken him a whole morning, in the full daylight and with the services of a professional guide, to go through all the galleries, floors, wings, porches, inner chambers. A man might be lost there or even be killed there, walking alone at night; for not all the walls were safe, and there were places where the floor had fallen in. The building, bigger than a city block, consisted of three tall stories surmounted by a tower.

Nevertheless, hoping to glimpse a light from within, Nick walked completely around the Bayon. He saw nothing.

He took the road toward the north gate, meaning to snoop around the Baphuon, the Phimeanakas and the Terrace of the Leper King, likely places, he calculated, for the concealment of treasure. Next to the Bayon, these structures were perhaps the most likely to frighten and awe the half-drunken millionaire that Martel thought Eddy Savoy was.

The gods, in stone, stared strangely at him as he slouched along, this huge man so curiously out of place. There were many reproductions of the Buddha, both seated in contemplation and lying on his side in sleep, but there were also likenesses of Brahmanistic deities, for Grahmanism, too, had been practiced at Angkor. There was Brahma himself, his four arms waving, riding on the sacred goose Hamsa. There was Sarasvati, his spouse. There was Vishnu, protector of the Universe, sometimes as a lion, sometimes as a wild boar, sometimes asleep on the sacred serpent, Sesha, with a lotus flower growing out of his navel. There was Lakshmi, born in the Ocean of Milk; and Rama, the celebrated hero; Siva the Terrible, a god who created and destroyed too, but mostly destroyed—Siva atop the sacred bull, Nandi, his hair in a topknot, his whiskers spade-shaped, sometimes represented with as many as four or five or six heads, one above the other, all fierce. There were Parvati, Ganesha, Krishna, and many representations of that burly favorite, that roughneck among gods, Garouda, who had the head of a bird, the paws of a lion, and the chest and shoulders of a longshoresman except that they were all covered with scales.

All these, and many others, stared down at Nick Fisher as he prowled among their shrines; and they seemed vaguely displeased. He was sneaking

along past the elephant bas-reliefs in the terrace of the Royal Palace when suddenly the night was rent with illumination white and dazzling, and there was a thunderous *Poom!*

NICK dropped flat, and for a terrible instant there flashed through his mind the possibility that after all the ancient gods were taking steps to strike down an intruder. A silly thought, of course, and he forgot it promptly, snapping out his pistol and cocking it as he dropped.

Silence. Nick sniffed. There was a sharp, acrid smoke in the air. Something near him whimpered, squealed a little. He wriggled in that direction, gun ready.

It was a goat, a very small and melancholy goat, tied by one leg to a stake driven into the ground. Then came a high-pitched voice, quivering with apology:

"I am so sorry, kind sir! I am sorry! I thought you were the tiger!"

Nick recognized the voice and realized what had happened, though it was a minute or so before he could fully believe it. He had met this absurdly enthusiastic little Japanese gentleman several times at the hotel. The fellow was a camera nut of the worst kind. He had been hereabouts for more than a week, taking the ruins from every conceivable angle. He would talk for hours about his pictures, if you let him; and he was particularly proud of his command of the English language, which really was excellent.

Nick rose, frowning, and walked toward the voice. He snapped on his flashlight.

The Japanese was all smiles, but they were smiles of apology. He bobbed. He almost wept. He was so very sorry! Would the kind sir please to forgive him? He was so sorry! He had wished to take a picture of the tiger skulking in these parts, and for this reason he had planted the live goat.

"Conceive it, sir! A tiger pouncing upon a goat, and for background the palace of Harshavarman the First!"

"Yeah, that would be nice. But in the meanwhile you half scared the wits out of me." Nick tried to look stern. "Don't you know you're not supposed to be here at night?"

The Japanese said pointedly, but politely, "Are *you* supposed to be here, sir?"

"Well, you've got me there." Nick waggled the pistol, "But at least I've got some protection. What have you got? Suppose that tiger did come along, and, instead of going for the goat, he went for you?"

The little man was not nonplussed. He raised a rifle Nick had not previously noted, a heavy elephant gun, a Mauser 5-97.

"I would take the picture first, I would maybe shoot afterward," he explained. "The picture is the important thing."

"Well, I'm afraid you're not going to get it now. Any tigers that might have been hanging around probably scrammed after that explosion. That's what I'm going to do, too—scram."

"There are hours yet," the Jap said patiently. "I shall try elsewhere."

"Well, don't be taking any more shots at me, even with a flashlight," Nick begged. "Good night."

"Good night, sir," said the Japanese, picking up his rifle and his plate case.

THE shorter of the two hatchetmen had heard the *Poom!* of the flashlight. He pushed his bicycle off the road, left it there concealed by

bushes, and made for the Terrace of the Leper King. When he saw Nick, the insurance detective was walking back toward the Bayon, and the hatchet-man walked after him. The hatchet-man was tired but persistent, and in spite of the eight pipes he saw no reason, in this place, for making a lot of noise while killing a man. He would not shoot Nick in the back. There were quieter methods when the man was on foot. But surely it was necessary to leave the bicycle behind, now.

The hatchet-man moved fast, making no sound. Looking neither to right nor left, he did not see the light Nick saw in a small temple near the north *khleang* or storehouse of the palace. This temple would not ordinarily be visible from the road, even in daytime. Indeed, it was only the light which made it so now.

Nick moved toward it swiftly but carefully. He had slipped out his pistol again. The Cantonese, following, was certain that his master and the American millionaire would not be found inside the walls of Angkor Thom, but he was puzzled, just by the flashlight exposure which he had heard but not seen, and now by this strange light. He began to get frightened. He wished he had been given time for a few extra pipes. After all, he was not superstitious, but anybody could tell you that it never does any good to violate the *sancta* of unfamiliar gods.

There was another thing that worried him. The wound in his leg, a trifling enough flesh wound, he had bandaged crudely with a handkerchief, but now this bandage had worked loose, and the wound was bleeding again. The hatchet-man did not fancy the idea of being the center of a smell of fresh blood. The detective would not smell it—but a tiger would.

What caused him more immediate alarm, however, were the sounds coming from the direction of the light. There was the muttering of a man's voice which rose at times almost to a scream. There was a murmurous undertone to this, a sort of chanting, as though many men were mumbling agreement. There was a rustling of wings, a squawk which might have been that of a chicken—surely a curious sound to hear in a place like this—and which was ended even more strangely with a choked-off gurgle.

He was close behind Nick now, but he would not touch Nick until he was sure of what lay just ahead. Nick was much taller and broader, and he could not see beyond the detective.

Nick paused at the edge of a clearing, and the Cantonese heard him gasp. The Cantonese peered around him, and *he* too gasped. In fact, *he* lost his head to such an extent that he squeezed the trigger of his automatic in sheer nervous excitement—though perhaps the lingering effects of opium had something to do with it, too. The roar of that big gun was terrific, shattering the jungle silence.

Fourteen or fifteen men were there in the clearing, half-naked natives, gathered around this all-but-forgotten small temple originally dedicated to Siva the Destroyer. They were, as Nick later learned, members of an obscure sect of Mahayana, which is something like a cross between Buddhism and Brahmanism. Quiet and utterly harmless three hundred and sixty-four days and nights of the year, on the three hundred and sixty-fifth they were best avoided. They had strange rites of their own, rites known only to them, performed amid great secrecy at this temple of Siva, who was the god they sought most particularly

to propitiate. That one night they were intoxicated by fanatical belief; they were madmen.

At one time this sect in its annual offering to Siva had sacrificed live babies. The coming of the French had ended this, and had supposedly ended the sect, too, for it was outlawed. But it persisted. No more live babies but live hens and roosters now were sacrificed to the Destroyer; the feelings of the faithful, on that one night, remained as fierce as ever.

IT was into this scene that Nick Fisher had stumbled. Or rather, he had not stumbled into it but had paused most prudently on the outskirts of the crowd, in the shadow of the jungle, unnoticed by any of them. Left alone, he would have slipped quietly away. He didn't know who or what these midnight chicken-slaughterers were, but he was not anxious to learn.

It was the hatchet-man, whose presence was not then known to Nick, who spoiled everything. When he had fired, surprising himself as much as anybody else, the hatchet-man turned and fled. Nick, too, fled, but he had been seen. There was a yell of rage, and the worshippers of Siva came toward him, brandishing clubs, sacrificial knives, machetes. He didn't have time to wonder who had fired that shot behind him. He didn't have time to do anything but run.

Having lost all sense of direction, he tore through the jungle blindly, colliding with trees, being torn by long spiked creepers, stumbling over rotting logs. Once he fell into an ant hill, heavily, and smashed it. He had guessed what it was even before he felt the ants. He rose, frantically brushing them off his arms, his neck, his shoulders. They stung viciously—hundreds of them crawling over him, thousands.

After a while he stopped, panting, brushing off the last few ants which bit his hands as he did so. His body was soaked with sweat. His heart pounded. His face and hands were bruised and torn, scratched by unseen spikes. His trousers were in shreds. But he still had his pistol and his flashlight; and he could no longer hear any sounds of pursuit.

More quietly then, more slowly, he proceeded, feeling his way from tree to tree. There was nothing to go by —no glow in the sky, no hum of automobiles or tooting of railway engines. He just fumbled around in blindness and hoped for the best. With luck he might find the road. Without it he might wander through the ruins for many hours, even after dawn.

He had luck. He came, very suddenly, upon the road leading to the Gate of Victory, the very place toward which he had been heading when the lights of the Mahayana ceremony diverted him. He looked up and down this road. There was nobody in sight, and he could hear nobody. He stepped out very quietly, wiping his face. He started for the Gate of Victory.

A few moments later, from the other side of the highway a watchful Chinese slipped out of the shadows of the jungle. He still held his automatic, though the hand that held it, like his face, glistened with sweat. He was afraid, this hatchet-man; but he was even more afraid to face Frenchy Martel with an order not obeyed. He set out after Nick.

IV

THE guide leaned across the table, sinking his voice. The glasses were empty and warm, the hotel was

quiet; it was almost midnight in a part of the world where everybody goes to bed early.

"There is no need for me to tell you of the months I searched, *monsieur,* nor of my disappointments. Again and again I was about to quit. Had not many before me searched the Takeo without success? Why the French government itself had searched until the very walls began to sag and tumble, and then the government decided that the existence of the building itself was of greater worth than any treasure that might be found within it. Besides, how did I know that the treasure *was* in the Takeo? What had I except what you Americans call a hunch, eh?"

Eddy Savoy nodded. A little while before he had been drowsy-eyed, slack-lipped. Now he sat forward on the edge of his chair. "How did finally you find it?"

"Ah, monsieur! That is too long a story! *Probablement* what I have found is a very small portion of all the treasure hidden in the Takeo, but it is more than enough to make me rich for life —if only I can dispose of it at even half of its intrinsic value."

"Why can't you? Won't the Cambodian government or the French government—"

"Ah, monsieur! Whatever is found here belongs to them! Do you think they would so much as give me a small reward, if I turned over to them this fortune I have found? *Non, non, non!* They might say to me *merci beaucoup,* but they would say no more."

"Then," suggested Eddy, who knew the answer before he asked the question, "why don't you take it to the United States and sell it on the sly?"

"There are several reasons why I have not done that, *monsieur.* One, because I cannot afford the trip. I know the whereabouts of a great and famous treasure, and know it alone, and so I am a rich man. But also I am a poor man because I have no money in my pocket, you understand? Another reason is because it is forbidden to take out of Cambodia, and most in particular out of any of these ruins, any article of art or of value to archeologists. *You* will not be searched, *monsieur,* when you leave Indo-China, because you are an American, rich, above suspicion. But *I* would be searched, *ah, oui!* For after all I am nothing but a professional guide. There is a third reason. Entering the United States I would be searched again, I an alien and clearly not a wealthy one. How would I explain those jewels, when they were found on me? However would I pay duty on them? *Ah, non, monsieur!* First of all I must have a stake, I must have some money with which to clothe myself as befits a gentleman. *Then* perhaps I can get into the United States with my treasure, and make myself wealthy for life. But the money is necessary first, and I do not dare to take anybody around here into my confidence. That is why I appeal to you, *monsieur,* a wealthy tourist, an American, and one who is interested in rubies and other fine stones. That is why I offer you a bargain such as you never before knew in your life—always provided that you first promise you will tell nobody about this bargain for at least three months. That would give me time to equip myself properly, to clear up my affairs here, and go with the treasure to the United States. On that condition only, *monsieur,* will I consent to sell you at a ridiculously low price a few of the pieces I have found."

Eddy leaned back in his chair, chin against chest, and his eyes grew wary.

He seemed no longer drunk now—or only a very little. He was more like a man of business whose caution has been raised in front of him, barrier-like, at the very mention of that word *bargain*. He stared narrowly at the guide. "Listen," he said slowly. "How do I know you're not stringing me along about all this?"

The guide shrugged. He did not seem greatly concerned about this part of the discussion. He seemed to have expected it. "*Monsieur* has seen the samples I showed him? They were real silver, were they not, and real rubies?"

"They were," Eddy admitted. "Old silver, too, and magnificent rubies—among the best I've ever seen."

"They are as nothing compared with the ones which remain in the Takeo."

"So you say."

"*Monsieur*"—the guide leaned closer still— "would you care to have me take you to the place where I found this treasure? Would you believe it then, if you saw it glittering there in its hole? Would you believe it if you saw it with your own eyes?"

"Well . . ."

"Of course, first of all you must promise, *monsieur,* that if there is a bargain struck between us the price must be paid in cash. Hard cash, as you Americans say. I need hard cash, which is the only reason I am willing to tell you about my find. And a man as wealthy as you are is in a position to obtain it without exciting suspicion."

"Cash," Eddie agreed, "if I buy."

"You will buy, *monsieur,*" the guide rose, "you will buy when you see what I show you. Shall we start?"

FOR Eddy Savoy that ride was a nightmare. The guide drove, and very slowly, with only dimmers to light the way; the big car seemed to crawl mysteriously, silently, between the walls of jungle, past the towering ruins, through the massive stone gates. Very slowly, scarcely moving, and preceded only by a wan smear of yellow light, the car went until it was outside the city of Angkor Thom and within a few hundred yards of the Prasat Takeo or Sanctuary of the Crystal God. There the guide stopped the car, after steering it far off to the right of the road, and snapped out all lights.

"*Bien,* monsieur. We will walk the rest of the way."

As the car came to a stop, a Cantonese hatchet-man, a tall one, stepped off the luggage carrier in back and slid soundlessly into the jungle whence he could watch the movements of the two men. Eddy Savoy, getting out of the car, didn't see him; but the guide, who was looking for him, did.

"Eerie sort of place," Eddy said, looking around. He shivered. "Enough to give a guy the creeps."

"Would *monsieur* care for a sip of cognac? I have brought with me a flask."

Eddy knew it was only a trick to keep him as drunk as the guide thought he was, but nevertheless he nodded eagerly. He could use a drink! He took a good one.

The Takeo is a particularly old and out-of-the-way temple, a particularly large one, too. Built in the middle of the tenth century, it was hidden by vegetation until in 1920, archeologists discovered it and rendered it accessible. It is surrounded by a moat and inside that by a wall. The sanctuary itself consists of galleries, a couple of small pavilions supposed originally to have been libraries, and three huge tiers surmounted by a shrine. The jungle has been more than usually harsh with

it. Great *sao* and *fromager* trees grow not only out of the courtyard inside the wall but also out of the walls of the main building themselves; and their huge roots, twisting and squirming, appear here, are lost there, and always are thrusting aside vast building stones, spreading open whole wings that, a thousand years ago, were built by uncountable slaves at the cost of inconceivable agony. The jungle is everywhere. With no sound, but relentlessly, it refuses to back away and surrender this ancient pile to the newcomers, the curious, transient white people. The jungle clings, with the roots of its mighty trees in a grip that only dynamite could loosen. And dynamite, of course, would bring the whole building tumbling down.

So not much reconstruction work has been done on the Takeo, which is much the same today as when it was first hacked out of the jungle in 1920. The ceilings have fallen and their rocks are slippery with damp moss. Snakes and lizards lurked in every shadowed nook. The walls, some of them seven or eight feet thick, sag dangerously this way and that. Vegetation is everywhere.

Perhaps the Takeo never was fully finished, its interior decoration never done. At any rate most of it, for a Khmeer temple, is singularly devoid of stone carvings, statues, bas-reliefs. Here and there will be found a *Naga* with five, seven, nine or even eleven heads; or a *Linga,* symbolic of the Brahamistic trinity; or a group of *Apsaras* or *Dvarapalas.* But for the most part even the gods appear to have deserted this gloomy structure, or possibly to have been afraid to enter it in the first place.

"Looks as if there'd be a lot of snakes in there," Eddy said nervously as they slished through thick vegetation to reach the causeway over the moat.

"There are," the guide said cheerfully. "Just take it easy and watch where you put down your feet. I don't want to use a light until we have to."

Eddy slipped close to the man, and Eddy's right hand slithered into the man's right coat pocket, emerging with the man's small automatic, which Eddy put into one of his own pockets.

Perhaps it was a foolish thing to do. Certainly it had been an impulsive act, unplanned, inspired by fears of the moment. But it made Eddy feel safer. If the guide missed his pistol, well and good. He could assume that he'd lost it somewhere, mislaid it. Surely he would not suppose for an instant that this drunken American millionaire had lifted it out of his pocket with all the skill of a dip of long experience.

EDDY gripped the little gun tightly as they climbed up one slippery rock, around another, down the face of a third. They were obliged to move very carefully, very slowly. The gun was hot and wet in Eddy's hand.

In time, a long time, they came to an inner chamber lighted only by what light came through the branches of the trees from the sky above—for the ceiling of this chamber had fallen long years before. The chamber was very large, fifty-five or sixty feet square, and the walls, which extended up for three stories, each floor having fallen in like the roof, leaned this way and that at breathless angles. However, shrubbery and the piles of lichen-clad rock with which the floor was covered kept the place from seeming quite as big as it was.

So far as Eddy Savoy could see

there were no statues or carvings of any sort. There was nothing, indeed, except the fallen stones in haphazard, irregular piles everywhere, and the trees which grew not only out of the floor but out of the sides of the sagging walls as well, and the persistent, encroaching jungle.

There was only one entrance, the one by which they had come. It was low, broken down in places, very difficult of passage.

"Visitors never come here," the guide explained.

"I don't blame them," Eddy said feelingly.

"Just the same, I have only worked here at night. I have taken no chances. That is why my secret has remained my own."

He lighted a small electric lamp—not a torch but a lamp with a solid base, like an old-fashioned kerosene lamp. He set this in a corner. With his long strong fingers he started to work on one of the stones of the wall. There was nothing that Eddy could see to mark this stone from any one of the thousands of others.

Eddy remembered with a small and rather bitter smile the trick bootleggers had sometimes worked in seaports. A familiar trick in stories, though how many times it was actually worked nobody will ever know. The bootleggers would swear to a potential but skeptical customer that their stuff was absolutely "just off a ship." If he didn't believe them, he could come down with them some night when they were expecting their next cargo in from Rum Row and he could be there and help them unload, taking his own purchases on the spot. Of course, there was a certain element of danger, but— The sucker accepted eagerly, thrilled by the thought of that "certain element of danger." They put on a fine show for him, much hissing and whispering, giving of countersigns, showing of pistols, and finally the speedboat itself at the end of the dock, all covered with tarpaulin and manned by grim-eyed fellows with suspicious bulges under their left armpits. After all that build-up, naturally the sucker bought! And the bootleggers, who had simply transported the stuff from a neighboring dock, received McCoy prices for a phony product.

Here, in the middle of Cambodia, Eddy Savoy reflected as he watched the guide work the stone loose—another man was trying what was in effect the same trick. Eddy was slightly annoyed that the trick should be tried on *him,* who after all until a few years ago had been easily the smartest jewel crook in the United States, smarter even than this Frenchy Martel who at Angkor called himself Mazin.

Eddy knew, of course, that Martel had not discovered any treasure at all. He had stolen it, reset it, planted it. And now he was going into a most elaborate act in order to get any sort of price for it. Elaborate, but clever, Eddy admitted. By watching his chances, picking the right suckers, telling the story convincingly, finally by putting on this fancy act when the American millionaire was at least partly tight, Martel, Eddy knew, would get an excellent price for the Maysfield rubies, reset as ancient Cambodian pieces by the clever jewelers of Bangkok and Phnom Penh. Perhaps he would not get as much as those rubies were worth, but he had never seriously hoped to get any fraction of that sum. Certainly he would get far more in this elaborate fashion, and be safer about it too, than he would ever get by peddling the hot gems to a fence.

"Ah, now, *monsieur!* Here we have it!" Dramatically he spoke, dramatically he acted.

The great block of sandstone slid out of place with scarcely a sound. The guide reached into the hole and dragged out a mass of splendidly clanking jewelry—heavy old silver stuff, the silver itself almost black with age, the rubies and diamonds set in it, however, bright as ever they had been—ancient jewelry of the sort you never see today, never did see except in barbaric countries—anklets, huge bracelets, great clanking, necklaces, rings so big they could only be worn on the thumbs of a big man and each one containing a precious stone even bigger than the ring itself.

These things glistened in the light of the electric lamp. They speckled the grim dark walls with flicks of color. They glowed, seemed almost to throb with beauty.

"*Monsieur* perceives, of course, that I have been telling him only the strict truth? *Monsieur* is a keen judge of rubies and he knows that these are real ones?"

They were real, all right! They were as real as anything Eddy Savoy had ever seen—and Eddy in his time had handled millions of dollars worth of precious stones.

V

STARING at them, lost in admiration, Eddy had a wild impulse to draw the pistol from his pocket, hold up Frenchy Martel, and try to get out of the country with these articles. The impulse passed instantly. The thing could not be done. What was even more important, it *should* not be done. He was working now for Nick Fisher, and he couldn't let Nick down. He *wouldn't* let him down. He'd play out his part, ask for another day in which to think it over, and then, back in the hotel, put in a call for Nick at Kompong Thom, describing to Nick in careful detail how this hiding place was to be reached. The rest would be up to Nick himself, an expert at that sort of thing. Eddy, having pointed the job, would quietly depart. It was important for both of them that Eddy should not be expected to sign any affidavits or warrants or to testify against anybody. After all, a close scrutiny of his passport and the way he had obtained it would reveal many interesting things, and only fingerprints were needed to prove that this man Everard Savage of Molokai was in fact the notorious Eddy Savoy, wanted by police departments all over the United States. So Eddy wouldn't stay around. He would go as soon as—

Something hit his back, and a voice at his shoulder said:

"He got your gun. He stole it, after you got out of the motorcar. I saw him. He got it in his right coat pocket."

The guide stiffened, staring over Eddy's shoulder at the newcomer. The guide's geniality vanished, his comic eyebrows flipped down, the lips under his comic mustache grew tight and bloodless.

"You sure of that?"

"Sure of that," repeated the voice behind Eddy. Then, as Eddy started to reach for the pistol, the thing pressing his back was pushed harder, and the voice said with no expression, "You move, I kill you here."

Eddy did not move. The guide rose, set aside the glorious mass of jewelry he had been holding, and approached Eddy slowly. He wasn't Mazin now, he was Frenchy Martel of Paris and New York.

"You know, there's been something funny about you from the beginning. Something about the way you talked. If I hadn't been so anxious to collect a little hasty jack . . ."

His hand shot out, dipped into Eddy's right coat pocket, emerged with the small automatic. His eyes glittered with hate, for he was a vain man and it displeased him sorely that somebody could have stolen his gun so readily.

Eddy, saying nothing, did not move.

"Who are you, anyway?" Martel asked.

Eddy shrugged.

"Working with Nick Fisher, are you?"

This time Eddy didn't even shrug. What was the sense of it?

Frenchy Martel pocketed his own gun carefully—in a hip pocket this time—and then with his large strong hands went all over Eddy's clothes. There was, of course, nothing incriminating in them.

Martel stepped back. Eddy never saw it coming. The next thing he knew he was lying across a tall slimy stone, and his ears were ringing furiously, the wan light was an Aurora Borealis before his eyes. He knew that he had been slugged, but he was too stunned to understand how.

Eddy raised his head slowly. The movement made him slither down off the stone.

Now he saw for the first time the man who had come up behind him, the tall Cantonese of whose very existence he had until this time been ignorant. The Cantonese held a big Colt.

Eddy might have known, he reflected bitterly, that a man like Martel wouldn't try to work an elaborate setup like this without some assistance. A muscle-man or two, just to be safe, to do the dirty work if any was necessary. Well . . . It was too late now.

MARTEL took the knife out of the sheath between his shoulder blades, from under his coat. He did it in one swift graceful motion. For a terrible instant Eddy thought he was going to throw it. But he held it there, fingering its point, staring glumly at Eddy.

"I asked you," he said after awhile, "if you were working for Nick Fisher. Are you?"

Eddy said nothing. Martel came a step closer, poising the knife in readiness for a throw.

"Are you?"

Eddy said, "If you're going to kill me, go ahead and get it over with!"

"There's plenty of time," Martel said. "I want you to answer my question first. I've got other ways of asking you, remember. Ways you've probably never even heard about. So I'm asking you again: Are you working for Nick Fisher?" He grinned suddenly, and not pleasantly. "Not that it will make any difference," he said. "Fisher's no good to anybody by this time anyway."

That stirred Eddy, frightened him even more than the sight of the knife.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "Have you— Did you—"

"So you *were* working for him? I thought so!" Again Martel grinned his hideous grin. "Well, Fisher's not going to do you any good now. He's twenty miles away by this time, and dead as a doornail."

This was untrue by a sizable margin, for, like an actor on his cue, Nick Fisher emerged from the shadowed entrance, cracked a pistol across the hatchet-man's right wrist so that the hatchet-man dropped his Colt; Nick kicked him to one side.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that!" he said to the flabbergasted Martel.

Martel did not dare to stir. His own gun was in his hip pocket. The knife was in his hands, but he did not have it ready to throw at Nick, and he knew Nick's reputation for marksmanship.

"Drop the knife, Frenchy. You'll get it that much worse when I get you back to the States because you were rough with my friend. *Drop the knife,* I said!"

Martel dropped the knife. The hatchet-man looked longingly at his Colt on the floor, but like Martel he did not venture to move. Nick had them both covered.

Nick said, "So I'm dead? Well, it happens that thanks to a water buffalo I'm not. Step back, both of you." And when they had, Nick asked quietly, solicitously, "They hurt you much, Eddy?"

Eddy said, "What?"

"I mean—Everard."

"No, they didn't hurt me much," Eddy replied. "Just a smack in the jaw. I've taken worse, and I'm still alive."

Martel said, without raising his voice, "Maybe you won't be soon!" Then he fell sideward.

Eddy yelled, "Look out, Nick! Behind you!"

Nick Fisher stepped backward and sideward at the same time, not knowing, in the confusion of that instant, which way to shoot. The short hatchet-man, his left leg still dripping blood from the wound Nick had given him in the rubber plantation, lurched wildly out of the entrance and into the chamber. He fired three times as he came, but fired wildly from the hip. He was lost to all caution now. All he knew was that the American detective had eluded him up to this point, and unless he was to answer to Martel, he must finish the job here and now.

One bullet tugged at Nick's coat. He turned still further, dropped to one knee. His gun exploded. The short hatchet-man, still plunging forward like a football player, jerked strangely. He plunged on, however, until he hit a rock. He pitched over this rock, seemingly unable to lift his feet. He never moved again.

The other hatchet-man, the tall one, did not try to scramble for his Colt on the floor. He was too far away from it. Instead he picked up a small rock and hurled it at Nick. Eddy caught the hatchet-man's left foot and pulled hard, spilling him to his back. But Eddy was a split second too late. The rock hit Nick on the side of the head and toppled him backward.

Frenchy Martel got out his own .22 automatic with a grin of delight. It seemed to be his moment.

Martel's eyes grew wide, and he screamed. He had seen the thing just beyond Nick. He had seen the tiger.

NOT one of those men, as a matter of fact, was more shocked than the tiger itself. It had been prowling peacefully, looking for a stray dog or goat, possibly a chicken. It had sniffed fresh, keen blood, and therefore, without actually catching sight of the hatchet-man, had followed that smell, which was so much stronger and keener than the human smell of the hatchet-man's body. Sniffing, it had padded into the Takeo, lost the odor for a while, picked it up again. It had prowled here many a time without fear of hunters. Now it had followed the trail up a short and low passageway, had taken a turn, and abruptly had found itself facing a flare of light, a

thunder of men's voices and guns, and a good-sized handful of humans.

It paused, astounded. Given an instant, it would have turned and dashed away from that place. But Frenchy Martel did not give it that instant.

Frenchy, the only man in possession of a pistol, lost his head completely. He threw both arms over his face, possibly with some idea that the tiger, fifteen or twenty feet away from him was going to spring upon him and tear his face. He screamed. Then he fired the automatic. Maybe he hoped that one lucky shot from the .22 might bring down the magnificent jungle beast. More likely he was lost in panic and didn't hope for anything at all, or think of anything. The little pistol, kicking in his hand, sprayed lead like a miniature machine gun as Martel rolled wildly in a wild attempt at escape.

Only one of the shots hit anything at all, and it hit the electric lamp on the floor. Instantly the chamber was dark.

For a moment nothing at all could be heard, nothing seen. None of the men in that black chamber stirred.

Then from outside somewhere came a dull, muffled *Poom!* and the entrance of the chamber flared briefly with white light. An excited voice was calling:

"Ah, the perfect picture! The beautiful picture!"

Nick whipped to his feet, got out his flashlight, muttered, "That blasted Jap—" He switched on the flashlight. Its beam fell full upon the entrance, and in the entrance appeared the tiger.

THE flashlight explosion, meeting it as it raced outside, had driven it back. It was wild with fear and rage now. As Nick stepped back in astonishment and the flashlight moved, the tiger saw the prostrate Frenchy Martel, still with his arms wrapped around his head, his little automatic in his right hand. It may be that the tiger was merely blind with excitement and sprang upon the first moving thing it saw. It may be that it remembered this man who had fired at it a moment earlier.

Anyhow, it picked Martel—and sprang.

Nick Fisher fired twice.

The taller hatchet-man, on his feet now behind Nick, raised above his head a huge stone which would easily have crushed the detective's skull. Eddy Savoy snapped up the hatchet-man's Colt and fired once.

All three of these shots were good. The hatchet-man, his throat torn open, fell back dead, the rock falling at his feet. The tiger, with both of Nick's bullets clean through its brain from behind the left ear, also fell dead. But the tiger had been in midspring at the time, its claws spread. Killed in mid-air, it fell upon its elected prey. And its claws did their work. You could hardly see Frenchy Martel's head and neck for the blood that gushed. (Martel lingered on for two days, but they didn't dare move him, and he never recovered consciousness.)

At the entrance a little yellow man stood blinking, gasping, a camera in one hand, a Mauser elephant rifle in the other.

"What is this? Where did the—Who shot the—"

Nick Fisher, hands on hips, a smoking pistol in his right fist, looked at him and shook a heavy head.

"Well, I hope you got your picture," he said.

"Ah, kind sir! The most *wonderful* picture! Let me tell you how—"

"Tell me tomorrow," Nick suggested. "I'm likely to lose my temper

if you try it now, and bust that camera over your head!"

ON the terrace of the Hotel Oriental in Bangkok, gazing idly across the darkening Menam River, they sat and sipped gimlets. Nick was only out of Cambodia under heavy bond to return at an early date and appear again before some sort of magistrate or inquiry board; there were details still to be cleared up. But Eddy Savoy, free and clear, not even mentioned officially in any report, was to sail the following morning for Shanghai, from which port he would catch a ship back to the Hawaiian Islands and peace.

"You see, the reason it was never necessary to mention you at all," Nick explained, "was because neither of Frenchy's two tough boys lived to tell about it, and neither did Frenchy himself. The only other person who could say you were there was the little Jap, and he was so delighted about getting that picture of the tiger that he agreed to forget he'd seen you—especially after I told him he never would have got the picture at all if you and I hadn't shooed the beast back out of that chamber."

"Shooed him out! Why, I was so scared I couldn't move!"

Eddy Savoy hunched his shoulders in a gesture of remembered fright.

"No need to tell the Jap that. Anyway, he got his picture, which really is a wow. Here's your copy of it. He asked me to give it to you as a little souvenir. Nice, isn't it, Eddy?"

"It is, and thanks," said Eddy, "but what was that you called me?"

"I mean Everard. Everard Savage."

"A nice, quiet name," said Eddy, "for a nice quiet guy in a nice quiet place. You ought to settle down yourself some day, Nick, and come out to the Islands. I could show you some wonderful fishing."

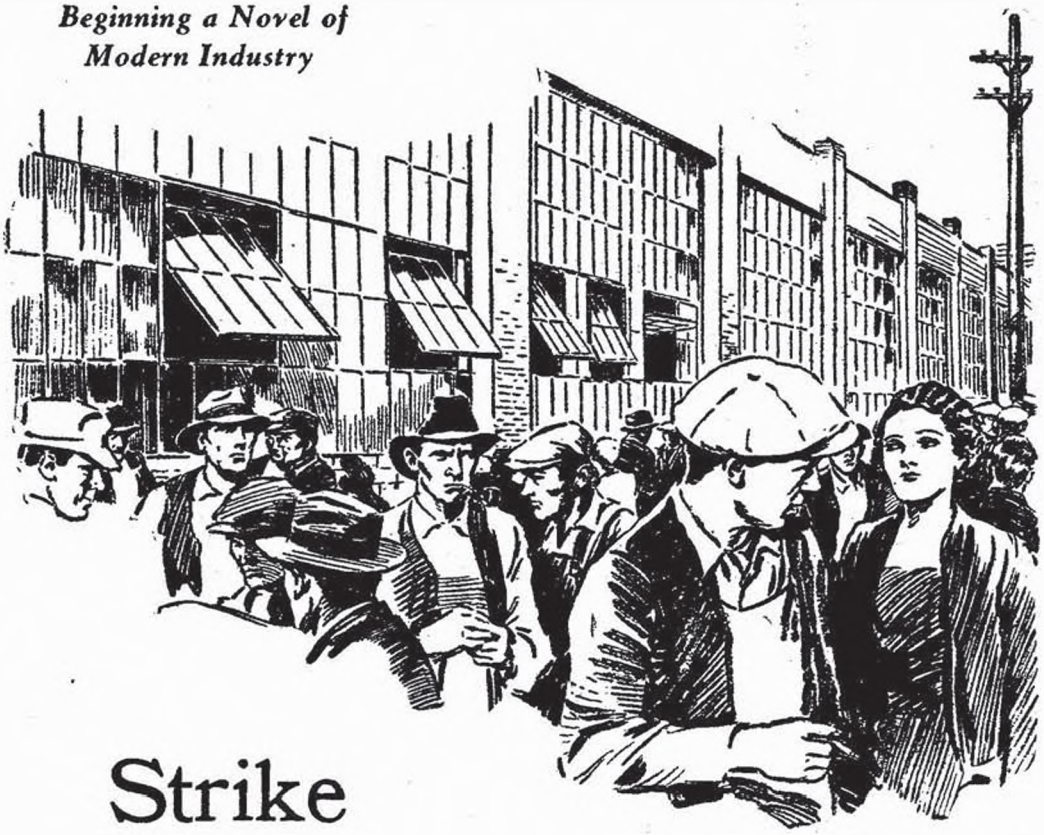
Nick tilted his glass.

"Well, you can't tell. Maybe some day I will."

"You really ought to, Nick. I mean it. If you don't watch out you're going to get hurt some one of these days, handling cases like that. You might even get killed!"

"Sure," said Nick. "Well, let's have one more of these things, Ed—Everard. And then I've got to race for that train back to the frontier. *Boy!* A couple of gimlets, please! Make 'em cold!"

Beginning a Novel of Modern Industry



Strike

By JOHN HAWKINS

Author of "Money Player," etc.

CHAPTER I

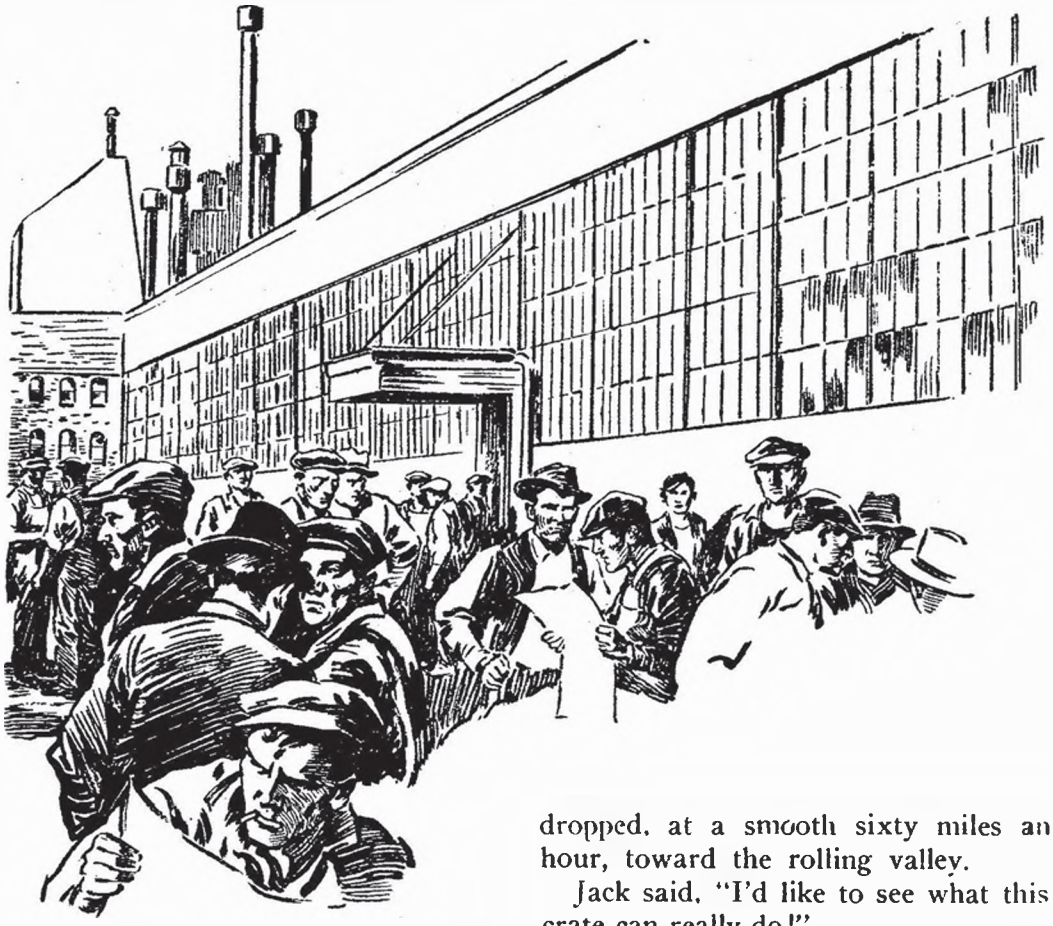
HIT AND RUN

DUNCAN McCANN felt good. The wedding was over. The minister had done his bit, and Duncan, as the best man, had not fumbled the ring. The bride had been kissed, and the rice thrown. All that remained now was the ride back to the city. An hour. Then Jack and Ann would be driving up to the lake for their honeymoon; and Duncan could climb out of these clothes, and dash over to the River Yacht Club. There'd still be time to tune that outboard motor.

He grinned as the high-powered black Hispano roadster slowed for a boulevard stop and then rolled east on the cross state highway. Ann, seated between Duncan and her very new husband, was singing a low-voiced, rapturous little tune. She had an odd, throaty voice that wasn't exactly marvelous, but the happiness that bubbled up through the words was real.

McCann looked past her, spoke to the stocky man under the wheel. "You can drop me anywhere along here, Jack. I'll catch a bus into town, and you can take the base line road over to the lake highway. It'll save an hour."

"Not a chance." Jack shook his head. "I borrow your car for my honeymoon, and haul you all the way out here to be my best man. That's enough. You've done enough already. Ann and I are



tremendously grateful to you, but—"

"But nothing. I—"

The girl looked up at McCann and said, "Jack's right—as usual."

McCann grinned at her. "Happy, Ann?"

Her voice was husky. "From this day on."

She began to sing again. The speedometer needle edged up to sixty, and the motor sound deepened to a throaty purr. Duncan McCann slouched deeper into the seat as the roadster charged through open country.

It happened then.

The roadster swept over the brow of a low hill. The shadowed, empty highway stretched away in front of them. The roadster seemed to pause before it dropped, at a smooth sixty miles an hour, toward the rolling valley.

Jack said, "I'd like to see what this crate can really do!"

"Jack!" Ann screamed. "The bicycle . . . oh—!"

McCann's eyes darted back to the road ahead of them, to the flicker of white that careened into their path. He swore, as rubber squalled and the heavy roadster slewed sideward. There wasn't a chance to avoid the crash. The girl on the bicycle had shot out of a blind driveway squarely in front of them.

A LONG, sickening second dragged out while Jack fought the wheel, whipped the car straight for the ditch. The child heard the tortured wail of the tires, and her head jerked around. There was a split-second glimpse of a small, fear-chalked face, of big eyes,

of a small mouth opening to scream.

Jack cursed—deep, harsh oaths that were torn from set white lips. Ann's fingers bit deep into McCann's arm.

The front fender hit the swaying bicycle. There was a small, metallic sound; a shrill, childish wail that cut suddenly short . . . and then nothing.

The roadster rocked into the ditch. Duncan McCann was fumbling with the door latch when the motor bellowed again. The car jerked ahead, and McCann was slammed hard against the seat. The car bounced, yawning as the wheels churned loose gravel, and then roared straight down the road.

Startled unbelief held McCann rigid for a second, and then he was leaning forward, shouting. "Jack! Stop, you fool. That girl might be badly hurt! You can't leave her lying there. We've got to see if we can—"

The rising thunder of a wide-open motor blotted out his words. Jack was hunched over the wheel, his mouth a thin line, his face dead white. Ann was huddled between them, her face buried in her hands. McCann was reaching for the ignition switch when Jack struck at him, barked:

"Leave it alone! I'm doing this!"

McCann's eyes glanced at Jack's set, desperate face and he dropped his hand. He flicked a glance at the speedometer. The needle hung at ninety, and was still rising. If Jack forgot the road at that speed—even for a clocktick—there'd be work for the coroner.

McCann leaned forward, yelled, "It wasn't your fault, Jack! No one's going to blame you—if you go back. Can't you see? You're ruining everything this way. Slow down!"

Jack's mouth twitched. The roadster swooped up behind a truck, flicked past it, without slackening speed.

"You can't outrun the radio, Jack! They'll be phoning ahead now. The next town'll have the road blocked. Go back while there's still time to do something. . . ."

Jack sobbed out, "Shut up!"

Ann's agonized voice cut in, "Jack! You've got to stop, you've got to go back! She might be dead!"

A white *City Limits* sign flicked by, and then they were racing toward the clustered houses and crowded streets of a small town. The motor sound diminished, and Jack's foot hit the brake pedal. A moment later he swung the car into a side street, stopped.

Hot anger beat through McCann's head.

"Jack!" Panic clouded Ann's voice. "You've got to go back! Right away or—"

"Too late," he said dully. "The police will be there by now." He brushed his hand across his eyes. "I don't know what got into me, but just for a moment there—Ann, listen. I couldn't see our marriage smashed up before it was two hours old. I had to take a chance. . . . I didn't think."

His troubled voice cut through McCann's anger. McCann asked, "What do you mean by that, Jack?"

"You know my father. It would have been bad enough, but this accident just about ruins everything. Dad will say this was nothing but a gin marriage, say that I was drunk when I hit the kid. My job'll be gone, and . . ." He lagged to a stop, turned, "We'll do it this way. Duncan, you and Ann take a bus from here. I'll take the car back. Then we'll keep the wedding quiet for a week or two. Maybe we can work it out."

Ann's sharply indrawn breath made the only sound. McCann's eyes touched her face, saw the tears that streaked her cheeks, her quivering lips, and then

somehow he seemed to hear her gay voice saying again, "From this day on—"

McCann's voice was flat. "No, Jack. This is *my* car, and I'm not leaving it in changed hands. The bus station can't be more than a block." He slipped out of the seat, opened the turtle back, and stacked their bags on the walk. Then he went around to the driver's side.

"End of the line, Jack."

"What—"

"You two are going to take the bus to town. Then you're going to grab another for the lake and your honeymoon. I'll handle this."

"But your father, Dunc—how about him? The papers will eat this up. Think of the publicity. I can't let you do it, that's all."

"I'll take care of that, too. Come on, you two, all out." He opened the door, waited—a lean, tall man in easy-fitting flannels with sun-bleached hair that seemed almost white against the deep tan of his skin. Laughter lines showed around his wide mouth, webbed the skin at the corners of his eyes. He put a lightness in his voice. "I can keep it out of the papers. And if there's anything said, you won't be mentioned."

"You're sure you'll be all right?" Jack climbed out of the car.

"Of course." McCann forced a grin as he slid in behind the wheel. "I was wondering what to give you two, anyway. You can call this a wedding present." Then he was nosing the roadster into a driveway, turning. He waved as he flashed past them, and Ann's handkerchief fluttered in reply.

HE was halfway back to the scene of the accident when he saw the motorcycle. Only a dot at first, it grew with the seconds until he could see the trooper bent low over the handlebars—see his head twist as they met, passed.

McCann's eyes flickered to the rear-view mirror, held there as, far down the road, the motorcycle turned, streaked after him.

He kept the roadster's speedometer at forty. The motorcycle was still a half a mile behind him when he met the ambulance. A moment later the trooper was pulled up beside him, siren calling him to a stop.

The trooper left his motorcycle on its side-stand, and walked slowly around the roadster before he stopped beside the door and asked, "This your car?"

McCann said, "Yes."

"Okay." The trooper was a burly, weather-beaten, big-jawed man. "You come by here about a half hour ago, didn't you?"

"Yes."

The trooper put his hand on the door. "You're the guy that ran down the girl on the bicycle! You're the rat that left her in the ditch an' ran to save your own neck!"

"You're partly right, anyway," McCann said slowly. "I did hit her, but—"

Angry lights glinted in the trooper's eyes. "Get out of that car!" he said with cold savagery. "And get out fast!" McCann silently obeyed. "Now," the trooper ground out, "what'd you do with the other two guys?"

"Sorry." McCann thrust his hands deep into his pockets, shrugged. "You're wrong there. I was alone."

The trooper said, "Yeah?" in a flat, bitter voice, and stepped close. One gloved hand tapped McCann's chest. "Get over that idea."

"Sorry."

The trooper pushed him then. The stiffening arm sent McCann back, off-

balance, and the trooper's right hand whipped up to smash solidly against McCann's lips. He reeled back against the car, and the trooper was on top of him. McCann slipped as he ducked. A fist scraped past his cheek, another slammed deep into the pit of his stomach, bent him double.

A hazy, crimson curtain danced in front of McCann's eyes as he crouched there, swaying. He could see the trooper's set face, hear him saying, "You'll talk, guy—plenty!" Waves of nausea churned in his stomach. Then his head cleared and he was moving, fists cocked, toward the trooper.

"So you're asking for it?" The trooper's mouth jerked. "Baby-killer!" His hand dipped back, came up with a blackjack.

"Jackson!" The sharp, authoritative voice, coming from behind, stopped the trooper in his tracks. He swung, eyes widening, to face the car that had come to a silent stop on the pavement.

He stiffened, said, "Yes, sir."

A tall man whose uniform bore sergeant's chevrons left the car and came toward them. He was lean and thin-faced; his voice was chill. "I'm waiting for an explanation, Jackson."

"This man was driving the car that ran down the girl, sir. He tried to get clear and I had to smack him. There were three of them in the car at first, according to the girl's brother. He saw the car from the driveway. This man admits driving the car, but says he was alone."

The ice blue eyes raked McCann's face, the clipped voice asked, "That right?"

McCann nodded.

The tall man turned. "I'll take him in with me. Have his car towed to the headquarter's garage and report when you're finished."

CHAPTER II

POLITICIAN AND SON

THERE were two uniformed men in the small office when the sergeant led McCann in. He dismissed them with a gesture, waved McCann into a straight-backed chair and seated himself at the desk. His voice was soft now, almost friendly.

"I'm sorry Jackson thought he had to get rough with you. I discourage that among my men, but I can't watch them all the time." He pulled a pad toward him. "You've admitted driving the car. We've got your name and the rest. Now"—he looked up—"who was with you, and why didn't you stop?"

"There was no one with me. I—I must have lost my head. I was going back when Jackson stopped me."

The sergeant got to his feet. "You're lying, son; we've got witnesses to prove it. You're lying, and we want the right answers." His voice dropped. "Why don't you tell me? We'll get it down on paper, and then you can rest."

McCann's puffed lips burned, his throat was dry. "I was alone."

The sergeant's mouth twisted. "That was a kid you hit. This is manslaughter, McCann, an' we'll put you away for a long time. You're in a spot, guy. Out with it, who was with you?"

"Nobody!"

The sergeant thumbed a pushbutton and the two big men came back into the room. The sergeant kept his eyes on McCann's face as he spoke. "This is the man who ran down the little girl. There was somebody with him—find out who."

The biggest of the two said, "Right, Sarge." The other man stepped beside McCann. The two moved suddenly, pinned McCann's arms to his sides. jerked him to his feet.

"We'll get it, Sarge," the big cop went on. "We'll get it if we have to bounce this guy off the walls. I got kids of my own."

"Yeah." The sergeant's hawk-thin face was close. "That's what's waitin' for you. Better talk now. Who was with you?"

"No one."

A dark flush swept into the sergeant's thin cheeks. He stepped forward, as hard and angry as a brawler's fist.

McCann tried to move, but the dragging weight of the two big men held him motionless. He watched the sergeant's knuckles grow in size—like a trick camera shot—until they blotted out the light. Waves of pain burst in his head. Dimly, he heard the sergeant say, "The works, an' don't stop till you get all the answers."

McCann was hauled out of the room then, held upright by the two men who walked beside him. They went down a long hall, turned to the right. One of the cops swore suddenly as a shadow-thin man in rumpled tweed lounged out of a doorway in front of them.

"Hah?" Easy laughter rode his words. "Playing tag again, boys? This one fell down the stairs too, huh?"

"Beat it, Casey, there's nothin' in this for your paper. Go on, beat it."

"Sure, sure." A sharp, quizzical brightness came into the thin man's eyes. "Sure, in a minute. Just two things. What's the charge, and what's the name?"

"He run down a kid, and then tried to slide out."

"The name?" The thin man was softly insistent.

"McCann," the big cop said. "Now will you get out of the way?"

"Sure." Drooping lids veiled the thin man's eyes as he stepped aside.

A moment later McCann was jammed down into a hard chair; the fierce glare of an unshaded high-wattage light bulb seared his eyes. The cops were only shadowy figures on each side of him.

Their questions were like hammers beating inside his aching head: "Who was with you? . . . Where'd you drop 'em? . . . Why'd you run? . . . Who was with you?" Over and over while the hot light sent agony through his eyeballs; while his throat went dry, and his tongue became a thickened wad of flesh he couldn't control.

Then the big cop said, "Take the light away, Doc. We'll try somethin' else."

McCann was hauled to his feet. The big cop growled, "You get one more chance. Ready to talk yet?"

McCANN shook his head. The big cop struck, a short looping blow that whipped the rubber hose solidly over McCann's kidneys, and started a sick pain welling up his back. McCann staggered. The big cop repeated his question, and repeated the blow when he got the same answer. He let go of McCann then, and McCann swayed, stabbed out blindly with his fist.

The big cop's flatted voice cursed him. The big cop's fist hit McCann in the mouth. McCann's legs wilted. The floor tilted, swayed, and then leaped to meet him.

"Hey, Buck, you shouldn'ta done that." The second cop bent over McCann, lifted him into the chair. He frowned, and stooped to put his ear close to McCann's lips. "Wait," he said, "this guy's talkin'!"

The big cop waited impatiently till the other stepped away, asked, "Well? What'd he say?"

"Huy? Oh, somethin' about 'From

this day on . . .' Whatever that means."

Quick footsteps beat in the hall, and both men swung to face the opening door. The sergeant came through it first, his thin face pale and drawn. When he stopped, a big man shouldered past him. A man whose slanting hat brim only half hid cold, slate-gray, unwinking eyes.

The sergeant said hurriedly, "This'll bring both of you a suspension. Just because I tell you to question a suspect doesn't mean you've got to use him for a punching bag. You—"

"Stop it," the big man said. and his calm, almost genial voice was at odds with the icy light of anger that flickered in his eyes. "That act won't buy you a thing. You're responsible for what's been going on here."

"Yes, Mr. Stanley—" The sergeant's voice had a cringe in it.

His were the first words Duncan McCann heard when he came back to consciousness. He scowled and tried to think. Norman Stanley here? Duncan struggled up through a pain-fogged world toward the sound. Nausea still crawled in his stomach, and his head throbbed.

"Feeling better, Duncan?"

McCann opened his eyes. Norman Stanley was standing in front of him, a wet, blood-stained towel hanging from his hand. "These fools didn't know who you were. Here." He bent forward, laid the cool towel against McCann's temples. "I'll have a drink for you in a minute."

Stanley lit a thin cigar. "I stopped on the way down to find out what happened. These apes have no case against you. The brother admits that the girl rode out in front of you, that it wasn't your fault. The hit-and-run charge is the only thing they can hold you for, and that'll never stand up in court."

McCann said. "Thanks, Stanley."

"For what?" the big man shrugged. "You'd do the same for me. I'm practically one of your family. I managed your father's campaign—a little thing like this is nothing." He broke off as one of the policemen came in with a quart bottle and a couple of glasses. "Here, a drink'll put you back on your feet."

McCann accepted the whisky gratefully and asked, "Does father know about this?"

"Not yet. Your father was out, and the girl put the call on Davork's phone. He called me, and I came right down. Davork's a good secretary, but a little jumpy." He studied the tip of his cigar. "Ready to go?"

The shadow-thin man in the baggy tweeds was in the room then, saying, "I'd like to get a statement. I'm the man who called the Governor's secretary, and—"

"I'll see that you're taken care of," Stanley said, "but there's nothing for publication."

"Then," the thin man grinned, "I'll wait and ask the Governor. His car was pulling up outside when I came in."

Stanley swore, turned to McCann. "I'd hoped you'd have a chance to clean up before you had to talk to—"

McCann said, "Might as well get it over with."

The sergeant's voice reached them first. "This way, sir—Your Excellency. Your son's down at this end of the hall. As soon as we found out who he was we made every effort to do—"

The big cop stepped over to the door, shot a quick look down the hall. Then he stepped back, his brow suddenly ridged, his voice thick. "Holy Saints, Doc, we're in this up to our ears. Do you know whose son this is? The Gov-

ernor's—that's who. Only the Governor of this whole darn State!"

"Brace yourself, guy." Stanley moved away.

GOVERNOR JAMES McCANN was a trim, small man with square-cut shoulders and a fighter's jaw. His hair, his tufted, bristling brows were white; his nose was thin, and slightly hooked. There was a bitter down-curve to his wide mouth that his years of unflagging service as special prosecutor had put there.

He stopped just inside the door, his stormy blue eyes swinging from Stanley to his son. His voice was deep, and he spoke slowly like a man fighting to retain control of his temper.

"Why did you come here, Stanley?"

The big man looked away. "I thought I could help—and you'd have done as much for me."

"You'd have been kinder to let me clean my own house," the Governor said, bleakly. "I'd like to speak to Duncan—alone."

The others filed out of the room. A strained silence fell between father and son, at the sound of the closing door. They faced each other, across a low table, and in that tight quiet, the gulf between them stretched deep and wide.

"A hit-and-run accident this time," the Governor said. "Isn't there any sort of wretched idiocy that you can avoid? Parties, drunken brawls, smash-ups, and now—this. What will it be next time—murder? That's the only thing you've missed. You have no respect for the name you bear, no respect for your mother's memory, or for my position. You've never been any good to me in all your life. I wanted a son, Duncan, a man—not a drunkard and a useless, idling—"

"Hold it—" Duncan said steadily. "You're saying some pretty unpleasant things, Dad. I'll admit this looks bad but it's easily enough explained—"

"You might think so, but you can never explain a hit-and-run accident—not to *me!* Men have a word for that, a word I never thought I'd have to use for a son of mine—*yellow!*"

"But—"

"You ran. You dodged the responsibility that should have been yours. That's all that counts. And this isn't the first time. All through school you took the easiest way. You graduated a year ago, and since that time you've done nothing but disgrace your name—and mine. You're trying to make it stand for drunken escapades and—"

Anger flamed in Duncan's eyes. "Stop!"

His father flinched. A deep line appeared around his mouth as though cut there by a lash. His voice was bleak. "Disrespect can hardly matter. Not now, not after the other things. This must be my fault. Somewhere, years ago, I must have let you get off on the wrong foot. I gave you too much money. Now you aren't worth the powder to blow you up. You'd starve in a week if you were ever put on your own. You've never worked at anything. You couldn't hold a man's job for one day."

Duncan McCann didn't move, didn't speak.

"It's too late to try and correct that now. You're my son, heaven help me, but you're anything but a man. Men stand on their own feet. You're leaving my house tonight, and from this day on, you're my son no longer. And you won't be, until you've shown me that you've earned the right to use our name."

That phrase seemed to burn in letters of fire in Duncan McCann's head:

"From this day on—!" His anger had burned itself out, leaving nothing but a black, harsh bitterness.

"You've said a lot of things, sir, and you're positive you're right. As positive as if the recording angel was one of your own office girls. But there's this you've forgotten. You know nothing about people—what they're really like, I mean. That tin world of yours is populated with nothing but stuffed shirts, run by a few smart politicians who like to play God because they can control a few votes, one way or the other. You're honest, sir—there isn't a more honest, iron-backed, bull-headed man in the world. But you're in a league where they make up their own rules, and one of these days somebody'll hang something on *you*. And *then* watch out for your precious name!" He heard his voice rushing on, saying all the harsh things, all the bitter things, all the half truths that he could put into words, just to hurt his father as he had been hurt.

"You'd never believe that any one of our blood could want to do anything but do just exactly what they've always done—follow the profession of law until somebody elected them to something. Well, I don't, I never have, and I never will! I'm a mechanical engineer, and it took all of my strength and all of mother's to force you to let me be one."

The Governor's face was gray and worn. Only his eyes were alive, and they were suddenly very old, very tired. But Duncan went on grimly.

"I *will* go, sir, and I'll be mighty glad to go. I wouldn't have stayed this long if I hadn't thought you wanted me to. I'll be glad to get away from that musty mausoleum that never's been a home. Glad to get out some place where there's a man's work to do."

The Governor leaned forward, placed both hands flat on the table, and said in an old man's voice, "There *is* a man's work to be done—and ten men for every job. There's small pay, poor food, long hours. A million things you've never known. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not begging you to stay, but I want you to know what you're up against. That—that suit you're wearing would cost you three months pay at any job you could handle."

"What of it? Who cares?" Duncan McCann instantly regretted those trite, flat phrases. Regretted them when he saw the pain in his father's eyes.

Governor McCann sighed, "I guess there's nothing more—not now! I'll give you my check for five hundred to carry you until you can get started in—"

Duncan McCann stared. Suddenly he wanted to make this break sharp and clean. "There's one thing more. You can have your name. I don't want it. From the minute I walk out of here I'm *John Duncan*. You can keep your money, too. I won't need it."

THERE was pain and disbelief in the Governor's eyes when he pulled them away from Duncan's face. He turned then, walked slowly to the door. He opened it, passed through it and went down the hall without looking back.

Duncan McCann stood there stiffly, his cheeks white, his lips pressed thin. Twice he started to call out, and twice he fought the impulse down. There was an emptiness inside him as the Governor's trim shoulders went through the outer door.

Stanley came lounging in ahead of the thin reporter and the sergeant. He prodded the air with his cigar and asked, "How'd it go, Duncan?"

McCann's brows pulled down. "I'll need a blank check on the Boardman National Bank." He had a little left of the money his mother had willed to him.

"Okay." Stanley ripped a check out of his book, dropped it on the table. "I've got news for you. Dorn, the reporter here, just came from the hospital. The girl's gonna be all right. She—"

McCann's head jerked up. "I thought she was going to—"

Stanley shrugged, and the red-faced sergeant said rapidly, "The men must have made a mistake. There was a lot of blood and—"

McCann filled in the check, blotted it, and then got a small, pink slip out of his wallet. "What's that girl's name?"

Stanley said, "You don't have to do that. I'll be glad to lend you enough to—"

"I pay my way," McCann said, bleakly, "as I go. What is her name?"

The thin reporter said, "May Hale."

A moment later McCann stood up. "Here," he pushed the check and car title into the reporter's hands. "You deliver these for me. The check's small, but I signed the car over to her, and her people may be able to sell it for something. Sorry it isn't more, but that cleans me out."

The reporter blinked.

"And listen!" There was cold fury in McCann's voice. "If you print a line about this, I'll come back and break your neck. Use the accident, and take me over the jumps if you want to, but not a word about the money. Get it?"

The reporter nodded dumbly. McCann whirled on his heel and stalked to the door. He turned then, frowning, to ask, "How much is the fare to Industrial City?"

"The plane's around twenty dollars I think," Stanley said. "The train will be about half that."

The reporter spoke then in a thin, amused voice, "They run buses to Industrial City, too. You wouldn't know about that, but a lot of people ride them. Fare's about four bucks."

"Thanks," McCann said soberly. "Maybe I'll like the bus ride."

CHAPTER III

DISAPPEARING LADY

THE weazened pawnbroker dropped the thin pad of bills on the scarred counter. "Thirty-five for the camera," he said, "and sixty for the rifles. Better count it."

Duncan McCann took the last cigarette out of a slim, golden case, and pushed it between his lips. He said, "Why bother?" and thrust the money into his pocket. He stopped then, stared at the cigarette case in his hand. He dropped it on the counter.

"How much for that?"

The weazened pawnbroker examined it carefully, said, "Five dollars."

"I'll take it." McCann grinned wryly.

He paused in the pawnshop door, and then walked swiftly down South Street. The chill wind had freshened, carrying a growing hint of rain. It tugged at the skirts of his overcoat and flattened his hat brim over his eyes.

He walked two blocks, cut across the walk toward a wide doorway, and bumped head-on into a slender woman. She reeled back, stumbled, and her open purse bounced out of her hand. A scant second later, McCann was beside her, blurting an apology.

"Sorry. I really *didn't* see you, I—" He dropped to his knees, scooped up a compact, a cigarette case, and some silver, and replaced them in the purse.

Then he was on his feet, looking down into a clear, oval face in which glowed the deepest, darkest eyes he'd ever seen. The girl was frowning, and a mouth that should have been provocative was firmly set.

He swallowed. "Sorry to be such a clown. But I don't ordinarily make a habit of—"

Her frown vanished then, and she laughed—easy tinkling laughter that brought color to McCann's face. "I thought it was a new kind of a pick-up at first. Till I saw your face." Amusement glimmered in her eyes. "From your face I'd say you made a practice of running into things, hard things—like left hooks."

McCann's hand went to his swollen lips. He said, "Hey—" and the rest of the words died unspoken. The girl was gone, swinging away through the crowd. His eyes followed her pert, white turban as far as the corner.

He shrugged then, went through the door under the sign, *Bus Tickets to All Points*. A moment later he was pushing a ten dollar bill through the ticket window, and saying, "Industrial City, one way."

"Right." A clerk slapped the ticket and his change down on the counter. "Bus leaves in half an hour. You can get on now if you want to. The garage attendant'll show you which one."

McCann looked around the shabby waiting room, said, "Thanks, I will."

McCANN woke up, as the bus motor started, and the bus pulled up to the platform. He slouched deeper in his seat as the passengers came aboard, pulled his hat down over his eyes and dozed. He heard, dimly, the far-away growl of the engine as the bus toiled up the ramp; heard the low hum of voices, but didn't open his eyes. After a while he went back to sleep.

Then someone was shaking his shoulder, and a cool voice was saying, "Wake up, Bert, wake up."

McCann started up, blinking the sleep out of his eyes. "But—" He stopped then, jaw sagging, and stared at the girl who bent over him. He remembered the clear, oval face, the pert, white turban; but the dark eyes weren't laughing now.

"I thought you were going to sleep all the way," she said. Before he could speak, she had squeezed past him to drop in the seat beside the window. "I had to do this," she said in a low quick voice. "There's a small-town Romeo over there with restless hands and stupid ideas. Mind?"

McCann said, "Which one?" His eyes raked the seats, and halfway down the aisle a fat man turned his head quickly aside.

The woman's hand was on his arm, her voice low. "Don't, please. Let it go."

McCann settled back in his seat, fumbled for a cigarette. "Sure, if that's the way you want it." He struck flame from his lighter, studied her face as she bent toward the tiny flame. "I still owe you an apology. It's nice to have the chance to make it."

"But you have."

"How," he asked a moment later, "did you happen to pick me? I might have restless hands, too."

She smiled. "No." Strange, lovely lights came to life in the depths of her dark eyes. "I'll make you a bet—say, sandwiches at the first stop—that I can tell you almost everything about yourself."

"Taken."

"Well. Let's see. You're a college graduate." She tipped her head to one side. "Money, or at least a moneyed family. You've got a temper—almost

too much of that, and you're down on your luck." She laughed. "The temper might explain the condition of your face. Enough?"

"Plenty." McCann grinned. "But there's one thing you can't guess. My name is"—he hesitated and frowned—"my name is John Duncan."

Laughter sparkled in her eyes. "I thought for a minute you were going to say Smith." Her cool palm touched his. "I'm Marcia Dubois, and that's my *right* name."

He flushed.

"Dont let it bother you," she said. "But you'd better practice saying that name." She laughed then, said, "What's the difference, anyway?"

The tension between them disappeared. They talked as the bus roared on through the night. She had beauty—a restless, vibrant beauty—and a way of going straight to the heart of any subject, a knack that made her conversation vital and alive.

He found himself telling her things he'd never told any other woman, without realizing that she was offering no information about herself.

"So you're going to Industrial City?" She opened a folded newspaper, spread it on her knee. "If I were you I'd look for work any place but the Falcon Plant."

"Why?"

Wordlessly she indicated the headline. He read:

LABOR TROUBLE IN MOTOR INDUSTRY

Strike Rumored in Falcon Plant

McCann's mouth twisted, and bitterness clouded his eyes. "Trouble? Well maybe that'd be right down my alley. That's a good chance to start making my points the hard way."

She shook her head. "I wouldn't. It would be starting under a handicap. Why don't you try some other place first? You don't want to work in a place where the men are all suspicious of their bosses and each other. According to this story several of the workmen have been beaten up pretty badly. It's bad enough for the men who have to work there; you can get a job some place else just as easily. Besides, if they strike you'd have to find another job, anyway."

McCann grinned. "I still think that'd be making my points the tough way. Why not? I've never seen a strike. It would be exciting. I could throw bricks through the windows and yell with the rest of them. Why not? I think I'd like to toss a few paving blocks around. I'm right in the groove."

"Don't talk like that!" she said quickly. All the laughter had gone out of her face. "You don't know what you're saying—what a strike is."

He laughed easily. "You sound—"

"Don't laugh! It isn't funny. You'd know if you'd ever seen picket lines, the police. Riots. People smashing things. Oh, maybe you've seen them in a movie. But you can't know what a real strike is like. You don't know the violence, the hunger, the deaths—It's—it's . . . You'd be better off anywhere else. Stay away from the Falcon Plant."

McCann turned, surprised at her sudden earnestness. "You seem to know a lot about strikes. How come?"

"I just know, that's all." She got the cigarette case out of her purse. "I talk too much."

A HALF hour later, perched on high stools in a roadside lunch room, they had coffee and egg sandwiches. They were walking back to the bus when he tried to get her talking again.

"Were you ever in a strike?"

"I thought we weren't going to talk about that." She smiled up at him, and then said, "I'm out of cigarettes. Will you get me a package, please?"

"Sure, but—"

She smiled again. "I'll hold the bus for you."

McCann grinned, went back inside the lunch room. The counterman was handing him his change when the bus motor bellowed suddenly. McCann spun, yanked the door open and ran. The bus was already moving, and even as he gained the drive, its ruddy tail lights swung out into the highway.

He stared after them, and then down at the package of cigarettes in his hand. He swore ruefully and after a long moment, he wheeled and went slowly back to the lunchroom.

The counterman bobbed his head, said, "Tough, buddy. There ain't another bus till morning."

"There wouldn't be." McCann climbed up on a stool. "I'll have more coffee."

He drank in silence while the counterman went back to his paper. What had happened didn't make sense, he thought savagely. First the girl had used him to scare off some masher, and then she had tricked him into missing the bus. Why—?

He was staring into space when the counterman touched his arm. "Say, I yelled at you a couple of times but you didn't hear me. I just happened to think—if you go over to the service station you might be able to hitch-hike a ride. They're open all night."

"That, mister, is an idea."

The service station attendant was a big-shouldered, good-natured chap who dropped his magazine to say, "Come on in. Maybe I can scare up a ride for you. I saw you miss your bus."

Midnight came and went. A couple of loaded trucks rolled in, but the attendant said, "You don't want to ride in those. They won't get there till late tomorrow. The next bus is better than that."

It was around one-thirty when a sleek, streamlined Falcon sport coupé rolled up to the pumps. McCann stood in the door and watched the attendant fill the tank, clean the windshield. The attendant said something to the driver when he brought the change. Then he turned to beckon McCann out.

"Here's your ride, fella, straight through to the big town."

The motor purred louder, and the big coupé was moving almost before McCann was settled on the seat. He said, "I—" and then stopped as he saw the face outlined in the reflected glow of the dash. The driver was a girl.

Her whole attention was on the road. She drove fast, but expertly. The headlights tunneled far down the windswept highway, and even at sixty the machine under the long hood was merely loafing.

Finally the girl spoke. She asked, "Are you going to Industrial City?"

"Yes." He fumbled for words. "I missed the bus back there, and there wasn't another one till morning. I—"

"Are you a worker?" Her voice was low, pleasant, and very serious.

"Am I what?"

"I mean do you work in the plant."

Duncan McCann told her that he hoped he was going to, and caught her looking at him as if she were trying to make her mind up about him.

"Are you interested in the Cause?" she asked, and she sort of capitalized it with her voice.

"What cause?"

"The cause of the new freedom."

Duncan smiled a puzzled smile, and

the girl began to explain. "You must know that the day of the old capitalistic machine is finished. The new liberty will come, a new class rule. We must all work for that. Surely you understand. The worker's day."

FOR the second time in four hours Duncan McCann stared in frank amazement, astonished at the vehemence in a woman's voice.

He frowned. A two thousand dollar car, a fur coat, and a hat and gloves that could have come only from Paris well, it wasn't exactly an appropriate uniform for an exponent of social justice. The girl was young—around twenty—of Irish-American extraction he would have guessed. A tip-tilted nose gave a Puckish charm to her profile. hinted at flashing wit. Yet—

"The capitalistic machine is crumbling, you see, and the new day is near. Then the workers will control their own destiny, the cause will triumph." She was almost childlike in her earnestness. but somehow he couldn't laugh at her.

Then McCann smiled into the darkness. As she went on, he suddenly recognized the words, the terrible sincerity of the voice. A year or so out of college the textbook platitudes still seemed, to her, the panacea for an ailing world.

"I hadn't thought much about it," he said, "but I imagined capital was doing business at the same old stand. And doing about as well as usual."

She snapped, "You don't know—"

"I know this," he said easily. "This is a pretty good country, and there's still plenty of chance for an ambitious man . . . for any man. Sure, there are things wrong with it—there can't help but be—it's new and growing fast. Those things can and will be taken care of—but not by turning everything upside down by simple violence. There are other ways—much better ways."

"You sound very sure," she said, "but you're wrong. Any thinking person will tell you that."

"I am sure of one thing. This is my country and I'd hate to see it wrecked. I'd hate to see the government in the hands of some of these big-voiced, empty-headed fixers who want to write a new book of rules." He stopped, lit a cigarette. "Sorry. You probably don't care much what I think. After all, we can still think the way we want to, and I'm your guest." He peered out the window. "I'll buy coffee and sandwiches at the next restaurant we come to if you'll forgive me my bad manners."

"All right."

THEY fell silent as the coupé knifed smoothly through the night. A little later they stopped in front of an all-night restaurant.

They ordered. She pulled her hat off, dug slim fingers through blond hair. "I'm tired. I've been driving all night. But it was worth it. I heard Gordon Burtra speak on the new justice. He's —he's wonderful."

McCann looked at her silently. She was attractive, strikingly attractive. A smooth, deep brow, large eyes, a good mouth, and he hadn't been wrong about the impish charm of her face.

"I'll drive," he offered quietly as they were walking back to the car. "That way, you can get a little sleep before we get in."

She looked up quickly, said, "Thanks, I'd like that."

McCann enjoyed driving. The big coupé handled the way only a perfect car can handle. There was power under the hood, plenty of sweet power, and

the wheel answered the faintest touch. The night miles dropped behind.

Once she stirred and he said, "This is a lot of car."

"Yes, it is," she said drowsily. "But father's cars have always been good. Ever since the first Falcon, he's tried to make the best car on the market."

McCann's brows arched over thoughtful eyes, "Your father?"

"Yes. I'm Helen Falcon."

McCann didn't speak.

"I know," she went on, "you're wondering why I'm fighting capital when my father is a manufacturer. I'll tell you. Because he, and the rest of the country, will be better off when the workers have control. You'll see. You wait—" She paused thoughtfully, went on, "If you're going to be in Industrial City I'll put you in touch with people who will convince you that I'm right."

"That," McCann said softly, "will be just dandy."

Dark thoughts ticked through his head. Helen Falcon, a radical. Father and daughter on opposite sides of the class question. McCann wondered how long her ideas would last if they deprived her of high-powered cars, coats of luxurious fur?

The roadster took a sweeping curve, flashed over the crest of a hill, and on the plain below them the countless thousands of Industrial City's lights winked against the backdrop of the night.

McCann's throat tightened. Industrial City seemed suddenly a very big, cold, unfriendly place. Tomorrow he had to find work. His money wouldn't last long, and then—

He shrugged. Let tomorrow take care of itself. He could live only one day at a time. And from now on he would live as John Duncan.

CHAPTER IV

HIRED

DUNCAN McCANN spent a week learning that there were no jobs open in Industrial City for a graduate mechanical engineer. Or that if there were, he wasn't going to get one—not without references. A week of filing application forms, of talking to bored clerks, and, occasionally, of talking to someone in authority who listened while he stated his qualifications, and then used one of the trite ways of saying "No."

His hundred dollars dwindled to fifty, and he moved to a cheaper hotel. He stopped tipping waitresses, and began to shine his own shoes. At the end of the week he had three ten-dollar bills tucked in his watch pocket, and a hunger to talk to someone, anyone. The worn chairs in the dark-walled lobby held only a few grouchy old men, and an occasional traveling salesman. His hotel room was worse. There was nothing there but a straight-backed chair, the bed, and a small closet.

The week end was drab, endless. Monday morning he swallowed his pride, and joined the crowd of men around the employee's gate of the Falcon Motor Plant.

Even there getting a job was no cinch. The first morning McCann was one of the tight group who stepped forward when the gray-haired personnel man came through the gate and said:

"Three mechanics."

McCann waited while the personnel man frowned, and then said, "Mechanics, huh? Let's see your hands."

There was a cold feeling in the pit of McCann's stomach as he pushed his hands out. He didn't need to be told the verdict—he knew. His hands were

white and soft, and showed no trace of work. The gray-haired man's eyes brushed over them, went on to the others. To the hard, square, stained hands.

A stubborn anger came into McCann's face as he watched the three men chosen go through the gate. That afternoon he puzzled a garage attendant by asking:

"Have you got any crank-case oil? No, I don't want to take it with me. I just want to soak my hands."

"Sure," the man shook his head, "and the babe is always yellin' at me 'cause I can't get the grease out of mine. You'll never make a hit with the gals if you don't—"

"The guy I want to make a hit with is an old duck with a face that's been chipped out of concrete." McCann took the grease and stalked back into the rear of the garage.

Two days passed before he got a chance again. He found a restaurant that served hot cakes and coffee for fifteen cents, and by skipping lunch he spent only a dollar and twenty-five cents a day. The men around the gate had begun to know him now, and a couple of them called a greeting as he joined the crowd in the morning.

The third morning he was again one of the group under the gray-haired man's inspection. He waited stiffly while the icy eyes raked over him, but there was no sign of recognition in the personnel man's face.

The personnel man said gruffly, "You'll do. Go in with the other three."

A GRINNING, full-cheeked man led them into the basement, past rows of steel lockers, and into a white-walled medical office. The physical examination took half an hour; the guide waited till the doctor had initialed their cards and then led them to the timekeeper's office.

McCann filled out a personal record card, got his badge and time card. The timekeeper leaned out, pointed with his pencil. "You ring in over there. Then go up that ramp, ask for O'Meara."

McCann watched two of the others ring in, and then dropped his card into the slot, tripped the arm. He was turning when the man behind him said:

"Hold it, buddy, you had that in backward. Better do it right or they might hold up your check."

Then they started up the ramp, while the heat increased and the welter of sound grew in his ears. The machine-gun clamor of air-hammers, the high-pitched wail of drills, the hum of electric motors, and countless others he couldn't identify. Thunderous, strident, ceaseless noise. There were odors too. Steel, rubber, leather, and fresh paint. But mostly he was conscious of the noise.

A sharp-faced little man appeared from nowhere to lead them across the floor.

They went past huge racks of motors. Past the place where the chassis came into being. The air-hammers were here and the clamor was deafening. McCann could see a second moving line where workmen added wheels and axles to the chassis. And still another line where motors moved slowly from one mechanic to the next. They were using air-wrenches there. One mechanic tightened the spark plugs, another attached the distributor, and still another hooked up the wires.

Then down an aisle to a storeroom. An overalled storekeeper jerked a thumb at McCann, asked, "What's his, O'Meara?"

The sharp-faced man said, "Body drop."

A short, big-pocketed apron was slapped down on the counter and followed by two, foot-long, tapered steel punches and a hammer. Then the storekeeper poked a slip at McCann, said, "Sign here."

McCann obeyed automatically, and then realized that habit had been too strong. He had signed Duncan McCann on the sheet, and not the name he had used on the personal record card.

The storekeeper was busy, and the sharp-faced O'Meara was talking to the others. McCann used the eraser, and then wrote John Duncan in big letters across the smudged sheet.

O'Meara touched McCann's arm, "This way."

McCann's eyes raked the four-block-long room.

There were three or four assembly lines. He grinned then, remembering the charts the college professor had used in the lectures on mass production. These were the subsidiary lines. The body line would be on the floor above. These others—the short ones—would be the motor line, the frame line, and the axle line.

O'Meara led him down the floor to stop, finally, where a hoist was lowering a sedan body through a hole in the floor above. They waited while two aproned mechanics guided it into place on the waiting chassis. Waited while they dropped bolts through holes drilled in the body, and through the matching holes in the chassis below.

"You work here," O'Meara shouted. "This man'll show you what to do." He stepped close to the moving line, and tapped the aproned man on the shoulder as he dropped the last bolt in place. "He'll relieve you. Stick around and break him in."

The workman nodded.

THE next hour was a nightmare. McCann learned what the foot-long punches were for. His job was to place them in the body-bolt holes at each end of the chassis, where the bottom of the channel steel, which made the frame, held them upright. Another man on the opposite side of the line did the same thing. The body would be coming down then, and he and the other man swung it until the proper holes fitted over the punch ends. The punches acted as guides, bringing the body firmly in place.

The bolts next. There were nine of them in McCann's half of the car. Nine bolts to be yanked from the apron pocket and pushed through as many holes in the floor of the body. Then he had to jerk the punches out, and fit bolts into those holes too. And by that time another chassis would be moving under the body drop.

That was his job, and it wasn't a task that required any special talent or training. Yet at the end of the first hour McCann's nerves were stretched wire-tight. His head ached, and blinding sweat streamed down into his eyes.

His hands slipped on the bolts, and the punches refused to come free the first time he yanked. Small things, but things that lengthened the time of each operation by seconds. And seconds counted here, where they had only a minute and fifteen seconds to work on each car.

The squat, dark, broad-faced man across the line worked with an unhurried precision that left McCann gasping. Each movement was smooth, timed. His thick-fingered hands shot the bolts home in split seconds. The punches came free, and he was stepping back before half of McCann's work was done.

And McCann couldn't stay with the

car. He knew that without being told. Mass production wasn't geared that way. His operation began where the man behind finished placing the strips of insulation that the body was to rest upon, and ended where the next man stepped into the body to hold the bolt-tops while the electric wrenches in the pit below ran them up tight.

Another hour, and the numb ache was creeping up McCann's arms to his shoulders. The squat man across the line was grinning at him, a nasty, thick-lipped grin, and once he put his lips close to McCann's ear to shout, "Foldin' up, are you, Kid?"

McCann didn't answer. Anger burned in his head, and his lips flattened over his teeth. A handful of bolts skittered out of his grasp and, as he fumbled for them, a hand touched his shoulder.

"Leave 'em, lad, I'll get them." It was the man who worked on the line ahead of McCann, who held the bolt tops for the men in the pit.

McCann grinned his thanks, twisted the punches free, and squeezed past him.

Twice more, in the hour that followed, McCann was forced to leave his job unfinished. And twice more the tall, gray-eyed man added that bit of work to his own.

He helped McCann in other ways too. He showed him where he was wasting a half dozen seconds. Showed him how to flip bolts out of the apron pocket with one hand, how to jam them home with the other.

Noon.

The assembly line stopped moving, and the roaring clamor died to a low hum, stopped. McCann leaned gratefully against the side of a car, pulled a long, slow breath deep into his lungs. The men were streaming toward the ramp. McCann took a couple of long steps to the gray-eyed man's side.

"Thanks," he said. "I'd have been sunk without a trace if you hadn't lent a hand. Thanks."

A slow smile played across the tall man's lean features. "Forget it, lad. This kind of work bothers everybody till they get used to it. A couple of days, and you'll be helpin' *me*." He tucked his gloves in a back pocket. "Anybody'd do the same thing. Come on, let's eat."

McCann fell in step with him.

"You're wrong. There's one guy who'd cheerfully cut my throat." He jerked a thumb at the retreating back of the squat man who worked across the line.

"That's Johnny Robb, lad."

"Right. And Robb is a cutthroat if the Lord ever made one." This was a new voice. A low-pitched, hard voice that brought McCann's eyes swinging to the speaker.

He too was tall, lean, gray-eyed. Almost a mirrorlike image of the first man. The same long arms, the same reddish hair, the same steel-hard leanness, the same ease of movement. And yet—

THE newcomer was different. There was a bleak anger in his face, in the down curve of his mouth, in his bristling brows. His eyes were stormy, his voice raw.

"Watch Robb, lad. He's a heel, and he'll do everything he can to make your job tougher. He's a rat, and—"

"Shut up, Kim." It was the first man speaking.

McCann looked from one to the other. "You guys must be brothers."

"Right, lad," it was the first man again. "We are. I'm Mack Saddler, and the one who's spoutin' off is Kim.

He works behind you on the line. He places the insulation strips under the body." His hand went out in a flat gesture. "A nice guy, Kim, but he talks too much."

His only answer from Kim was a growl.

They joined the line in front of the time clock, rang out, and then Mack Saddler said, "You can buy fruit and sandwiches at the counter there, lad, and you'll find us at the table over there, next to the wall."

McCann brought his lunch to their table, and Mack Saddler slid over to make room for him. They ate in silence.

Then Kim Saddler touched his arm, said bitterly, "Here comes Robb now. Better join, kid, it's the easiest way out."

"Huh?" McCann's eyes found Robb. The squat man was threading his way toward them. "Join what?"

Mack said, "Wait."

McCann did, smoking silently, while he watched the chunky Robb pause to speak to four other men, and bring them with him. The group stopped in front of McCann.

Robb said, "You, there, let's see your card. Hurry it up."

"What kind of a card?"

"What kind of a card!" Robb leaned forward, said disgustedly, "Your union card."

"I haven't got one."

"That's just what I thought." Robb wheeled around, spoke to the man behind him. "An' you guys ain't packin' cards either. This's a closed shop. You can't work here if you ain't a union member. We got a hundred percent membership, an' we're goin' to keep it. Initiation fee's ten bucks. Dues're three bucks a month. I got blanks here. You get a half a day to decide."

"Supposin'—" a tall, rail-thin man in new overalls began. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down, and a flush tinted his lined cheeks. "Supposin' we don't join? Then what?"

Robb's lips went flat. "You will," he said harshly, "or you won't draw any checks here."

"But look, guy, I can't afford it. I got a wife in the hospital, and this's the first job I got in three months. Old man Falcon says he's runnin' an open shop. I read that in the paper. The company won't fire me if I don't carry a card. I'd like to, honest, but I can't afford it."

He stood there blinking, and the hum of voices around them hushed. There was only the rustling sound as the men turned to watch and listen.

Robb's voice shattered the tight silence. "Makes no difference. You might be stallin'. You pack a card or you don't work! We ain't foolin', guy. Maybe the company won't fire you, but"—the last phrase seemed to hang in the quiet—"they got more beds in that hospital!"

McCann twisted free of Saddler's grasp, was on his feet when the stocky red-headed man elbowed his way close to Robb. "Tell 'im to go fry, Slim." The red-headed man pushed his angry face close to the squat man's. "If you won't I will. I been all over this country. I worked in more plants than you ever seen, an' I carry cards in three unions—but I'll see you sizzle before I put my name on *your* list. Union—bah!" The red-headed man spat. "A gang of thieves and robbers! You and your ten dollars. Why don't you take Slim's whole check? What kind of a union is this, stealin' the food out of a man's mouth? Pack of rats." The stocky red-headed man stood there, hands on hips, head thrown back, eyes

blazing. "Rats! And that goes for you too, Robb. You might scare the rest of these guys, but you'll get no money from O'Malley!"

BLACK anger knotted Robb's face. His big hands jerked. He pushed the words out through stiff lips. "You did your talking, guy. Beat it. You don't want to join. Okay, maybe you'll change your mind later." His voice thinned, became low, deadly. "An' *maybe* you won't—you got to be alive before you can think!"

O'Malley sneered. "Big talk." He spun then, stalked away.

The others shifted uneasily. Robb's voice was harsh with fury. "You got a half a day to decide." He handed each of them a small card. "I'll pick up those cards tonight."

McCann waited till Robb's eyes were on his, and then he said, "You can have my answer now." He ripped the card in half, tossed the pieces at Robb's feet.

The ugly flush came back into Robb's face. "If we was outside," he blazed out. Then he regained control of his voice. "You still got a half a day to change your mind, punk."

Neither of the Saddler brothers spoke for a long moment after Robb had gone. Mack broke the silence.

"That was a nice gesture, lad. I'd like to make the same kind myself. But you'd best change your mind. It's the easy way, the only way." His voice was low, couldn't have been heard more than five or six feet away.

"But why—"

"They've got the upper hand, lad. The union runs this plant, and don't you ever doubt it for a minute. They've got hundred percent membership. The men have to join—or go to the hospital."

"But." McCann broke in. "I thought unions were meant to *help* the working man."

"There are two kinds of unions, lad. Good ones, and this kind. Honest unions, of course, son, do help the men, but this kind hold their members by force and fear. They take everything and give nothing. They do just that. O'Malley called the turn when he said a gang of thieves ran this one. Have no doubt about that, but you and I can't do anything about it—not against their gang of strong arm men."

"How long has—has this been going on? I'd think the men would do something—or that Falcon would stop it."

A ghost of a smile pulled at Saddler's lips. "Falcon would like to, but his hands are tied. It's hard to tell a good union from a bad one—on the surface. He has no doubts about this one, but he can't stop it. The word would get into the newspapers—the union would see to that—and that would give them an excuse to call a strike. It's bad, but he can't do anything to keep his own men from being robbed. They'd say Falcon was trying to force the men away from union activity. The union would yell, and most of the people would be on the side of the union. That would mean a strike. That's all they're waiting for. They can't ask for more money—Falcon's wages are the highest they've ever been. Higher than any other company."

Saddler looked away, and then went on. "Falcon is a grand man to work for, he always has been. He demands work from his men, sure, but they're well paid for it. He was the first plant owner to organize an employee's association. And it was a hundred times better than this rotten union. The giv-

ing was on the other side there. Falcon was the first to get health and accident insurance for his men—the first to listen to any suggestion for the improvement of working conditions. His plants are the safest in the world. If any question of wages or hours ever came up, the men used to appoint a committee and Falcon would hear them. He worked out the four- and five-day week so he could keep all the men on the payroll through the depression. Things began to pick up—"

"Yes?" McCann prodded.

"Well, Vick got here about that time. J. D. Vick, efficency expert. He raised plenty of dust. The first two weeks he didn't do anything but watch, and then he went to work. He came through the plant and speeded up every operation. That took plenty out of the men on the line. But he held it there, and it was keep up or get a yellow slip. A month, and then he began laying off men. One here and one there. The others had to split that work up—and still stay ahead. That started the bad feeling.

"The union came in then," he went on. "Crooked unions are run only when times are good. The organizers got a membership list of four or five hundred, and gradually worked it up to a thousand. Then the rest of us were forced to join. Some of the men refused. Their houses were burned, their cars wrecked, the men beat up. It was easier to join than to stay out. The union controls the plant now—as you'll see."

"But they can't do that!"

"They can, lad. Once they get an excuse they'll force the men to walk out. They'll close this plant down, and keep it closed till Falcon meets their demands for recognition. If he does, he puts the entire plant in the hands of the union bosses. He'll have to hire his men through them, and he won't be able to discharge any man without their consent. They can make him raise the wages at any time—or face a new strike."

McCann whistled. "He'll tell them to take their union and—"

"Softly, lad. He'd like to do that, but he can't. You forget that the union leaders control the men. Falcon will have to meet their demands or shut his plants down for good. He's got to have labor."

"The dirty—"

"Right, lad, but remember that the union leaders are playing for big stakes—they won't stop at anything. So you'd best change your mind, you'd best join."

"I'll see them roast first. My mind's made up now."

The strident clamor of a gong broke up their talk. Lunch was over. It was time to be an automaton again—to be as much of a machine as the machines they produced.

"That's it," Mack Saddler got to his feet. "You'll get nothing that way, lad. Better to be short three dollars a month, and alive."

"He's right, lad," Kim Saddler said, and cursed as he pushed past them to the time clock.

ALL along the assembly line the workmen were preparing their stock for the afternoon. Two workmen were trucking stacks of front fenders into place from the supply piles. There were low tables just back from the line where other workmen stacked the smaller parts.

McCann noticed the electric wrenches then. They were hung on spring cables where a touch would bring them down to the car. Enough

cord was looped with them to allow a fifteen foot movement along the line. When any task was finished the springs pulled the wrenches back out of the way. McCann grinned. Efficiency. One man armed with an electric wrench could do the work of five men using ordinary wrenches.

Efficiency. The key-word of mass production. Each man had a job to do —and no more. Constant repetition made an expert out of him, and the pressure of the moving line kept him working fast. Part upon part, operation upon operation, from sheet metal to completed body. From sections of channel steel to completed chassis. The wheels and axles were added on a separate line where the chassis lay across the line, instead of lengthwise along it.

A hoist picked the chassis up, placed it upon the main assembly line. Other parts were added. Braces, exhaust brackets, brake rods. Then it came abreast of the end of the motor line. Again a hoist. This time lifting the motor, swinging it over, and dropping it swiftly, smoothly into place.

More parts as the chassis crept along the quarter-mile long assembly line. The body drop where the body was placed, bolted. Then fittings, wiring, the front fenders, the tail-lights were added. Inspection, more parts, and more inspection, until finally it was fed gas, oil and water and driven off the line a finished car.

McCann grinned. Efficiency. The men showed it too. Their overalls were reinforced against wear only in the places where the wear came. One mechanic whose job made him lean far over the chassis had heavy canvas sewed across his thighs where they hit the steel. Another wore a single armguard to protect his sleeve from the edge of the chassis brace. There was no waste of material or motion.

McCann noticed the strained look about the other men. The quiet, sharp-eyed watchfulness as they waited for the line to start. Noticed the way they eyed one another, how they whispered instead of talking aloud. They seemed almost apprehensive.

Then the line began to move, and McCann forgot it as the thunderous clamor rose instantly. He jammed the punches in place, and then steered a sedan body into position just above them.

He was tired, even then. A dull ache throbbed in the center of his back, crept up his neck. His arms were heavy, his fingers sore swollen things that fumbled awkwardly at a simple task. He forgot all about everything but his job.

Forgot it till Saddler whispered, "Watch yourself, lad," as they passed during their work.

The tension came back then. Raw, nerve-tightening tension that grew with the minutes, that gathered in his weary muscles and throbbed in his aching head.

Other men along the line felt it too. It showed in the tight set of their mouths as they bent over their tasks, showed in quick side glances, and the tense, waiting air that seemed to grip them all.

A growing wonder swirled in McCann's mind. What could the union do? Surely Saddler must have been exaggerating. This was America. How could a bunch of thieves so completely control the thousands of men on the Falcon payroll? And if Falcon tried to smash their grip upon his men they would force a strike. And who would benefit by it, but this small group of racketeers? . . .

MARCIA DUBOIS' words came back to him then. "You don't know about strikes. You can't know about strikes. The hunger, the violence, the deaths. . . ." McCann's brow furrowed. She'd been right. He *didn't* know about strikes, but if Saddler was telling the truth he was going to find out.

Twice in the next hour he caught Robb looking at him. The squat man's lips were pulled back in silent laughter, but he didn't speak. McCann watched Robb narrowly as the next sedan body came down, watched him as he leaned forward . . .

The scream came then. Loud, sharp, a scream of pure animal pain, it was audible even above the chattering roar of the air hammers. It cut through the other sound like a knife through sheer silk, mounted to unbearable heights—and chopped off short. After it the din seemed almost quiet.

Every head on the line jerked toward that sound. McCann could see only an arm flailing upward; see a crumpling body, and then swirling figures cut off his view.

The line didn't stop. There was only a second, and then the hoist was crawling out over the hole in the floor above, and the next sedan body was settling down to the four guide punches. McCann went back to work, his hands moving with savage swiftness, but his mind now busy with conjecture.

Who? What had happened? There was a growing sureness in McCann's mind that he could name the man whose scream had rung the length of the line, and that the thing that had happened to him had been no ordinary accident.

Robb's mouth was twisted in a leering grin.

There were white-clad figures in the group down the floor when McCann next looked. He saw them lift the stretcher and carry it back toward the ramp. McCann got only a glimpse of a blanket-swathed figure, and then they were gone.

They got the details from a gray-faced inspector, an hour later. The inspector stepped close when Saddler jerked his head. His eyes were still glazed, shocked, and his mouth jerked as he talked.

"They're still usin' drills down there. High speed drills to ream a couple of holes on them fender braces that are sour. That guy got it right. Name's O'Malley, he went to work this morning. He got it right above the belt. Six inches of half inch drill steel right in the stomach!"

Black anger throbbed in McCann's head. The stocky Irishman had had the courage to say what he thought. And Robb had made a promise. Now that promise had been filled.

McCann's anger grew each time he looked into Robb's face. He was waiting for Robb to speak. Robb did, just before quitting time. They were placing the body bolts when he leaned forward to shout:

"You'll change your mind now, eh? Better join while—"

"O'Malley called you a rat. Well, rat isn't strong enough." McCann's voice cut like a lash. "*Murderer's* the word for you! And I'll see you hang before I put my name on your list!"

Surprise widened Robb's muddy eyes.

"You," he promised harshly, "will get just what that guy got!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Bright Cartridges

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Sourdough," "Mail Boat," etc.

CAPTAIN MOOSE WALLER of the Arctic trading schooner, *Polar Sea,* smiled grimly as he unscrewed the top from a can of metal polish and broke open a box of condemned cartridges. The cartridges were green and beginning to corrode.

Waller wiped a cartridge clean, then applied the metal polish. While waiting for the polish to dry, he gave several other cartridges a liberal coating, then he began rubbing the dry ones with a heavy cloth. "You could almost say that was made of gold, eh, Bledsoe?" Waller's battered face, wrinkled into a cruel grin.

"It's dangerous business," Bledsoe protested. He was the *Polar Sea's* first mate and had spent almost all his life in the Arctic. He could speak a number of dialects and make himself understood in all of the American and some of the Siberian villages. "To talk straight from the shoulder, it's manslaughter—if not downright murder."

"It's business," Waller growled. He was a giant of a man, with massive shoulders, a tremendously deep chest, ham-like fists. "Not dangerous business—just business."

"You know what will happen," Bledsoe argued, "you'll give that rifle to Sapsuck, the chief's son. He'll go out and take on the biggest polar bear he can find. That condemned ammunition will wound the bear and make him crazy mad. He'll charge Sapsuck and the Eskimo will be torn to pieces. You could just as well trade good ammunition. Their furs are good, Lord knows."

"Bledsoe," Waller said, "for thirty years you've wanted command of a trading schooner. I begin as a seaman under you and in ten years' time I'm giving you orders. Why? Because you're too chicken-hearted in dealing with natives. And you haven't any imagination."

"But I can get furs no other man in the Arctic can get," Bledsoe reminded.

"But you're still a mate," Waller

jeered. "You know the situation up at Sapsuck's village. His father, old Chief Kullak, sent the boy to a native school to pick up a little education. Education is bad for natives. It gives them ideas. They jump the price of their furs and want the finest trade goods in exchange. You can't get them drunk. And trading with drunk natives is the most profitable side of the business. Why there was a time when you could stand up a rifle on deck, and they would pile furs to the muzzle to get it. But not any more. They're getting educated."

The *Polar Sea* shuddered as her bow, sheathed with iron bark, crashed through ice into a lead. Bledsoe squinted through a port hole at the sky, and by its color judged the situation ahead. The sky revealed the location of ice and water. The sullen roar of the contending floes came steadily.

Waller started to say something more, then suddenly lapsed into a tight-lipped silence. It wouldn't do to tell his mate too much. Summed up, Sapsuck had learned something of values during his brief period in school. More and more he was educating his people, and particularly his father, in values.

His method was simple. He merely tossed a fox fur onto the ground, and then dropped trade goods beside it. The pelt stood for the price the white trader had paid for the goods. The difference was impressive and staggering.

The previous year they had encountered a deadlock. It looked as if Waller would have to turn back without furs or else give in to Sapsuck's demands. In the end Kullak had proved he was still chief by ordering his son to accept the trader's terms.

Waller was satisfied in his own mind that Sapsuck would continue to be a problem, and that when he became chief the situation would be impossible. There was even the chance—and he shuddered at the thought—that Sapsuck would buy an old schooner and set up a trading business himself.

To arrange an accident in which the native was killed, would be to invite a charge of murder and Government prosecution. "But Sapsuck has got to be bumped off," Waller growled, "and it must be done when I ain't around. It's got to look natural, and I think I've figured out a sure-fire trick." And he continued to polish condemned cartridges.

AS THE *Polar Sea* pushed deeper into the ice, Waller's doubts of Bledsoe increased. The mate might drop a word of warning in Sapsuck's ears. "He's so damned careful about the reputation he's built up among the natives," he complained. "I'll drop him and a few tons of stuff off at the next village, put him to work trading, and pick him up on the way back."

When they dropped anchor in an ice-scoured inlet the following morning Bledsoe came in for orders. "Take what you need, Mr. Bledsoe," Waller said, "and do the best you can for us. I'll pick you up in a couple of weeks. If we don't show up then, you'd better charter an *umiak* and join us. We'll load the fur on the way out."

Bledsoe gave him a queer glance, nodded and departed. "A good man, Bledsoe," Waller reflected, "obeys orders without a question. Knows the ice, natives and fur, too. But he's too chicken-hearted. He'll never skipper a trading schooner."

Waller drove the schooner hard as he pushed on to Kullak's village. The ice in the region was subjected to conflicting currents and winds. There was a fine chance of being caught and being forced to winter in. But the value of

Kullak's furs was well worth the risk.

Natives raced down to the beach and shoved off in *bidarkas* and *umiaks* as soon as the *Polar Sea* rounded the bluff headland. They made an excited, chattering escort. Sapsuck and Kullak, with the dignity befitting a chief and his son, remained on the beach.

"He's still alive," Waller growled, studying Sapsuck through his binoculars. "I thought he might have caught some white man's disease and died. The old chief looks in good shape, too. He'll probably hang on for another ten years." He put up the binoculars and then ordered the anchor dropped and a dory sent over the side.

Sapsuck regarded him with suspicion as he landed and said, "Where Bledsoe?"

"Oh he's down at another village," Waller replied.

"Think may be him schooner captain pretty soon," Sapsuck said.

"He'll make the grade sometime," Waller predicted. "Now let's get down to business. I want to go on a bear hunt. Got a new rifle and special ammunition."

"New rifle?" An eager light filled Sapsuck's eyes. Kullak grinned. "Plenty bear! Big fellers. Lots of 'em. Mean like devil," Sapsuck said.

Waller made no mention of bears or the rifle until all the trading had been completed and the furs were aboard the schooner. He raged inwardly at Sapsuck's stubbornness, but in the end he gave in, promising himself that next year it would be different.

"I'm going ashore," he told his second mate when the last bale of furs was stowed. "I promised myself a bear hunt. Sapsuck and his boys are going to guide me."

Waller returned to his cabin and took down a rifle from the rack. He loaded the magazine with new cartridges that he had polished carefully. Then he slipped two packages of the condemned cartridges into the left pocket of his coat. Every cartridge in the lot was highly polished.

TEN minutes later Sapsuck came alongside in an *umiak* paddled by young natives. Their eyes were bright with excitement and the brightness increased when they saw the rifle in Waller's hand. As the big skin boat glided down the lead, Sapsuck reached over and lovingly touched the weapon. "Mmmmm!" he exclaimed in the tone of a small boy sucking candy, "plenty good! How many fur for him?"

"I don't know," Waller said. "You show me plenty bear, may be I give you him."

The native beamed and growled something in dialect. The *umiak* turned, and an hour later they landed on the shore ice near a point. A school of whales was playing in the lead and in the distance there was ice black with walrus. "He's brought me to his private hunting ground, looks like," Waller mused.

Sapsuck led the way over the ice and presently stopped and pointed. Two big polar bears were stalking a seal that was growing suspicious of their advance. Waller worked his way to within a hundred yards of the bears, then flung the rifle to his shoulder. He dropped one in its tracks and wounded the second.

The big fellow roared, bit at the spot where the bullet hit, then charged. Waller stood his ground and sent in two more bullets. The bear turned end over end and skidded to a stop against an ice hammock.

Four empty cartridges, bright as gold, lay on the ice. One of the native

boys picked them up, the others followed Waller as he approached the two bears. They were dead and Sapsuck began skinning the largest. As he worked, he looked at the rifle.

Waller said nothing until they had returned to the schooner. Then he broke one of the boxes of condemned ammunition and reloaded the magazine. He handed Sapsuck both boxes, then the rifle.

"Present," he said, "from me to you. Good luck. See you next year." As the natives went over the side, he turned to the men forward. "Haul up the hook," he roared, "we're getting under way."

The schooner moved sluggishly down the lead, her scarred bows cutting a lane through shattered bits of ice. Waller tucked his binoculars into their case and climbed the rigging to the crow's nest. He took out the glasses, adjusted them and then watched the *umiak* that had suddenly started for the hunting grounds.

"I had an idear Sapsuck couldn't wait until he tried that rifle," Waller said in a brittle voice. "A kid . . . with a new toy." He shouted down a change in course that would permit him to watch some of the hunt.

Ten minutes passed without incident and Waller ordered the schooner to slow down. The gasoline motor chugged heavily and the craft hardly moved. Sapsuck, crawling over the ice, suddenly stopped and cautiously lifted his head. Abruptly he stood up. Distance prevented Waller from seeing the rifle held against the Eskimo's shoulder, but he knew from his position that he must be firing. The grind of the pack drowned out the crack of the weapon.

Waller climbed onto the frame work of the crow's nest and got a better view. Suddenly he saw a bear tumble over the ice hummock directly in front of Sapsuck. Something that must have been the rifle whizzed upwards, and then man and bear vanished into a depression. Fur-clad figures carrying harpoons rushed in from all sides. As Waller pressed the binoculars to his eyes, a pressure ridge on the drifting floes blotted out the scene.

"I expected it to happen," he said as he descended to the deck, "but I didn't expect it to happen so soon."

FIRST MATE BLEDSOE had a nice bunch of furs on the beach when the schooner stopped to pick him up. He said little, but noticed that the new rifle was missing from the rack. The schooner proceeded to Seattle, discharged her cargo without incident, and the crew scattered. Bledsoe stayed aboard. The schooner was home to him and he usually lived on her during the winter, serving as watchman and making repairs.

When spring came she was clean, painted and ready for sea. Waller heaved his bulk over the side in due time and began signing on a crew—mostly men who had sailed under him before. He had put in a tumultous winter, drinking, gambling, playing the races and catching up on his romances with the girls he had in different ports.

"I look forward to a big season, Bledsoe," he said jovially. "And it had better be—my appetites cost more each year. We sail direct to Kullak's village, pick up what he's got, then look over some of the smaller places—places where some blasted missionary hasn't told them what is costs us to lay down a bag of candy on some Arctic beach."

Bledsoe said nothing. And he continued to say nothing during the long voyage to Kullak's village. Waller

lowered the wheelhouse window as the schooner stood in toward the village. His binoculars picked up the old chief, but there was no sign of Sapsuck.

Umiaks put out from shore and escorted the schooner to her anchorage. Again Waller went ashore in a dory and gave Kullak a present, grinned at the women and patted the children on the head. It all paid dividends.

"Where's Sapsuck?" he asked. "Get sick? Die?"

"Bear kill 'em," the chief informed him.

"What" Waller's astonishment was almost perfect. "How did it happen? Why that was a brand new rifle I gave him."

"Bear hit 'em rifle. Bear hit 'em Sapsuck. Bad! No bearskin. Fox? Plenty. No bearskin," Kullak explained.

"I see, the boys are afraid to trap or shoot bears since then, but they have plenty of fox," Waller said.

"You kill 'em bear," Kullak urged, "give 'em two fox."

"I get the idea," Waller replied. "For every bear I'll kill you'll give me two fox skins. That's fine. It's a deal."

Waller found trading easier this year, with Sapsuck out of the way. There were times when the chief bowed his neck and forced the trader to give more than usual for an exceptional skin, but as a rule the skipper made the terms. He came ashore when all trading was finished and he carried a new, high-power rifle in the crook of his arm.

In every respect it was a duplicate of the weapon he had given Sapsuck the previous year. A young Eskimo, obviously Sapsuck's brother, smirked whenever he looked at the rifle. "Me shoot 'em?" he asked. "Kill walrus?"

"Why not bear?" Waller suggested. The Eskimo shook his head.

"May be I'll let you shoot 'em," he continued, "after I've finished my bear hunt. All right, Chief, let's see the fur you're going to give me for every bear I kill."

"You come along me," Kullak said. He led the way to an igloo made of driftwood and sod, and roofed with walrus hides. Heavy stones attached to lines crisscrossing the roof held it in place.

The chief got down on his hands and knees and squeezed through an entrance. "Bring 'em light," he said.

Waller leaned his rifle against the igloo, pulled out an electric flashlight, switched it on and followed Kullak into the vile-smelling interior. A dozen silver fox pelts hung from a beam—pelts that left Waller breathless. "Why didn't you show me these before?" he asked.

The chief muttered something in dialect, mixed with English. "I get the idea," Waller said. "You were afraid I wouldn't go up against a bear unless the reward was big enough. Well, it's big enough. Twelve skins, eh? I'll knock over six bears."

He backed out of the igloo, switched off the flashlight and took in a big breath of fresh air. He caught up the rifle and headed for an *umiak* that waited with silent, native paddlers.

Bledsoe was waiting in a dory near by. "Stand by, Mr. Bledsoe," Waller ordered, "I'm going to wipe out the bear population. The chief's second son is guiding me. What's his name?"

"I call him the Duke of York," Bledsoe replied. "His native name is more than I can handle." He watched the *umiak* start, then called across the water. "Watch your step, sir. They may hold you responsible for Sapsuck's death. The native mind is sometimes queer. And it's awful logical."

"Don't worry about me. There'll be

no knifing in the back or anything like that," Waller answered. "I'll keep 'em in front of me."

WHEN they landed, Waller indicated the others were to stay in the skin boat while he, with the Duke of York leading, advanced on the bears. It was evidently a favorite feeding ground as the ice had piled up in a way that would let a bear close in on the seals almost unobserved.

A big fellow, flattened out, was squirming over the ice toward a sleeping seal. As the seal slept but a few seconds at a stretch, the bear had to exercise the utmost patience. Waller levered a cartridge into the chamber and waved the Duke to a point well to the left. "Bledsoe nervous," he thought. "He figures they'll hold me for Sapsuck's sudden end. They aren't *that* smart."

The Duke fairly oozed friendship and good nature, but he suddenly grew tense as Waller crawled toward the bear. Waller stood up suddenly and fired. The bear leaped convulsively and the seal vanished into the lead.

Waller roared. "I just creased him. He's got my scent, too." A hard, murderous smile spread around his heavy mouth. He levered a second cartridge into the chamber and the first rang out as it bounced over the ice. Waller fired and saw the bear slash at a point behind his shoulder. A trace of crimson appeared on the white fur. But it was only a trace.

"Holy Saints!" Waller bellowed. "Look at him come!" He poured lead into the lumbering, charging monster. Each bullet went home. He saw blood stain the fur. And even as he shot the last cartridge into the chamber he saw something else out of the corner of his eye—the empty cartridges scattered over the ice. They weren't the dull brassy cases he had taken from a box of new ammunition. They were bright and golden, taken from the lot he had given Sapsuck the year before. And kept bright, he sensed, by a chief who had polished them frequently as he waited for a long winter to end and the *Polar Sea* to anchor in the lead once more.

The thought flashed through his mind that the Duke of York had emptied the rifle and substituted condemned ammunition while Kullak had kept his mind occupied with the silver fox pelts. In that case some of the bullets might strike the ground before reaching the mark. There was only an outside chance any of them would penetrate deep enough to inflict a fatal wound.

He waited for the bear to come closer, relying on that outside chance. Plumes of white vapor burst from the beast's pink mouth. He caught a glimpse of froth dripping from the gleaming fangs, then he fired. The bear stumbled as the bullet glanced off its skull, then bounded to its feet and continued the charge.

Waller grasped the rifle around the barrel and smashed downward with all of his great strength. He was swift, but the bear's right paw moved faster than the eye could follow. Waller felt the weapon torn from his hands and the next instant a mighty sweep of paw lifted him into the air. A numbing force crashed over him. Vaguely he realized he had crashed down onto the ice again. Vaguely he sensed the creature was rushing him once more. Then —blackness . . .

Bledsoe saw the paddlers driving the *umiak* through the water. With each stroke the light skin craft leaped forward. The Duke of York jumped to

the beach as the *umiak* grounded. "Bear," he gasped. "Him kill Waller. Ammunition no good."

"All right," Bledsoe said slowly, "I'll get a rifle and go for the body." He looked hard at Kullak. The old chief's face was a mask, but his eyes revealed many things. Uncertainly they met Bledsoe's, and something of understanding passed between the white man and Eskimo. Bledsoe's gaze turned to the schooner, with her battered bows, riding at anchor. It had been long in coming, but he had known from the beginning that it would come—his command.

Way Out West On Tenth Avenue

LONG a welcome sight to visiting Westerners were those urban cowboys who escorted the New York Central Railroad trains through the chaotic traffic of Manhattan's Tenth Avenue. These outriders of the iron horse loped ahead of the engine and warned vehicles from its path. Often the train was halted while an inebriate citizen was removed from the tracks, or while the cowboy untangled a traffic snarl caused by horses that had taken fright at the approach of their snorting mechanical brother from the stables of old Commodore Vanderbilt.

These riders of the New York Central ranged below Thirtieth Street, and, in the early years of the railroad, there was some prestige connected with their jobs. They lasted, a quaint anachronism, until June of 1934, when twelve horses and thirteen cowboys were retired. This left just three horses and three intrepid young riders to carry on the tradition of the old Bar-NYC. This consists, they have said, of sitting around the sand lots waiting for some engineer to blow his whistle five times, which means that they must escort him three and a half miles to St. John's Park, at Laight and Hudson Streets. Sometimes they sing as they lead the line of little iron dogies, but more often they have to gallop up the track for dear life, because the engineers have ideas of speed that are a little faster than a horse can keep up with.

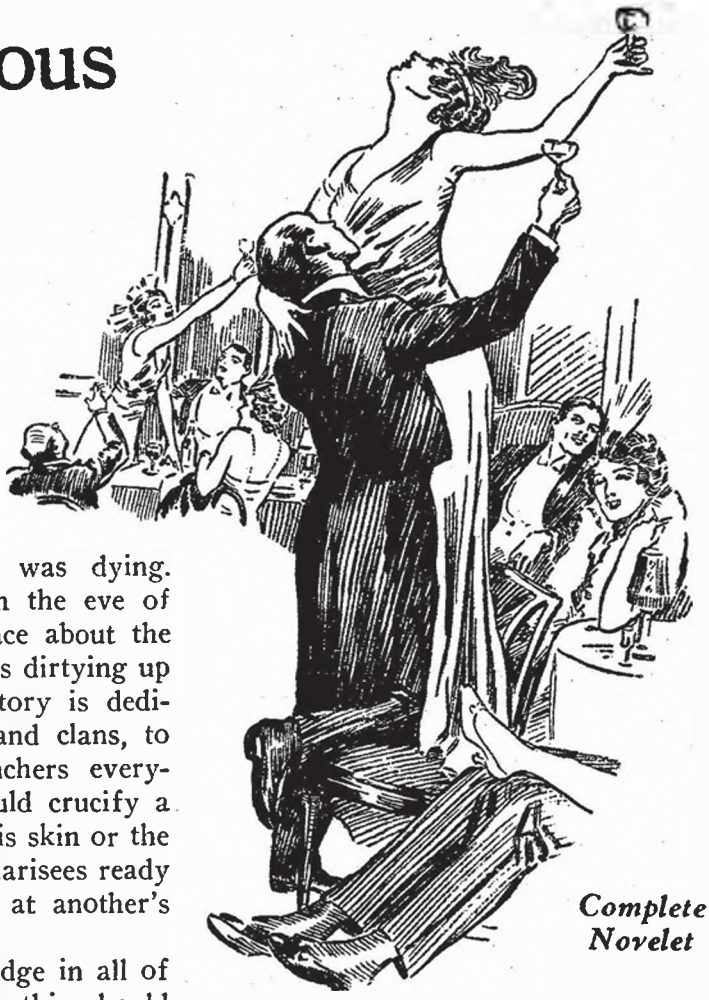
Last month most of the traffic of the New York Central was switched through a new cut and since then the Tenth Avenue cowhands have practically nothing to ride herd on. But there is an old statute on the city books, dating from 1850, which says that no train can go unescorted through the New York streets. So the three lonely, bored, young cowhands—none of whom have ever seen a *real* cowboy, will probably still take an occasional gallop up to St. John's Park—pursued by a snorting, streamlined dogie.

—*J. Wentworth Tilden*

Frivolous Sal

By
THEODORE
ROSCOE

Author of
"He Took
Richmond"



Complete Novelet

I

FRIVOLOUS SAL was dying. What happened on the eve of her death took place about the time the Black Legion was dirtying up the headlines, and this story is dedicated to all such underhand clans, to all witchburners and lynchers everywhere, to those who would crucify a brother for the color of his skin or the size of his nose, to the Pharisees ready to launch the first stone at another's mistakes.

There's a bit of the Judge in all of us, so it's not surprising this should come to the surface in a place as narrow as Four Corners. Not that country towns are the only strongholds of violent bigotry (our world capitols have their whipping-posts today) but you hear of it more readily in a country town. An explosion, for the quiet of the hills, is louder.

And the hills around Four Corners are pretty quiet. News, when there is any, travels fast and echoes farther. Death in a rural community is pretty big news, especially if it happens to be overtaking one of the county's oldest citizens. Villagers consult down at the Feed Store; neighbors run in and out; Theodore Seymore, undertaker, perches like a gaunt black buzzard in his parlor window, waiting with fishy talons spread to catch the prize; there's a lot of head-shaking and loud talk. But this time the talk was low, it was the echoes that were loud.

"Yes, sir." Ear against palm, Mule Lickette, leaning on the Mocony pump in front of Lem's Garage, fixed a somber gaze on the twilight-shadowed ridge the other side of Blue Valley. "Yes, sir, I reckon her number's up this time. Doc Trosch was there again las' night. Lungs. Gets 'em in the end, every time."

"She ain't been seen by nobody 'cept th' Doc come five years, now," Lawyer Bickle averred, scratching the side of his beaked nose with a barley straw. "Don't suppose she sees *him* very often, way he charges."

"Dunna how she's kep' alive since McGuire foreclosed th' mortgage on that road place of her'n," somebody said. "How she lives on alone in that shack up there beats me. Never comin' out ner seein' nobody."

"Wouldn'ta heard she was dyin' if Postmaster Crackenbush hadn't seen th' flag up on her letter box where she'd left a note for th' Doc."

Mule Lickette stared across the valley. "Funny, ain't it. A woman hermit."

"Yeah, after you remember—" a voice from in back broke off.

"Can't carry on the way she useta an' get away with it," Leonidas Barrows pronounced sternly. "Dyin', is she? Well—"

THERE was a book behind that grim-voiced "Well—", and I thought I knew which book it was. *Proverbs,* perhaps, or one of the Prophets. *Isaiah.* "Cast thy bread upon the waters—" Four Corners may have hung on to their Testaments longer than your finger-snapping urban locales, which is true of most communities that must work with their hands. You see stone fences around Four Corners and those fences came out of the soil. People who farm such fields—especially the oldsters who did it by arm-power—know the truth of *As ye sow, so shall ye reap.*

There was a number of the older generation in the evening's gathering before Lem's—their wives at a knitting social at Grange Hall—and I took it from their expressions that the person in discussion (who was not at the knitting social) had sown neither wisely nor well. A woman hermit. I was intrigued. In residence only a year, and therefore a stranger, in Four Corners I had to ask about her.

Leonidas Barrows, who is the County Bank, answered with a sound *humph,* indicating the subject unworthy of my investigation. A general drawing-in of chins from the other oldsters there—Horace Johns, head of the Dairyman's League; Mordecai Sailor, owner of Blue Valley Farms; Town-Clerk Tinney, Lawyer Bickle and some others. Not one of that group drives a car above a Buick; there's more money among them than you'll find in many a fleet of V-16s on Park Avenue, and twice the pride.

It remained for the younger generation (in their liberal forties) to tell me about the woman reported as dying. Her time, so far as I could gather, had been the Gay Nineties when people were humming waltzes, looking at Gibson Girls and whispering of Suffragets. Not country people, though; leastwise, not around Four Corners. Young unmarried ladies—self respecting ones—wore hair ribbons at twenty-five, spent Sundays cooking Sunday dinner for Pa, and, around Four Corners, knew how to get milk out of a cow. But around Four Corners, same as anywhere a girl ought to've married by twenty-five. Hadn't ought to have uppity notions about travel and dancing and sending 'way to Albany after hats and such, even if her father did own one of the best farms in the valley.

Her father wanted her to marry and settle down, but she hadn't. Even at twenty she was always talking about fashions and trips to places and learning to waltz. You know the kind of girl. Flighty. All the village boys courtin' her, but she didn't want to be

a farmer's wife. Too good for everybody. Pity, too, for her father was elder in the church.

Then it looked like she was going to settle down—her father let on she was engaged to a mighty-fine catch, but it was to be a secret till the wedding, and she'd run off to Boston; yes, sir, run off all by herself. And that just broke the old man's heart. He up and shot himself next night out in the barn; committed suicide, he felt that bad.

Scandal? There'd 've been a scandal anywhere. Whole valley knew she'd run away from her wedding; never learned who'd been jilted, whoever it was, he'd been decent enough to keep his mouth shut. Rumored it was a local boy, but maybe it was someone at Brockton. Anyhow, she'd inherited her father's farm by his death, and on top of that she'd had the gall to come back to Four Corners all rigged out in mourning clothes from one of the smart shops in Boston, and when she got off the local at the depot she hadn't shed a tear. Not one. Nor said she was sorry, nor nothin'. And it was just the same, folks said, as if she'd killed her own father.

They still talked about the funeral. Her sitting there dry-eyed without any kind of expression on her face. Deacon Winegarth—he'd been alive then—preaching the funeral sermon and working in the line about "a serpent's tooth and a thankless child." But she hadn't batted a dry eye. Nobody ever saw her cry even once.

AFTER that the whole valley cut her dead. You could hardly blame them. Wasn't she out of mourning in a month, wearing a bunch of new frocks, city clothes bought with her father's hard-earned money? Coming into the post office, looking neither right nor left and sending off letters here for a piano, and there for all kinds of furniture? But it was the automobile that finished her. One of those get-out-and-get-under kind, bright red. It came from Albany and she drove it herself with the top down. Talk about brass!

Wasn't a woman in the valley who'd speak to her after that, and it just seemed like she was trying to flaunt her brazenness at the whole county. She planted shrubs around the farm and sodded the lawn for croquet. She used to bat the balls around all day Sunday by herself, and the minister went up to speak to her about it and she told him to please stay away. You could imagine the farm didn't last long, run like that.

Four Corners learned she'd had to mortgage it over in Brockton, heavily. Had to sell the lower fifty to meet the payment. It didn't stop her, though. She went to Albany for a visit, and come back letting on she was going to marry a city man. There wasn't any holding her, then; you'd see a city crowd up for weekend parties, singing and shouting all over the place—until the one she'd got engaged to went joy-riding down the valley one night in that red car and smashed plumb into a train. Killed dead as stone. That quieted her down for a spell.

She was at it again, though, in about two years—there were stories she'd been seen over at Brockton with some of the boys around town. Then she went to Chicago for a year selling another piece of the farm to go, and when she sold the woods she went to New York. Plain wild. Somebody saw her at a party in a New York Hotel, drinking champagne. A man was kissing her right at the table, and everybody was laughing and carrying on. That was the day before War was declared—after-

wards Four Corners read in the paper she'd been married to an army captain. Nobody ever heard a word about him afterwards 'till, a month after the Armistice, she was back in Four Corners selling more of the farm. Seemed she'd just been divorced and was out of money. Had spent a fortune gallivanting, and, as everybody knew she would, by winter that year she'd lost the whole farm.

It was quite a slide from there to the roadhouse on the state highway to Brockton, but the process of dissolution is as inevitable around Four Corners as anywhere. *As ye sow* . . . The roadhouse must have started with soft drinks, and gone hard. Prohibition—the old economics of supply and demand. The woman had to live.

It must have been a dingy place, but it brought echoes from the big towns and strangers whistling dance music. Mill workers from Brockton out for a Saturday night. Sneak in the back door for a brandy. It brought, too, an Irish bootlegger named Rion, red-haired and genial, who remained as husband and half-owner of this speakeasy, who put in a dice table, imported taxi dancers—you know how it would go. A Gambling Hell, Brockton pulpits called it; the Saratoga crowd went there. The pulpit in Four Corners called it worse. If you were bored with tilling rocky fields and your wife had gone to Cousin Hat's at Valley Spring and you wanted an evening out—

Somebody had to be shot there. Somebody was. Rion, in a dim room with the blinds down, in the back. He lived long enough to return the compliment, so there was nobody for the Law to make a lesson of but the proprietress who got, for violating the Eighteenth Ammendment, six years Federal Prison.

Even after that she had the brass to come back and try to open a roadside soft-drink stand across the valley. A citizen's committee, thinking of young sons just in highschool, took care of that. So she'd gone to live as a hermit on the last bit of property left her by her father, a shack in the woods. Nobody went there, unless it was a delegation of small boys to throw stones on Hallowe'en, and for five years she'd never come out. If she wanted anything, she left a note for the grocer in her letter box. The grocer would leave a package and pick up the coins. And for the last two winters the grocer had said it was hardly worth going across the valley after, maybe, once a week a pound of tea, box of crackers or something. Doc Trosch was the last man from Four Corners who'd seen her, and the undertaker would likely be next.

II

THIS much I reconstructed from such laconic bits as, "Two marriages, a divorce, six years in Federal jail for runnin' one them places with the blinds down."—"Hard? Plain broke her father's heart."—"Recollect th' time she came back all painted up with lipstick; first I'd seen."—" 'Member seein' her whoopin' downhill in that red car, roarin' through th' village an' never bringin' her chin down an inch."—"Wonder what she looks like now?"—"Locked up in there like a hermit."

In the fading lilac of twilight I could just make out the gray roof of a shanty lonely on the pine ridge across the valley miles. Tiny in a desolation of timber. For contrast I was shown a meadowed reach along the river, white fences and barns that had once been her farm.

Mule Lickette shook his head. "The

story of that woman's life would sure make a book."

Sheriff Vickers, from a back bench among the oldsters advised sourly, "You can read a couple chapters, if you're a mind, in th' records over at th' county jail."

"I wonder," from Cecil Price, a dairyman from over Brockton way "I wonder, now, could she be writin' one?"

"Writin' a what, Ceace?"

"Writin' a book or suthin'. Y'know I drive by that shack four o'clock every mornin' to meet th' milk train. Well, since last winter, every mornin'. I been seein' a light. Shutters closed on her winder, but I see a shadow there. She's sittin' up. So one mornin' I creep up for a look, an' make out a pen in her hand. Sure enough she's writin', I can see that much through the chinks. Got nobody to write letters to, so it must be a book."

"Say," Mule wondered, "maybe she's doin' th' story of her life."

"Maybe she's keepin a diary." It remained for Charlie Rambow to put the fuse that was later to touch off the explosion. Charlie's the village wit, and sometimes there are barbs to his jest. At the time there was a piquant edge to his smile, I thought, and a malice to his eye.

One of the older men didn't get it. "Her? A *dairy?*"

"*Dairies* is what you fellas around here keep," Charlie's grin twisted up. "Women keep *di*-aries. You know. Day to day accounts of everything happens in their lives."

I can recall (although I paid it no attention then) an arresting of side-conversation, a leaning forward of tilted chairs, one or two throat-clearings. Charlie enlarged with a flippant hand-wave, "They start writin' 'em when they're girls in school an' keep 'em through to the day they die. All their secret loves an' whatnot. Newspapers are always printing them by murderesses an' actresses an' such. Plenty musta happened in *her* life, she hasta stay up all night writin' it. Probably wants to bring it up to date 'fore she dies. Some record *she'd* leave behind—! Sure, I bet that's it. She's keepin' a *di*-ary!"

Silence spread in growing darkness. I could see a pin-point of yellow, now, marking the hermitage on that distant ridge. A figure that had been standing as a soundless shadow on the fringe of our forum, spoke out suddenly in a cutting tone. I recognized the acid voice of Doc Trosch. Afterwards I learned this saturnine old country doctor so far as his patients were concerned usually kept his mouth shut tight as a clam. At the moment I couldn't understand the razor in his tone or realize the aim of his scorn.

"Yes I've seen her writing in it. She *is* keeping a diary."

He snapped about-face on heel and walked away.

Women's voices were sauntering down the road from the direction of Grange Hall, and the men, who had been waiting for their wives, stood up. I walked toward the post office with Mule Lickette. "Guess she was pretty wild," he told me. "Good looker, too. Remember when I was a kid the flossy hats she wore, an' bright paint. 1912. My mom useta yank me into th' house, she go by."

"What was her name?"

"*Was,*" he emphasized the past tense, "Clariselle Alders. Ain't heard it in thirty years though. We called her after a song she use to sing." He chuckled. "Frivolous Sal."

Neither of us knew the quiet that

settled across the valley was the lull before the storm.

I DIDN'T mean to pry. I always take my daily walk across the bridge, following the river trail north from Peterson's Mill for solitude and escape from traffic. There's a scarecrow on a hillside over there I like to argue with, and often I take a fly rod for a try at trout. I had my rod that day. My friend Lion (you've seen his syndicated column) was coming up in a couple of weeks for fishing, and I wanted to test the pools.

But the fish weren't good sports that afternoon, and the scarecrow was uncommunicative. I sat down beside him in the blue-gold stillness, communing with a pipe. Presently my thoughts were drifting with the smoke uphill in the direction of a roof I could make out on the timber-lined ridge. Last night's story of human frailty, the fall from grace of another spirit, had left me in a grayish mood. I thought of the girl who'd sold her birthright for a pile of Albany hats: the price of plumes —a six years' prison sentence and a hermitage. A woman hermit. Prison could have been nothing to these last five years in "solitary," jailed in by the tight lips and averted eyes of her neighbors, committed to banishment by outraged society, exiled by a community's condemnation.

I thought of her dying alone under that roof up there. Surely she was paying now for her undaughterly "carryings-on," her father's suicide, her heartless adventuring. How expensive that unremorseful red car, the trips to Broadway, the broken conventions must seem. Or had the sordid roadhouse period ending in prison's gray left her encysted in a sullen vacuum from which all repentance had gone—a demented slattern jeering at all reproach. Likely; yet it didn't seem to fit with those nightly vigils at writing. That seemed queer.

From Clariselle Alders to Frivolous Sal—I confess it spoiled the fragrant perfection of that country afternoon—heaven help the person ostracized by a country town. Yet I wasn't the one to deny the implication of Leonidas Barrows that she had got her just desserts, or feel that she wasn't entitled to what the village dialect called her "come-uppance." There was a Law laid down long ago, *He that seeketh his life shall lose it*—

So I found my boots drifting with my thoughts toward the ridge. There's a fascination about a "death house"; my subconscious mind was already framing a novel around this human story, and I suppose I was impelled by a hunter's instinct after "material." Might pick up some authentic color around the place. We writers are cold-blooded like that.

The ridge topped a slope known as Blueberry Hill; I found a path through the climbing acres of briar and mounted slowly, scaring chipmunks out of the weeds with the ferrule of my stick. Perspectives in open country are deceiving; it was a longer climb to the wooded ridge than I'd thought. And lonelier. The path was so little used there were places where it was choked with scrub, and when you rout out a couple of foxes you know you're pretty close to wilderness.

Afternoon was waning when I finally gained the ridge and came to the wood-hemmed wagon track down which Cecil Price made his morning drive with the milk. I saw the bones of some old farm machinery half buried in underbrush where starvation soil had killed enterprise; farther along the

timber thickened into forest. I picked up the "color" of the place, all right. A dispiriting twilight lurked under the pines, and it was lonesome blue when I reached my objective. The shack could not have been more gloomy.

It stood in a stump-pegged clearing where someone had made a doomed attempt to pioneer a farm; I shouldn't have noticed it but for the rusty letter-box at roadside. The path up to the clearing was screened with undergrowth; the clapboard house, sagging in decay, darkly overshadowed by pines. There wasn't a sign of life about the place. Everything had run to seed. I could make out a ruptured sofa, disemboweled of its springs, on the rickety veranda. Windows with shutters closed, warped at crazy angles. A pile of old tin cans at one side; weeds closing in.

III

CERTAINLY no woman could be marooned in that squalid abode. I decided I'd found an abandoned shanty. Working my way around to the back, I came on the white skeleton of a dead horse, and sidestepping that, almost fell through the rotted timbering of a trap door covering a cistern. I had made up my mind this couldn't be the lair of anyone living or dying, when I heard from within that ruin a frail, phantasmal coughing—a wheezy thin whooping that might have been cut from a ghost's throat with a hack-saw. There was a torture in it worse than croup. I never heard a sound so moribund; for a moment I stood sick at the thing. There followed a sort of thumping sound at the shanty's front; I thought I heard feet shuffling in a front room, and in panic lest my spying be discovered, I ducked lightfoot away and into a nest of goldenrod. Looking back, I saw a shadow at the front door. The shadow of a man.

The twilight was almost gone and the man had appeared from nowhere with the silence of a secret. He was stooped like a thief in a cloak of darkness, hat low over his eyes, face dusk-blurred, his manner furtive as hide-and-seek. His knocking on the door was a clandestine summons—three knocks, then two—I recognized the thumping sound I'd heard, and I thought I recognized the man. If he wasn't the Messenger from the Land of Shades come to collect his dead, I didn't know him.

"Sal," his voice was a low, haunting call intended for no farther than her door. "Sal—are you there?"

Actually my hair went up. It was the first time I'd heard anyone summoned to the grave—or heard the answer to *that* summons.

"Yes, I'm here," faint from behind the door. "Is that you—?" a croupy spasm of coughing; then weakly, "—is that you, Doctor Trosch?"

"No, Sal, it ain't. It's me—It's Ginger—"

The occult voice had changed to a whine, and I saw at once that an emissary from the Netherworld would hardly be named Ginger. Too, the nasal twang, local to the valley, sounded dimly familiar. But I could recall no "Ginger" around Four Corners, and apparently the name had been in desuetude for its owner, after a baited silence, repeated in a tone of plaintive petition ,"Ginger! Don't you remember, Sal? Don't you remember Ginger—?"

"Yes, I do. *Go away!*"

Ordinarily I'm not in favor of eavesdropping, but the response from behind that door, the sudden fierce uplift of a feminine voice roused from a coughing whisper to that steely vitality,

overwhelmed my manners. Altogether these circumstances were queer. The visitor's skulking appearance, the voice from within, the man's further appeal had me listening all ears.

"But I got to see you, Sal. Sal, please! Let me in!"

"You're too late. I don't want to see you. Go away!"

"Too late?" Tone of panic; then wheedling desperation. "Just let me in for a minute. Only a minute—! I want to do something for you, Sal. I can't tell you out here—"

"Go—" there was a gag of stifled coughing that ended in a command like a knife-thrust through the door, *"away!"*

I don't know what was said then, for the man had his mouth at the key-hole, whining a low singsong, like an entreating dog's, but I heard the last part of it clearly enough. "A thousand dollars, Sal. Yes, I will—"

Fiercely low from behind the door, "No!"

"Fifteen hundred," the shadow at the door falsettoed. "I wouldn't do it, but, seeing it's you—fifteen hundred, Sal. All right—?"

The answer was an echo of laughter that came through those gray walls high and dry and thin, a laugh like the clinkling of thread-strung needles, infinitely more painful than the cough which choked it. Then, "Fifteen hundred! Oh, my—! And Beezy here this morning with two thousand—"

"Beezy!" there was shriller panic in the shadow-man's cry. I thought he took out a handkerchief; mopped his forehead. *"He* was here—"

Again the thin needles of laughter, too painful for merriment.

"But you can't do this to me, Sal," the man on the veranda was gesturing frantically. "I got a family, Sal—grown boys—grandsons! Think of my wife—she never done you no harm. Three thousand—!" the voice broke. "I brung it with me. All I could raise, Sal—ain't that enough—?"

The answer came cutting through the door, the thin tone of a woman's daggering mockery that twisted in the man's shadow and made it writhe. *"You* never could raise enough. Not *you!* Never, never, *never!* Go *away!"*

The silence lasted an hour, or so it seemed to me, before I saw the man turn away from the door and move, bent-shouldered, leaden-footed, across the darkened clearing, fading among shadows on his slow way to the road. Then I saw something else—something that froze me to an image where I crouched. Eyes! Eyes like wizard's goggles in a clump of brambles on the opposite side of the clearing. Someone else had been watching that scene!

A LAST beam of daylight infiltrated down through the pines on that side, and what I saw was the refraction from a pair of glasses, round spectacles trained at the shanty with the fixity of aimed binoculars. The figure retreating to the road in stooped hopelessness did not know of that levelled espionage. Footsteps faded in the woods; the ambushed eyes watched.

I waited. Barely enough light remained to see those glasses emerge from their hiding place, move as disembodied shines toward the veranda, melt with the night at the shanty's front. Again I heard that clandestine knock, a low-voiced summons, faint answer from within. When the parley reached "four thousand dollars," matching almost word for word the dialogue I'd heard before, it became too astounding for belief. Only this bespectacled visitor was named Snow-

shoe, and he begged for the happiness of his youngest daughter who was going to be married.

His petition fared no better than Ginger's. His voice, deeper than Ginger's, conveyed a similar impression I'd heard it somewhere before, became a threatening rumble. "But you won't get away with this, Sal? Hear? I know what you're up to an' I warn you you better think twice—!"

"You're funny, Snowshoe," the voice from the house was crystal scorn through the night. "You and Ginger! And Beezy! Oh—what fools—!"

"Sal, if you keep on with this thing!"

The voice behind the door was acid then—vitrol. "Do you think you can harm a body who's *dying*—? Oh, my —! And you and all your picayune money. Is that all you think you're worth? The lot of you? Get out!" The thin up-pitched voice was almost strangling. "Go! The doctor'll be along any minute—if you don't want him to see you—*run!*"

I could hear the man running. Blundering off in blind darkness among the clearing stumps. But he stopped half way to the road to look back; his voice was raging, throttling in furious sobs; I couldn't see him but I knew he was shaking his fist. "You can't keep this thing up, Sal! We'll stop you, so help me, Hanna! Four Corners won't stand for no *witch!*"

There wasn't a sound in the night for a long time after those feet were gone. Shanty and woods were absorbed in total black. I crouched there with my neck-flesh crawling, skin twitching off a feel of decay. There was a creeping death in that invisible house, and something more ghastly. I wanted to get away from there, and it took an owl-hoot to start me home.

When I looked back once through the pines, I saw a light in one of the windows; a shadow through the shutter-cracks of a woman sitting there, the silhouette of a hand moving a pen. The respectable lights of Four Corners looked pretty good to me when I crossed the valley bridge, and I wondered if that whole ugly seance had been in my mind. Even so, I couldn't have imagined the grim shape of things to come, the curse that was to haunt Blue Valley for a month, the dreadful throw-back to witchcraft—

KNOWING what I knew, it was surprising that until the final storm I remained so short-sightedly in the dark and saw certain happenings which followed my evening excursion only as blind straws in a wind.

Mordecai Sailor's prize bull died the day Mordecai went to Brockton with a load of alfalfa; the veterinary said it had been poisoned, he wasn't sure by what. It was Mordecai's wife who found, wound like a thread around the bull's nose-ring, a strand of red hair.

Peter Johnathan's orchard had been blighted the week before; the day after the acute indigestion of Mordecai's bull, Peter found on his back stoop an apple pie, nobody knew how it got there, its crust unappetizingly threaded with red hairs. Nobody ate the pie; examination found a baked crow at the bottom.

Little Amy Watters had scarlet fever. Morning after quarantine, strands of red hair were found glued to her bedroom window.

The letter sent to Postmaster Crackenbush from Valley Spring was filled with poisonous black spiders and red hair.

I began to hear these stories as one begins to hear rumors of smallpox in

a neighborhood, rumors of a secret-spreading plague, little whispers of wind. I couldn't see the forest for the trees. This Hallowe'en stuff seemed nonsensical. Farmers today with their radios and ice machines aren't the simple rustics of David Harum's era; nobody could be scared by these dark-o'-the-moon capers into an Inquisition with bell, book and candle.

But what was the woman up to? Time and again, drawn by the sort of horror which repels as it fascinates, I found my eye scanning that distant ridge for the rooftop lonely in the pines. The creature dying in that desolation, consumed by that eating cough and subsisting only on a thin pain of laughter—what spell did she hold over those three shadowy visitors, the unknown Beezy, Ginger and Snowshoe? What power over their pocketbooks to bring them groveling—"Ginger" in the name of his family, "Snowshoe" for the sake of a marriageable daughter. Casual inquiry divulged no such names among my valley neighbors—any number of whom possessed grandsons, wives and eye-glasses. Who could they have been? Why the offerings at her door? Was this outcast in possession of something more evil than Siren sorcery; had she brewed with the dregs of her life some spiritual menace with which, from her house of exile, she could threaten the homes in the valley?

Someone, I knew, was fighting back. I discovered this one morning at the sheriff's office when, going there to renew my fishing license, I heard him arguing in the next room over a telephone. The telephone's voice was a buzzing of anger; and the sheriff was loudly agreeing, "it's a dang shame."

"Yessir," he said, "a downright disgrace. But there ain't a thing we can do about it long as she owns th' property outright, an' her taxes is ten years paid up. If her livestock was infringin', for instance—but she ain't got any, ner as far as anybody knows she ain't been trespassin. No, you can't oust a body not for keepin' up their property—eh? —nobody's *seen* her leave th' premises. You gotta have *proof—!*"

And two nights later, a group formed around the doctor who was having his oil changed in front of Lem's: "Say, Doc, how's Frivolous Sal?"—"I don't discuss my patients."—"Well, now look, Doctor. Some of us don't think it's right, her left up there alone, dying like that, starving maybe. I took her up some vegetables yesterday and she absolutely refused to answer the door; she's got it barricaded inside with a plank, her windows nailed down and herself shut in like in a fort. I say, if the woman's gone crazy—"

The doctor answered tartly: "I didn't know you were a charity worker, Barrows. Didn't know anyone around here would go near her place. I been seeing she gets enough to eat. And I assure you her mind is very clear."

Wind whispered out of the doorway at the post office—three ladies, hats roosting together: "Tell you, Melissa, any woman who's shut herself up for five years ain't right."—"My husband was sayin'. Plumb out of her mind, playin' such tricks."—"Floss Watters is scairt to death, what happened to her Amy."—"Lawyer Bickle says if Mordecai Sailor was public-minded he'd demand she be put away, 'stead of keepin' his mouth shut."—"Tell you, Melissa, these goin's on may be work of th' hand, an' I say, maybe not. You never can tell, I say. You never can *tell!*"—"If she *is* crazy it wouldn't be so bad as if she *ain't—!*"

Little conferences at the Feed Store grew to lowpitched arguments at

Charlie's Cafe. Men stood with heads close, dispersing quickly at the approach of some woman or a stranger. I could sense the falling barometer in the way I was left on the "outside" of this topic, relegated to my status of newcomer. "Mule," I asked the gaunt farmer whom I knew as a confidant of mine, "what's up?"

He shook his head. "Honest, I don't know. I asked some of my crowd at Legion meeting the other night, but none of 'em seem to know. Talk, I reckon. Just because that woman has red hair—"

He spat sensibly. Mule keeps a stubborn head.

I thought I knew what was up; it was the "why?" that bothered me. I'm sure there were many in Four Corners as startled as I at the way the storm broke in town meeting that eventful Saturday night. Saturday night in Four Corners is Saturday night in any country town: Farmers in from everywhere. Dusty cars lined up at the curbs. Grange Hall open wide, and the town clerk calling the council to order in the room downstairs, his tone promising the audience nothing more important than a debate on taxes. Mule Lickette (I wasn't there) told me the hall was packed like a cabbage bin; farmers from as far as Valley Spring—nobody seemed to know how or what, but every man there had a feeling something was going to happen.

AND something did. In the cottage across the street. *Little Amy Watters died!* The gavel hadn't struck when the stricken child's mother came screaming into Grange Hall, wailing her anguish through the crowd. *"She* did it! *Her!* Her with her wicked devil-taken soul. Her with red hair!"

Chairs going back. Shouting. Watters fighting through the pack to carry out his fainting wife. Mule said that for a minute you couldn't hear your own voice. Then, white and panting in the door, fisting his way down to the rostrum, there was the doctor come from the cottage across the street. Doc Trosch flinging up his hands. Shouting for silence. Then:

"Listen to me, all! The child died of scarlet fever! You hear me? Scarlet fever and nothing more!" He whirled on the platform; pointed at one of the older councilmen. "I've heard some crack-potted stories these last few days You, Banker Barrows. I call on you as one of our prominent citizens—our *most* prominent citizen. Do you believe in witchcraft?"

Mule told me Barrows' face was bone-white as he stood up. "Certainly not! There ain't no such thing! But I believe if th' woman's crazy, if she's runnin' loose at night playin' these heathen tricks—"

Dr. Trosch faced the crowd. "I can tell you that woman isn't in condition to *leave* her house. I tell you, she's dying! Something more! Some of you been imputing her sanity. Lawyer Bickle come to me sayin' some clients of his demand she be put away. As commissioner of Public Health of this district, I'm tellin' you, she's sane, an' I'll declare her as such." He paused with lifted fist. "One thing more. I got no call to defend that woman or what she was or is. No business of mine, either way. But she's my patient an' she's dyin'. Any move made to molest her, it's my professional duty to call th' police. You there, Sheriff Vickers! You don't take the proper steps in this case, I'll be bound to advise the State Troopers."

You could hear the pocket watches ticking in Grange Hall as the sheriff

stood up to speak. His face was like chiseled granite, his eyes pale bleak; instead of wearing the big nickle-plated star on his vest where he usually wore it, it was pinned that night on his coat lapel.

"Doc Trosch is right!" he boomed at the room. "I don't like this woman in our community, neither. I'm not forgettin' her criminal record. But long as there's no legal way to oust her, I'm bound as officer of th' law to see she stays. I've heard as how certain people been hinting they're goin' to take this matter in their own hands. Got a letter this afternoon warnin' me if anything happens to keep my eyes closed. You people know me better'n that. I was born an' raised in this valley, an' I've allus stood for law. Don't start nothing that's outside the law, or I'll be against you. That's all!"

You could hear the pocket watches ticking again when the sheriff sat down. Then somewhere in the night outside an open window, harsh, a bolt from the black, came an answering shout. "You may think that's all, Sheriff, but it ain't. Callin' th' law after the crime's been done, is lockin' th' barn after th' horse is stole! Our homes is more important than your law! Waitin' till after th' lies are told will be too late. Maybe you didn't read today's paper from Albany an' see there's a newspaper man coming to Four Corners tonight." The harsh voice trailed off. "What do you think he's comin' for—?"

Never, Mule Lickette assured me, had there been such a meeting in Grange Hall. The stampede to the window broke it up. Nobody knew who'd shouted out there in the dark, or why. Nobody knew what anything was about after that. Sheriff Vickers had raced off in his car. Men were still standing the curb in baffled groups, waiting for something to happen. Doc Trosch had gone. Theodore Seymore was in possession of the little Watters girl. Mule Lickette had run, panting, over to my cottage to tell me about it.

"Witchcraft. Insanity. Threats. Newspaper man. All tied up with Frivolous Sal." He shook his head, going out. "It sure beats me."

It never occurred to me to link the "newspaper man from Albany" with my friend Lion, whom I'd invited up for a Sunday's fishing. That he might have inserted a note in his column (lucky he didn't mention my name) about his intended jaunt, never came to my thoughts. Nor could I figure a newspaper man into the thing until Lion, himself, came racing into town about midnight; landing in my dooryard with a load of Scotch and fishing tackle and wanting to know how long Four Corners had had a Black Legion.

"What do you mean, Black Legion—?"

"Took a wrong fork across the valley," he grinned at me, "and ran plunk into 'em on a side road. Saw 'em right in front of my headlights. White sheets and black hoods, and almost scared me into the middle of next week. They ducked off into a berry patch though, and I got on the main road darn quick afterwards. Probably just some prank going on, but—"

"Lion," I said whitely, "that isn't any prank. Come on!"

IV

I SHALL not soon forget that night-scene in the pines. Lion had driven a steeple-chase across the valley; we left the car on the lower road and took the shortcut up Blueberry Hill on foot, scouting up behind the prowlers (fortunately) but still in time.

The clearing was done in shades of

black, blue and blue-black; the pines were carbon monoliths upholding a sky of crepe; the shanty a silhouette inked into a background of midnight. Only its roof was tombstone gray, touched faintly by the luminance of a moon that hung like a green dial in the pine tops, suffusing the outer edges of the scene with a cloudy aura of disaster. The silence was that of a vault. But my skin told me that, on the fringe of the clearing, Lion and I were not alone. Others there had heard us; played possum to listen? I suppose they thought we were some of their party, for the stillness was finally relaxed by a low whippoorwill call, a leafy rustling in the dark across the clearing.

A whippoorwill answered on our side, and at once the clearing was alive with sheeted figures, a phantom congeries thefting about in the dark. There may have been less than twenty, but the shadows multiplied them to an Indian band. Dim hand-lanterns, ominously shaded. Heads faceless under black gunny-sack masks. Fists weighted with clubs; one beckoning to the others with upraised buggy whip. Moving in from all directions, they converged in a creeping circle on the shack's silhouette, and the sweat broke cold on my forehead when I saw two with axes and a hand bearing a coil of rope.

"Lion!" I gasped. "They're going to luh—"

His fingers in the darkness gripped my arm. "Don't move."

"But we can't just *watch* here—"

His voice tiptoed up to my ear. "Can't make a move yet. There's a man on guard by that tree over there. With a gun—"

He wasn't a fly-cast distant. Standing so immobile, so utterly black and still, he seemed one with the pine. Peering, I could discover the shine of a shotgun barrel like a thin thread of moongleam taut between unseen fists. Lion was right. There might be a dozen of these vedettes deployed around us in the night. We hadn't a show with these ghosts; could only watch their ghost-show which had moved to the shanty's veranda. A fist knocking on that door. Softly. Louder with impatience.

"Sal—! Wake up, Sal! It's Beezy!"

No answer. I could see a redistribution of the hand-lanterns on the veranda, the shack-front only darker for their being there. The knocking quickened to pounding. "Wake up in there! This is Snowshoe, Sal! You hear? I and Beezy want to talk to you!"

Silence. No reply from the one emprisoned in that framework of a misspent life locked in a hermitage of decaying wood. On the door there were angered hammer blows; the summons breaking into a chorus of shouts.

"We know y're awake in there, Sal!" —"Come out peaceable, or it'll be th' worse for you!"—"You know what we're here after, Sal, an' you hand it over to us, we won't molest nobody!"—"Fetch it out, Sal!"—"You open that door an' let us have it, or we'll come in there an' get it an' you, too!"

And you, too! I've heard a man's voice on that deadly basso before, but the baying of a dozen such voices cooled my blood. I was sure the woman, hearing that baying threat, would disperse them simply by giving them whatever they were after. But she gave no sign of having heard, answered with no window light, no voice. Shack and its darkness remained adamant. The shanty's inner hush merely deepened with the clamor raging at its door.

"Break her in then, boys! Wants to wreck our homes, does she? We'll learn the red-headed she-devil a lesson!"

LION had disappeared. Unable to bear the first axe-crash, I had spun to shout at him; capped my mouth with a hand when I saw he wasn't there. Vanished! The axe crashed again before I saw where he was—crawling on hands and knees, soundlessly, toward that invisible gunman by the pine. Lion has nerve. But his assault was stayed by an unexpected bellow from the gunman.

"Stop! Hold on, there!"

The figure made no swerve in Lion's direction, but plunged from wood's edge into the clearing; râced at the hooded mob with menacing gun. I glimpsed the nickel-plated star before the vandals gave back a yell.

"Sheriff Vickers!"

"Git away from that door, all o' you! This here's against th' Law! Ain't gonna be no lynchin' in Four Corners long as *I'm* Sheriff!"

"Now, look here, Vickers—!"

"Git offa that veranda, I tell you! I know th' lot o' you—want to, I'll call you out by name! Get outa here!" He was doing what no stranger could have done, shouldering through them with burly violence, threatening them with exposure more than gunfire. Chopping broke off. Dimmed lanterns retreated in an angry circle. Right then I took off my hat to that sheriff; there was no mistaking the temper of that crowd. He had my silent applause when I saw him square off before that door, legs apart, gun hugged to chest, indomitable statue of Law holding mob fury at bay.

"Vickers," a harsh voice challenged "you know what sort this woman was!"

"Yes, I do," loudly. "But that ain't anything to do with th' law in question. I know she's an ex-jailbird an public disgrace. Bad reputation all her life. You git a legal writ, I'll hustle her outa this county quicker'n you. But until I got legal warrant—"

"Lissen, Vickers," the harsh cry flung back, "we ain't gonna allow that red-headed vixen in there t' ruin our lives just becuz you can't find no law to stop her! We men are all good citizens, Vickers! Elected you to pertect our homes! You can't do it, we'll do it ourselves!"

"We got wives an' families," another shouted. "Duty t' them!"

"I told you at town meetin'! You get proof, get a warrant—"

"An' I told you," the harsh spokesman interjected, "that'd be lockin' th' barn after th' horse was stole. That woman knows there ain't no red tape to stop her. Knows th' only way to prove, is to let her go ahead. An' that'll be too late. Lot of us in this valley cherish our good names! Maybe this don't concern you, Vickers, but some of us don't want our lives an' homes muddied up with a lot of scandlous stories. People believe such stuff even when you can prove it's all lies. After th' lies are told, y're licked!"

"Yah," echoed another. "An' th' woman's dyin'. She figgers she'll pass out afterwards so's nobody could contest her for libel in court—"

"Whole valley's with us, Sheriff! You keep out!"

"We want that writin' of hers, Vickers! That's *her* witchcraft! Are we going to let her sell out our names with a pack of lies to the papers—?"

I got it! I got it from that last harsh shout, the key to all the other puzzle fragments—the things I'd heard and witnessed, the rumors, the part of the "newspaper man"—fitting at one sweep into the whole dark picture. "Lion," I gasped at him, "they think you've come here to buy—"

A blow on the veranda froze my

tongue. Someone must have thrown a club. I heard the sheriff bawl, "Nobody's gonna get through this door!" Somebody squalled, "At him!" There was an instantaneous scrimmage on the veranda, grunts, oaths, trampling of boots, thudding of clubs, fists. Shadows scuffled around the black doorway, swarmed across a railing that fell in splinters, piled up on the ground. A voice shrilled, "He dassent shoot us!" Another, "I got the shotgun!" Another, "Bust into th' house!"

I'VE seen no man fight as the sheriff fought then. For a moment or so, robbed of his Winchester, he knocked those masked vandals around like a cyclone in a field of wheat-shocks. In the dim kaleidoscope of weaving lanterns, I could see the swinging bludgeons, the tumbling bodies, the sheriff centered in a thresh of dark figures, slugging, beating them back, throwing them off. The two with axes started for the door, and he caught them by the collar, kicked them headlong away. "Nobody gets in there! Nobody!"

Like wolves they were at him. Tackling his legs. Clubbing his back. His fists were mauls cracking on their masked heads. Three times the assault reached the veranda; three times in bull-like fury he drove them off. "No, damn you! I'll break yer necks, first! You ain't—gonna—get in!" Ten to one they were on him, a pile-up of sheets, flailing arms, kicking hobnails. Lanterns smashed. Clubs splintered. His fury grew with theirs; he put up a one-man exhibition of slugging and jiujitsu that held me in the paralysis of an onlooker. Back and forth in shadows the battle raged. He was down. He was up. Down. Up again. A roaring red ruin of a man, face hammered crimson like something on a forge, eyes striking sparks, he drove those attackers a fourth time from that silent door. Drove them away from the veranda in a swirl of battle that circled among the clearing stumps.

It was there he went down. Free of the tangle, the two with axes had run to a front window and were smashing in frenzy at the heavy shutters. Thinking of the woman who must be crouching in that black and storm-shaken house, I forgot I was watching until I saw Lion in the middle of that fight. Somehow I was with him, then, plowing and punching in the dark flurry, and so we were there to see the sheriff go over like a felled ox from a crowbar on the skull—and both front and center for the battle's end. This came with the breaking of the window; the shearing away of those sinister blinds; and the scene was revealed as a picture in the open frame.

I won't soon forget the cry of the axe-man whose vandalism uncovered that picture. How those masked attackers, charging forward to see it, took root and stood staring in sudden hush. That hush might have been the stoppage of all sound everywhere that night. If Lion and myself had been noticed, we were then forgotten. In the minds of those around us there must have been older remembrances. I wonder what the masked memories of those masked citizens saw in that window-framed picture. I wonder—

All I know is what I saw. I don't know what I'd expected of that hermit's shanty or its occupant—what manner of red-haired Roaring-Nell termagant her history had painted in my mind, or what sort of witch's den I'd expected her retreat to be. I know I hadn't expected, in that raffish outer hulk of a house, a setting clean as a pin—the chair with crocheted chair-

arms, the china visible on a back wall, the little vase of wild flowers, an interior dainty as a music-box making background for a portrait by Whistler.

He couldn't have done it. The moon drifted out of the pine tops and touched the portrait with a silvery luminescence, softening out the shadows with a deft and kindly brush. In profile she was posed, as natural in her chair as real life; had been content there for some time, one would have said—the clock on the old-fashioned writing desk having stopped three hours before. The shawl drawn over her shoulders was a delicate tracery of fine lace, and the same infinite patience must have made the patchwork quilt about her knees, the white embroidery on her cuffs. There was the sewing basket on the footstool beside her chair, a wicker bowl filled with spools and colored yarns, pin cushion, thimbles, crochetting needles. But she had put this aside for the ink stand and Spencerian pen, and then, having finished with her writing, fallen asleep at the desk so naturally one saw that a touch would have waked her and set her fumbling for her glasses.

I hope to always remember the fragility drawn in that figure, the composure in that sleep-smoothed profile —head bowed a little, features relaxed, the gentle smile of one released from another day's care. The silver-white of the moon-brushed hair; the delicate lines of age. Her hands, on the desk before her, were folded on the yellowed cover of what looked like a time-worn scrapbook; she had just made her last entry.

It was at least three minutes before I realized why no tumult and no shouting, no furious chopping of axes could have waked her. One by one the men around me were taking off their hats. Then, somehow, it was the spectacles in her lap that touched me most.

But it wasn't until that harsh voice —harsh as a bad cold, now—spoke out to the other "citizens," not until then had I realized Frivolous Sal was dead.

"The first man here who makes a move to touch that *di*-ary—!"

They had come to rob their own memories—not a white-haired old lady in death. The most ungallant there would not have disturbed those folded hands. Too bad Sheriff Vickers was not awake to see that picture—to see his fellow citizens lowering their heads before it, backing in respectful hush; moved, by the same pack instinct which had brought them ravening, to an act of restitution, sincere if late: "Alone up here for five years—!" "Hardly seen her since she come back from—from prison!"—"We'll send Seymore up, first thing in the morning."—"Have him arrange a right good service."—"I'll give a hundred dollars for th' parlor an' flowers."—"Don't care what my wife thinks, here's fifty."—"Count me in on that, Joe."

But I don't think the sheriff came-to until he heard them nailing up the broken window. He must have watched, and wondered why they were leaving. He made no interference, and nobody remembered him. He was not there when the masked party crept away. They went in silence, shamed, and they left the old lady at her desk where they'd found her, asleep, alone, but no longer in exile.

I HAD not been asleep five minutes when I woke with the fire-call wailing in my ears, and for a moment I thought it part of a dream. Then I grabbed my corduroys and fled.

It had been my honor to be elected to the volunteer fire department, and

who would turn down a chance to run with the Protectives? The pay was glory; but if you missed the truck at headquarters you were fined a dollar. I would have let them fine me five-hundred dollars for missing the run that night.

Without looking, I knew where that fire was. Red smoke up on the ridge across the valley confirmed my fears.

Scarlet and clanging, we rolled for Blueberry Hill ahead of half the village, our careening pumper a comet followed by a speeding tail of flivvers, farm trucks, bicycles and barking dogs. Charlie Rambow (never guessing himself the incendiary) drove; and Charlie, once in a fireman's helmet, lost all respect for time and space. We got there. But he might as well have saved us the risk of broken necks.

The ridge-top was Fourth of July. In the night above the clearing, sparks swirled and climbed like the fairy lights of a roller coaster, and the tumult in the pines was lower carnival.

Driven off by the golden heat, we stood as helpless onlookers, our red hats held at bay, extinguishers useless; a lockjawed, sober-faced little company on the edge of Inferno. We knew what was in that crumbling mound of molten embers. But I think I, alone, of my fire-hatted companions knew she was dead; saw her shanty as a funeral pyre. And then I was wrong. It remained for our astounded eyes to learn whose crematorium it was—certainly it wasn't what I had expected!

Doc Trosch had saved her. Driving his late-night rounds, he had arrived just in time; smashed through the burning front window to snatch her out of the flame's reach—saving, too, the little time-yellowed book he had spied beneath her folded hands.

We came on them out on the wagon road—the doctor, the quiet old lady, and a State Trooper who'd beat the volunteers on the run. Doc Trosch was declaring his patient the victim of murder, and I think the acrid old physician was disappointed when he had to say, after examination, that she had died some time the previous afternoon, neither from violence nor smoke-stifled lungs.

Nothing we could do after that but wait for the embers to cool, and smother them at last under chemical. All of Four Corners was there by the time we set to work with our hosing. So all of Four Corners was witness to our finding of the body in the cistern.

The body of a man!

Running along the side of the house, he had fallen (as I once nearly did) through the rotted planking of the cistern-cover; broken his neck. Face up, he lay beneath an evil mirror of water that angled his neck askew, twisted his mouth, distorted his out-puffed eyes. Clutched in his left fist was the extinguished torch of arson; in the clutch of his right hand was a kerosene can. It was shocking to see the star shimmering under water like that—almost as shocking as the death-leer stamped on the dead sheriff's face. Nobody could understand why he'd burned her house down.

We had to wait for the answer until after we returned to the fire barn. The Trooper was there with Trosch. Charlie Rambow, Mule Lickette, my friend Lion, and myself were allowed to remain, hunting clues. The Trooper was turning the yellowed pages of the diary.

Therein we saw why Sheriff Vickers had so boldly defended her door—that he might, himself, destroy her

girlhood biography before the others could see it:

January 3, 1897—He is coming to the house again. I can't bear the sight of him. Rather than marry him as father wishes, I would die.

March 16, 1897—Father has told the village I am secretly engaged. That is to force me to go through with it. He says if I do not, the circumstances being what they are, it will cause a terrible scandal.

April 21, 1897—Whatever can I do? Father has told me why I must marry T. Father owes T's father a great deal of money from gambling debts of long ago. If I refuse to marry T the debt will be brought in the open; father will be publicly disgraced. T holds it over me. O, God, help me!

June 4, 1897—I can't. I can't marry a man I don't love, to pay my father's obligations. Have I no right to happiness? Father says the wedding must be next week. But I will run away. I will run away before they force me to marry Tom Vickers!

There was that in the faded early pages of the diary. And there was also—

Not a line about Ginger or Beezy or Snowshoe! Not a mention of any of the valley's citizens! Not a breath or hint of scandal such as their imaginations had put in her pen, their warped little minds had fancied behind her refusal to sell them the recorded personal sufferings of a down-hill life—her desperate search for romance, her fiance's death, her wartime marriage to a bigamist, her reckless abandonment of hope culminating in the Golgotha of a prison cell, as: *Dec. 24, 1925—I am learning to sew.*

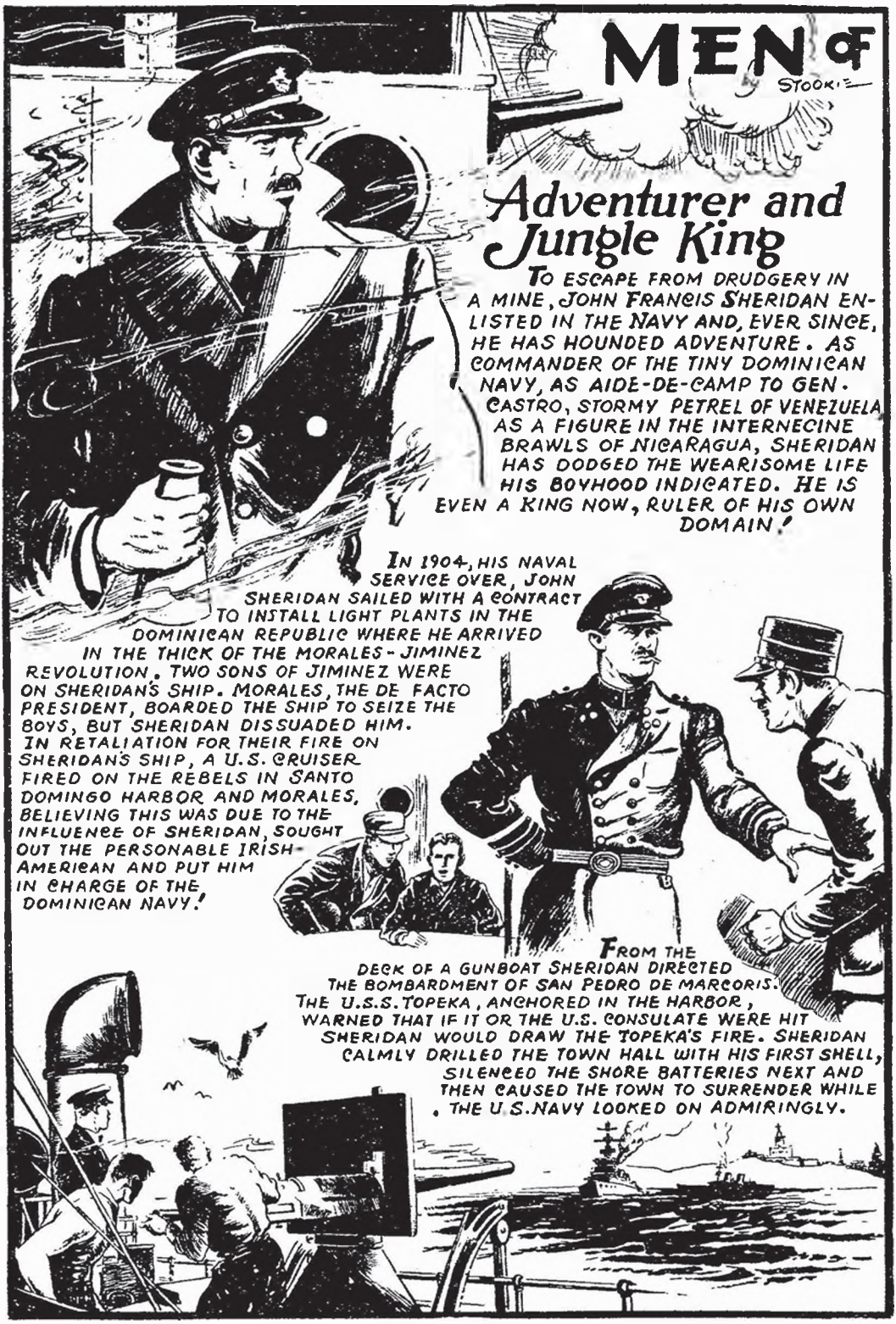
But I am consoled by knowing that the rats who harried her, who tried to rouse mob feeling against her as crazy and a witch—I wonder to whom, in the romantic promise of youth, she had once given a lock of her flame-hued hair—I am consoled by knowing them as the sort whose inner consciences give them no peace.

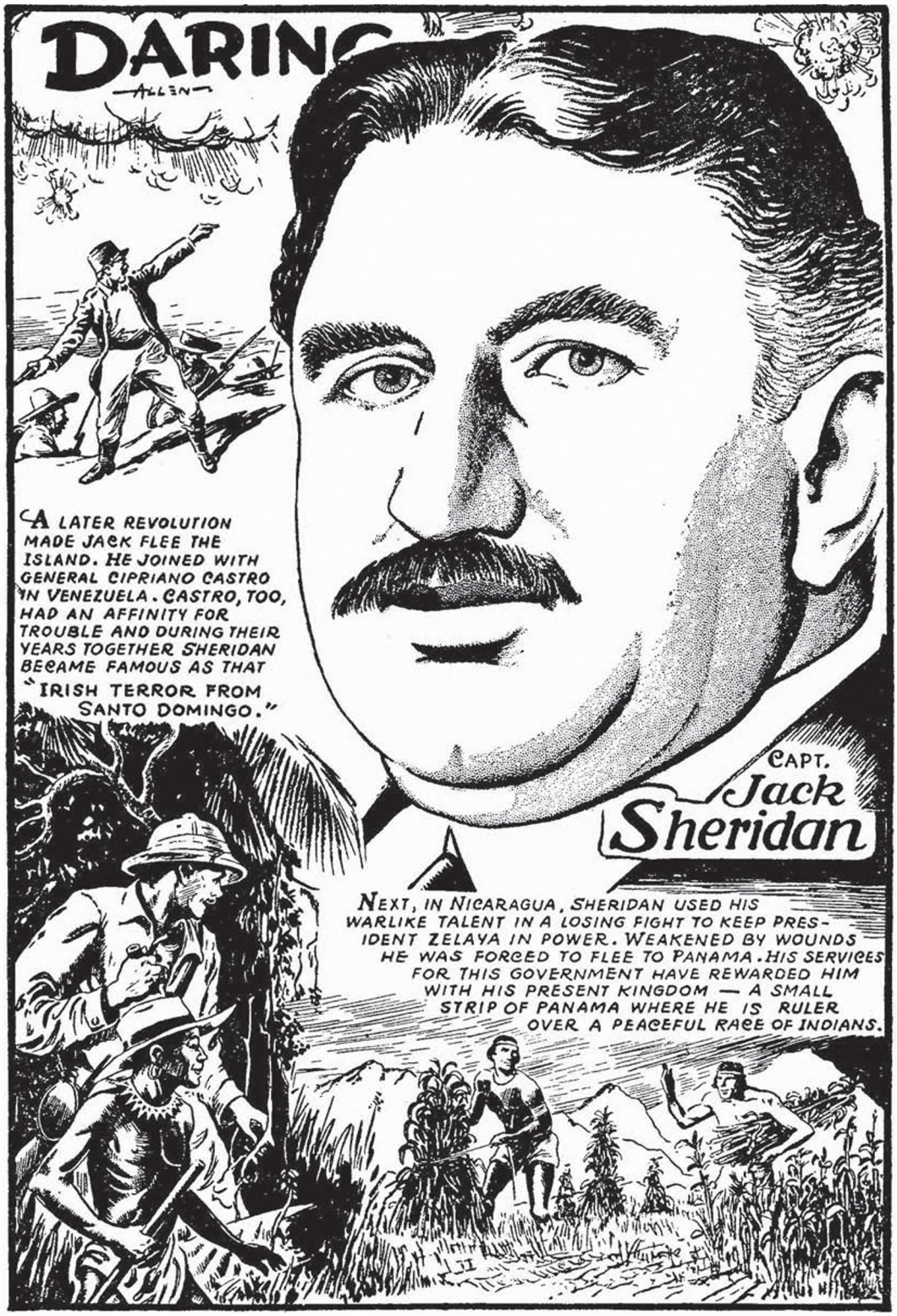
Beezy. Ginger. Snowshoe. Quite by accident I came on those precious three in an old dim photograph among the cobwebs and forgotten horse-collars of the firehouse attic—volunteers themselves in 1897. Quite the boys with their Zouave shirts and curly sideburns; gay enough, in those days, for nicknames. The nicknames were scribbled under the photograph. On "Beezy" I recognized the beak-nose of Roger S. Bickle, Counsellor at Law. On "Snowshoe" the near-sighted glasses of Mordecai Sailor, master of Blue Valley Farms. In "Ginger" (pompous even then) none other than Leonidas Barrows, our County Bank.

So that was that.

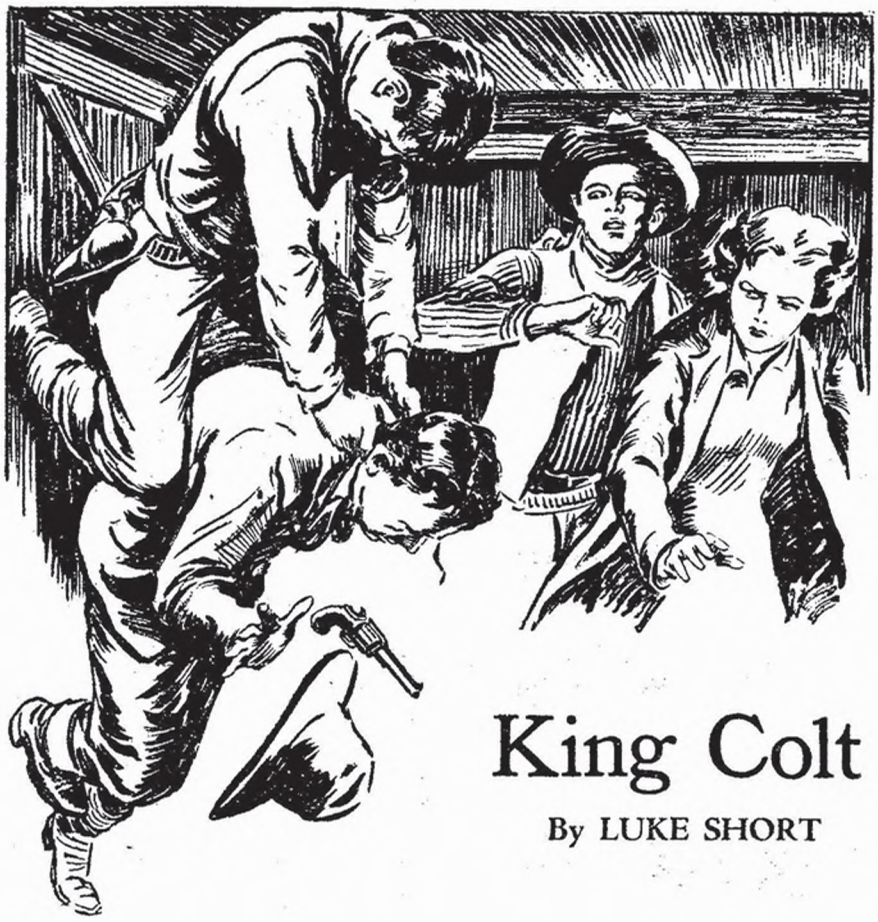
At the funeral service for Clariselle Alders the minister preached on "throwing the first stone" and "judge not that ye be not judged."

It might not have been appropriate to the ceremony, but he could have quoted the last two lines of the old ballad that had given her her better remembered name. "A wild sort of devil, but dead on the level—" That was how Lion ended his prize-winning, hypocrite-searing article against lynching. It was an article that must have been read in excruciating discomfort by some of the citizens around Four Corners, who know the line "dead on the level"—even when Theodore Seymore has them in his parlor—will never apply to *them*.


MEN of
STOOKIE
Adventurer and Jungle King
TO ESCAPE FROM DRUDGERY IN A MINE, JOHN FRANCIS SHERIDAN ENLISTED IN THE NAVY AND, EVER SINCE, HE HAS HOUNDED ADVENTURE. AS COMMANDER OF THE TINY DOMINICAN NAVY, AS AIDE-DE-CAMP TO GEN. CASTRO, STORMY PETREL OF VENEZUELA, AS A FIGURE IN THE INTERNECINE BRAWLS OF NICARAGUA, SHERIDAN HAS DODGED THE WEARISOME LIFE HIS BOYHOOD INDICATED. HE IS EVEN A KING NOW, RULER OF HIS OWN DOMAIN!
IN 1904, HIS NAVAL SERVICE OVER, JOHN SHERIDAN SAILED WITH A CONTRACT TO INSTALL LIGHT PLANTS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC WHERE HE ARRIVED IN THE THICK OF THE MORALES-JIMINEZ REVOLUTION. TWO SONS OF JIMINEZ WERE ON SHERIDAN'S SHIP. MORALES, THE DE FACTO PRESIDENT, BOARDED THE SHIP TO SEIZE THE BOYS, BUT SHERIDAN DISSUADED HIM. IN RETALIATION FOR THEIR FIRE ON SHERIDAN'S SHIP, A U.S. CRUISER FIRED ON THE REBELS IN SANTO DOMINGO HARBOR AND MORALES, BELIEVING THIS WAS DUE TO THE INFLUENCE OF SHERIDAN, SOUGHT OUT THE PERSONABLE IRISH-AMERICAN AND PUT HIM IN CHARGE OF THE DOMINICAN NAVY!
FROM THE DECK OF A GUNBOAT SHERIDAN DIRECTED THE BOMBARDMENT OF SAN PEDRO DE MARCORIS. THE U.S.S. TOPEKA, ANCHORED IN THE HARBOR, WARNED THAT IF IT OR THE U.S. CONSULATE WERE HIT SHERIDAN WOULD DRAW THE TOPEKA'S FIRE. SHERIDAN CALMLY DRILLED THE TOWN HALL WITH HIS FIRST SHELL, SILENCED THE SHORE BATTERIES NEXT AND THEN CAUSED THE TOWN TO SURRENDER WHILE THE U.S. NAVY LOOKED ON ADMIRINGLY.



Next Week: Captain Lehmann—Hindenburg Hero



King Colt

By LUKE SHORT

JOHNNY HENDRY was the easy-going deputy of Cosmos Town, a corner of the West apparently run solely for the benefit of hard-cases, rustlers and killers. Johnny's idea of the law was a little hazy. "Real men never take their fights to a star-toter," he always said. "But when you crowd a peaceable man, look out!"

And when old Picket-Stake Hendry, Johnny's foster father, is found in the desert, dry-gulched, his head blown to a bloody mess, it is Johnny's turn to feel crowded. If Cosmos Town hadn't been such a nest of rats, Picket-Stake's killers would never have come there in the first place. So Johnny, half as a sort of memorial gesture to Picket-Stake, and half because it will give him a chance to find the old prospector's murderer, runs for sheriff on a law and order platform, resolved to clean up the town..

Old Picket-Stake would have been mighty pleased at that if he could have seen it. For his idea in playing dead had been mostly to find out the sort of stuff Johnny was made of. Picket-Stake had struck it rich out there in the desert, but he didn't care about the money if Johnny turned out wrong. Picket-Stake, you see, was a better shot than the man who had dry-gulched him, and Picket-Stake had shot first; then changed clothes with the dead man and disappeared.

WHEN Johnny announces his candidacy, the town is divided. Sheriff Baily Blue is popular with the lawless element. But Major Fitz, the manager of the big Bar 33, several of the terrorized merchants, the mining companies and the honest ranchers see in Johnny their last hope for a decent community.

Johnny picks Turk Hebron, a petty cattle thief, but a dead shot and braver than brass, for his first deputy. Then he circularizes the square ranchers and asks them for a list of the county's undesirables. Someone tries to steal the lists, but Johnny recovers them and to his everlasting amazement finds the name of Major Fitz at the head of every list but

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one. And only someone who knew Johnny had asked for the lists could have arranged to have them stolen.

On election day, Johnny acquires his second deputy when Hank Brender, a veteran hand on the Bar 33, spoils an attempted robbery of the Esmerella mine shipment. Because Brender suspects Major Fitz had inspired this attempt, he quits the Bar 33 and joins Johnny. Like Turk Hebron, he's a sure-shot and as courageous a citizen as the town can boast.

BESIDES Major Fitz, who orders every hand on the Bar 33 to vote for Johnny, Hendry's other supporters include Hugo Miller, the assayer and Picket-Stake's crony, Tip Rogers, the young manager of the Esmerella mine who happens to be in love with the same girl Johnny is, and Chief Commissioner Bledsoe, of the town's unofficial chamber of commerce.

Between them they manage to get Johnny elected by a slim majority of sixteen votes. Johnny's first step is to swear in his two deputies. Bledsoe and his coterie are a little horrified by Johnny's choice, but there's nothing much they can do about it.

Losing no time, Johnny issues an ultimatum. Every hard-case and saloon cowboy in town must find employment within twenty-four hours or clear out of town. And on the night after Johnny's election the three of them—Johnny and Turk Hebron and Hank Breeder—make a riotous tour of the saloons.

There's a brawl in the first one, an encounter with chairs and bottles and tables in which Johnny manages to make Leach Wigran, rustler and town bully, turn tail and run. Because of his conquest of Wigran, Johnny has less trouble in the eleven other saloons stretched along Cosmos' main thoroughfare. He even persuades the owners to hire bouncers to throw out every known hard-case that comes through the swinging doors.

Nora, Johnny's girl, has gotten her landlady secretly to reserve a room for Johnny and his two deputies, so that they may not be picked off one by one.

Johnny's made enemies by these firm, quick moves. So he isn't very much surprised to find a gun-trap waiting for him in the room he shares with his deputies. He dismantles the trap and stares at it balefully. Then he grins at Turk and Hank.

"Well, we done it, didn't we?" he says.

Turk looks sour. "Them hard-cases ain't out of the county yet, Johnny."

"They will be," Johnny says quietly. And that was a promise . . .

CHAPTER IX

VOTES FOR BAILY BLUE

MONDAY in Cosmos was the quietest day anyone could remember. Not one gunshot sounded over the busy street clatter; not once did the long line of ore freighters have to stop while a street brawl blocked traffic. Business was good everywhere except at the saloons. Turk, on the north end of the street, had a six minute argument with an undesirable who hadn't heard about Johnny's new régime. It was Cass Briggs. Turk was gentle with him, didn't even bother to hit him, and Cass rode away without ever having reached town. Hank spent the day whittling. Johnny roved the saloons and streets on the watch for trouble that never came.

He saw Tip Rogers at noon just as he passed the bank, and Tip grinned self-consciously at him.

"Goin' to the dance?" Johnny drawled, reminding him of his wager.

"Alone," Tip said, nodding, and laughed a little. "That's all right, Hendry. You win. I'd go to dances alone for six months if it meant cleanin' up this place."

"You watch."

"I am," Tip said.

The afternoon was calm as the morning. After supper, Johnny, up in his attic room, dressed for the dance that was to be held in the courthouse that night, and then came down to sit in the lobby while Nora completed her dressing. When she came out, her tawny hair combed back into a loose knot at the base of her neck, and her rich green dress full and sweeping, Johnny knew that no woman had ever looked so beautiful. The first thing he said was, "Marry me tomorrow?"

Nora laughed with pleasure and looked at him. He stood tall and clean-looking in his white shirt and red neckerchief and hand-tooled boots. Nora was almost tempted to say yes, but then she remembered. "Clean up the county first, Johnny."

The orchestra—a piano, violin and accordion—was in full swing when they ar-

rived at the courthouse. Bledsoe, having deposited his mountain of a wife at a wall chair, was calling the dances from the platform. The whole town had turned out. Turk, true to his resolve to reform, was struggling manfully but politely to dance with a little restaurant waitress as shy as himself. Hank had on a boiled collar and worked at pushing Mrs. Jenkins around as if her two hundred pounds of very active flesh was at least eight hundred. Over in the corner opposite the orchestra, Major Fitz, in a neatly tailored black suit, was joking and making himself popular with half a dozen laughing girls.

Johnny soon lost Nora to one of the many men who clamored for a dance with her. He felt a hand on his arm and wheeled to confront Hugo Miller, who said, "Let's find a quiet corner, Johnny."

They walked over to a window, and Hugo lighted up his pipe. "I've got what you wanted," he said, and blew out his match. His deep eyes were watchful as he observed Johnny's face tighten and lose some of its good humor.

"The volcanic breccia?"

"Yes. A man brought it in tonight while I was dressing for the party."

"Know him?"

"Nope. He didn't look much like a hard-case either. Clean-shaven, tall, a puncher about my age. He said he was in a hurry for a report. Wanted me to stay in tonight and turn out the assay report for him."

"Give any name?"

"Lemrath. I told him I'd leave the dance a little later and come back and work on it. I told him I'd have it tomorrow night."

"Is he still in town" Johnny demanded.

"Possibly." Hugo smoked in silence a moment. "It's just occurred to me, Johnny—if you wait around till he comes back and arrest him then, you're going to have a hard nut to crack. He won't talk, and you'll get no farther. Why not try another way?"

"What?"

"Let me fake his report. I'll give him such a wild assay that the first thing he'll do will be to dash for the claim recorder. That way, you'll find out not only who owns the claim but where it is. If you want him, all you'll have to do will be to go out to his workings and get him."

RELUCTANTLY, Johnny agreed to this idea. Almost surely this Lemrath was the man he had been waiting for. He must be Pick's killer, and Johnny's impulse was to go after him this very moment. But there was wisdom in Hugo's suggestion. Let Lemrath lead him to the ore deposit, which would be the additional proof needed. Not, Johnny swore darkly, that Lemrath would ever come to trial; he would die before Johnny's guns. But still proof would be needed to vindicate himself, Johnny thought. He looked over the dance floor, took a deep breath and said quietly to Hugo, "Did you check up to see if Lemrath had filed any claims?"

"Yes. He hasn't."

"Then we'd better wait," Johnny said glumly.

"I thought you'd see it that way," Hugo said, and walked off.

Just then, Bledsoe called a Ladies' Choice and Johnny was almost mobbed by girls. Tonight, as always, he was the most popular man on the dance floor, and the engaging thing about it to Nora was that Johnny didn't seem to know it. She watched him dancing with a half dozen girls, feeling a little jealous, when she heard Major Fitz addressing her. He was standing beside her, watching the dancers.

"Not hard to see who's the man most in demand tonight, is there, Nora?"

Nora flushed a little and laughed. "Yourself, Major Fitz."

"Nonsense. I'm a relic. I mean your Johnny."

"That's because he's the new sheriff and this is an election dance."

Major Fitz, smiling a little, asked her to dance. As he swng her out on the floor, they saw a rider in dusty levis and Stetson make his way through the dancers to Bledsoe's side and begin talking in a low, urgent voice.

"Wonder what's up?" Major Fitz asked.

Then pretty soon. Bledsoe excused himself, sought out the three other county commissioners and retired to one of the offices in the front of the building.

Nora had forgotten all about it when Johnny came over to claim his first dance. Halfway through it, Bledsoe again appeared, and this time he hurried to the platform and waved the orchestra to silence.

"Folks," Bledsoe said. "I've got news." Everyone stopped dancing and waited. "The votes were just brought in from Doane's Trading Post over in the corner of the county. It seems there were fifty-six votes cast in that corner of the county. Unfortunately, this changes the result of the election." He paused. "Since all fifty-six of these votes were cast for Baily Blue, that puts him ahead of Johnny Hendry by some twenty-eight votes."

Notwithstanding the fact that Bailey Blue and his wife were right there among them, the dancers raised a storm of angry protest. Bledsoe raised his hand for silence, but it was a while before he got it. When he did, someone called out, "That's plain ballot-stuffin'! Why weren't them voters registered?"

"They were," Bledsoe assured him glumly. He looked over the crowd and then raised his voice to call to a man at the rear. "Doane, come up here."

THE dusty rider came forward. He was an ordinary-looking man in rough clothes, unshaven, a little stiff from his long hours in the saddle. When he stood beside Bledsoe, the merchant announced, "This is Morg Doane, the election judge over there. Tell them, Morg."

"Like he said," Doane began, "it looks legal. Last registration day, I was out at one of my line camps. Had been for a week. I left the registration book with one of my clerks. I never even thought to look at it when I got home. Come this election, I took out the book. There was somethin' like fifty-six men registered. I couldn't ask my clerk about it because he'd left. But them fifty-six men voted, and I guess they had a legal right to."

"Did you know any of them?" Bledsoe asked.

"Not me. They claimed they'd had a wild-horse camp up on the edge of the Calicos for somethin' like two years now. Mebbeso, but I never saw it."

Johnny left Nora and elbowed his way through to the front of the crowd. "Did you bring that register with you, Doane?"

"It's up front, there."

Johnny went up to one of the front offices, where the other commissioners were gathered, their faces solemn as owls. One glance at the book showed the fifty-six names registered. Johnny looked up at Bledsoe. "That ink looks mighty fresh to me, Bledsoe. Maybe it was put there in March, but I'd say it came closer to bein' only a week old." He swiveled his gaze to Doane, whose eyes were untroubled, fearless.

"You say this clerk of yours left a couple of weeks ago, Doane?"

"That's right."

"And he never mentioned to you when you got back from your line camp last March that fifty-six voters had registered?"

"Nary a word."

"Don't that strike you as a little queer?" Johnny persisted. "If there were fifty-six men up in your end of the county, wouldn't you mention it to folks?"

"I would. But then there's always wild-horse hunters up where we are."

"But fifty-six—that's a lot. Wouldn't it naturally be mentioned?"

"I reckon so," Doane said slowly. "Howsomever, it wasn't. I never even looked at the book all year. Election day, I'd 've forgot it if all these men hadn't come in and wanted to vote. Then I dug up the book, and sure enough, the names was there."

Johnny watched him all the while he was talking. If any man looked honest Doane did, but the fact remained that the whole set-up seemed crooked. "Answer me this then," Johnny said mildly. "Wouldn't it have been possible for a man to watch your place until you went away, then go in and talk to your clerk? Maybe he could

have slipped him a hundred dollars or so, and the clerk would have given him the registration book. Next day, he would bring it back to the clerk with fifty-six extra names registered. Your clerk, knowing questions would be asked, just picked up and left. Why shouldn't he? He had a stake."

"It could be," Doane admitted. Here he allowed himself a spare smile. "Lord, son, it surprised me more'n it did you."

"Baily Blue shouldered his way forward. He said gently, "Johnny, you ain't a very good loser. This all looks legal to me. You're huntin' excuses instead of acceptin' facts."

"Why haven't we seen or heard of these fifty-six horse-hunters?" Johnny drawled.

"That's danged easy to explain," Baily said. "They're a good sixty miles from Cosmos, right on the very edge of the county. When they want to go to town for a drink or for grub, they just drift down over the Calicos to Bowling county. It's only a short fifteen miles over the Calicos — nothin' for a man that knows the trails. And they'd know 'em." He smiled amiably at everyone in the room. "Me, I never kicked when Johnny was elected. It was the mandate of the people. I don't see any reason why he should kick now. Tough luck, that's all."

Johnny's mouth came shut with a click, and he straightened. "I'm not kickin', Baily, providin' it's fair, and decidin' that is in the hands of the election board, which is the county commissioners. I'll leave it up to them." He turned and stalked out of the room.

Outside, Nora came up to him. "What did they decide?" she asked breathlessly, and Johnny, stony-faced, only shrugged.

The orchestra made a half-hearted attempt to put the dance in full swing again, but people had lost their enthusiasm. Major Fitz, Hank and Turk and Nora and Johnny, along with Hugo Miller, all gathered at one side of the room to wait. Johnny told them quietly what had happened.

Major Fitz appeared the most indignant of all, and Hank watched him covertly, a little puzzled. A good half hour passed before Bledsoe, his face flushed and harried, made his way up to the orchestra platform. He didn't have to raise his hand to command silence this time.

"I—I don't know how to announce this," he said. "But when it comes down to brass tacks, it's a question of the legality of the registration. All right, but what about our registration in this town? We know that maybe a tenth of the voters here did not register. Nevertheless they voted. Are we going to draw the line when it comes to those outside of Cosmos?" He shook his head. "I don't see how we can. At any rate, these men were better registered than a tenth of our voters. So the votes stand—and Baily Blue is re-elected Sheriff of Cosmos county."

Johnny's heart dropped, to rest in a sodden unhappiness. Only Nora's look of sturdy courage and faith in him made this minute bearable. To Turk and Hank, the news was like a blow across the face. Turk grinned wryly and murmured, "Well, it was a nice two-day vacation from business."

Nora turned away from the dozen people offering Johnny their sympathy and took him by the arm. "Shall we go, Johnny?"

Outside, in the silver-pricked blueness of the night, Johnny didn't say anything for a long while. They walked along instinctively drawn close together. Then he felt Nora squeeze his arm.

"I guess I'm soft," Johnny murmured huskily. "But I hate to get a rookin' when I'm lookin' it right in the face."

"Who did it, do you suppose?"

Johnny looked at her in the dark. "What do you mean?"

"Why somebody sent those fifty-six men over to vote, didn't he? Whoever it was knew that the election would be close; he didn't want to take any chance of losing."

Johnny didn't answer for a moment. Of course that was it, but who was responsible? And was Johnny Hendry going to let him get away with it?

AT the hotel they went out into the kitchen, where Nora made them sandwiches and coffee. Soon, a little of the anguish was gone from Johnny's mind, and it was done through Nora's skilled argument.

"But Johnny, you're not vain, are you?" she began.

"No. Not much."

"And you didn't want to be sheriff just to wear the star?"

"You know I didn't," Johnny growled.

"Then why did you?"

Johnny smiled sheepishly. "Two reasons, honey. The first was because I thought it would lead me to gettin' Pick's killer. The second, was because you said you'd marry me if I did a good job of cleanin' up this county."

"All right," Nora said. "You forget what I said. It's not possible now. You did your best, and you were doing a good job when the chance was taken away from you. All right, now about Pick's killer. Hasn't Hugo told you enough tonight to give you the chance you wanted?"

Johnny nodded.

"Then why care about the sheriff's office, dear? It's got you what you wanted—information about Pick's murder. As for me, I'll marry you when you bring that killer to justice, Just as I promised in the first place."

There was only one thing to do, then, and Johnny did it; he kissed her. After a cigarette, he said good night and went up to his attic room. Turk and Hank were undressing glumly, and it sort of hurt Johnny to watch them.

Hank announced grimly, "Me, I've wore this country out. I'm clearin' out tomorrow. Maybe in a month of ridin', I'll have the taste of it out of my mouth."

"And me," Turk said, 'I haven't wore this county out. It's the only place they'll leave me alone, so I reckon I'll go back to my old business."

Wisely, Johnny said nothing. He unbuckled his holster belt and hung it over its peg, taking out the pearl-handled Colts, wrapping them in their flannel and putting them in his warbag. He looked around for his every-day, cedar-handled guns, but he could only find one of them. The room was in a litter of clothes and blankets and gear, and he was too tired to finish the search. He blew out the light and tumbled into bed.

Sleep was long in coming. And he couldn't estimate how long he'd been asleep when a low rumble awakened him. He said, "Turk," softly and Turk grunted.

"Hear that?" Johnny asked.

"Yeah. What was it?"

"Thunder? Blasting?"

"Probably Baily Blue turnin' over in bed," Turk growled. "He makes big enough tracks now to do it. Whatever it was, it ain't any of our business, is it?"

"I guess not," Johnny said, and turned over. He slept.

CHAPTER X

IN THE CANYON

IT took old Picket-Stake Hendry one full day of tireless walking to get back to the canyon he had cited on the false location papers planted on the bushwhacker. The next morning, he summed up the situation. It would probably take a couple of days for the body to be discovered. It would take at least two more for the discoverer—who would undoubtedly be a partner of the bushwhacker—to find this canyon. One day had passed; that left at least three days before anyone would appear in the canyon, time enough for him to hunt and gather berries and stock his cave with provisions.

Pick had discovered this cave a long time ago. It was high up the canyon side, just a few feet below the rimrock, and from the bottom of the canyon, it was invisible. It's only entrance was by a length of rope anchored to the rimrock. He knew it would be a perfect place of concealment.

Satisfied, Pick left the canyon to go to a salt lick higher up in the Calicos. Two days later he returned with his pack full of partially dried deer meat. The next day,

he went back to the salt lick for the rest of the meat and the berries he had picked.

On the morning of the fourth day he left the cave at sunup and made his way down into the canyon. Choosing a small butte, screened with thick brush, he pushed his way into it, and by full day he was on the watch, invisible to anyone in the canyon or on the rimrock. During that long day, Pick did a lot of wondering. Would the bushwhacker's body, under the belief it was Pick's, be turned over to Johnny? Maybe then Johny would be the one to find the false location papers. If so, Johnny would come up here.

But Pick didn't think so. He knew two men had been following him. Up yonder and over south where his real strike was, where the mother lode was, he knew that he had not been seen. Neither was it down here, where he had dug fruitlessly for months and sunk a dozen test pits, that the two men had picked up his tracks. It had been farther over toward the north, where he had been puttering at a couple of test pits off and on for the last two months before he moved up the mountain. There were two of them, and they were careless with their tracks, he thought. That had cost the life of one. Surely, this man's partner would be the one to find the body, and to get the false papers.

Afternoon came and passed, and Pick did not see a living thing the whole day but a jackrabbit. At dark, he went back to his cave. Next morning, with the patience of an Indian, he was back in the brush.

Around nine o'clock, he saw a man enter the canyon on foot, and a dry smile of satisfaction crossed Pick's face. The man's movements were cautious; he had a rifle slacked under his arm, and a pack of miner's tools on his back. When he had climbed a pinnacle rock and scanned the canyon for a full half hour, he came down and pulled a paper from his levis' pocket. Those would be the location papers, Pick thought.

Pick lay there a long time, watching. The man paused perhaps three hundred yards away, down on the floor of the canyon, and soon was working at a shallow test pit Pick had dug. He was filling small ore sacks with a short-handled shovel. The clang of his pick and single jack were loud in the morning stillness.

Pick debated. He wanted a good look at this man. He also wanted to talk to him, but after a few minutes of watching, he knew that it would not be easy to capture him here. The pit stood in the midst of a barren space that afforded no cover at all. He would be a perfect target for the man's rifle. Pick knew that the old trail was the only logical way out of the canyon. "Why don't I drop down there and stop him? He won't be half so spooky if he gets his work done and thinks he's alone."

His mind made up, Pick backed quietly out of the brush, and, keeping the big boulders of the canyon floor between himself and the man, worked his way to the canyon side. Halfway up it, he heard the ring of the single jack cease, and he hurried a little. It was a good mile to the place he had in mind. Still, the man would have to tote the heavy ore sacks, and that would slow him up. Even if he missed him, Pick thought, it wouldn't be hard to overtake a man afoot packing forty pounds of ore on his back.

JUST the same, old Pick hurried. The place he chose was so similar to the one in which he had lain in wait for the bushwhacker that a wry smile pulled up the corners of his mouth. Crouched behind a rock, gun drawn, Pick waited—and waited, and waited.

When he could stand it no longer, he took to the trail and worked carefully back toward the mouth of the canyon. When he got a view of it, he saw it was empty. Dismay struck him, and immediately, he searched for tracks. Back in a little *rincon,* he saw the reason why he had missed the man. Here, in the drifted dust, were the tracks of a horse.

Pick squatted on his haunches and cursed himself with blistering venom. He

had been taken in like a child, like any simple fool. Just because the man had entered the canyon afoot, it had not occurred to Pick to look for a horse. And while he was making his laborious way afoot to the trail, the man had escaped on horseback.

But Pick remained standing there only a moment. Then he started out trailing the horse. He could do it at a fast walk, but it was nerve-straining work, and when darkness fell he had to admit defeat. He could not overtake the man; but maybe he could track him to the end of his journey.

But next day, at noon, Pick knew he really was licked. The tracks petered out in the gravelly bed of a stream, and four hours spent in searching for tracks went unrewarded. Pick glared at the horizon, cursing himself and his luck, and life in general.

"But hogtie me," he swore darkly, "if this isn't the last time I get caught."

Next night, down at one of the foothill water holes, Pick helped himself to a Bar 33 horse. In four more days, he was over on the other side of the county, where he was sure he wouldn't be known. He was there for a reason. He wanted to find out if Johnny Hendry was doing anything about cleaning up the mystery. To Pick, this was more important than finding the man who had tried to bushwhack him.

Pick met a puncher near Doane's store. And, talking with him, learned many things, among them that Johnny Hendry had been elected sheriff, that he had run the hard-cases out of Cosmos, and that there had been an election dance held for him last night.

The puncher, seeing Pick's grin, said, "What's the matter, Pop? Anything funny about that?"

"Nary a thing," Pick answered. "I was just wonderin' when it was goin' to happen."

"Brother, it has," the puncher said fervently.

And Pick, satisfied, headed back for the Calicos, his patience a bottomless thing once again. In a few more days, if Johnny's success in dealing with these hard-cases continued, Pick could come back to life. Just a few more days.

CHAPTER XI

KILLER'S GOLD

AT the first gray dawn, Johnny was awakened by a soft noise. Almost instantly, he realized that last night he had neglected to haul the trunk over the trap door. He reached out for his gun, pulled himself back in a dark corner of the bed, and trained his gun on the attic's only entrance.

And Nora appeared.

"Johnny," she whispered, and when Johnny answered her, she came over to him. Her hair was down around her shoulders, and she held a gray wrapper close around her. Johnny could not see her face, but he could tell by the timbre of her voice that she was frightened.

"What is it?"

"Are you awake enough to get this straight? The bank was blown last night and the Esmerella gold taken from the vaults. The robbers escaped. But Baily Blue is down here—in the hall right below—waiting for you. He—he found something of yours in the bank."

Johnny sat bolt upright. "Mine? What?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. Dress and come dawn. And oh, Johnny, do keep your temper. I know it's all right, that you weren't in it, but be careful what you say."

Nora went back down the ladder and Johnny dressed hurriedly. Turk and Hank were breathing deeply, and he did not think they had awakened.

Baily was waiting down in the hall below. Johnny stepped off the lower rung of the ladder to face him. "What is all this, Baily?"

Baily's chill blue eyes belied the amiability of his face. "Nora tell you about the bank?"

"Yes, that it was blown. What about me, though?"

For answer, Baily held out a worn Colt. It was cedar-handled, its butt scarred witb use. "We found that in the alley just outside the back door of the bank. It fell out when a man jumped on his horse and it bucked." He looked at Johnny. "It's yours, ain't it?"

Johnny nodded, not taking his gaze from Baily's face. So that was why he hadn't been able to find his other gun when he went to bed.

Baily extended his other hand. It held a worn spur. "We found this, too. You got any idea whose it is?"

Johnny looked at it and then shuttled his gaze back to Baily. "You know whose it is, don't you?"

"I got a good idea. You tell me," Baily said.

"Turk's."

"That's what I thought." There was a little silence, during which Nora came and stood by Johnny's side. They were both watching Blue, waiting for him to make a move. He lounged erect from the wall, took off his hat, mopped his head with a handkerchief and said, "Son. heaven knows I hate to do this. But I got to take you and Turk in."

"You believe it?" Johhny said softly.

"It ain't that, and you know it. But you've worked around my office long enough to know how we run things like this."

Johnny had his mouth open to answer hotly when a dark form hurtled down from the trap door above and crashed on top of Baily Blue, carrying him to the floor. It was Turk, and, straddling Blue, he pinned both his arms to the floor.

"I heard," Turk said angrily. "Wake Hank and get your bedroll, Johnny. We're gettin' out of here."

"No!" Johnny said angrily, his voice sharp above the sucking and gasping that Blue was making in his effort to recover his wind.

Turk's face was dark with fury. "You fool! Don't you see what kind of a frame-up this is? We'll be strung up by a lynch mob if we give ourselves up! All those hard-cases—Wigran and his outfit—will be in town in the mornin'! Once we're in jail, they'll see us swing higher'n a kite!"

"It's true, Johnny," Nora said.

"Get your stuff! Get mine! Wake Hank and tell him to dress and come along. If you don't, we're dead and you know it!"

Johnny looked at Nora, and she nodded bleakly.

WHEN he was gone to wake Hank, Nora looked down at Blue. He had his breath, and he was observing Turk with placid friendliness. "Well now, Turk, that was a giveaway, wasn't it"

Turk growled, "Shut up."

Baily looked up at Nora and said sadly, "It's pretty tough on you, girl. Johnny's the last man I ever thought would do that."

Turk's open palm smacked sharply across Blue's mouth. "Say that again, and I'll show you how your teeth taste when they roll loose in your head."

Baily only smiled. When Hank and Johnny returned, Turk took Blue's guns away from him and let him get up. He said nothing; his smile was still only amiable, and a bit pitying.

"Baily," Johnny said gently, "I don't know if you're behind this or not. I don't think you are. Anyway, you were at least partly behind that election steal. But if you are mixed up in this, heaven help you. I don't like a frame-up!"

"I'm sheriff and I done a sheriff's duty," Baily answered.

"A sight too well," Turk growled. He took the rope from Hank, and in a moment Blue was tightly trussed on the floor.

"I just wanted to tell you the rest," Blue said. "There was three men robbed the bank. One of 'em held the horses. Would the third man be you, Hank?"

Hank said nothing. Johnny turned to Nora and took her in his arms. "It'll be a long time before I see you again, honey. But I'll be back. And when I do come back, I'm goin' to have plenty scalps in my belt. All right with you?"

"You know it is," Nora murmured.

Twenty minutes later, the three of them were riding south out of town. At the rise above Cosmos they pulled up and looked back at the grimy, slatternly town that they had tried to save. "Still want to hit the grit, Hank?" Johnny asked.

Hank only shook his head.

"And you, Turk?"

"You couldn't blast me out of this county," Turk said savagely.

"Nor me," Johnny murmured. "Looks like we're all here. Want to stick together on it?"

They nodded.

They pulled off the road and headed cross country for the shelter and solitude of the Calicos. To Johnny, these were the bitterest hours of his life. To see success within his grasp and then to lose it was enough to dishearten anyone. But had he really lost? After all, the election didn't matter, and the fact that he was an outlaw wasn't much more important. He had a clue to Pick's killer. That alone was worth all the hard luck he had suffered. "Let's don't ride too far," he said, toward noon. "I'm goin' back to Cosmos tonight to talk with Hugo Miller. And not even Baily Blue had better try to stop me."

MILLER was deep in his report when the door opened and Lemrath came in. It was seven-thirty. Hugo had been working all day.

"Evenin'," Lemrath said pleasantly, and he took the chair Hugo waved him into. He was an ordinary-looking man of middle age with a square, alert face. His least movements were slow and entirely controlled. There was no nervousness in him at all. His clothes were worn but clean; he looked at Hugo with a frank and steady gaze.

"Know anything about minin' and assayin'?" Hugo asked by way of conversation.

"Never saw a place like this before," Lemrath said. Hugo glanced at Lemrath's hands. They were not soft, but neither were they the horny hands of a man who has swung a pick all his life. Hugo was certain he was a cowman, not a prospector, and that puzzled him all the more.

Hugo put down his last notation—*Silica . . . . . 006*—and glanced over the faked assay report. Then he looked up at Lemrath and said carefully, "You have a mighty good thing here, friend."

He was observing Lemrath closely, but he could see no sign of excitement or exultation. Lemrath's face changed not at all. He simply said, "That's good."

"Take a look yourself," Hugo said, and gave him the paper.

The assay, of course, had been doctored up to make the gold content of the ore look phenomenal. Lemrath glanced at the paper and nodded imperturbably. Folding it, he held it in his hand. Hugo was confounded. Was this the way a man greeted fortune?

To cover up his confusion, Hugo said, "If there's much of that ore around, I'd advise you to keep it quiet. That'll start a rush anywhere, any time."

"I reckon that's right," Lemrath said idly.

Hugo's intentions began to falter. If this man was a crook, dishonest, then Hugo was willing to admit that he did not know an honest man when he saw one. And Hugo was a shrewd judge of character. Then something else occurred to him. This plan of his and Johnny Hendry's risked a reputation for honesty that had taken him a lifetime to build. Once the news got out that he had faked an assay, his business and name would be ruined. He wouldn't have minded if he saw a chance to catch a crook and a killer, but Lemrath was definitely neither. The whole thing puzzled and angered Hugo. He said impulsively, "You've filed on your claim, of course."

"No."

"Don't you know where it is?"

"I got a paper that shows it," Lemrath said quietly.

Hugo was more bewildered than ever. He said, "You mean you've never been to your location?"

"No."

Hugo took a deep breath of relief and

walked over to confront Lemrath. "Do you mind if I stick my nose in business that doesn't concern me?"

Lemrath regarded the spare, gray-haired man before him with mild concern. "Why—go ahead," he said.

Hugo said, "The man who registers the claim this ore was taken from will brand himself a murderer. And he'll be killed."

Slowly, Lemrath came to his feet. "A murderer?"

"Yes. Because the real owner of this claim was murdered, and the location papers were stolen from him before he had a chance to file. Naturally, the only man who would file on that claim is the man who killed the rightful owner."

Lemrath regarded Hugo with blank surprise. "You know where the claim is, then?"

Hugo told him about the volcanic breccia. "That stuff could only come from one place, the place Pick Hendry was working. And there's volcanic breccia in your sample. Figure it out for yourself."

Deliberately, Lemrath drew out his pipe and packed it and sucked the blue smoke into his lungs while Hugo watched him closely.

"I'll tell you how it was, Lemrath said slowly. "I'm a rancher down in the next county. I've been havin' hard luck. My wife died, my place burned down and my kid is sick. Then a man rode up to my tent a week or so ago and offered me five hundred dollars if I'd bring this ore to you, have it assayed, and then register the claim. I jumped at the chance."

"Did you know his name?"

"No."

"Remember his looks?"

"No. He looked like a saddle tramp. Hadn't shaved, his clothes were dirty and he looked shifty—but that didn't matter. I needed the money."

"How much did he give you then?"

"Two hundred." Lemrath smiled a little. "It just about saved my life, too. I squared up with the doc, got a nurse, and got help to rebuild my shack."

Hugo nodded. He could understand that, and he believed the man's story because it jibed with what he had already observed. "What did this jasper say to you?" Hugo persisted.

"Nothin', except what I told you. And he said I wasn't to make any fuss at all about registerin' the claim."

"So you've got the location papers on you?"

Lemrath patted his pocket. "Right here."

"Are you going to register it, knowing what you do about the claim?"

"I reckon," Lemrath said slowly. "I don't see how that'd change things much, and that's what I was paid to do."

"Do you mind showing me the location papers?" Hugo asked mildly. "I'd give plenty of money to see them—not, understand, because I want the gold, but because I want to locate the place where I can find Pick Hendry's killer."

Lemrath took his pipe from his mouth and scowled. "That wouldn't be livin' up to my word, because I promised to keep this quiet."

Hugo said coldly, "You're workin' for a murderer," and let his hand move toward the drawer where he kept his gun. He was going to see this through.

LEMRATH did not answer for a moment. He studied Hugo and then scowled down at his pipe. Finally, he said. "Tell you what I'll do. The claim recording office closes at eight, don't it? It's a few minutes to eight now. We'll both go over and I'll register the claim. You can copy it down from the book and find out what you want to know. And that way, I'll be keepin' my word to the man who paid me. That all right?"

"It's perfect," Hugo said, relieved, and reached for his hat. Lemrath folded up the assay report and tucked it in his pocket.

The claim recording office was a small shack at the very end of the town. Hugo and Lemrath hurried, for it was within a few minutes of eight o'clock, the closing time. They could see the lamps of the office still lighted. Stepping off the boardwalk, they went past a dark warehouse.

Hugo felt a gathering excitement in him.

He turned to Lemrath and said, "Friend, when you've registered this, you'd better—"

Crash!

The bellow of a shotgun pounded right beside Hugo, and he saw Lemrath driven down on his face. Whirling, Hugo turned just in time to see the dark figure of a man leap from the corner of the warehouse. And then something rapped down over Hugo's skull and a blanket of stars blossomed and burst in his head. He didn't even remember falling.

When he regained consciousness, he was lying on his own bed in the back room of the assay office. His head ached abominably, and it was a long time before he could focus his eyes on the figures beside him. When he did, he saw the sturdy figure of Baily Blue.

"Well, well," Blue drawled. "For a minute, I'd thought they'd done it, Hugo."

"Is Lemrath dead?" Hugo murmured.

"A hole shot through him as big as a washtub," Blue said cheerfully. "Who was it?"

"Did you search him?"

"Sure."

"Find anything on him—any papers?"

"Not a thing," Blue said. "Not even a cigarette paper. His pockets were turned inside out."

Sick at heart, Hugo turned his face to the wall. The location papers were gone before he'd had a chance to see them. The claim would never be filed now, or if it was, he would never be able to identify it as the one containing the volcanic breccia. The only sure thing was that, since the faked assay report was stolen too, the claim would be worked. But that would be meager consolation to Johnny Hendry.

Hugo heard Baily go out. He lay there a long time, and finally, when his headache calmed down a little, he struggled out of bed and fixed himself something to eat. He'd nearly finished when he heard the back door open, and turning to look, found Johnny Hendry standing there.

Hugo plunged into the story of Lemrath's murder. Johnny listened to it with an increasingly morose face. When Hugo was finished, Johnny tilted back in the extra chair, rolled a smoke and lighted it.

"Well," he observed to no one in particular, "it seems when I take a beatin', I take a good one. What is there to do now?"

And Hugo, who had asked himself that same question, didn't answer, because he couldn't.

CHAPTER XII

THE FINEST MAN IN THE COUNTY

MAJOR FITZ'S office reflected, as did everything else in this clean white house, a military neatness. It held a roll-top desk, a safe, three chairs, and a bookshelf filled mostly with copies of the *Stockman's Gazette.*

Major Fitz was there examining a small ledger. Before he took it out of the safe, he carefully pulled down the blinds and locked the door. He didn't spend much time over the ledger, for he knew its contents almost by heart. When he was finished and had the ledger back in the safe again, he allowed himself a thin smile of satisfaction. Then, because he was waiting for someone, and idle time always hung heavy on his hands, he pulled out some back issues of the gazette and leafed nervously through them, glancing often at the wall clock.

He waited almost twenty minutes before he heard a soft knock on the outside door, and he crossed the room to open it. Carmody stepped in, followed by a smaller man, a puncher. The look on this man's face made Major Fitz frown. "Well?" he said.

"It went all right," Carmody said in a businesslike tone, following Fitz across to his desk. He laid down two sheets of paper, which Fitz picked up after he sat down at his desk.

"Did he get to the claim recorder's?" Fitz asked.

"We left him stretched out almost on the steps of it," Carmody said.

Fitz looked at one of the papers and handed it to the puncher. "That's the same location paper, isn't it, Barney?"

The puncher came over and glanced at the paper. "Sure, that's the one I give him."

Fitz, his hands trembling ever so slightly, deliberately opened the other paper, which was Hugo's falsified assay report. He read it swiftly, and Carmody heard him sigh a little.

Carmody said, "What is it?"

"Better than I had hoped for," Fitz said softly. He stared at the paper a long moment, then raised his eyes to Barney. "Barney, you did a good job. I thought maybe old Pick was on to something, but I never dreamed it would be this good."

"I did," Barney said, his voice bragging and arrogant. "I could tell by the way he acted up there in the Calicos when we was followin' him. When a man's got a strike, everything he does gives him away—even an old tough jasper like him."

"Well, he had a strike all right," Fitz said dryly. "Describe this canyon to me again."

Barney did. He obviously knew something about minerals and mining. He described the dike at some length, guessed at its probable length and depth, while Major Fitz took careful notes.

"How many claims would it need to cover it?" Fitz asked, looking up from his writing.

"Six would blanket it."

"You're sure Pick didn't register it before he was killed?"

"I looked through the register this mornin'," Barney asserted. "There ain't a thing registered in that canyon, not a thing."

"How do you explain all his test pits?"

"Why, Pick was like any other prospector. He dug around, puttin' in a lot of pits and gettin' no color at all, or maybe just a little. He didn't go deep enough. There wasn't no sense in payin' good money to locate a worthless claim. On the other hand, he might have knowed that the gold was there, or somewhere close. He wanted to make sure of the best claims before he recorded anything. That's natural enough, ain't it?"

"I suppose," Fitz said, rising. "Well, Barney, you've earned a nice cut out of this. One of those claims—the best one in fact—will be yours."

"It ought to be," Barney bragged. "If it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't 've known anything about it."

"That's right," Fitz said. "Good night, boys."

Barney turned to the door and went out, Carmody swinging in behind him. As Carmody was about to step out, he shuttled his gaze to Fitz, and it was questioning. Imperceptibly, Fitz nodded and Carmody closed the door.

Major Fitz stood utterly still, his hand traveling up to the breast pocket of his coat, from which peeped the tips of five cigars. He drew one out, his head cocked as if listening, and bit the end off it. Striking a match, he held the flame to the tip of the cigar, just as the muffled explosion of a gunshot sounded out in the night. Major Fitz paused long enough for the corners of his mouth to turn up in a slight smile, and then he lighted his cigar.

HE was sitting at the desk when Carmody returned. "Where do you want him?" Carmody asked quietly.

"I don't care. Get rid of him on your way over to Warms. Did the boys wake up?"

"I told them I shot at a dog nosin' around the corrals." Slowly, Carmody walked over to Fitz's desk and looked down at him, his slack face thoughtful and grave. "I din't like that much, Fitz," he murmured.

"Did you want him getting drunk in Cosmos and babbling the whole thing?" Fitz inquired.

"It isn't Barney. He'd 've got it in the back sooner or later." Carmody paused, his face still grave, his eyes meditative. "It's you, Fitz. When you're through with a man, you throw him away—like you'll throw that cigar butt away."

"I don't deny it."

"I wonder if—" Carmody's voice died, and his face settled into an unpleasant hardness. Leaning both hands on the desk, he put his face close to Fitz's. "Don't try it with me, Fitz. I'm a careful man."

"Hoke, you're a fool!" Fitz said angrily. "You've been with me almost since I took over the Bar 33. We've built ourselves a nice stake by trusting each other. If your cut doesn't suit you, say so. If you want to pull out of here, saddle up and ride out —only I'd hate to see you go."

Carmody straightened up. "I'll stick," he said briefly. "I just wanted to make sure."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as a man can be when he's runnin' with a man like you," Carmody murmured. "What do you want me to do about Westfall over in Warms?"

Fitz indicated the papers before him. "Take those over and tell him what I want. He's to take his crew to the canyon and put up his monuments. Then he'll go down and file on these six claims, buy his supplies and start work. Once he's operating, I'll expect to see his books once a month. The expense funds, all cash, have been deposited in the Warms bank. If he ever mentions my name, either in public or private, tell him what he may expect." Here Fitz smiled thinly. "Also, you might impress upon him what he's to expect if I even suspect that his books are crooked. Have you got all that?"

"Sure, but he's honest, right enough." Carmody cuffed his Stetson off his forehead and drew out his sack of tobacco dust. Fitz relighted his cigar and sat scowling at his desk.

Presently, as they both smoked in silence, the old feeling of close camaraderie returned. But Fitz was drumming on the desk with his fingers.

Then he said abruptly, "You know, Hoke, there's only one thing in all this business that I can't explain."

"What's that?"

"Barney and Tohill were sent to follow old Picket-Stake Hendry. Barney comes back with the news that Pick has been shot, blown off the rim. By whom? Presumably, Lee Tohill. But where is Tohill?"

Carmody studied his cigarette. "My guess has always been that Pick Hendry tagged him, and that he died up there."

"But we searched the country."

"No man can cover that country like it should be covered. Besides, a man that's shot bad ain't so careful about directions."

"But how could Pick shoot him when he got a load of buckshot right in the face?"

"Maybe Pick got first shot at Tohill."

"That could be," Fitz said. "However, my mind's not at rest on that point. Where is Tohill? If I knew that, I'd feel a lot better."

"What difference does it make?" Carmody said. "You've got the location papers. And they're the true ones, because they're in Pick Hendry's own handwritin'. If they weren't, maybe you could accuse Barney and Tohill of doublecrossin' you, of fakin' the location papers and keepin' the real ones Pick had with him. But you can't do that. That handwritin' checked."

"So it did," Fitz said quietly. "Well, get along, Hoke. And good luck."

WHEN Carmody was gone, Major Fitz rose and blew out the light. On the way back to his room, he let the memory of this evening filter through his mind, and it gave him pleasure. Once he had something tangible like this gold mine he would be fixed for life. It pleased him too, to recall how neatly he was cleaning up all the evidence that pointed to him: Pick had found the claim, and he was dead. Lemrath was dead, for Fitz had not wanted the claim located; he had only wanted the assay. And Barney was dead, too, now. That left only himself and Carmody—and Westfall, a legitimate mining man. Sooner or later, Carmody and Westfall would go the way of the others.

It was all working smoothly. Soon, no one could touch his backtrail. And in a short time, he would be a man of wealth and power, not just a salaried manager of

a cow outfit. Yes, life was good. But to Barney, slacked over the saddle of a horse out in the night, he did not give a thought. That was over.

Next morning, Major Fitz rode into Cosmos. He went first to several stores and ordered supplies. Major Fitz had a gift for making storekeepers talk. They valued his advice as well as his trade, and he gave both impartially

Standing with legs outspread, big sombrero on the back of his head, duck coat over his singlet, he was talking to Bledsoe about Johnny Hendry in the Miner's Emporium when he caught sight of Nora at another counter. He left Bledsoe and walked over to Nora, who greeted him with gravity, taking his hand. The Major's foxy face was carefully gloomy.

"I've heard about this deal they shoved off on Johnny. What's behind it?" he asked bluntly.

"A frame-up," Nora answered simply.

"Of course, but whose?"

"Baily Blue found the gun."

Fitz eyed her keenly. "You think he planted it?"

"I don't know, Major Fitz. Johnny didn't either."

Major Fitz rapped on the counter and bellowed, "Bledsoe! Bledsoe!"

A clerk called the storekeeper, who hustled over to Fitz and Nora. Bledsoe looked harried, as if he had spent a sleepless night, and his manner contrived to be both ingratiating and defiant.

"You're a commissioner here, Bledsoe. Why can't you do something about clearing Hendry?" he snorted. "You know as well as I do that he didn't do it!"

Bledsoe shrugged. "What can we commissioners do, Major Fitz?"

"Get a decent sheriff!" Fitz answered sharply. "You had one and let him go."

"Please," Nora said, putting a restraining hand on Major Fitz's arm. "He did what he could, Major Fitz."

Fitz scowled, and drummed on the counter top with his fingers. "Do you think it would do any good to give Baily Blue a dressing down?"

"It never has, has it?" Bledsoe asked.

Suddenly, a gleam of inspiration appeared in Major Fitz's eye. "I'm going to talk with that gentleman," he declared firmly. "Maybe he'll change his tune. You wait until I get back and you'll hear something," he promised, as he tipped his hat to Nora and walked out of the store.

Baily Blue was in his office. Fitz stomped in and closed the door, and immediately, he relaxed. "Take a chair," Baily said amiably. "It ain't often you pay me a call in broad daylight."

Fitz chuckled and sat down. "Are we alone?"

Baily nodded.

"That was a nice job at the bank," Fitz said. "Where'd you cache the stuff?"

"Two bars are in this bottom drawer here," Baily drawled, indicating his desk. "The other two are under a bunch of junk in the closet."

"Tell me about it," Fitz said. "How'd Hendry take it?"

"Just like we thought he would. The girl kept him from flyin' off the handle, Turk Hebron jumped me, and then they decided to run. They had Leach and his hard-cases figured pretty good. It was Turk that said Leach would likely breed a lynch mob."

"Did they suspect you?"

"I don't think so. They think I crooked the election, all right, but Hendry said he didn't think I framed this bank robbery on him." Baily grinned slyly. "I'm quite an old duffer, Fitz. They got me down for a little bit of a fox, but that's all. Johnny don't think I'm crooked. Leastways, I never give him cause to while he was my deputy."

Fitz nodded. "I've got an idea. I was just talking to the girl, and to Bledsoe. Of course, they believe it's a frame-up. I sided in with them, naturally. But I want to make my sympathy look plenty real now, Baily. We've got too much at stake for them to suspect me."

"That's right."

"I'm supposed to be in here now, arguing with you. When I go out, I'm going to tell them I've offered a thousand dollars re-

ward for the capture of the real bank robbers—not Hendry and Hebron and Brender. That'll leave you in the clear, since you only did your duty in trying to arrest them on the evidence found. You haven't put a reward on their heads. This bounty I offer for the bandits will be with your full knowledge. You can say in public that you approve it, providing anybody can prove to you that it wasn't Johnny and those other two." He paused, regarding Baily. "How does it sound?"

"I dunno. There's a lot of feelin' against me."

"All right. That's a way to show you're open-minded, isn't it?"

"I reckon. Only don't say we've had a row about it. Say I was reasonable and agreeable, that I was only doin' my duty."

"Fine." Fitz shifted in his chair and pointed a finger at Baily. "Here's something else that will give it weight, Baily. Tonight have Leach Wigran steal a hundred head of steers off that south range of mine. They'll be along the creek, with no one riding herd. I'll have them pushed over today. It'll make it look like the robbers—just to mock my reward offer—are beginning to raid my stock."

"What'll the company say about that?" Baily asked.

"I'll take care of the company. I haven't showed them any losses so far. Besides, once the excitement has blown over, the steers can be returned, can't they?"

"Sure." Baily plucked at his lower lip. "You don't want anything planted, do you, like somethin' of Temple's or Hart's or Kennicott's—anything from one of them honest ranchers?"

Fitz shook his head. "Not a thing. All I'm interested in doing is showing the girl and Bledsoe and anybody else who's apt to make trouble that my sympathy is with Johnny."

"What are we goin' to do about him?" Baily drawled.

Fitz made a wry face. "That young man has a charmed life. First he managed to survive that shot of Carmody's. Next, he discovered that trap door set-gun. I'm beginning to believe he can't be killed."

"I could have told you that."

"Well, he's taken care of now. At least, he can't harm anybody where he is. And if we ever get a try at him again, we'll make it stick."

Baily nodded and Fitz rose.

Baily said, "I'll get those two bars up to you tonight. I'll give the other one to Leach, like you said. Tip Rogers was in here all day raw-hidin' me to take a posse out. That all right with you?"

"Go ahead." Fitz started out, and suddenly turned and asked, "Has the Esmerella got a reward out?"

"Two thousand."

Fitz only grinned and stepped out on the walk.

Back at Bledsoe's, he found Nora still talking to the storekeeper. They looked at him expectantly as he approached.

"Well, I found him reasonable," Fitz said briskly. "I've offered a thousand dollars reward for the capture of the real bank robbers—the reward not to apply to the capture of Johnny or Turk or Hank, because I don't believe they did it."

"You darling!" Nora cried, and her voice was tight with gratitude.

"What did Blue say?" Bledsoe asked.

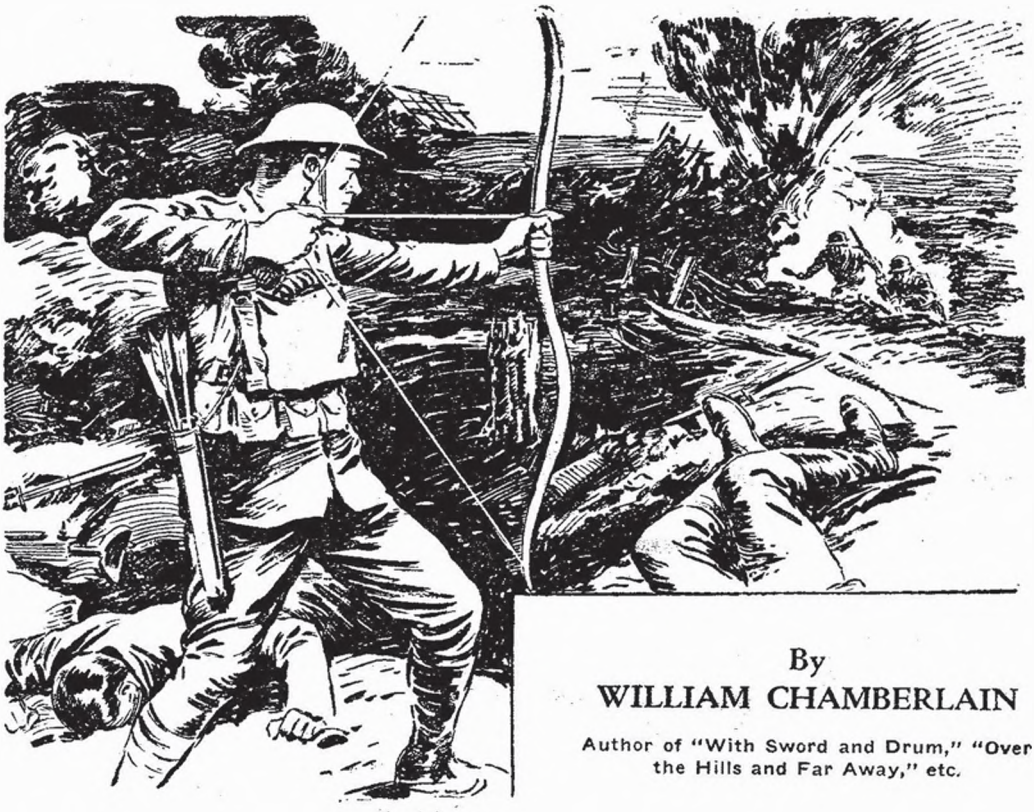
"Oh, he was reasonable. He said he'd only worked on the evidence he found, which was inescapable. He admitted the gun and spur might have been planted by the real robbers, but he said he only did his duty in acting on the evidence at hand." He snorted loudly. "The fool!"

"Let's hope your offer will make the Esmerella officers change theirs, too, Bledsoe said, shaking his head.

"Three thousand dollars is a lot of money," Fitz said wisely. "Many a man has sold out his companions for less. I believe these robbers will."

He chatted a moment longer, then left them. Watching his trim figure mingle with the crowd, Bledsoe, as if voicing Nora's own thought, said, "There goes the finest man in this county—or any other county."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



By
WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

Author of "With Sword and Drum," "Over the Hills and Far Away," etc.

Battle Shouts Down the Wind

War horses stamp across the years . . . and battle shouts come down the wind.

THE two of us squatted on our heels while the rain trickled down across our faces. I looked at my watch—three o'clock and still half an hour until morning stand-to. Beyond us the light of the hooded battle lanterns dropped a dull glow on the muzzles of the guns which nosed out into the rain.

Dusty Rhoads, first sergeant of artillery and veteran of many wars, hunched his shoulders against the rain and made a cigarette in the shelter of his poncho. The flare of the match lighted his face with its fine network of lines about mouth and eyes; it glinted against his hard chin and touched the clipped gray line of his mustache. He smoked in silence, shielding the limp cigarette in the palm of one big hand.

Off to the left, and a half a mile away, a searchlight winked on with an angry abruptness. Its white pencil of light crawled sullenly across the weeping clouds; then it was gone, swallowed up in the night. The war game had been going on for a week now.

The gun crews were beginning to turn out for morning stand-to and hobnails scraped faintly against the metal of the gun platforms. There was the uneasy murmur of the surf beyond the gun line and the whisper of the wind in the ironwood

trees and that faint restlessness which comes when dawn is treading impatiently against the heels of the dark.

Dusty Rhoads said to me in his lazy drawl, "Man is a funny animal, Lieutenant. Maybe that remark ain't very original but—bein' what the story writers call an old soldier—I can subscribe to it hearty nevertheless."

The gun crew, just awakened and still in the grip of that vague and indefinable fear which is man's heritage before daylight comes, huddled together by the battle lanterns and talked in sober monotones so that their voices drifted back through the rain. Dusty Rhoads pitched his cigarette away and stared reflectively.

"Me, I been soldierin' for thirty years now," he went on, "an' I reckon I've seen all kinds—good men, bad men, big men who were soft an' yellow like butter an' little men who died laughin'. White, brown, red, black—I've known 'em all. I've seen 'em in battle an' that's where you get to know about a man fast."

I hunched my shoulders into my poncho and looked at the thin trickle of rain which dripped from the brim of my helmet. There was, I knew, a story behind Dusty Rhoads' words.

"YEAH, I've seen big, tough men blubber while they waited for time to go over an' I've seen white-faced kids, who got sick when they cut a finger, swingin' a red bayonet as cool as though they was forkin' hay back in the old man's meadow at home. I've sort of studied men, Lieutenant, bein' interested that way an' havin' plenty of opportunity. Then, just when I figure that I've got 'em labeled an' indexed an' filed away in their own particular pigeonhole, one of 'em ups an' knocks all of my pretty theories into a cocked hat—an' I start all over."

He jerked a thumb at the men down there who were dark silhouettes against the red glow of the battle lamps.

"They're all the same an' they're all different, Lieutenant. That bunch down there, now. There's Mike Donlin—*his* ambition is to draw his pay every month an' go to town an' get drunk. Little Boudreau is savin' up his money to marry a schoolma'am. Squinty McGann, th' chief of breech, put in a coupla hitches in th' Foreign Legion an' is so tough that he'd turn a machine-gun bullet; old man Brey knew Dawson an' Forty Mile when they was red an' roarin' camps an' he reads his Bible in th' squadroom of an evenin'; Petey Levinsky gets letters from his ma every week askin' does he keep his feet dry an' eat plenty of vegetables with his dinner.

"They're all different—an' they're all the same. You see 'em huddled together down there, sir, an' talking low? There's a man or two down there that has graduated from a big college—take La Roche, for instance—an' there's other men down there that have got no more *savvy* than a rock crab but, right now, La Roche ain't thinkin' of what he learned in books an' Mike Donlin ain't thinkin' of the beer on River Street an' Little Boudreau ain't thinkin' of his schoolma'am back in the States. An' why is *that*, sir?"

Dusty Rhoads was speaking half to himself as he leaned his elbows on his knees and stared out into the darkness. The searchlight winked again; went out and the beam hung redly against the clouds for a long moment.

I murmured, "You tell *me*, Sergeant."

"Because they're scared, Lieutenant! Not scared of anything you could put a name to—they'd give you the lie in your teeth if you tried to tell one of 'em that his belly was like a chunk of ice an' the skin was damp in between his fingers an' the hair prickly along his spine. No, the thing they're afraid of goes back a million years—or maybe ten million. It's something that hides in the darkness a half an hour before the dawn comes an' it's the same thing which made the ancestors of every one of us wake up snarlin' an' reachin' for a stone club back in the days when man lived in a cave in the rocks."

Wind rippled the ironwood trees and died away toward the mountains with a

faint *whoooooo;* the rain dripped on. A man swore and then the night was quiet.

Dusty Rhoads drawled on in his low voice.

"I'll make you a little bet, sir. I'll bet that if I was to jump out there an' yell now every man of 'em would bare their teeth an' snarl at me like a dog snarls—an' the little hairs on the back of their necks would bristle the same as the ruff on a dog's neck. If I was to do it a half an hour later, when daylight is beginning to come, they'd laugh at me or think I was crazy."

DUSTY RHOADS licked at the flap of another of his brown paper cigarettes and fumbled for a match. I held my own box across to him and he took it with a nod of thanks.

"I once heard a fellow talk about that thing—a pretty smart fellow, too. I ain't educated—any more than a man gets educated in knockin' around an' about for fifty odd years—but I got the drift of most of what he was sayin'. *His* idea was that there's times when a man suddenly gets yanked backward a thousand or ten thousand years by that ancient strain in his blood an' then the man, who's snappin' an' snarlin' at you, ain't Johnny Jones any longer at all but is one of Johnny Jones's tough ancestors along the back trail. I don't reckon I've made it very clear—but *I* ain't got the language *he* had."

Dusty turned toward me, the glow of his cigarette a thin smudge in the darkness.

"He had a name for it—that fellow did. Lieutenant, you been to West Point. You ought to know it."

I murmured "Atavism," and suddenly I had a picture of old Professor Richter, associated with my brief university days. Thin, bald and with his eyes peering nearsightedly across the steel bows of his spectacles. His reedy voice seemed to come toward me out of the night:

"Atavism—the recurrence in a descendant of characters of a grandparent, or more remote ancestor; the reversion to a more primitive type."

I quoted it and Dusty Rhoads nodded his head thoughtfully.

"Atavism, eh? It's a good word, sir. Yes, I reckon that that's the thing which reached out an' grabbed Timothy Lane one day back in April of 'Eighteen. Atavism—yeah, Timmy had it."

He stopped for a little and then went on: "Timmy came to the outfit late in 'Seventeen when we was at Camp Baker, gettin' ready to go overseas. He was assigned to 'L' Company of which I was the top-kick at the time—I was in the doughboys then, you understand. I transferred to the artillery after the Armistice but that's another story. . . .

"Well, Tim was just a big, good-natured hayseed right off the farm from some place out in Iowa an' as wooden as they come. We had plenty trouble teachin' him to step off with his left foot an' not to crack his front rank file on the head with his rifle when he was comin' down to order arms an' what battle sight meant an' how to take cover an' keep his place in a skirmish line. I remember the lads in the outfit used to razz him a lot—they was mostly old soldiers an' not yet used to seein' the regiment filled up with recruits picked green right off the tree. Tim, he just grinned an' kept right on tryin' though. I got to like Tim a lot."

"He was a big, husky fellow with a red face an' yellow hair which was considerable curly. He used to come around to my tent sometimes in the evenin's an' I'd talk to him of this an' that—places I'd been an' things I'd seen—which same he seemed to like to hear about. He didn't like the army, it bein' some different from plowin' or ridin' the mowin' machine around the old man's farm. Still, he figured that the government had taken on a job of work to do an' he would help if he could."

" 'It's like this, Sarge,' he says to me one night when we was sittin' an' smokin' while we waited for tattoo. 'I got two brothers, both of 'em married, an' they can run the farm for dad. The old man, he was at San Juan Hill an' he'd a felt kind of funny if I hadn't up an' joined.' "

The wind was lifting a little and it carried the faint tang of wood smoke. A comforting smell. A motorcycle wheeled up through the ironwoods to stop for a moment; then it pounded away into the mist.

DUSTY RHOADS went on. "He had a girl back there in Iowa an', when he come back from the war, she an' him was goin' to get married. He used to talk about her quite a bit—her name was Margaret, I remember. He showed me her picture once an' she was the kind you'd expect a man like Tim to pick. Blonde an' a little hefty with a sort of a placid look. The sort who would raise him a flock of kids an' know what to do when one of the cows got sick. Tim thought a heap of her, I gathered."

"Well, it was the night before we left for Hoboken an' the transport that I got a new slant on Tim. There was a big rowdy in the outfit—Michaelson, his name was—an' he was tough all right. He come into camp that night fightin' drunk an' he meets Timmy in the middle of 'L' Company street. Tim tries to go by him, not wishin' for any trouble, but Michaelson sees it different.

" 'Ho!' he says, nasty, '*You're* that such-an'-such that's been walkin' on my heels in the rear rank, ain't you? I'm goin' to spread your face all over the front of your shirt!' "

"Well, Tim don't say nothin' an' tries to go on by, but Michaelson swings on him. Tim was as clumsy as a three-legged cow but he wasn't exactly weak, sir. He picks himself up off his back an' lets go a haymaker which accounts for five of Michaelson's teeth, cuts his lips up right smart, flattens his nose an' does other general damage to his features—which was ugly enough to begin with. Michaelson takes up the prone position on the gravel an' stays there. All he needed was a bunch of lilies in his fist, Lieutenant.

"I'd seen the whole thing from my tent but there's times when a good top-kick keeps his hands off. Well, I come out then all surprised to see Michaelson tryin' to sit up with the blood pourin' out of his nose in quarts. Tim was just standin' there.

" 'You must have met up with an accident,' I says to Michaelson. 'You better go in your tent an' souse your head in a bucket of water before the cap'n sees you an' puts you to breakin' rocks. Maybe you remember somethin' being said about gettin' drunk tonight.'

"Well, he got the idea an' staggers off an' then I turned around to where Tim was standin'. Well, sir, you could have knocked me down with a thong brush! The boy's face was as white as a sheet, his knees was tremblin' an' his eyes looked as though he had seen a ghost.

" 'Oh, gosh! I hit 'im, Sarge!' he says to me in a shaky whisper. 'I didn't go to do it!'

" 'Hit 'im?' I asks. '*I* didn't see no hittin'.'

"But Timmy just stands there, shakin' his head an' mumblin'.

" 'I *hit* 'im!' he repeats. 'I saw the *blood!* I *hit* 'im!'

" 'Well,' I says to myself, 'I *will* be a such-an'-such!' an' I goes back into my tent. You see, sir, I was just beginnin' to understand what Tim was talkin' about. He wasn't afraid of Michaelson an' he wasn't afraid of bein' punished for hittin' Michaelson — as I had thought at first. No, the thing that was botherin' Tim was that he had smacked a fellow human being—if you could call that big ape a human being—an' *had made him bleed! That* was the thing Tim couldn't stomach an' can you beat *that* for a bird in an infantry regiment about to go overseas for some wholesale blood-lettin'?"

Down in front the shadows passed back and forth before the battle lanterns. The rain felt colder.

"WELL, we got across to France in December an' started to work with the Frenchies in a trainin' area back of the lines. I didn't see much of Tim any more for we were right busy. How they did work us! There wasn't no more talkin' in

the billets before tattoo; if we wasn't still workin' we was in our blankets an' glad a plenty to be there. We dug practice trenches an' we hiked till our boot soles fell off. We practiced throwin' grenades an' we took the dummies, with the bayonets an' we shot on the rifle range until the barrels of the pieces was too hot to touch.

"In March, along about the middle of the month as I remember it, the brass hats decided that we were good enough to go into a quiet sector an' relieve a couple of French divisions. They sent us into the line down south of Verdun an' told us to take care of the heights of the Meuse which is thereabout. It was pretty dead down there—hadn't been much of anything goin' on since the Germans made their big push in 'Sixteen.

"The battalion was in reserve at first, maybe three miles behind the lines an' we was beginnin' to believe that maybe it wasn't such a bad war after all. We learned different later but no matter about that. We was gettin' hot chow three times a day, plenty of sleep an' there wasn't too much trench diggin' to do. The Frenchies already had trenches dug half way back to Paris.

"We got a little shelling now and then but we didn't have no casualties an' the boys sort of looked forward to the mornin' an' evenin' hate to break up the monotony of things. Me, bein' an old soldier an' experienced in such things, I fixed me up some comfortable quarters in a broken down château an' settled myself down to see what was goin' to happen."

Dusty Rhoads stopped and stared away thoughtfully across the rain. Finally he went on:

"I reckon it was that château that started the thing off," he said soberly. "It had belonged to some rich Frenchman before the war an' he had filled it up with all sorts of crazy things. It was pretty well wrecked when *I* moved in but there was a room or two which wasn't as bad as the rest an', in one of those, was where I fixed me up my *boodewar*.

"It was a big room with most of one side shot away an' fallen down in a big heap of rubbish. One wall was still standing, though, an' there was a painting on that wall—about the grandest painting I ever saw, I reckon. Part of it was gone an' the canvas was tore an' ripped in places but there was enough of it left so that you could make out what it had been. I used to sit an' look at that thing by the hour an' wonder what it was all about for—mark you, sir—that was a fightin' man's picture!

"It was a cavalry charge but not any cavalry like you or *I* ever seen, Lieutenant. They was big swarthy-faced men with mustaches an' funny lookin' turbans an' they rode grand horses. They were all yellin'—seemed like you could almost hear 'em as you looked—an' they was wavin' short, curved sabers over their heads an' out in front was the toughest one of 'em all."

Dusty Rhoads stopped again but I didn't hurry him.

"A BIG, tough man," Dusty continued reflectively. "His face was lean and sort of fierce an', no matter where you stood when you looked at him, he seemed to be comin' right at you. I noticed particular that he carried a bow an', strapped on his back, was three quivers of arrows.

"Well, like I told you, the fellow that painted that picture sure knew his business. I reckon the Frenchy, that had owned the château, had been some kind of a collector because there was still a lot of books scattered around an' some broken swords like them in the picture. A lot of other junk, too.

"I looked at some of the books—what there was left of 'em—an' they were all about some tribe over in India or China or some place like that. Mongols, I think it called 'em. They were fighters, sir, an' some of their scraps would make our little argument up at Saint-Mihiel look like a pink afternoon tea."

"Jenghiz Khan," I murmured under my breath and Dusty Rhoads turned and looked at me.

"That was the name of one of 'em," he agreed. "I was tryin' to think of it. Now *there* was a general for you—but to get back to my yarn.

"We got our first casualties a couple of days later. A shell cracked down on three of the boys—two of 'em was killed an' the third messed up considerable. It kind of shook the outfit up a little an', that night while I was layin' on my blankets an' tryin' to read one of them books I had found, who comes into my *boodewar* but Timmy.

"I seen that he was pretty disturbed an' it wasn't until now that I noticed that he had changed considerable from the rosy-cheeked kid who had joined at Camp Baker. His face wasn't so rosy now—but it was his eyes I noticed first, his eyes an' his hands. His fingers were so shaky that he had trouble lightin' a cigarette an' his eyes were those of a man who is hangin' on with his fingernails to keep from goin' crazy.

"'Sit down, Timmy,' I says. 'I'm right glad to see you. What's on your mind?'

"'Sarge,' he says, 'you gotta help me!' I notice his voice is sort of strained an' husky. 'I can't go through with it! I'm goin' to desert, Sarge! I tell you I can't go *through* with it!'

"'Whoa!' I says, sittin' up an' taking notice in a hurry. 'You can't go around shoutin' things like that—Uncle will have you stood against a wall an' filled full of holes! Now what's the trouble?'

"'I wouldn't care, Sarge,' he goes on in that funny voice. 'It ain't that I'm scared, Sarge, but it's that *other!* It's *the killin'!* I can't *do* it, I tell you!'

"Then, all of a sudden, I remembers something which I had forgot—that night back in 'L' Company street when Michaelson goes off holdin' his bloody mug an' Tim stands there watchin'.

"Well, I talked to him a long time an' told him many things—the same which I had learned when we fought in the Islands an' down in Cuba an' the Boxers up in China. I told him that a soldier's job is different from almost any other job in the world an', while it's sometimes nasty, it's got to be done an' no questions asked. I told 'im that it wasn't our job to go out an' jab at people with a bayonet but it *was* our job to go over an' occupy a certain ridge or a certain clump of woods an', if people got in our way, they took the same chance of gettin' hurt as we did."

Dusty Rhoads reached for the makings of another cigarette and I held out my own soggy pack but he shook his head.

"Much obliged, Lieutenant, but I'll roll me one of my own. Somehow there's a taste to 'em that just ain't in one of your tailor-mades."

The light glowed across his dark face and then the shadows closed in again.

"WELL, Tim sat an' listened an' all the while his eyes was lookin' at that fierce picture on the wall—the candle was on a box beneath so that the light fell on it straight. I talked on for maybe half an hour an' then Tim stretches out his hand an' points at that picture an' I know that he hasn't been listenin' to what I been sayin'.

"'Sarge," he says in a queer sort of voice. 'Who *is* that big devil on the horse?'

"I thought that he'd gone off his nut entirely but, when I seen his eyes again, I knew it wasn't so, so I told him about some of the things I had been readin' in the books an' I showed him the broken swords with the funny carvings on their hilts. He lapped it all up an' I was glad a-plenty to find something that would take his mind off that *other* business.

"After a little he says, 'Maybe there's some more of this stuff in here, Sarge. Let's have a look, huh?' an' he fingers one of those broken swords like a kid with a new toy.

"'Okay by me,' I tells him an' we start diggin' into that pile of junk where the west wall had come down.

"We found some knives an' a couple of wicked-lookin' spears with the shafts busted an' a lot more books buried down under that trash heap. You might have thought that there was a mess kit full

of francs down there, though, the way Tim was rootin' around. After about ten minutes I hear him give a kind of a choky sigh and I turn around fast.

"'*Ahhhh!*' he says.

"Lieutenant, there wasn't much light from that candle but I could see plain an', in his hands, Tim has got the deadliest lookin' instrument I ever hope to see—oh, I didn't know that then—if I had I'd taken the thing away from him an' burned it then an' there. No, I didn't know."

Dusty Rhoads tossed his cigarette away and its end was a short red arc in the night; then the rain swallowed it up. He went on thoughtfully:

"It was a bow—maybe four feet long—an' it didn't take any second look to see that it wasn't no toy. It was a beautiful an' wicked thing made out of horn an' sinew an' wood an' it had silver nocks at the end for the bowstring. Then Tim reached down into the hole he had made in the rubbish an' he pulled out something else.

"He squatted down on the floor an' pulled them across his knees an' I saw that they were quivers—three of 'em made out of some sort of hard, black leather an' they was chock full of arrows. Well, sir, them arrows—just the sight of 'em—was enough to send cold chills up your spine. They were thick with short feathers an' the nastiest lookin' iron barbs on 'em you ever saw. *War* arrows!

"'All we need now is a tomahawk, Tim, an' we can play Indian,' I says, tryin' to be funny, but Tim didn't answer. I don't think he even heard me. After a minute he gets up an' goes on out into the dark without sayin' anything.

"Well, I thought about that considerable but the next night the word comes that we're to relieve the second battalion up in the line an' so we go up a couple of hours before daylight an', after we got there, we were plenty busy an' I didn't have time to worry about Timmy. I seen him now an' then an' I remember that I had a sort of a vague idea that he was changed somehow from that night when he had come into my *boodewar* back in the château. Nothin' that you could put your finger on exactly. Maybe it was that his face didn't seem so fat for one thing—it was leaner an' more sharp. There was something about his eyes, too."

DUSTY RHOADS stopped and pulled his helmet off to run his fingers through his gray hair. When he began again his voice was low and thoughtful.

"Once when I was a kid my old man gave me a hawk. I made a cage for it an' fed it an' all an' I was mighty proud of that hawk. The hawk didn't like *me*, though, an' when I was around it would just sit there an' look at me with the yellow eyes it had. Well, Tim's eyes reminded me a little of that hawk's—hard an' with something wicked way at the back of 'em. I thought of all this afterwards, you understand. At the time I was too busy to pay much attention.

"I told you that it was a quiet sector an' it was compared with the fightin' which the outfit saw at Soissons an' later in the Argonne but, just the same, there was damn few nights when we didn't have a man or two knocked off. There was some shellin' an' there was more raidin'. The lines were maybe a half a mile apart here an', at night, that half mile was full of raidin' parties—Krauts an' Yanks. There was wire parties an' outpost groups an' raiders out after prisoners an' other raiders out on their own hqoks. Oh, we kept busy all right!

"I kept thinkin' of Tim but he seemed to be all right now—went out on his share of the raids an' came back home none the worse for it. One night I was talkin' with Jake King, who was platoon sergeant of Tim's platoon, an' I asked Jake about him.

"'Oh, *him*,' Jake says, spittin' out of the corner of his mouth. 'You don't need to worry none about *that* boy—I've had 'im out three times now an' almost have to drag 'im back when it's time to come in. *He's* all right!'

"Well, that relieved me some. It looked

as though there hadn't been any more talk of desertin' an' I guessed that Tim had just been down in the dumps with the black dog on his trail that night. An' *that,* Lieutenant, was where I was wrong.

"'Doesn't take his bow an' arrows out with him, does he?' I asks just to josh Jake King. Jake looks blank.

"'What bow an' arrows?' he says but I told him that I was just pullin' his leg. I guessed that nobody but me had seen that wicked-lookin' bow an' I thought that was a little strange.

"We stayed in the lines another week an' the raidin' went on but now the patrols begun to come back with the word that the Krauts had stopped sendin' out parties in our sector. Our men were comin' back night after night with never a smell of an enemy patrol which was against the natural order of things. The boys were beginnin' to get a little jumpy; Lefty Simmonds, in the first platoon, came in with a funny story of things he had seen an' heard out there between the lines.

"Then, one mornin' just after stand-to, the old man sends for me to come down to his dugout. The battery officers are there an' a fellow named Schwartz who could talk German an' acted as an interpreter sometimes. They had a prisoner down there who had been captured over in the sector next to ours—a runty-lookin' devil who looked hungry an' half starved to death.

"'Sergeant Rhoads,' says the captain, 'this man's got a queer yarn. See if you can make any sense out of it.'

"Well, Lieutenant, I'd have thought that the Kraut was lyin' if I hadn't known what I knew. He belonged across the way an' he had gone down into the next sector an' come into the Yank lines to get himself captured. It seems that his outfit was scared silly by the things which had been goin' on. Patrols wouldn't go out after dark any more—even the sentries at the listenin' posts refused to stay out.

"As far I could gather it had started something like a week before. Three men in a listenin' post had been killed in a very unusual manner—shot through their chests an' torn in a way no bullet ever did. The next night it happened again. One man of a raidin' party was killed the same way though he wasn't six feet from the rest of the patrol when it happened. They hadn't heard anything except one man remembered a queer *thwinging* sound like a rubber band bein' snapped against a newspaper.

"Things like that had kept on happenin' until everybody was scared an' jumpy, an' then, three nights ago, one man had come staggerin' into their trench screamin' an' they saw what had been leavin' them big holes in the men they dragged back each night. He had an arrow in his chest, Lieutenant—a big thick arrow with short feathers an' a barb made of iron."

DUSTY RHOADS sucked thoughtfully at his cigarette. Through the rain, towards the east, I imagined that I caught the first hint of the coming dawn. It was ten minutes until stand-to.

"'Can't make nothin' out of what this bird is sayin', Cap'n,' I says an' I got out of that dugout. I had to have time to think an' I admit that I was some upset by what I had heard.

"After thinkin' it over I decided that I'd do a little gumshoe work on my own account that night an' so, after the patrols had gone out, I found me a place where I could listen an' watch an' I settled down for the evenin'—I had seen to it that Tim was detailed to go out that night.

"It was just about this time in the mornin' with daylight about to break an' I had been dozin', I guess. Anyway I woke up with a jolt an' the hair beginnin' to prickle along my scalp. A man was slippin' down into the trench. I managed to get out my flashlight an', in spite of the danger an' orders to the contrary, I flipped it on. It was Tim, all right.

"He stood there blinkin' an', for the second before I snapped that light off, I saw something that I'll not forget if I live to be a hundred. Tim stood there with his head thrown back an' his lips thin an'

white. His face didn't look fat any more —it was lean an' hatchet-like an' sort of sallow lookin' . . . an' . . . I swear to you, Lieutenant . . . *It was the face of that big devil in the paintin' back there in the château!*

"Tim was mumblin' to himself in the dark an' I was standin' there cold all over as the light went out. I had seen that Tim carried that bow in his hands an', strapped across his shoulders, was three quivers—not so full now. I wiped my forehead an' wondered what I was goin' to do next—an' then the Krauts solved that problem for me.

"All of a sudden a half a dozen shells busted down in front of us an' a machine-gun started to cough. Daylight was just breakin'. Then I heard the Springfields begin to crack, spiteful an' clean across the mornin', an' I knew that the Boche was tryin' to jump us some place. Joe Dawson runs into the bay where I am an'. I see that he is some upset.

"'Sarge!' he yells, 'the Krauts are jumpin' Jake King's outpost an' Jake says he's got to have help!'

"Well, it wasn't no time to stand around with my mouth open. I grabbed ten or a dozen men an' we went down that connectin' trench on the run. Jake had the most advanced post—maybe four hundred yards out an' hid in what had once been a stone barn. It stood up on a little rise at the head of a gully where the Germans could come up without bein' fired on from the big trench. It was a bad place an' we usually kept a squad or two out there for that reason.

"They was havin' it hot an' heavy when we got out there—Jake had got a bullet through his mouth an' was lyin' on the floor an' tryin' to swear. The Boche artillery planked a barrage down back of us an' there we were."

"I RECKON that those Krauts wanted that barn pretty bad an' the next half hour was as busy a one as you'd care to see. They rushed us three times but we had a machine-gun an' a basket full of grenades an' we poured those into 'em right hearty. Then things quieted down for a little bit but we seen that they hadn't give that barn up yet—not by as far as from here to there.

"Then they started comin' again—lots of 'em. It was kind of a gray, cloudy morning an' they looked big an' awful wicked, Lieutenant, with their loose-fittin' uniforms an' coal-scuttle helmets. Marty Shienieski, who's behind the machine-gun, yells over.

"'Give me some more belts!' he says, very excited.

"'Ain't none. You used 'em all up!' Joe Dawson answers him. 'Grenades is all gone, too!'

"'Grab a bayonet, boys,' I tells 'em calm-like—but I ain't feelin' calm with them ugly devils comin' up the hill seventy yards away.

"Well, we shot up the ammunition we had an' they kept on comin' at a sort of a shufflin' trot. I was just tryin' my bayonet to see that it was locked snug when I heard Marty yell.

"'Sarge! *Look!*'

"Lieutenant, it was the damnedest thing I ever seen! Tim was out there maybe ten yards in front of that stone barn in the gray morning. I could see a part his face from where I knelt an' it was lean an' yellow an' fierce—an' in his hand he had that *bow!* The Krauts saw him, too, an' they started yellin' an' shootin' but Tim wasn't hit although I could see the bullets kickin' the mud around his feet. He stands steady an' he reaches a hand over his shoulder slow an' he pulls out an arrow from one of the three quivers.

"It seemed to me somehow that the mornin' had gotten quiet all at once while I looked. Tim pulls that bow string back even with his ear. Well, I heard that *thwing* plain an' a big Kraut takes that arrow square through the middle. Tim reaches back to the quiver again an', all the while, I can hear him shoutin' something in a language I couldn't understand.

"In the stone barn we just stood an' watched an' the whole bunch, includin'

me, was scared stiff at what we was seein'. There was plenty of bullets thuddin' into that stone but not one of 'em touched Tim an' his bow string kept up that wicked singin' all the while.

"Well, there ain't much more to tell. The Krauts couldn't stand it—an' I don't blame 'em. They stopped, an' a man cries out in a scared an' whimperin' voice, an' then they're piling back down that gully with Tim's arrows overtakin' 'em. Tim begins to follow an' then I hear the sort of shrill whistle which means a big one is comin' close.

"We ducked an' ducked fast. There was a tremendous big flash an' a noise which like to split our eardrums an'* then the rock slivers was whining about our heads. No more came an', after a minute, I got up. I seen that Tim was layin' on his face out there, half naked an' with his bow busted an' his quivers empty.

"Well, it was our chance an' we grabbed our wounded, includin' Tim, an' we beat it back to the lines. We made it all right an', sir, were we glad to get there. Tim was still alive as they took him back to the aid station but first I had stripped off them quivers an' I left 'em out there between the lines where they belonged."

DUSTY RHOADS stopped and smoked thoughtfully for a long minute. Whistles were beginning to shrill farther down the line; stand-to was close now.

"That's all?" I asked.

"Not quite," Dusty Rhoads told me slowly. "A week or so afterward they pulled us out an' we went up to the Soissons scrap—then come the Argonne an' one day, when we were lyin' in the muddy woods up past Letanne on the other side of the Meuse, a fat major comes up an' says that the war is over. We went on into Germany after that an', in 'Nineteen, I come back to the States havin' almost forgot poor old Tim.

"I put in a couple of hitches on the east coast an' then I decided that I'd like to see the Islands again, so I took me a reenlistment furlough to drive across the country an' I started out. I got into a little burg named Prairie City, just outside Des Moines, one night an' decided to stay there until the next mornin'—the Lizzie bein' in need of rest.

"Well, I was walkin' along the main drag that night about seven an' I heard somebody call my name. I turned around an' I'll be blowed to little pieces if it wasn't Tim!

"'Hello, Sarge,' he says.

"He looked just the same as when I had first seen him at Camp Baker except that he was a little fatter an' his face was even more good-natured lookin'. Well, you can believe I was glad to see him an' we went into a restaurant an' had supper together while we talked about old times. He was married, he told me, an' livin' on the old man's farm. He had married Margaret an' they had three kids now an' was very happy. I guess we talked for a couple of hours about this an' that an' finally he brings up the subject that I was wantin' to ask about—but was afraid to. But he mentioned it first.

"'Sarge,' he says, 'you remember that night up by Verdun when I come into the château where you was bunkin'?'

"'I remember,' I says.

"'Sarge,' he says, 'I'm goin' to tell you something I ain't never told to anybody —not even Margaret. I'm glad that shell got me that night! I was goin' crazy, Sarge! There was somethin' in me that seemed to keep pullin' and pullin 'and I couldn't get away from it. I had bad dreams—terrible ones which I couldn't remember in the daytime—but—I *know* I was goin' crazy!'

"I saw the light then, Lieutenant. It was this—Tim didn't remember anything about that bow or goin' up into the lines or about the fight at the stone barn. He thought that shell had got him back when he was visitin' me there at the old château!"

Dusty Rhoads flipped away his last cigarette. Behind us the range section was checking the instruments—the voices of the men came faintly to where we sat.

"Height finder okay."
"Director okay."
"Range section okay."

I STOOD up stiffly and Dusty Rhoads lounged beside me. Other voices were making faint reports through the rain. Morning stand-to was here.

Dusty said reflectively, "I didn't tell him any different, Lieutenant. I figured that thing was better buried—like the bow had been—out there between the lines. The next morning I got in the flivver an' pulled out for McDowell an' the transport. What was that you said atavism was again?"

"The recurrence in a descendant of characters of a grandparent or more remote ancestor; the reversion to a more primitive type."

Dusty nodded solemnly. "That about fits in, I reckon. What do *you* think, sir? You remember I told how he was when he come into that château—all shakin' and talkin' about desertin'?"

I nodded.

"Well, I got a theory—maybe I'm all wrong—but my guess is that Tim had been fightin' with some thousand-year-old ancestor who had been knockin' at his door an' tryin' to come in, so to speak, ever since that night when big Michaelson got smacked back at Camp Baker. The old boy was gettin' the best of Tim that night when he come to the château an', when the kid saw that picture on the wall, Tim Lane disappeared altogether an' the ancestor took his place. That's *my* idea of it, Lieutenant—but maybe *you* can tell me?"

I tossed away my cigarette and pulled the helmet down a little so that the rain wouldn't drip into my eyes. The clouds were beginning to gray in the east; they hung heavy against the cliffs which were taking shape in the morning. There would be no dawn attack today. Not in that growing, sightless fog.

"Tim Lane . . . Timmy Lane . . . Timmy Lane." The name danced through my mind with a mad persistence. Where had I heard of a man named Tim Lane? Then I knew and the palms of my hands were wet with something more than the rain.

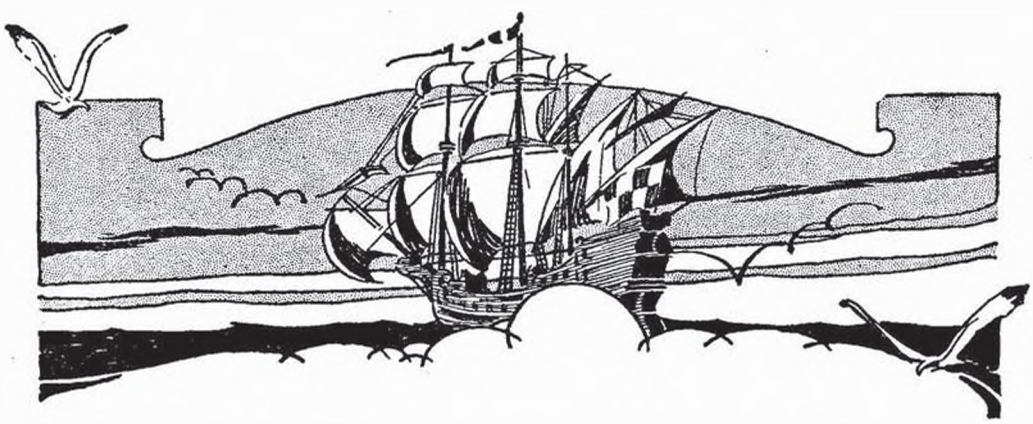
I heard myself shouting.

"Tim Lane. *Tamerlane!* The lame Mongol!"

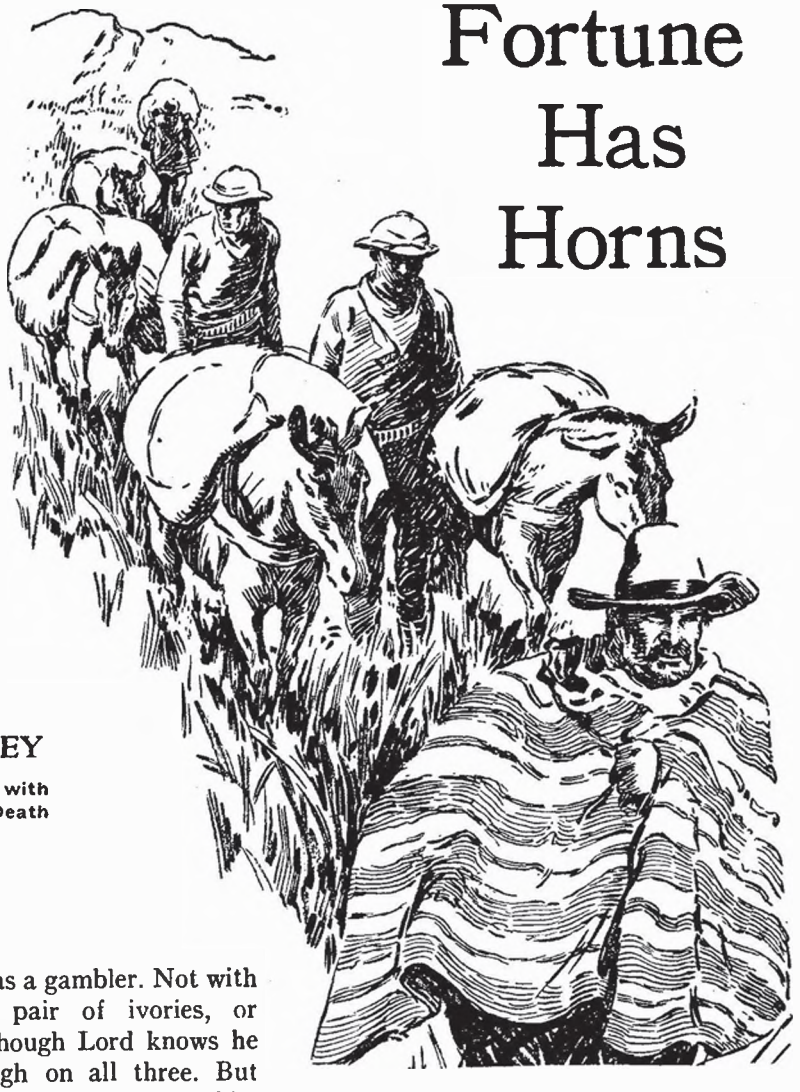
Suddenly I could see him, grinning across the gap of five hundred years, as he swept forward at the head of his shouting horsemen. Horsemen whose shoulders bore the three arrow-filled quivers and who brandished short and wicked bows in their hands.

The answer?

I didn't know. As I went toward the gun line to take the reports the cheerful notes of "Soupy, soupy, soupy," drifted across from the ironwood grove. The odor of boiling coffee mingled with the smell of wood smoke and was a pleasant thing in the morning.



Fortune Has Horns



By

ALEXANDER KEY

Author of "The Book with the Golden Leaves," "Death Certificate," etc.

CORCORAN was a gambler. Not with cards and a pair of ivories, or even horses, though Lord knows he dropped enough dough on all three. But you'd understand if you ever saw him squinting at a mountain—a mountain that might have gold in it. And you'd damned sure understand if you'd been with him that time on the Matamata. . . .

My racket in those days was oil, and my trouble was politics. My company's leases had run out, and the new dictator wouldn't renew them. So the company had quietly decamped and left me with only a month's draft in my pocket and a ticket home. I didn't want to go home; I wanted to get roaring drunk. And before I got drunk I knew I'd better write a long letter to Raquel and tell her it wasn't any use.

I knocked down the ticket for half price, went over to the Yankee Club and tried to mull through the Raquel Mackenna problem.

That was the worst of it. The Raquel problem wouldn't have seemed so bad at home; things are more democratic in the States. But Peru had never heard of the black days after '29, and the old families here in Lima, with four centuries of gold and silver platters behind them, would make a Long Island millionaire feel like a piker and look like a race tout. And don't let the name Mackenna fool you. Ever hear of Vicuña Mackenna? Never mind. The Mackennas fought with San Martin and Bolivar, and long before that,

when they were burning witches in Salem, the Mackennas owned villas in Chile and mines in Ecuador.

So that was that. It wasn't any use. I was trying to find words to tell Raquel about it when little Corcoran came in. He ordered three whiskys, downed them in three gulps, turned and clipped out: "Any of you dirt-diggers know the Matamata country?"

Everybody looked blank, even old Phillips, the copper scout.

"It's a nice place to keep out of," I said. "I saw the mouth of it where it dumps into the Ucayali."

Corcoran swung on me. He was a little, bow-legged, sun-dried wisp of a man with a pouter-pigeon chest gained from twenty years in high altitudes. He had white eyebrows over very pale, very hard blue eyes. He flipped something that looked like a gold coin, stared at it, said: "I can't afford to go that way. Too far; too expensive. I'd have to go fifteen hundred miles down the Marañon, hit the Amazon, and come way back up the Ucayali. I want to cross the divide and tackle the headwaters from the *montaña* side."

"Sorry," I said. "I knew some guys went in there once. They never come out."

"One came out," said Corcoran. And then added: "What was left of him."

"He find anything?" asked Phillips.

"Oh, he'd panned some dust."

Phillips snorted. Everybody knew you could find the stuff in most of the east-slope streams; the trouble was to get it out and live to spend it. "You're crazy," Phillips said. "Why didn't you stick by that Urubamba business?"

"I did," rasped Corcoran. "And all I got was pretty vases. The government claimed 'em. Artifacts. Now I'm trying the Matamata—but I've got to have a guide to locate it."

"If you want to die of curare," growled Phillips, "get in touch with Big Pedro Ramos. He piloted the Davidson expedition, and he was with Hendricks and Vilanti on the survey. You can't trust him, but he knows more about the *montaña* country than any man alive, and he's strong as an ox."

"Where'll I find him?"

"In Trujillo."

"Thanks."

CORCORAN turned slowly, looking at each one of us. He flipped that little gold thing again and his pale eyes rested on me. Suddenly he sat down beside me and started drumming on the table. He had the inscrutable look of a poker player, but I knew part of what was in his mind. He didn't know much about the jungles, and he wanted someone else along besides Ramos who did.

"Go on, don't pick on me," I told him. "I don't want to leave my hands in a Mangeroma cook pot."

He ignored that. "Hayes," he said slowly. "Two's company; three's a crowd. I need a crowd. Let's see: you're twenty-nine, weigh about one-eighty, and you've got enough red Irish in you to see it through. Besides, you've lived on the Amazon side long enough to learn to eat monkey meat and keep your nose out of trouble. How much money can you raise in an hour?"

"About five hundred. It's all I've—" I stopped and stared at him. "Beat it! Leave me alone. That country's poison. I've got a letter to write and a lot of likker to drink."

"Yeah, so you have," he murmured drily. He leaned back, a queer, tight quirk to his mouth, and said nothing for about a minute. Then he began quietly: "Hayes, fifteen years ago I went through the same thing you're going through now. It's tough—and I had no prospects and no job. Sure, I know you're washed up here, and I know about Raquel. It's all over Lima."

I started to gulp something but he held up his hand. "Raquel's a good kid, and she's worth taking a lot of chances for. But you've got to have a hundred grand in your mitt before you can look Don Carlos Mackenna in the eye. All right. I know a place where you can pick up five times that much in a month."

He let that sink in, and went on slowly. "It'll take every penny we can scrape together, and we'll have to travel light and work fast. There's a rainy season coming. But we can outfit in Trujillo, sign up Ramos, and maybe be on our way in five days. It'll be bugs and malaria—but there's a fifty-fifty chance of winning."

He stood up. "The Trujillo plane leaves in an hour. Think it over."

He left abruptly.

I WASTED ten of those sixty minutes thinking of shrunken heads I'd seen for sale in Iquitos, and remembering how much cooked monkeys looked like boiled babies. And suddenly I was writing a hurried note to Raquel:

My darling:

Your Tony's off to the hinterlands to grab fortune by the horns. If you love me, wait for me. It may be six months. But when I come back I'll have enough. No time to explain; must hurry to catch the Trujillo plane, but I'll be thinking of you every minute.

I got a boy to take it to Raquel's old Rosa, who had carried notes for us since Don Carlos had put me on the ineligible list, then I crammed a couple of duffle bags full of junk, tucked my cash into a money belt, and made it to the airport with nine seconds to spare.

Corcoran was waiting. "I figured you'd come," he said simply. "I've got tickets."

And when we were in the air he handed me a letter. "Taxi driver brought it just before you came. Fast work."

It was from Raquel, whose papa, I think, had always been sorry he'd allowed her to go to Wellesley.

My Tony:

What's happened? I'm frightened. No, I'm not. You can do it, Tony, and I'll spend all my allowance subsidizing the saints till you come back. Of course I'll wait, stupid; what else can a poor maid do in this man's country? But Tony, fortune has terribly sharp horns; be careful. Just come back.

Just come back! If she knew where I was going she'd hide her lovely honey-blond head in a black mantilla and give me up. I buttoned the letter carefully in my breast pocket and tried to study Corcoran's map. Once I looked out of the window at that tortured, snow-capped world of granite on the right. Some of it was four miles high, and we had three-hundred miles of it to cross on foot and mule-back. After we crossed it there'd be the sweet job of locating the Matamata. Well, that was Big Pedro's worry.

We got our first kick in the pants when we grounded in Trujillo. Everywhere I looked I saw posters, and they were all offering a reward of ten thousand soles—more than a year's salary to me—for the carcass of one Pedro Ramos.

It seemed that Big Pedro was overhandy with a knife, and that he'd done a neat job of butchering a Trujillo official. When the constabulary went after him he'd done some more knife work, and now he was Peru's Number One bad man.

MY hopes, if you could have called them that, did a tailspin. Corcoran shrugged. He flipped that gold pocket piece of his, looked at it, and rasped: "Hayes, take part of your money and buy some mules, packs and equipment. Don't forget medicine and some trade junk. I'll take care of the main grub later. Then pick out an honest Quichua, if you can find one, and hit the road for Huamachuco. If I'm not there when you get there, go on to Tocache and wait." And before I could ask questions he was gone.

It took me two days to round up the mules and a Quichua, and two more to get them started; and before I reached Ruamachuco the Quichua deserted with one of the mules. Corcoran wasn't in the town, so I got some warm clothes, another mule and another Indian, and started for Tocache, a good two hundred miles away. On that jaunt I wished I'd bought llamas instead of mules. I lost the new mule, half the equipment and all the trade goods in a mile-deep plunge off the old Inca trail. I went snow-blind on the high pass and

rolled in agony for a week, thinking my eyeballs would burst; I got frost-bitten, and before it healed I was blistered on the hot plateau lower down and nearly strangled in a sand storm. And finally I reached Tocache.

Corcoran wasn't there. He appeared exactly twenty-seven days later, gaunt and thin-lipped, and with him was Big Pedro. Don't ask me how he did it; he's never told me. But Corcoran knows his mountain people as well as he knows placer mining. It cost him his last sol to find Ramos, and all he had when he arrived were two sorry mules, his gun and the clothes on his back, and this knife artist.

Big Pedro Ramos. Six feet of barrel-chested brawn, black-bearded and with a laugh that made the mountains ring. There was an old scar running from his hawk's beak to his ear, and it gave the left side of his face the look of a flawed copper casting. The mere sight of him frightened the Indians in Tocache. Even if they'd known there was a price on his head, they wouldn't have come near him.

I asked him if he thought he could find the Matamata.

He waved his huge hairy hand in a gesture that ignored the wild canyon of the Huallaga in front of us and dwarfed the fifty thousand square miles of grim mountains and black, pathless jungle beyond. It was filled with head-hunters and hand-eaters, with yellow men and brown men who were devils with poison, and with poisonous springs and snakes and Upas trees, and it was the home of the *mata calado*—the silent death that can strike you suddenly without a breath or a sound, and leave your dead body without a scratch on it. It was the breeding place of a thousand unpleasant streams, and the Matamata was only one of them.

Big Pedro laughed. "But yes, senor, I can find it. Why not? I hear there is much gold on the Matamata!"

"I cut him in for a twenty percent split," Corcoran explained in English. "It was the only way to get him and make him stick." He spat. "We've already used up a third of our time—and there's a rainy season coming. Let's get going."

WE spent the rest of our money in Tocache buying dry grub and some more trade goods and equipment, all at a high price, and lost nearly a week getting it safely across the roaring Huallaga. My Indian was a staring, long-nosed Inca whom I called Boggle because I couldn't pronounce his real name; I thought he would quit cold when he first saw Big Pedro, but Corcoran told him he could have the mules if he stayed with us till we got back. Boggle stuck, but all the way up that nightmare of rocks beyond the Huallaga, and down through the high slopes of *páramo* grass on the other side. Boggle watched Big Pedro like a rabbit would a wolf. After we dipped past the timber line and wandered for days in the rolling *montañas* while Ramos sought a landmark, Boggle had other things to worry him.

Below the two-mile level the mountain mist rose and we could see the awesome black-green jungle of eastern Peru and Brazil stretching interminably away at our feet. I was looking at the little wisps of steam rising from the hidden watercourses when Big Pedro clouted Boggle out of his way and strode to the opening of a game trail. Tufts of bright feathers dangled gaily from a string stretched across the opening.

Corcoran saw it, and being a western cordillera man, didn't understand. But big Pedro cursed and slashed at it with his machete. *"Por Dios!* The infidels. They would stop us here when there is no other way to go! The Matamata is two, three days to the north, and we must follow the lay of the land or it will be impossible to find it!" It was the first time I had seen him angry. He raved, for he was as eager to reach the Matamata as we were.

"What's the matter?" rasped Corcoran.

"It means keep out," I told him. "I'd just as soon face a few regiments of riflemen as pass those feathers. In fact, I'd rather."

Corcoran hooked his thumbs into his cartridge belt and stood with his bow legs well apart. "Hinckle went this way," he said slowly. "I talked to him in Tocache last year."

Hinckle was the guy that I didn't think had come out. It was the first time Corcoran had mentioned his name.

"What happened to Hinckle?" I asked.

"He died," said Corcoran. "I might never have run across him if some Quichuas hadn't found him. He didn't have any hands. What do you think he bumped into down here? Jivaros? Antipas?"

"No. Mangeromas. They're hand-eaters. You know how to play your cards, don't you, Corcoran?"

"Yeah. If I'd told you before you might have thought twice about coming. I needed you." He looked at Big Pedro. "You sure there's no other possible way to get to that place in time?"

Ramos glared at him with his black beard bristling. "*Mil diablos!* No—not if we would beat the rainy season! And we have no more time to lose now. But *Senores,* I would find it pleasanter to be decently executed in Trujillo."

CORCORAN grunted, and made the inevitable gesture when he was deciding something. He flipped that gold pocket piece and looked at it. He'd found it on his Urubamba trip, and I think he considered it a good luck charm. Every born gambler carries something like that. "Hayes," he rasped, "you're elected to take some trade goods down and leave 'em in an open spot somewhere."

"Very well, Little Corporal." The scheming devil knew I'd rather be dead here than broke in Lima. I took a few knives and some bright calico to the half-mile level where the bamboo begins to grow, and left them beside a spring. It was dark and silent in there, but I wasn't bothered. I came back and we waited until late the next afternoon.

Corcoran might shoot at a hundred-to-one chance, but he was no fool. We started downward with our guns ready, counting on night to hide us if our peace offering hadn't been accepted.

The offering still lay there. And on both sides of the spring were little sticks, each holding its gay feather warning. They'd undoubtedly seen us, they didn't like what they saw, and they were probably getting a reception committee ready for us right now. And no wonder. Too many Spanish had come down from the cordilleras, looking for gold, women, and whatever they could pick up. There were four centuries of bloody history behind those tufts of feathers.

Ramos took one look at them and jerked the thirsty mules away from the spring. "May be poisoned," he rumbled through his beard. "We go this way—and we go fast! We do not touch any water until tomorrow night." He slapped his mule with his machete and plunged into the undergrowth.

We followed as best we could, coaxing the balky animals over boulders and fallen timber and around bamboo tangles, and using our electric torches only a flicker at a time. It had been twilight at the spring, but ten steps off the trail it became black, opaque dark.

I remember praying then that Ramos would not go further down where the real jungle began. You have to cut your way through that stuff, and sometimes you have to crawl. I didn't want to die where I could feel slimy things under my fingers. But Big Pedro led us downward, and it cost us Boggle and two of the mules.

PERHAPS the jungle demons know what happened to patient, long-nosed Boggle. I don't. It was nearly morning when it happened and the crazy howling monkeys were making my ears vibrate. I was close behind Ramos and we were hurrying, practically throwing ourselves through that strangling growth, slashing at it with our machetes and tearing at it with our hands. Fear does strange things to people. We didn't know we were tired, that we'd been driving ourselves like devils all night. And none of us even realized we

were frightened. There was just the feeling of a great hand pressing behind us in the blackness, and each hour it pushed a little harder and we tried to go a little faster. Whenever we stopped for a few seconds it was not to rest, but to listen. And we heard only the silence, the hot, stifling silence of the darkest dark on earth, the silence that throbs in time with your heartbeats.

The last time we stopped I could dimly make out Big Pedro in front of me, and the red howlers were beginning to shatter that silence. It must have been nearly daylight. Boggle was behind me, and Corcoran was last in line. I thought I heard Boggle mumbling to his mule, and I was thinking this was no place to bring the fool beasts. Then I recognized Corcoran's rasping whisper.

"Where's Boggle?"

"He—he *was* between us," I told him.

We looked at each other. Suddenly I motioned him to stay where he was, and I started back. I went at a crouch, counting my steps so I wouldn't get lost, and I was as quiet as a white man can be. The mule might have escaped my attention altogether if I hadn't been feeling my way carefully along; when I'd gone about a hundred paces to the rear I touched its furry rump. It had fallen in a fern tangle and there was a six-foot poison-tipped hunting arrow through its belly.

I didn't look for Boggle. I knew it wasn't any use. And I can't explain it—why they happened to get him and not the rest of us, and why I didn't run into trouble back there. The only thing I could do was to salvage that two-hundred-pound pack from the mule. I shouldn't have taken the time for it, but I heaved the thing to my shoulders and hurried back to Corcoran.

"I'll always remember Corcoran's comment then, for it showed the attitude with which he'd tackled the entire Matamata trip. "Shucks," he said. "We needed that mule." He meant it, and it was true. We needed the mule more than we needed Boggle—if we expected to pack gold out over the mountains. I think, hidden somewhere in that pouter-pigeon chest of his, is a heart as big as any man's; but we were playing a close, terrible game now and Corcoran had to watch every card.

WE divided the contents of the pack up among the other mules, and we did it on the move. Then we swept on with all the speed we possessed. At the moment our main fear was darts; you can't hear a blow-gun, and half the time you don't know you've been hit. The things come in a shower and a scratch from one is enough. The arrows are more horrible, but it takes a bit of maneuvering to shoot them, for a man has to sit down and stretch the bow with his feet.

A little while later we crashed through into daylight, a thin, blinding shaft of it that sliced the black waters of a stream. If there hadn't been the need for hurry I think Big Pedro would have picked a better place to cross. But he plunged straight ahead like a wild tapir, sending the spray flying, and we followed. We lost the second mule there.

I was last this time, and my tired animal decided to balk in mid-stream. I was jerking at him and cursing when Corcoran yelled and went splashing up the shallows in a frenzy. Pain like a red-hot poker ripped through my right leg; the water boiled around me and I heard Big Pedro bellowing. I thought it was arrows again.

"*Dios mio! Piranhas!* Hurry, you fool! Hurry!"

I dove shoreward faster than I've ever moved in my life, stark fear in my heart and the worst horror in creation gouging at my boots. My mule screamed behind me, and then I was clawing up the bank, Corcoran pulling me to safety while the water boiled and churned with fish. Little fish that clung to my clothes and feet. Cannibal fish. Piranhas. Fiends with snapping jaws and razor teeth that left holes as big as half-dollars in my boots when I knocked them off.

I kicked the horrid snapping things away and stood shaking behind a tree, staring at my screaming mule. It screamed

like a man. For about five seconds I hated that mule; it had nearly been the death of me. After that I was just sick. The mule reached shallow water and had only a few yards to go when it collapsed because it didn't have any legs left to carry it. Fish smothered it instantly, thousands of them, leaping high and fighting one another for a taste of blood.

"If I'd told you about this," I said to Corcoran, rubbing it in, "maybe you'd have thought twice about coming."

"It's part of the gamble," Corcoran rasped between tight lips. "We've still got two miles, and you and Ramos have strong backs. That's why I picked you. Let's get going. Those fish will keep any one from following us, and we ought to be in safe territory in a few hours."

I didn't say anything. This was hardly the beginning, and I knew it. Besides a mule, those fish had cost us half our remaining food supply and all our quinine.

WE reached the Matamata two days later—with one mule. The other simply dropped in its tracks. It may have been the *mata calado* that did it, as Ramos inferred fearfully, or the beast might have been scratched by a dart and we failed to notice it.

But we reached the Matamata, the three of us and one mule, and Big Pedro laughed for the first time in days.

"Mira Hola!" His great voice and sweeping hand was like Balboa showing us the Pacific. "I told you I would find it, *senores.* Behold—the Matamata!"

I looked down at the place and spat into it. A muddy, shallow stream that scrawled between wide clay banks and matted, towering harwoods. Farther down it deepened and disappeared in a black tangle. The place was beastly hot, with a steamy, stifling kind of heat that clamped on your lungs and made you gasp for breath. The still air sang with insects; mosquitoes, piums, flies—stinging, biting, crawling things that made life a torment. I tried to find our head nets, but they'd been lost with my mule.

Ramos went scrambling down the bank. He sprawled into the water, trembling hands clawing along the bottom with a kind of crazed eagerness. His hands came up and he stared stupidly at their contents. It was not the fine yellow gravel that I'd expected to see, that I'd been counting on seeing during every tortuous day since leaving Lima. It was not gravel or even sand. It was just gobs of sticky blue clay.

Clay! You don't find gold in clay.

Big Pedro roared oaths. He flung the stuff away, whirled, saw Corcoran, and came slowly up the bank. He was suddenly very light on his feet for so big a man and the scar running from his hawk's nose was livid. He thrust out his beard at Corcoran and in his hand was a knife. Probably the same knife he'd used so well in Trujillo.

"Canalla!" he muttered. "You told sweet lies to make me bring you here. I lead you through many deaths to a place of hell because I believed you. *Porque?"*

Corcoran did not move. "Put your knife away," he said.

"I will put it away when you show us gold. *Basta!* Find gold in that mud!"

Corcoran drilled him with his pale blue eyes. "You fool," he intoned slowly, "do you think I'd go to the trouble of saving the likes of you from an execution, and risk my own neck and everything I own if I didn't know it would be worth it?" He jerked his thumb to the left. "See that?"

I followed Big Pedro's eyes. Through a rift in the jungle I could see fragments of green foothills, and a patch of cool mountain beyond.

"The *montañas,*" said Corcoran. "Full of ore. This stream drains them. Go back down there, Ramos; take one of those hunks of clay on the bottom and cut it open with your pretty knife. See what you find."

Big Pedro's eyes widened. He leaped back into the water and I followed. The entire bottom was clay, all in loose, fist-size hunks formed by the water at flood stage. We tore open some of the balls and

the place echoed with Big Pedro's roaring laugh.

"Sacred Mother! We've found the wealth of the Inca!"

"That's what Hinckle found," said Corcoran. "It's a rare formation, but any placer man will tell you it happens sometimes."

In the center of each of those blue hunks of clay was a greasy wad of soft gray-yellow stuff. An amateur could tell what it was. An amateur could gather it with a flick of his wrist, and there was enough here to keep him busy for years.

But there was a catch in it. My eye traveled up the bank and found high water mark on the boles of the trees. When the rainy season came every drop of water on the nearby *montañas* would come this way, and the Matamata would spread out through the jungle in a ten-mile-wide flood.

"We've got just five weeks left before the rains come," I told Corcoran. "It's mighty little time to make a killing. I'm going to work."

WE all went to work. We were a little crazy about it at first—and who wouldn't be after fighting the worst mountains and the meanest jungle on earth, and finding more wealth than you could ever hope to get your hands on? And only a few weeks to salvage it. I cursed those days I'd spent waiting for Corcoran in Tocache and began working like a maniac. None of us ate that first afternoon, nor did we rest; we were three lunatics splashing after those gobs of blue clay, opening them in a frenzy and spooning their contents into little leather bags Corcoran had brought. Corcoran worked in swift silence; Ramos went about it in trembling clumsiness, making eager clucking sounds in his throat and sometimes roaring in delighted laughter when his knife exposed a yellow nugget.

Twilight stopped his laughter abruptly, and we all stood mute and suddenly sober at the ringing of a xylophone. Just a few high, staccato notes, coming from some indefinite direction miles away. An interval, and it was answered from another quarter.

"What's that?" said Corcoran. "Sounded like a marimba."

"It's the original xylophone," I told him. "Those devils talk on them. My guess is that some news hound is telling all the maloccas about us."

"What are they—Mangeromas?"

"Maybe. Maybe Antipas or Huambizas; they're just as bad." Then I added: "Head specialists. We'd better set out some peace offerings."

I did up some small bundles of beads and calico and we left them on the game trails on either side of the river. Jungle people are children and there was a chance the stuff might keep their minds off our heads for a while.

The next day we got some system into our work. Ramos and I hauled the lumps out of the water and Corcoran crouched under the bank opening them. For a while we made good progress for Corcoran was fast enough to keep us both busy. I'd have given a lot for Boggle then, for we certainly needed a watchdog.

The leather bags grew heavier, and we grew thinner. At the first crack of dawn we were at it; we stayed at it until the moon went down; on the black nights we built a fire and worked by the light of it until we dropped. There were no piranhas in that water, but the insects hovering over it were as bad. They stung us all until we were unrecognizable; they were in our food and our eyes; they blinded us—there were days when I stumbled back and forth with my armfuls of clay, counting my steps because my lids were swollen shut. And always I seemed to hear the faint, devilish music of those xylophones. Sometimes at night I would spring out of a drugged sleep, sweating and shaking, thinking I'd heard their talk.

"Get a grip on yourself," Corcoran told me once. "Two weeks or so to go, and we haven't got half the stuff we ought to have."

The Matamata had turned him into a thin, red-eyed scarecrow. His hand on my

shoulder was hot. "You've got fever," I said. "Malaria."

"I know it," he said. "You have it too. But there's no quinine."

WE had to keep going, and we did —with time out each day for chills and fever, which became steadily worse as we became weaker. Big Pedro didn't catch it and he worked on tirelessly, cursing us because we couldn't keep up with him, and cursing the ringing xylophones that flayed our nerves raw. A crazed look had come over him, and he seldom laughed.

It was the thought of Raquel that drove me on, that kept my reason clear. During those final days she was in my mind every waking minute, a kind of mental stabilizer. "Fortune has terrible sharp horns," she'd written. "Be careful. Just come back. . . ."

Dear child. I'd come back, and I'd bring her something other than yellow gold as a memento of the Matamata. That idea was born when I found the piece of spodumene.

It was good spodumene, milky-blue but flawless—the kind that is hard to find. It isn't worth much, but I didn't want this gift to have a monetary value. Cut and polished by a gem expert I could see it pendant at Raquel's throat, a live thing taking on all her soft coloring.

I found more pieces in among the clay; picking the best ones I thrust them in my money belt, and then forgot them under the press of other matters.

Food was one. It was all gone now, so we took turns hunting monkeys. And then one night, when the first rain came slashing down and put out our fire, and we lay in our hammocks too exhausted to even stretch a tarpaulin, Big Pedro announced that a jaguar had put an end to our remaining mule.

We'd built a stout corral for that mule, we'd petted him and fed him, for he had to help carry our stuff over the mountains. The loss of him was tragedy.

I heard Corcoran swear softly. For awhile he didn't say anything, but I knew he was lying there fingering that good luck piece he'd found on the Urubamba, and probably wishing it were Aladdin's lamp. Then I heard him slump to the ground and I guessed he was hefting those little leather bags that held our gold.

"Hayes," he whispered in a tight voice. "See—see how much of this stuff you think you can carry."

I fell down beside him, groping for the bags with unsteady hands. There were only six of them—and we'd planned on filling at least ten. Each weighed probably sixty pounds. Nearly two hundred thousand dollars' worth altogether, but it might just as well be so much sand unless we could pack it out.

I tried to lift a pair of them. Then I tried just one. I could get it off the ground, but I was so weak I couldn't have carried it fifty yards. I could have cried.

"It looks like a stalemate," I muttered. "What the devil are we going to do?"

"Do?" snarled Corcoran. "There's only one thing left to do. Make a damned dugout and float down to the Amazon! It's our only chance. *Verdad,* Ramos?"

"Si, Señor," the big fellow rumbled. "But certainly. It is the only thing left to do."

A hundred, maybe two hundred miles down the unexplored Matamata; several hundred more on the Ucayali before we might find a river steamer or a white man. No food. And worse, no quinine. I knew we couldn't do it and live.

And then I thought of Ramos. He could do it; he was strong and he didn't have malaria. It struck me suddenly that he'd been thinking of this all along. They wanted him for murder in Trujillo—but down on the Amazon he'd be free, and he'd have a fortune. All six bags of it. I never found a trace of that last mule, but I'm certain now that no jaguar ever killed it.

THE dugout was our only chance; we started work on it the next morning. A raft would have been easier, only there's very little wood in this country that floats, and none of it grew on the Matamata. Not even balsa or the giant bamboo.

Big Pedro felled a partly hollow tree on the bank and we went at it with fire and ax. It took us two weeks of mad, torturous labor to shape it and cut and burn it out. Two weeks that we'd hoped to spend filling our other bags, for the Matamata rose slowly at first. We rigged tarpaulins over the dugout so the fierce morning downpours wouldn't put out our fires. The fires had to char the wood before we could chip it, as this low country stuff is as hard as iron. And it had to be chipped thin so it would be light enough to float, safely.

The Matamata was lapping the top of its banks and beginning to overflow before we were ready. The xylophones were tappy-bonging a new tune now, a furious, menacing sound that was like a blood cry. We knew we didn't have any time left. We hurriedly chopped paddles, threw our stuff into the dugout, and the second it was bobbing in the overflow we pushed off downstream.

Big Pedro's laugh came back to him then. *"Hola!* For luck, *Senores!* May we reach the great river top side up!"

Yeah! I glanced back at Corcoran sitting in the middle. He was beginning to shake with a chill and his drawn face was a death's head. I guess I looked as bad to him. Two hundred thousand dollars under the thwarts, and Big Pedro laughing. Corcoran glinted at me and spat.

I've often wondered what Big Pedro would have done if he hadn't hit rapids an hour later. He might have waited until the chills and fever finished us, or he might have used his knife. Anyhow, with the rapids in front of us, he must have seen his chance. In his way he was as big a gambler as Corcoran.

At the first sound of water roaring ahead we pulled to the bank and got out. Ramos went scouting downstream to see how the passage was. When he came back both Corcoran and I were flat on our soggy blankets, shaking our teeth loose with our usual late afternoon chills.

Big Pedro rubbed his beard; his eyes flicked from us to the dugout. *"Pobre hombres!"* he said, laughing suddenly. "If I took you with me you would make the dugout too heavy in the bad places. *Adios, amigos!* I leave you to do your shaking here!"

And with that he reached the dugout in a bound and was off in the flood, paddling furiously into the rapids.

IT happened so quickly, so unexpectedly, that all Corcoran and I could do was to claw to our knees and gape at him dazedly. It came at a time when we were utterly helpless, when neither of us could have drawn our guns if we'd tried. A jolt of tropical malaria takes you by the back and makes the very marrow rattle in your bones.

We could only slump on our blankets, shaking and watching. And we saw the whole show from the moment the paddle snapped in big Pedro's hands.

Whatever he was, the big fellow had nerve. There was no other paddle in the dugout, because I'd taken the second one to lean on when I got out. I could almost hear him roaring curses at the river while he inched forward with his hands on the gunwales, trying to shift his weight from side to side and keep the stern from whipping around. He couldn't do it. The dugout slithered into the white water and started to spin. For a moment spray smothered it when it struck a half submerged log. Then one end shot high into the air.

I caught a glimpse of little bags falling into the flood—little bags that had cost us months of deadly toil and every penny we could scrape together. Cold and white heat, bugs and poison, fever and starvation. We'd been through six hells to fill those bags, and now the Matamata was grinding them back into its devilish maw again. Just a glimpse when time seemed to stop, and then only the swirl where the dugout had smashed downward with Ramos beneath it.

Like a heavy, clumsy bird, wounded unto death, it rose and wallowed out of the water. It seemed to try to stay up, hanging in the air for spaceless seconds. Then, still laboring, it fell. . . .

That was the last we saw of either of them.

Of all the black, bitter hopelessness a man can feel. . . . It was night when I was able to sit up. Corcoran had found a box of waterproofed matches in his pocket and had built a fire. He was crouched beside it, fingering that good luck piece. The damned little gambler!

I knocked it out of his hand. "Don't let me see that confounded thing again! It's probably got an Inca curse on it. You've placed your last stinking bet."

He looked at me and said quietly, "We have to swallow the breaks as they come, kid. We've got our lives, and there's a machete, some matches and a few rounds of ammunition left between us. It still gives us a sporting chance."

"Chance! Chance for what?"

"There's Raquel," said Corcoran.

Yes, there was Raquel. She was all I could think about. But what was the use of even trying to get out of here if it meant returning to Lima like a whipped dog with only a few pieces of spodumene in my pocket?

I took the things out and toyed with them. Raquel would never have a chance to wear them. I hurled them into the night and heard them clatter on the rocks.

Luck can play queer tricks. The fire had died down, but suddenly an unearthly glow lit up the place. I heard Corcoran's sharp intake of breath. "Hayes, what in Heaven's name did you throw away just then?"

"Why, just—just some stones. Spodumene."

"Spodumene!" he cackled. "Spodumene! You're some gem expert!" And he was scrambling over the rocks, picking up those little glowing things.

I was struck dumb at the sight of them and I couldn't understand what had happened. Those stones fairly blazed. It was uncanny.

"Spodumene!" rasped Corcoran, and he blew up the fire and piled more wood on it. He crouched beside it, pawing at the stones, striking them, staring at them. "Spodumene! And they came out of that clay! Milky-blue. Flawless. Ha, and whoever saw flawless spodumene this color! Shades of the Inca!"

"If it's not spodumene, what is it?"

"Tiffanyite," breathed Corcoran.

"And what of it?"

"Tiffanyite," he repeated in a whisper. "Rarest gem on earth—the phosphorescent diamond. Comes only from this region. Nothing like it in the world. Glow when they hit on something. Worth a year's output at Kimberley. You could ransom Lima with these, kid!"

I couldn't say anything for awhile. Then I said:

"It's fifty-fifty. Half are yours."

He thrust them back at me. "They're worth nothing unless we can get out with them. I picked on you because I thought you could do it in a pinch. You've got all the reason there is to reach Lima now. How about it?"

But the rest of it is better forgotten. It's a tale of ghosts who came out of the Inferno, of tottering skeletons who tore at raw flesh when their matches were gone; a tale of fever madness and poisoned water and bats that sucked our blood, of crafty-eyed brown men who fed us bitter cinchona bark for the chills when they could have had our heads. Why, I don't know, except that you can never tell about human nature. Then the high passes and the mountain sickness again, and the blistering plateaus. And when we reached the hospital in Trujillo an orderly cut off our remaining clothes with a pair of scissors and burned them. I had to fight to keep the money belt.

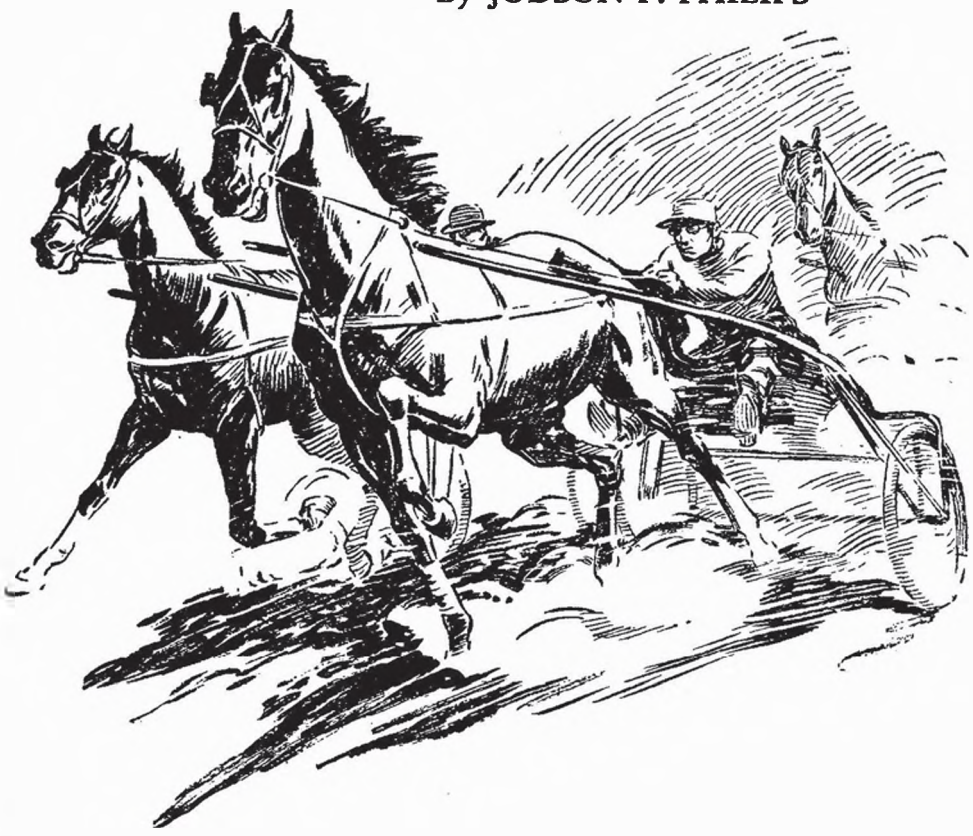
It was there that Raquel found me a month later. She was frantic and there were hollows in her cheeks. She'd run away from home to see me. "You idiot," she wailed. "Why did you do it? Why? . . ."

"Why indeed?" I answered. "When they find out where you've gone, the Mackenna clan will raise the roof."

"Let them," she said. "I've no intention of going back."

County Fair

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS



FOR twenty years Brad Everton's trotting horses had won first money at the Dorchester County Fair and his wife had taken prizes in the food exhibits. The Fair was a part of Brad's life, as it was to all the rest of those toiling Vermont farmers who are his neighbors and friends. But this year things were not the same. Silk Riley, an itinerant promoter has taken charge of the Fair.

Brad arrives at the fair grounds in a trailer with his wife and his eighteen year old son, Johnny, only to learn from Ben Harder, an old friend, that no stables have been saved for his horses. Silk Riley, a cigarette drooping from his lip, tells him coldly that he didn't send in an application. "You'll have to get that junk out of here," Silk says, referring to Brad's equipage.

"I once knew a feller at the Chicago World's Fair that wore a fancy vest like yours," Brad tells Silk. "That feller out in Chicago was a crook."

BRAD stables his horses in an old barn and goes to his friend, the Judge, to register them for the races. Brad has a new horse, a black mare named Dolly, that he plans to enter in the feature race of the Fair —the Fourth of July Championship Stakes. Brad bought her from a junk dealer. The Judge says he can't register her for the race because she has no record. But when Brad, aroused, makes an issue of the matter, the Judge agrees to enter the horse.

With every step Brad bumps into something that makes him suspicious. Soon he becomes convinced that Silk is entering high-class horses of his own in all the races so that, winning, he will not have to pay out any prize money. Brad is certain of this when he sees a shiftless farmer he knows

This two-part serial began in last week's Argosy

sporting a fine horse and a new sulky—possessions which the shiftless one, when questioned, cannot satisfactorily account for. And when Brad loses to outside horses in races in which he has entered his two most reliable trotters, Old Phil and Volometer, he knows darned well that Silk Riley is no angel to the Dorchester County Fair.

But what really worries Brad is that his son, Johnny, is entered in the dirt track automobile races. Brad is too proud to tell Johnny not to race, but—as Johnny is a first-rate driver—he fears what Silk's drivers may do to win.

THE night before the race, Hazel L'Amour —as the spieler announces her—a dancer in the girl show, and Silk's "babe," gets into conversation with Johnny. Johnny, brought up to believe all women are sacred, wants to help Hazel from her low estate, and Hazel, in kidding him along, finds out he is Brad's son. Johnny tells her that his father is suspicious of Silk. He also tells her that he is going to win the automobile race.

Hazel imparts this information to Silk. "He's a good kid," she says of Johnny. "You won't do anything will you, Silk? He might be killed." Silk squints through the smoke of his cigarette. "So what?" he says.

CHAPTER VII

WATCH THE TURNS!

ALL the next morning the sound of racing motors roared incessantly in Brad Everton's ears. The race drivers were testing their cars out on the track, and every time they skidded around that south turn the little maple grove where Brad's horses were stabled, and where the trailer stood, was showered with dust. They came with a roar, reached a peak of staccato explosions as they skidded, and then roared once more, fading away as they sped down the track. To Brad each one of those moments was like the grating of a dentist's drill against a raw nerve.

He spent nearly an hour in the barn trying to quiet the horses who were fretful and excited by the unusual commotion. Johnny was in the barn, too, carefully checking and rechecking his motor. Johnny hadn't taken his car up to the pits because he was convinced it was all set and he didn't want to run the risk of having anyone tamper with it. Half a dozen times Brad was on the verge of urging the boy to give up the race. And half a dozen times he took his pipe out of his mouth to speak, only to put it back and bite savagely on the stem. For he knew that this race meant as much to the boy as the trotting championship on the Fourth meant to Brad. Johnny was a man now, even if he was only eighteen. A man wouldn't quit simply because he knew someone might be gunning for him.

"How's your nerve, son?" Brad asked.

Johnny grinned. "I'm scared pink right now, Brad," he said, "but once I feel this old crate movin' under me I won't be scared no more."

Brad could understand that. He felt the same way when he was warming up before a trotting heat—felt that way till the moment when they began to maneuver for a start. Then he went ice cold and deadly calm. Johnny was the same way he guessed.

"I wish I could be more use to you, son," Brad said, almost pathetically. "I don't know the first thing about this auto racin'."

"It'll help to know you're in the pit, pop, to lend a hand in case I need it—changin' a tire, or somethin'."

"Yeah," said Brad, miserably.

He was worried about Martha. She'd been gay that morning at breakfast—too gay. There was a sound to her laughter that got under Brad's skin. Johnny was too keyed up to notice it. Brad knew she was paralyzed at the thought of Johnny driving, yet determined not to show it. That was the way with Martha. And she didn't know or suspect half of what Brad did!

All morning long Brad kept looking out the barn door toward the fair grounds. Ben Harder and Mort Graves were supposed to be locating Benson and Bill Watrous, the two suspected horse owners. If they could only get the proof of Riley's crookedness from one of them Brad meant to use it to hold over Riley's head as a guarantee of Johnny's safety. But there was no sign of Ben or Mort.

At noon Johnny went into the trailer to have his lunch, and Brad stood watch in the barn. The horses were getting used to the roar of the motors. It was while Johnny was still at lunch that Ben Harder finally put in an appearance. One look at his face and Brad knew that they'd failed. Ben sat down on a box, wearily, and cut himself a fresh plug of tobacco.

"It's a washout, Brad. Can't find hide nor hair of either Benson or Watrous. Folks say they was around yesterday, but they ain't visible today. Mort and I drove clear down to Sutherland, to Benson's farm. Benson only took possession down there a month ago. Folks say they don't know whether he owned any trottin' horses when he showed up or not. They can't say he did and they can't say he didn't. Then we drove over to Bill Watrous'° place. It's closed up tighter'n a drum. The folks there say he's always foolin' around with trottin' horses. They don't know anythin' about whether this one he's got entered here is one he's had right along or not. You and I know it ain't—but that ain't evidence."

"The auto races start at one-thirty," said Brad, dully.

"Mort's still huntin' fer Benson or Watrous," Ben consoled him, "and I'm goin' to join him. I jest wanted to let you know how things stand."

"It's mighty nice of you and Mort to—to—"

"Hush up, Brad," said Ben, spitting at a fence rail and hitting it squarely. "If the Fair Committee is willin' to let Riley make a sucker of 'em, that's one thing. But we don't aim to stand by and see any of the old timers played dirt if we can help it."

A FEW minutes after Ben had gone Johnny came out of the trailer. He was grinning nervously, and his eyes were bright with excitement.

"Well, pop, I guess it's time to shove the old crate up onto the track."

"Okay, son," said Brad, quietly.

They wheeled the little racing car out of the barn and pushed it along the dirt road to the track. Johnny took a leather flying helmet out of a pocket in the side of the car and adjusted it on his head. He wiped his goggles clean on a big blue handkerchief and slipped them on over the helmet.

"We'll start her right here and I'll run her around a couple of times just to check on her and then I'll pull into the pits. You join me there."

Brad nodded. "I'm gonna slip back to the trailer an' see if yer ma wants anythin'," he said. "Then I'll be with you. And—and—shucks, I was gonna tell you to be careful, son, but I guess you know your stuff."

"Sure, Brad, don't worry none about me," said Johnny confidently.

Brad put his shoulder to the back of the car after Johnny had climbed in behind the wheel. He pushed him for about fifteen yards before the motor caught, and then with a wave of his hand, Johnny was off. Brad watched him for a moment, wiping the sweat from his face with his sleeve, and then he turned, heavy footed, for the trailer.

Martha was sitting very still and white of face in an arm chair near the window of the trailer. As Brad came in they looked at each other in silence for a moment. Brad thought for the first time that Martha looked old.

"I was just wonderin'," he said, "if you was goin' to the races. I know you got your grandstand ticket an' all, but I thought mebbe. . . ."

"I don't want to go, Brad," she said, "but I guess I can't stay away." She looked earnestly at her husband. "Brad, there's somethin' wrong. I can tell it by your face. I can tell it by the way you and Ben and Mort have been whisperin' together. What is it? There's danger in this for Johnny, ain't there?"

"Shucks, no, honey," said Brad, and prayed that his voice sounded convincing. "Ben and Mort and me figger them horses that won the races yesterday was ringers, and we figger there's a ringer entered in the

championship tomorrow. We're jest checkin' up. It ain't got nothin' to do with Johnny."

"You're lyin', Brad," said Martha quietly.

"No, honey, honest! That's what we been confabbin' about. Jest horses."

A nerve twitched in Martha's cheek. "If anythin' happened to Johnny, Brad, I—I—"

"Nothin' goin' to happen to him, honey. Why they have these races all over the country. Johnny's drove in a lot of 'em around home. He's got a good car. There's nothin' to worry about."

"You'll take care of him, Brad? You'll take good care of him?" she pleaded.

"Sure, honey," he said, softly. "I'll take care of him. You know that!"

But there were tight, cold bands of steel around his heart as he spoke.

SILK RILEY was in the judges' stand, his green hat set at a rakish angle, cigarette between his lips, his malacca cane hooked over the railing. He held a program in his hand and he was speaking through an amplifier to the crowds in the grandstand and bleachers.

"Ladies and gentlemen, while these race drivers are getting their cars tuned up I want to tell you something about auto racing, since I know it's an innovation in these parts. It's a dangerous, thrilling sport, ladies and gentlemen. You may notice the ambulance drawn up there in the infield. Not one of these drivers would start a race unless that ambulance was there. They know their lives may depend on quick, expert first-aid. Most of these boys have had serious crack-ups at one time or another, but the lure and excitement of the sport always brings them back when they've been patched up.

"There's nothing about the race itself that you won't understand. It's a fifty mile go, which means a hundred laps around this track, for a grand prize of five hundred dollars. The race is run like any other kind of race, except that in case of an accident the race is temporarily halted until the track is cleared. It is then resumed with the drivers still in the same positions they held at the time of the crack-up.

"But the preliminaries may need some explanation to those of you who are unfamiliar with auto racing. First we have time trials. In the time trials each driver takes his car out on the track and does a half mile by himself against time. The fellow who makes the best time in these trials draws the post position. So you see, these trials are important because they determine the driver's starting position. By the way, folks, there's Ace Taylor just walking into the pits—the fellow in the blue shirt with the yellow helmet. Give him a hand, folks! Ace is one of the most daring of all the dirt track drivers in this section. But to get back to the time trials, folks. . . ."

Down in the pit Brad stood next to Johnny who was tinkering with his motor. His hands were damp with cold sweat, and he kept them tightly clenched. "I can't listen to what he's sayin', son," he said.

"What's the advantage in position in this start?"

"Plenty," said Johnny. "If you draw first position it means you get off first, an' if you're any good you can hold it for most of the race on account of they don't do much passin' in the early part. And if you're in the lead you don't have no dust in your face an' you can see where you're goin'."

Brad nodded. "You know any of the other drivers, son?"

"Most of 'em, or I've heard of 'em," said Johnny. "Eddie Plotnick, Jack Reynolds, Pete Anderson, Pat Duncan, and a couple of others I know. I never did hear of this Ace Taylor they're all talkin' about, though. I hear he won up to Rutland last week, and they all say he's the boy to watch. But I know better," Johnny grinned. "Johnny Everton's the one to watch."

Just then Eddie Plotnick's motor roared to life as he moved around the track preparatory to taking the first time trial. In a time trial the driver circles the track and starts stepping on it as he comes down the home stretch. If he likes his start he

signals the flagman at the starting line and gets a "go" sign. The lap from that point is timed unless the driver signals before the lap is over. If he doesn't like the way it's going he can call it off and try again. This is called "re-checking." The driver can re-check twice, but he must accept the time on his third trial, no matter how bad it is.

Plotnick came roaring down the home stretch, nodded to the flagman and was off. He went skidding crazily into the first turn, lost speed, and then raced away down the back stretch. But he was holding up his arm.

"Re-check on Eddie Plotnick!"

Plotnick skidded around the south turn and then came thundering up the home stretch again, and once more got the "go" sign from the flagman. This time he took that first turn better, slewing around in a cloud of dust.

"Plotnick's going for it this time—and he's going good, folks!" Riley cried. "Look at him eat up that back stretch!"

Around the south turn Plotnick came with an aura of dust. And it seemed to Brad that the racer would go hurtling through the rail into the crowd. But Plotnick's purple racer straightened out and roared up the home stretch to complete his trial.

"Eddie Plotnick's time — thirty-seven seconds!" Riley announced. "The next driver will be Pat Duncan, who placed second to the great Ace Taylor in the recent Rutland races."

THE time trials went on. Brad's face was damp with sweat. It was frightening enough to see these cars skid dizzily around the turns when they were alone on the track! When seven or eight of them were out there together it was going to be almost more than he could take.

He began to feel a dreadful nausea creeping over him when the moment came for Johnny's trial. He helped Johnny push his car out on the track. Johnny climbed in behind the wheel. He grinned at Brad.

"The best time, so far, is thirty-three seconds," he said. "Watch my smoke!"

Then Riley's voice boomed through the amplifier. "This driver, folks, is a local boy. You all know his father as one of the greatest trotting-horse drivers in this section—Brad Everton!" Wild applause . . . But Brad didn't hear it. He hadn't even heard what Riley was saying. He was fighting an impelling last minute urge to yank Johnny out of the car—to prevent his driving.

"The son is a chip off the old block, folks. Locally he's looked upon as one of the fastest drivers ever to drive the local tracks. Johnny Everton! Okay, Johnny. Hit 'er up!"

Johnny pulled down his goggles. "Shove her off, pop," he said. His voice was steady as a rock. His nervousness was gone. Brad put his shoulder to the car and pushed. The motor jumped to life, and Johnny was off. Brad stood where he was, watching him, his heart hammering against his ribs.

"Get off the track, please, Mr. Everton," said Riley. And Brad turned and stumbled back to the pits.

Johnny was going down the back stretch now, starting to hit it up. He was skidding into the south turn. Brad's fingernails bit into the palms of his hands. Johnny was coming down the home stretch now. Brad saw him nod vigorously to the flagman.

"Go! Johnny Everton's off, folks."

Johnny's yellow car shot for the first turn. Dust flew and the motor barked sharply as the gun was cut for an instant. And then he was racing down the back stretch—a yellow streak.

"No re-check on Johnny Everton! No re-check, folks! He's taking this one . . . and boy, how he's taking it!" Even Riley's voice was charged with excitement.

Brad shut his eyes. A feeling of dread settled over him. Johnny could never make the south turn. Brad knew it . . . knew it as surely as he knew the sun would rise tomorrow. In a moment there would be a splintering of wood as Johnny crashed through the fence . . . the screams of the crowd. Brad was tense—waiting.

"Boy, oh, boy! That kid can drive an

automobile," said somebody at Brad's elbow. The grandstand crowd was screeching its excitement. The roar of Johnny's motor grew to a furious crescendo. Brad opened his eyes . . . and began to laugh. Johnny'd made the turn! He'd made it! Brad slammed somebody in the back.

"That's my boy!" he shouted. "Look at him drive!"

Johnny tore past the finish and was skidding around the north corner when Riley announced the time.

"Thirty seconds flat for Johnny Everton, folks! That's going to be hard to beat —very hard to beat."

A moment later Johnny came sliding into the pits. And Brad's hands were shaking as he helped the kid out of the car.

"What was the time?" Johnny asked, anxiously.

"Thirty seconds flat, son," said Brad, and he laughed again.

Johnny grinned. "Let Mr. Ace Taylor take a shot at that," he said.

MR. ACE TAYLOR took a shot at it and missed. Driving a low-slung red car with huge nickel exhaust pipe running back from the hood he managed a neat thirty-two second trial and placed in the number two position.

Brad's exhilaration had departed and left him limp as a wet rag. The race would start in about ten minutes and there was no word from Ben or Mort. That meant that Johnny was going into this race without protection. Brad had things pretty well figured out. Ace Taylor was Riley's driver. Ace Taylor was booked to win this race, and Brad guessed he had orders to win it any way he could. In that moment Brad prayed that Ace Taylor could win on the level. He prayed that something would go wrong with Johnny's car.

The cars were being wheeled out on the track now. In a moment they would start . . . fifty miles . . . a hundred laps. They would circle the track once, get the flag, and the race would be on. Brad could restrain himself no longer as Johnny climbed into the car.

"Listen, kid," he said hoarsely. "This Taylor—I think he's Riley's man. Watch him, son. I don't know what kind of dirt he can play you—but if there's any way he can, he will."

Johnny's lips tightened. "There's only one thing he can do," he said. "He can connect with my back wheels just as I'm skiddin' into a turn. If he's good he can get away with it without spillin' himself, and still knock me into the next county."

"Johnny!" Brad's voice was thick with his fear.

"Don't worry, pop. I won't let him get that close." Johnny grinned, and for a moment his hand closed tightly over his father's. "I've got a faster pick-up than him—I noticed it in the trials. Now give me a shove, pop."

Eight motors throbbing steadily—last minute instructions from Riley in the judges' stand—one lap around—and then the race would be on. Brad looked at Ace Taylor. Taylor was paying no attention to Riley. His eyes were fixed on Johnny's car. Goggles and helmet hid everything except the broad slit of his mouth. Brad stood where he was, shaking.

"Okay, let her go, boys—and good luck!" shouted Riley.

Slowly the cars started up and began a leisurely circle of the north turn. Once more Riley was shouting through the amplifiers.

"Please—along the rail there—keep back! There may be an accident—particularly on the turns. We don't want anyone seriously hurt. Please! . . ."

Down the back stretch the cars were gathering momentum—enough momentum so that they skidded on the south turn. And then they opened up. Johnny's yellow racer came ripping along the inside, Ace Taylor directly behind him, the others following in single file. There were skids—the sharp popping of cut motors—a fresh roaring—colored flashes down the back stretch into another skidding mass—and then again the steady roar. Around and around —lap after lap—never changing positions. they roared, and always Johnny's yellow

streak was in front, and always Ace Taylor's blood-red racer was behind him, while the rest of the field streamed out in the dusty ruck.

Riley kept talking through the amplifiers: "Johnny Everton's setting a hard pace, folks. There's not apt to be much change in position for a bit unless somebody makes a bad turn and has to swing out. But there are a hundred laps, folks—two hundred turns. No driver in the world can make 'em all perfect. Sooner or later everyone will have a chance to change positions."

Brad's teeth were sunk into his lower lip, but he didn't notice the pain. "There's only one thing he can do," Johnny had said. "He can connect with my back wheels just as I'm skiddin' into a turn . . ." Brad watched, frozen, fascinated. Ten laps . . . fifteen laps . . . and then Plotnick, driving third, skidded wide on the south turn and sent the crowd tumbling over itself to get away from the rail. By the time he got his car straightened out he was forced to pull into last place.

Johnny was driving with a positive genius. His skidded turns kept him so close to the inside rail that his car seemed to nose its own way around the rail. He left no opening for anyone to slip up on the inside—and no one would dare swing around him from the outside. Twenty-five laps were gone . . . thirty . . . and still there was no mistake from Johnny, and none from Ace Taylor who hung doggedly on his tail. Then Brad noticed something he hadn't noticed before. On each of the straightaways Taylor was forcing his car to the limit, trying to get in very close to Johnny. It seemed as if he almost reached him each time, only to have Johnny break away from him in the skid. After the turns Johnny's quicker pick-up would open a gap between them, but by the time the straightaway was ended Taylor would be almost on him.

BRAD'S lips were as dry and parched as if he'd been on a broiling desert. Taylor was trying the very thing Johnny had predicted. And Brad felt he must do something. He ran to the front of the pit and as Johnny shot past he cupped his hands and screamed at him. "Watch Taylor! He's crowding you!" But it was as futile as trying to shout into the teeth of a hurricane.

Thirty-five laps . . . forty laps . . . passed. And the grim duel went on. Always Taylor was reaching out for Johnny on the straightaway, but Johnny always managed to break away from him and open up a gap after the turn. Yet it seemed to Brad that inch by inch Taylor was gaining.

Crowded against the infield rail Brad watched them take the south turn. Just before they reached it he actually saw Taylor's front tire touch Johnny's rear wheel. But just before Johnny skidded he pulled away an inch or two.

Then fear leaped wildly in Brad. This was murder! And he, Johnny's father, was standing here like a fool and letting it happen. He'd stop it. He'd stop it if he had to wring Riley's neck. He turned and started to run madly for the judges' stand, buffeting spectators right and left. He reached the stand, started up the stairs, stumbling, panting for breath. And then, just as he gained the platform it happened. There was a shriek from the crowd. Brad couldn't see who it was—but a car was turning over and over on the north turn. It smashed through the side rail, and there was a burst of flame; and at the same instant Brad saw a body—inert as a sawdust dummy—lying on top a mass of splintered fence posts.

Brad grabbed someone and shook them savagely.

"Who is it? Who's hurt?" he shouted.

A nearby voice screamed, sick with horror. Brad was shaking Judge Hobbs, chairman of the Fair Committee. "Brad . . . Brad!" the Judge cried. "Don't look . . . Don't look, Brad!"

For a moment Brad stood there, swaying like a tree about to topple. Then, suddenly, a choking cry escaped him and he

sprang forward at Silk Riley who was busy exhorting the crowd to make way for the ambulance.

Brad cried out once and then his fingers sank into Riley's throat.

CHAPTER VIII

A DOLLAR'S WORTH

A CURTAIN of red rage had closed down over Brad. He couldn't see—he could only feel his fingers in Riley's flesh. He heard a confused babble around him and he realized that people were trying to break his hold. Judge Hobbs' voice came through the blur, high-pitched, frightened.

"Brad . . . Brad! Stop!"

And then there was another voice, harsh, incisive. Brad never knew who spoke the words but they had the effect of a pail of ice water thrown in his face.

"Stop it, Everton! Your place is down there on the track with your boy!"

Brad's fingers came away from Riley's throat, and suddenly everything was clear again. He saw Riley stagger back against the rail, purple, choking, tugging at his shirt collar. He saw people down on the track running by the hundreds toward the scene of the accident. He heard the insistent wail of the ambulance siren.

"Johnny!" His voice was faint and hoarse. He turned and bolted down the steps toward that body on the splintered fence posts, now blotted out by the crowd. The race was halted and as he ran, Brad caught a glimpse of Ace Taylor climbing out of his car in the pits. "If he's good he can get away with it without spillin' himself . . ." Johnny had said. Time enough to settle with Taylor! Time enough to settle with the whole murdering crew of 'em.

The crowd was thick but Brad literally ripped his way through. People swore at him. Then someone shouted, "Let him through! It's Brad Everton . . . It's the kid's father!" And then Brad broke through into the open—into the little circle where Johnny lay. An ambulance doctor was kneeling beside him. And there was Martha . . . Martha sitting on the grass with Johnny's bloody head in her lap. She looked up at Brad and her face was calm—frighteningly calm.

"He's alive, Brad," she said, in a flat voice. "They say he's alive."

Brad stood, unable to speak, vaguely aware of the tinny music of the merry-go-round somewhere in the distance. For an instant he remembered the years that lay behind, the years when the merry-go-round had been Johnny's big thrill at the fair, Johnny, who lay there so still with his blood drenching Martha's white linen skirt. And then Brad knelt beside Martha and his arm closed tightly around her shoulders. Every muscle of her body was tight as a violin string, and he could feel her vibrating under a terrible, shocking pressure. Yet her face remained calm, and her fingers stroked Johnny's blood-soaked hair.

"Well, let's get him moved!" Brad said, sharply.

The doctor and the driver lifted Johnny deftly onto the stretcher. They carried him to the ambulance and placed the stretcher inside. Martha walked steadily after them and without a word climbed into the back of the ambulance. Brad followed her. A little boy came running up.

"Here's his helmet and goggles, Mr. Everton—if you want 'em!" said the boy.

They started for the hospital, lurching on the bumpy road. The ambulance driver saw Brad's twisted, working face.

"He's quite unconscious, Mr. Everton," said the doctor. "He can't feel anything!"

"How bad is it, Doc?"

The doctor shrugged. "Can't tell a thing till we get him to the hospital. He had a nasty crack-up. Fortunately he was thrown clear. He might have been mashed to a jelly under the car. They say it turned over three times."

That was all. About ten minutes later Brad and Martha found themselves alone in a little waiting room at the hospital. Johnny had been taken to the emergency ward. Dr. Chandler, the head surgeon, was looking after the case personally. He and Brad had grown up together. It was

something—having Chandler on the job. Brad trusted him.

WAITING . . . waiting . . . Brad paced the room like a caged animal. Martha sat in a chair, enveloped in that deadly, unnatural calm. Finally Brad could stand it no longer. He dropped on his knees beside her chair.

"It was all my fault, honey!" he said, brokenly. "I knew they'd try to get him, but there was no way to make him quit. I was on my way up to the judges' stand to stop things when . . . when it happened. You'll have to blame me, honey."

Her hand was very cold as she rested it for a moment on Brad's cheek. "Don't blame yourself, Brad," she said, quietly. "I knew how it was, all along. I knew, even if you said you wasn't worried about him. And I couldn't ask him to give it up neither, Brad."

And then Dr. Chandler appeared. He dropped a reassuring hand on Brad's shoulder. "I can't give you a very complete report, Brad," he said gently, "but what I can tell you is encouraging. His scalp is badly lacerated, but there's no sign of a fracture. A concussion at the worst—What we can't tell yet is whether or not he has internal injuries. He does have a couple of fractured ribs, and his left arm is broken—but neither of those injuries is serious. If he's escaped any internal damage he's going to be all right."

"When will you know?" Martha asked.

"We're preparing to take X-rays now," said the doctor. "In an hour or so, perhaps. But there's nothing you two can do here. He may not recover consciousness for hours, and it may not be advisable for you to see him even then."

"I'm staying," said Martha, in that flat, emotionless voice.

Dr. Chandler looked at her and decided secretly that it might be a good thing. When she cracked it was going to be bad. It was better for her to remain where she could be attended.

Martha turned to Brad. "You've got the horses to tend to," she said. "You run along, and come back when you've got 'em fixed for the night."

"I'll send word to you if there's any change," said Dr. Chandler.

"All right," Brad said.

He left them and walked out the front door of the hospital. Sergeant Bellows of the State Troopers was standing beside his side-car motorcycle. Bellows came up to him quickly.

"How's the kid?" he asked, anxiously.

Brad mopped at his forehead with his red handkerchief. "Doc Chandler says it may not be as bad as it looked. If he ain't busted up inside, he'll do."

"Gee, that's great," said Bellows. He shuffled his feet uncomfortably. "I'm sorry, Brad, with all this trouble and everything . . . but I've got a warrant for your arrest!"

Brad stared at him open-mouthed. "My *arrest!*"

Bellows looked unhappy. "It's swore out by this fellow Riley, Brad. He's chargin' you with assault and battery. He's down to Justice Potter's now, and Potter sent me up here to fetch you. But if you want to hang around till you get the low-down on the kid I'll just say I couldn't find you."

Brad threw back his head and laughed mirthlessly. "So Riley has swore out a warrant for *my* arrest! That *is* a laugh, Jim! That crook!"

"You don't have to go now if you don't want to," said Bellows, hastily. "The justice himself told me not to bring you if there was any reason why you should stay with the kid."

"Oh, I'll go now," said Brad. He laughed again. "Riley havin' *me* arrested. That's a hot one."

"Hop in the side car and I'll run you over," Bellows said.

OLD man Potter had been the Justice of the Peace in Dorchester for forty-five years. He knew Brad, as he had known his father before him. The justice always held "court" in his front parlor, and it was into this familiar room that Bellows brought Brad. Riley was there, sitting in

a corner, smoking cigarettes and scattering the ashes on the carpet despite old Potter's scowls. The justice was cleaning his steel-rimmed spectacles as Brad came in.

Brad looked at Riley, and saw that Riley's eyes were little hot pin points of fury. He saw, with satisfaction, bruises on Riley's neck. He ignored the promoter.

"Howdy, Potter," he said.

The justice fixed his spectacles and pered over them at Brad. "I'm mighty sorry to see you here, Brad," he said. "And mighty sorry to hear about the boy. How is he?"

"Chandler thinks he may come out of it," said Brad.

"I'm glad to hear it," said the justice. He cleared his throat. "Well, I guess we might as well convene court. Mr. Riley," and he managed to make the name sound distasteful, "you're the complainant in this case. I guess it's up to you to state what you got agin' Brad."

Riley stood up, smiling his one-sided smile. "With pleasure," he said, grimly. "I swore out this warrant on assault charges, your honor. But I have something more serious to bring against this man. For two days Everton has been insinuating to me and to everyone else he talked to that I'm dishonest . . . a crook!"

Justice Potter looked blandly over his glasses at Riley. "Anythin' to it?" he asked, casually.

Riley's eyes blazed furiously. "I'm not on trial here, your honor, and I resent that question. My business depends on faith. I'd like to run this Dorchester Fair another year. If Everton keeps spreading the word that I'm a crook it may cost me a good many thousand dollars. I want him stopped. If he has anything against me let him prove it in court! And I want damages for his having assaulted me. He came running up in the judges' stand just after the accident and tried to choke me to death. You can see the bruises yourself. If there hadn't been several people there to prevent it he might have succeeded."

"Why'd you do it, Brad?" Potter asked.

Brad drew a deep breath. "It wasn't no accident that Johnny cracked up," he said. "He was deliberately forced off the track. I figgered the one who done it was a driver in Riley's pay . . . so I figgered Riley was really to blame. I guess I went a little crazy when I seen Johnny lyin' there, and I just let Riley have it!"

The justice rubbed his chin. "You was crazy at the time, eh?"

"I reckon," said Brad.

"Look here, your honor," Riley snarled. "I want this man stopped from making libelous statements about me and I want damages for this attack."

The justice ignored Riley, and looked thoughtfully at Brad. "Can you prove, Brad, that the driver that cracked up your kid is Riley's man?"

"No," Brad admitted. "I can't. Not yet."

"But you thought so at the time?"

"Yes, I did."

Justice Potter meditated for a moment. Somewhere deep in his old eyes a light of perverse humor glinted. He looked over at the ashes Riley had spilled on his carpet. Then he looked admonishingly at Brad. "Brad," he said, "you got to quit makin' unsubstantiated accusations against Mr. Riley. If it's brought to my attention officially that you're continuin' to make libelous statements about him I'll jest have to lock you up."

"Yes, your honor," said Brad, meekly, keeping his eyes averted.

"As for damages for assault," continued Potter, "there don't seem to be any doubt that you committed the act, but you don't seem to have done an all fired amount of damage. Mr. Riley seems t'be able to talk and smoke plenty, so I guess his throat ain't exactly ruined. Bein' as how you admit you was crazy at the time, and thinkin' you had a justifiable motive, I'm gonna makes the damage light. I'm gonna award Mr. Riley one dollar."

"One dollar!" Riley almost screamed.

"That's right," said the justice. "That'll pay the expenses of you buyin' a couple of larger sized collars to wear while your throat is still swole up."

"This is a travesty!" Riley snarled.

"Well, Mr. Riley," drawled the Justice of the Peace, "you c'n always appeal. You c'n take it to the State Supreme Court, an' if they don't uphold you, you c'n take it to the Supreme Court of the United States—if we still got one! But that's my rulin'. And if you hear that Brad's spreadin' any more libel about you I'll have him locked up. Now, you fork over the dollar, Brad, and that'll close the case."

"Eat your dollar!" cried Riley furiously and stormed out of the house.

Old Potter chuckled as he heard the front door slam. "Brad," he said, "you didn't do a good enough job on that feller." Then his face grew graver. "But you'll have to watch your step about accusin' him, Brad, if you ain't got the proof. The law's on his side unless vou c'n back up what you say."

CHAPTER IX

DOLLY CAN GIVE

THERE had been a moment of exhilaration in the encounter with Riley, but as Brad made his way to the fair grounds it left him. The crowd milling around the midway had forgotten the accident. Money was rolling into the various booths, money that Brad guessed would never find its way to the Dorchester County Fair Committee. A few people spoke to him, asked him about Johnny.

The merry-go-round music grated on Brad's nerves and the sound of the motorcycles roaring around inside that huge wooden tank sent a cold chill along his spine. He could still hear the roar of the racing motors on the track. He couldn't drive out of his mind that moment of horror when he'd seen Johnny's car bouncing over and over like a wild thing and finally bursting into flame.

County Fair! It had always been the high spot of the year for Brad . . . a time to be remembered pleasantly and talked about for a year until the next one rolled around. This was one he would never forget, and would never want to talk about. Uppermost in his mind was his deep concern for Johnny, but underlying that was the bitterness of defeat at the hand of a man he knew to be a crook. It was hard medicine to take.

The horses were clamoring for supper when he reached the barn, and for a moment Brad forgot his troubles as he cared for them. They were like children to him. They expected certain caresses from him, reacted to his low quiet voice, and nuzzled at his pockets for sugar. Volometer played a game with him when he cleaned out the stalls. This was to gently remove Brad's hat and drop it outside the stall. It was almost a ritual, with Brad murmuring tender epithets at him, retrieving the hat, and going through the same process all over again.

The little roan mare was strangely quiet, and she had a far-away look in her eyes. Brad had often wondered about her—wondered what her history had been before he'd found her on the junk wagon. She had raced for someone — been well handled. She had seemed expectant ever since they'd reached Dorchester, as if she knew that presently her turn would come to do her stuff. Brad had meant to give her a workout that evening after the auto races, but it was too late now. As a matter of fact he had about decided that he would withdraw from the championship on the next day. He couldn't drive with Johnny on his mind . . . and he felt certain he had no chance to win against Riley's ringer.

He had just finished giving the mare a good going over with a stiff brush and was bundling her hay into the stall when he was interrupted by a voice from the barn door—a woman's voice.

"Mr. Everton?"

Brad turned quickly, frowning. A girl stood in the door, a cloak pulled close around her throat. She had a face that might have been pretty if it hadn't been so hard and so brightly painted.

"I'm Everton," Brad said. "What can I do for you?"

The girl came hesitantly into the barn.

Brad saw that for all her hardness there was anxiety in her eyes. "I wanted to ask about . . . about Johnny," she said.

Brad's frown deepened. What had this girl to do with Johnny? "They say he has a good chance," he said, slowly, "if there aren't any complications."

"Oh, I'm *so* glad!" said the girl.

Brad leaned on his pitchfork and studied her. "You know Johnny?" he asked.

Hazel L'Amour nodded. "I . . . I just met him," she said. "I work in the tent show here. We—Johnny and I—got into a kind of conversation last night." And then, suddenly, words flooded out of her like water breaking through a dam. "Oh, Mr. Everton, it's my fault he was hurt. I knew it was coming. Maybe I could have saved him. I knew Riley was gunning for him, and I didn't tell him. If anything should happen to him . . . if he should die . . ."

"He isn't going to die!" said Brad.

"You should have heard him, Mr. Everton. He said I wasn't the type to be workin' in a girl show. Me! Me that's been troupin' for five years. He said if he won the race he wanted to—wanted to lend me money so I could make a fresh start!" She laughed harshly. "An' all the time I knew they was layin' for him."

Brad's fingers tightened on the pitchfork handle, and there was a sudden gleam of excitement in his eyes. "You've been with Riley for five years, eh?"

"Yes," she said, unsteadily. "And Johnny's the first decent feller that I've seen in all that time. Gee, Mr. Everton, if there was something I could do . . ."

"There is!" said Brad. "Give me the dope on Riley! Come to the Fair Committee with me and tell 'em that Ace Taylor is his man and that he was deliberately gunnin' for Johnny. Tell 'em he has ringers entered in the trottin' races under Benson's and Bill Watrous's names. That's what you can do for Johnny, girl."

HAZEL L'AMOUR shrank back. "I—I c-can't do that," she stammered.

"It's so, isn't it?" Brad demanded, fiercely.

"You don't know Riley," said the girl, her voice shaken. "You don't know what he does to squealers. There was a fellow up to Rutland who—"

"If you've got any of the stuff in you that Johnny thought you had," said Brad savagely, "you'll expose this crook. He won't do nothin' to you, so help me! I'll promise you to see to that!"

"No, Mr. Everton! I can't do that! Riley'd kill me, or he'd mark up my face or somethin'. You can't do no squealin' in this racket, Mr. Everton!"

"Then Johnny was wrong about you!" said Brad, contemptuously.

"Sure he was wrong!" the girl said bitterly. "That's what made it so tough. I'm just a carnival tramp. I ain't denyin' it. These people are my kind, Mr. Everton, and I can't go back on 'em. Not even for Johnny. And don't forget," she said, almost hysterically, "it wasn't me that said Ace Taylor was Riley's man. It was you! And the rest of the stuff—*you* said it! Not me! Goodbye, Mr. Everton." And she turned and literally ran out of the barn.

Brad leaned on his pitchfork, his face bleak. For just a moment he had seen a glimmer of hope. For just a moment he thought he had Riley where he wanted him. But now he threw down his pitchfork and started back toward the hospital. He was without hope—licked. Dr. Chandler met him in the reception room. The doctor had a broad grin on his face.

"The boy's going to be all right, Brad," he said. "There's no 'ifs' about it. The X-ray shows no internal injuries. It's a miracle—but there it is. Of course he'll be laid up for a while with that head and with his ribs and arm. But he'll come out of it clean as a whistle."

For a moment Brad thought his legs were going to give out under him and he gripped the doctor's arm to steady himself.

"He's conscious," said the doctor, "and Martha's with him. He's asking for you, Brad."

"Take me to him, will you, Doc?" asked Brad huskily.

The doctor led him along the corridor to the door of a private room. Brad tiptoed in. Johnny lay on the bed, his head swathed in bandages. Martha sat beside the bed, and as Brad came in she smiled at him—a smile Brad would never forget.

"Hello, son," Brad said, "they tell me you're gonna be all right."

Johnny grinned. "Shucks, pop, you don't have to whisper! I ain't that sick!"

Brad laughed happily. "I guess I always whisper in a hospital, kid," he said.

Johnny looked serious. "You was right, pop, about Riley. I figgered I was good enough to beat him at his own game, but I wasn't." He stirred restlessly, and a little spasm of pain crossed his face. "But you ain't goin' to let him beat us all along the line, are you, pop? You're gonna take that championship tomorrow with Dolly, ain't you?"

"I was figgerin' maybe I wouldn't race at all, son," said Brad, gently.

"Oh, you gotta race, pop!" Johnny cried. "We can't let him lick us every time."

"I know how you feel, son. But if he's got a high class ringer in there we won't have a chance."

"You don't know about Dolly," said Johnny eagerly. "You don't know how good she is. She can beat Volometer and Old Phil. That's all you've ever asked her to do. Maybe she can beat this ringer. Maybe she's good enough to do it, if you ask her. You've gotta try, pop. Gosh, if Riley cleaned up on everythin' . . . Promise me you'll give it a try, pop."

Brad reached out and covered the boy's hand with his. "You can count on it, son," he said. "Dolly and me'll give it everythin' we got!"

FOURTH OF JULY!

Brad was up at four o'clock, but not before some ambitious youngsters had set off the day's first cannon crackers somewhere in the distance. Brad could tell that it was going to be a clear, hot day. A clear Fourth meant big dividends for the Fair. Brad felt a strange thrill as he shaved and got into his clothes. The Championship Stakes! He'd driven in many of them with as little chance as he had today. It was *the* event of the year, for him. Today there was even more in it—a grim determination to beat Riley! A determination to expose him before the day was out—before he could move quietly out of town with his mob and the money that belonged rightfully to competitors and to the County Fair Committee.

The horses whinnied at the sound of Brad's footsteps as he approached the barn. He'd gotten his own breakfast, for Martha had slept at the hospital. He went into the barn, took the little red mare out of her stall and led her out into the green grass, wet with the heavy dew that characterizes Vermont mornings in summer. He slipped the rope over the mare's neck and pulled gently until Dolly went down on her knees. And then she rolled—rolled and snorted with delight. Finally she scrambled to her feet. Brad allowed her a mouthful or two of grass and then he took her back into the stable, fed all three horses their hay, and busied himself with the sulky, dusting it, greasing it, making certain that it was in shape.

An hour later the horses had finished their grain and Brad brought the little mare out onto the floor and cleaned her. It was about six o'clock when he finally harnessed her to the sulky and drove her out to the track. He was not the first driver out. He saw several other horses who would work that afternoon getting a limbering up.

Brad worked the mare easily, jogging her around the track for a half mile. He didn't use blinkers on her, and he had found she worked with a looser check rein than most horses require. After that half mile Brad stepped up the pace and she did another half mile at a spanking trot. In the middle of this lap he heard the thunder of hoofs behind him, and a horse came up at a terrific clip and passed them as though they'd been standing still. Brad caught a glimpse of the driver. It was

Saunders! Saunders driving the horse that was entered in Bill Watrous's name.

Brad's teeth were tight-clenched as he eased the mare into a jog again. That horse that Watrous was driving was "big time" —no doubt of it. Well, he'd promised Johnny. He and Dolly would go out there this afternoon and take their licking.

The matter seemed settled a little later, when Ben Harder, looking worn and tired, turned up at the barn as Brad was cooling out the mare.

"We've hunted all night, Mort and me," he said, "without findin' hide nor hair of Benson and Watrous. It looks like Riley got wind of what we was up to and covered 'em up."

"Then our goose is cooked," said Brad, glumly. "I just seen Saunders drivin' that Watrous entry."

"We done our best, Brad," said Ben.

"I know that," Brad assured him, quickly. "I just feel kind of low. I hate to have that louse put it over on me, Ben. And I hate to disappoint the kid. He's lyin' there in the hospital rootin' for me to win."

"I know," said Ben. He spat angrily at a small stone and submerged it. "But you ain't the only one. I hear the Committee's kind of stirred up over the first two days' reports. They figured about five thousand folks had been here the first two days, but accordin' to Riley's ticket taker there was less'n twenty-five hundred. The booths in the midway has had crowds around 'em all the time, but Riley claims only a few of 'em is spenders. The rest jest stand around and look on, he says. Accordin' to the present returns the Committee's forty percent of the profits ain't goin' to amount to enough to clean up the grounds after it's all over."

"I could've told 'em that before it started," said Brad. His big fists were clenched. "It makes you sick to sit by and see this kind of thing happenin', and not be able to put the kibosh on t'it."

"Well, Mort and me won't quit, Brad. Maybe Benson and Watrous won't be able to stay away from the big race. We'll keep circulatin' in the crowd, an' if we can nail one of 'em we will. And good luck, Brad."

THE day dragged for Brad. He saw the crowds pouring in to the grounds. He heard all the amusement devices going full blast. Ordinarily he was keyed to a fever pitch of excitement before the big race, but today he felt none of that. He was going out there to take a licking, and there was no excitement in that. He went over to the hospital and had a chat with Johnny. He didn't let on to the kid how hopeless the whole thing was. He promised to send Johnny word between heats how he was doing. The boy was getting along so well that Martha came back to the trailer, fixed Brad a fine luncheon, and prepared to go to the races herself.

Brad went grimly to the barn about one o'clock and began to ready the mare. There were two other races beside the championship on the card. A free-for-all trot or pace came first, the championship came second, and a trick race for horses that also did light farm work came third. The heats would be run off in that rotation. The grandstand and bleachers were already jammed. This was the day the crowd looked forward to. They'd have their laughs and they'd see the best trottin' the county offered in the big Stakes. There was the constant sharp report of firecrackers. The horses were nervous, and their drivers strung tight.

By the time Brad had the mare carefully groomed and ready to harness the horses were out on the track for the first heat of the trot or pace. Brad went to the barn door from where he could see the entire track. He saw the horses maneuvering for the start. There were three false breaks before they got off. As they came down the back stretch and rounded the south turn Brad saw that Saunders was driving the pace-setting horse. He smiled grimly. That horse belonged to Ben Grafton and was on the level. It showed how smart Riley was, getting Saunders the job of driving a couple of legitimate horses as well as the ringers.

Saunders' horse won that heat and then Brad brought out Dolly and hitched her to the sulky. He adjusted his goggles and led her out to the track, walking at her head. He stood, rubbing her nose for a moment before he pulled up the check rein.

"We can't beat Riley, honey," he said, "but we can take a shot at beatin' all of the legitimate horses. It'll suit me fine if we do that." He climbed into the sulky and they began to jog around the track.

As they came abreast of the grandstand the crowd began to clap and cheer and shout at Brad. They all knew about Johnny, of course. It was a sort of greeting and a wish for good luck. He sent the mare for a couple of fast sprints down the track, and, by that time, all the entries were ready to go. Brad saw Saunders, spraddled behind the big bay ringer. He saw Ben Grafton's entry, a fine black trotter that Brad knew could run all day but had no particular burst of speed. He was always a tough horse in the third heat, because he could trot just as well then as he could when he was fresh. And there was Joe Cobb's chestnut filly, a hot favorite with the crowd. And Playboy, Bob Whipple's handsome gray. Oh, it would be a fine race if it wasn't for Saunders!

As Brad came back past the judges' stand he saw Riley up there, along with the starter and the race committee. For a minute their eyes met and Brad saw a sardonic little smile twist Riley's lips.

"You're on the outside of the front tier, Mr. Everton," called the starter. "Let's get going the first time."

Brad looked over the field, Saunders had the pole. Grafton's horse was number two. Maritza, the chestnut filly, was third, and Brad was fourth in the front line. Playboy, Lewis Wilson's Snapdragon, and two other horses Brad didn't recognize were in the back tier. The eight entries moved slowly down the track.

"Give those second line horses a chance to get down before you turn, Mr. Saunders!" the starter bellowed.

Saunders handled the bay, who was obviously high strung and nervous, with skill. He kept him headed down till the second tier horses began to whirl. Then Saunders whirled. Brad felt that cold, racing calm descend over him as he turned Dolly. Maritza was slow, very slow, making the about-face.

"Easy, easy! Let that filly come up!"

Saunders had the bay well in check on the pole. Grafton was stretched out almost straight trying to pull in Niblo, his black. Dolly responded to Brad with almost the sensitiveness of a saddle horse. She stayed exactly where Brad rated her. Maritza was coming now—coming fast. It looked good—very good!

"Go!"

THEY were off the first time! This rarely happened in the big race. Everyone was too eager—or a smart driver would see he didn't have the best of starts and purposely break his horse into a run. Brad rated Dolly fast for the first turn. Saunders wasn't going any great shakes on the pole and as they reached the turn both Brad and Joe Cobb's Maritza rounded it ahead. Dolly forged to the front as they went down the back stretch. She was sweet . . . sweet! Brad glanced over his shoulder and saw the line up behind him. Maritza, Niblo, Saunders with the bay, Playboy—the rest he couldn't distinguish. Down the back stretch they went, and around the south turn in the same order. Dolly was the only trotter Brad had ever driven who didn't lean heavily on the reins. He simply set her at a certain pace and she held it, without effort, without excitement.

They came down the home stretch for the first trip with the crowd yelling. Grafton's Niblo was pulling up and for the moment it was a three horse race between Dolly, Maritza, and the black. All the time in Brad's mind was the bitter certainty that presently Saunders would start driving the bay and then it would be all over. Dolly gave just a little more and pulled away from the two challengers, and then Brad heard the roar from the crowd that

he'd been expecting. Saunders had pulled out and was coming up. As they turned into the back stretch the big bay came winging. Brad began swearing softly under his breath. It was so unfair . . . He could feel a little more pressure on the reins. Dolly was pulling slightly. She had a great heart, the little red mare, but she was going as fast as Brad had ever known her to go. Saunders swept past at a killing pace, and he grinned at Brad as the bay took him away. The bay was a great horse—but a horse that ought not to be running in this kind of competition. Well, it was just what Brad had expected. He glanced back as they reached the turn into the home stretch. Maritza was coming up, challenging him boldly for second place.

Very gently Brad tapped Dolly with his whip. "Give what you can, honey!" he said, softly.

And then something very much like a miracle happened. The sulky seemed almost to shoot out from under Brad. Dolly was flying. Brad had never ridden so fast behind a trotter in his life. It was as if the mare had shifted into high gear for the first time. She raced away from Maritza as if she were standing still. She was pulling up, up on the bay! Suddenly Brad's heart began to hammer at his ribs. She was overtaking Riley's horse—bearing down on him like an avenging angel. The crowd, whipped to its feet by the sudden revival of the race, was screaming its excitement. On came Dolly, straight as a string, trotting . . . trotting like mad. She was up to Saunders' shoulder. Saunders was flapping his arms and shouting, "Yah! Yah! Yah!" —an old maneuver designed to spur on his own horse and frighten the one coming up.

But Dolly never wavered. She didn't flinch as Saunders' whip slashed at the bay's flanks. Up . . . inch by inch . . . up to his flanks . . . up to his withers . . . up till they were almost neck to neck and then the bay nosed under the wire, first by inches!

Brad was swearing as he eased the game little mare down! "My fault, Dolly! My fault!" he kept repeating. "I started you too late. But how did I know you had it!"

CHAPTER X

FAIR ENDING

WHEN Brad got back to the barn Ben was there, ready with coolers, sponges, cloths. Brad looked at him, bewildered.

"What are you doin' here, Ben? You're supposed to be up to your own barn."

"Heck with it!" Ben cried boisterously. "I'm stringin' with you. You've got him beat, Brad. He was all out at the finish and you was jest startin' to come. If you hadn't let him get the jump on you . . ."

"I know," said Brad, bewildered. "I didn't know she had it in her. It was like she shifted into high gear—like I'd been runnin' her in second before that!"

"Oh, the lovely!" Ben cooed. He was rubbing the mare's sweating flanks with a cloth. "She ain't even breathin', Brad. You're gonna take Riley—take him in spite of his dirty tricks! Boy, what a laugh!"

Brad was like a man in a dream. He was trying to remember all the times he'd driven the mare. He raced her against Volometer and Old Phil on the farm . . . that was all. He'd never asked her to do more than beat them, and she'd never opened up. And he'd never dreamed she had it to give!

Dozens of people were crowding down around Brad's barn now. They were all talking excitedly about the mare. They were all berating Brad for starting her too late. And Brad only smiled. He couldn't tell 'em he hadn't known how good his own horse was.

It seemed like almost no time before marshal came galloping down the track with the summons for the second heat of the Championship Stakes. Ben helped Brad re-harness the mare . . . walked out to the track with him.

"Watch Saunders this time," Ben cau-

tioned. "He knows you got the speed to beat him and he may try tricks."

"I'll watch him," said Brad grimly.

The start of that second heat was nothing like the first. They tried at least a half dozen times before they really got off. The chief trouble was Saunders. He was turning the bay on the pole too soon and getting off too fast. Brad realized that he'd changed his tactics. He was going to run in front this time if he could. Saunders looked worried. Brad caught a glimpse of Riley in the judges' stand and saw that the sardonic smile was gone from the promoter's lips. Then, just when it seemed that this was another false start, the starter let them go. He let them go with Saunders a good length in front of the rest of the field.

Brad's lips were a thin determined slit and his fingers were strong as piano wires on the reins. This heat he *had* to win. If the bay took this one the race was over. Saunders was driving fast from the start, and he had a good lead. Brad was in third place when they rounded the turn, Maritza having shot quickly in behind Saunders at the start. Brad kept out toward the center of the track and set Dolly at a steady clip. He had a hunch Maritza would break presently under this gruelling pace, and he didn't want to be behind her when it happend. Half way down the back stretch it did happen, and Brad moved into second place.

It was a two horse race from then on. Behind them the field was a shambles. The pace was too hot, and three of the horses had broken and were fighting for their heads. Only Niblo came on at his steady gate, unruffled, unperturbed. He'd finish third—a bad third. That was apparent.

Brad was willing to run second. It put the pressure on Saunders. Riley's driver kept glancing back over his shoulder, his teeth bared. He was wondering when Brad would start to come on. The crowd roared at them as they swept by the stands and started into the second lap. Brad was filled with wonder. The little red mare ran smooth as a watch. He had set her at this pace and she stayed there. She wasn't fighting for her head. She was waiting for Brad to tell her to go. And Brad wanted to laugh. The bay was all out as they came down the back stretch, and Brad knew that Dolly still had a lot in reserve. He could feel it. They came round the south turn and into the home stretch.

"Now!" said Brad, and touched her with the whip.

It was like loosing a skyrocket. She seemed to shoot forward. Saunders was watching, and as she came up he swerved the bay slightly toward the center of the track in front of her. Suddenly Brad, perspiring, felt cold down to his toes. Saunders was going to try to prevent his passing. He tried to cut in, and Saunders cut in front of him.

Brad yelled at him. "Let me by!"

He swung out again and Saunders swerved wide in front of him driving him almost to the rail. The crowd was on its feet, booing, shouting! Brad lost his head completely, but Dolly kept hers. She didn't break, but kept trying to nose around the sulky in front of her. There were hot tears of rage in Brad's eyes. He might have expected this. Across the finish line they flashed, the bay first, Brad second.

BRAD reined in Dolly as quickly as he could, wheeled her about, and trotted quickly back to the judges' stand.

"I claim a foul on that!" he shouted up at Lem Hobbs. "He wouldn't let me past! That ain't allowed, Lem."

"Foul my foot!" Riley shouted down. "Everton, can't you take any sort of a licking without crying!"

"Foul!" the crowd was shouting.

Lem Hobbs looked worried and conferred with the others. Ben Harder came running up with a cooler for the mare. He was shaking with rage. "If they let that stand," he said, hoarsely, "I'll have every one of their hides."

People were sweeping across the track toward the judges' stand, shouting:

"Everton would've won that fair and square!"

"Foul drivin'!"

"Even a blind man could tell that was foul!"

In the judges' stand Riley was arguing urgently, angrily. At last he left the stand and headed directly for the barn where Saunders had taken the bay.

"He's kind of lost his head, ain't he?" said Ben Harder. "Showin' right out in public he had an interest in that horse."

Then the starter came to the amplifier, a slip of paper in his hand. Tensely Brad waited for his first words.

"Number one was disqualified," he announced, and the crowd shouted its approval. "Number four, Dolly, won the heat." There were yells and hoots of delight from the spectators. "Number six was third. Number five was . . ."

Brad and Ben led the mare down the track toward the barn. Ben was chuckling. "You've got him now, Brad. That bay ringer was wobblin' in the stretch. You'll beat him by ten lengths in the next heat."

"I got to telephone the hospital and let Johnny know how things is," said Brad.

And then, when they reached the barn, Mort Graves was standing in the doorway, a grim smile on his face. In silence he gestured toward the inside. There, seated on an old nail keg, was Bill Watrous. He was white, and his lips trembled.

"I didn't mean no harm, Brad," he said. "I needed the money bad—have a note to meet at the bank. Honest I didn't mean no harm."

"Riley give him fifty bucks fer the use of his name," said Mort disgustedly.

Brad's eyes had the light of joy in them. "You'll testify against Riley, Watrous?"

"Sure. Sure I will, Brad. I'll do anything to put things right."

"If you'll take care of the mare, Ben, I think I'll try to get to a phone," said Brad. He smiled, a tight little smile. "And maybe I'll have time for a little fun before the next heat." He turned to Mort. "How'd you find him, Mort?"

"Funny thing," said Mort. "A girl come up to me in the crowd. 'You're lookin' fer Bill Watrous, ain't you?' she says. Yes, I says. 'Well, he's hidin' over in that tool shed, watchin' the races through the window,' she says. And with that she slipped away. I don't know who she was or how she knew I was lookin' fer Watrous."

Brad's smile broadened. He knew the answer. So Johnny hadn't been so wrong about the girl after all!

IN the tack room of the main barn Silk Riley confronted Saunders, his driver. Riley's face was vicious. "You fool," he snarled. "You tipped our mitt, pulling an obvious foul like that. What's wrong with you?"

Saunders shrugged. "Our horse is through, Silk. He pulled his cork in that last heat. I knew I had to win that or our goose was cooked. Only chance left was to foul him and hope the claim wouldn't be allowed." And then Saunders' eyebrows went up and he took a quick step back, for someone had just come through the tack room door. Riley turned —to face Brad Everton and his fingers tightened on his malacca cane.

"What are you doing here, Everton?" Riley demanded.

"I come lookin' for you," said Brad calmly. He looked at Saunders. "Run away, little man, if you don't hanker to get hurt," he drawled.

"Stay where you are, Saunders!" Riley snapped.

Saunders looked at Riley and then at Brad, and then he made for the door.

"Shut it after you as you go out!" said Brad very softly. And then he was alone with Riley. "We found Watrous," he said, calmly. "I guess we'll be able to nail you fer the whole rotten business, Riley. I kind of think that when Justice Potter hears about your game he won't be likely to fine me very heavy for what I'm about to do."

"Keep your hands off me!" said Riley. He raised his stick as Brad advanced and slashed savagely at Brad's face with it. Brad's right forearm took the brunt of the blow—and then he caught up with Riley. His left arm jammed Riley back

against the wall and his right fist landed with devastating force squarely in the middle of Silk Riley's face. Just that one blow was enough.

Riley crumpled and folded slowly on knees that no longer held him up. It seemed to take a long time before he lay face down on the ground. Brad stood over him, then turned away.

Back in his own barn Brad sucked on a set of badly bruised knuckles, but there was a look of calm satisfaction on his face. Ben Harder, who had just finished hitching the little red mare to the sulky for the last heat, looked at him shrewdly.

"Well, Brad," he drawled, "looks like you had your fun all right!"

Brad smiled. For the first time in three days the old humorous twinkle which was so characteristic of him was in his eyes. "Yep," he said, casually. "I had my fun —plenty of it." Methodically he examined the mare's hitching to make certain that everything was all right.

"Mort took Watrous over to the Fair Committee," said Ben. "I guess when they hear his story Mr. Silk Riley may have quite a lot of questions to answer."

"If he *can* answer," drawled Brad. "The last time I saw him it looked to me like he might have quite a bit of trouble doin' any talkin' of any kind."

Just then the track marshal came riding up on horseback. "All ready for the third heat of the championship, Mr. Everton."

"All ready," said Brad.

The marshal grinned at him. "They just got word up t'the judges' stand that Watrous's horse is withdrawn from the race."

"I kind of figured it might turn out that way," drawled Brad. He climbed into the sulky and adjusted his goggles.

Ben Harder gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder.

"It looks like mebbe the Fair's got back in the hands of the people that ought to run it," he said. "Thanks to you, Brad."

Brad jogged the little red mare out onto the track and as he went by the stands in a warm-up trot there was a roar of approval from the crowd. No question about who their favorite was. As Brad turned Dolly to come back to the starting point he found himself moving along beside Ben Grafton and Niblo.

The little red mare stood patiently, but there was an eager lift to the set of her head. Brad was satisfied.

Grafton grinned at him. They'd been friendly rivals for years. "I hate to admit it before the race is run, Brad, but it looks like that there mare of yours is the champion for this year."

There was just a faint note of pride in Brad's voice as he said:

"She does go kind of sweet, don't she?"

THE END

The Pup Comes Home

By CHARLES T. JACKSON

Author of "Getaway Money," "Risin' River," etc.

THE shotgun guard chunked his heel down upon the sandbag topping where the river had begun to nibble. He was a sharecropper from the Mississippi shore, and over here it was different country, a gloom of moss-hung cypress through the mist and their bases were in seven feet of black still water, backwash from a *crevasse* miles below. The tired farmer didn't like the Mississippi talking to him, didn't care for the grunts and mutters from the boils and eddies, but the Louisiana cypress swamp just over this levee was deadly still, sinister, to a lone man walking his beat.

Deputy Sheriff Steve Malette, the lean, grinning Cajun of the swamp country, had come up the main levee singing in the rain. He thought it would help frightened strangers drafted to this job.

Crawfeesh put to d' middle de sea dis mawnin',
Crawfeesh put to middle de sea dis mawnin'—
Crawfeesh put to middle de sea, an' holler,
Yo Frenchman, yo can't catch me dis mawnin'!

The patrol smiled wanly; this was a gaga Frenchman sure enough. Then he started nervously, swung his rusty buckshot gun.

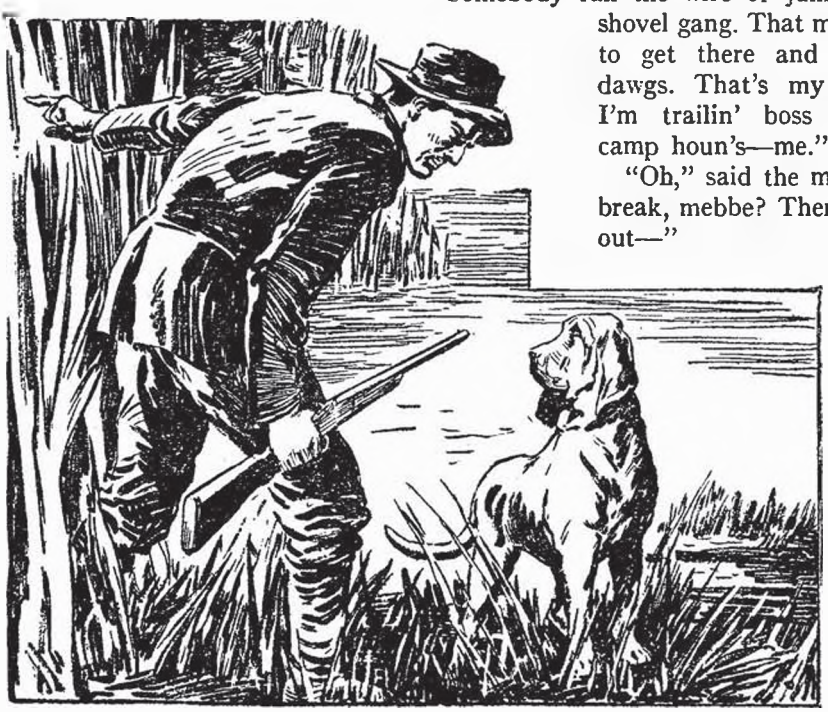
"Man, what's that!"

A sound above the shuffle of the river and the rain on the sandbags. The deputy tensed, staring, listening. The guard yelled.

"Steamboat! No boat's allowed to run the river on floodcrest along here! The bank liable to go with a pound more pressure!"

Steve eyed him tranquilly. "Boy, she ain't no steamboat. It's the siren at camp. Somebody ran the wire or jump out the shovel gang. That means I got to get there and start my dawgs. That's my job—me. I'm trailin' boss for them camp houn's—me."

"Oh," said the man. "'Jailbreak, mebbe? Them convicts out—"



He was wet and chilled and lonesome, and a man on levee patrol gets funny feelings. Step down the ramp and the Mississippi is level with your eyes, and it looks like a herd of brown-backed bulls crowding and grunting; and if they shoved harder, this dirt bank would explode under your feet. The top of the levee was nothing but a line of dirty white between the brown of the hurrying river and the dead black silence of the cypress water. The singing deputy caroled again to wipe the fear from this farmer.

Get up Frenchman, yo sleep too late,
De crawfeeshman done pass yo gate, dis mawnin'!

"Dawgs," muttered the patrol, "I seen your pack when I was off duty last week. The old gray, and the black spot hound, and a lame whitey dawg, but say, I seen one of 'em just now—little bitty red hound and he was sobbin' like his heart was broke."

"*Non!* Not my dawgs on the loose—no!"

"Yeah, I did. Red hound come down the levee and turned off on the back-set bank when he saw me—right into that swamp there! Kind of a brindle redbone whimperin' to himself."

Deputy Steve winced. This hurt. That young redbone was a rebel who wouldn't train. The pack leader, old gray Powl, couldn't teach him. And Steve Malette loved the renegade. He swore he had breeding and class and wisdom and courage, but the little hound had shown nothing. He was shy, and would gaze at the prisoners through the wire stockade with sympathetic eyes as if he thought, for some past misdeed or other, he, too, should be inside looking out.

Malette had staked his fame as a trailin' deputy on this dog, and last week the jeers and jibes of all the camp had come upon him. Camp guards and convicts had laughed at the story. Even the sheriff roared when it reached the county seat. Steve had given the new hound a final test. The custom was, on a Sunday morning, to promise some long-legged trusty two bits if he'd run out ahead and let the hound tree him. That grinning swamp black man took the money and his head start. Malette sent his redbone pupil on the trail and followed listening for the treed call, the glad clear cry of the triumphant hound. That Negro never came back, nor the pup either for two days, hungry and thin. The sheriff said that of course he didn't want a hound that escorted prisoners to the state line and then kissed them goodby. It was a scandal; Malette had bought the pup from a Plaquemine tradeboat man who said it had come from the famous Doyon plantation kennels on the Teche. Starved and scared and broken-spirited as the pup had been, Steve saw something in him, had waited patiently for him to show class.

Now the deputy stood in the rain where the ancient back-set levee left the main one and curved south into the jungle. The old Creole back-set was important this week when the water had backed in from a break miles down river. The flood was deep in the big woods but unstirred while the Mississippi was lashing to fury under rain and cross wind. Malette looked down the back-set.

"Well, my frien', the whistle means me—hurry to camp and put my dawgs out. The camp captain will wait fo' me—yaas."

DEPUTY STEVE could boast a little; he had a name through the deep swamp, tireless and eager as his baying pack. The short-term convict gangs liked Steve too. He put the gang guards in a good humor with his Cajun songs and banter when he passed the weary workers. He made the camp captain proud of his gangs' fight behind the levee. Black men and white men who'd licked the river all these weeks. Prisoners who worked in mud and chill and danger under the gun. But there were free men, honest men, also, working in the chill and mud, with little food and no rest, alongside the chain-gang boys. This levee section was a bad one, but the workers were winning. Hardly a man of the ninety convicts in this camp

who wouldn't win commutation of sentence, and some would get full pardons for the fight they'd made.

So this hurt Steve now. A jailbreak, a run-out, today was like desertion in the firing line. Then he thought of the faithless redbone hound; another skulker who had quit the levee to hide in the deep swamp. Sorry, shy little hound with sad eyes of mystery. Steve couldn't understand; he loved a dog and this one dog let him down.

He waved a courteous *adieu* to the forlorn levee guard. Where the back-set levee left the river he looked through the gap of forest. On the left side there were seven feet of water under the mighty trees. On the right, lacing pools through deserted fields, seepage water which one could expect now. Beyond the first brushy fields were the cane lands, the big plantation houses, and the little Creole farms bowered in magnolias and oaks. Steve's own family lived down there on Bayou Leroux. He wasn't worried about Celeste and the two kids and the cows and mules. Cajuns didn't leave till the water really came, and the flooded swamp belt was checked by the back-set levee. But it was a somber countryside, hoping against evil. Steve's duty was back in camp tonight with his hounds, but he studied the land briefly. There were shallow ponds and pools everywhere, seepage water that had come through the ramparts, but that was all right. For a moment, Malette watched the land below the levee with swamp-wise judgment.

Then he saw the redbone. The young hound was slipping along the brushy ramp of the levee to the top, and there it halted, turning a delicate nose in Malette's direction. The deputy did not move. Certainly the dog had scented him and now saw him. But it might have been a blind, dumb animal for all the recognition given the master. On the hound went, deeper into the brush, head up, the fine high skull cap with the deep red line running to its tail, moving when Malette couldn't see the brindle body. The long lap ears and the deep melancholy eyes were what had drawn Steve to it in the first place. "A thinking dog, a noticin' dog," he had declared with honored pedigree behind him, and he ought to work.

Malette sighed and shook his head. That hound had deserted in the time of need. There must be some scandal back in his ancestry, or that tradeboat man had broken his spirit before Malette had got him last autumn.

"Boy," muttered the deputy, "yo' better keep on goin'. Back where yo' come from if yo' know how. You're a bum."

Then he saw the red head lifting above the brush, moving as a hound will on sight. Only there was no prey in sight, and if there had been, a good hound would give the call that every trailing officer would know as the signal of success. The wild joyous clamor of the pack when an escaped man is treed or turns at bay to wait for the deputies. Malette followed into the woods, and the dog slipped silently ahead. It was queer. When the hound came to where a tree had smashed down upon the old levee, it went to the water, swam about the obstruction and pressed steadily on.

THE deputy climbed through the broken branches of the fallen tree to watch the renegade. It hurt to give this dog up as a failure, and he was curious. That animal had the alert absorbed manner of a good hound on trail. Except his silence, for if a hound wouldn't give call at the right moments you couldn't do much about it. On training days Malette had run his legs dead trying to find the redbone again.

Steve grumbled discontent. "Boy, I can't trifle with yo'. My business is back to camp on that alarm. How come yo' out on yore own, unless the captain kick you out for some foolishness?"

But Malette climbed higher for another look. Then the rotten bark slid and he pitched out headlong into the deep black water about the cypress knees. Seven feet of dirty creeping flood held behind the ancient Cajun levee in this timber belt. Malette got his head up, clawed to the ramp and out. There was the young hound

gazing at him doubtfully. The deputy swore and crashed toward him.

The redbone went on, weaving under the wet brush. Malette shoved after him, dodging mangrove clumps and palmettos, and then stopped to wipe mud from his arms. Then muttered more wrath. His flashlight case and his automatic were gone from his belt—down in that muddy pool by the fallen tree.

"Name of the devil! Do I have to go back and report this happen on account of a runaway dawg? Me—laughed at again!"

Malette was so mad that he forgot all his English and began reviling the hound in stout Cajun-French, and the animal looked back dumbly. The deputy followed on in growing twilight. In spots the *crevasse* water was trickling over the rampart slowly, and the shallow pools in the fields on this other side were wider. But still there was a good path along the top, and where the levee went eastward the first cultivated lands came to view. Young green cane was drowning in the seep pools.

Beyond them Malette saw the ancient white columns of the Forêt plantation house and the great oaks of the coast highway. Five miles beyond was the five-acre truck farm where Celeste and the children stayed with old Pierre Malette whose family had held the home since the days of the Spanish viceroys. No lights were about the big Forêt house, and the field hands' quarters were deserted. The Yankee sugar managers worked these lands now, and they saw no use of sticking to a place that was under the threat of the river. To be sure, there was the cypress belt over the first levee, and the engineers said that this swamp, even if it was a mighty lake seven feet deep now, was an added protection for it lessened the strain on the main levee along the swirling river. So this was a somber deserted countryside with fear written across its rainy miles, as the Cajun deputy gazed at it in the fading twilight. He would like to get home if only for an hour to tell Celeste that the floodcrest was passing.

"Fallin' river, *chérie,* and even a soft bank will hold—if the back-set keeps the water in the swamp. Trust *le bon Dieu,* and luck, for another day." Malette turned away.

Going home would be desertion in the face of the enemy just as this renegade dog had done, deserted, and that foolish prisoner who'd made the run-out when every man was needed on the battle line. Only he was puzzled about the redbone tonight. That hound had never shown interest in his work before, and now he was moving through the dark and the storm just as a dog of the Law should do—working alone without orders. It made no sense.

MALETTE felt the water slush around in his boots, and he was chilled now. Time to give up this foolishness and get back to the stockade where swift work waited for him—Steve Malette and his famous runnin' pack. Old Powl would be wild to scent trouble, and his master was absent. Powl would work under Steve like a tough old army sergeant, grumbling but obedient. Old Powl would run the other dogs, too, just as a tough non-com runs his squad. With a swamp deputy behind them they were grand workers.

Deputy Steve turned back growling; he didn't see the hound he'd loved and lost. Then he saw a light through the misty twilight; it seemed to shine from under the broken brick arches of the ancient Forêt sugar house, and then it moved. It shone on thin pools by the levee and vanished. That was queer. The place had been deserted a week ago by its timorous managers—Yankees who feared that brown river behind the woods above their heads.

"Some river rats lootin' in the Forêt place," muttered Steve. "Me—maybe I better look closer." He went on along the levee until he was opposite the long sugar house, crouching in the brush on the opposite side, and the water was deep here. But Steve was wet anyway; he moved stealthily to make no stir in the flood. An old plank-loading platform extended from the warehouse out to the levee; the rusty rails of an abandoned field road showed in places

above the pools. And on the end of this platform where it joined the bank stood the redbone hound. Malette was thirty feet behind him and the dog's nose went up. No other sign that a man scent was near him. He was steady as a pointer, watching the dark bulk of the sugar house.

Then Malette heard voices, one in croaking laughter. Two men had come about the corner, and one pointed in the dusk.

"Mebbe you believe me now, Ike. The pup's come home!"

The other man came closer muttering. Malette recognized him now—a big hairy shanty-boater unknown on the Bayou Leroux. He'd come down from some rat-eyed river town below Natchez last year, and ran a bush-cat line though he had little catfish for the tradeboats. The swamp bayous sheltered many such who came and went no one knew where. But when Malette got a fair sight of the other, he tensed. Dirty faded blue and gray stripes —a twisted face that snarled even as it laughed. Mase Delery, who'd been sent to the levee camp from jail where he'd been doing a year on a 'fightin'-an'-cuttin'' charge in Bloody Tangipahoa. A trouble-maker in the convict work gangs, a man who had boasted darkly of his record up-river.

"And so," whispered Malette, "it was for yo'. the siren she blew this evenin'. Ma' frien', yo' come fast, I remark."

But that hound? The deputy was watching it unseen. The two men on the planks were watching it, too. Delery snickered again but a queer silence followed. The hound gazed unflinchingly at them. Then the big man croaked uneasily.

"You took a dog out from the stockade, eh? It ain't done!"

"Look at him, Sourds! He's the pup you stole down on the Teche from that planter and sold to the fish boat! Man, that hound's been knowin' me fer five weeks since I came to the stockade. He remembered me from when I was with you on the Red River before I gets in the knife job in Tangipahoa. He—watch him now!"

Delery went slowly, reaching his hand out, and the hound slunk back, fading to the levee brush. Sourds grunted relief.

"Knows me, eh? Curse him, I don't want to know him. How come you pick up a law's dog makin' in here to me?"

"He come to me on the upper levee. I took out from the gang when they knocked off and started to the wires. It was drifting fog, and them gun guards passed me lyin' in the ditch. They didn't know I was missin' 'till the gate check-up. I heard the whistle when I was clear down on the back-set—safe."

"Yeah? But that dog?"

"I tell you he wouldn't worry me none. The first I saw him was when I put a levee patrol down. Run on this guy in the fog, and I got him—"

Sourds snarled, "Killed him?"

"Well, it was like this. I slugged him with a chunk of wood. His shotgun fell in the river so I rolled him after."

The shanty-boatman cursed savagely. "And you run to me—kill a feller, and run to me, Where's that dog now?"

He was peering in the wet bushes. Delery muttered, "What you thinkin' about that dog? That's when I first saw him—he came along in the mist when I slugged the shotgun guard. And he didn't give call nor nothin'. Stood watchin' me like a ghost. When I went on and turned out on the back-set he followed me. Never made any trouble. Just once he raised a yammer when I turned from the big levee into the cypress. Then he came pushin' after me."

"Blast you," growled Sourds, "you didn't tell me you'd killed a man when you first came. And fetch a camp dog in. You know that deputy, Malette? He'll scout the deep swamp from here to Bayou La Romp, hell'n high water, fer his dog."

"Will he? Not if you and me stick. There ain't goin' to be trail nor time fer nothin' by them guards when I'm done. Let's go."

DELERY crouched lower, then back, for the two were coming from the platform. Once he saw Sourds above the brush. The big man was carrying a shovel and Delery followed with some package

that the officer could not make out. Malette crouched lower. Let them go down the old levee to Sourds' shanty-boat; it was all right with the Law. Before daylight Malette would have his hounds in here and the killer would get nowhere across Bayou Leroux. There was no other habitable country he could reach, for the flooded cypress swamp skirted the Mississippi for miles. An escaped man would want to reach the coast or the railroad unless he had a hideout—and Malette knew the hideout now. The thin-lipped killer of that other farmer guard, who should have been on the beat above the one that Malette had talked with, was leaving a plain trail.

But the two had stopped on the levee. Malette saw Sourds peering about uneasily. Then he spoke loudly.

"Delery, where's that dog? I don' like it. I didn't like him on the shanty. He seemed watchin' me all the time. I used to beat tar out of him, and he watched me all the time."

"What's the matter? Scared of a hound? . . . There he is now."

Sourds tried to see through the gray twilight along the levee. "Where is he? You don't hear him."

"I heard at the camp that's what's wrong with him. He won't give voice. Malette had to stop workin' him, I heard. Well, come on."

Malette saw them fade in the gray night. He got to his feet and looked north along the old levee, the misty fields on one side and the wall of black water on the other. He felt good now. Five miles to camp perhaps, and he would boast to the captain that he'd have Mase Delery trapped or treed by daylight. It would be something to string to the grand record of Old Powl and his trailing mates.

The deputy had taken one silent step on the path when something touched his hand. The hound had come from nowhere and nudged a cold nose to him. He looked down and the redbone stared up. Malette muttered softly, and he could swear that the hound was warning him with a shake of the head. Malette touched his wet back. That dog was pleading mystery with him, mystery and danger sure as ever dog sign held with men who knew.

"Leetle feller," whispered Malette, "where you been raised? Leetle bitty sorry dawg, raised on a river rat's shanty—boy, no wonder yo' act 'shamed to me. Now, man, tell me about it."

He knelt in the wet leaves and held a hand out. But the dog had vanished. Malette bent to look under the brush. The redbone had gone a yard on the trail of Delery and Sourds and then stopped. He was looking back and when Malette nodded, the hound put a foot down slowly cautiously on the trail again. And looked back. The deputy got up puzzledly. This was no way for a hound to act. The woods should be echoing with his deep glad baying if he was on sight of a fugitive. It didn't make sense except in a bird dog who mustn't alarm the game ahead. Malette felt of his empty gun holster. The handcuffs were still in their case, but he hadn't even a match for the dark of a cypress swamp in such a night. He ought to be heading for the river in the last light.

Then the cold nose touched his hand again. The redbone had come and gone. Malette sighed and stole after. He passed the sugar-house platform and followed the hound on the levee top. It might be a mile to where Sourds' grimy shanty-boat was moored safe under the levee where Bayou Leroux ended in the first big timber. Deputy Steve Malette could do nothing here alone and knew it. Yet he slowly followed the softly trailing hound. It didn't make sense but he followed the hound. There'd be guns aplenty on Ike Sourd's shanty-boat, and two desperate river rats to handle with no help within miles along this deserted countryside, but Malette followed the hound.

What was that Delery had said? There would be no trail when he was done?

A trail fresh as paint and deep as a rut along this narrow strip of dirt! You could track these men tomorrow by their footprints! But the killer had said there'd be no trail tomorrow . . .

DEPUTY MALETTE stopped rigid, thinking of something—an idea that would smash a river man like a hammer blow in the face. Then he had to crouch. He heard the two low voices very near. There was an open space, a sunken spot in the levee, and here they knelt. They were working and mumbling. The hound was six feet ahead of Malette watching.

"Nom de Dieu!" whispered the Cajun.

He crept a space and touched the thin dog's wet flank. The redbone did not quiver. He was like stone—watching.

"Boy," breathed Malette, "Now I know. There is death about . . ."

He thought he saw a dim light ahead and wasn't sure. But Delery and Sourds arose and started heavily down the levee beyond. Once Sourds' grumbling croak arose. "Where's that mangy dog? We oughta killed him first, Mase. Law's hound sneakin' in the dark! Never did like that dog. There was somethin' in his eyes all the time I had him. Get along here, man, to the shanty and cut loose. There'll be driftin' water below a-plenty."

They were fifty feet beyond the sunken spot when Malette rushed. The hound was ahead of him when they broke from the brush. The deputy threw himself sprawling, clutching in the mud.

He fumbled and clawed hopelessly in the dark, and then he saw the spark, and his belly was over a coil of fuse. He crawled over it and had hands to a soaked paper package. His fingers went through it about dynamite sticks, and then he staggered up. He was swinging fuse and package high and swift and then he let it go far out in the wet fields. Death was here for himself and the hound and maybe for all the people beyond, the little Cajun farmers who wouldn't leave just at a threat of big water. Delery saw the sparkling fuse twinkle a minute but the redbone was yelling by his side. The dog that wouldn't give voice was raising the clear deep call of his kind. He was chorusing to the dark, and any man in a mile would have recognized it.

Then Malette swerved. Some one was coming back. A cursing, fighting man with a shovel. Delery did not see the deputy until Steve rose up by him. Then the dark vanished in a spread of flame. The flame vanished in a sea of mud—rising harmlessly in the cane fields, but the back blast of that explosion leveled the hair on their heads. Delery reeled back from the rocking noise of it and Malette rushed him. He swung his steel cuffs and the killer took the cut across his temple. He was down and the deputy fumbled over him. Then Malette staggered up, the breath gone from him. The dark had come again, and an odd silence. Then the hound bayed.

Malette felt of the cuffs again when Delery recovered and started to strain against them. The clamor of that dog following Sourds as he fled to his shanty echoed in the big cypress. Then silence. Deputy Steve sat down by his prisoner.

"Onnerstan', ma frien'," said the Cajun, "the leetle houn' is escortin' that fellow home. But he will come back to me. Now he will mind me, *eh bien?"* Malette laughed. "He has wiped his honor clean."

"Damn you, Malette, how you get in here? No dogs are running!" Delery fought and cursed savagely, and Malette waited until he stopped.

"Of no consequence, my frien'. The black water is very deep behind this bank you tried to destroy. If it had gone there would be a sea from here to Bayou Teche. First the swamp water and then the river leaping after it. You knew that, eh?"

Delery cursed him again. Malette went on softly, "You fled to your frien' who would give you clothes and had the dynamite with which he kills fish in the lakes all against the law. This man Sourds could not refuse you because you knew of his deeds up river—is that not true?"

The killer rolled upon one elbow in the mud staring. The hound came out of the dark and around him. Malette laughed and put his hand to the dog's neck. "You see how quiet he is now? How satisfied? No longer shame in his eyes because once he lived with you and Sourds on the shanty-boat. The man who beat him!"

"Listen," Dellery croaked unbelief.

"How'd you know anything about that? That hound came long quietly from the camp."

"He saw you escape, surely. And he also saw you slug a levee man and throw him to the river."

Delery came up twisting his cuffs. "You're a liar!"

The deputy smiled. "The red hound followed. It was his first blood trail. *Eh, bien*—why discuss it? Another murder, my frien'. But in the eyes of a swamp man like me—a Cajun, the worst crime is to blow a levee. *Sacré nom!* If the people on Bayou Leroux knew that, they would be here and swing you to a tree! But the joke is on them—I will deliver you to the law to be hanged for the murder of a poor man who was trying to guard their homes."

The killer suddenly remembered that he had better not talk. Anyway Deputy Malette paid no more attention to him. He called and the redbone obeyed him for the first time. Steve laughed and pulled his wet ear. The dog curled up by his knee.

"That is right," whispered Malette. "Rest, little soldier. You have done a good job, eh? Trailing in silence these men who hoped to be safe on a shanty-boat while people drown along the bayou. *Sacré nom!* Wait till I tell the sheriff that! No one will believe. But I know; you and I understand each other now, eh? Old Powl is nearing his end. Next season there will be a new leader of the pack, the greatest of them all! You will give voice now; it will ring all through the swamp on trail, but now talk to me just a little."

He put his ear down to the cold nose and the redbone gave a glad little whimper as a dog will do to the man who understands.

SANTA FORTUNA

The roots of the mystery that put forth its ugly blossoms that night aboard the *Fortuna* lay buried in the past. But Tony Blaisdell had to dig down and uncover them—if he wanted to live. A two-part novel by

T. T. FLYNN

COPRA

Samona was a Polynesian beauty who followed the Ten Tabus in the religion of the man she loved. It was Samona who showed Dave Weston how to battle South Sea savagery and the tyranny of white-man's law. A complete novelet by

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

HELL AND HIGH WATER

There was this newshawk named Perry Hilton. He was troubled by something he called ethics. At least he was until the flood tide of a river on rampage swept them right out of his life . . . A novelet by

RICHARD SALE

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—July 24th

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

HERE we are again, loaded to the gunwales (somehow we can't manage to keep the ship simile out of this column for more than a week or so) with so many stories that we had a tight squeeze getting the *Argonotes* into berth at all. Without further comment from the bridge, let's get on to the mail.

We are always happy to receive letters like the one (from Hawaii) immediately below. We can't say whether we agree with the writer or not. Nevertheless, we are always happy to receive letters like the one immediately below. It's from

MAMON NAGATA

Adventure all, and we here in Hawaii are enjoying one of America's best fiction magazine of variety. Oh boy! does it travel here and there on land, water and air of past, present and future.

I see the Captain doesn't forget to call at the port of Hawaii here and there. Here's hoping she will call here often, as you know we sure enjoy reading them.

But, as you know, one cannot improve the magazine by just printing any old sort of stories but must select the stories very carefully in order to please the readers and wait for their judgment by writing to you whether the story is good or not as often as I see in the Argonotes. Bang off it goes like this: best story I ever read . . . what a story . . . how about a sequel? . . . here's hoping more of them . . . trash! . . . if you print more of them I will not read ARGOSY again . . . and so forth, and does my head ache, does yours do, too? Well, it's all in the game.

Well, I got something here that may whirl your head round and round but please give it some thought.

Well, I must be going for I have taken too much of the Captain's precious time so *bon voyage* to the good ship ARGOSY. May it long sail the seven seas.

Honolulu, T. H.

ONCE more we are made to feel the perils of becoming an institution. We don't know whether any of you have ever been an institution or not, but it's a precarious lot at best, leading to a sort of anguished absorption of private ego, and fixing your life generally so that your friends are very nearly as harassing as your foes. The amiable partisanship of the next letter, for instance, had us wondering for days if we really existed (in the flesh, we mean) at all.

J. W. WILLIAMSON

When I hear these young sprouts tell about how long they have read the ARGOSY, say, five, ten or fifteen years, and then they try to tell you how to run the magazine, it makes me intensely weary. The ARGOSY and I are nearly the same age, but when I was a little kid, I read quite a few of the first years in bound volumes, and then my mother subscribed to it for me. I never made a kick when it was merged with other magazines, and others merged with it, for I knew that the fellow at the helm knew his business in steering.

However, I have noticed recently one suggestion that I would like to see you carry out. I say this as one who has never missed reading the ARGOSY from the beginning, Vol. 1 No. 1, except one or two copies I missed while overseas in 1918, but I believe I got most of those when I came back. The proposition is to have a monthly or quarterly, preferably the former, to reprint old stories. How I would like to see "Train and Station," "The Penrose (Major's) Plot," both of which were printed twice in the ARGOSY, quite a few years apart, "The Track of Midnight," "The Talisman" (that one is going back some) and others. I think that is a splendid idea.

Tell those ten and fifteen year readers to pipe down, that you are running the ship.

Ask those kids how many of them spent almost a whole night reading "Tarzan of the Apes" as the first story in the ARGOSY (com-

plete in one issue). That's only a short twenty-five years back.

Columbia, S. C.

THE next letter writer sent us a contents page with his preferences plainly marked in bright blue and red penciling. It's an interesting idea, and for us, an extremely instructive one. Why don't more of you try it?

L. WILMOT LOUGHMAN

I've been reading ARGOSY for years and years. Francis Lynde was your best author. This is just to give you an idea of the kind of stories I like.

RED SNOW AT DARJEELING (Part I)	**Fair**
BEYOND CONTROL	**Good**
THE MIGHT AND THE MIGHTY	**No good**
GALLOPING GOLD (Part II)	**Good**
GRAND NATIONAL (Part III)	**Very good**
THE GENTLE GUNMAN	**Good**
WAR FOR SALE (Part IV)	**No good**

Loughman, Florida.

EVEN our friends seem to hold out very little hope for us. The future is apparently filled either with bitterness or with straitjackets. Buried in the commiseratingly cheerful advice below seems to lurk—at least to our apprehensive eye—a sinister kernel of truth.

Sympathy, though, is our dish. As a small and somewhat noisome child, we used to sham sickness just to get the guava jelly and chicken broth that in our household were reserved strictly for those near to death's door. For your figurative jelly and broth, Good Neighbor Rankin, many thanks. Until your cheering epistle reached us, it had been many a long day since we had indulged in the luxury of feeling thoroughly sorry for ourselves. Now we can go on with brighter eye and stouter heart to what we trust will be better and much bigger things.

HAROLD B. RANKIN

Until I reformed to lead a saner life, I used to be mixed up in that there now publishing racket myself. So as one who's been behind the scenes himself I can more or less appreciate your struggles as well as admire your hearty effort to assemble a widely varied line-up of stories. But listen, pal, you can't please everybody. Trying to do that keeps you just one small jump ahead of the psychopathic ward.

Congratulations on "War for Sale." It was really a swell yarn—grown-up, male, and seemingly conversant with reality—at least with the splendidly cockeyed reality of a really good fairy tale. And there's enough new stuff in the Western prairies yet to keep a serial like "King Colt" rattling along at a good, refreshing clip.

I patiently waded through four—or was it fourteen?—installments of "The Big Wind Blows" entirely unrewarded, and I can't say that I would recommend either "Galahad Stuff" or "Guardian of the Gold' for the O'Henry Memorial. In fact the Watkins yarn receives my vote here and now for the Leo Lawson Rogers Prize announced a couple of weeks back.

But then, I know, you can't please everybody And I [illegible] would hate to be an Average Mean Reader.

Chicago, Ill.

YOU may remember that a few weeks ago, we mentioned, somewhat ecstatically, the new Arthur Leo Zagat serial *Drink We Deep.*

If our announcement sounded just a trifle unbalanced, it was because we were still under the spell of Mr. Zagat's grand story. We didn't say much about it then, believing that after a brief vacation from the tale we could regard it with a calmer eye.

But no go. Our enthusiasm hasn't cooled a bit. We still are of the opinion that Zagat's *Drink We Deep* is one of the most unusual novel-length yarns of this or any year, and that it deserves a place on the bookshelves of posterity beside Machen, Alexander Layng, Merritt, Doyle and Weinbaum.

To put it mildly, we think *Drink We Deep* has—oh pshaw,—everything. It's a pseudo-scientific in whose veins flow honest literary blood instead of mere formaldehyde. Mechanically fascinating, it has the grace to tell a human, moving story—and to tell it well.

We're rushing it right into print, and it will appear the end of this month.

fun?

SURE IT IS

—and mighty strenuous too!

"SPORT, even for the fun of it, can be tense and tiring," says Miss Glo Wheeden, who is sho aquaplaning above and at left. "Like most of the folks who go in for water sports, I pride myself on my physical condition. Yes, I smoke. When I feel a bit let-down, I light up a Camel and get a 'lift' in energy." When an active day drains physical and nervous energy, Camels help you renew your flow of vim. And being mild, they never get on your nerves.

"MANY A TIME I've smoked a Camel to get a 'lift,'" says Harry Burmester printer, *(left)*. "With Camels handy, I feel I can take the tough spots right in stride. Camels never tire my taste or irritate my throat—even smoking as much as I do."

COSTLIER TOBACCOS

Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.

1060 PARACHUTE JUMPS—no mishaps! Floyd Stimson *(right)* started smoking Camels at his first parachute jump. "Camels are so mild I take healthy nerves for granted," says Floyd. "I've found what I want in Camels. Mildness — tastiness."

Get a Lift with a Camel!