ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

APRIL 27

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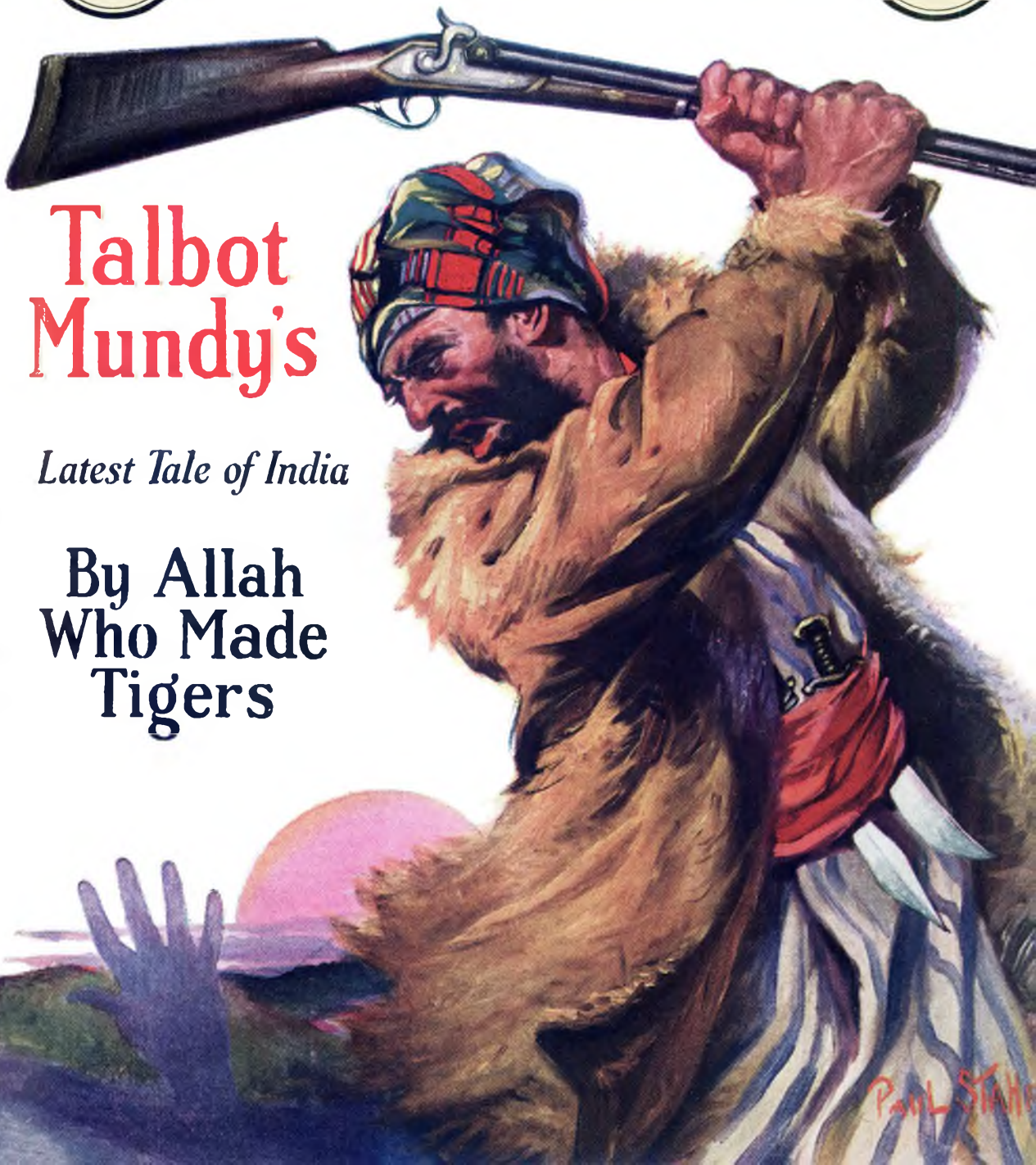

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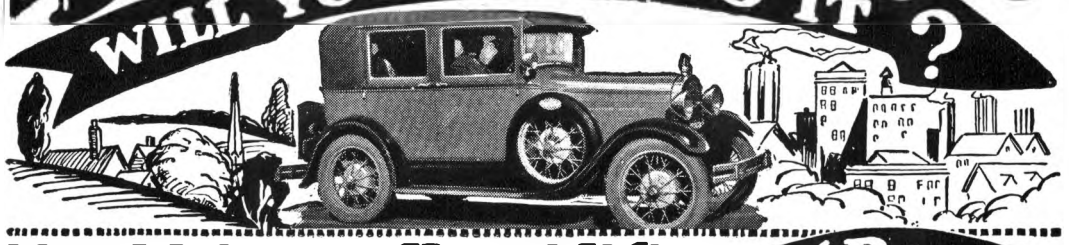

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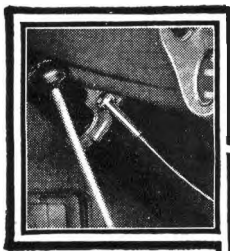

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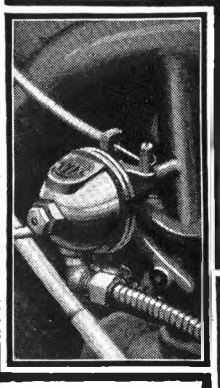

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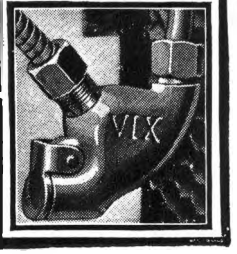

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 203 | CONTENTS FOR APRIL 27, 1929 | NUMBER 2

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

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State of NEW YORK } ss.:
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared C. T. DIXON, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publishers of ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date showu in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publishers—The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—Archibald H. Bittner, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—C. T. Dixon, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 203 | SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 1929 | NUMBER 2

The Pathan crashed to the ground

By Allah Who Made Tigers

Bold and crafty was mullah Mir Mahommed, leader of the hillmen; and his mad plans for a holy war were well advanced when secret agent Frank West happened along

By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Asoka's Alibi," "Ho For London Town!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

HILLMEN IN THE NIGHT.

THIRTY years have not blotted out that memory; the incidents stand out like a cameo cut from the mass of all that happened before and since. Peshawar, thirty years ago, was raw, and uglier than the inside of a usurer's conscience, although at first glance no usurer's money ever looked more alluring.

Nothing noble, or even nice, belonged there, so nobility stood out and shamed you; beauty made you choke and do things that a sense of self-preservation would otherwise have vetoed. Hot by day, with a wind that grilled you until comfort and a cool drink were synonymous terms and

nothing else much mattered; cold by night because the wind reversed itself and moaned from the northern snows, raising a mist that filled all hollows and came creeping out of them toward the city.

It was in that mist that sentries had to stand, as lonely as honest men on Judgment Day and just as uncertain of the outcome, seeking to keep their souls within their bodies by alertness. There was also some indoctrinated theory or other about duty to lie-abed merchants, who must be saved alive to cheat each other in the morning; but nobody who had had a few dealings in the bazaar would have been less than delighted if the hillmen could have purged it without knifing you and me and one or two other people.

The men who had to risk their lives on sentry-go and outpost duty admired the hillmen far more than they did the citizenry they were guarding with such grim blending of endurance and impatience. Except for that little point of honor, with which Shakespeare so vexed *Jack Falstaff*, the British—aye, and the native Indian army too, might long ago have taken sides with the tribes beyond Peshawar and have helped them once again to conquer India from the northwest.

There were some very lovely ladies in cantonment that year, of whom the loveliest was Winifred Orloff, a guest, and, I think, some sort of cousin of the Wingates. Colonel Wingate was in charge of the military hospital, where he was too busy, just as his wife was too lazy, to pay much attention to Winifred.

She, nevertheless, was better worth attention than anyone else at that time on the northwest frontier. That was the one point on which everybody was agreed, and everybody was exactly right. She was the reason—and reason enough—why I was in Peshawar, suffering from ingrown loathing of myself and all my ways. It needs a woman to produce that state of consciousness, and even she can't do it, lovelier though she be than blossoms in the sight of snow, without youth and ideals to work on.

Never mind about ideals. They are usually secondhand, and by-and-by we trade them in for something more snappy and up-to-date. Youth is the point. I was young and painfully aware that I wore no uniform. No long-jawed Scotsmen with muscular knees saluted me; nor was I one of the "heaven-born" civilians with a handle in front of my name and half of the alphabet after it, who used to govern India in those days with a Roman gesture but without the Roman cynicism in the matter of bribes—decent, exasperating men, who would have been a credit to themselves and everybody else if only they had not been so sure they were.

I had been sent to Peshawar on secret service with instructions—considered too secret to be put in writing—to watch Miss Winifred Orloff and to discover what connection, if any, she had with the Czar's government. Strict orders to make love to her would have been much more tasteful.

I REMEMBER I looked at my face in a mirror near the door of the ballroom of Government House and thought I was better looking than possibly half of the men in the room. Then, in the same mirror, I saw her dancing with Ross of the Guides.

He had eleven medal ribbons, of which one was the Victoria Cross, and he could dance with a rhythm suggesting the lilt of a squadron's lances when the long line sweeps into disciplined motion. As for her, men looked at her and left off talking. So I got my hat and coat and went out to think the situation over.

It was not so good. If, in the course of duty, I should prove her guilty of espionage— We were supposed to be very hard-boiled in the secret service, but not only was I more than half in

love with her myself, but two of my friends, Ross and Grabowski, were in open and hot competition for her affections. I was worse than out of the running, yet I could not go away and leave them to it.

The hotel was a miserable place, so I changed—to the everlasting credit of the lords of luck—into a dark green gabardine suit and shooting boots, pulled on a heavy overcoat and went for a walk, followed by my gray dog, Brandy—part sheepdog and part terrier, with wise eyes and a way of keeping his distance while watching you constantly for a hint of what you wanted him to do. Winifred Orloff thought more of my dog than she did of me, so I had used him more than once as an excuse for watching her.

I walked, of course, toward a cemetery. You can't leave Peshawar in any direction without meeting a cemetery. They almost surround the city, and in the moonlight and the mist they look more ghastly than the engravings in Dante's "Inferno"; but the tombstones made wonderful cover for Pathan outlaws, armed with jezail and tulwar, on the prowl after modern rifles or whatever other loot might come their way. However, first I passed Grabowski's shop in the bazaar.

Grabowski was a Scotchman—Polish ancestry, of course; there is a surprising number of Polish families in Scotland, and their younger sons are at odds with convention all over the earth.

This particular descendant of a line of Quixotic fighting men was an artist of distinction and considerable private means, with a funny flair for missionary work. He was a doctor, among other things. He had a theory that art would tame the hillman, and it made no difference to him that Moslem scripture and tradition utterly repudiated the use of the human form in painting or sculpture.

Indispensable to the border cutthroats by reason of his skill with wounds and the inviolable loyalty of his silence, he could talk so persuasively when he chose that he had even prevailed upon the mullah Mir Mahommed to pose for him for a statue. Some Moslem fanatic smashed the clay model, but not before Grabowski had reproduced it in papier-mâché. He set that papier-mâché thing outside his shop door, painted to look so lifelike that it was almost impossible to go by without being startled. Even dogs would snarl at it. It made hillmen shudder, it was such an offense against their religious prejudices, but Grabowski hoped to wear down that prejudice.

The statue would have been destroyed in no time if any one but Grabowski had made it, but along that border a skillful surgeon who charges nothing for extracting bullets, asks no impertinent questions, and tells no tales to the police, can do with impunity what no government would dream of risking.

To decoy Pathans and other savages into his back room, Grabowski sold in the front room snuff and such other simple comforts as they craved at prices which made the local merchants hate him. His papier-mâché Pathan in the doorway substituted for the old-fashioned tobacco shop Scotchman. In the back room he kept beautiful illuminated copies of the Koran, which it delighted him to read aloud to any cutthroat who would listen.

On his walls were shields and tulwars—weapons with which he was reputed invincible; he enjoyed no exercise as much as meeting all comers in his back yard and having it out with them with naked blades. They were men who, in a frenzy of excitement, might forget they were only playing, but it was all one to Grabowski.

THE mist let me walk out of the city without being challenged and turned back—mist and perhaps the barracks beer some soldier had been drinking. I was far outside

the zone of comparative safety, walking in the gray haze among flat-faced tombstones, wondering what sort of pressure could have induced a girl like Winifred to choose the Russian side of any argument, half Russian though she was. Abruptly a hoarse voice brought me back to the comfortless present with a suddenness that jarred. One sentry, at least, was awake.

"Ha-a-a-lt-t! Who comes there?"

The frontier rule was shoot, then challenge. Even if discipline and habit, or a sense of decency should make a man challenge before he fired the shot —if he were sane—should follow voice more swiftly than an echo. I had no time to weigh arguments.

"Rounds!" I answered.

"What rounds?"

"Visiting rounds!"

"Advance, visiting r-roun's an' gie the password. Pit y'r han's up—over-r y'r heid! Aye, nae doot ye're oot walkin'—ye're daft! Mon, but f'r the fact ye'd that dog wi' ye I'd ha' shot ye dead-der-r than beef!"

I faced six feet of indignation in a mist-wreathed overcoat. His nerves were on edge, because he had shot a man that night. He held the empty brass cartridge and kept tossing it. Speech was not in him, except as announcing the limit of forbearance, emphasized by a smack of his fist on his rifle butt.

"Ye'll stan' here until rounds come an' I han' ye over-r tae the guar-rd!"

Not another word was spoken. Mist wreathed the two of us. I came a half step nearer to him, meaning he should see my face and perhaps change his mind about me, but he misinterpreted the movement. The butt of his rifle struck me in the chest. A stone slipped from under my heel and I lost balance.

As I fell a tulwar licked out of the mist—above my head by less than half an inch. It struck off the Scotsman's head, so that it hung by a shred of ligament before his knees gave way. I was actually on my feet again before the headless body struck the ground. Brandy was worrying somebody's heels.

I did not see, I *felt* the tulwar come licking again out of darkness—ducked —and I think Brandy set his teeth into the man's leg, because the edge missed and the broad of the blade struck me on the forehead.

Strangely, I was not stunned, but I lay still and heard a man laugh. Brandy came and sniffed my hair, then my lips. I breathed on his nose, since I did not dare to speak, and he slunk away to pursue his usual tactics of watching from a distance.

Little by little I opened my eyes, and now the mist had drifted and the moon was shining clear. A big man in a smelly sheepskin jacket, with the fleece turned outward, was busily stripping the murdered sentry. Two others watched him, their faces in profile—one a lightly built man, but the other bigger than the first. They carried jezails and had long knives as well as daggers stuck into their girdles.

The shorter man said something about me in a low voice, and his accompanying gesture had unmistakable meaning; he drew his thumb across his own throat, finishing the motion by pointing the thumb in my direction. But the man who was doing the stripping looked up for a second and cursed into his teeth.

It was more like a dream than reality. However, those three men were plainly no deceptive dream; simply honest outlaws helping themselves to weapons and boots and ammunition in the old familiar way.

THE stripping did not take long. He who did it rolled the clothing in a bundle, which he tied by pulling out the leather bootlaces and knotting them together. Then the biggest of the three men seized me by the shoulders. I wondered whether to sham dead or to show signs of recovery, but the lightly built man, who had wanted

to cut my throat, solved that problem by sticking the point of his knife under my thumb nail.

I don't think I have ever hit a man since then as hard as I hit that one. I almost broke the heel of my right fist on his jawbone, and he lay unconscious so long that the other two began to quarrel as to which should have his weapons. Meanwhile, they searched my pockets and were so annoyed at finding so little in them that they would probably have killed me, but for a piece of almost ridiculous luck. A letter, anywhere along that border, is a thing of mystery, involving unknown quantities—and awe.

They found in my inner coat pocket a letter in a large square envelope. It was an utterly unimportant letter written by a maiden aunt in England; but the seal on the back of the envelope was so enormous, and she had used so much golden wax, that it had called for triple postage, the stamps thus making the face of the envelope also appear important.

Furthermore, she had impressed the seal with a die that she had bought in some old curiosity shop; it was covered with Arabic characters, so that it looked as if the Grand Mufti or some one equally distinguished had been writing to me. The biggest man—the other called him Ismail—demanded to know what was written in the letter and I refused to tell him.

"Allah," I said, "has his own way of teaching fools the danger of other people's business."

"Look thou. Canst thou read it, Suliman?"

He who answered to the name of Suliman opened the letter and tried to examine it by moonlight, but he held it upside down, and by the time he had made his puzzled face look owlish wise and had tucked the two sheets back into the envelope, the man whom I had hit recovered consciousness.

He looked so comical, with his jaw dropped and his eyes swiveling around in the moonlight to discover what had happened, that the other two laughed at him; and laughter is a moral insult on that grim frontier. It was almost his duty to draw steel, so they loaded him with ribald criticism that suppressed his ego for the moment. But it did not cause him to admire me.

However, the notion of murdering me had vanished for the time being. I had become the bearer of an important document, who might be worth holding for ransom. And, as Ismail said:

"His clothes are good. They will be no worse if he wears them a few hours longer."

THE third man, Ali bin Adam, stroking his beard over the lump I had raised on his jaw, began to think of ways of salvaging his injured honor. Having eaten shame, he must inflict some. So he gathered up the bundle of clothing stripped from the Scots sentry and commanded that I carry it. I refused. He tapped his knife hilt.

"Draw your knife," I said, "and I will fight you with my bare hands."

He was howled down promptly by the other two, who shrieked so loud with laughter that I hoped they would be heard at the distant guard house. Ali bin Adam showed me the whites of his eyes, and I knew that he and I were enemies beyond any mere settlement by murder or the theft of one another's goods.

"Allah!" he remarked. "As you and I live, Ismail, it is true he struck me. He can strike you also. Would it be a jest if he should strike all three of us and run? Who has a thong to tie his hands?"

I knew what the torture of that would be, if Ali should do the tying of my wrists, and I was wondering whether a bluff would hold, or whether I could endure the torture without losing self-control, when Ismail's black beard suddenly jerked sidewise as he cocked his ear to listen.

"Soldiers!" he said curtly.

Ali was ordered to carry the bundle. Suliman and Ismail seized me by the elbows, hurrying me away between them. I filled my lungs to shout for help, but Ismail divined my intention and clapped a huge filthy hand over my mouth. I bit it and tripped him, shouting as we fell in a heap, with him on top.

Ali jumped on both of us, and Suliman swung for my head with the butt of the stolen rifle. He missed and hit Ali bin Adam, whose thick turban broke the force of the blow. I heard Brandy barking. Then something did strike the top of my head. It felt as if my head exploded. Flames, not sparks, flames of all the colors in the spectrum flashed before my eyes.

I remember wondering what the next world would be like—what Brandy was barking about, and whether he was coming with me. There was something a bit vague, but not unpleasant, about Winifred. After that, nothing except the sound in my ears of roaring water—and then absolute unconsciousness.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPHET OF A HOLY WAR.

I LOOKED up at a blue sky without a cloud in it, and I thought a year had passed, but Brandy was still barking. One eagle was circling, and he was so near that I could see his feathers. It was probably heaven, or hell, and not much matter which, since wishing would not change it either way.

The sensation was of floating in space, in which light was too strong for my eyes, and I was surprised that I could remember earth life—also rather interested in remembering it. There was a very comfortable feeling of detachment, and no pain whatever. But I remember I wished Brandy would leave off barking.

I began to think of Winifred, and felt detached from her, too; not indifferent, but rather curious as to whether spies went to heaven or hell. I could not imagine myself in either of those realms, although the sky was blue enough for anything—and then, I remember, I began wondering whether it would be possible to look back into the world and learn whether or not Winifred Orloff was a spy.

My next thought was one of amusement; I wondered what the folk who don't believe in an after life would have to say when they, too, got there. Then I began to wonder where the Scotsman was. I had seen him killed, so he ought to be somewhere near me. Or had he gone to hell? Perhaps Brandy was barking at him. I tried to look, and became aware of a sharp crag on my right hand that pierced the sky. It was like a painted crag; it seemed to have no back to it.

I tried to sit up, but something that felt like a rough hand forced my head down again, and a moment or two after that I knew that my head was bandaged, which was sickeningly disappointing. So I was not dead.

Then, since I was not allowed to sit up, I turned on my left side and discovered that I was lying on an oxhide spread on dry grass, on a ledge that overhung a gorge between two precipices. The bottom of the gorge appeared to be at least a thousand feet below me. It made my head reel, and I think I became unconscious for a while.

The next thing I remember, Brandy was still barking, but the feeling had returned of being dead and in another world. I remembered my name had been Frank West, and wondered what it was now; I don't know why, but it seemed unlikely that a man would keep the same name after death. Frank West seemed something like a character in a play I had been witnessing. I remembered him as a rather futile person, not important. Winifred, too,

seemed like a character in a drama, but Grabowski, strangely enough, was a real person, and when I thought of Grabowski the feeling of being dead and in another world completely left me.

IT became clear to me, vividly clear, that I liked Grabowski better than I had ever realized. He was an absurd, quixotic, chivalrous ass with all the instincts of a gentleman. But it also occurred to me that his love-making might be a ruse, just as his absurd attempts to civilize Pathans by means of art and their own religion might be a ruse to cover up intrigue beyond the border.

Winifred and he might be playing that game together, he communicating with the tribes and she providing the connecting link with the Russian secret service. I wondered why I had not thought of that before—why nobody had thought of it. No one, so far as I knew, had suspected Grabowski.

In fact, all that anybody knew for certain was that the mullah Mir Mahommed for a long time had been receiving money from an unknown source, and had been talking war all through the savage hills through which the Khyber Pass runs like hell's throat, roughly north and south. The mullah Mir Mahommed's influence reached a hundred miles either way, east and west of the Khyber.

His was not authority, it was influence over about half a million savages. It was easy enough to understand why the Russian government should have him in its pay. Properly subsidized and encouraged, he could start a holy war that would keep the British-Indian army busy while the Czar's men slowly encroached through Bokhara and Samarkand. But Winifred and Grabowski—

Brandy was still barking. Some one shoved a spoon between my teeth and I tasted hot soup. Opening my eyes, I felt sure I was dead this time—dead and in hell! A negress with her head in a yellow bandanna and a bright blue shawl over her shoulder kneeled behind me, smiling, shoveling the soup into my mouth and watching me with a strange mixture of calculation and amusement.

"There, honey—how's that? Feeling better?"

"Where am I, and who are you?" I asked her.

"You're a two-day journey from Peshawar," she answered, speaking like an educated woman. "Is that your dog? I thought so. I tied him up. I fed him."

"Who are you?" I repeated.

She laughed, showing wonderful teeth and the whites of her eyes. I judged her about twenty-four years old. "I'm the mullah's wife, honey. I am Mrs. Mir Mahommed. Come, now, good goat soup with onions in it."

She raised me by the shoulders, pillowed my head against her knees and shoveled in soup until I gasped. Then suddenly she laid me down again and vanished. I heard her arguing in Pushtu with a man whose voice was as harsh as a file on metal, but I could not catch the words; the voices seemed to come from fifty feet below where I was lying.

Presently I heard a man's footsteps; then I felt his shadow and looked up into the eyes of the mullah Mir Mahommed. He was so exactly like the papier-mâché image outside Grabowski's shop that for a second or two the woozy impression returned of being dead and in another world. However, I discovered that I could sit up, and he had the decency to drag up a bundle of hides for me to lean against.

HE was a magnificent specimen, tall, broad-shouldered, active, clad in an embroidered smock and a sheepskin jacket. His turban was wrapped around a green cone, indicating he had been to Mecca and was

therefore a Hajji. He leaned on a British military rifle. There was a curved knife like a Goorkha kukri at his waist.

He was wearing a necklace of amber beads as big as hens' eggs, and in his right hand was a rosary made of dried seeds strung on catgut. He kept flicking the beads with his thumb while his fiery yellowish brown eyes watched me as if he expected me to change into somebody else under his gaze. His great hooked nose was like an eagle's beak, and he had the bushiest black beard I have ever seen on any one—coal black with one streak of snow-white where a sword had once bitten his jaw.

He made me remember a picture of Peter the Hermit, only this man was less fanatical, more cunning and personally ambitious. He looked considerably more than six feet tall, but that may have been due to the shape of his turban.

"Name?" he asked.

I told him, and he repeated it, pronouncing it "Feranquesat." He appeared to think the name important, and I understood why after a moment when he produced my aunt's letter and looked at the seal. He tapped the letter with his finger. Then he laid his finger on his nose.

"It is the seal," he said, in Pushtu, "of the Sharif of the Mosque of El-Kalil. The words on the seal are the true words of God's prophet. But what is the writing within the letter?"

"He who asks," said I, "when he has eyes to see with, is a begetter of lies inviting others to deceive him."

"Allah who made tigers! What dam of all impudence brought thee forth?" he retorted. Then suddenly, his finger on his nose again: "Who read the letter?"

I pretended not to understand him. He waited almost a minute for my answer and then repeated the question in another form:

"Three men made you prisoner. Did they ask what is in the letter?"

"They asked," I said, "but am I a bell that rings for any one who pulls the rope?"

He appeared pleased. But it seemed to me that if the New York negress was his wife, it was more than likely she had read and translated the letter to him.

"You have eaten my salt," he said after awhile.

"Lacking other," I retorted. "Allah repays such debts as that. It is written that no obligation is binding on him who has had no alternative."

"You have the tongue of a *wakil*," he said, curling his lip with the scorn that one sort of special pleader normally exhibits for another.

"God's ways," I retorted, "are wonderful, but surely this is the strangest of all: that one with such eyes as yours should be so blind as to see in me a lawyer."

"Allah! Do you wish to live?" he asked me.

"Not by your leave," I assured him. Then I took a long shot, at a venture, being almost sure from his manner that he had a scheme in mind for making use of me. "I am one whose services have value. He who desires something of value without paying for it is a thief. If that shoe fits your foot you have my leave to wear it."

"*Atcha*," he said, "*atcha*. I will pay you. I perceive you are a person of merit." But his eyes looked crafty. "It is ever the way with those who are made prisoners, that they wish their friends to know they live—in order, doubtless, that the ransom money may be swiftly paid. Name me your nearest friend, that I may send the message."

THE last thing I wanted was to be sent back to Peshawar. I wanted to remain his prisoner and learn his secrets, so I did not answer. He began to argue, as a man might who has nothing to gain by hiding anything.

"If I send the message, and captivity is thereby shortened, then, having done you a favor, I may seek one in return!"

Voice and face were reassuring, but there lay trickery behind his eyes—trickery and speculation. I decided to discover whether he really wanted money.

"Not one rupee of ransom!" I said. "Let the troops come. Meanwhile I claim your protection, since it was not you who took me prisoner and therefore I have no quarrel with you."

The Moslem law is very definite on that point, it is deadly sin to refuse protection, even to an enemy, who claims it—aye, in the very heat of battle. A mullah, who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, could hardly ignore the Koran's teaching.

His eyes changed; there was half masked satisfaction in them and he was about to answer, but Brandy began barking furiously at approaching footsteps and he turned from me to face the three Pathans—Ismail, Suliman and Ali bin Adam—who had given themselves the trouble of capturing and carrying me all that distance. My back was toward them as they climbed the narrow path to the ledge where I lay, but I could watch the mullah's face.

He and my three captors faced one another as animals do before a fight begins. I might have been the "kill" between them. It was Ali bin Adam who broke silence first.

"You mullahs assume rights that don't belong to you," he said hoarsely. He sounded asthmatic. "You pretend Allah talks to you alone. There is one law for you and another for us. Since when? Who ordered that?"

Mullah Mir Mahommed answered loftily: "*Bismillah!* Is your ignorance my law?"

Then Suliman spoke up: "I took him prisoner. I slew the Scotchman. It is true, we left him by the way because he seemed to us dead. It is also true that we did not take his garments. But that was because we were in great haste."

"And why the haste?" asked mullah Mir Mahommed. "*Mashallah!* They be guilty men who run because a man's voice calls to them. It was I who called. And what said I? I spoke only of God and His mercy. Lo, I look down from the cliff and behold, there are three men carrying another who might be dying, but was not yet dead, since who should carry a dead man in such unseemly haste? Was it wonderful then that I spoke of Allah and his mercy?"

"It may be," Ismail answered.

"And the letter that you let fall?" Mir Mahommed asked.

"Nay, we hid it," said Suliman "not being agreed as to who should keep it. We divided the loot by agreement, and the prisoner, but not his clothing, fell to Ali bin Adam's share. There was dispute about the letter."

"SO you laid it away where any fool could find it, being fearful of what might be written beneath such a seal. And well that ye were afraid! It was God's will that it should fall into my hands. Allah, who imposes folly on fools, sent that stupidity into your heads. And so ye laid it at the tomb of Holy Ali the Lousy, beneath a stone that would never have held it in a wind made by a bird's wings. But a strong wind came. And the letter was blown whither Allah intended. Nevertheless, ye come to me, and in your impudence ye ask me for the letter?"

"Nay," whined Ali bin Adam, "we have not asked for it. But the prisoner is mine. It is true, your she-black found him, but he is mine, and his shirt also is mine. So strip him of his other clothes and I will take him."

"And as for the letter," said Suliman, "we will discuss that. We will yield or assert our claim when we know what is in it. The overcoat and the

suit of clothes belong to Ismail, and the boots to me. Deliver them."

"I will deliver the vengeance of Allah and his burning curses on your thieving souls," said Mir Mahommed. "Nay, touch no hilt at me and tap no rifle-butt. Have ye lifted your stone from the field? Ye have not. Neither have I. Nor yet has any man. Not until seven more days and the seeding are past may the each-other-shooting season begin. Thereafter, if ye choose to pick a feud with me, may Allah be the judge between us, praise be to his prophet. The kites and the jackals shall feed then if Allah wills it."

"We spoke not of a feud," said Ismail. "As for me, you may have the prisoner. But you shall answer for him if the troops come, or if the headmen listen to the border talk and agree to return him. If they name an indemnity, you shall pay it."

"He is worth to me three thousand rupees of ransom money!" exclaimed Ali bin Adam. "And you give him away without even demanding the price of his shirt?"

"I will give you his shirt. You shall have it," said Mir Mahommed. "In the name of the Almighty you shall have it. The women and the children and the very goats shall know you henceforth as Ali-who-sighed-for-the-shirt. It shall be carried to you on a camel, with all the honor that is due to such a fine Pathan as you are, Ali of the bold heart who sighed for the shirt!"

Ali swore, making use of the liver and lights and entrails of obscenity, then strode away and leaned his back against the cliff. Nobody laughed. Ali-who-sighed-for-the-shirt was too likely to go mad with anger and shoot me, who might prove valuable even yet.

"But the letter. What is in it?" Suliman demanded.

For a moment Mir Mahommed caught my eye and I admired the splendid savage. He dared me to give him the lie, and he dared to fling his lie into the faces of three men who easily —so far as he knew—might have tortured or otherwise persuaded me to tell the truth about the letter. I watched him narrowly, but he made no sign of an appeal to me—no bargain—no flicker of eyelid to suggest that we should play his game together. He lied as he would have used his tulwar or the stolen rifle on which he leaned—cold steel, hot lead, and take the consequences. And his lie was so beyond belief that none thought of disbelieving it.

"THE letter concerns me only," he announced portentously. "It is a letter from the very holy Sharif of the Mosque of Ibraim at El-Kalil, where as a Hajji I had lodging on my return journey from Mecca. May God bless the prophet of God. The letter is addressed to this one, whom you mistreated. It desires him to find me and tell me of a dream the Sharif had, wherein I appeared to him as having died. The letter says that in the dream I told him of this, that the prophet of God—be blessings on him!—told to me in paradise: that if, when I am dead, my people the Pathans shall reckon me a saint and keep my burial place sacred, then I will appear to them after death from time to time and will make them conquerors of all these hills and of all the Punjab and the rich lands watered by the rivers. Also he informs me of my approaching death and bids me to make my peace with Allah—may his prophet be praised."

Ismail and Suliman came closer to him, so I saw their faces. They were jealous. They believed him, since who could invent such a lie? They were glad he should die so soon; his "she-black" and his goods and chattels would be lawful plunder to be intrigued and fought for. But they resented the odor of sanctity. A dead saint, yes. No living saint is tolerable within crow-flight of the Khyber.

"You!" said Ismail. "You preach a holy war, yet let a Christian make an image of you! Does the shameless thing not stand in a shop door, dishonoring the prophet and defying God's commandment?"

"That is also written in the letter," Mir Mahommed answered. "Shall the all-merciful not forgive sin when the heart repents? He who readeth all hearts knoweth mine. I let the image be made to deceive unbelievers, who should thus believe me unfaithful to Islam, and should trust me the more because of that, to their own undoing. It is his will that the image shall not vanish and be burned by devils in the pits of Eblis, in order that my soul may escape condemnation and be caught up into paradise."

"Allah!"

Suliman turned and eyed me fiercely. "Is that written in the letter?" he demanded.

I wanted to know more about the holy war, so there was nothing to be gained by taking any side except the mullah's, at the moment. The grand old savage did not bat an eyelid. He had invented and told his lie, and now he stood there, like the image outside Grabowski's shop, and calmly awaited the outcome.

"Who are you," I asked, "who challenge the writing of the Sharif of the Mosque of Ibraim at El-Kalil? You saw the seal."

Ismail eyed Mir Mahommed's rifle —eyed it with hunger and longing. Also he eyed the double bandolier well filled with stolen cartridges. "So," he exclaimed, "then name me, Ismail, to be the owner of that rifle when you die and I will be first of the men of my valley to call you a saint."

"We will speak about that," said Mir Mahommed tartly," at the proper time and in the proper place." He appeared not quite to relish such a premature division of his goods.

"And what shall happen to this prisoner?" asked Suliman.

"*Insh'allah,* I will answer for him, and ye have my leave to go," said Mir Mahommed.

That phrase is final. Either leave, or break the law of hospitality and fight. All three went, taking great care to betray no sense of the importance of their host and by that very care betraying it. A living mullah in that democratic country is a restless political influence, a hardly tolerable nuisance, and a menace to plain men's dignity. It is only dead ones who receive much praise; the living ones are to likely to demand some kind of holy war at inconvenient moments.

Ismail and Suliman ignored me as if I had not been there, but Ali-who-sighed-for-the-shirt surveyed me with a hatred that seemed to burn him like a torch. He was livid with it. It was producing jaundice; the whites of his eyes were turning yellow, and he loved the mullah hardly more than he did me.

"You preach a holy war," he sneered. "You pay money to this and that man, hoping to hire fools to slay themselves on British bayonets for your advantage! Allah!"

I supposed that Mir Mahommed would remain on the ledge and explain away that accusation when the others were out of ear-shot, but apparently there was nothing further from his intention. He followed them to the top of the track, stood watching, with his rifle resting in the crook of his arm, until their footsteps echoed far away below in the ravine, then strode out of sight without glancing in my direction.

CHAPTER III.

THE MULLAH'S WILES.

I WAS awakened again by the negress. "Nice hot tea, honey, with brown sugar in it and goat's milk."

"How long have I been here?" I demanded.

"Two nights, and I've covered you each night with a linen sheet stretched on wicker-work, so's you'd not get moonstruck."

"How badly is my head hurt?" I demanded.

"Honey, it's a marvel you're living. And it's lucky for you I've had to nurse folks, and mind babies, and do whatnot else for a living. You'd a lump on your head as big as my two fists, and you'd have been veal if you'd lost any more blood. I'd have had you in the house, only fresh air was what you needed, and there's too many folks come in here. It was easier to keep you quiet up here on this ledge."

It was clear enough that she was not telling all of the truth. It followed that the way to learn the truth, supposing that were possible, would certainly not be to ask too many questions. Brandy had resumed his barking the moment he heard my voice, and there was a plan in my mind already half formed. The dog's barking gave me the excuse to ask about him.

"Sure, honey, he's been well fed. My man—I mean the mullah, doesn't like a dog around. Moslems are mean about dogs. But I told him the dog was worth a heap o' money, so he let me tie him up, behind the house where other folks can't see him. The house is fifty feet below this ledge. My name? They call me Khadija. I used to be Louise—Louise Emmet. Drink your tea now; come on, drink it."

She watched me finish the tea. Then:

"What's in that letter, honey?" she asked casually. "He won't let me read it." But that was a rather too obvious trap.

"You'll have to wait, Louise, until my head doesn't ache so badly," I answered.

More tea, and a long pause.

"Honey, who is that girl you rave about when you are out of your head? Winifred? Is that it? Is she anybody in Peshawar? Is she any one that knows Mr. Grabowski?"

It was a lame way of dragging in Winifred's name and probing me to find out how much I knew about her. I don't rave in delirium. Drunk, sober, asleep or out of my head, I can be trusted to name no names and tell no secrets.

It was my first real clew connecting Winifred with Mir Mahommed, and I judged her guilty instantly. A sort of craving to protect her from the consequences, however, was equally instantaneous.

"Yes, I dare say she knows Grabowski. Why?" I answered.

"Oh, just because. My man, I mean the mullah, knows Grabowski."

"I know he does."

"BUT the mullah can't cross the border just now. The English say he killed a soldier for his rifle. It isn't true, but they say it's true, and you might as well argue with that mountain as try to make them believe different. Honey, if my man—I mean the mullah Mir Mahommed—if he should help you to the border after you get well, and see you safe across, could he count on you for something? I mean something that wasn't money, and wasn't easy, but that 'ud mean a heap to him?"

"I'll buy," I said, "if I can pay the price. I keep promises."

"You look it, honey. But you can't move for days and days yet. Could you write a letter from the mullah to Mr. Grabowski?"

"Grabowski can read Pushtu and Urdu," I answered. "Why doesn't the mullah write his own letter?"

"Because it's something important that Mr. Grabowski might not do unless you ask him. If Mir Mohammed wrote it, who should know it weren't a forgery?"

"I don't know whether I can write," I said. "Get me a pencil and paper—or pen and ink."

She picked up the teacup and for awhile she tapped it with the spoon, as

if considering that idea. I sheared across her line of thought, since it seemed to be leading nowhere.

"Loose the dog, too. Let him come and see me."

She nodded and went away. I heard her loose the dog, and after that I caught a few words in a man's voice, but I could not hear what was said, or even be sure that I recognized the voice as Mir Mahommed's, because Brandy came galloping up the track, and I had hard work to protect my head from his enthusiastic greeting. It was several minutes before I could get him to lie down quietly behind me.

Luckily he had on his collar, and I had worked the nameplate loose before Louise came back with a blue copying ink pencil and about a dozen sheets of cheap ruled paper, but no envelopes.

"There you are, honey."

I pretended to be unable to control my fingers. When I had made about a dozen efforts she left me, saying I should try again after awhile; but I noticed that she stood at the head of the track for several minutes, watching me, but pretending to watch something down in the ravine. However friendly she might feel, she was the mullah's woman.

Even after she had gone she came back once very quietly to watch what I was doing, and I wondered whether she had counted the sheets of paper. I decided to take no chance on that. She had seen me crunch up and throw away the top sheet, on which I had scrawled a dozen efforts to write my name. I could not reach it, but Brandy found it for me in a minute, so I straightened it out and wrote on that—no more than a long telegram, the problem being to let the authorities know where I was without betraying myself as a secret service man if the dog should be caught and the letter read before it crossed the border.

Whoever finds this, please deliver to Provincial Commissioner Peshawar. I am a prisoner somewhere in the hills, apparently in a valley parallel to the Khyber Pass. Head hurt, but recovering. Look after Brandy for me and don't pay ransom money because if my wits hold out I think I can escape.

FRANK WEST.

I folded the paper and tucked it under the brass nameplate of Brandy's collar. Then I examined Brandy's feet, which were in good shape.

"Go home," I commanded.

I had to repeat the command three times before he left me, but when he did go he went in a hurry. There were only two places where he was likely to go—the hotel, where the manager would recognize him, or the Wingates' bungalow in the Peshawar cantonment; and the Wingates' bungalow was the more likely place because Winifred was fond of spoiling him with too much food. He would be hungry, and he would probably think of food first. That might be the means of warning Winifred to cover her tracks. I hoped so. If I had dared, I would have warned her in the note to escape from India.

BRANDY had been gone about half an hour when Louise returned. Naturally, the first question she asked was where the dog had gone.

"Whistle him," I suggested. "He's somewhere near. I've been asleep."

She whistled and called for several minutes. Then she counted the notepaper and found the number of sheets correct, so I felt fairly sure she did not guess what had happened.

"He sure has run away," she said. "I was a fool to loose him. Honey, you mustn't try to play any tricks with me, because I'm your friend and friends are skeerce in these hills. Can you write now? Write a letter to Mr. Grabowski."

Twenty minutes, I suppose, she spent in telling me what I should write, repeating the gist of it over and over, developing new angles with each repetition, so that by the time she had fin-

ished I thought I understood who was the brains of that partnership between a magnificent Moslem savage and a New York negress.

It was also obvious that she would give me no chance to play tricks with written words that should cause Grabowski to read between the lines some message from myself. Louise could have written a better letter than I could; it was my handwriting and my signature that she needed, and she reenforced persuasion with just enough diplomatic pressure to reveal how entirely I lay at her mercy.

"I've been good to you, honey. If it weren't for me there'd be some bloated vultures, and there'd be jackals cracking your bones to get the marrow out of them. If I should say you'd lied about that letter they found in your pocket, how long do you think it would be before Ali bin Adam took charge of you? And how would you like that? And if the ransom money didn't come, what do you think he would do to you? So you take that pencil and write to Mr. Grabowski in Peshawar. You oblige me, and I'll take care of you."

"DEAR Grabowski," I wrote, "our mutual acquaintance, Mir Mahommed, is distressed on account of his papier-mâché portrait, so remarkably well executed by yourself. It appears that its public exhibition outside your shop door has created such a scandal in those hills that Mir Mahommed, being a Hajji and a mullah, is not only embarrassed, but is possibly in danger of his life. In the circumstances, he considers that his own broad-mindedness in posing for the portrait should be met by equal broad-mindedness on your part and he has asked me, his guest, to state his case. He does not regret the friendship that he has felt toward you from the first, but he does deeply regret the religious indiscretion into which you led him; and since political reasons not unconnected with certain rather recent bloodshed prevent him at this time from paying you a personal visit, he hopes you will pay to this request of his as swift attention as he feels sure you would if he could meet you face to face.

"Rumors, circumstantially based, have come to Mir Mahommed's ears to the effect that a group of his personal enemies intend to carry off that papier-mâché statue and, before burning it, to subject it to indignities, accounts of which, deliberately spread throughout the hills, would make his position unbearable. He is anxious, however, that you should not destroy it, because then the mullah's enemies would make cunning use of legend and superstition. People would be reminded that the magical means of killing any one is to make his portrait and then to destroy the portrait, after which he becomes the victim of the first misfortune that presents itself. There would be considerable competition to be the first to enact that misfortune, and the mullah would be sniped from behind every bowlder whenever he should dare to show himself.

"Mir Mahommed dreads the danger to yourself if you should hide the statue, since fanatically minded men might then invade your premises and possibly subject you to indignities, or even violence, thus beginning a feud, the end of which it is impossible to foresee. An indignity to you, on his account, would obligate the mullah Mir Mahommed, to wreak vengeance on the perpetrators to the second generation—a contingency that neither you nor he can look forward to with any degree of pleasure.

"Much thought has brought the mullah Mir Mahommed to this ultimate decision: to confess to the assembled tribes that it was contrary to the prophet's teaching and therefore sinful to permit the statue to be made. He will display the statue and will himself destroy it with his own hands,

thus, he believes, not only wiping out a sin, but possibly even increasing his own standing in the public estimation—something eminently desirable, because the mullah, as you know, is a man of importance, who, nevertheless, can carry out no plans unless well regarded.

"That the statue may reach the mullah without the knowledge of abominable men, whose ill will probably would cause them to waylay it, he requests that you inclose it in a coffin or, better yet, wrap it in a shroud such as is used for Moslem funerals; then lay it on a stretcher and let Faisul and Abdul beni Rahman have it, they being trustworthy men who will carry it over the border by night to a certain place where others will be in waiting to protect them on their journey up the valley. Faisal and Abdul beni Rahman, both of whom are known to you, will be the bearers of this letter.

"I am requested by the Hajji Mir Mahommed to convey to you a strong expression of his personal good will.

"Assuring you that the mullah's hospitality is unique, and with kindest personal regards, I remain,

"Yours sincerely,

"FRANK WEST."

LOUISE took the letter away and for a long time after that I heard the distant droning of her voice as she translated it to the mullah, who interrupted her at frequent intervals and made her repeat whole sentences. When she had finished they argued, but I could not hear what they said, only the contralto and bass—the liquid coaxing and the gruff decision of their voices. Later Louise returned with an envelope. She made me address the envelope. She sealed it and made me impress my thumb-print on the wax.

"There, honey," she said. "You've made a friend for yourself."

She took the letter away and returned with hot soup. Uncertain how to deal with her, but trying to catch her off guard and at least to start a conversation that might lead somewhere I asked why she did not make her own escape across the border and return to the United States.

"The authorities would pay your fare home," I suggested. "If not, it would be easy enough to raise the money by subscription."

"Might have to do that some time," she answered. "But could I find another mullah in the States? He isn't bad. He isn't half bad. And I've had my fill of minding white folks' babies and nursing what they call neurotics. I used to get twenty-five a week because I could wrastle 'em—and, bu-lieve me, it wasn't easy money. I came to India in charge of a pair of twins that 'ud drive an angel crazy. They were kidnaped—maybe it was in the papers—and I went with them jes' to earn my money. I wasn't going to have it said I'd run and left 'em. They were ransomed and they went back over the border with their noses wiped and clean ears. Ransom money was sent for me, too. But the mullah's wife—he was always a one-wife man—had got caught cheating, so she'd had a funeral—and the mullah made me offers. I figured all the chances, honey, best way I knew how. It wasn't always too good, but there's trouble wherever you go. I'm not sorry I stayed."

Until dark, because there was nothing else to do, I lay and wondered about Louise and what effect that letter would have on Grabowski, who was a genius and therefore unpredictable.

IT was just growing dark when Louise came back again, and she was followed this time by the mullah, who carried a cheap imported lantern. It may give some idea of how weak I was from the injury to my head when I admit that I had not noticed until then that I was dressed in a hillman's smock and covered by a yak-hair blanket.

What made me realize it now was

that Louise had brought my home-spun overcoat, as well as an enormous sheepskin one of local make, of the sort that Pathans wear in winter. Besides holding the lantern, the mullah was dragging a goat by the forefeet, and he was followed by a wiry old Afridi, who dragged another goat and carried a pick and shovel—good ones, bearing army marks and obviously stolen.

Not a word was said to me. The mullah set the lantern down and held both bleating goats while the old Afridi looked me over and proceeded to dig what looked remarkably like a grave, in a place where the weathering face of the cliff had deposited tons of soft dirt. I observed then that the mullah was wearing his tulwar in its sheath hung from his girdle, and that he also had an automatic pistol, army model, loaded, which he examined from time to time, alternately setting and releasing the safety catch.

I thought the silence ominous. It might have occurred to him that, having written that letter to Grabowski, I had exhausted my possible usefulness. But I was puzzled by the goats until the dreadful thought suggested itself to a fevered imagination that Louise might have another reason for remaining with the mullah, and another hold on him, than the one she had mentioned to me.

I had heard of voodoo, but knew nothing about it at first, or even at secondhand. About all I could remember was that black goats figured in the voodoo sacrifice, and that some one had told me that human murder formed part of the secret ritual. Those goats were black.

Supposing that the mullah had decided to remove me from the scene as an unprofitable encumbrance, the proceeding might not be exactly ethical as judged by altruistic standards, but there would be nothing surprising about it, in a land of warlike savages, except for one important fact: I had eaten the mullah's salt. Therefore, by a custom of hills that is more sacred and more rigidly observed than any law of property or tenet of religion, my life was on his head and he was even obligated to protect me at the risk of his own life.

But who else in the hills had a negress wife? And why had she remained in such a comfortless and cruel land, when, according to her own admission, ransom money had been offered to her? History is full of tales of women from a strange land who have seduced and perverted their captors.

I knew I was running a temperature, but, nevertheless, I did not think, and I do not now think it was delirium that suggested to me how the mullah Mir Mahommed's conscience might have been corrupted by Louise's voodoo teaching. I could imagine her having persuaded him that murder, if performed with the proper ritual, was no sin.

THE digging of the grave was easy, especially as it was made quite shallow. Then the mullah glanced at me and drew his tulwar. Louise looked away, and the old Afridi seized the bleating goats, which he held by the horns.

The mullah stepped behind me, where I could not see him, and I thought that was possibly meant to be a considerate act, although I would have preferred to look him in the eyes.

I held my breath then. I could feel him raising himself on tiptoe. It was as if I had eyes in the back of my head that saw him raise the tulwar and poise it a moment, measuring the distance with his eye; and I remember wondering whether he meant to split my head in halves, since he obviously could not sever my neck at that angle. I heard him draw his breath with a sharp, hissing intake, and I involuntarily shut my eyes.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

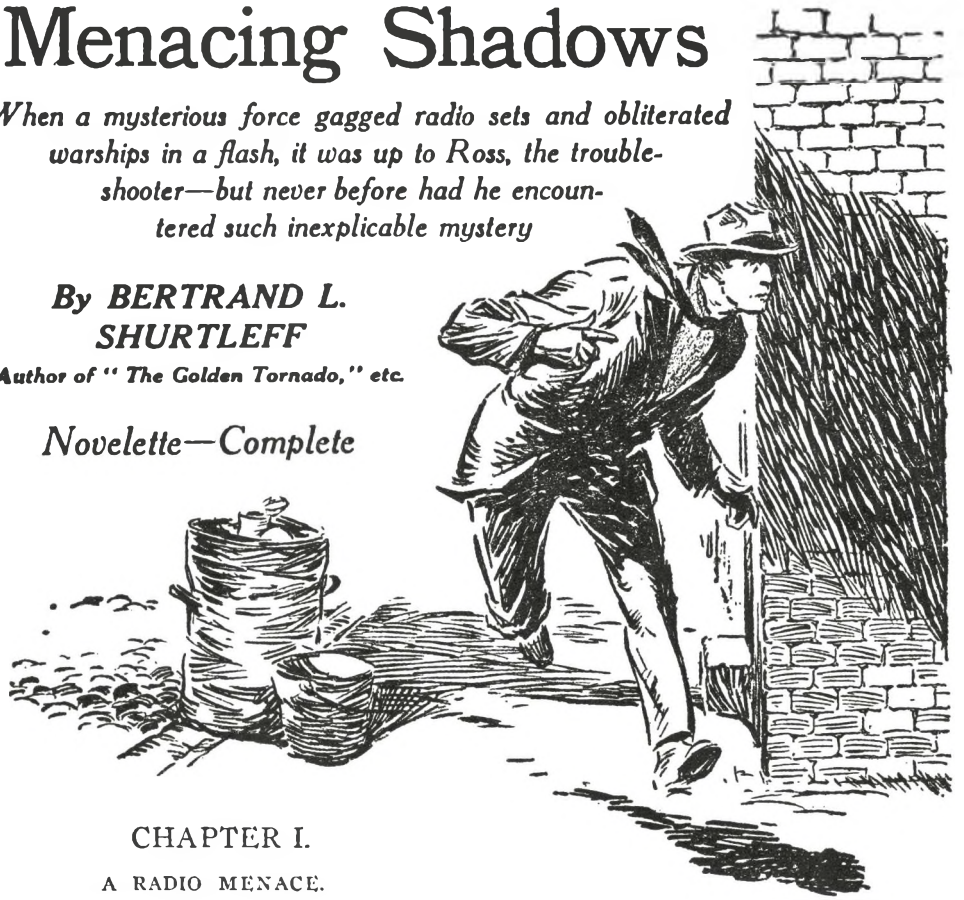
Menacing Shadows

When a mysterious force gagged radio sets and obliterated warships in a flash, it was up to Ross, the trouble-shooter—but never before had he encountered such inexplicable mystery

By BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

Author of "The Golden Tornado," etc.

Novelette—Complete



CHAPTER I.

A RADIO MENACE.

THE president of the great radio corporation slumped back in his chair and stared at the tall young man who stood before him. Although he noted the intelligence of the eyes that met his unflinchingly, he frowned at the thought that he must rest the greatest burden that he had encountered in his years with the company upon these slender shoulders.

"You're Inspector Ross?" he asked, half hoping that this was some irresponsible young clerk who had wandered in while he was waiting for the expert trouble-shooter.

"Yes, sir."

President Ainsworth half lifted from his chair as if to dismiss him, but dropped back again. It had been his intent to send this lad away, to turn elsewhere for help and let this youngster run off to the dances and parties that should claim his attention at his age. But the hopelessness of the situation overcame him, and he felt too old and weary to carry the strain longer. Unless he found help, unless the terrible riddle could be solved soon—

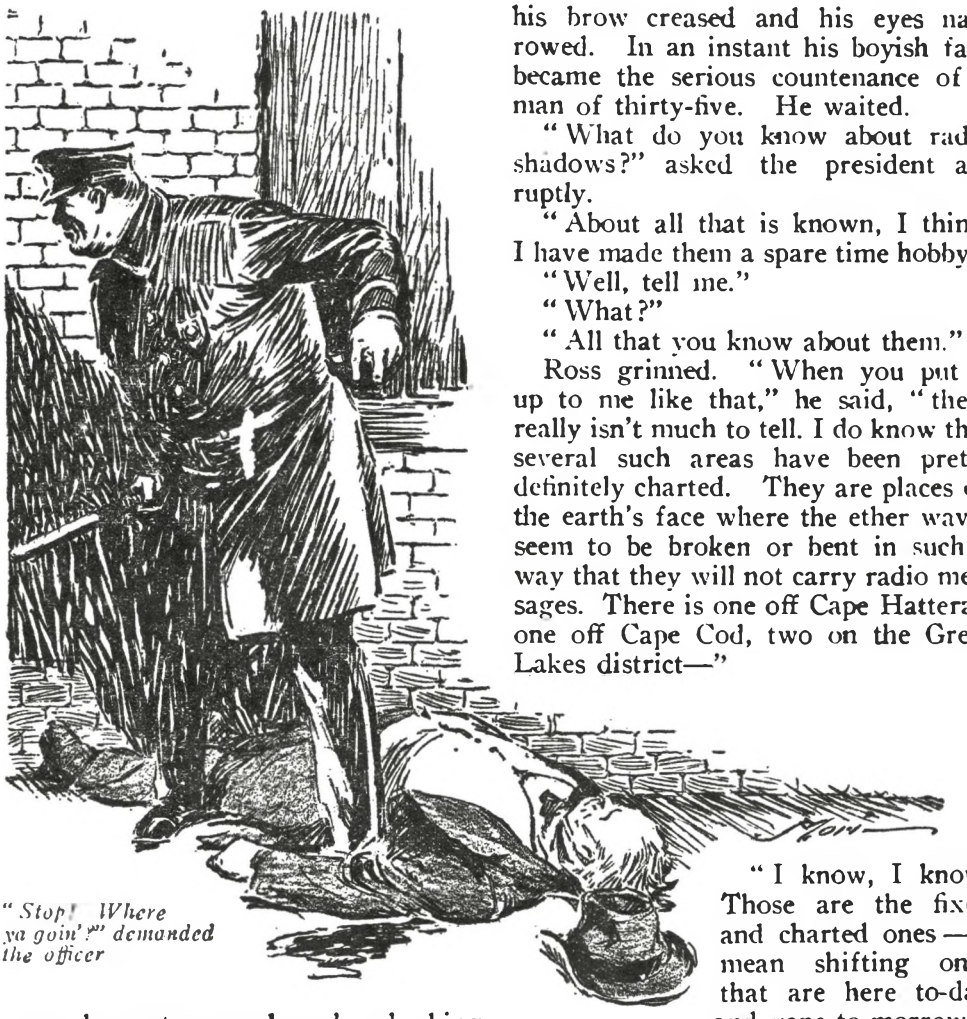
The telephone jangled and the big man snatched up the instrument.

"What—what's that? How about the Minado? Let me know the minute you hear from her."

Great drops of sweat stood out on the forehead of the executive as he put the telephone down and drummed on the smooth table top with nervous fingers.

"Any idea what that was, Ross?" he asked, turning suddenly.

"No, sir, unless there's trouble



"Stop! Where ya goin'?" demanded the officer

somewhere at sea and you're checking up. The Minado's a freighter of the Prestone line in the Pacific, isn't she?"

"Then you haven't heard?"

Ross shook his head slowly, a vague wonder dawning in his eyes. "I have heard rumors," he said, "but I have paid no attention to them."

"Rumors of what kind?"

"Oh, that there was some mysterious force at work destroying radio. I scarcely know just what was reported, for I didn't listen. It sounded like the comet scares in the Sunday supplements."

"And yet," the tone was heavy, "there is something to these rumors."

For a long minute Ross stared, then his brow creased and his eyes narrowed. In an instant his boyish face became the serious countenance of a man of thirty-five. He waited.

"What do you know about radio shadows?" asked the president abruptly.

"About all that is known, I think. I have made them a spare time hobby."

"Well, tell me."

"What?"

"All that you know about them."

Ross grinned. "When you put it up to me like that," he said, "there really isn't much to tell. I do know that several such areas have been pretty definitely charted. They are places on the earth's face where the ether waves seem to be broken or bent in such a way that they will not carry radio messages. There is one off Cape Hatteras, one off Cape Cod, two on the Great Lakes district—"

"I know, I know. Those are the fixed and charted ones — I mean shifting ones that are here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"There are no such things," said Ross evenly, leaning forward and looking intently into the radio president's eyes as though he doubted his sanity.

Ainsworth smiled sourly. "Six months ago I would have said the same thing, boy. To-day I know better. What is more, the knowledge has brought with it a terrible possibility that threatens the future of all broadcasting of radio, whether it be for entertainment, commerce, or warfare."

THE slender youth tensed. The eyes brightened. So all the vague rumors that had been circulating in the office were not idle gossip. The

thing that he had laughed at and gayly ridiculed was really stretching forth an unseen hand out of the unknown to throttle this new method of communication that had gained such instant popularity.

"Such shifting blind spots, if they do exist, cannot act as a real menace except in infrequent cases," Ross said at last, trying to keep his voice steady in spite of something within him that told him how important this visit to the president's office was becoming. "Even if they do make an impenetrable wall about several ships for a short time, the rest of the world will benefit by our service."

The big man pulled forth a roll of charts and flipped through them without answering.

"We are constantly experimenting to get through those stationary shadows we have charted," went on Ross. "We ought to hit on the answer any time now. Probably what goes for them will work with these shifting ones as well—some kind of device that a ship can carry to stabilize the rays in her vicinity and make communication possible."

"But we may not be in time."

Ross stared at the man, not understanding his full meaning, but sensing tragedy. The president stared at the chart.

"Manila," he grunted, indicating a plainly marked area. "Philippines."

He took a pair of compasses from the pen rack and placed one leg upon a tiny islet far to the south. Then he drew a small circle upon the chart.

"The first record of any trouble came from this spot," he said. "A United States destroyer was poking her nose in among the islands to investigate one of those Jap scares that are always rife down there. Of course there was nothing to the yarn about foreign invasion, but the destroyer ran aground on a bar at low water and radioed headquarters to know what to do about it. They got the message at Manila and her base sent orders to await a couple of seagoing tugs to pull her off. Although the air had been full of messages just before the sending of that inquiry, the destroyer heard nothing from other ships or shore stations for some time. They shifted from the wave length of the naval station and felt all over the commercial field, but without a sound. Then an order came through in the Federal code to abandon ship immediately and proceed inland to high land, as there was a great tidal wave advancing which would undoubtedly wreck the vessel." The president paused impressively, and leaned forward:

"Manila sent no such message, nor did any other ship or station hear it. During the time that this was happening several attempts were made by ships within the circle I have drawn to communicate with others, whether inside or out of it. Yet none of these messages was ever received, although two of the ships were less than twenty miles apart during the two hours that the silence lasted. The commander of the destroyer hastily landed his men, remembering the fate of a larger government craft that was caught in a similar wave some years ago with great loss of life. A storm hid the ship from view within an hour and darkness shut in. When it lifted in the morning the vessel was gone, although there had been no tidal wave and no heavy sea to break her up. She has never been located since, although divers explored the bottom for hundreds of yards in every direction and airplanes scouted the shores for signs of drift that might have come from her."

As Ainsworth reached for a glass of water, the trouble-shooter leaned forward. "You believe that the destroyer was in some manner deatomized, broken into its elements, shattered into unrecognizable bits?"

"I don't know," shrugged the other.

"There was only one clew. When darkness fell there was a peculiar vivid light of a ghastly blue color that was noticed by all of the crew. It was a dancing, vibrating illumination such as no one of them had ever seen before. They are saying in the office that this thing utterly destroys ships, that it is akin to these destructive rays we are always reading about in the tabloids. They compare it to lightning, except that it wipes things out where lightning kills or damages." Ainsworth lifted his hands, palms up, and shrugged. "We have tried to keep it silent," he said, "to avoid a panic."

"But I refuse to accept that theory," said Ross. "There was some human agency at work. Why did that message come through, unless somebody sent it?"

"That was my first question, and it seemed to establish human connection with the mystery. Then they called in the best men available, including an eminent psychologist. He went over and over the facts with the operator and decided that the message had never been sent at all. It seems that Demerest, the Sparks on the 789, was a friend of the lad who was working the key for that other vessel, a cruiser, I believe, that got caught in the tidal wave. Sitting there with no outside connection, he got panicky and remembered how his friend had gone. That suggested the possibility of a similar wave hitting them, and his imagination did the rest."

"THEN they decided that this one example was striking enough to prove the possibility? Don't you think it might be possible that the destroyer drifted off the bar to deeper water, where she might have filled and sunk? Couldn't that blue light have been an unusual display of lightning or some similar electrical phenomenon?"

"That wouldn't explain why the ships in that circle were unable to communicate. Why, man, do you realize that our own powerful station at Manila could not send a message twenty miles, nor receive a single one of scores that were being relayed to them? Nor does it explain this."

He lifted another chart and indicated a place above Singapore.

"Two weeks later this region was visited in the same manner by one of these shifting shadows. Even the Calcutta station could not penetrate it for the two hours that it existed. And, what is more significant, a cargo steamer that was directly in the center of the stricken area disappeared as mysteriously and completely as did the destroyer."

Ross whistled and scowled. If ships equipped with radio were likely to be whisked into oblivion when caught in the center of such a shadow, the industry was truly menaced.

"Less than two hundred miles above that one," went on the president, "and only two weeks later, another destroyer which had been sent to search for evidence of the freighter was lost in another of these accursed blind spots. Not a sign of her or of her complement of men has ever been found."

"The whole thing ought to be a matter for Federal investigation, sir."

"It is. Every man who knows anything about radio has been summoned and put to work on it. The Pacific, which has been unusually good for reception over long distances, is suddenly the scene of the greatest menace that has confronted shipping since the submarine scare—a menace that is even more terrible because we know nothing of its cause. Every effort of the United States, of England, of France, of Japan, and of many private concerns operating in the neighborhood has been turned to the solution of the problem. All of their findings are available, but they offer no clew."

The long fingers of the trouble expert drummed the table. A seriousness had settled over his face, completely dismissing his youthfulness.

"And that is not all," went on the discouraged voice. "Five ships have been caught in similar shadows since the last destroyer was lost. Not one has chanced to be a passenger vessel, so we have been able to keep it fairly quiet, but I anticipate such a disaster as the loss of the Titanic or the Lusitania at any minute. Then the whole world must be told."

Ross did not answer. He was thinking of the many men he knew who were sitting alone in their tiny cubbyholes aboard freighters and passenger vessels, their ears incased in the phones, their shoulders hunched over the keys. He thought, too, of officers and crews, of laughing passengers, and anxious friends at home. Who knew when this menace might strike the radio listener in the home, demolishing the house with the same ease that it destroyed ships? Unless they checked it, and checked it soon, what panics must result in shipping, insurance, and all other activities that were in any way connected with radio and commerce on the seas!

THE phone rang, and Ainsworth turned to it. The light of hope died from his face and grim-lipped despair replaced it.

"Ainsworth speaking. Still silent, eh? You have accounted for all the others? Well—send the Tella to investigate. Wire her owners that we will pay all charges. Have 'em make it at full speed."

He wheeled his chair about and smiled grimly.

"While we have been sitting here, Ross, there has been another of those weird demonstrations. It was just ending as you came in, and the other call was a check on all shipping in the region. It reported all safe but the Preston steamer. Now we have a wire from the Tella stating that they saw a peculiar blue light reflected against the sky some miles off their port bow during the period of silence. I ordered them to investigate, thinking it might be a clew."

"It is night over there now," Ross suggested. "Do these always come during the hours of darkness?"

"Yes," said Ainsworth slowly, "I think they do."

"It might be something to work on. If men are behind these disappearances, darkness would aid in hurrying a stolen vessel out of sight."

Hope sprang up anew in Ainsworth's face. "I like your attitude," he said, "and I believe you are going to do something for us."

"Of course I can promise nothing," said the young inspector. "This is a great puzzle, and there seems to be but few clews, and those baffling. Anyhow, I'll do my best."

"The company is back of you to the limit," Ainsworth said. "You'll want to see some of the men who have been near these things. I've sent for Demerest. He was dishonorably discharged after the psychologist found him morbid and likely to be subject to hearing things that weren't coming over the set."

Ross stood up suddenly, his manner abstract. Wrapped, as he was, in profound thought much of his time, he had become accustomed to relying upon intuition to an unusual extent, instead of the senses that usually actuate a man. Now he stepped swiftly to the door.

His feet made no noise on the soft rug, and he grasped the knob and swung the portal inward with the agility of a cat. His body hid what was without from Ainsworth, but Ross saw a girl's skirt whisking around the corner of the doorway, a scant five feet away, across the private secretary's tiny office.

"This thing has upset my nerves a little," he laughed. "Thought there was somebody there. I think I'll go home, if you don't mind, and rest up a bit. I'd like to see Demerest as soon as he arrives."

"I'll send him up," nodded Ainsworth.

Ross hurried out through the main office, his eyes intent for a girl wearing that particular type of skirt. He found her just turning from the water cooler. She was an intelligent looking girl with big eyes that bored into his with a look that he interpreted as bravado.

Puzzled to know her reason for spying upon her employer, he continued upon his way. She might be merely curious, he decided, or she might be connected in some manner with the group of men that he felt certain was attempting to put over a great steal through the medium of this new discovery in radio.

Unfortunately, there was no way to check her reason for listening at the door and fleeing in haste, although he cudgeled his brain for some method of making her confess. It would clear the air considerably to know that human beings were directly responsible for the loss of the ships, but he finally decided that there was little chance of learning anything from this source.

"Still," he muttered to himself, as he took out his latchkey, "I'm sure that men are behind this. My tinkering with those blind spots has proved to my satisfaction that ether waves can be influenced by certain light rays. I am almost willing to bet my reputation that something of that kind is being done."

CHAPTER II.

RUTHLESS MEASURES.

HE went into his laboratory and tinkered with his instruments in a half-hearted manner.

Either this thing was the scheme of some diabolical brain or a mere chance of nature. But from the evidence presented, he was pretty well convinced that some man or group of men was scheming for world power or the accumulation of great wealth, and were going about their designs carefully and quietly. Otherwise, he felt certain that the manifestations would not have come in such a limited area and in such seeming order.

"But I mustn't let myself close my eyes completely to the possibility of some unknown radio ray," he kept warning himself. "Conditions at that particular part of the earth's surface might be just right for the germination of whatever it is that seems to annihilate matter. This science is altogether too new for anybody to scoff at the possibilities that lie within it, and I must work accurately though hurriedly."

Bit by bit he checked over the evidence, keeping in mind the alternatives. Unwilling to let himself be balked by the theory that unknown things are necessarily impossible, he could not help but arrive at a firmer conviction that these disappearances were planned.

"They break down the waves or negate them in some way," he decided, "to keep ships within the zone from calling out to the world that they are being attacked. I don't know what manner of super-radio they used for getting that message through to the 789, but I am convinced that that particular message is the best evidence of human intervention. Either Demerest was hired to deliver that message, or some way was found to fool even him. They took a destroyer first to have a threat for their later victims," he went on. "Then they began systematically to waylay merchant ships with cargoes that were easily salable. When the second destroyer chanced upon the 789, and asked for an explanation of her conduct, the pirate jumped the other by surprise and either captured or sank her."

Turning the possibilities of this scheme over in his mind, he smoked pipe after pipe. Finally a knock on the door aroused him from his dreams.

"Come in," he called.

The little man who opened the door and slipped in would be recognized by anybody in the company's employ as the typical Sparks of some vessel. He had the customary seagoing roll to his walk, the bent shoulders from sitting over his instruments, and the strange cant to the head that is acquired from hours of conscious listening with ear phones adjusted.

"You are Demerest?" asked Ross, rising to welcome him with a strong handclasp.

"Yeh, but I'm not boasting about it just now," the other answered with a sad shake of the head. "Feller don't go boastin' around that he's breezy aloft an' hearin' things that ain't bein' sent over. Took my crow off my arm at first," he moaned, "which was enough for a bird wearin' a couple o' hash marks. Then this balmy perfesser drifts in an' says that I never heard a thing, but on'y remembered how Andy Johnson got his and did a funk. Give me a dishonorable for that, they did, just on the word of the queer one what asked me all the questions. Busted me fair and drummed me out—me what never had even a deck court against me and on my third hitch."

"I feel sure," said Ross, looking into the man's eyes, "that you have been unjustly dealt with. I am investigating this thing for the company, and would like to ask you a few questions. Will you help me?"

"I will that, sir."

"Then I'm going to tell you the truth about my own suspicions, right at the start. Before you came in at that door I was certain that you were paid to say that you received that message, although no message had come over because the ether waves in that particular area were refracted or charged with some negative influence that killed off reception. Now that I have seen you, I believe that you had no part in it."

"I didn't, sir, upon me honor. That perfesser is all wet about me dreamin' I heard that message. It come over all right."

"How do you explain it?"

"Mister, I ain't got no explanation. That ship was there and then she wasn't. I've heard o' these voices warnin' people, and I'm figgerin' that was one o' them warnin' us. I'd sorta let church things slip in the outfit, you know how a feller will, but I been payin' for candles ever since the 789 was took."

Ross was silent, looking at the floor.

"What you guessin', mister?"

"I believe that this thing is the work of crooks who have in some way discovered a secret means of negating radio for a limited time over a limited space. A country would not bother with taking one or two isolated destroyers and a mere handful of merchant vessels, if it set about conquering the world with such a device. Only individuals would need that destroyer to intimidate their prey."

"Nobody could of got the 789 off that bottom without a tow or higher water than we got that night."

Ross turned up the chart and stared at it, putting a pencil down at the spot where the destroyer had grounded.

"You went ashore here? Had you poked your nose into this bay before you fetched up?"

"No, that was where we were bound," decided Demerest, after studying the chart.

"And this point would have hidden any vessel lying in the protected spot where the chart gives us an anchorage in eight fathoms?"

"Mister, I reckon you're on the right track at that. The light we see was off that point. It was the wildest thing you ever set eyes on. Something like the spark jumping off the antenna on'y a thousand times bigger and bluer. She come around that point and drifted slowly over to the 789, where she stayed until we reckoned she'd burned the old tub up. Then

she shut off like a blowed out match and the night was blacker'n coal."

"And you—none of you saw a thing in that blue light?"

Demerest hung his head for a long minute. Then he lifted it defiantly.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I was the first one that seen the light. It was comin' on dark, so that a light 'd begin to show, as we made the beach. The skipper ordered us to pull up the boats away above high-water mark, and then to head up into the hills. I hung behind, hating to shove into them jungles. While I was waitin' that blue light drifted around the point, and I seen what was makin' it. It was a naval collier, a ghost of a naval collier."

Ross did not answer, but looked at Demerest steadily.

"She drifted out to the 789 before I got back to the boys. Then it got real dark and they couldn't help but see the blue light through the trees."

"And you told no one about the collier with the queer blue light?"

"Mister, I didn't dare to. My brother was aboard the Cyclops when she was lost on the high seas durin' the war. Sunk without a trace, she was, an' here she come steamin' around that point with the ghostliest light all over her. You've heard that a ghost can't harm you 'less you speak of it, ain't you? Well, I ain't dared to speak of it before, but things have been going so bad of late that I don't much care what happens."

ROSS was nodding slowly, his face mirroring satisfaction. Demerest, trembling with the memory of the scare he had received, was staring at the floor.

"Do you think the destroyer could have managed to slip away under her own power if a trained crew had managed to get aboard and that collier had pulled her off the bar?"

"Floatin' and tight, manned with a crew that could get ev'rything out of her, she sure could. By paintin' out her numbers or changing 'em, she could have worked it easy. There was a lot of our type in them waters and she could have slipped off where there was little chance of ever bein' seen."

"Thanks," said Ross. "You've helped me a lot. I've got some work to do now and I must be alone to think. I'll see you again to-morrow."

As he watched the humped little shoulders swing dolefully away from his door, he felt an impulse to follow. The little operator was in a mood that might well end with a jump into the river.

He stood debating with himself for a few seconds and caught a movement across the street. Focusing his attention he saw a slinking figure emerge from the shadow, watch Demerest until he passed under the full glare of a street lamp, and then take after him hurriedly and silently.

With a bound, Ross was down the steps and in pursuit. The little radio man rounded a corner, followed by his swift pursuer. The inspector put on a burst of speed, his fears heightened by the appearance of the shadow, which crouched like a man about to spring upon his prey.

Turning the corner on the run he came upon a startled policeman who was bending over the body of a man on the sidewalk.

"Stop! Where ya goin'?" asked the officer suspiciously.

Ross stared at the huddled shape on the sidewalk, too horrified to answer. It was Demerest and a trickle of blood was creeping across the smooth concrete even as he stared. The cop growled at Ross:

"I find a bloke done in with a knife and still warm. Then another yegg drifts up in a hurry with no hat on and stares at the dead one. I reckon you better come to headquarters and explain this."

Ross stared wildly about. There was no sign of the shadow, but an open al-

ley within twenty feet of the body offered concealment.

"I'll go, but take a look around first. I didn't kill him and I know the man who did must be close at hand. I saw some one take after him as he was leaving my house and I ran to warn him."

"That's an old one. You don't give me the slip that easy, brother. You stay right here until the Black Molly rolls us both down to the sergeant."

Ross fumed at the delay, but there was no way out of it. He had caught but an uncertain view of the pursuer, but he had concluded that it was an Oriental, probably a Chinese. Now he tried to remember what had made him jump at this conclusion, but he could think of no definite reason other than the intuition that he had grown accustomed to trusting.

Their arrival at the station interrupted his train of thought and he spent two hours in telephoning and explaining before Ainsworth could be reached and the law satisfied that it was doubtful if he had been at all responsible for the murder.

The death of the young operator had shocked him and he walked home slowly. He had none of the sailor's superstition and felt certain that the peculiar vessel that had looked like the Cyclops to the unnerved man was nothing other than the ship that the criminals were using to create their blind spots in radio.

The murder had almost shaken the young inspector's certainty, coming as it did on the heels of an expression of foreboding, but he now assured himself that the death of the operator was only a part of the widespread plan to terrorize the shipping of the world. That slayer had been Chinese, he was willing to wager, and the reason for removing Demerest was plainly that the plotters feared he would tell something to investigators that would reveal their secret through the one weak spot of their whole plan, that message they had been forced to send through the first shadow to warn the crew of the 789 and get them away from the vessel.

EVEN if he could be satisfied that the agency behind the mysterious losses was human, Ross still faced an almost insurmountable difficulty. Such clever men would have picked a safe retreat and it would take the navies of the world to locate the harbor from which they operated.

"And I can't go to the authorities and prove that this thing is man-made," he groaned. "I have got to get proof, definite proof that some one is back of all this."

At this instant he was passing a dark stretch where a shadow from an awning fell across the sidewalk. Out of this shadow leaped a lithe form and something gleamed in the uplifted hand.

Warned by instinct as much as by sight, Ross leaped aside and struck at the descending arm. His fist caught the forearm of the assassin and sent the knife spinning across the smooth surface.

With a scream of fright the attacker sped away, as Ross clutched at him. He grasped something and tried to hold but the frightened man tore loose and whisked off into the darkness.

The radio inspector stared down at what he held in his hand. It was a strip of cloth and a hasty inspection showed that it had been torn from a jacket, ripped from the neck down. It was of thin satin such as is often used for the sack coats worn by Chinese.

Picking up the knife, he thrust it into his pocket and continued upon his way. He was almost certain now that this man was Demerest's assassin or was hired by the same conspirators, and that they feared that he had learned enough from the operator to be dangerous to their schemes.

"This is getting to be a tough game," he said, as he closed the door and slipped the knife from his pocket. "Hm, Oriental, just as I supposed. It wasn't mere accident that all these

demonstrations took place off the coast of China. They're operating from a base that might be in the Philippines, in French Indo-China, or in China proper. And evidently they mean business."

He paced his room until daylight and then decided to head for Ainsworth's office with his discoveries of the night. The man would not be in for hours, but Ross would have an opportunity to look things over and perhaps question the secretary about her behavior of the day before. In the light of what had transpired in the last few hours he began to look upon her as worthy of immediate investigation.

The big building was as still as death except for a sleepy elevator man and the few scrubwomen who had not finished their cleaning jobs the night before. It took a good deal of talking to win his way into the company's offices, but his inspector's badge finally gave him admission and he set about searching the secretary's desk.

He found nothing of an incriminating nature and was about to give up the task when his eye fell upon a yellow sheet in the waste-paper basket. The slip looked like a telegraph form and he picked it up to stare idly at the half-finished message.

For a long time he could make nothing of it, as it was written in some kind of code. Then he began puzzling over the cipher to discover if he could make any sense of the fragment given.

The crumpling of the sheet had partially obliterated the pencil marks, but he studied it carefully and reconstructed the smudged letters. Then he applied the formula for decoding messages written in English and arrived at the following:

> Secured position. Ainsworth panicky. Young inspector assigned to job. Demerest expected to-night. Will report to Inspector Ross at—

"Not so bad," he chuckled. "Evidently she felt that she could improve on the wording of that. The young lady ought not to be so careless."

"And the young man ought not to be invading the young lady's office. By what authority are you here?" rang out sharply.

Ross's smile was far from friendly as he whirled.

"I am on the trail of a band of murderers," he said quietly, "perhaps worse. What were you doing at Mr. Ainsworth's door yesterday when I was closeted with him?"

The girl's face had been flushed, but now it went white. The big eyes roamed from side to side, their cold disdain suddenly melted into fear.

"Demerest was murdered last night," he went on harshly, "as he was leaving an appointment with me. I want to know what you know about it."

The girl stared at him in stupefaction as he tapped the decoded message and looked steadily at her. She seemed unable to speak and he felt certain that she was on the point of fainting.

"To whom did you send this message?"

She glanced down at the code and saw his translation. Her eyes started from their sockets and she teetered back and forth groggily. Then she slumped in a little heap and lay as still as death.

HE sprang to the water cooler, only to find it empty. Returning to her he chafed her hands and tried to revive her, but she was as limp as a rag. Rising, he rushed out into the hall to call for help.

He was back in a few seconds with a frightened scrubwoman and the towel man who was refurbishing the supply. They stared at him, as he glared around in disbelief at the spot where the girl had lain, for she was missing.

It was easy to trace her flight, but she could not be located. Slipping through the maze of offices, she had escaped by another door and dropped swiftly down to the street level in the

lone elevator that was running at this early hour. By the time that her pursuers were able to get the cage back to their floor for them, all hopes of catching her were gone.

Chagrined, Ross waited impatiently for her boss. He had hoped to confront her with enough evidence of her complicity to frighten a confession out of her, but he knew now that he was dealing with a clever little actress. If they did manage to find her, he began to doubt if they could worm anything from her.

Ainsworth came in at last, apparently refreshed.

"I slept the soundest last night that I have since this thing started," he said. "Somehow, it made me feel that things were going to happen, simply to remember the spirit with which you tackled this. You haven't uncovered anything yet, have you?"

Ross nodded. "Your secretary has not been with you long?"

"Good grief," ejaculated the boss, "do you mean to tell me that she was mixed up in this? Why, she came to me under the recommendation of a United States Senator. My regular girl left suddenly and I did not dare to hire haphazardly with this thing in the air, so I took Miss Hammond on very high authority."

Ross passed over the decoded message with no further comment.

"And where is she?" asked Ainsworth, as soon as he had read the damning evidence. "We must apprehend her. Her confession would stir Washington to action. This almost proves that men are behind all this."

"She discovered me at her desk, pulled a fake faint, and disappeared while I was looking for water. She was a clever little girl and I doubt if we could get much out of her, even if we had her here."

Ainsworth was silent for a long time, toying with the paper. "What do you plan to do?" he asked wearily.

"These are clever men, but we have seen through their horror. They tried to make the world feel that this was some new radio ray that would destroy everything connected with it. We have robbed their work of that terror and reduced it to the task of locating the men at the bottom of the hoax. That ought to be easy. Let the combined fleets of the nations affected search every nook and corner of the shores within a thousand miles of these disappearances. Give them orders to seize and hold any vessel resembling a collier, together with any destroyer not definitely accounted for by a careful checking of the fleet. It must be a big organization that is doing this. They've got enough men together to run this queer ship that Demerest mistook for the ghost of the Cyclops and others to man the destroyer and the prizes. They must have a contact with shore somewhere for food and supplies. A group of that size cannot operate without some leaks. We must throw the secret service men of all the countries involved into the task of uncovering the plot. Meanwhile I'll shove ahead on my work of trying to reconstruct shattered rays of ether. We need to hurry, for these fiends are growing wealthy and powerful.

"Your plan is all right but for one thing: our government has decided to accept the psychologist's decision on the reception of that message aboard the 789. They still lean to the conviction that these demonstrations are some new kind of electric phenomena connected with radio. I doubt if we can shake them from their position without more proof of our suspicions."

CHAPTER III.

OFF FOR THE ORIENT.

ROSS clenched his fists and stood up.

"Then I shall sail for the Orient," he said.

"What can you do there?"

"I can at least be near the scene of the shadows to carry on my experiments. This thing has to be stopped, and stopped soon. Unless I am mistaken, the men behind it are aiming at nothing less than world domination. If it were not for the fact that the Chinese people are not inventive, I should lay this whole thing at the door of some revolutionary leader with a dream of Oriental conquest."

Ainsworth shook his head disapprovingly, but Ross went on earnestly.

"Try to get the commander of the 789 and have him meet me at San Francisco. Book me passage on the first ship that will get me to the vicinity of the trouble."

"I will," said Ainsworth, catching the younger man's enthusiasm. "You're giving me fresh confidence. Anything else you can suggest?"

"Do all in your power to check any shipments of bullion, especially on passenger ships, for the period of our investigation. If the money must be sent, try to get naval convoys, and have them strong enough to stand off two destroyers. Now, forget about this radio lightning and remember that we are on the track of a band of ruthless pirates who are sending spies to this country to foil us."

Ainsworth was busy bundling a great sheaf of papers together. "You'll want these," he said. "They're copies of all the data we have on the whole thing."

Ross nodded and rushed away in a taxi for his rooms. There he made a hurried job of packing his clothing, carefully crated such of his laboratory devices as he needed, and made arrangements to insure that they would be shipped on the same train that he took for the west coast. Then he dashed off madly for the station, the portfolio that Ainsworth had given him under his arm.

As he was settling himself in his seat in the dim light of the terminal, he caught sight of a shuffling figure skulking along beside the train. At first he paid little attention, then he leaped from his seat with the realization that the walk was like that of the man who had waylaid Demerest.

Just as he reached the vestibule the man turned. For an instant the startled black eyes stared full into his, then the man scuttled away down the long platform. That fleeting glimpse was enough to assure Ross that he was an Oriental and that he was frightened at having his presence known.

"We are enough of a celebrity to warrant being shadowed," he chuckled, as he dipped into the papers on his return to his seat. "I wonder if they'll turn out a band to receive me. If they do," he added as an afterthought, "it will probably be a narrow black band to be worn on the coat sleeve. That bird had no love for me in his yellow face."

The papers proved fascinating, and he was soon deep in a study of the nature of the cargoes stolen by the pirates. It did not take a man experienced in the ways of the East to know that these were all common enough shipments of merchandise that could easily be sold in almost any port without suspicion or identification.

Charting the positions of the shadows, he was not surprised to find that all of them lay between Singapore and Shanghai. The very center of activities came near the southern part of China or the top of French Indo-China.

When deep in this study, he was suddenly aware of being watched. Lifting his head suddenly, he found a young Chinese of pleasing appearance smiling over his shoulder.

"You contemplate a trip to China?" asked the newcomer in the stilted voice of one who sought to speak perfect English.

Ross glowered into the dull eyes with suspicion in his soul. The impenetrable wall that he found there staggered him with the realization that he must deal

with many such inscrutable faces in the days to come. How could he hope to pick the guilty from the innocent, when this seemingly innocent question from a fellow traveler threw him into a panic of mistrust?

The Chinese shrugged and offered a cigarette from a silver case. He had the polished manner of a college graduate and made himself at ease in the neighboring seat.

The young inspector put his papers away with an uneasy feeling that the Oriental had bested him in a point of good-fellowship. It made him just a bit out of sorts to think that he had been surly when addressed so fairly, and he tried to think of some way to square himself.

"Shall we go to dinner together?" he asked as the dining car attendant announced the meal.

"If you wish, sir," smiled the Chinese, bowing Ross into the aisle before him. "But first allow me to introduce myself. I am known in my own country as Foo Chan, although I travel in this land under the name of Stanton."

"Mine is Ross," said the inspector, looking closely but in vain for some sign of a start that would betray too great an interest. "Let's go."

DARKNESS had fallen and the passage was in shadow, as Ross swept the curtain aside and plunged into the gloom. For an instant he felt a prickling at the back of his neck at the thought that he might be attacked from behind by this suave creature who had shamed him into an acquaintanceship he had not desired, but it passed and he swayed on to the lounging room at the end of the sleeper.

The green curtains tripped him and he stooped suddenly to brush them aside. Just as he did so a knife whistled over his head and buried itself to the hilt in the thin paneling beyond.

He swerved, bent low, and grappled with a man's knees. He heard a shrill curse and a bursting of glass, and realized that he was holding his slender companion, who was struggling to get free.

With a twist that must have been acquired from some one skilled in the jujutsu of Japan, the Chinese youth threw him aside and rushed to the window. The frosted glass had been broken and the center rods of the sash carried away.

For an instant Ross thought that his assailant was about to leap through, but Stanton only pointed excitedly through the frame. The inspector, suddenly convinced that he had grasped the wrong man, poked his head out of the window. Far behind them, illumined but faintly by the lights from the trailing coaches, he saw a tumbling figure halt at the foot of the embankment and stand erect. It resembled the man he had seen in the station so closely that he instantly absolved Stanton from all blame.

A small hand was placed firmly in the center of his back and a quiet voice said in his ear: "One slight twist of the ankle, Mr. Ross, would precipitate you into the night. I refrain from such antics, but merely mention this to show you that any suspicions concerning my being involved in this attack are utterly without foundation."

"You're a good egg," grinned Ross sheepishly. "I want to apologize for even suspecting you. Now let's look at that knife."

They extracted the blade from the thin wood and took it to a better light for examination. It was very similar to the one Ross had picked up in the street after the first attempt to assassinate him, and he passed it to Stanton without a comment.

The dark eyes of the Chinese narrowed. He examined the handle carefully and then turned to Ross wonderingly.

"You are involved in some difficulty with the Ho Sin?" he asked.

"I'm blessed if I know. Who are they?"

"The Ho Sin of Kwang Si is a powerful organization. This knife is marked with their emblem."

"What is it, a tong?"

"You would call it that, you who know little of China. Strictly speaking it is not a tong as you know the term.

"The tongs that give trouble in America are gambling societies. The Ho Sin is not a tong in that sense. It is a great secret organization of China that is little known by any but its members. What have you done to offend the Ho Sin?"

Ross shrugged again.

"I have seen one other knife like that," said the Chinese quietly. "It was sticking in my father's heart. Rest assured that I will do all that I can to save you from their vengeance, although there is little that can be done to save a man who has once been marked by them for destruction."

"Nice thought," shrugged Ross, "but it must not stop my mission. This is the second time they have failed in their designs. Perhaps I bear a charmed life."

"It was the Ho Sin that sent me to this country," said Stanton, as though talking to himself. "I came that I might go back to China and seek out the leaders of the group to destroy them.

"They are big and powerful, they are surrounded with wise men and much money, but"—his voice shook with passion and his eyes narrowed to slits—"they shall pay."

AFTER a brief embarrassed silence they started for the dining car again. As they passed through several cars they met the earlier diners on their way back to their seats. Swinging his body aside to allow a young lady to slip past him, Ross gasped in surprise. The woman was Miss Hammond!

She flushed and dropped her eyes, hurrying away from him. He stared after her until Stanton seized his arm and urged him to hasten.

They had scarcely given their orders before a black suspicion swept over the young inspector.

Excusing himself, he raced back through the cars to his own seat, mindful of the papers that he had left in his open portfolio.

On his way he scanned the face of every girl he passed, but he saw no sign of the spy. Finally he reached his own seat and stared in hopeless despair at his grip.

The papers were gone!

He finished walking the length of the train and still found no sign of the girl.

As he was passing the stateroom in one of the sleepers he heard an old colored man in an argument with a porter.

"'Scuse me, Mistah Pohtah, Ah went an' misunderstooded the rules, sah. Ah tho't this was where Ah was to sleep, but it sure am too scrumptious fer a old nigger. Ah reckons Ah better sleep back in one o' dem coaches lak' you say, sah."

The suggestion that the girl might be lurking in any of the staterooms gave Ross an idea. Up and down the long train he prowled, peering into every face he encountered, staring at blousy figures that promised to reveal the trim lines of the young woman under padding, watching suspiciously whenever a stateroom door opened.

The rest of the long, wearisome trip across the country was a nightmare to him.

As he was leaving the train at San Francisco the old colored man passed near him, carrying a bundle of old newspapers. As the crush blocked their way, the old negro turned and thrust the bundle into Ross's hands. Then he scuttled away with a chuckle that sounded vaguely familiar.

Ross tore open the bundle and stared

at the contents. There were his papers, with a note appended:

> Better go home, little boy. Nearly lost your papers. Not much of value in them. Meet you on the boat, if you don't get frightened and run home.

Angered to the boiling point, he started on his way to meet Lieutenant-Commander Henderson of the ill-fated 789. As he went he muttered to himself: "I'll see this thing through now or bust in the attempt."

He found the officer a rather young man with a few streaks of gray showing at the temples. There was something clean-cut and vigorous about him that made Ross feel sure that he had not been implicated in any bribery that might have been connected with the loss of the destroyer.

"Would you like to go with me in an attempt to get at the bottom of all this?" Ross asked.

"I certainly would."

"Good. I'll wire for the necessary permission from Washington," Ross said.

"Fine. I'll go mad if I don't get away from here. They're all so eager to climb, in this outfit, that they don't care if they do have to push down a corpse that isn't quite dead yet, on their way up. Nobody has spoken a decent word to me for months, for fear they'd be blacklisted for hobnobbing with a man who lost his ship."

"We'll change all that," grinned Ross. "I wouldn't be surprised if you brought the old wagon back yourself. I'm beginning to think that I'm on the trail of something definite. Know anything about the Ho Sin of Kwang Si?"

"No, I don't," said Henderson with a shake of the head. "I'm a naval man, first, last, and all the time. What is she, a junk?"

"I'm afraid not. You can help me a lot with distances, shipping lanes, and the like anyhow. I've only the vaguest idea about this section of the globe."

He drew forth his maps and they bent over them eagerly. While Henderson was studying the location of the more recent shadows, Ross scribbled a telegram.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLEVER GIRL.

TWO hours later a messenger appeared with a telegram.

"There are your orders," smiled Ross, passing over the slip. "Had to get it from the Secretary of the Navy, but it went through in record time. We've got just enough time for you to pack a few things and then we must be off to the boat. Things are breaking for us, and we're going to win, old boy."

"Say," grinned the surprised lieutenant-commander, "who are you, anyhow? I've known an admiral to wait three days for word from that bird and you get an answer in two hours."

"I'm a youngster on a mighty important job," said Ross soberly, "and mighty afraid I can't handle it."

"I'll put my money on you. Anybody who can move that department in such record time can move the earth. If that blamed Ho Sin of Kwang Si, or whatever it is, happens to be in your way it had better look out."

The reservations that had been made for Ross on the big steamer were sufficient for both of them, as he had been given a double stateroom to himself to insure privacy. Now the inspector opened such of his crates as he felt were necessary and started working over his complicated apparatus.

Henderson tried to work up an interest in the queer devices, but the whole thing was too theoretical to be easily explained. Giving up in disgust, he took to the deck and spent much of his time pacing back and forth in silent meditation.

"Say, Ross," he called, breaking into the stateroom one day with a

beaming face, "you ought to see the pippin I knocked off to-day. Prettiest girl I've seen in some time. Asked me if I knew you. Said you had a stateroom down this way."

For a long minute Ross stared in dismay. Then he found his tongue.

"With big eyes?" he asked hopelessly. "And a melting look? An innocent-looking little creature that would melt a stone?"

"That's the one. What do you know about her? Thrown you over some time?"

Ross laughed harshly. "I know enough about her to warn you not to mention that you had any connection with 789."

"What's eating you? Have you got the spy complex? Anyhow, you're too late with your warnings. The young lady pumped me dry."

"Well, you're—"

"Aw, give a man a chance. There I was, down in the mouth and aching for somebody to talk to. The kid came along and asked me what made me so blue and I told her. How could I know she was a spy, with a face like that?"

"And you told her what we are after?"

"I sure did," said Henderson glumly. "Told her you were the Wizard of Oz when it came to solving the secrets of the unexplored ether. I even went so far as to prophesy that we'd find my old tub and sail her through the Golden Gate to the consternation of the admiral and the vindication of faithful but abused old John McAlpin Henderson, Lieutenant-Commander of the United States Navy, long may he wave."

Ross dropped weakly upon a chair and let his hands go through his hair. It seemed as if this girl was destined to follow him all the way and pry into every thought that ever came to him. He was so upset by the officer's confession and bantering tone that he left without a word and went on deck for a breath of fresh air.

The first person that he encountered was Stanton, the Chinese student who had identified the knife on the train.

"Words with you," whispered the Oriental, drawing him forward and looking about to see that they were not overheard. "Two Ho Sin followers are on this steamer. Very smart boys, too, from American colleges. They talk in Chinese of a marvelous development in radio that is yet a mystery to the world. I can not discover the exact import, but it has much to do with the aggrandizement of Ho Sin in the immediate future."

"Can you show them to me without being observed?"

"Supper time. Sit with me, and I will show you."

Ross did not need to have the men pointed out to him. They came in with Miss Hammond, two suave well-dressed young men of the type one sees on the campus of more than one Eastern university. Their attention was centered upon the girl, and Ross was disgusted with the manner in which she played up to them. Although he was not strongly prejudiced against the race, he did feel nauseated at sight of her laughing face between those slant-eyed, grinning countenances.

"MISS HAMMOND seems well versed in radio, too," sighed Stanton, leaning toward him. "I regret that I cannot converse intelligently with one so advanced in the subject."

"Sometimes," said Ross glumly, "a little knowledge is, as the adage says, a dangerous thing. You had better stick to the Ho Sin. Tell me what you know of the club."

"Sh-h-h! Do not speak that name so carelessly. The very walls have ears beyond California. You go to a land where thoughts are often better unspoken than hurled to possible repetition. I will tell you all that I know when the opportunity is presented."

Ross went back to his stateroom alone and sat staring at his apparatus. The ship was nearing her destination, and he was no nearer his solution than ever before. He was beginning to lose confidence in his experiment, fearing that he had started on a false premise.

"I wonder I didn't think of that before," he said aloud, slapping his thigh. "He would know, if any man would."

He ran to the wireless room with a quickly scribbled message for Ainsworth. The answer might destroy any lingering doubts they had about this being a natural demonstration, for he had wired to have an old scientist questioned, the one man alive who had delved very carefully into the question of ether waves and their refraction. If he deemed it possible to negate the carrying power of the ether in some manner it was almost certain that they were on the right track.

Darkness engulfed him as he left the radio room, but he smiled expectantly into the gloom. Somewhere off there was the mysterious power that dropped suddenly upon these unseen feelers that these man-made monsters used for communication with distant people, dropped upon them and silenced them in their groping efforts to bridge the great space that separated them so ineffectually until this silence pervaded them. Perhaps the spell of those shadows might be cast over this very vessel before another sunrise, for they were rapidly nearing the coast of China and the danger area.

The thought made him shudder and turn back to his room. His conviction that the whole thing was human began to seep away from him, much as one's confidence melts away as thunder begins to roll and vivid flashes of lightning split the sky.

To quiet his own nerves he switched on the tiny set that he had installed secretly and listened to the messages. The sharp crash of his own message to Ainsworth drowned all else at first, but as soon as that was finished he began to pick up code messages from Manila to eastbound steamers.

As he was spelling out the words of one message, the dots and dashes ceased. He reached for the dials, his pulse quickening, and spun them in perplexity. It was fully two minutes before he realized what had happened —and then it was not until he had checked ground and aërial, batteries and bulbs.

"We're—we're in a shadow," he whispered, awed in spite of himself.

With grim tenacity he stuck to his phones, trying wave length after wave length in a vain attempt to locate some ship or station that was still active. Only the light hum of his batteries answered, though he stuck to his post until his head ached with the strain.

"Radiogram, sir."

He jumped up, knocking aside the chair and laughing at his fears. Something had gone dead in his set, after all, for there was no way for the ship to receive a message if the shadow was on.

He tore open the envelope and stared in wonder at the typed message:

> Go no further, Inspector Ross. You are delving into matters too deep for human mind. I speak when all others are stilled.

Without stopping to put on his hat, he rushed madly for the operator's room. On his way he nearly tripped over Miss Hammond, who was sitting with one of the Chinese students near the housing. As he recovered his balance and apologized for his awkwardness, he caught a glimpse of the other Chinese coming from forward.

"WHEN did that message come in?" he asked, bursting into the wireless room.

"Less than two minutes before I sent it down to you. Ev'rything went

dead just after I got your wire off. Then I stood by for nearly an hour without bringing in a thing, until this came over."

"Clear or faint?"

"Clear as a bell."

For a long minute Ross studied the other's eyes, as though looking for dishonesty. Then he wheeled and started across the deck.

Miss Hammond and her companions were gone. Satisfied that they were out of sight, Ross started forward in the direction from which the second Chinese had come. As he went he glanced aloft at the antenna of the great set, where it swayed against the sky.

Beyond the forward end of the housing lay a raft that made a little sheltered nook not far from where the wires led up from the radio room to the masts. A man might remain concealed in the tiny space from any but a purposeful search for hours, especially at night.

Scanning the wires closely, he found a spot that had been taped recently. He was not surprised to find the gummed area still sticky, in spite of the exposure to wind and water.

"Just what happened on the 789, unless I miss my guess," grinned Ross, unwinding the tape and exposing the skinned copper. "Wait until I give that operator a scare."

He ran down to his own stateroom and returned with a tiny sending outfit that had been packed with his other incidentals. By attaching it to the cable he was instantly wired to the ship's instruments.

"S.S. Hongkong," he tapped off. "You are a fat-head to let somebody tap your antenna and slip over a message that seemed to come through a shadow. I thought you were too smart for that."

He stood there grinning when the wild-eyed operator came rushing out to find him.

"Well, you're a wonder," greeted the other, after staring at the skinned cable. "How'd you figger that out?"

"Easy enough. I was trying to listen in myself on a set in my stateroom when you got that message. I didn't understand how it could be as clear as a bell to you and not register on my outfit. This helps a lot. Clears up some of the mystery to know it isn't that ray. Everything is pointing more and more against such an idea."

"But how did those birds know you were on their trail?"

Ross smiled grimly, thinking of the girl. "They have plenty of spies about," he said, "but I think I know their chief operative. The man who sent that message to you is right here on the ship, of course, and I know who he is."

As he said this he stared forward. There, crouching against the rail, was the man who had introduced himself as Stanton.

"That puts me at sea again," muttered Ross to himself as he strode away. "I was sure that it was the one who had left Miss Hammond and the partner on watch. So Stanton might be in on this in some way, eh?"

He found a morose and sullen Henderson sitting, half dressed, on the bunk and glowering at the floor.

"If that wouldn't sink the navy," he grumbled. "A white girl giving up Uncle Sammy's gold braid for a couple of thin-chested little yellow men who aren't dry behind the ears yet. I'm going to get out of the outfit and make a good pile of yellow gold dollars. That's what the women want these days."

"Unless you snap out of it and help unravel this tangle, you may be quitting active service to make little ones out of big ones with a sixteen-pound sledge for a plaything. I have just found out how that faked message was sent on the 789."

"How?" asked Henderson, all naval officer again.

"Somebody skinned a piece of the

antenna cable and tapped in with a small hand set. The message was not sent by radio, but over the wires of your own rig, by some spy of the pirates. The same thing was done aboard this steamer less than an hour ago, during another of the cursed shadows."

"Say, you're a wiz, buddy. The next thing you know you'll be handing me over the 789 and watching my smoke as I head for Frisco."

"I'm not that hopeful," yawned Ross sleepily, getting into bed. "There are a lot of things to clear up yet."

His cablegram was answered the next morning.

> You win. Possible, but we don't know how. Working on it. Do your best to speed matters. Another Preston freighter lost last night. Hurry.

The young inspector smiled grimly at those words. He knew only too well what they meant. It was Ainsworth's way of saying that he must abandon slow experimental work in the laboratory for the first opportunity to get at the great secret in some other manner. The experimenting might better be done by skilled men back in New Jersey, where every facility was at hand, and the task of locating the lair of the pirates be left to him. Now he must jump at any offering, take any risks, to push the thing through, so that the company might get the credit. Before this he had been warned to go slowly and carefully, but now he need not.

CHAPTER V.

BAITING THE TRAP.

"HENDERSON," Ross asked suddenly, "will you gamble?"

"Never do," replied the other, not understanding him. "I couldn't do it and dress decently."

"I mean will you gamble your life with me—take a chance?"

"In clearing this thing up? You bet I will."

Ross nodded and smiled grimly.

"Say, that's my business," grinned the officer. "We boys in the outfit spend the best years of our lives learning how to go into trouble and the rest of the time praying some will come along. What's the racket?"

"I'm going to try to get into the center of one of those shadows and be taken captive by the pirates who are stealthily robbing the world of its shipping. Want to come along?"

"I sure do. How do we work it?"

"From Hongkong, instead of shipping for Singapore on the fastest passenger liner we can get, we'll try another manner of travel. I'm afraid that I'm a marked man and likely to be picked off whether I want to be or not, but I think I can arrange to make it certain."

Keeping his plans to himself, Ross hurried to the wireless room and sent off some messages. Then he dropped into the saloon and sat studying a list of the lost ships.

"You look depressed," said a musical voice at his elbow; and he stared into the face of Miss Hammond.

She seated herself beside him and smiled coyly.

"I feel almost acquainted," she went on. "One gets to feel so aboard ship, don't you think, even with people who have not been overfriendly?"

Ross nodded, his face still grim.

"So"—her little chin lifted defiantly—"I thought I would ask you the next step. Are your plans all made?"

He smiled wanly and stared at the carpeting. "I don't mind telling you—I am trying to keep out of the reach of the enemy until I perfect the instrument I am working on. If they keep their hands off another two weeks I'll be able to surprise them."

One of the Chinese entered the saloon and stared at the girl. Ross did not raise his eyes, but he felt that a signal passed between them. The girl

got to her feet with a peculiar little laugh and walked away.

"Look out," she called banteringly. "They'll get you if you don't watch out."

"It beats me," he said ruefully, "how a girl with eyes like that can work for such a crooked bunch. I don't blame Ainsworth and Henderson for trusting her. I could almost trust her myself in spite of all I know about her, if I could sit and look at her all the time. But this will show that she is linked up with them."

Instead of wiring his discoveries about the wire-tapping, Ross had prudently decided to send the information by registered letter. It would be slower to reach its destination, but could not be intercepted by the enemy. The longer he could keep the pirates in darkness concerning his knowledge of their methods, the better his chances of success.

He hurried to his room now and spent the rest of his time in letter writing until it was time to pack.

Glancing hurriedly into his most valued chest of apparatus to see that his experiment was safely packed, he caught his breath with a gasp. Somebody had ripped the soldered wires apart, smashed the delicate bulbs, and upset the jars of liquid that were so necessary to success.

"Wow! She didn't lose any time," he muttered, looking at the wreck. "Well, it doesn't matter much. With Edison's best working on the same problem I can afford to forget it and try something else. I only hope they do as I think they will."

In company with Henderson, he left the steamer by sampan and hurried to meet Preston, the owner of the line that had been so hard hit.

THEY found the self-made financier chewing a cigar and staring out of his office window at the maze of junks in the harbor. There was a deep frown on his face as his eyes rested on a red rusted tramp steamer that lay, heavily laden, at her anchor in the stream.

"We've come to see if we could book passage on your next steamer for Singapore," smiled Ross, knowing that Preston had already been made aware of his mission by headquarters.

"I guess there'll be no more of my vessels pulling out for Singapore, or anywhere else, for that matter," said the other heavily. "Not until this thing is cleared up."

"Why not?"

The big man nodded toward a telegram that lay on the desk. "Cut off my insurance. I've been keeping quiet about my losses, as your company and the rest of the big ones advised, and the insurance companies think I'm a bad risk. Can't understand why so many of my ships are lost in good weather without a trace of wreckage or crew."

Ross nodded. He had realized only the night before that nearly all of the vessels that had disappeared were Preston boats.

"And without insurance I'm whipped. I've got all I own tied up in my line, and I sweat good blood getting my hands on the money."

"I sympathize with you, Mr. Preston," said Ross, "especially since your loss is mine. I was counting on being aboard the next one of your vessels to be seized."

Preston stopped his nervous pacing and stared at the youngster. "How would that help you?"

"I want to get captured by whoever's doing this. And it looks as if they're concentrating on your boats."

"I have enemies," Preston said half aloud, "plenty of 'em. Who hasn't, in this cutthroat game of underbidding for cargoes? But there's only one man—" He paused and stared at the harbor again.

"If there is only one who has a real grudge to settle," said Ross, after a respectful silence, "I'm willing to

wager that I can tell you who it is, even if not by name. Is it the head of the Ho Sin of Kwang Si?"

Preston wheeled about suddenly and stared. His heavy jaw was open and his eyes were wide with wonder.

"There ain't a half a dozen men alive that know he has a thing against me," he said. "How'd you find out it was Soo Fang?"

"I made a wild guess. I have pretty good reason to believe that the Ho Sin is mixed up in this."

"He's got it in for me with a vengeance. He's money-mad, that one. I have beaten him at every turn and nosed out his petty plots to ruin me. It all started when I had only one junk and was running anything I could get. He had a leaky old wreck of his own, and we both dropped into a little harbor at the same time.

"There was only one cargo and two junks, and I had to have money to pay my crew—so Soo Fang sailed in ballast, with a cargo of hatred in his heart. Since that it has grown steadily, and members of his Ho Sin have been sent to kill me many's the time, though I always squeak out of it somehow. So you think the Ho Sin and old Soo Fang are behind this? How did the old rascal have brains enough to work up such a scheme?"

"I don't know, but Demerest of the 789 was knifed in New York by a member of the Ho Sin. They tried to get me too, but I shook them off."

"Boy," said Preston suddenly, "if you're willing to risk your life on this bet, I'm willing to risk a floating rust box like the old Mantu. She's down there in the stream loaded with shell that the Jap schooners just brought in. I'll book her for Liverpool and have her stop at Singapore, if you say the word."

"Great. The company 'll reimburse you, if this is ever solved."

"I won't ask for a penny if you solve this, youngster. You're game, and I like to help out a game lad. Besides, there are a couple of more millions where I got the first, if you can clear the sea of this trouble."

"That can be settled later. When do we sail?"

"Any time you say. Take a sampan out to the Mantu and have Trent get ready for sea. Then come ashore for dinner at my house."

"But the enemy must know we are aboard. They're on the look out for me."

PRESTON laughed and pointed down at the street. Across from the doorway lolled a figure that never took its eyes from the humanity that passed in and out of the main doorway.

"Unless my eyes are going back on me," chuckled Preston, "that's their spy waiting for you. They're clever men, these Ho Sin shadows. When you give Trent that message he'll be along somehow to hear."

Ross smiled and started off on his errand, feeling sure that the tone of voice indicated that Preston was well pleased with his plan.

Henderson had decided to spend his time calling upon some people he had known during a previous visit to the city, so Ross set out alone. He had an uncertain feeling that somebody was likely to stick a knife in his back at any minute as he wound in and out of narrow streets on his way to the wharves.

He found a sampan and negotiated with the man in charge of it for passage to the steamer and back. While he was haggling he caught a glimpse of a gesticulating native out of the corner of his eye. The boatman made a peculiar motion in answer and it seemed to Ross that the newcomer dodged into the very sampan that he was hiring. But when he seated himself under the rattan awning he saw no sign of another being in the tiny craft and decided that he had been mistaken.

His trip to the steamer was uneventful.

"So you are to start for Liverpool in the morning," Ross concluded, as he turned back to the sampan, "and stop at Singapore to let us off. But keep this quiet about our being aboard. It's a secret."

"Right," called Captain Trent, turning to give orders for getting the vessel ready for sea.

The return trip was not as easily made. A sharp head wind added to the difficulties and they were nearly an hour in drawing in to the wharves. As they began to bump gently through the swarm of sampans that crowded along the shore, Ross was aware of a slight movement near his feet. Staring down he made out a curled body of a man cramped in the tiny space near him, his clothing so near a match for the other bundles on the floor that Ross had not noticed him until he tried to relieve his cramped limbs.

Before his better judgment could suggest that he must avoid letting on that he had seen the figure, he had launched a kick at it.

"What are you skulking there for?" he demanded, although he could have bitten his tongue the next instant for having said it, for the man lifted the pockmarked face of his shadow in an angry snarl of defiance.

Ross had little time for defense. The coil of humanity released itself with the lightninglike speed of a rattler and leaped upon him. One of those wicked dragon knives of the dreaded Ho Sin was glinting in his hand as he launched himself upon the white man.

Ross kicked in self-defense as the man leaped. His heavy sole caught the assailant in the wrist and sent the knife spinning and flashing out over the neighboring sampans, where it splashed into the water between two of the tiny harbor craft. Then the slender body was upon him.

Although the young inspector was slightly heavier, the Oriental was versed in the dreaded jujutsu of the Japanese. Clawlike talons found the neck of the white and dug into the soft flesh for important nerves. Ross was aware that he must exert every effort to save himself, for the boatman stood staring at them and offered no aid.

Flesh seemed on the point of parting under those clutching fingers that penetrated past cord and muscle to the centers that are known only to the student of that fiendish type of wrestling. Ross knew that the particular hold that the man sought would tear loose the great cords of his neck and leave him a deformed thing for life. With a great effort he lunged backward, his foot striking in the abdomen of the Chinese as he went down.

It was an old wrestling trick that came to him in his emergency out of the dim memories of childhood as the only break for that particular grip. He fell on his own back upon the mat where he had been sitting, his leg held out stiffly with the victim still hugged against the foot.

The lighter body of the Chinese was swung on the end of his leg like an apple spitted on the end of a stick in the hand of some youngster. When the limb reached the forward end of the arc above Ross's head, he released his grip upon the man's arms. The frightened Oriental had let go of Ross in an effort to save himself. Now the lighter body catapulted far into the air as though tossed by some giant.

For half a minute he seemed to hover in the air, as though undecided which of the craft to pick for a landing. Then he dropped suddenly between two, nearly capsizing half a dozen in the immediate vicinity with the splash.

"What a fool I was," muttered Ross to himself, as the body did not rise and his sampan shot in to the wharf. "Here I have killed the informant, after going to all that trouble to have him know we're sailing on the Mantu."

Then a stirring between two distant sampans caught his eye and he grinned

to himself. The half-drowned Chinese was pulling himself out of the water and scrambling ashore.

TWO hours later, as Ross reached Preston's home, he was again aware that he was being followed. Turning suddenly, he seized the Chinese who was at his heels and tore down the arm that held a screening sleeve of flowing cloth over the yellow face. He staggered back as he recognized the features, for it was none other than the student who called himself Stanton.

"I was about to inform you, sir," said the shadow evenly, "that the Ho Sin men from our steamer have obtained passage to Singapore on the Mantu with you."

"And how," asked Ross angrily, "did you learn that I am to go on the Mantu?"

"The ways of China are new to you," sighed Stanton. "I am old to the intrigue of this city and have friends who do not worship at the throne of Soo Fang. The nation stirs with awakening and the dictator of Kwang Si province must go."

For a full minute Ross was undecided whether to place this suave creature with his friends or his enemies. Then he remembered all that the other had told him of his hatred of the Kwang Si order, and how the information given by him had been their first inkling that the secret organization was at the root of the trouble. Stanton spoke softly:

"I wish to go with you on the Mantu."

"I'll see what Preston says," Ross answered. "After all, it is his ship."

"Tell him," said Stanton, leaning forward and whispering the words, "that it is the son of Ah Wing, the shark-fin merchant, who seeks vengeance on the killers of his father."

Preston did not hesitate when Ross put the request before him a few minutes later.

"Carry a son of Ah Wing into a fight against Soo Fang?" he boomed. "I'll say I will. Why, his father was wiped out by that old scoundrel when the lad was only a baby. The son's been hidden away and nursed to manhood for just this purpose. Unless I miss my guess you'll find him worth more than a regiment of soldiers if you are taken prisoners by the Ho Sin."

It developed in the course of dinner conversation that the present leader of the Ho Sin was seeking new worlds to conquer. Inflated with self-importance at the easy manner in which he had deposed Ah Wing, Soo Fang had steadily spread his influence over the whole province until he was now a power to be reckoned with. Rumor even insisted that he was plotting to overthrow the unstable government, recruit more members to his organization, and attempt to rule war-ridden China.

"And he has hundreds of new members scattered all about these waters," added Preston, as they dallied over cigars. "I have authentic news that he has a following among the Japs and the Filipinos, especially intent upon signing up ex-navy men."

"That proves my theory from another angle," declared Ross. "That accounts for the disappearance of the 789 and that other destroyer. He had trained men to handle them. We're on the right scent. Whatever happens to us, you'll know that Soo Fang is probably responsible."

Preston nodded and the party broke up because they must be off to an early start in the morning.

Light was just showing in the east as they slipped out to the old tramp.

Ross grinned inwardly, although his face was a frozen mask, as he saw the two Ho Sin men on deck long before the old steamer was clear of the harbor. The Orientals smiled blandly in return to his frosty nod and hurried foward to knock at a stateroom door. Ross merely curled his lip in scorn as Miss Hammond answered their sum-

mons, dressed in silken Chinese garments and looked decidedly Oriental with her hair done high upon her head in the approved fashion of young women of China.

"WELL, the gang's all here," Ross said, turning to Henderson.

"It certainly is," said that officer sourly.

"Just beginning to realize what a fly she is in our ointment?" asked Ross.

"Just thinking that I'd overlook all the damning evidence if she'd only smile at me once more the way she did the first week we met," growled Henderson, hunching his shoulders and striding forward morosely.

The day passed uneventfully and another followed swiftly. Not until darkness of the second day began to close in, did Ross and his companion begin to feel that they were nearing the danger zone in earnest.

They met in their stateroom and tinkered with the little receiving set that had been put in place for them. Messages were coming in regularly from the ships and stations in the vicinity and the old Mantu was doing her share of relaying. The great Manila outfit was plain and Calcutta came in once or twice so clearly that they could distinguish the code on their tiny set.

"It's a great night," sighed Henderson. "No static at all and reception as good as the old Pacific ever knew it—and that's saying a lot."

"If they can throw their shadows to-night, they've got a wonderful idea," nodded Ross, playing with the dials.

Again the crackling of a message startled them and they ceased talking to spell out the words. It was a call for their own steamer and they tensed to listen, marking down the dots and dashes on paper.

INSPECTOR ROSS,
S. S. Manut:
Experiments fail. Unable to create such shadows. Believe phenomena due to sun spots. Professor Dunik warns leave vicinity immediately, pending further investigation. Accepts theory destructive ray. Return Hongkong at once. (Signed) AINSWORTH.

"Wow," grunted Henderson, as the message ended and the operator signed off.

He lifted a match to a cigarette.

Again the instrument began to click and again they listened. It was a frantic appeal from Preston to swing back to their port of departure, as he had also received word from New Jersey.

In the middle of the message the instrument went dead.

"Fade-out," laughed Ross a little loudly. "I'll fetch it in."

He spun the dial in vain. There was no sound.

"It's a shadow," said Henderson, scarcely breathing the words, as he removed the ear-phones and stared at the young inspector.

On deck outside a heavy-footed seaman passed. Below them the engines throbbed regularly, sending their shuddering vibration through the old hull. But the receiving set gave no response, in spite of their every effort. Then a crackling noise burst upon their ears, growing rapidly louder.

"The bursting of the atoms," groaned Henderson. "We're done."

Together they leaped for the door and staggered onto the deck, where a brilliant blue light dazzled and almost blinded them, a light that pulsed and throbbed until it seemed like the beating of their own hearts exaggerated a million times. Then the crackling din increased and they stared in awe at each other's ghastly blue faces.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PORT OF MISSING SHIPS.

A THINNER, older Ainsworth drooped over his desk and stared at the yellow slip a boy had just brought him. His weary, discouraged eyes drank in the meaning of the words

at last. His tongue tried vainly to moisten dry lips.

"I'm going out there," he declared, pounding the desk. "This thing is killing me by inches. I'd rather go like —like that, than die a nervous wreck with the uncertainty. Maybe the stockholders will begin to see that the world must be told, if I go, too."

Trains were too slow for the anxious official. He soared westward in an airplane and chafed at the pilot because the machine could go no faster. Then he spent anxious days worrying the captain of a steamer because the craft could not fly to Hongkong.

An equally grave Preston met him at the dock. They merely stared grimly at each other, exchanged a tight handclasp, and then were silent.

"Not a word from 'em," said Preston at last.

"Did he leave a message, anything that might guide us?"

"He left this letter for you, together with the suggestion to me that the trouble was really human and was in some way connected with the Ho Sin of Kwang Si, a secret order that you from the States would call a tong."

Ainsworth ripped open the envelope and hastily scanned the contents. His face lightened a little and then sank into its hopelessness again.

"He was convinced the whole thing was man-made," he grunted. "Asks us to present his theories to the United States government and demand an investigation of all the harbors, great and small, along the coast of China from here down. Suggests a strict blockade of the entire coastline by swift government vessels and patrol boats, with heavier war craft, lying at hand in case they're needed."

"He had me believing in his theories," said Preston. "I had to admit that he talked as if he knew his stuff, and I was only too glad to give him the old Mantu for the trial."

"Think of it," groaned Ainsworth, "a mighty steamer, loaded with a cargo of valuable freight and manned by men like ourselves. Rushing steadily through the night, guided by a knowledge of rocks and shoals and tiny islands, aided by the compass and the sextant, in communication with the distant world by radio and then—sudden and complete disintegration, as horrible as the workings of the war gases. More horrible, in fact, because there isn't even a blackened corpse left behind to tell what has become of them. Nothing but silence and mystery."

"And yet," said Preston, rising and extending his hand, "I'm going with you."

Ainsworth took the firm hand and felt comfort in the crushing grip.

"We'll start things," he said. "The Naval Department has promised me anything I want but invasion of forbidden waters and we'll have the whole Pacific fleet off Kwang Si. If that boy was right, we'll do our best to smoke out the fiends who are responsible for all this. If he wasn't, we'll center the attention of the world on the trouble."

THE light illumined the old Mantu with its weird coloring as the two men stared in disbelief. There was nothing in sight to port, but it was plainly evident that the rays were coming from somewhere to starboard. It took courage to step from the comparative shelter of the housing and face the thing, but they went doggedly.

"My God, it's the end," shouted Henderson, as the light began to sear his eyeballs.

For an instant Ross was almost ready to believe him. The ripping, crashing sound had increased until they could scarcely hear each other shout and the gigantic sparks of blue light that leaped and played off to starboard made vision difficult.

"It's moving," he whispered to himself. "It's coming nearer."

By this time his eyes were more accustomed to the dazzling brightness. Under the constant playing of the great

sparks he made out the hull of a great vessel, a huge bulk that strangely resembled the lost Cyclops to which Demerest had likened the apparition that he saw in the islands. Rearing above the hull was the framework that gave the appearance of a collier to the weird vessel, but the great arms that lifted skyward now served as points from which the blue lights leaped and played as their noise and brilliance awed the watchers.

Then he made out two long lean shapes of gray that flanked the mystery ship and he tugged at the hands Henderson held over his eyes.

"Destroyers," he shouted, "see 'em?"

Henderson lifted his face and stared, shading his eyes as best he could.

"My old wagon," he howled, suddenly beside himself with excitement. "It's the 789, and Collie Wilkin's old tub, or I'm a liar. You win, buddy, you win."

One of the destroyers now leaped forward and ran close to the old tramp. An officer in spotless white appeared on the bridge, his uniform reflecting the blue light and his ghastly face turned toward the Mantu.

"You will heave to," he called to Captain Trent, who had been called at the first appearance of the blue light. "Stand by to receive a boarding party."

"At whose command?" bellowed Trent belligerently.

There was no answer from the destroyer, unless the slow motion of the forward turret could be called an answer.

With the majesty of an ancient king waving for the destruction of a fallen gladiator, those two long guns crept steadily around until they pointed squarely at the bridge.

"Are you stopping?" asked the voice languidly.

"Aye, aye, sir," called Trent, recognizing death in the blackness of those two barrels.

A smart boat's crew swept alongside a few minutes later and an agile officer climbed the pilot's ladder that had been dropped for him. The two Ho Sin men met him at the rail and exchanged greetings that were plainly of a fraternal order.

"It will grieve us to disturb the honored captain," smiled the officer bowing low, "but my master desires that he submit himself to a visit to our esteemed vesel."

In less than an hour the Mantu was again steaming upon her way, commanded now by a grinning Chinese, and manned by more of his kind. A yellow face bent over the engines, others were illumined by the glare of the fires when the doors of the furnaces were thrown open, and still others stood at the wheel or paced the forecastle-head. Over her bow, slung on stagings, another group of excited Orientals was busily painting out the identity of another lost cargo carrier that had joined the list of mysteries of the sea.

"This is piracy," blustered Trent aboard the vessel that had sent forth the peculiar light. "You'll all hang for this."

A smiling Chinese answered him. "There will be no miserable hanging, august sir. All who know of this new magic are sworn to keep the secrets of Ho Sin.

"No one has left our hiding place until he has sworn to the vows that no man dare break. Thus shall we continue until China is in the power of the great Soo Fang. Who then will question the manner of his conquest? The winner of wars writes the history as he wishes."

"The United States will have a few words to say."

"Not when they consider carefully that the mastery of the entire world lies in the grasp of Soo Fang. When once they realize that he can seize ships at will, they cannot refuse to forgive him such inconveniences as the borrowing of two of the many destroyers

that are at the disposal of that great country."

ON the morning of the second day they steamed slowly into harbor. A long line of shipping, looking not unlike the post war collection of many United States ports, lay rusting at one side of the harbor. These held the attention of the prisoners only until Trent nodded and named them as members of the Preston fleet. Then all eyes turned in inquiry upon the unique forest of spars and stays and crisscrossed wires that reared high above the maze of buildings on a nearby point.

"The shore station," whispered Ross to Henderson. "I thought they'd need something of this kind. Unless I'm mistaken, half a dozen such outfits as that, with a fleet of these queer floating broadcasters, could silence the radio world."

They were herded ashore and hustled through a barbed wire gate into an extensive compound. Their jailers were vile-looking Chinese, armed with modern rifles with bayonets attached, but dressed in variegated motley arrays of rags and tatters, quite in contrast to the smart uniforms of the men aboard the ships.

Brother officers from other ships of the Preston line rushed forward from the shacks that served as shelters to greet Trent and his fellows. There was a settled despair on their faces that was only slightly relieved by the joy of hearing from the outside world. All too eloquently it spoke of their belief that Soo Fang and his accomplices held the day, with little hope of succor.

"Who is the cripple?" asked Ross, as the introductions were completed without including a hunchbacked little dwarf who seemed to be forever trying to efface himself against the distant confines of the fence.

"That's the bird who's to blame for all this," grunted one of the older prisoners.

"How to blame?"

"He thought up this brilliant idea that Soo Fang has seized—some way of broadcasting a powerful light ray that throws out a wave or impulse and kills off all radio messages around the receiving vessel. Can't understand it myself, though I've heard it explained. Deeper 'n Einstein's theory."

During the anxious days that followed, Ross learned much about the silent little cripple. He was a German who had been sent out by the Imperial forces during the war on one of the lone sea raiders that caused such havoc among Allied shipping. Possessed with his dream of negating radio messages by means of light impulses, he had given much time and study to the question, believing that his discovery might well be an effective weapon in the winning of the war if he could get it ready in time.

Higher officers had ridiculed him, but he had continued to experiment until the raider came to grief in a storm off the coast of Kwang Si. His shipmates had taken to the boats in an attempt to land, and had never been heard of since. Refusing to leave his apparatus behind even to save himself, he had clung to the wreck.

At that time Soo Fang was delving into anything that would offer money for his growing dreams of conquest. His wreckers had found the scientist aboard the wreck, and would have put him to death, in order to make their claim to the salvage all the more certain, but their leader saw that the old man's interest in his work was something that might be of value to Soo Fang.

Given a chance to explain the nature of his work, the little hunchback had convinced the wily old Chinese of the ultimate success of his dream. Together they had planned and built the great shore station, using as their capital the money that Soo Fang had been accumulating for years for his big coup.

Von Hertz had labored under the delusion that the device would be used to reinstate the Kaiser and supply him with an adequate navy for the conquest of the world. With this belief he had aided in taking the destroyers, after they had scraped up enough money to alter an old tramp steamer into the necessary shape for the transmitting of their light impulses.

Not until the first half dozen ships had been seized did Soo Fang finally reveal the truth to the man from whom he had snatched the power to mystify the world. By that time Soo Fang had trained enough bright youths of his own following in the handling of the machinery to insure success without the bent old inventor. When Von Hertz learned that his years of experimenting were to go merely to make the old pirate the future emperor of China, he flew into an ungovernable rage.

Bitter indeed had been the struggle until the yellow man's followers had seized the scientist and trussed him securely. Then, believing that the prisoners in the compound would kill the originator of their troubles if they could only lay hands on him, they had ironically thrust him into the inclosure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAIR OF SOO FANG

THE great gate swung open with a clang and two armed men stepped briskly in.

"The man Ross is wanted at once," said one.

The young inspector stepped forward unhesitatingly. He had come across a continent and an ocean for this meeting and the discoveries that might lie behind it.

They took him in a power launch across the harbor to the point where the station towered. His heart beat rapidly, despite his efforts to control it, as the launch swept in toward the landing. Here lay his success or failure, and he must be awake to every possibility if he hoped to win freedom for himself and friends and to maintain the supremacy of the Caucasians in the Pacific.

He was led up a long corridor, from which he caught glimpses of a vast laboratory full of retorts and numberless electrical devices, some of which were intricate beyond his wildest dreams.

Suddenly they turned a corner, opened a door, and ushered him into a room.

For a long minute he thought that the room was empty, but he heard the deep intake of breath and turned to find a dried old Chinese peering at him from behind the door.

"You know much of radio, learned youth?" asked a high-pitched voice.

Ross recovered his wits enough to nod.

"So my new bride has told me," cackled the old crone.

Ross started slightly and could scarcely restrain a gasp of astonishment. The new bride who knew about Ross's knowledge of radio could be none other than the girl he knew as Miss Hammond. He had tried to explain to himself how she could be interested in the two Chinese youths aboard the steamer, but it was unthinkable that an American girl, even an adventuress of the worst type, could bring herself to marry this scrawny old devil with the sunken snake-like eyes and the thin scraggly beard.

The Chinese read his thoughts and cackled in mingled delight and anger.

"Yes, it is the pretty one who has come but lately to our stronghold, she who told us much of your plans. In one week shall she be my bride, waiting only in respect seven days for our betrothal. Soo Fang shall have worthy sons to carry on his dynasty, sons with the wisdom of the white devils in his blood."

A feeling of revulsion swept over Ross. Even to the last he had kept a faint ray of faith that she was not as bad as she had appeared. Together with Henderson he had shared the hope that those lying eyes would eventually prove trustworthy, or innocent of the full meaning of the stand she was taking.

"What do you want of me?" he asked harshly.

Soo Fang shrugged. "The lady states that you know much radio. She desired me to bring you here to see what we do."

Ross laughed coldly. He thought that he understood the man's desires. He was hoping to induce him to take the place of the deposed German as chief of the plant.

Hope leaped up within him at the thought. Although he did not know the meaning of half of the intricate machinery that he could see through the windows that gave a view of the great shop, he felt certain that Von Hertz had made adequate blue prints, and that he could master them easily. There might be a chance to communicate with the outside world, the very chance for which he had planned when he voluntarily put himself within the power of the pirates.

Again the clever old Chinese seemed to read his thoughts.

"We need advice," he said softly. "This German will help us no more. You are eager to know all things?"

Ross nodded again, not daring to trust his voice.

"For these men who have hired you to come here and learn what we do to still the talking of their machines? How much of their sacred money will they give for this great work that you attempt to do for them?"

"Nothing extra. It is but a part of my job."

"And for that the stipend is—?"

"About five thousand a year."

"We will pay you a thousand dollars a month to be our adviser—fifty thousand more in one sum when my empire is formed."

Ross did not answer. He had caught a glimpse of Miss Hammond moving about in the great shop. Something about her manner of tiptoeing along, with furtive glances toward the office, made him realize that she did not wish to be discovered. Soo Fang had not seen her, because his back was turned to the windows, and she made a sign with finger at lip to Ross that he was not to mention her presence.

Hope leaped up in Ross's heart; the faith that he had all along wished to have justified came again to the fore. Soo Fang swung about toward the windows.

Ross's young body tensed to leap upon the bent old back, but there was no indication that the old man had seen. Breathlessly, Ross waited.

SOO FANG finished his pacing and turned. His eyes were on the floor and Ross was sure that he had not seen.

"I must have time to think this over," said the inspector, sparring for time and trying to keep the old scoundrel from turning to face the shop.

"Think well," smiled the Oriental; "but think not at all of treachery. In my little room are three handles, contrived for the time when the stupid Von Hertz should attempt the same thing. One handle, when pulled, destroys this plant; another our wave relayer; the third the prison camp. If I am to lose my empire, I care not who goes with me to the greatest of all mysteries. But Von Hertz cares, even as you care, young white man, and the dynasty of Soo Fang is safe."

He paused and chuckled at his cleverness. Ross read in his eyes the truth of what he had said, his utter indifference to death in the face of failure. Then his eyes wandered past the defiant old man into the shop where he saw Miss Hammond reach forward to touch a sending key.

Instantly a great spark crackled forth, followed by another and another until Ross read the dreaded S. O. S. of marine radio, the call that demands the instant attention of every operator who chances to catch its meaning.

A puzzled light spread over the face of the old Chinese at the first leaping of the sparks. He seemed to be at a loss to understand what was happening, and stared up at the masts and their maze of wires, where the radio waves were leaping out to scream their message to the world.

Then his gimlet eyes darted to the laboratories and he caught sight of the girl at the keyboard. Disbelief and surprise mingled in his face as the stoical mask of the Orient was lifted for an instant. Then, before Ross could leap upon him, the feeble old hands clapped together softly.

The signal brought half a dozen armed guards pouring from various places of concealment. Not an avenue in the shop but was covered by one of those high-powered rifles as the men swung into assigned positions.

It was too late now to interfere, for one of the men stood at the door of the office, his rifle muzzle covering the young inspector's chest unwaveringly. Meanwhile the girl had stopped at a shrill command and was gazing in horror at the men who were coming menacingly toward her.

"Fire if she touches the key," called Soo Fang shrilly.

She did not have time to send the location that would make the attempt worth while. Ross saw by the light in her eyes that she would have braved death to put it upon the air, but that she realized that a bullet would drop her before she could send off a single word.

Proudly she turned from the instrument and smiled upon the guards.

"Is it thus," she asked haughtily, "that the promised bride of Soo Fang is treated in the home of her husband? Can she not play with these things that are so new to her without incurring insults from such dogs?"

The old man had thrown up a window in time to hear her questions. His teeth showed as he leered at her.

"It is strange, little white one," he purred, "that the finger of inexperience finds so ready at her touch the mysterious letters of warning with which to summon her people. Soo Fang requires that you come here to his office and explain."

She came proudly, unmindful of the bayonets that stalked behind.

"You are too new to my household to be entirely within my trust," crooned the old villain. "What you have done arouses within me a cruel distrust of this promise of marriage. It is my will that you delay no longer but admit of the ceremony."

She turned pale, but swayed back against the wall and regained her control. Proudly she drew herself erect.

"If the venerable Soo Fang doubts the truth of my promise, let him have his will."

She had stepped forward and her eyes had strayed to Ross. He saw pain and suffering in them.

"I am sorry that this must happen, Mr. Ross," she whispered, as she bent toward him, "but it must be."

With the words, she darted past him and into the room where Soo Fang had planted his levers of destruction. Strong in her despair she seized the first of the three handles and yanked it forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEVERS OF DESTRUCTION.

AINSWORTH and Preston hastened to get in touch with the naval authorities through the Secretary, asking that all of the available war vessels in the Pacific be rushed to the southern coast of China.

"They won't go into Sui-Ting without more proof," said Preston sourly,

as they sat over cigars and pondered the situation. "The port has been closed to shipping because of the revolution, and foreign devils cannot enter."

"And that's the very spot Ross seems to have hit upon as the likely hand-out. You say it's the stronghold of this Soo Fang who seems to have dragged his men into the mess, and it looks as if the boy might have been right—if the scientists are all wrong."

"There's one way to get the navy into Sui-Ting," said Preston, clamping his jaws shut. "They'd go in to bring out Americans they knew were held by hostile forces, wouldn't they, even if the said Americans went in against advice?"

"If they were convinced."

"We'll convince 'em."

Ainsworth stared at Preston uncomprehendingly. Then he followed the shipowner's lowering gaze. Another of his tramp steamers had come in since Ross left the port, and she swung at anchor within range of their eyes. Suddenly the big man from New York realized what the other meant and he whacked him on the back in appreciation.

"We'll sail into Sui-Ting," he roared. "The destroyers 'll have to come in for us if we don't come out. Let's go."

Like two eager boys about to explore the mysteries of some little-visited spot, they went about their preparations. Both of them had felt the ignominy of sitting quietly at their desks while underlings in their employ faced this great terror alone. Neither of them had felt at ease until the decision was made. Then they dashed off eagerly to make arrangements.

It took time to get the steamer ready for sea and a crew aboard, and they fretted about the delay. Their own packing had been but a matter of minutes, and they could scarcely hold themselves in check during the negotiations incident upon getting to sea.

They knew that naval vessels were assembling from all quarters of the Pacific to throw a cordon about every port on the whole coast. Destroyers were slipping gracefully through the morning mists that made their gray lines scarcely discernible. Heavier cruisers and one or two line-of-battle ships were following in slower grandeur to take up positions near the suspected Sui-Ting, where they would be at the call of the speedier boats.

"Soon be there," called Ainsworth to Preston, after studying the chart. "That must be some of the fleet off yonder."

Ahead of them they made out a number of gray shapes lying off the land. It was evident that the navy had been held in readiness for such a call and had responded quickly.

Soo Fang had picked his retreat with an eye to concealment. The great masts and their wires were hidden as completely from the casual eye of the passer as were the long lines of hulls that he had emptied of valuable cargoes and anchored within the shelter of the bay.

That watchful fleet before the harbor with their high-powered glasses trained upon the sky line could discern nothing suspicious about the place, so well did the hill shelter the masts.

"We'll start something," muttered Preston, as he gave the order to go into the harbor.

"But it's a closed port," remonstrated the captain.

"Don't I know it?" snapped the owner. "What do you think we loafed down the coast with you for? If the port wasn't closed, any destroyer would have taken us in. Shove her along at her best."

THEY passed ship after ship. No one seemed to pay particular attention to them, for Preston had ordered a course that would not give their destination away until the last minute.

Suddenly they veered and ran for the harbor mouth. Behind them the fleet burst into frantic signaling. Semaphore men waved frantically, wigwag flags slatted rapidly in Morse code, and the radio equipment of the flagship burst into an order to stay out of Sui-Ting.

"They're telling us to come back," grinned Ainsworth, reading the messages easily, "but I can't understand this flag signal stuff at all, can you?"

"Never a wig nor a wag," grinned Preston, covering his eyes with his hand, "nor can I see a sign of flags bein' run up to order us to lay to. Don't you look, cap'n; your job is to look ahead."

At this instant the signaling shut off and confusion seemed to reign on the vessels of the fleet. The wireless man on the old freighter came to the door and called.

"What is it?" asked Preston.

"Says he just picked up an S. O. S. that sounded right aboard. Then she shut off without telling why, where, nor nothin' else. Wants us to shut down so he can get it clear if it comes in again."

Ainsworth was in a quandary. The nearest destroyer was slipping her cable and evidently preparing to follow and chase them away from the forbidden port. On the other hand, that might have been a call from the inspector they were seeking.

"Hold our course," he called, "let the naval men pick up the call. Beat that destroyer into port."

It was no race. The old tramp had a big lead before the greyhound slipped its leash, but the white water broke from the bow of the destroyer and the long hull leaped. In less than half a mile, she came boiling alongside and an angry officer bellowed through a megaphone to stand by or be blown out of the water.

There was nothing else to be done and the two men wilted in despair at their failure.

At that instant there came a terrific explosion from somewhere ashore. A great cloud of smoke drifted skyward and fragments that had been hurled high enough in the heavens to be observed from the ships sank quickly down again.

"My God," moaned Ainsworth, "the boy was right! He has managed in some way to blow up the plant, even at the cost of his own life."

BACK in the laboratories the guards leaped upon the girl. Too late to stop that deadly lever, they tore her away from it, even as there came a great blast that rocked the building.

It was fully a minute before any one realized what had happened, so expectant of death had they all been. Then Ross recovered his wits quickly enough to lunge forward.

"The ship," moaned Soo Fang, unaware of the struggle that was taking place within, as he stared at what had so recently been the anchorage of the queer craft that was so essential to his plans. "She is gone."

The first lunge of the young inspector knocked to the floor the rifle that covered him. With another wild bound he was upon the men who held the girl, smashing the Chinese with his fists.

It had all come so swiftly that he had little opposition. No one thought to bring a weapon into play until he had the last of them at his mercy and was fast beating him into unconsciousness against the wall.

"Stop!" The insistent call did not penetrate his excitement until he felt the sharp prick of the bayonet between his shoulders.

Ross wilted. He had done all that he could. The fates seemed to be conspiring to block all their attempts to overcome the power of the Chinese.

"Stand back against the wall," ordered the old man, still covering him with the rifle. "And you stand beside him, base one. You shall know what

it means to dare the anger of Soo Fang."

As the old scoundrel stooped to aid the first of the reviving guards, the girl leaned closer to Ross and whispered: "I'm from Washington. Secret Service. They put me in Ainsworth's office to make sure that he was not connected with this plot. Then I used my information about you to work my way into the confidence of these men. I am so sorry that I had to deceive you—that we had to fail at the last."

"Well, it was a good fight," shrugged Ross, his eyes on the unwavering muzzle that still covered him.

"We—we might have worked it together."

Suddenly the young inspector realized just what that look in her eyes had meant, ever since he had first seen it there. He forgot the rifle and the crouching Chinese as he put a big hand over hers in sudden pleasure.

"We will work together after this," he whispered, "wherever we are. Agreed?"

She nodded swiftly and dropped her eyes.

Soo Fang's harsh cackle burst in upon their dreams.

"You shall learn what it means to play with Soo Fang, woman of lies," he purred. "Together? No, you shall not even go together to that mystery that faces you. He shall know the tortures that make men cry for the mercy of the knife or the strangler's cord. You shall watch him cringe and writhe and beg for the mercy that shall be denied him. You shall see him die the ten thousand deaths, little traitor, and watch that pale face that you love turn black with the hell of despair. When he can stand it no longer and the spirits have taken the little that is left of him, you shall choose." He paused and laughed again, that high cackle. "You shall choose between such a death and life with Soo Fang."

He bent near her, his wicked old face wreathed in a nauseating grin.

As the lips came near to hers, Ross kicked viciously.

Two of the revived guards fell upon him and bound him securely. Then they placed him against the wall, from which vantage he smiled upon the howling Soo Fang, who clutched a bruised shin in his long fingers.

"The fleet," gasped the girl, pointing down the harbor.

The guards stood spellbound for an instant, staring at the majestic sight as the battleships came nosing in to demand an explanation of the disturbance. With frightened yells, they fled from the building, followed by their fellows from the whole encampment.

A light of cunning appeared on the face of the ruined plotter. He darted for the room where the handles of destruction awaited his touch to send them all into eternity.

"I fail," he cackled, "but you go with me."

His hand was on the lever. It inched forward. He grinned mirthlessly at them as the bar came forward and the pawl clicked past the ratches.

A door burst open behind him and a lithe figure leaped upon the old man. An equally yellow hand closed over the wrist that held the handle, and stopped the forward movement of that deadly lever. For an eternity the two stood locked in a struggling embrace that threatened at any minute to hurl them into space.

Slowly Soo Fang's fingers relaxed their grip on the lever and fell away under that tense clutch. Then a face appeared above the old body, a face that Ross recognized, even as he saw the glitter of insanity in the dark eyes.

"Know me, Soo Fang?" rang the voice. "I have pulled thy hand from the throttle only to replace it with my own. I, the son of Ah Wing, have come for revenge, revenge upon you and upon the order of the Ho Sin of which I am the rightful head."

Still holding the cowering old man with one hand, he reached for the bar.

The glitter of madness leaped up again in his eyes. He caressed the handle lovingly as his mind seemed to flit back across the long years that he had been waiting for this opportunity.

"STANTON, hold up an instant. Give us a chance, man!"

Ross had lurched forward in his bonds, to fall almost at the feet of the maniac.

Recognition dawned in the frenzied eyes. The scorn was replaced for an instant with sympathy.

"It would be poor pay for the aid that thou hast given me, to carry thee with me to destruction," Stanton admitted. "Leave at once, that thy life might be spared."

"And Miss Hammond?"

"She who would have wed this enemy of my father? She, too, shall die with us."

"But she didn't intend to marry him at all. She was working against him. She called the battleships that are in the harbor now."

Stanton looked quickly from the girl to the vessels and relented. He quickly cut Ross loose.

"Go," he cried, "but go quickly. The fingers of my hand itch to draw forward this bar of death."

Without a backward glance they raced down the corridors, as soon as Ross was freed. Out upon the quay they sped, where a launch lay in readiness for Soo Fang's slightest whim.

They threw themselves into the tiny craft and Ross leaned over the engine to study the shift. The motor caught, and in a few seconds they were scooting toward the war vessels.

No sooner were they well clear of the wharf than they saw Stanton's face at the window of the office. He lifted a hand in farewell and turned back to face Soo Fang. Almost immediately the whole building seemed to lift and sway skyward, while a dense cloud of smoke burst from the lower windows and great cracks appeared in the walls. Then a mighty blast rocked the atmosphere and threw them into the bottom of the boat.

"Thank God it's over," sighed Ross, "and here come the boats."

Launches were really coming toward them from the fleet, launches from which white-clad men waved anxious greetings, as they drew rapidly nearer.

There was little left of the shore station. The explosives had been so cleverly placed that the most secret part of the discovery had been most completely demolished. Some of the tall masts still stood at rakish angles with wires dangling from them, but the intricate devices that Ross had barely glimpsed were a mass of debris.

"There's nobody left who knows how it was all done except Von Hertz," Ross told the group that crowded around him on shipboard, "and I wish somebody would muzzle him. I've had enough of the whole thing."

"There is no need to worry about him," said Trent, who had just arrived with the other prisoners from the compound. "He had a coughing spell and burst a blood vessel when that first explosion came. Broke his heart to see that blue-sparker of his destroyed, and he died in a few minutes."

"Which is good news for my company and the world in general," said Ainsworth, pushing through the excited circle. "The world is deeply indebted to Miss Hammond and Inspector Ross."

"And I get my 789 back," Henderson said wonderingly, staring across the water at her trim lines.

"My ships—my lost ships, back again," sighed Preston happily.

"And I," smiled Ross, "get the best reward of the lot—Miss Hammond has promised to marry me."

"That's not all," shouted Ainsworth above the din. "You get a job as vice-president of the corporation, if you'll take it."

THE END.

His shot had been heard, and men were appearing in doorways

Man-Hunt

Hostile and suspiciously secretive, the Arizona outlaws make life a dangerous game for Webb Summers as he searches blindly for his missing partner, Ned Funstall

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "The Raider," "Mystery Land," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

NED FUNSTALL, a wild young cowboy, has just left his friend Webb Summers. Riding up to a cabin, he sees the brutal Ben Lavercrombe strike and kill his wife Emily. There is a gun duel, and Lavercrombe is killed. Funstall rides south, seeking the relatives of the woman in Pardo, Arizona.

Summers finds the bodies and recognizes the print of his friend's right hand—which has the third finger partly cut off—on a dusty packet of envelopes. Fearing that Funstall had committed murder, yet not wishing to set the sheriffs on him until he knew the right of it, Summers rides after Funstall, searching all southern Arizona, and hunting the little town named in the letters from "Mother" and "Laura Bainter."

Just outside Pardo he sees a Mexican catch a rattlesnake and attempt to make it bite a girl. Summers kills the Mexican, Pedro Loaza, and frees the girl, Juanita. She tells him Funstall

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had been in Pardo, but disappeared, leaving his horse—which the wild young Clay Meeder is riding.

In Pardo, some days later, Summers is surrounded by four men—two Mexicans, two Americans — who accuse him of killing Pedro. He is about to draw and go down fighting, when riders come dashing down the street, scattering the four, and beating them with bullwhips. The leader of the riders is Clay Meeder. He orders the Mexicans not to disobey his orders again, but to keep out of Pardo.

There is a clash of wills between Meeder and Summers; then Meeder, with a secret smile, says he won't fight yet—he tells Summers to stay around and clean up the Loazas — and find Funstall if he can!

CHAPTER VIII.

A GUNSHOT IN THE NIGHT

A FLASHING glance at the witnesses of his meeting with Clay Meeder revealed grins on some faces, while others were curiously unexpressive, betraying lack of interest or perhaps disappointment because there had been no killing.

Summers walked down the street toward his boarding house. He had found a quiet place which had been recommended to him by the owner of the livery stable in which he kept his horse. The liveryman himself boarded at "Quinn's Palace." The place was not the palace it was advertised, but it was cleaner than many.

Luiz Loaza was gathering his friends together. The American, called "Deamude" by Clay Meeder, had returned when he had seen the latter ride out of town, and he and Luiz Loaza were hoisting their injured friends upon horses. And now that Clay Meeder had departed, the injured men seemed surprisingly active.

Silence reigned as Loaza and his friends rode eastward toward the desert. No one spoke to Summers as he walked to the front door of his boarding house. The episode appeared to have evoked little excitement. Some Indians, squatted in front of their adobe houses, were stolidly smoking.

Summers himself was aware of no tension. A gun fight in which there were no fatalities, was not a tragic spectacle. As a matter of fact it had a humorous aspect, and later, the flight of the Loaza contingent would be recounted with hilarity by the witnesses.

Clay Meeder's manner, when speaking of Funstall, had been enigmatic, his laughter derisive. He revealed nothing. Funstall might be dead, or he might be living in the vicinity unaware that Summers was searching for him. Or perhaps he knew of Summers's presence in Pardo and was avoiding the town.

Summers had not intended to divulge the reason for his presence in Pardo. He surmised that his conversation with Juanita about Funstall had led the girl to believe he was searching for Funstall, and that Luiz Loaza, questioning her, had contrived to elicit that information.

Summers had given Meeder no intimation that he had recognized Funstall's horse, nor had Meeder's manner intimidated him. Meeder was undoubtedly a wild man and a killer, but in his wildness was wisdom, which had taught him that there were men as proficient as himself in the art of handling a weapon, men with courage to match his own.

There was little doubt in Summers's mind that Meeder had meditated killing him as they had stood for that brief space facing each other. Summers had observed the telltale glint in Meeder's eyes, just as he had seen them fill with the shadows of a sudden doubt.

Meeder was dangerous, there could be no doubt of that, but as Summers mounted the narrow stairs that led to his room in the palace he was con-

scious of a flash of contempt for the killer.

STANDING in his room gazing through the window at the now deserted street, his thoughts went to Loaza. He would have to be careful about Loaza. There was a difference between Loaza and Clay Meeder. Meeder was wild and blustery, but Summers was convinced that any aggressive movement by Meeder would be made facing an enemy, while Loaza would not hesitate to strike from behind.

Obeying a sudden impulse, Summers sought the street again, got his horse from the livery stable, and rode out of town in an easterly direction.

If there were any citizens of Pardo to observe his departure they were able to form no conclusion as to his destination, for his course was such as to give the impression that he was riding aimlessly. But there was method in his apparent wandering, and when he was at last out of sight of the town, he left the east trail and rode into a gorge running northwestward. Two hours later, after having traveled in an irregular semicircle, he was in the little wood that surrounded Juanita's cabin.

He could not be seen from Pardo because of the wild brush that screened the cabin from view, but he was cautious in his approach because he feared Juanita might have visitors.

However, Juanita was alone. He found her inside the cabin, sewing, and her dark eyes glowed at sight of him.

"Come!" she invited as he appeared in the doorway. She dropped her sewing in her lap and looked at him.

"So," she said, "you have met the Loazas."

"You saw what happened, eh?"

"Everything. Their faces, no. But I recognized them. And Clay Meeder. Be careful!"

Summers stood just inside the doorway. His gaze met and held Juanita's.

"Luiz Loaza knew I came here to look for Funstall," he said. "Do you know how he found that out?"

"They have friends."

"Not you?"

She grimaced, and her eyes flashed.

Summers laughed. "I was near suspectin' you'd told them about Pedro."

"I tell them nothing!" she declared. "Not if they keel me! Luiz come here and ask question about Pedro. I know nothing about Pedro. He ask about you. I say you stop here to ask question about Pardo, for I see him looking about and think maybe he find tracks. If he catch me in one lie he think everything lie."

"Look here," said Summers. "I don't know what you know about the Loazas that makes them want to kill you, but if I was you I'd light out of here."

Juanita's eyes gleamed with a sullen light.

"You look for your friend Funstall," she said. "They have try to keel you. Do you light out?"

"Shucks. That's different"

"It is different weeth me, too. I have friend I weel not desert."

"Well," said Summers, "you're game. You're in trouble because you're friendly with some one, an' because you know somethin' about the Loazas that they don't want you to know." He smiled. "Seems we're in the same boat. Do you think tellin' me anything would help?"

She shook her head, though her eyes were grateful.

HE stayed the greater part of the day in Juanita's cabin, sitting where he could gaze out of the doorway at Pardo. Several times he tried to draw Juanita out, tried to induce her to talk of the things that interested him — Funstall, the Meeders, the Loazas, Laura Bainter, Emily Lavercrombe's mother who, according to the letter he had in his pocket, must live in the vicinity. But only once,

when he referred to Emily Lavercrombe's mother, did Juanita betray any emotion. Then her face reddened beneath the rich bronze of her natural color, and she sat rigid.

He pretended not to notice her emotion, but when at dusk he left her he felt that the secret of her fear of the Loaza band was somehow connected with Emily Lavercrombe's mother.

He rode back to Pardo the way he had come, so that none would know he had visited Juanita. Night had come when he rode out of the desert toward the cluster of lights in the town's buildings, and when he observed that a crowd had collected in front of one of the saloons, he drew his horse down and sat in the dense desert darkness, watching and listening.

Through the front windows of a solitary house near him shone the light of an oil lamp. The house was not part of the group that straggled down the street; it was separated from the others by several hundred feet of desert, and had previously attracted his attention because it was larger and better than its fellows. However, he had asked no questions about it, assuming that its owner had sufficient reason to isolate himself from his neighbors.

There was a great deal of laughter in the group of men in front of the saloon; loud talk and much profanity. In his own country Summers had often been in crowds like this, and had enjoyed himself, but these men were strangers who had never made friendly advances to him, and he was reluctant to mingle with them.

He sat quietly on his horse in the darkness for half an hour. There was no moon, and the lights in the windows of Pardo's buildings stabbed the darkness futilely. Except for the single group of men the town seemed deserted, and presently the group disintegrated and a flat, heavy silence came.

Summers might have gone on now, but he did not move. He had seen a face at one of the windows of the solitary house near him, the face of a woman. He still saw it, a beautiful face, pale, proud, contemptuous. The light from within shone fairly upon the woman, revealing a slender form which was erect and rigid.

Summers appreciated beauty, and he recognized passion in the woman's attitude, but though he felt that inside the house there was being enacted a domestic clash of some kind, he was not curious enough to eavesdrop. So he kicked his horse in the ribs preparatory to leaving the spot.

As his horse moved slowly forward, however, the front door of the house flew open and a man's voice issued through it.

"You're not leaving here until I let you!" said the voice.

Then Summers saw tne speaker. He was a big man, tall and massive, without seeming to have much excess flesh on him. The light from inside the house was behind him, and Summers could not see his face distinctly, though he got an impression of heaviness.

The man slammed the door. Summers felt he placed his back against it after closing it.

The woman had advanced toward the door; now she had stepped back again to where she had been when Summers had first seen her.

There was color in her face now—indignation, probably. Her lips moved, but Summers could not hear her voice. In spite of the resentment she exhibited, her manner was almost regal as she pointed to the door, no doubt commanding the man to open it.

The door did not open, then. And the woman vanished.

SUMMERS halted his horse. He was curious now, and was aware of a malicious interest in the man.

He heard sounds of a conflict being waged inside the house. There was a scraping of feet, the crashing of overturning furniture, the thudding of bodies against the door.

The woman was a fighter. If she was the man's wife she was evidently determined to leave him. They were in the midst of a marital difference of opinion, was Summers's grimly humorous thought. To-morrow the current of domestic life would be smooth again.

He was about to urge his horse on again when for the second time the door was thrown violently open, this time by the woman.

Summers saw her framed in the opening, the light behind her disclosing her shapely, slender figure as for an instant she was poised on the threshold. Evidently she had fought with the man in her efforts to open the door, and had momentarily bested him, for as the door had opened he was off balance and clutching at her. He caught her as she sought to leap, and in an instant his big arms were around her, and she was helpless.

The man laughed.

"What did you come here for?" he said. "Why, you fool, everybody knows why you came here!"

The woman's answer was to reach up with both hands as though to claw at the man's face. Summers knew she had succeeded, for the man roared with rage and pain. He shot out one big hand and clutched the woman by the throat, while the other was drawn back, clenched, and driven with terrific force into the woman's face.

The movement was so abrupt and swift that Summers could not prevent the blow from landing. But the flash of his gun at his hip came almost simultaneously with the impact of the big fist, and the man released the woman and went crashing to the floor inside the doorway.

The woman was lying in a heap on the threshold when Summers reached her. As he swung her over his shoulder he saw a pool of blood spreading on the floor under the man's head. He was lying face down. Summers had shot with deadly intent, and he felt rather confident that the man would not bother the woman again.

As Summers turned, with the woman lying limply on his shoulder, he glanced down the street. His shot had been heard and men were appearing in doorways. A few men were already in the street.

He moved quickly away from the lighted doorway, knowing that he must get the woman away before the inhabitants of the town discovered the man's body. There would be a demand for explanations, and he would have none to offer. He had thought at first that the man and woman must be husband and wife, but the man's words: "Why, you fool, everybody knows why you came here!" had changed his opinion on that point. A close view of the woman's face revealed that she was young—not more than twenty.

He ran to his horse, climbed into the saddle and rode a little distance out into the desert, eastward, where he halted the horse and sat for a few seconds gazing back into town. A dozen men were moving about in the street, and he knew that presently they would come upon the man's body.

He rode south, then west, aimlessly, his chief concern being to get the young woman out of town before the man's body was discovered.

Pardo's lights vanished into the darkness behind him. He swung the young woman's body across the saddle in front of him, holding her so that her head was pillowed in his left arm.

He did not intend to ride far, for he expected that presently she would revive and be able to reveal her identity. His problem after that would depend entirely upon her wishes.

HE halted the horse and ran a hand gently over the young woman's face, seeking the spot where the man's fist had landed. He found it presently, a huge lump on her right temple, and he anathematized the brute

who had struck her. The blow might have killed her.

He grew apprehensive over her continued unconsciousness, and began somewhat vigorously to rub the injured temple. He felt her body move as though in protest; then she spoke, reprovingly:

"Don't, please! You are hurting me!"

His pulses leaped in relief.

"So you're awake, eh?" he said.

"Of course." Her voice had a note of quiet mockery in it. "I have been awake for several minutes, I believe, trying to remember what happened to me. I didn't know until you touched my temple."

Summers could not see her face, but she made no effort to struggle out of his arms, and so he divined that she was not alarmed and was calmly accepting the situation that circumstance had arranged. He was not surprised that she did not struggle. She was brave. He had realized that from what he had seen through the window. His admiration for her was sincere.

He heard her draw a slow, full breath, but there was a long interval of silence before she spoke. Then she said, quietly:

"Where are we?"

"We're in the desert, west of Pardo. We're on my horse. I thought we'd better pull our freight."

"Where are we going?"

"You're the boss," he answered.

"Help me down, please," she said. "I am all right now."

Summers lifted her and slid her gently to the ground beside the horse. He got down also, looped the reins in the crook of an elbow and stood beside her. He felt she was trying to look at him, for she said:

"Who are you?"

"I'm Webb Summers."

"You don't live around here?"

"I'm a temporary resident, I reckon. Been livin' in Pardo two or three weeks."

"I've heard of you. You are the man who is looking for a man named Funstall. Some people in this country don't believe that; they think you are lying."

"What folks think ain't important, ma'am. As long as I know what I'm here for, I ain't doin' any worryin'."

"No. It is none of their business, anyway. But they will speculate, you know."

There was a silence and he felt she was again trying to see his face. Then she said, quietly:

"You are the man who shot Judge Lavercrombe. I saw the flash of your gun just as he struck me."

Lavercrombe!

Summers was glad the girl could not see his face at that instant, for he was certain she could have read the amazement expressed there. For though he knew that Ben Lavercrombe had come from this section of the country, the thought that there might be another Lavercrombe here had not occurred to him. And, of course, the Pardo Lavercrombe would be a relative.

"Did you hear what Judge Lavercrombe said to me just before he struck me?" asked the girl.

"Sure. I wasn't far off."

"Do you know that Judge Lavercrombe is a beast?"

Summers felt sure that with these words her slender figure stiffened with pride and defiance.

"That's why I shot him," said Summers.

"And do you think I gave him any encouragement to do what he did?"

"A man like that don't need any encouragement, ma'am. You see, I know somethin' about the Lavercrombes. I knew Ben."

"YOU did!"

He felt her move closer to him; he was certain he could feel her breath.

"I wish I could see your face," she said.

Summers laughed. A match flamed in his hand, giving her the glance she had wished for. She saw a pair of manly, whimsical eyes looking into hers; a mouth with straight, resolute lips which were just then parted in a smile of amused tolerance.

Summers had also done some looking during the short interval in which the match flared. He saw the big, inquiring, eager eyes first, and last. He did not withdraw his gaze until the match went out. And afterward he imagined he could see the eyes in the darkness.

He was aware that his feelings toward Judge Lavercrombe had become intensified; he was glad his bullet had sped true.

"You have said you knew Ben Lavercrombe," said the girl. "Did you know Emily—Ben's wife?"

"I've seen her."

"Was she happy with Ben?"

"How is a man to tell when a woman is happy?" he equivocated.

He would have liked to talk longer with her, but he felt that back in Pardo there must now be a hue and cry over the finding of Judge Lavercrombe's body. If the girl lived in Pardo she would be missed. He would have to get her back there before her absence was discovered, and if she kept silent about her adventure with Judge Lavercrombe there was a chance that he might escape suspicion for his share in the tragedy. He had left town early in the day, and no one had seen him return.

"I reckon we'd better be headin' back to town," he said. "If you can get back to your place without any one seein' you it's likely nobody will suspect you of bein' with Lavercrombe tonight."

"I don't live in town, and I think I never want to see it again!" she declared.

"Did you ride in or drive?" asked Summers.

"I rode."

"Shucks," said Summers. "When things go wrong they have a way of goin' wrong all the way. I reckon when you rode into town everybody in town saw you."

"Nobody saw me," she said positively. "I didn't want to be seen visiting Judge Lavercrombe, and so I timed myself to reach town after dark."

"Where did you leave your horse?"

"I tied him to a ring in a corner of a shed back of the livery stable," she answered.

Summers's hands went out in the darkness, groped for her shoulders and gripped them tightly.

"We've got to fan it," he warned her. "Judge Lavercrombe will have friends that will be interested in findin' out who killed him. Maybe they'd listen to your explanation about what happened an' maybe they wouldn't. We'll not take any chances on that. You jump on my horse an' light out for home. I'll go back an' get your horse. Hustle!"

He helped her into the saddle and felt her trembling a little.

"You'll be careful?" she said, whispering.

"Sure. You go ahead now."

He heard her horse move away while he turned and began to run back toward Pardo. However, before he had taken a dozen steps her voice reached him.

"Wait!" she called. "You won't know where to come. You will ride straight west. It is about ten miles. You will come to a valley. Go straight down the middle of it and you will find my cabin. I am Laura Bainter."

Laura Bainter! He might have known that. Juanita had prepared him through talking about her.

Moreover, she was just as he had pictured her during the days and nights of his long journey southward, when his thoughts persisted in dwelling upon her.

"Shucks," was his decision as he ran lightly over the sand that stretched

between him and town. "I'm lucky. Seems I just had to bring up in front of Judge Lavercrombe's house. Somethin' kept holdin' me there. It was just as if I knowed she'd be needin' me."

CHAPTER IX.

BACK TO PARDO.

THERE had been few women in Webb Summers's life, and until now the enchanting thrills of romance had not been included in his experiences. He was not aware of what had happened to him when in the light of the match he had gazed into Laura Bainter's eyes, though he knew his senses were in a whirl. As he moved toward Pardo he was considering the phenomenon.

"She'd certainly want to know what a man looked like," he decided. "Wakin' up an' findin' herself in the dark, an' not knowin' what had happened would sure make her curious. But after she got a look at the man she was ridin' with an' found he was a stranger you'd think she'd be sort of scared. But she wasn't. I reckon she's game."

But the fact that the girl was "game" did not explain his own feelings. Never had his admiration for a woman been as complete and deep, and never had he experienced a longing such as had assailed him when he had gazed into her eyes.

Nor was this strange longing the only sensation he felt. The country in the vicinity of Pardo had affected him with its bleak monotony. Its desolation had oppressed him. Yet now the star haze disclosed a country which was palpitant with romance and athrob with life. Even the darkness seemed to have lifted, for the stars were spreading a subdued but effulgent light which tinted everything around him.

When the lights of Pardo became visible to him he was aware of a feeling of elation. He was glad to be in the girl's service.

As he drew closer to town he was able to look down the street, and he observed that a crowd was assembled in front of Judge Lavercrombe's house. Some one had brought a torch and had stuck it on a post, where it flared in the lazy breeze, disclosing the faces of the men in the crowd.

All Pardo would be collected there, of course, and he would be able to get the girl's horse without danger of being apprehended at the task, so before he came within range of any of the lights from the buildings he circled around to a point south of town, where he would be invisible in the darkness. There was just enough starlight to disclose the shapes of buildings near him, and he therefore had little difficulty in making his way to the shed in the rear of the livery stable, where Laura Bainter had told him she had left the horse.

He found the animal after awhile, standing patiently at a corner of the shed, and he spoke softly to it as he approached it. When he found the animal was not vicious he ran a hand over its neck and rubbed its muzzle playfully.

He was aware of a slight feeling of malice toward the crowd in front of Judge Lavercrombe's house. From where he stood he could see the torch flickering its unsteady light into the faces of the men surrounding it. It appeared the crowd was uncertain as to how to proceed with the mystery which confronted it, for there was no activity except for the movements of several men who walked idly back and forth from the door of the house to the torch on the post.

FROM where Summers stood he could see the open door of the house with the light from the oil lamp within shining through it. The light from the torch did not penetrate far into the surrounding darkness, but Summers finally became aware that its

beams were occasionally flickering brightly enough to disclose to him the walls of several of the buildings near him.

He didn't want to be seen, so he leaned over, intending to untie the horse, mount him and slip away into the desert. As he bent his head he heard a swishing sound, and something thudded into the pine wall of the shed, about where his shoulders would have been, had he been standing erect.

He knew the object was a knife, thrown with vicious force, and so he slipped behind the horse and dropped his right hand to his gun holster as he peered into the star haze in search of his treacherous enemy.

He caught the outlines of a man who stood not more than a dozen paces distant. That man seemed to be leaning a little forward as if trying to penetrate the semigloom in an effort to discover what had become of his elusive target.

Summers was reluctant to shoot, for the report of his gun would bring to the scene the crowd that stood in front of Judge Lavercrombe's house, and if he did not succeed in escaping they would recognize Miss Bainter's horse, and the story of the shooting of Judge Lavercrombe would be easily read.

As he hesitated there was a rush of hoofs, and a rider loomed out of the darkness. Summers somehow got the impression that the rider had been concealed somewhere, watching and listening, and that he knew exactly what was happening.

The horse and rider appeared so suddenly that Summers could detect only a moving blur until animal and man halted momentarily beside the knife-thrower. Then there was a heavy, thudding blow as of metal crushing flesh and bone, and the knife-thrower plunged forward into the sand.

There was another clatter of hoofs, and the rider vanished into the surrounding darkness.

The action had been so swift that Summers had not had time to use his gun on the knife-thrower. Now, amazed that the rushing apparition had been an agent of revenge for the stealthy attack upon himself, he stood for an instant motionless.

He was curious about the identity of the knife-thrower. He suspected that it was one of Loaza's friends who had been prowling around and had discovered Laura's horse. Perhaps he had even seen Laura enter town and had lain in wait. But Summers would not risk lighting a match in order to see the face of his enemy, nor did he intend to jeopardize Laura's safety by delay. Swiftly he untied the horse, leaped into the saddle and melted into the darkness south of town.

Once, halting the horse and gazing back toward Pardo to see if there were any signs of pursuit, he thought he heard hoof beats at a little distance. Over beyond a sand dune he thought he detected a blur that might have been made by a horse and rider, and he rode toward it. Instantly the blur merged with the surrounding darkness and a faint laugh floated to Summers.

He grinned.

One of Laura Bainter's men, probably. That must be the explanation. She had met one of her men on the trail and had sent him back.

"He's sure a shy cuss, anyway," was Summers's conclusion.

CHAPTER X.

NEWS OF FUNSTALL.

SUMMERS had not been riding westward more than half an hour when the eastern sky became tinged with the golden radiance of a rising moon. He was on a level of dun sand which had a golden aspect in the mellow flood that bathed it, and his gaze roved in search of the rider who had so opportunely discomfited the knife-thrower. But the rider had disappeared.

Summers rode straight west for several miles, and when he reached the head of the valley to which Laura had directed him he found that the trail led down a narrow wash. In the center was a thick layer of sand with a single set of hoof tracks leading through it. He recognized the prints because the left forehoof turned sharply inward, a peculiarity which had affected his horse Major from birth.

"Wrong, I reckon," said Summers to the silence. "Our friend can't be one of Laura Bainter's men." Then he remembered that Juanita had told him that Laura Bainter employed no men; that she lived at her ranch with a brother. The brother was about twenty, he recalled. Well, the unknown rider had befriended him, anyway, and certainly he need have no apprehensions concerning him.

The valley was big. It was several miles long and at least two miles wide at the center. He could see the entire length and breadth of it now, for the moon was sending its brilliant golden light straight through it.

The valley was rimmed on its northern side by high, rugged walls of rock which erosion had shaped into grotesque formations. Along the crest was a wild tangle of spruce and pinon; and at the bottom was a moraine that stretched hundreds of feet out into the valley to fringe the bank of a small stream of water.

About midway through the valley was a wood composed of giant cottonwoods, and at the eastern edge of the wood the moonlight shone upon the roof and walls of a cabin.

The river, Summers observed, came out of the north and entered the valley through a narrow cañon. The luxuriant green of the valley floor was in sharp contrast to the sandy desolation of the country from which Summers had descended, and once more he was aware of a sensation of strange exhilaration.

He rode through a stretch of knee-high saccatone grass, and out of it to the shorter gramma, where a herd of cattle was bedded down for the night. Half an hour later, having made leisurely progress because he had no wish to seem in undue haste to appear before Miss Bainter, he was sitting in the saddle before the door of a room in which there shone a light. He hailed gently.

A shadow crossed the window and the door opened. Laura Bainter appeared on the threshold.

"Oh!" she exclaimed when she saw him. "It is you?" She seemed to catch her breath. "Did—did they see you?"

"I reckon not. I thought one man saw me, but if he wakes up at all he won't be certain that he saw anything."

"Do you mean that you hurt some one?"

"Not me. I expect it was your brother did the hurtin'."

"My brother! Why, how could that be? Jerry is in bed, asleep! He hasn't been out of the house to-night."

"Then I've got a friend I didn't know I had," said Summers. He told her what had happened, and she had no explanation to offer.

"If you'll tell me where you put Major, I'll be goin' back to Pardo," he said.

SHE stepped down from the doorway and approached him, shading her eyes with a hand the better to see him. "I shouldn't go back to-night if I were you," she told him. "They have probably missed you, and if you go back now they will suspect you."

"I reckon not," he said. "I left town this mornin' an' got back after dark. Some one might have seen me go, but I'm dead sure nobody saw me come back. I was just ridin' in when I saw you an' Judge Lavercrombe in the doorway."

"But you were seen taking my horse."

"It ain't likely that the man who saw me will be doin' any more talkin'."

"But if he should? Suppose he is not dead?"

"Well, that would be mighty awkward for me."

"There! It would be awkward for both of us. Judge Lavercrombe's friends would be certain to kill you. There is nothing for you in Pardo, anyway, is there? Your friend Funstall is not there, or you would have seen him before now. I wish you wouldn't go back there."

There was a strange note of appeal in her voice. He thought he could interpret her feelings. Except for her brother, she was alone, and he suspected she had some enemies, Judge Lavercrombe particularly. While it was hardly likely that the judge would bother her again, she probably knew that he had friends who would harass her.

The fact that she had visited Judge Lavercrombe's house indicated trouble of some sort, and the man's insulting words seemed to prove that the trouble was of a personal nature. Juanita's words about Laura Bainter—"Maybe she not be good long"—appeared to hint of danger, the danger that always hovers over a good woman living amid wild, outlawed men in sections where the hand of the law does not reach.

Summers gravely watched her. She was facing the moonlight, and he saw that her eyes held a strained and anxious expression, the expression of a woman in trouble trying to be brave, but hoping, yearning for assistance.

Summers was somewhat awed by her beauty, though it was a conviction of her helplessness that stirred him as he watched her. The firm lips, the rounded chin which had been pugnaciously set when he had first seen it through a window of Judge Lavercrombe's house; the graceful curves of cheek and throat; the drooping, coiling waves of golden brown hair that curved over her forehead and framed the oval of her face, he could not fail to observe and admire; but it was something else that gripped him—something he saw in her eyes—the courage that continues to fight against all obstacles.

She wanted him to stay and help her fight her enemies, but she would not ask him.

"Well, maybe I hadn't ought to go back," he said. "As you say, Funstall ain't there. He's in this country, though, an' I'm stayin' here until I find him. I reckon I'll go find myself a job somewhere an' just sort of hang around until I run into him."

"We've been needing a man," she said quickly. "And if you are going to stay in the country, I don't see why you couldn't work here."

"Well," he smiled, "that's luck! I don't any more than decide that I want a job, when I'm hired." He removed his hat and bowed to her. "Ma'am," he said, "I'm reportin' for work."

She gave a little laugh of delight. "That's fine, Mr. Summers."

"Webb," he suggested.

"Webb, then," she conceded, mocking his manner.

"Now, if you'll show me where you've put Major, I'll turn your horse in. I reckon I'll need a place to bunk, too."

She pointed out the stable, adding: "We have no bunk house, Mr.—Webb. But we have a spare room. It was father's."

HE rode to the stable, dismounted, unsaddled. He was soon at the door where he had left her, but she was in the big front room, seated in a chair beside a big center table when he appeared on the threshold. She looked up when he entered, but did not speak as he placed his big felt Stetson on a chair. Gravely regarding her, he unbuckled his cartridge belt from which was suspended a heavy Colt re-

volver, and dropped belt and weapon on the chair beside the hat.

"Not needed in here, I reckon," he said.

For the first time he was seeing her in a light that was sufficient to disclose the charms he had been certain she possessed, and now his reverence and admiration were deeper than ever. Yet he was aware that he was being subjected to a somewhat critical examination, though there was frank interest in the glances she gave him. He felt that she did not regret her decision to employ him, for she smiled serenely at him.

He removed his hat and cartridge belt from the chair, dropped them to the floor, seated himself, and faced her.

"Go ahead," he said. "I'm wantin' to hear it."

"Hear what?"

"About your trouble. You've got plenty of it. Let's talk straight. I was not lookin' for a job. An' there's a bunk house down near the creek. You wanted me to stay in the house because you expect trouble to visit you."

"That's right," she answered. "And now that you know it, you are at liberty to quit your job, if you wish." She looked straight at him. "I meant to tell you to-night. I did not intend to deceive you."

"I've still got a job, ma'am."

"Well," she said, "I would not have offered to hire you if I hadn't trusted you."

"When you hired me you hadn't any evidence that I am trustworthy," he smiled. "You don't know it now. Some folks would say you are takin' a big chance."

"I'm not worried about that," she said serenely.

She was not worried, he could see that; and he thought he knew why. However, he said nothing, but sat there, gazing about the room.

There wasn't much furniture, but it was arranged to advantage. There was a carpet on the floor, shades and muslin curtains on the windows, a white scarf on the rough board mantel over the adobe fireplace. A bearskin stretched in front of the hearth; there were some pictures on the walls and an elk head over the mantel.

The top of the big center table at which she was sitting was covered by a spotlessly clean scarf upon which were strewn several books, a sewing basket, and some colored yarn. The oil lamp on the table was equipped with a bulging green shade which spread the light downward and left the rest of the room in semidarkness. The girl was sitting in a position so that her chin, throat and shoulders were in the white light, while her eyes were shaded.

The atmosphere of this room was unlike any that Summers had experienced. He had almost forgotten what the home of his youth had been like, but it seemed to him that this room had been hallowed by the presence of quiet-living, home-loving parents, and that memories perpetuating them were here maintained. Reverence for the departed was somehow unmistakable.

When he finally looked at Laura again he found she had been intently watching him.

"Aren't you curious to know something about us—about Jerry and myself?" she asked.

"No."

"I'm curious about you," she said frankly. "I think it is because you said you knew Ben Lavercrombe and Emily. Won't you tell me about them? I have written Em several times and have had no answer."

There was no reason why he should withhold the truth from her, and so he told it, leaving his suspicions of the identity of the murderer unmentioned. He told her the little he knew of the lives of Ben and Emily during the time they had lived in the Lavercrombe

Basin. His information was meager, but it seemed illuminating to Laura Bainter.

"BEN never treated her right," she declared. "He didn't treat her right while they lived here, after they were married. The Lavercrombes were always brutal to their women." She gazed meditatively at her hands, folded in her lap. "Ben killed her," she said positively.

Summers had tried to believe that, but he knew better.

"Ben didn't shoot himself, ma'am," he said. "There were no powder burns on him. He didn't shoot himself. The shootin' was done from a distance."

"Well, Ben was brutal to her, anyway!" she declared.

Summers was reluctant to discuss the tragedy, for his mental picture of it was always the same—Funstall shooting Lavercrombe, and afterward striking Emily when she sought to attack him.

Summers had known of his friend's departure from the ways of uprightness and honor, but he hadn't wanted to believe him capable of striking a woman. He had tried to erase the mental picture, and there had been nights when he had awakened from the torture of his dreams to a greater agony of spirit.

Just before he had started on this search there had been the incident in the Flying A bunk house. After a hard day on the range he had turned in early, while the other men had been playing cards by candlelight. He had awakened to find them all facing him, and he was conscious that he had been talking in his sleep. He sat up and looked guiltily at his men, rubbing his eyes in a daze.

"What's wrong with you jaspers?" he demanded.

A laugh greeted him, and Bill Adnett answered.

"Well," he said, "when a man talks in his sleep, he's a sort of curiosity, an' when he starts to talkin' about a man named Ned doin' somethin' he oughtn't to have done, it sort of makes us begin to wonder if any of us has got a handle like that. There ain't none of us got it."

"The gent was holdin' four aces against a king full," answered Summers. "I was bettin' high on royalty. Would a friend have done that to a man?" he asked.

He had turned his back to the gale of laughter that followed. But that had been the night he had reached his decision to leave the Flying A. And on that night also, his sense of justice triumphing over affection, he had decided to find Funstall and bring him back to the law.

He had hoped, though, that Funstall would be able to explain; that some circumstance that would prove his innocence would be disclosed. And now, facing Laura Bainter, he discovered that his conviction of Funstall's guilt had grown. Or had he entertained such a conviction all along? He didn't know. What he did know was that Lavercrombe had not killed himself, and that Funstall had been at the Lavercrombe cabin on the night of the murder.

"Why are you looking for Funstall?" asked Laura.

"Why, ma'am, Funstall's my friend!"

"I have seen Funstall," she said. "I think he was a man that other men would like. But when I saw him he was with Clay Meeder. I understand he rode with the Meeders a great deal, and the Meeders are outlaws." She gazed straight at Summers. "You haven't acted like an outlaw."

"Meanin' that a man is known by the company he keeps," said Summers gravely. "Well, Funstall was always straight. If he's strayed now, it's because he's got in bad company. You ain't seen him lately?"

"Not for several weeks." She was

studying Summers, and now she spoke more gently, asking: "Is it possible that you haven't heard?"

"Heard what, ma'am?"

"That Funstall is dead."

Summers did not say anything. He sat, steady of eye and muscle, meeting Laura's gaze.

"HE was shot," the girl went on. "He was killed by Judge Lavercrombe in a gun fight. I did not see the fight, though it is said that it occurred in front of Judge Lavercrombe's house. The Loazas were there. There was no inquiry, of course—there never is when anything happens in this country. But the Loazas say that it was a fair fight, and that the judge drew quicker than Funstall."

Summers received this news without visible emotion. The girl observed his lips had tightened a little. That was all.

Funstall had been killed by Judge Lavercrombe in a fair fight. Judge Lavercrombe had beaten Funstall to the draw. That was the story. Nobody except the Loazas had witnessed the fight.

Well, they might tell that story, and possibly the people in the vicinity of Pardo might believe it. But one who knew Funstall as Summers had known him could not believe it. For of all the men Summers knew, Funstall was the fastest with a gun. His efficiency with the weapon amounted to wizardry.

"Do you think Funstall was killed in a fair fight?" Summers asked.

"No."

"Why?"

"Because Judge Lavercrombe and the Loazas are never fair. They are thieves and murderers."

"Those are hard words. Especially about Judge Lavercrombe. A judge, now—a judge usually—"

"Not Judge Lavercrombe!" she declared, her eyes flashing scorn. "I believe you saw something that Judge Lavercrombe was trying to do. Wasn't that why you shot him?"

"I reckon it was."

"Well, you avenged your friend, even though you didn't know it at the time."

Yes, Summers had repaid Judge Lavercrombe for killing his friend. But it was not the payment he would have made had he known the facts. He would have wished the judge to know from whom the shot had come, so that in the moment before his death the judge himself might understand with what malice and satisfaction the shot had been fired.

But now his quest was ended: and if Funstall had killed Emily Lavercrombe the crime had been expiated by his own death at the hands of a man who bore the same name.

Funstall. His friend. The wistful, reckless, wayward companion who had strayed from his governing influence.

"Where did they bury Funstall?" he asked.

"Clay Meeder and his men buried him, I understood," said Laura. "Clay Meeder hasn't talked."

And now, to Summers, was explained the reason for Clay Meeder's strange manner when he had said: "I'm lettin' you live, so's you can find Funstall."

Meeder had known, of course, that his quest was futile. Probably everybody in the country had known it, even the various men he had subtly questioned while he had been conducting his search.

But why had it been Judge Lavercrombe who had killed Funstall? Had Judge Lavercrombe known that it had been Funstall who had killed his son? Had Funstall foolishly confessed his crime to men who had carried the news to the father? At any rate, his quest was ended.

Laura was watching him sympathetically.

"It's too bad," she said. "You

must have liked your friend a great deal."

"I would have liked to had a talk with him before he died," said Summers.

Had there been an opportunity for such a talk, Summers would have asked Funstall a straight question, and there would have come from Funstall a straight answer. Now there would always lurk in his heart a suspicion that would poison his affection for his friend.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT KILLER.

SUMMERS looked up and observed that Laura was watching him.

"Well," he said, "that's settled. I expect some day I'll find out if Funstall left any word for me. But right now there's somethin' else to think of. You're in trouble. Up to now I don't know anything about the trouble you are in. Whatever it is, I'm intendin' to stay here an' help you out of it. If you're wantin' me to stay, an' you think you can trust me, you can go ahead an' tell me about it."

"I've been wanting to do that," said Laura, quietly. "And it won't take long because there isn't much to it. My folks and Emily Blandin's folks came to this country together, from Kansas. In some way my father and Mark Blandin, Emily's father, heard that there was gold to be found here. That was twelve years ago. The Blandins had no children but Emily, while my parents had Jerry and myself. Mark Blandin was killed seven years ago. He was murdered and the murderer has never been apprehended. Father and Mr. Blandin had been prospecting together and had separated. Not long after that father found traces of gold, near here. He found more, later, and divided it with Mrs. Blandin.

"The news got out and there was a great deal of excitement. Father never staked out a claim because he had found the gold on our own land. He never told where he had found it, and he worked secretly. He was spied upon, but no one ever succeeded in discovering where he found the gold. It isn't necessary to tell you how we lived in those days, with desperate and greedy men always hanging around watching our movements. But one day I overheard father and Judge Lavercrombe quarreling about the gold. About six months later father was found at the far end of the valley. He had been shot in the back. We never found who had killed him, though Judge Lavercrombe pretended to try.

"Mother died soon after. Father had left a diagram of the place where he had found the gold. Before she died mother found the diagram and gave it to me. Perhaps she had known about it all the time. Not long after mother died, Judge Lavercrombe came here and searched the house under the pretext of seeking evidence of the identity of father's murderer. But I think Judge Lavercrombe himself killed father. At that time he was very friendly with the Blandins. Ben Lavercrombe had begun to call on Emily Blandin, and so I did not mention my suspicions to anybody.

"After Judge Lavercrombe's wife died he asked me to marry him, and he was furious when I refused him. He told me he would get even with me. He tried. I soon began to be bothered in all sorts of ways. The Loazas were the worst offenders. Then Clay Meeder wanted to marry me. I refused him, too. Clay Meeder is a wild man, and I liked him no better than I liked Judge Lavercrombe. But after Clay Meeder declared he wanted me I was never again bothered by Judge Lavercrombe or the Loazas. They were afraid of Clay Meeder.

"Ben Lavercrombe married Emily Blandin. After they were married Ben tried to find out about the gold.

When I told him that father had left no word about the location of the place where the gold had been found, Ben seemed to believe me. He took Emily and went north." She seemed saddened for a moment at the thought of what had befallen her friend, then went on:

"JERRY and I found father's mine. Secretly we took a great deal of gold out of it. We hid our share, and Jerry took the rest to Mrs. Blandin. There was a big sack of it. Four or five thousand dollars. One of the Loazas saw Jerry leaving Mrs. Blandin's cabin; and the next morning Mrs. Blandin was found dead. During the night some one had heard her scream, but had paid no attention because the scream had not been repeated. But when she did not appear the next day some men entered the cabin. They found a big rattlesnake in the cabin. It had bitten Mrs. Blandin and Mrs. Blandin was dead.

"I went to the cabin myself, wondering about the gold Jerry had taken there. There was no sign of it. I suspected Judge Lavercrombe, for I had been told that he had been seen taking some things away from the cabin. I was afraid of Judge Lavercrombe, and so for a long time I said nothing. But last night I decided to see him. I wanted to tell him that he had no right to the gold; that it belonged to Emily. I told him that and he laughed at me. Then he insisted that I share his cabin with him. He professed to believe that I had not come about the gold at all, and he tried to prevent—"

She ceased talking, covered her eyes with her hands and sat there, crying.

Summers had got to his feet. He was standing near Laura, watching her pityingly, and he was thinking of Pedro Loaza with his forked stick, catching the snake which later he had tossed into the room with Juanita.

It was evident that Pedro Loaza had also caught a rattlesnake upon a previous occasion and that he had tossed the loathsome reptile into Mrs. Blandin's cabin. It was a novel way to kill women. Juanita had probably caught Pedro at his deadly task, and he had sought to still her voice by the same means. He would have succeeded with Juanita had it not been for a blazing gun and a steady nerve.

Twice had chance brought Summers to places where he had been able to thwart the horrible projects of Laura Bainter's enemies, and as he stood there in the subdued light from the shaded lamp on the table, he reflected that his quest for Funstall had brought results far more satisfactory than he had dreamed.

These men—the Loaza band, now that Judge Lavercrombe had been removed — would doubtless persist in their aggressions against Laura Bainter. Summers was silently thanking Funstall for leading him to Laura Bainter's assistance, when he heard a sound outside.

He had been standing close to Laura. And when he heard the sound from outside he leaned swiftly over the table and blew out the light. Another movement and he had swept Laura out of the chair and leaped with her toward a corner of the room.

As he moved away from the table he saw two crimson streaks of fire split the outside darkness, one streak following the other so closely that they appeared to mingle. Two crashing reports accompanied the flashes, and the glass of the lamp tinkled musically upon the floor.

Followed a heavy silence.

Laura's arms were around Summers's neck, gripping him tightly. He was speaking to her, trying to reassure her so that he might get to his gun, which was lying on the floor where he had left it, when from outside came another crashing report.

This time the shot seemed to have been fired from the west side of the cabin, and while the report still echoed

Summers had succeeded in releasing himself. He plunged forward, got his gun and leaped to the wall near the front door.

Peering around the door jamb he saw the form of a man lying face down on the ground in front of the cabin. The faint rays of moonlight that filtered down through the trees disclosed a weapon lying near the man's extended right hand, indicating that when he had fallen the weapon had been knocked from his grasp by the shock. He was dead or badly wounded, there could be no doubt of that, but when Summers moved to go outside he felt Laura's hands on his shoulders, restraining him. It seemed that in spite of her fright her senses were alert.

"DON'T go out!" she warned. "There were two of them. I heard three shots!"

"This jasper fired two of them," said Summers. "But he was on the receivin' end of the other." He chuckled grimly. "Seems my friend who busted the knife-thrower is still hangin' around," he added.

He would have stepped out of the doorway now, but Laura's arms were around him and he could not release himself without hurting her.

"I won't have you go out there! There may be more of them. I don't want you killed. I won't let you be killed!" she whispered.

"Why, shucks," he said gently, marveling at her insistence, and amazed at her holding him so tightly. "Well, there ain't no danger now. If there had been any more of them they'd have been shootin' at my unknown friend."

He thought he knew the secret of her concern for him. In all her experience since the death of her father he was the only male she had found upon whom she could depend for protection. She was reluctant to lose him.

And now, as they stood there in the darkness a voice from somewhere in the room reached them.

"Who's there, Laura?" the voice asked. "Are you all right? I heard shooting."

The voice was boyish, and was shrill with apprehension. It amazed Summers. For he had heard that Jerry was twenty, and most young men of his acquaintance had at twenty voices that were unmistakably masculine. This voice was more like a girl's voice, yet, of course, it was Jerry's.

"There, there, Jerry," answered Laura soothingly. "I'm all right. There was some shooting outside. I am with a friend."

"Who is he?"

"It is the man who has been looking for Funstall."

"Oh! That Summers man!"

There was friendliness in Jerry's voice, but they heard him advancing across the room, and Laura ran to him.

Leaving them, Summers slipped out of the doorway and leaped to a corner of the cabin. He had hoped to be in time to catch a glimpse of the man who had fired the third shot, but all he could see was a thin dust cloud leading up the dry slope of the valley, indicating that his mysterious friend had gone in that direction.

This friend seemed to have amazingly accurate knowledge of the movements of Summers's enemies, was his thought as he returned to the man who was lying in front of the doorway.

As Summers had divined, the man had been alone. As Summers bent over him he was aware that Laura and Jerry were standing in the doorway watching him. The moonlight was shining on them and Summers could see their faces quite distinctly. Laura's face was pale, and she was rigid with apprehension, but Jerry's eyes were agleam with malice. He seemed to recognize the fallen man.

"That's Jim Kerlow!" Jerry declared.

"A Loaza man, I reckon," said Summers.

"Sure. It ain't the first time he's

been prowling around here. Did you shoot him, Mr. Summers?"

"I can't claim that honor," returned Summers. He picked up Kerlow's gun and examined the cylinder. He held out two empty cartridges for Laura's inspection. Then he shoved the weapon into the holster at the man's hip, seized him by the ankles and dragged him into the darkness of the surrounding trees.

"He'll be there in the mornin', I reckon," he said.

HE entered the cabin, carried the lamp to the door and examined it, to find that only the green shade had been shattered. He placed the lamp on the table, lit it, calmly adjusted the wick and the chimney, then stepped back to look at Laura and Jerry. Both were standing near, watching him.

Jerry was a small, wizened creature with the body of a boy of ten or twelve; some physical malady had distorted his left hip and shoulder. The left arm and leg seemed to be useless, and dangled limply.

But Jerry's face was beautiful. His features were almost feminine, and his complexion would be envied by any woman. His eyes were like Laura's, as big as hers, with the same depth and expressiveness. Moreover, Jerry's eyes were wistful, eager, questing, while Laura's were distinguished by a calm serenity and confidence.

"Who was Kerlow, Jerry?" asked Summers.

"I don't know anything about him except that he was one of the Loaza gang. He was a gunfighter and a killer. I have heard men say that next to Pedro Loaza he was the worst man in the Loaza gang."

Summers smiled.

"Then my unknown friend picked a tough one," he said. "When the worst of a bad lot gets himself killed the rest of the gang take time to talk things over before they make another move. I don't think they'll bother us again tonight, so we'd better turn in." He looked at Laura. "That room you spoke about will sort of interest me now, ma'am," he added.

Five minutes later, with the doors closed and the shades of the windows drawn, the three occupants of the cabin were in their rooms.

Laura and Jerry were asleep. Confidence in their new friend had given them a feeling of security.

But Summers did not yield to slumber. Fully dressed, he was stretched out on the bed, listening. For the coming of Kerlow had been significant.

To Summers it meant that the Loaza faction had discovered that Laura had been in Pardo at the time Judge Lavercrombe had been shot. It meant to him that the knife-thrower had not been killed by the rider who had burst out of the darkness; it meant that the knife-thrower had seen Laura and had recognized the horse she had ridden; it also meant, perhaps, that the knife-thrower had seen and recognized Summers.

It meant, too, that when Kerlow did not return the other members of the Loaza gang would come to search for him. And Summers wanted to be awake when they came.

CHAPTER XII.

DEAMUDE'S MISSION.

STIRRED to a cold rage by the attack on Laura, Summers passed the night fully awake.

He was aware that the new influence that had come into his life had changed him, and he was somewhat amazed at the depth of his passions. In the past he had never permitted his passions to rule him, and now they threatened to overwhelm him. He had been noted for his equable temper, for his coolness in the crises that came inevitably to men of his trade; for his steadiness, and his reliability in situations requir-

ing the assumption of responsibility. And in this situation his responsibility was obvious enough.

Yet nature's exactions were resistless, and when daylight came he was asleep.

He was awakened by Laura's voice reaching him from the big room beyond the closed door. It was clear, sharp, defiant; and it brought him to his feet, aroused, alert, listening.

"Deamude, you get out of here!"

Deamude! He had been one of the four men who had sought to force Summers into a fight; he was the man who had escaped Clay Meeder when the latter had used his bullwhip on the Loaza men in Pardo, yesterday.

Deamude laughed.

"I've got some things to do here before I go out," he said. "I didn't come here to make a social visit. Judge Lavercrombe is wantin' to know who shot him, an' I'm here to find out."

Summers was now standing at the door. He was ready to interfere, should interference be necessary, and he heard Laura exclaim sharply. The knowledge that Judge Lavercrombe was still alive had startled her, but the information had a different effect upon Summers. It filled him with exultation. For now he could satisfactorily avenge the killing of Funstall.

There was an interval of silence following Laura's exclamation, and then she said:

"You don't think I shot him!"

"No, I reckon you didn't shoot him. He said you was standin' beside him in the doorway. You was too close. There was no powder burns on him. Whoever shot him was outside. We saw where a horse had been standin'. Pretty close shootin'. Creased the judge's head an' knocked him out for a long time. But exceptin' for a bad headache, an' a fit of ravin' because you got away from him, he's all right. What he's wantin' to know is who shot him."

"Judge Lavercrombe lies!" declared Laura. "I was not standing in the doorway with him. I was trying to get out and he was trying to drag me in. I scratched his face and he hit me. I was unconscious, and when I came to Judge Lavercrombe was lying just inside the doorway."

"WHAT did you go there for?" asked Deamude.

Summers caught the subtle insult in his voice.

"That is none of your business, Deamude," retorted Laura.

"Well, don't tell, if you don't want to," laughed Deamude. "I'll say this, you're pretty slick. You're a Sunday school scholar one time, an'—"

Laura slapped his face. The sound of the palm of her hand upon Deamude's cheek was unmistakable. Summers's hand was on the latch of the door, for he anticipated the blow would arouse Deamude's passions to physical reprisal.

However, nothing happened. A heavy, portentous silence followed the blow. Then at last Deamude spoke:

"You'll pay for that." His voice had changed. It was now vicious, malicious, brutal. "I'm tellin' you what I come for. Judge Lavercrombe thinks the shootin' was done by that twisted-up brother of yourn. I'm goin' to bust him wide open. Then I'm goin' to take you back to Judge Lavercrombe."

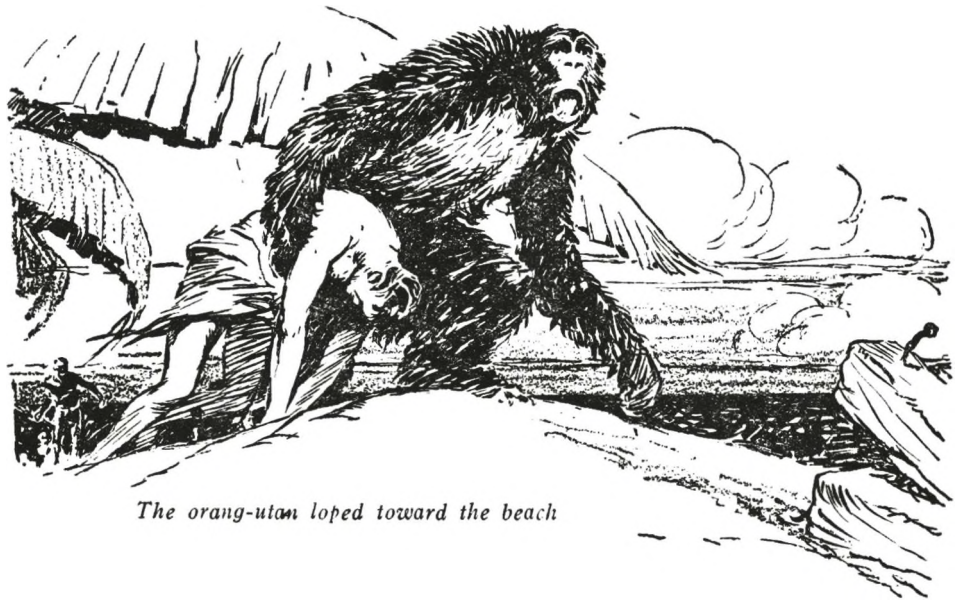
There was silence again. Then came Laura's voice, hoarse with horror.

"You shan't touch Jerry! You shan't! You brute! Put that gun away and get out of here!"

Summers opened the door. He stood on the threshold, looking at Deamude, who was facing him. Deamude had been in the act of drawing the heavy gun at his right hip, and he now stood rigid, his eyes staring.

For when Summers had swung the door open his own gun had come out.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The orang-utan loped toward the beach

Moon Calf

Tom Mansey combed Papua's lost lagoons for the missing baronet and his fabled queen of pearls—and when he looked for anything, including trouble and danger, he found it

By BASSETT MORGAN

IT had not been easy to persuade Tom Mansey to go after the Moon Calf, partly because he understood the perils of those unnamed stretches of the lost lagoons along Papua shores, and because he valued his life and the lives of his men above pearls of price. Partly it was that he believed the Moon Calf to be a myth.

For years there had come at intervals the whisper of this queen of all pearls, of a size and splendor unequaled in the history of the world. Mansey was skeptical—until, through those inexplicable devious channels of South Sea traffic, came a message carved laboriously on a pearl shell, which ultimately reached the hand of Quong Yick, the Paradise trader.

Quong Yick promptly forwarded it to headquarters, where the newest clerk might have read its tragic import, and where the officials held solemn debate and persuasive arguments with Tom Mansey. On a trocha shell which is commercially valuable for making pyjama buttons, was scratched a crescent moon of fair size and a smaller one, also the name Ootaw, which spelled as nearly as possible a particularly venomous land trap for white men known by reputation to Mansey, and the letters, "H-E-L-P."

"If he is a white man why didn't the fool write his name?" Mansey demanded. "It may be a trap. We've been inoculating these black fellows with our trickiness. And I don't care two damns for all the pearls between here and this Ootaw lagoon, which is plain hell."

"But a white man, Tom, yowling

for help! Take a decent lunch and picked crew. Take anything you want and fetch the beggar out."

"Not omitting his Moon Calf," snorted Tom Mansey.

Nevertheless he went. Junior clerks were busy checking up on lists of white men who had gone in the jungle-furred hinterland of Papua. Two missing men were after gold, which meant the hill country. Some others were trouble-seekers, and had very likely been satisfied by accommodating savages. One was a pig-headed naturalist who was warned of perils ahead and offended most well-intentioned warners by scornful aloofness and the remark:

"My good fellow, do you not realize that I am Sir—"

Mansey recalled him, but not his name, until that list was finished. Not that it mattered. The Moon Calf had taken on tangible form and substance with that message and the lure of a white man in difficulty.

MANSEY damned him when a half dozen false leads took him into jungles, leaving his very good launch moored in a shore lagoon with half his crew of Tonga boys who are loyal to a white man as the better part of valor in preference to facing Papuan black devils. The other half of his crew accompanied him in canoes, up shoreless rivers stinking of decay like a tiger's throat, where mangrove roots twine in black water like serpents, and crocodiles croak obscene amours on walk-about grounds.

Thorns had taken bits of Tom Mansey's garments, and his shoes rotted off his feet during that first year. So he wrapped his hips in a giddy sarong affair, wore fiber sandals and a woven fiber hat shaped like a pagoda roof, and carried his finest treasures on strings about his neck. He had interviewed many chieftains, sorcerers, and young men with treasure to trade, and would have plenty to pay for his time.

That year had taken its toll of Mansey. His skin was mahogany, his flesh was fever-dried. In the sarong, hat and necklaces he looked like some miscegenate mating of East and West. He had even arrived at the stage where he conned poetry aloud to keep from the lure of mad little dreams that lead a man to certain destruction.

It was a prosaic side of bacon that altered things. He had thought the supplies provided by headquarters devoured long ago when one of the boys discovered a well-wrapped slab of bacon, the best that could be imported to those latitudes. It cropped up one sunset when he had even ceased to curse fish and the forage possible on a shore deserted by humans. Tom Mansey welcomed the bacon and instituted a shore party and camp fire, and toasting slabs of bacon over glowing embers. He had carefully unwrapped the slab, and twisted the strings neatly. String was scarce and this was stout twine, strong enough to hold a shark, grease-soaked to the last fiber.

At moon-up, when the tide had covered the coral bridging the reef jaws just enough to prevent the launch escaping until flood tide, came a flock of canoes, sleekly black against the luminous sea, smudged with feather-crested warriors and pronged with spears. A few clustered about the launch. Others grounded on the coral.

Mansey faced a young warrior magnificently naked except for the finest paradise-feather crown he had ever seen and a necklace of pearls strung between knuckle bones and shark's teeth.

He sniffed appreciatively at bacon odors and spoke fairly fluent pigeon, requesting Mansey, in forcible tones, to visit his village.

Mansey could not very well refuse, since the war canoes surrounded his launch. Besides, the young warrior had sounded a name remarkably like Ootaw, the origin of the Moon Calf shell and its cry for help. It was not

far-away. Mansey wondered if the appetizing odor of broiling bacon had betrayed his presence.

Before dawn they were headed into a lagoon across whose shining water twinkled the cooking fires of a village with huts wading on stilt legs and fringed at the eaves with tinkling shells. Mansey went ashore in the chief warrior's canoe and faced the end of his quest, a white man wearing only a loin cloth and a wealth of pearl necklaces, his face as haggard as his white hair was lank and long, the flicker of madness in his eyes.

"Sir Ansley Dimmick?" Mansey inquired, then gave his own name and told about the Moon Calf shell. It was the scornful savant right enough, but despair and incipient insanity had ousted scorn.

"It must be three or more years ago I scratched that shell. You're a long time coming with your silly old launch. I expected an armed cutter at least," and Sir Ansley dropped his forehead on his wrists in an utter dejection that moved Mansey to pity.

THE native women were stirring cooking pots of turtle stew. The village showed evidences of sanitation unusual in Papuan wilds and a wealth of carved wooden masks as well as excellently mummied heads, both ancient and fairly fresh. Mansey was enjoying turtle stew and scraped coconut cream washed down with palm toddy when the rather rambling talk of Sir Ansley halted and he looked apprehensively at the surrounding jungle shade.

"I came out here to experiment," he said suddenly. "And, oh, God, how I have succeeded. Hear them, Mansey. Listen to the watchers I've trained!"

The bird calls and squawks of lorries and parrokeets were silent, the chatter and scampering of mischievous little monkeys ended. In their place came the creak and swish of branches, like rush of sudden winds, that betokened the presence of the reddish-brown men of the jungle, the mighty orang-utans.

"Coming for breakfast, Mansey. Never far away. Good fighters when the drums begin to chatter. They've made my tribe practically invincible—and me a prisoner. It took time. I'd had a theory that they could be trained, out of captivity, and I succeeded beyond my wildest hopes. We caught the young ones and treated them like babies, drilled them daily, hourly, ate and slept with them. Now—well, I'm satisfied they're almost human, show every emotion man reveals, even to jealous guardianship of the fool who tampered with them. Mansey, I'm afraid you're trapped likewise. The reddish-brown men are demons in battle. They go with my warriors and kill every black they find, except those whom I have commanded them to protect. The blacks realize that the minute I am gone they are at the mercy of the reddish-brown men, so they hold me like something precious. Still, we may be able to think of some plan to get away. If they'd only sent a gunboat," he sighed.

Full-fed, enjoying his pipe, Mansey was not deeply impressed with what seemed the raving of dementia, although he started to his feet with a gun in his hand when the cooking pots were emptied in shallow gourds set beyond the huts, and one by one the orang-utans stalked from the green gloom and squatted, each with a gourd. Dimmick laughed.

"You think I'm crazy. Possibly I am, but look! 'Tenshun!"

Nine reddish-brown apes leaped to stand in line, long arms hanging to their knees. Dimmick strolled to face them, and at his command the apes saluted, wheeled, marched, formed in twos behind a leader, then fours. A drum of the village marked time smartly for the drill. The moment Dimmick waved his hand the apes vanished in the tangled lianas and Man-

sey had the feeling of having dreamed. A ghastly dream.

"The odd thing, Mansey, is that I believe these apes have communicated with their wild brothers and spread a sort of protective propaganda in the jungle." He laughed mirthlessly.

"Reactive as a boomerang. Have another drink. Do you happen to have any canned food in the launch? I'd give a good deal for a civilized meal."

Mansey was earnestly sorry he had finished the bacon in the night.

"I think you'd better come out with me as soon as the tide serves," he urged Dimmick, who laughed again.

"Thanks. I'd like to. Only for the hope of getting out I'd have killed myself long ago. I have said the natives won't let me go. They know what would happen them once I was away. These apes are warriors, I tell you, human killers. Once the drums start and the young men go forth, they fight. And it's a shambles when they finish. There isn't a village for I don't know how many miles."

"Well, I don't intend to stay here," said Mansey. "I had orders to help you, and to solve the mystery of this Moon Calf if it exists."

"You shall see. Nellie! *Nellie!*" he called.

AS if a blast of wind bored through the jungle, branches crashed and palms shivered. A reddish-brown shape hurled itself to the edge of the clearing and stood beside Dimmick, watching him with black gaze flicking at Mansey, yellow fangs displayed in a menacing grimace.

"Nellie, this white man is my friend." He laid an arm on Mansey's shoulder and with his other hand patted the ape. Then his fingers fondled her neck and lifted a light steel chain into view. Fastened in a crude but effective wire cage woven closely, bound fast to the chain, was something as large as a pullet's egg.

"Nellie is the leader of the army, Mansey, and guardian of the Moon Calf. You can realize I did not dare keep such a pearl in my possession. But they can't thieve it from Nellie. It is sewed in well-cured human skin and, for safe-keeping, Nellie wears it because she seems to show a doglike devotion toward me and, being a female, dislikes fighting except in defense of me, the sort of devotion she would give to a child. Only she will never have young ones. In my zeal to keep these simians loyal I took care of that when they were young."

Dimmick patted the big ape and waved her a dismissal, then he dropped on a mat and, with an arm over his eyes, seemed to sleep. Mansey explored the village, followed by a flock of naked children, watched by hut inmates and men of the *lagi-lagi* house. He was joined by the young warrior chieftain of the night.

"One fella white man stop longside?" he inquired.

"Maybe two, three suns," agreed Mansey.

"More better have one fella big *kai-kai*," stated the chieftain. "Long time fella young man catchem head, catchem woman."

Mansey nodded. It was a tribe unhampered by the white man's opinion that taking heads is impolite. Besides, a big feast, copious fermented palm juice, a raid on an unlucky inland tribe, and the rites of blood and fire enabling head-hunters to take wives, might provide that opportunity of escape for Dimmick and himself which seemed remote as things stood. Before sundown Mansey realized that the tribe cherished Dimmick as a sort of god or talisman whose presence averted evil from the reddish-brown apes, but that he had practically no authority over their coming and going.

He had returned to Dimmick and lounged in the shade considering the problem, nervously alert to the presence of the ape Nellie, who squatted near by,

diligently hunting insects in her fur. Suddenly a village drum began to speak. It was the lazy hour of greatest midday heat, and, except for children tumbling in lagoon water along shore, there was no native in sight. The tremulous timbre of human skin stretched over a skull, felt out by black fingers, roused the village to life. A second drum purred and chattered, a booming note from abdominal depths of the chieftain's anatomy yowled forth and Dimmick stirred.

"God, I was dreaming of bacon, bacon and coffee, at home." It was like a moaned cry, the greatest betrayal of Dimmick's plight Mansey had observed. His fingers went to the greasy bacon cord looped about his belt and unknotted it.

"Possibly you smelled bacon grease on this twine," he said. "I only wish I had some left to share."

Dimmick snatched the cord and sniffed at it, and he laughed.

"Bacon, all right. Makes me reckless. Mansey, how could we manage it?"

To Tom Mansey it seemed feasible and simple. The drum talk swelled to thunderous triumph and died away for the voices of young men to rouse the stirring jungle song of battle palpitating as the hot hills. Drums droned, insistent as swarming bees. Men poured from the *lagi-lagi*, arranging their plumed crests, grimly meticulous over their war paint and gaudy ornaments, proud of fine blue tattooing and cicatrice blisters across their breasts, obtained in agony, and young men who wore paradise feather crests in netted bags around their necks for the prideful moment they might flourish a human head as evidence of manly prowess and demand wives.

MANSEY could see his launch two hundred or more yards offshore filled with his Tonga boys, but the tide was ebbing. About cooking fires tended by old women the war dance began. Gourds of kava were upended. Drum tempos quickened, a blood-rousing rhythm that stirs heart and soul of a man, tingles his flesh, prickles his scalp, the primal quickening call to war. Then, as Mansey watched the warriors leaping in battle frenzy which a breath might change to yowls of bloody slaughter, came the nine reddish-brown orang-utans prancing in an outer ring, a carmagnole of horror from which the apes leaped to catch at overhead branches and spin in mid-air like gibbet fruit. Then, at a signal, the dance headed into the jungle and the great apes leaped to the trees. Where a swarm of ferocious savages had been were only scattered fire embers and old people gathering the empty gourds to drain the heel taps.

"I thought you said there were no natives living near your village," said Mansey.

"There are none. That's why I'm uneasy. They don't take heads of their own tribe. It doesn't seem reasonable that they plan to be away a week or so. Mansey, how did you happen to find this place?"

Mansey explained the feast of bacon and the coming of the blacks.

"Look, Mansey, the old folks are already digging ovens!" Dimmick was on his feet, stalking into the thickets just beyond the clearing, to make doubly sure, and Mansey followed. A yelp escaped Mansey's taut lips as a reddish-brown hairy paw caught his ankle and tripped him headlong. Nellie was on guard, and Dimmick whirled to Mansey's defense as the she-ape caught him like a sack over one arm.

"Let go, Nellie!" he yelled, and Mansey fell on the lacerating coarse coral.

"If you want to live, never follow at my heels, Mansey. She's trained to rear-guarding. I dare not risk the black stalking me. Mansey, Nellie isn't our worst peril. They're digging ovens. Ovens! That means a big feast.

I only hope it's wild game, but I don't think so. They are pronged for war, for battle. Mansey, I've a notion if we don't yet out before dark your Tonga crew will be the feast. That doesn't so much matter, but—"

"The hell it doesn't matter," growled Mansey. He had lived with his crew for more than a year, and a man cannot do that without feeling kinship with anything, living or insensate.

"Look here, I've been patient. I've wasted a year looking for you and this Moon Calf. Now I'm going to report to headquarters. Either you come or you stay. I don't give two whoops. I don't believe half of your story, Dimmick, certainly not about the Moon Calf, and—"

"Oh, you don't? You saw those apes drill. I'll show you more. Nellie!" The she-ape loped to his side and again Dimmick grasped the neck-chain and worked at the wire fastening, too intent to notice the small drum in the hands of an old man chatter an alarm. But Mansey heard. Mansey saw the oven diggers returning, saw old men from the *lagi-lagi* gathering to watch. They were armed with spears and knives, with clubs knobbed with cunningly inset knuckle bones, and they gathered to see what this white lord meant to do with the Moon Calf that had been the beginning and continuance of their great luck.

"I heard," Dimmick said, "they'd found the pearl of pearls. That brought me in the first place. Parlor magic won me their respect, but they killed my men and tried to make a god of me. It seemed the chance I wanted, protection and endless time to experiment. Oh, I did my share of mischief teaching them the Moon Calf heralded my coming, and then, for fear of something happening it, fastened the pearl to Nellie's chain. Mansey, we'll take the Moon Calf. I'll show it to you and palm it somehow. Hand me something to take its place. Wind that bacon cord in a ball. It's hanging in my breech clout."

Scarcely hoping to escape detection from those watching dark eyes, Mansey rolled the cord in one hand while Dimmick unwound the wire. The blacks dared not touch Dimmick for fear of the she-ape's vengeance.

"They'd kill her eventually, of course," Dimmick explained, "but not before this village was wrecked and the ground scattered with bits of humans. I've seen an orang-utan kill with a dozen bullets in his body. Nellie would damage ten or fifteen blacks before they ended her. Got the twine, Mansey? Then look!"

Dimmick's knife slit the skin sack. He held out his hand with the dark hide rolled like a black calyx from a huge bud, a gleaming breath-taking loveliness.

"PEARL of Pearls," crooned the voice of Dimmick. "Calf of the Mother Moon. Do you wonder I came and saw and stayed, Mansey? Do you wonder I worshiped, fell under its magic spell, gave the best years of life to contemplation of its beauty? Fairer than women. Cooler snow than the breast of love. Satin-skinned as a babe. Aloof as a star. The Moon Calf! Pearl of Pearls!"

"Pearl of great price if it costs you your lost years and me my life," growled Mansey. "Nice specimen for a museum showcase, but as a womanish adornment, about as impossible as a hen's egg."

"You poor fool," Dimmick commiserated. Sight of the pearl seemed to upset his balance completely. He held it aloft and his eyes held dreams. He thrust it toward Mansey's cheek and into his hand, his head came close, and Mansey understood. The ball of twine slipped into the empty skin sack, the pearl was folded in Dimmick's palm, and he was tying the sack threads, then thrusting it into the wire cage. The circle of black men came closer, too

close, for the she-ape swung an arm and clutched a wrinkled throat, and a despairing cry broke the tense silence.

Again Mansey's gun was in his hand, but Dimmick clutched his wrist. The she-ape squeezed. Mansey turned his head until a phrase rang from Dimmick's throat, a native sentence he immediately translated:

"So perish our enemies, Mansey!"

When Mansey looked, a limp body lay on the coral, eyes and tongue protruding, and Dimmick was fastening the wire cage on the she-ape's neck-chain. The circle of watchers stealthily drew farther away, fear and rage grimacing their faces, whispering menacingly, primed for trouble.

"Look here, we'd better get going. Listen!" cried Mansey.

Soft, purring sound wakened, quiet as the first whispering of a dawn wind. Dimmick's fingers fell from the task of bending wire, and, as if she sensed sudden paralyzing fear in the heart of her master, the she-ape wheeled, chattering guttural warning.

The wire cage dangled and a protruding strand stabbed at her throat. In a flash her claws jerked the wire ball and flung it bounding over the gleaming white coral sand. In the same flash Mansey saw how tragic a predicament faced them, for a black hand reached as he bounded forward, the black fingers two inches nearer the wired ball. A hand clutched his wrist.

"Run, Dimmick, run for the launch and I'll shoot my way," Mansey yelled. Then stars exploded, lights puffed, and blackness fell. His last conscious knowledge was the sound of foot-soles pounding coral as Dimmick ran shoreward, and the splash of a body plunging into the lagoon. The *put-put-put* of the launch engine, started when the Tonga boys saw a white man swimming out, was mingled with the rising menace of a single drum chattering its call for warriors to return, shrilling its announcement of trouble in the village.

The club tap on Mansey's head had been a glancing blow. He roused as the blacks squatted around his prostrate body, chattering like monkeys, hideous as jungle apes with their aged, tottering frames and sagging flesh. Bleary-eyed old men sucking fangless gums, horrible old women smeared with the filth that betokens death mourning, discussing his fate, handing from one to another the empty wire cage of the Moon Calf and the ball of bacon twine which replaced the pearl. They would not kill Mansey outright, he knew. The feast had subtler methods of prolonging an edible morsel. They would probably bind him to a tree, slice flesh as it suited the chieftain's whim, cauterize the wounds and keep him alive for days.

And that ingrate Dimmick had reached the launch. He heard its engine panting, receding into distance, heard the cries of his Tonga boys as they broke coral fronds in the reef entrance with poles to let the boat ride through. Mansey could still be glad the reef jaws were too wide to make spear marksmanship feasible.

A GOOD many of the patriarchs were out on the rocks trying their flabby aim, bursting their cheeks with blow-gun arrows. But enough were left to seal his fate. They held him flat by wrists and ankles, and one crone sat on his body with a knife at his throat. He watched them pass the bacon string from hand to hand, then cut it midway and bind one end on each wrist. The hag slipped from his body, stripped him with one wrench of his sarong.

They carried him bound to a stretch of shore where he could see the launch riding, see his crew taking aim at canoes which reached the reef jaws, see the aged paddlers drop, or twist, or leap, as a sharp *sput* and a puff of pretty smoke denoted a well-aimed shot.

His captors drove stakes. Then Mansey shut his eyes and teeth. He knew what was coming. Termites. The

huge ants were to feast. In sight of his boat, the man he had saved, and his crew, he would endure the tortures of hell. Over the ant-hill they spread-eagled him, binding his wrists with the cursed bacon cord.

The crone who had taken the liveliest part in his capture rose and shrieked her triumph, then whirled like a bundle of rags and fell across his body. Good marksmen, his Tonga boys—but why didn't they head in and clean out the savages before the village drum penetrated the jungle and called home the warriors? Going after fresh meat, those war-painted, spear-pronged savages, hunting game as a ruse for returning to take his Tonga boys! It had been a good thing Dimmick tried to show him the Moon Calf and precipitated this business; at least it was a good thing for the Tonga boys.

Where was the damned she-ape who started things?

The first pain of torture nipped like hot pincers, and Mansey's body twisted at the binding thongs. Beyond heaving the body of the old woman to flop on his stomach again, he accomplished nothing. Her death had frightened the others. They left him alone anyway. And the *put-put* of the launch was nearer.

"Dimmick!" he yelled. "Nellie, Nellie, *Nellie!*"

The ape's keen ears would hear his call where human ears failed. Perhaps she was intelligent enough to let Dimmick know where he lay, the ants biting, stinging his flesh, hot sun boring through his closed eyelids. Turn and twist as he would, the stakes held fast, the cords were firm. Ants stung his flesh, his throat and face, his lips, penetrated his nostrils and ears, his arms; streams of ants marching along his arms, armies of the termites streaking to his arms.

A crash on the coral startled him. His eyes flew open. The she-ape swayed with dangling arms, staring curiously at him, then, because she did not understand, squatted near by, reached an arm and dragged the old woman's dead body to the coral, where she proceeded to dismember it leisurely. Mansey turned his head seaward, suddenly faint, momentarily numbed to the agony of termite stings.

The launch still puttered about along shore, and he saw the blacks streaking from the reef jaws nearer where he lay. But the she-ape saw them, and mistrusted the stealthy sneaking figures, for she blasted the jungle silence with a roar of guttural rage and heaved a human hand in a magnificent parabola through the air.

Mansey strained and twisted at his bonds, trying to coax the ape, make her understand he wanted to be free. She looked at him an instant, then turned to watch the blacks tossing spears. She crept forward and secured one and threw it with better aim. A death cry shrilled.

"Good Nellie, good Nellie," moaned Mansey, but he could not coax her to work loose the stakes to which he was bound. Mansey fought in sudden bursts of fury, then subsided to greater weakness.

HE did not so much mind dying; it was the torture, the agony, and the ironic knowledge that the burning ant virus impregnating his flesh would make it a magic cure for aged pains and aches. If only Dimmick and his crew were not such frightful cowards they might rush in, might even end the hell he endured by a shot.

A sudden frenzy as of madness gave him strength for a final struggle, his body twisting from the grid of hot ant nest alive with crawling pain, and the eyes half started from his head. One wrist thong snapped. One arm was free. He swung it before his bloodshot eyes and stared at the frazzled fibers, then a great light penetrated, and he jerked at the other wrist and sat upright.

The ants had chewed the greased cord rather than his fevered hot flesh; at least swarms of them dined on bacon greased cord, and severed it. He was gouging them from his ears and nostrils, sweeping them from his flesh. Then he touched the she-ape's arm and lifted her paw gently to an ankle stake. Her claws seemed only to grasp it and the stake was lifted. He did not need to prompt her twice. An intelligent brute, Nellie. So intelligent she hooked a hairy arm about his body when he would have fallen otherwise and loped toward shore with Mansey dangling in the crook of her arm.

Because he hung limp and inert longer than she had patience to endure, she dropped him on the wet sand, and little waves came curling over, each one a little higher, cooling, laving his tortured skin, slowly bringing him from the tide of unconsciousness that receded as the sea tide rose.

The same sound roused the she-ape and Mansey. Deep in the jungle war-drums had replied to the village throb and chatter of a single drum. The she-ape lifted her head and howled. Mansey wakened, saw through swollen eyelids the launch offshore, saw the reef points suddenly cleared of old black men who raced to meet the young warriors and urge them faster on the way to recapture the Tonga crew, the white god, the Moon Calf.

The she-ape looked at Mansey, then toward the jungle. And he darted into the sea, the warm, fluid caress of a purple sea frilled with foam lace, smiling to Tom Mansey that day like a bride.

Back on shore the roar of the she-ape broke again and again. Leaping, screaming savages hurled their death spears and poison darts, then retreated from the lunge of the ape, who flew like a reddish-brown cloud of peril straight at their stinging deaths. Tom Mansey did not turn his head. Sometimes he ducked and swam under water, when a flight of spears sailed and dropped around him. Hand over hand he pulled out and far beyond the spear range where the launch headed, while the gunshots of his crew creased red trails in savage flesh ashore.

Then, as he came up for air and to tread water a moment to ease his aching arms, he saw Dimmick standing, a gun at his shoulder, aiming, it seemed, for Tom Mansey.

"Dimmick!" he screeched, "it's Mansey. For God's sake don't shoot!"

THE Tonga boys were aiming also. Then Tom Mansey knew he did not swim alone. Not to be balked of the feast, one savage had made it from the reef, and he was a faster, better swimmer than Mansey. The barrage of spears had protected his long swim until in the clear water the sharp eyes of Tonga boys discerned the black body following, the breaking bubbles where his lips expelled and took air close to the surface. By that time he was so close alongside Mansey they were afraid to shoot. By that time also canoes were flung from the lagoon carrying the advance runners of the warriors.

Half of the launch crew were sniping at the canoes, half watching the sea for Mansey and his pursuer. Dimmick pot-shotted and small geysers uplifted near Mansey, who darted down and shot up nearer, eluding the ghoul-dark swimmer, whose hand clutched a gleaming knife-blade, and who had probably stabbed many a shark in his time.

One Tonga boy had bound a knife to a boat hook and balanced it over the launch side. That glimpse had frightened Mansey more than the pursuing savage. Excitable as monkeys, the Tonga boys, well-meaning but useless in emergency where life hung on initiative. He plunged deep, came up, felt soft disturbance of the water as an arm thrust and missed, then his hand caught the savage's arm and their heads bobbed out together, just as a

Tonga boy heaved something hard and round and white which smashed in the black face and rebounded. The savage fell away for a moment, long enough to give Mansey his chance. He dived under the launch, coming up to seize the further side. He was hauled into the craft as Dimmick's gun sputtered, the launch engine crackled into action and the knife-bladed boat hook speared the black man through the body.

They saw the boat hook sticking up like a periscope for quite awhile, although Mansey did not see it. He was content to lie under the awning roof out of the sun and listen to the child-like blubbering of Dimmick mourning the ignorance of a Tonganese.

"He hit the black with my Pearl of Pearls! I laid it there, Mansey. Swam out with it in my mouth and laid it there. No other place to carry anything in a nature garb like mine. Placed it right there, and the blankety-dink idiot grabs it and heaves it at the savage."

"He hit him, though. Gave me a chance to escape his knife. Jarred him just enough to let me make that last spurt," Mansey tried to comfort Dimmick.

"To be hit with the biggest pearl in the world would jar anybody," wailed Dimmick.

Mansey could not smile. He was trying to count the cost in human lives of the Moon Calf, and wondering if headquarters would believe his story or still regard it as a myth. It would not matter. What was more important was a meal of civilized food, preferably bacon.

THE END.

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Bamboo Cannon

CAN you imagine a "fish-pole" cannon? It seems ridiculous to think of a bamboo tube giving a tremendous boom, belching flame and smoke; yet that is exactly what the Filipinos use for Fourth of July celebrations. They use firecrackers, too, of course, but bamboo cannon provide the big noise and the big thrill.

To provide themselves with one of these noise makers, the boys secure a length of bamboo six or eight feet long and from two to two and a half inches in diameter. They they take a pole or rod of smaller diameter, and, using this as a ramrod, they knock out all of the partitions in the joints of the big bamboo except the one at the butt end. Six inches from this closed end they bore a small hole, a quarter of an inch or larger in diameter. This is the firing hole. A pint or more of the petroleum which is to serve as ammunition is then poured into the tube and the tube's free end is elevated three or four inches to keep the petroleum from escaping.

In firing the cannon, two boys usually work together. They kneel on opposite sides of the firing hole. One is equipped with a little candle, a piece of flaming punk, or some such torch which will slip into the firing hole. The boy with the light thrusts it into the hole, and gas from the evaporating petroleum explodes. Immediately after the explosion the second boy cups his hands and blows through them into the firing hole. This blows out the smoke and encourages further evaporation. As the bamboo pole grows hotter and hotter, the gas gathers faster, and the explosions grow louder and louder. Flame and smoke spurt out of the muzzle two or three feet.

Noise? Oh, boy! *Louis W. McKelvey.*

"I want you, Winston!"

The Branded Man

Sternly pursuing the conspirators who have disgraced him and mocked the Mounted, Yorke struggles against unfair odds in a titanic drama of the Northland

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Author of "The Bandit of Batakaland," "While Dorion Lives," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SERGEANT JIM YORKE, ranking non-com of the Prince Edward post of the Royal Mounted, feels that the honor of the force is being blackened by their failure to catch Ralph Winston, murderer. Corporal Sheahy had failed—and was now running a hotel in the northern post of Fort McDonald. Others had failed, and, fired from the force, grew rich. Now Lewis and Smith return, without Winston—and Yorke's rival, Sergeant Cummins, hobnobs with them.

Yorke goes to Inspector Sealey and demands the right to go after Winston, who is reported with the Lateau gang at Reindeer Lake. Sealey reluctantly yields. On his way out of town he is stopped by lawyer Hamblett, who offers him five thousand dollars to return *without* his man, and warns that powerful interests protect Winston.

Near Fort McDonald, through which Sealey routed him, a girl's dog-team crashes his. She, Elsie Randall, insists on his dining with them. Her father, William Randall, superintendent of the Northern Exploitation Company, which is developing his ward, Gerald Adair's lumber interests, seems to take a fancy to Yorke and offers to make him his assistant if he'll accept.

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Yorke is tempted, but refuses. That evening his wine is drugged. Randall leaves the house, and Yorke is awakened from stupor by screams. Elsie runs toward the town, her clothing torn —and charges Yorke with attacking her. But the girl refuses to testify at the trial, so Yorke is simply dishonorably discharged from the force, and ordered to leave town, like a pariah. He vows he will track down Winston and uncover the conspiracy. Cashing a check with Sheahy, who feels he's being unjustly used by the conspirators, Yorke sets out, finding that his name and disgrace are known throughout the Northland. No one will even sell him equipment.

At last he reaches a mission where he is more kindly treated. A girl, Mary Adair, mistakes him for a messenger from her brother Gerald. He pretends he is, and she betrays the location of her brother's hiding place—Spirit Lake. But Sister Agnes, missionary and teacher at the post, knows Yorke's name and guesses his purpose. She tries, by threats and bribes, to dissuade him—for he has guessed Adair and Ralph Winston are the same man. But he is adamant.

Finally, Mary Adair offers to go with him, warning him that after they near Spirit Lake she will do anything in her power to prevent him from arresting her brother, whom she loves dearly and has not seen for years. The last night of their truce, as they are within a day's journey from Spirit Lake, men set upon them, kidnaping Mary and shooting Yorke. He tries to pursue, and falls unconscious.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CABIN AT SPIRIT LAKE.

MARY—somewhere out on the tundra! Through the night of unconsciousness, that thought persisted, forcing its way upward through the blackness until the goaded brain resumed its functions, and Yorke came back to consciousness again.

He realized that he was lying half buried under the snow at the foot of the precipice over which he had fallen.

With consciousness came the discovery that his head ached as if it were splitting. Yorke raised his hand to it with difficulty, and brought it away covered with dried and frozen blood.

He opened his eyes and saw that it was twilight. But it was the twilight of dawn, not of evening; instinct told Yorke that. The snow was still falling slowly in wet heavy flakes, and the sky was uniformly gray, but the gale seemed to have blown itself out.

It had grown warm, abnormally warm for that season and that latitude. It could not have been more than a few degrees below the freezing point. To this, undoubtedly, Yorke owed his life.

But Mary, she had been kidnaped, and the attack had not been due to any treacherous attempt on her part to murder him. Had Yorke not heard her scream, he might have believed that she had attempted to violate their pact while it was still in existence.

The kidnapers were the Lateau gang, of course. The inference was that they had come to take Mary to her brother, had discovered his presence, had trailed him and the girl, and had taken the first opportunity to put him out of the way.

In that case, Mary was not likely to be in immediate danger. Nevertheless, he must get on the trail as quickly as possible. But how could he have been shot through the head and be still alive?

He put his hands up to his temple and examined the injury. There was a quantity of congealed blood there, and, with his finger, Yorke traced a furrow along the scalp. The bullet had apparently struck him on the forehead, glanced round the temple, and emerged without shattering the bone.

Relieved by this discovery, Yorke tried to rise, but was seized with an

attack of giddiness that compelled him to lie down again. In the brief interval, however, he had discovered that no bones seemed to have been broken as the result of his fall down the cliff, due, no doubt, to the drift of deep snow into which he had fallen.

In spite of the urgent need of following Mary's abductors, Yorke could do nothing but lie where he had fallen. Gradually the snow ceased to fall, the clouds dispersed, a few transient gleams of pale sunlight shone through. Gradually the racking pain in Yorke's head decreased in intensity, and he began to feel stronger. At last he found himself able to get upon his feet again.

Looking about him, the first thing that he saw was the bodies of two of his dogs, their stiffened limbs protruding through the snow. They had both been shot to death, and their bodies apparently hurled over the cliff; but neither of them was Wolf, and a search along the bottom of the cliff for Wolf's body was fruitless.

Abandoning his search for the dog's body, Yorke began to work his way painfully up the cliff on hands and knees, to see what could be salvaged of the outfit.

THAT climb was the hardest task Yorke had ever undertaken. Time and again he was forced to halt, overcome by weakness, and to cling to the rocks. Finally, when he reached the top, he sank down in complete exhaustion.

But now the sun came out in earnest, and in the flood of brilliant light that covered the plateau Yorke's spirits and strength began reviving rapidly. In a few minutes he was able to look about him.

The frozen canvas of the tent was sticking out of the snow. Kicking away the frozen surface, and scooping up the softer snow beneath with the edge of the stiffened material, Yorke came upon a little handbag containing some of Mary's toilet articles—a brush and comb, toothbrush, mirror, and a couple of little jars of cold cream.

If Yorke had doubted that the girl had been kidnaped against her will, the sight of those things would have restored his faith in her. No woman would voluntarily have left them behind her.

A further investigation resulted in his discovery of his blanket, and a small quantity of supplies scattered along the edge of the precipice, where they had fallen when the sleigh was overturned, together with what was even more essential—Yorke's snowshoes.

There was a burst bag still holding a few pounds of dry flour in the bottom; there was a piece of bacon, and a half-pound package of tea was still intact. Under a rock at the very verge of the abyss he found the tin kettle.

But best of all was Yorke's discovery of his revolver, which he found where it had fallen from his hand when he dropped unconscious, under the same stone as the saucepan, and a foot or two away from it.

By the time Yorke had heaped his precious salvage together he was beginning to feel in distinctly better condition. His head still ached badly, but the dizziness and nausea were gone. He scraped the frozen snow from his blanket, made up a pack, and began the descent on the farther side of the plateau.

Bounding across the tundra came a shaggy form, and Wolf leaped up at him and almost threw him down in the exuberance of his greeting. Yorke, dumfounded with delight, took the great paws in his hands.

"You mean to say you followed them and came back to show me the way they took?" he demanded.

The husky, wild with excitement, raced around Yorke in a succession of circles, emitting deep-toned barks that bespoke civilized dog antecedents.

"Come on, then," said Yorke. "You're a pal worth having."

Man and dog set off together over the waste of snow.

TO Spirit Lake was an unknown distance, and the tracks of the sleigh had long since been obliterated by the falling snow, nor was there much likelihood of striking those that had been made after the snow ceased falling heavily. The sleigh must have covered many miles since it started. Yorke had a general idea of the direction, and for the rest he had to rely on Wolf.

He expected to reach the lake by the following evening, but that would be only the beginning of the search. It might be necessary to circle it and investigate all its tributary streams to find Adair's headquarters.

He mushed on with his dog, feeling himself growing stronger with every mile he covered. In the afternoon they crossed a stream. Yorke hammered a hole in the ice with the stump of a dead tree, and in a few minutes Wolf had his supper.

He was feeling almost normal that night when he camped in a windbreak. He awoke at some indefinite time drenched with sweat and moisture. The heat of his body had thawed the frozen blanket into a damp envelope that had the effect of a Turkish bath.

He threw it aside, but the penetrating cold forced him to resume it. By morning he was delirious. He tossed and tumbled till the dawn; when, after what seemed an eternity, the dawn began to break, and he came back to himself, he knew that he was seriously ill.

With the rising of the sun he managed to pull himself together, but that second day's mush was an immense effort. His mind wandered oddly. He knew that that distant depression in the tundra, which he was slowly nearing, must be Spirit Lake. By evening he ought to be there. Nevertheless, mingled with the clear perception of this were incongruous pictures of other scenes that at times blotted out the picture. Then he would mush on without realizing where he was going. Again he would catch himself talking wildly.

Wolf was leaping up at him, and barking excitedly, running back, and turning to bark again for Yorke to follow him. Yorke cleared the visions from his brain; there, running straight before him, and curving into the distance were the sleigh tracks!

The discovery came to Yorke like a douche of cold water. He realized that he was seriously ill, that he must pull himself together and stay put, if his journey was to be crowned with success. Immediately he became the cool, self-contained policeman again. He drove the phantoms from his brain, and went on fast through the declining afternoon.

The sun had just disappeared when he saw the lake in front of him, an irregular expanse of snow-covered ice set into the heart of the dreary tundra, not more than a mile or two across, but winding into the distance. The tracks ran on beside the margin, and Yorke pressed on, eager to reach his destination before dark.

But the tracks seemed to run on interminably, and it was growing dark fast. He could not longer see them. He would have to camp for the night. In the next windbreak, he decided reluctantly, in that clump of dwarf willows in the hollow ahead of him. By morning he might be feeling better. Yorke was nearing it, when suddenly a light flickered through the trees, and with that he knew that he had reached his destination.

HE called Wolf sharply to heel, and went on slowly through the darkness, expecting every moment to hear the challenge of the dogs. But it did not come, and now he could see a cabin, a long structure of logs beside the lake. He crept up, revolver

in hand. There was a small window on that side, but it was frosted over, and only a dull glimmer of light came through. Yorke whispered to Wolf to lie down, and went very softly toward the front of the structure. Immediately voices broke upon his ears, and he stopped. One was that of a man, but Yorke's heart leaped as he recognized the other voice as Mary's.

"I tell you you're crazy," the man was saying, in weak, querulous tones. "That fellow Yorke's dead and frozen. Those fellows say he dropped down a hundred-foot cliff after they shot him. Dead before he reached the bottom. I tell you it's just insanity, your idea of going back to look for him. And if he was alive, by some miracle, what would you expect to do with him? Nurse him back to health and then bring him here to arrest me?"

There were tears in Mary's voice. "It was terrible," she said. "Those men you sent murdered him in cold blood."

"Well, what of it?" snarled Adair. "It was that fellow's life or mine, wasn't it? You confessed that he wasn't even a policeman. He was hunting me down like a wild beast, and I had to defend myself. As a matter of fact, you know perfectly well that I'm not responsible for his death. I never stirred from the sleigh—"

"No, you sat there and let them do the work, but you're equally guilty!" cried the girl. "I know he's dead now, and that my idea was a foolish one, but—but—"

Yorke heard her move swiftly across the cabin.

"Gerald, don't speak harshly to me, after the many miles I've come to find you," he heard her say in beseeching tones. "You've changed so much, you're so different from what I expected. I've come a long way to help you, dear, and I realized that the hardships you've gone through have made you another person. I'll do anything in the world for you, Gerald. I'll give up that idea of going to find poor Mr. Yorke's body. But one thing I'm afraid of. Why have I got to go back to Fort McDonald in the company of those two men, while you stay here? I can't go with them, I can't trust myself with them. I won't leave you."

"I tell you you've got to. Lechance and Collins are good friends of mine, and you're perfectly safe with them. They know that if they dared harm you Lateau would kill them when he gets back from his trip north, and he may be here any day now. You've got to go. It's the only way of fixing things so as to clear me. This fellow Hamblett—"

Yorke, who had been on the point of entering the cabin, stopped at the name. Hamblett again! Who was Hamblett, that his influence extended even here?

Yorke was unable to hear the words that followed.

"I tell you I can't go with them and leave you here, Gerald!" came Mary's beseeching cry. "I want to stay with you. Gerald, I've got money at Winnipeg. We're not dependent on those dreadful men. Let's go away together instead, just you and I."

"You're crazy, I tell you!" snarled Adair. "Go away without dogs? Where are we to go? Steal the dogs while they're asleep, or what? You're going to do what you're told, and that's the long and short of it. You didn't have to come, but now you're here—"

Yorke stepped inside the cabin, gun in hand. "I want you, Winston," he said, covering the man.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTURE.

STUPEFIED by his appearance, neither of the two could move or utter a word. Yorke stepped forward into the fog, and quickly relieved Adair of the revolver in his belt, which he had made no move to use, transferring it to his pocket.

"Don't move!" he said, and turned to face Mary, who had slowly risen from her chair and was beginning to edge backward toward a small table with an open drawer.

Through the mist Yorke saw that Mary's objective was a second gun lying in the drawer. She meant to use it, too. With a leap he anticipated her, just as her fingers were closing about the handle. He wrested it away.

She yielded it to him, and he put it in the other pocket of his mackinaw, but the next moment her arms were round him. "Run, Gerald! Run for your life!" she cried.

Wolf leaped at the girl, snarling. Yorke kicked the dog away. "Hold *him!*" he shouted, indicating Adair. But the dog, doubtful of his meaning, and hurt by the repulse, slunk back with a show of teeth. Adair had almost reached the door when Yorke freed himself, covered him, and waved him back to his chair again.

He thrust the girl away, and she recoiled against the wall. He took up his station within the doorway. Odd how the room was going round and round. They must not guess that—Winston's face had an oddly familiar look. Yorke put forth a supreme effort to steady himself.

"I'm going to take you down to Prince Edward," he told Adair. "We start in the morning. I'm going to tie you. Miss Adair, you'll go into the next room and stay there."

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" panted the girl. "You coward! If you were a policeman, you might claim that it was your duty to arrest my brother for a crime that he committed years ago, but you're nothing at all. An outlaw yourself, or as good as one. For money—money, that's what you're doing it for! I've got more money than you've ever seen in your life in the bank at Winnipeg. I'll make it worth your while—tenfold worth your while to let him go!"

"You'll go into that room and stay there," repeated Yorke coldly. "If necessary, I shall tie you, too."

"You dare say that to me?"

"I'll dare do it!"

And, as coldly as Yorke had foreseen the necessity of the act, he was prepared to carry it out. Adair intervened.

"You'd better do what he tells you, Mary," he said sullenly. "We've just got to take our medicine, I guess."

The girl shot a look of scorn at her brother, then suddenly burst into tears.

Groping, the girl reached for the open door. It opened upon the room on the side of the cabin by which Yorke had approached. He had seen the little window, and knew that it was too small for Mary to get out that way.

"We're starting at dawn," Yorke said to the man. "I advise you not to make it hard for your sister, if she comes with us. There's no chance of your getting away."

"No?" grinned Adair, his eyes staring over Yorke's shoulder.

Yorke was too old a man-hunter to be caught by a trick like that. It was only the inarticulate cry from the girl that warned him. Instinctively he ducked his head, and the bullet fanned his forehead and embedded itself in the log wall beside him. Two more shots followed from the entrance.

THROUGH the smoke-filled interior Yorke leaped at his men. He saw them crouching on the sill, a burly ruffian with pistol-hand outstretched, and his companion, a bandage round his wrist. There was no time for parley. Three guns chattered through the fog. Mary's screams mingled with the howls of the marauders.

What happened exactly Yorke never knew. As the smoke cleared away, he found himself standing over a dying man, shot through the body, and threshing the sill convulsively with his moccasined feet. The second man was staggering away, his reeling gait show-

ing that he, too, had been hit. Then, all in a moment, the dying man was a dead man, and the second man had collapsed in the moonlight.

"Go back!" Yorke commanded Mary.

The girl was bending over the dead man, terror in her eyes.

"Go back!"

She obeyed mechanically, deprived, for the time, of all initiative. Yorke turned to Adair.

"Help me get the other one," he said.

Adair preceded Yorke gingerly, and they went up to the second man. This one had been shot through the head, and his movements since he staggered from the hut must have been purely reflex ones, for he was lying like a log. Yorke bent over him.

"No chance," he said, "but we've got to carry him in."

They brought him back into the hut and laid him down on the cot bed in the corner. He lay as he had fallen, in a profound stupor. Yorke sponged away the blood from the forehead; it had already ceased to flow. He placed him carefully so that Mary should not see the wound behind the ear.

"Help me carry out that one!" Yorke commanded his prisoner, and they took the body of the first man by the head and feet and carried it over the snow, dropping it at the edge of a clump of dwarf birch some distance away. Then they went back. As Yorke had expected, Mary was in the cabin again, looking at the unconscious man on the bed.

"Go back! You can do nothing for him!" said Yorke again.

"You murderer!" said the girl, with a glance of unspeakable contempt.

"For God's sake get into that room and stay there!" burst out Adair. "Give me a chance to talk to Mr. Yorke. I guess he's not unreasonable—not if he's the same man I used to know," he added, with a malicious chuckle.

Yorke stared at him. Then he knew why Adair had seemed oddly familiar to him. He was Beale, Yorke's companion in those earlier, foolish years, in the little mining settlement in Manitoba—Beale, who had so nearly made a crook of him!

THERE was a crafty look on Adair's face. He looked furtively toward the door at Mary's room, beckoned to Yorke to come closer.

"I want to talk turkey with you, Yorke," he said. "Maybe this thing can be fixed up. But I don't want her to hear me. You remember I was good to you in the old days, Yorke," he wheedled. "You won't go back on an old pal, I know."

Yorke stepped toward him and took his seat upon a chair, the gun still in his hand. He had not the least objection to listening to Adair's confidences. Perhaps in the course of them Adair would throw some light on the conspiracy that had left him free in spite of the hue and cry out against him.

Had Yorke actually been a policeman, it would have been necessary for him to caution his prisoner not to talk, but now this was needless.

"That was the straight goods, what she was telling you about having money in the bank at Winnipeg," whispered Adair. "You take us both out of this country, and it will be worth a clean ten thousand to you. As like as not, we'll be able to get away as trappers, but if we meet a police patrol, why, you'll tell them that you're bringing in a couple of prisoners, and decline assistance. That'll make it absolutely safe. When we get to civilized parts, Mary can go to Winnipeg and bring back the money. I'll be willing to stay this side of the border line until it's actually in your hands."

Emboldened by Yorke's silence, he went on:

"God, man, if you knew what I've suffered all these years! I'd give all

I've got to get even with that swine Randall. I believed in him for a long time, believed in his promises to get me out of this damn country. And Hamblett, too. Hamblett's put over a deal with Lateau. Those two birds were to have taken Mary to him. They were both stalling. Month after month, and always some fresh excuse. But Mary's a trump. I knew she'd come. She sold everything she could lay her hands on, and left by the first boat.

"Randall thinks that as long as I'm here he can keep on making away with my property—he and that gang of crooks at the Provincial capital that are in with him. I tell you those lands along the Saskatchewan that the Northern Exploitation Company has stolen are worth millions. But I'm wise to the game they're playing. I'll get even with them, once I get out of this cursed place."

Yorke nodded, as if he was acquainted with the facts of the case.

"My grandfather never dreamed what they'd be worth when he took them over in payment for the old Trading Company's debt of a few thousands. Luckily the family held on to them after his death. My father always refused to sell them. And every acre of them's mine as soon as I can get away from this place; mine and Mary's. Yorke, I promised you ten thousand. I tell you, as soon as we've sold out, there'll be fifty thousand more for you."

ADAIR had not said very much, but at last the whole significance of the plot was becoming clear to Yorke. With lands worth millions at his disposal, no wonder that it was to William Randall's interest to keep Adair in the wilds.

Equally, it would be vital to him that Adair should not pay the debt he owed the law by dying upon the gallows. With Adair dead, Mary would be the sole heir to the timber lands, and an accounting would be called for.

So long as Adair was a homeless fugitive, so long as Randall could publicly keep up the fiction that he was confined in a New York institution for the insane, that gang of conspirators would remain free to strip the timber lands. No wonder that the vast organized conspiracy had bent every effort to preventing Adair's capture!

Yorke saw all this with a sudden inspiration that might have been due to his physical condition, for, sitting in the chair, facing his prisoner, he felt that he was almost at his last effort. He could see Adair's face only dimly. There was a roaring in his ears, he was on fire with fever; yet his mind had never been clearer or more luminous than at that moment.

Adair was bending forward. "Well, what d'you say, Yorke?" he whispered.

"Tell all that to the inspector at Prince Edward," answered Yorke grimly. "I'm going to take you there!"

That was the climax of the evening. And, after all, Yorke had reason to be grateful for the swift clouding of his mind that followed. Afterward he was unable to recall in sequence all that had occurred following his unexpected refusal.

Adair had flown into a frenzy, pouring out a torrent of vile imprecations, recalling the old days when he had befriended him. Then had come Mary's terrified irruption into the room, and Wolf's attack upon Adair. Yorke had beaten down the dog with his bare fists. And in the middle of it all, the wounded man had died.

YORKE visualized some of it later, in a succession of pictures. At one moment he was cowing Adair with his revolver, and trying to force him back from the door; the next, Mary was trying to wrest the weapon out of his hands. Then Mary —Yorke hated to remember that—was emptying out the contents of a little bag that she had pulled from her dress.

Emptying it upon the table, with its pitiful little store of ten and twenty-dollar bills, amounting in all to three or four hundred, as an immediate bribe, and an earnest of what was to follow.

Well, it ended at last. Somehow his pertinacity had halted the girl's last desperate throw of the dice. She had gone back into her room, in a condition of physical collapse, and Yorke had settled down in his chair opposite the sullen, hopeless man, to watch him for the remainder of the night, and to wonder how he was going to see the night through.

There was a coil of rope in a corner of the cabin, and he could have tied his prisoner, but Yorke was never farther from sleep than then, and he did not want to take harsh measures a moment before they became necessary, for Mary's sake.

He settled down in front of Adair, who had lain down upon the cot bed behind the stove, and soon appeared to be sleeping.

Yorke knew now that he was seriously ill. He was burning with thirst and fever; time and again he rose to drain the water pitcher. Time and again he would start back into consciousness from some outlandish dream, a waking dream in which he reënacted that scene at Fort McDonald, and that other one in the barracks at Prince Edward. Slowly the night wore on, and with the first gray of the dawn he pulled himself together once more.

He would have to tie Mary as well as Adair, there was no help for it.

The girl came into the room, Adair sat up sullenly in his blankets; Yorke rose, looking from one to the other with haggard, swimming eyes.

"Well, policeman, we're ready for you," sneered Adair.

"Are you coming, Miss Adair?" asked Yorke.

"Of course I'm coming!" she flamed out. "And I warn you—"

She stopped and bit her lip.

"I must ask you not to leave my sight before we start," Yorke said slowly.

Again she checked the scornful retort that was on her tongue. "I suppose you have no objection to my giving Gerald a cup of coffee and something to eat before we get the dogs?" she asked.

"Not in the least," said Yorke. He had been wondering where the dogs were.

HE watched her as she busied herself at the stove, boiling coffee, setting out the remnants of the last meal, and he wondered how he was going on. The maddening sense of his physical incapacity, at the very moment of success, made him despair. He watched them as they ate and drank.

"Will you have a cup of coffee, Mr. Yorke?" asked the girl presently. "We won't ask you to stain the knightly honor of the police by eating with a criminal."

Yorke shook his head. He was too far gone to pay attention to the sarcasm. He saw Mary looking at him keenly, as if she suspected. He stood up straight, waiting. She began putting things together. Yorke remembered her little bag that he had in his pack. He unrolled his blanket and gave it to her. She thanked him ungraciously, and again looked keenly at him. At last all was apparently completed.

"I shall insist on Gerald's traveling with the sleigh," said Mary. "If you wish to load your things on it, you'll have to harness your dog, too."

Yorke assented.

"Well, shall we get the sleigh?" she asked, with a curl of her lip.

The three left the cabin with the dead man lying upon the cot, Adair and Mary walking side by side, close together, along a trail that ran down to the frozen surface of the lake, and Yorke following, with Wolf, who had slunk out of his hiding place, at his heels. They had covered some half

mile when a baying challenge arose, which Wolf answered in the best husky manner. Yorke called the dog back as it bounded forward, eager to do battle.

The howls increased, and Wolf could be restrained only with difficulty. The dog pen came into view, beside the lake, six huge brutes straining at their chains and doing their best to break loose and annihilate the strange canine that had appeared upon the scene. There was a long building behind the pen, and Yorke imagined that this was a storehouse of the Lateau gang; that explained why the dogs were not kept near the cabin.

Suddenly one of the straining brutes broke loose and leaped the wall of the pen. Wolf tore himself free and plunged forward to battle. Before they could be checked, the animals were doing their best to tear each other to pieces, and the baying of the rest made the place a pandemonium.

Mary screamed as the two dogs leaped at each other's throats. Yorke staggered between them, beating at their muzzles with his fists.

Adair's shadow, cast by the newly risen sun, fell across him. Just in time he leaped aside, reaching for his gun.

It was not in his holster, however; it was in Adair's hand. And, as Yorke tried to make for him, it rose and fell. Yorke felt nothing, but he slumped inert at his prisoner's feet.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHOW-DOWN.

IN a sense Yorke was never wholly unconscious. Unconsciousness was the blessed boon which he craved and could never find. He was always conscious of Mary's presence, too. When the pain in his chest was greatest, and it seemed impossible to draw a breath, she would be at his side, in some way soothing him, easing the pain. Afterward, when the agony had been succeeded by intense weakness, Yorke was still conscious of the girl's presence. He had a queer idea that she was pulling him up from some unfathomable depths of blackness, and he prayed to her to let him go, but she would not.

It was, in fact, more than a week later when Yorke came back to consciousness. Adair's light, though wildly delivered, blow upon the head had done little damage. Yorke had already been in the grip of pneumonia, and for a week had lain at death's door.

He came back to consciousness so weak that he could hardly lift a finger. He looked up at the girl and knew her. He saw her eyes wet with unshed tears, and he realized that he had made himself eternally her debtor.

"Where am I?" he whispered.

"In a cabin on the trail," she answered.

"The trail to Prince Edward?"

"To Hudson Bay."

Yorke lay still and looked at her. He did not understand why they had taken this route, or what it signified. The girl went on:

"I had to get you away. If Louis Lateau had come back and found you there, and learned that you had killed his comrades—you understand? Now you are safe. Lie still and rest."

The crisis past, recovery from pneumonia is very quick in the case of young, vigorous people, and in a few days Yorke was out of danger, convalescent, though still too weak to travel. He asked Mary few questions, but he was not long in picking up the threads of the situation.

He had collapsed, not from the light blow on the head that Adair had given him, but because he had driven himself as far as Nature would permit. Adair —this Yorke knew without being told —had wanted to shoot him instantly, and Mary had snatched the revolver from his hand and stood over his prostrate body. What Yorke never knew was that the girl, distrusting her brother's reluctantly conceded promise, had

guarded him practically night and day, with the revolver always at her hand.

SHE had found out that the brother she had worshiped was a weakling and a coward, but she would neither admit that to herself nor let it come between her and her loyalty to him. But Yorke should not be murdered.

At last Adair had come to see that their best chance of escape would lie in having Yorke as an escort. With that the tension was in some measure relaxed. They were waiting to see what Yorke meant to do.

Terrified with the apprehension of Lateau's return, Mary had insisted that they should leave Spirit Lake immediately. They had gone two days' journey in the direction of Hudson Bay, the dogs dragging Yorke on the sleigh; then they had come upon an abandoned trapper's shack. And there Mary had fought for Yorke's life.

Adair sulked during the period of Yorke's convalescence, but Yorke could see that he had abandoned any idea he had had of attempting to murder him. Mary, now that her ministrations were no longer needed, grew more aloof. The tension among the three was becoming unbearable, yet each of them hesitated to bring it to an end by an open question.

It could not go on. Yorke brooded for days, while the others watched him and speculated what he meant to do. The salient fact was that he owed his life to Mary, while he could not plead his duty to the force as an excuse for pursuing his plan of arresting Adair. That he was no longer in a position to carry out this plan, that he was in Adair's power, had no bearing on the matter. Slowly Yorke felt himself beaten by the bare logic of events. A life for a life—that was the eternal law to which he himself subscribed.

They were waiting for him to make some move, but in the end it was Adair, not Yorke, who took the initiative.

Adair had got a rifle from the cabin before they started, and had been constantly on the lookout for caribou. He had claimed to have got on the trail of a herd that day, but had returned, as invariably, without his quarry. He had been drinking hard, and was in that frame of mind that distressed his sister immeasurably. He slouched in surly manner to the meal, ate in silence, then blurted out:

"It's time this business came to an end, Yorke. I want to know what you're going to do. If you're still harboring that idea of arresting me, I'm going to end it all. By God, I'll shoot you! So lay your cards on the table!"

He whipped out a revolver and covered Yorke unsteadily. Mary screamed and tried to grasp his hand. But Adair pushed her violently away.

"I tell you I'm through with this, and I mean business!" he shouted. "Speak, damn you!"

NOT a muscle of Yorke's face quivered as he faced the drunkard.

"You may as well put that gun away, Adair," he said quietly. "I don't talk under threats."

"Threats? Damn you, didn't you threaten me?" cried Adair. "Haven't I spared your life when I ought to have shot you down like the dog you are? Oh, I know you're sweet on him!" he shouted at Mary. "But that line won't go any more. I'm putting the situation up to you fair and square, Yorke. Either you see us out of this damn country to safety, in the way I talked about before, that's to say, pretending you're escorting us in case we happen to meet any of the Mounties—either you'll do that, or I'm going to kill you right here and now."

The revolver described tremulous circles about Yorke's body. Yorke, looking fixedly at Adair, waited till the muzzle pointed over his shoulder, then shot forth his hand and grasped the drunkard's wrist. He expected to take

a chance on a near bullet, but Adair did not even press the trigger. Yorke pointed the weapon upward, then quietly detached it from Adair's fingers.

Without even withdrawing the cartridges, he tossed the revolver to Adair's feet.

"Take your gun, and put it away. You haven't got the nerve to use it, so why pretend?" he said. "I told you I didn't talk under threats, and I've proved it. Now take another drink of that filth you've been clogging your brains with, and come and sit down. I'm going to see you through."

"What's that?" Adair stared incredulously at Yorke, then edged toward him. "It isn't a trick? You mean—you mean you've given up your plan of arresting me?"

"That's just what I implied," Yorke answered. I'm giving you your life and liberty to square my debt to your sister. I'll hesitate at no sacrifice. I'll cover your escape, if necessary, with my life. That's all. No; one word more, Adair. If you get out of this, try to run straight for your sister's sake."

"I will, old man, I surely will," said Adair, reaching out and wringing Yorke's hand. "You're a trump, Yorke. I always knew you'd come round. God bless you, Yorke, and when I'm free I won't forget what I owe you, and as soon as I've fixed up some deal with Randall I'll send you—"

But Yorke had risen and was walking away. Mary came after him through the darkness.

"I don't know what to say," she whispered. "But don't think I don't know what this sacrifice means to you."

Yorke put her gently from him and strode off into the darkness.

On the morrow they discussed their plans. As the result of the conference, it was now decided that their best move would be to travel south and come out through Manitoba.

There had been a daily increasing influx of settlers, miners, lumbermen, and railroad workers into the northern sections of the province, as a result of the new towns that were springing up along the projected course of the Hudson Bay railroad. Once they could reach one of these settlements, it would not be difficult to pass for a party of immigrants, and to lose themselves among the population, eventually reaching the American border.

On the other hand, if they were intercepted by a police patrol, Yorke was to declare himself a member of the force, who was conducting two immigrants, whom he had found stranded, back to civilization.

THEIR hopes ran high as they turned their faces in a southerly direction. They had something more than three hundred miles to cover before reaching the outskirts of civilization, but the weather to date had been abnormally fine, and they made light of their difficulties.

The four dogs that they had brought with them made good headway, under the leadership of Wolf, who had quickly asserted his position as master of the team. Hares were plentiful, and formed a welcome addition to their scanty rations. Yorke succeeded in bringing down a small caribou, and they carried the frozen meat upon the sleigh. There was a surprising absence of snow, and in the still air the cold seemed almost negligible.

During those days Mary told Yorke much about her own life. Of their life in England, of her brother's departure for Canada as a boy, after an act of folly that had made a temporary absence from England inevitable. Their father had insisted that he should stand upon his own feet for a year or two.

He was to have gone West, to try for a job with the company that was then just beginning to exploit the Adair lands. But Gerald's father had refused to guarantee him a position with it, though he had privately written to his agent to give him one.

And Gerald had never reached Fort McDonald. He had grown hopeless, fallen into bad company, as Yorke himself had done, and at about the same time. The first letters had been succeeded by an unbroken silence.

Then Randall, a distant connection, had gone out to Canada to take charge of the Adair property, and he had reported that Gerald had gone north, years before, with a prospecting party, none of whom had been heard of after.

The father and mother ended their days in the belief that their son was dead. Mary had long since given up the hope that her brother was alive. Then one day there arrived Gerald's amazing letter. It told her that he was alive, that he had got into some scrape with the police, and urged her to come out at once with all the money that she could scrape together, since there was no one else who could help him. And the girl had obeyed.

She spoke about their plans for the future. "When we are free," she said, "we must take him away somewhere where the past will never trouble him again. He talks of making some arrangement with William Randall for a division of the property, but I know that that can never be. I never want to hear about that property again. I've money enough for the three of us to live in moderate circumstances. My idea is for us to go to Australia and begin life over again there."

That was an idea that seemed to obsess her, and Yorke had not the heart to try to dissuade her, or to tell her that he did not mean to let her provide for him.

CHAPTER XV.

"I'M RALPH WINSTON."

YORKE, the trained policeman, to whom the ways of the force were as an open book, little dreamed that the net was already drawn, and narrowing about them daily.

He, who knew well enough that the vast spaces of the north are a trap, rather than a refuge, had no conception of the forces that were being brought into play against them by the gang of desperate men who were prepared to hazard everything, rather than release their grasp upon the valuable Adair timber lands.

If one had tried to find the focus from which the news of Yorke's presence in the Northlands had spread, perhaps it might have been traced to old McAndrew. Within a week of Yorke's encounter with the old man, McAndrew had been relieved of his post, and had started for Scotland with Marge, to enjoy his pension. But before that week was at an end, all the North had known that Yorke, a discredited fugitive, was in the district.

The whispering gallery of the wastes added the information that Yorke had gone to join the outlaw Winston. This news, transmitted to Ottawa, resulted in the issuing of an urgent order to get Winston, and, incidentally, to bring in Lateau if possible.

Things had been happening at Prince Edward since Yorke's departure. Ottawa had been making one of its periodical wholesale transferences. Sealey had retired, and Lottimer; of the detachment only Cummins and Bennett remained. New constables had been posted, and Cummins, now a staff-sergeant, found himself the chief non-commissioned officer at Prince Edward, under a new and untried inspector, who knew nothing of local politics.

Simultaneously Sergeant Poussin and his two men had been transferred from Fort McDonald.

Nothing could have happened that would have been more in accordance with Randall's wishes. It was the new inspector who gave Cummins and Bennett their final orders when they started out to bring in Lateau and Winston, but it was Randall whom they consulted when they stopped on the way at Fort McDonald.

"Just two things to remember, Cummins," he said. "See that Winston's not taken. And see that Yorke doesn't leave the North alive."

Cummins, who understood the situation thoroughly, grinned as he thought of his new fat bank account at Prince Edward.

However, there was need of haste, for simultaneously, another patrol, consisting of a corporal and a constable, had started north from a Manitoba post to get Adair. This particular post was burning to capture the notorious outlaw and wipe out the stigma that the Prince Edward men had inflicted on the force.

It was thus a race between the two parties, the latter being in ignorance of Randall and his schemes. On the success of Cummins and Bennett everything depended—from Randall's point of view.

Cummins and Bennett, skirting the mission, reached Spirit Lake in time to gather in Lateau and learn of the killing of his two men. Lateau they took along with them, ostensibly on a charge of hooch-running, actually as a justification of their journey.

Lateau, who had nothing worse to fear than a short term of imprisonment, loaded up a supply of liquor, and the three became excellent friends. Lateau looked forward to his contemplated jail term as an exciting diversion from his routine. Not knowing which way Yorke and Adair had gone, the trio started for the Petit Pas.

ON the sixth day a blizzard from the north came sweeping down. From this time it squalled and snowed continually. Gale after gale came sweeping down from the bay, roaring over the white desolation. Mushing in the teeth of these constant storms, the gaunt dogs pulled their load with ever increasing difficulty. Adair, whining constantly about the hardships, lagged behind. Finally came another blizzard, rivalling the first in fury.

They found refuge in a small windbreak of larch beside a small lake, and Yorke built a snow igloo, as he had learned to do in the Northeast, just in time to save Adair, who had been relying upon his whisky bottle from freezing to death.

Inside, the three quickly grew warm, but for three days the storm lasted, and it was impossible to go twenty paces from the hut, or to attempt to feed the dogs. Nor could they be brought into the igloo, in which the three humans could barely accommodate themselves. The dogs died outside.

Wolf was the last to go. Yorke brought the dog inside at the end, and tried to feed him on the raw flour that had been their sole subsistence since the storm began, in spite of Adair's noisy protests. There was nothing else left, except a tiny strip of bacon and a little tea. On the fourth morning, when the gale had subsided to a high wind, Yorke awoke after a brief sleep and felt the dog's body cold against his own.

Mary was already awake, and bending over it. Yorke saw the tears running down her cheeks. Without a word, he got up, and, with the massive body in his arms, left the igloo.

The snow had ceased, but the wind cut like a knife. It was impossible to do anything but leave the body in the woods, for the wolverines.

Yorke laid it down and stood looking at what had been his companion of the trail. He had no sentimental fancies. They had done their job together, Wolf and he; and as to what it all meant, and why that comradeship had to be severed as all comradeships must, Yorke had no fine-spun theories. He accepted life as it was, with all its cruelties.

But he had a sort of prescience that the dog's death meant more than the end of a comradeship, that it stood as the symbol of a greater change which was approaching.

He plodded back along the border of the lake, gathering dead wood for a

fire. Halfway through the screen of larch he stopped. Something was moving out on the surface of the lake.

At first he thought it was a caribou. Then he saw a sleigh come into sight, drawn by five dogs and, accompanying it, two men. And it did not need his training to tell him that these two—*not* in the traditional scarlet which policemen on patrol are supposed to wear, but in their working winter garb of fur caps, pea-jackets, wool stockings, and moccasins—were members of the force!

FOR a moment Yorke stood watching them with something more akin to fear in his heart than he had ever felt before. Their unexpected presence in those wilds momentarily paralyzed his mental faculties.

In three or four minutes the slowly plodding train would reach a point opposite the break in the fringe of larches, from which the igloo would be in full sight, and there was no possibility of escaping discovery.

Yorke did some quick thinking. Then and there there came to him the only possible scheme for fulfilling his promise to Mary and her brother. Still carrying the wood, he glided noiselessly through the screen of trees, making a detour back to the camp.

Adair, shivering, eyes bleary and limbs trembling from the alcohol that he had been imbibing steadily for the past three days, was sulkily trying to scrape away the snow in front of the igloo. Mary had gathered a few sticks and scraps of birch bark, and was trying to ignite them.

Yorke threw down his bundle. Mary looked up. "It's hard trying to start a fire in this wind," she said. "Do you suppose you could light a piece of bark in the igloo and crawl out through the entrance with it?"

"Go on trying to light it out here," said Yorke crisply. "If you can't, just go on trying. We're going to have company here in a few minutes."

"Company?"

"There are two policemen out on the lake, with dogs and a sleigh. They'll see the igloo as soon as they get opposite that opening in the trees. We've got just about three minutes to make up our minds what we're going to do."

"Do you think they know we're here?" whispered Mary, going white as she turned her eyes upon her brother.

"They're after me!" snarled Gerald. "I'm going to hide in the woods till they're gone. You'll tell them I'm not here, won't you, Yorke? You'll help me out?"

"No chance of that! No time to cover your trail, Adair; not from policemen. I've got a plan, but there's no time for—"

"There is time!" The words broke wildly from Adair's chattering lips. He began crawling through the entrance of the igloo. Before Yorke could follow him he was back, the rifle in his hands. "Shoot them!" he sobbed. "You can pick them off in a second when they come up the trail from the lake. It's easy. It's the only thing to do. I'll do it if you're afraid."

Yorke flung the rifle down. "Mary, stay where you are," he commanded in a determined tone. "Don't come into the hut. Just go on trying to build a fire." He seized Adair by the arm and flung him down upon his face in front of the tunnel leading to the interior of the igloo. "Crawl in!" he commanded.

Shaking with fear, Adair obeyed, and Yorke crawled in after him.

OUTSIDE the hut, Mary struck match after match and held the strip of birch bark to the tiny flame, which was blown out instantly by the wind. Again and again she tried, shielding the match with her hand, but in vain. What was Yorke doing? Why had he made Gerald go inside the hut, and followed him?

Agonizing, she strained her eyes up-

on the open strip between the two lines of larches. But for that strip, they could have escaped detection. Now, she knew, the igloo must inevitably be seen, as soon as the policemen passed.

They were passing! Mary held her breath. Her heart was thumping heavily. She could not have moved now had she wanted to.

Then she saw one of the policemen stop, turn toward her, and raise his arm. His voice was borne faintly on the wind. The other swung about. They were pointing toward the igloo. There was no hope now. And suddenly the strained sinews relaxed, and Mary struck another of the matches.

Then unexpectedly, in a lull of the wind, the birch bark caught.

They were coming across the ice toward her. They were on the bank now, and striding up the slope upon their snowshoes. One of them called again, and Mary waved her hand to him in answer. After that she had nothing to do but wait.

Fifty yards, thirty, twenty. The stocky man in the lead touched his cap as he stood before her, looking at her in wonder.

"Good morning, ma'am. Didn't reckon to find ladies in these parts. I'm Corporal Rowlands, of the police, and this is Constable Shadwell."

The other, a fair-haired young fellow, touched his cap, too.

"You must have had a tough time in the storm, ma'am," the corporal continued. "Built an igloo, I see. The chap that built that must have done some traveling in northern parts. A right smart idea; saved your lives, I reckon. Your husband, ma'am?"

"No," answered Mary, and could get no further. She saw the furtive look of suspicion in the corporal's eyes.

"How many's in your party, if I might ask, ma'am?"

But before the girl could answer, Yorke appeared, crawling through the low entrance of the snow-hut. Behind him appeared the figure of Adair. The two men stood upright, facing the policeman.

YORKE'S transformation was complete. He was wearing the tattered clothes that had been Adair's. His very bearing had changed. There was no sign of the policeman in this scarecrow figure, slouching at Adair's side, and exhaling fumes of whisky.

Beside him, clothed in the semi-uniform that Yorke had worn, stood Adair. Rowlands's eyes narrowed as he took in the two figures.

"Policeman?" he asked Adair.

"You've hit it, corporal," answered Adair jauntily. "I'm Sergeant Knowles, of the Prince Edward outfit. I've been out on patrol, trying to have a crack at that fellow Winston. Well, Winston got away as usual, but I happened upon this trapper and his wife, pretty nearly starved, and I'm taking them down to the Pas."

"Trapper, eh? But I thought you just told me that this man was not your husband," said the corporal to Mary.

Silence followed. Then Rowlands grinned amiably and turned to Adair again.

"I get you, sergeant," he said. "You're trying to string me. Don't know as I blame you. Maybe I'd do the same thing myself if I had a badly wanted prisoner, and a couple of policemen butted in on me. However, it ain't necessary to hand me out that story. This feller's Winston. I ain't going to try to steal from you the glory of catching him, Sergeant Knowles. Glad you got him, I'm sure, and we'll all mush along to the Pas together."

"Well, corporal, I guess you've hit it," answered Adair jauntily. "Yes, this fellow's Winston, and this woman was at his quarters up in the Spirit Lake district. Sorry to be the first in the field, old chap, but the Prince Edward outfit had to make good after letting him slip through their fingers so

many times before. I didn't have any trouble with him. I guess he's glad to give up after what he's been through."

An inarticulate cry broke from the girl's lips. She stepped forward, her eyes blazing, and laid her hand upon Adair's arm. Yorke intervened. He turned toward Rowlands.

"Yes, I'm Ralph Winston," he muttered sullenly. "I'm ready to go down and stand my trial. And I'm damn glad that it's all over."

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"YOU must keep silent!" Yorke murmured. "Don't you see it's only for awhile, so as to give Gerald the chance to make good his escape? Why, if ever it came to a trial I'd be identified by a score of people! You don't suppose this bluff is going to last forever, do you?"

It was the night following the appearance of the two policemen at the igloo. The four had started southward immediately, and were now camped at a portage on the trail running toward the Petit Pas, from which the patrol had come.

Corporal Rowlands had suggested, with more than a hint of insistence, that Adair should accompany them back to that point with his prisoners, and Adair, whom they knew as Sergeant Knowles, had assented, after an ineffectual attempt to persuade Rowlands that he could take the two back to Prince Edward single-handed.

It was easy for Yorke to see that Rowlands and Shadwell were not at all favorably impressed by the self-styled policeman.

"Not my job to tell you how to run your show, Knowles," Rowlands had told Adair. "But it's my opinion you're making the mistake of your life trusting that girl. She'll take the first chance to slip the cuffs off Winston, and the pair of them will get clean away. Never trust women when you're taking in their man, sergeant."

And the two policemen had kept Mary under surveillance throughout the day. That night she had had a few minutes' opportunity to see Yorke.

"But you'll be punished for helping Gerald to escape," she said. "They may send you to jail for years."

Yorke shrugged his shoulders. "Would you rather have your brother placed on trial for his crime?" he asked. "You know what that would mean."

Horror and uncertainty held the girl silent. She slipped away through the darkness. Yorke turned once more to the consideration of his problem, racking his brains to find a way out of the dilemma into which his impulsive act had plunged him.

A life for a life! His life was debited, and he must repay the debt. That much was clear. But he saw that there was going to be hard sledding before Adair's opportunity for escape materialized.

Rowlands and Shadwell, though it had never entered their heads that Knowles might be the very man whom they had come north to find, had been looking askance at him more and more throughout the day—and this was only the first day of the return journey.

There was the fact that Knowles had had to borrow a pair of handcuffs to fasten his prisoner. And there was the smell of hooch on Knowles's breath.

"YORKE! For God's sake tell me what I'm going to do! I've never been a policeman!" whimpered Adair, a little later.

"I'll tell you what you've got to do, Adair. In the first place, throw away that filthy hooch you've been swilling all day. Got to keep your spirits up, have you? Well, find out some other method. Policemen don't drink when they're on duty, and guarding a prisoner. Try to feel like a man, Adair,

and then you'll look like a man, and that's not so far from looking like a policeman."

"It's all very well for you to preach to me, Yorke," whined Adair, "but you're not standing in the shadow of the gallows. I tell you I've got to get away as quick as I can. I want you to advise me, Yorke. It—it's not fair to you, placing you in this situation," he went on, while Yorke looked at him in contempt that he was unable to conceal. "I'm going to make a bolt for it to-morrow night. I know a hang-out about a hundred miles away, where Lateau has a cache of hooch—"

"Yes," said Yorke.

"You can still let them think you're Winston, and let those fellows bring you in. They won't drop you to go after me."

"Now listen to me again," said Yorke. "I'm doing this for your sister's sake, Adair. But there's a condition attached, and that is that you play the man. Never mind what those men think of you. Maybe they'll think that you've got into bad habits while you were alone on the trail. Such a situation has been known before. Whatever they suspect, they won't suspect that you and I have traded places. You'll go on down to the Petit Pas, which, if I remember rightly, isn't very far from your old stamping-grounds, when I knew you as Beale. Then you'll have your chance to make your getaway. And make it clean, Adair. We'll talk that over later. That's your one chance. If you try to bolt before we reach the Pas, you'll get caught, and—well, I shall not be able to do anything more for you."

Adair's shifty eyes were working in his head like the eyes of a trapped beast.

"You'll give me your word at once to do that, Adair," said Yorke, "or I shall tell Rowlands the facts."

"For God's sake, don't do that, Yorke!" cried Adair, so loud that Yorke raised his manacled hands to threaten him into silence. "I'll do anything you say. I swear that you can trust me!"

Adair's courage, if ever he had possessed any, had gone to fragments under the strain, showing a broad yellow band beneath the veneer of manhood. Yorke watched him as he withdrew a few feet to compose himself for the night.

"And that thing," he reflected bitterly, "is the brother Mary worships!"

LONG before the party reached the Petit Pas, Rowlands had quietly ousted Knowles from the charge of Yorke, and Adair had accepted the situation. Rowlands, though he did not place Mary under arrest, kept her under close surveillance. Nor did he permit her to speak to Yorke again. At night Rowlands and Shadwell took turns keeping guard over their prisoner. There was no relaxing of their vigilance, and Knowles they ignored.

Day after day, in this manner, the party mushed down toward the Petit Pas. At last they reached the outskirts.

Trappers' cabins appeared, then prospectors' shacks. Then came a railroad workers' camp—and at last the Petit Pas itself.

It had changed out of all recognition since the days when Yorke had known it. What had been a mining and lumber settlement had become a sizable town, and on all sides were evidences of the advance of civilization.

The sub-divisional post occupied the site of an old pioneer fort, on a low elevation between the river and the lake, overlooking the town. Somehow as always when a patrol returns, the news of their coming had spread; before they reached the fort the news had circulated that the patrol had brought back the notorious outlaw, whose crime, committed in the vicinity, had by no means been forgotten.

Probably there were none in the Petit Pas who had known Adair at all intimately in bygone days, possibly none of the few inhabitants of that period

was still to be found. Certainly it was on Yorke that the gathering throngs fixed their gaze as he walked between Rowlands and Shadwell, with Adair, ghastly in his tattered uniform, bringing up the rear with Mary.

They passed through the post entrance and across the little square to the inspector's office, the crowd following them. The officer, who had already heard of the patrol's return, was standing, waiting to receive them.

"Shut that door!" he ordered, as the crowd pressed forward. "Well, Rowlands, you're back: successful?" He shot a glance at Yorke.

"Well, sir, we've got our man, but —this is Sergeant Knowles, of the Prince Edward Post. We found him with Winston, and this girl. Sergeant Knowles has the credit of making the arrest. We've brought the girl in as a material witness."

"Well, Knowles, I congratulate you," said the inspector, turning to Adair. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow, nevertheless. "I must say, I thought you people were out of the running. We've got two of your detachment in barracks here; they stopped the day before yesterday for supplies."

He touched the bell on his desk, and an orderly appeared at the inner door. "Send in those two men from Prince Edward."

Yorke waited, in a suspense that grew each second till the door opened, and two policemen entered and saluted. And then Yorke realized that he had known all the time who they would be.

They were Sergeant Cummins and Corporal Bennett!

CHAPTER XVII.

"IDENTIFY THIS MAN."

YORKE had always known that Cummins hated him, in spite of the latter's professions of friendship, but he had never realized the depths of that hatred until he looked into the greenish eyes, aglow with malice and puzzled uncertainty. Cummins, who had certainly never expected to see Yorke at the Petit Pas, and in the rags and tatters of Adair's four years' old clothing, was swallowing hard and trying to take in the situation, which at present was completely obscure to him.

Bennett, on the other hand, was grinning at Yorke in frank recognition. His idea was that Yorke had brought in the murderer and had him put in the cells, and that Adair was a member of the Petit Pas detachment. It would certainly pay him, therefore, to be friendly toward the hero of the occasion.

"Well, boys, I've got to congratulate your detachment on having put it all over the Petit Pas outfit," said the inspector handsomely. "Here's Sergeant Knowles, of your crowd, with Winston. I didn't know you had another patrol of one scouting around the north, but Sergeant Knowles got Winston and this woman single-handed, and was bringing them in when he fell in with Rowlands and Shadwell here. I'm going to see that you Prince Edward people get all the credit. Winston, of course, remains here for trial. You'll have every opportunity of being properly represented, Winston, and I caution you that any statement you may make will be used against you. The woman will have to be detained as a witness pending the trial. What is this woman's name, and what is her relationship to the prisoner, if any?" he asked Adair.

"She calls herself Mary, sir. Declined to give particulars," faltered Adair. "She seemed to be living with the prisoner in his hang-out up north."

The insult, the hideous betrayal of Mary's character came to Yorke like an electric shock. Base as he had known Adair to be, it had never entered his head that the man would deliberately traduce his own sister, who had suffered and sacrificed so much for him, to further his own escape.

And he saw Mary start and quiver at the words.

"That's a lie!" Yorke shouted, leaping forward.

Instantly Rowlands and Shadwell were gripping him tight. "Come, none of that, my man!" said the inspector sharply. Then, to the orderly: "Chase that crowd out of the barracks, Regan!" as the murmur of the excited spectators, who had seen the scene through the window, came to their ears. "Get the orderly sergeant, clear the square, and close the gates!"

ADAIR'S words had broken down the girl's last barriers of self-control. For days she had been upon the verge of madness, torn between the two dominating motives, not knowing what to do, unable to trust her brother and unable to have word with Yorke.

Now, with everything dissolving, her fundamental nature asserted itself. She would have done with this deception, which could lead nowhere; she could only be straight and frank. She stepped forward quickly, her face livid, her fists clenched, her eyes blazing.

"I'm going to tell you the truth!" she cried. "This is my brother, Gerald Adair, whom you knew as Winston, and this is Sergeant Yorke, of the Prince Edward detachment. Sergeant Yorke came to where we were living, to arrest my brother. He was attacked by two of the Lateau gang, and he killed them. Then he fell ill from pneumonia, and we nursed him back to health, Gerald and I, and so he promised—he promised that he would let Gerald go. He planned to escort us south across the border, but these two policemen met us on the way, and, to save Gerald, he changed identity with him. It was because he felt that he owed us his life, and had to repay it. I swear I'm speaking the truth.

"Gerald's been a fugitive for four years, but he killed that man in self-defense. He's told me all about it. Any jury will acquit him when it knows the facts. I'm tired of this deception, and I can't let Sergeant Yorke suffer because he tried to help me. I'm telling you the truth now, inspector. Gerald is ready to face his trial, and when it's over he'll be a free man!"

Stupefied by the girl's outburst, by the violence of her manner as much as by its substance, the inspector had listened to her in silence. So did the rest.

Yorke broke it. His mind had registered the absolute incredulity with which the statement had been received. The presence of Cummins and Bennett made discovery inevitable. But Yorke meant to play his game out to the end.

"It's no good trying that game, Mary," he said wearily. "Nobody will believe you. You're only complicating things and making it worse for me."

He turned to the inspector. "Please take no notice of what she's been saying," he said. "She's stood by me like a brick, and I suppose any woman who loved a man would do as much. She's my sister, though—that's the only part of it that's true. And when this fellow hinted at anything but that he lied, damn him, he lied!"

YORKE, whose senses seemed preternaturally acute, was conscious of some indefinable change in Cummins's manner. He had made his protest without hope, certain that Cummins would identify him for the man he was. And now, incredulous though he still must be, he read in Cummins's quick whisper to Bennett, the possibility that Cummins would support him.

Actually there was nothing strange in Cummins's mental processes. Randall had told Cummins to get Yorke, to see that he didn't leave the tundra alive. In that ambition Cummins had definitely failed. But Cummins knew that, more urgent still to Randall than Yorke's death, was the keeping of Adair out of the hands of the police.

He had no inkling of the reason that had impelled Yorke to play his extraordinary rôle, but he saw in it an incredibly lucky opportunity to snatch Adair out of the hands of justice, and give him his chance of escaping. And for that Randall would add a large sum to the fat bank account that Cummins had at Prince Edward.

Cummins's time had actually expired while he was on patrol, but that would have made no difference. If he played up to Yorke long enough to enable Adair to make his get-away, he could laugh at the police and take his departure to some place where the long arm of the police was powerless.

Cummins had seen all this, and had weighed in Bennett with his schemes in that moment's whisper. Bennett, a supple tool in Cummins's hands, would make no protest. And this was what Yorke had read in Cummins's face.

"I swear to you that I've spoken the truth!" cried Mary again. "This man is Sergeant Yorke of the police, and this is my brother, Gerald Adair!"

"Really? It sounds quite like a romance," sneered the inspector. "I think you didn't understand, madam, that these two men are from the Prince Edward detachment." He indicated Cummins and Bennett. "Please identify this man!" he commanded Cummins, jerking his finger at Adair.

"This man is Sergeant Yorke, of our detachment," answered Cummins blandly.

"Yorke? Nonsense! You mean Knowles!" snapped the inspector.

"No, I mean Yorke, sir. The girl's story's a lie, of course, to save the prisoner, who answers the description of Ralph Winston, as we received it. But this man who brought him in is Yorke. There's no Sergeant Knowles in our detachment, and as for Yorke, why, I've known him for a long time."

"Yorke?" the inspector gasped. "You mean *the* Yorke?"

"Quite so, sir. He was dishonorably discharged, as you no doubt know, and he started off north to arrest this man Winston, I suppose with the idea of getting reinstated. Well, he's done it. Bennett and me would know Yorke anywhere, and that's him."

Bennett nodded.

"BRING in your prisoner!"

The inspector's words rang through Yorke's head without conveying any especial meaning to him. He stood dumfounded at Cummins's attitude, trying in vain to attach some meaning to it.

"Bring in your prisoner!" What had the inspector meant by that? Who was the prisoner, and why had Cummins and Bennett left the office?

Yorke gathered his wits together. A miracle had saved the situation, had saved Adair for Mary; he must not let himself falter till the end of the game was reached.

Cummins and Bennett were returning to the office. With them was the orderly, Regan, and with the three was a huge, red-haired, shambling savage of a man, with a red beard, and tiny eyes, screwed into slits by the suns and winds of the tundra. He shuffled forward and faced the inspector uneasily.

"Lateau! Attention!"

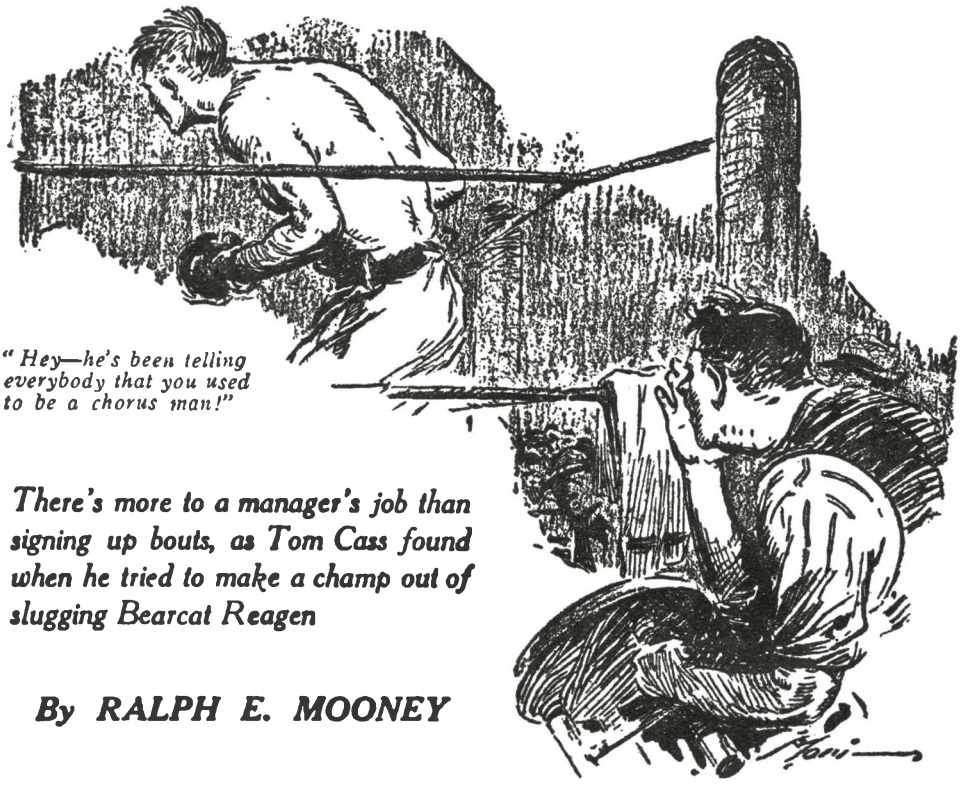
The savage straightened himself and grinned ferociously as he turned to look at Yorke.

"Do you know this man?" The inspector demanded. "Have you ever seen him before? If you have, name him."

"Do I know him? Sure I know him!" The very tone was strange, as if long absence from civilization had made the natural English difficult. "Sure I know him! Why wouldn't I, when we've been three years together? I dunno what he calls himself now, and he wasn't never strong on names, but I allus understood he went under the name of Winston!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

He Had To Have a Reason



"Hey—he's been telling everybody that you used to be a chorus man!"

There's more to a manager's job than signing up bouts, as Tom Cass found when he tried to make a champ out of slugging Bearcat Reagen

By RALPH E. MOONEY

ONE day I was in the kitchen when it just happened that an old fellow came up selling wire rat traps and kitchenware.

"Want a rat trap?" he asked.

"No," said I.

"You wouldn't," he remarked.

Somehow I realized that before me stood a literary gold mine. I mean to say that before me stood an astonishing character.

"What is your name?" I asked. "You look to me like a rather astonishing character."

"My name is Tom Cass," he answered, "but my first name ought to be Jack."

Dazed with more astonishment, I invited him into the kitchen. I pushed a buzzer, summoning my stenographer, and Mr. Cass immediately began to unfold a tale. I am going to give it to you word for word. I think you will agree that it is a remarkable slice of raw life. A slice, too, of a life that is rapidly passing.

If any one doubts the authenticity of this surprising human document, I am all set for him. I have affidavits from Novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, from Petroleum V. Nasby, famous humorist, and Novelist E. P. Roe, attesting the fact that it is truly the work of astonishing old Tom Cass. These testimonials are on exhibition in my kitchen. Here is old Tom's narrative:

WELL, the laugh to me is that when they started all the talk about morons I thought they meant somebody else. I never figured I was elected. I got good marks in

school and I never took bad money without passing it on right away. Now I finish by landing myself a seat on the international board of dumb-bells without giving more than twice the ordinary price for it.

I'm the man who discovered Bearcat Reagen. Up until I quit, I was Reagen's manager. I quit, understand? I resigned to go traveling for my health. If I hadn't started traveling fast and early, I wouldn't have had any health left to travel for. It was that serious.

I first saw Reagen's peculiarity in Nacogdoches, Texas. He was losing a fight to a Mexican that called himself Battling Hennessey. Reagen had survived the first round, but was not half conscious; and believe me, half conscious for him wasn't much. I got up in his corner and whispered something to him. I didn't think what I was saying, I was just talking wild because he had lost four fights already and this was his last chance with me. On the level, I was getting ready to say good-by to him when he woke up.

"Reagen," I says, pretending to plead with him, "are you going to let this wop flatten you after he's said you are a yellow pup, the son of a crippled Scotch collie and a hairless poodle?"

Reagen's head lopped over and he looked at me.

"Did he say that about me? Did he?"

"Make him eat it," I says.

He seemed to take a brace. I noticed his eyes clearing up.

"Eat it?" he answers. "I'll make him eat boxing gloves. I'll make him so sick of leather he'll never order anything but vegetables till he's ninety-five years old. I won't let no man insult my mother."

The gong tapped and Reagen jumped up.

"Take that back," he growls as he meets Hennessey, "take that back about me being a yellow pup."

The Mexican showed his teeth.

"You go straight t'ell, boy," he says. "I don't take back nothin' from a punch bag."

There was a lot of thuds. Then a flop. The Mexican was on his back, his lips still moving. He was going on talking to himself. He got up, looking like he was listening to church bells, and he laid down half a second later, looking like he'd just heard bad news. They were five minutes bringing him to.

I was almost as near knocked out as Hennessey. I couldn't dope it out, but some way Reagen had showed a horrible punch; what I mean, a punch that when a man's got it, he never needs science, but just a place to strike, like lightning. I don't know where Reagen kept the dynamite hid, ordinarily.

"Listen, boy," I said, in the dressing room, "that's the stuff for you. Fast and furious. No more boxing. Just jump in and finish it. Use that jolt of yours and there's no fighter in the world, good or bad, that won't spend the rest of the night holding his jaw and wondering what mistakes he made."

"Sure," he answered, "sure, I get you. Is it too late for a picture show, do you think?"

A week later, Reagen stepped into the ring against a punk that couldn't have bought a license to be sparring partner to a rubber doll. He got in front of everything the punk started and finally accommodated by falling on his chin and putting himself to sleep for ten minutes.

I got to thinking. What was it had done the trick the first time? I remembered the off-hand lie I'd told about the Mexican. Reagen had gone at him with: "Take that back," and that meant something, I said. I was right. That was the secret. I gradually worked it out to this: Reagen had to have a reason to fight. Get him red-headed mad before a fight and he would pile in and score with all he had, and all he had was a plenty. But start him

cold and figure on his getting mad after he was hurt a little, and he would get hurt so bad he couldn't hear the referee counting.

I arranged a match in Brooklyn and just before the battle began, I said:

"Boy, you ought to jump in and pound this man's head off. He's been telling everybody that you used to be a chorus man in a musical comedy."

The result was as near manslaughter as the club dared allow.

WHAT was it eventually made Reagen a champion? His awful, ungodly punch. Who made him champion? Me. I was the guy that invented the reasons that started that punch from the place he tried to keep it hid, up his sleeve.

Now, there's lots of managers that take all the credit for their men, but there's only been one in the history of the world that deserved it: me. Because what I did was no trifle. The easy lies I begun with didn't last. After Reagen had won about six fights, he wouldn't listen to them.

"This bird says you are the lowest blank-blank that ever put on a glove," I told him one night.

He gave me the razz.

"I don't care what this bird says," he answered, all excited with the lights and noise, "this one or any other. I'm too good a butcher to bother how the meat talks about me."

After which he went in the ring and fought like any goof that is over-confident. The other man had heard of his punch and was scared to mix with him or Reagen wouldn't have lasted the opening round.

"Listen," I says, after the bell, "you didn't wait to hear why he said that about you. He's going around telling a story that you ran away from home and let your mother starve to death. That's why—"

Red fire came in his eyes again.

"That's a lie," he says. "I never ran away from home. They sent me—"

The gong tapped and he got up and faced his man.

"Take that back," he growled. "Take that back what you said about me!"

See what I got into? I had to use deceitfulness and strategy and schemes, new stuff every fight. New and better stuff. I had to be careful and deep.

When we took on Jeff Billings, I got a vaudeville actor to go into Reagen's room in the hotel, dressed as a bellhop.

"Listen, Mr. Reagen," the actor says, "could I tell you something? Listen, this Jeff Billings owns a house up in town here, and he rented it to me mother. And one day last winter, when it was snowing hard, Jeff come around to get his rent and we couldn't pay so he moved us out onto the pavement and me mother caught pneumonia and died."

The actor was good. He got real tears in his eyes.

"Revenge," he says, "is all I want, Mr. Reagen. And if you'll go in there and clean this bird, why, I ain't rich, but I'll give you this little watch she left to me, with a lock of her hair in it. It's all I got, but it's yours if you win."

Reagen thought this over for an hour and went in and dropped Billings through the ropes and then took the watch, which I had bought from a pawn shop with his own money and had put a lock of my hair in it. He carried it for a long time afterward and, believe me, I've seen him looking at it and crying. All told, that was the best I ever pulled on him, I guess.

Well, we got a match with Dillard, the champion. I hired another actor to send a note to Reagen from a hospital. "Please come and see me as a favor to a dying man," it said. Reagen went there and the actor laid in bed and told a story how Dillard had robbed him once in a crooked fight deal.

"Don't let that man make any more money," he begged. "Stop him. Make him suffer. You'll have my blessing if you do."

Dillard's seconds threw a towel in the ring at the beginning of the fourth round.

I KEPT Reagen champion for years. The minute a contract was signed, I began to study what the next sob story would be. I used all my friends and relatives as principals in the continuities, not to mention half a dozen confidence men and gamblers.

Once I even hired a whole moving picture company to put over a little heart-throb drama while Reagen was sitting in the lobby of a hotel. That was real art, that was. Nobody asked him for revenge, nobody even seemed to notice him, but they talked so he got an earful that made him knock out Big Bill Watts. Oh, I had to be thorough. The boy couldn't help wondering how it was he kept getting tangled up in these sad stories, so everything had to look more and more like an acicdent. Reagen was only champion as long as my brains and the supply of smooth actors held out.

Then I got into this jam. We had made a wad of money and Reagen had salted his share down and had got married and had begun to talk about retiring from the fight game. While I had lost the clothes off my back trying to put over a patent for a friend of mine.

I had to keep Reagen working until he could win me another stake; and even when I persuaded him to do that —arguing against his wife, too—why, I was up against it anyhow. I would have liked to get him about three more fights before we risked the title, but the list of easy marks and money-makers was used up. There was no way to get the kind of match I wanted.

Worse still, there was a tough challenger in sight, this Dike McGann. McGann had traveled the same route we did; he had flattened the old champ and Billings and Watts. And now he was hanging around challenging us every odd week and acting like a bad dream on a dark night. And who was his manager? Nobody but slick old Marcus Wade, who has hated me for thirty years and will hate me all his life, he says, just because I got a kid to break a contract with him, once upon a time. A nice combination, if you ask me.

Well, I had to come to it. They got a promoter to post a forfeit and say he'd handle the fight. There was no answer but to name a date when we'd sign articles.

Dike McGann gave me a dirty look after we finished with the papers. Marcus Wade came over and stuck his nose up in my face.

"All right," he says, "now we've forced you to it, and we're going to make you tired you ever heard of us. You gave me a fine hosing once, and we're going to make you feel it."

"All right," I says, "you can figure out different ways to do that after Dike wakes up in the dressing room."

"Different ways," he laughs. "Say, listen, I've got you on the pan already. Me, I'm the guy that got you broke. I knew what a dub you was with your money, and it was me tipped Thompson off you'd be a good prospect for that patent rat trap. Now, you're in a fix where you got to win this fight to keep outside the poorhouse, and you ain't going to win it."

"Oh, it ain't that bad," I tells him. "You got to pay heavy to even fight us, being only second class challengers."

That got his goat.

"Second class? Say," he growled, "we may pay big guarantees, but my odds is five to one you don't stay around to collect."

GIVING me something to think over, you might say? The articles was signed and the date set. We began training. That is, the Bearcat done exercises, while I tried heavy head work.

One thing stood out like the light

at a police station. We were at the end of the rope. The Bearcat hadn't overtrained during the last year, and to win this time the sketch I would put on for him must be a lallapaloozer.

He wasn't going to fall for no ordinary busted fire escapes and ruined lives. Not off strangers. The boy had heard every kind of known tragedy in the world, and he'd be a regular sucker if he'd swallow any more.

Yes, and my poor old bean was rattling like a worn-out taxicab. It had carried the pitcher to the well once too often. Lacking a red-hot racket, why, there wasn't a idea came to me except second-class ones that smelled musty even to me. My head felt like it was filled with cotton. I took to reading patent medicine ads and taking tonics that were supposed to pep me up. They increased my appetite, but never helped anywhere above my chin.

It came to within a month of the fight. Reagen left his wife at home and settled in camp for hard training. Scouts that came from McGann's headquarters didn't bring good news. Dike was shaping into a whirlwind. From all I could get on him, he had a punch in both arms and had the edge on us in speed. I began to have a light fever every evening as I thought things over.

Then one day a woman came to see me.

"I know some stage people," she says, "and they told me something about you that made me think I could help you."

I felt cold all over. Of course, I was pretty sure my secret was getting known, but I hated to have her come out and talk about it. I remembered Wade's talk about not staying to collect, and I smelled frame-up.

"What do you mean?" I says.

"I mean I think I could do something that would make your Mr. Reagen feel mad at Dike McGann. Something like you had done the time he knocked out Mr. Watts."

What could she do? I asked. She said she had it in mind she would pretend to be Dike McGann's deserted wife.

"Stop, lady," I says. "It won't do. I worked that one when we fought the Frenchman."

"Well, then—" she began.

"I don't know of anything now," I went on. "Personally, if you'll take a tip, this here is a grudge fight, and there won't be anything of the kind necessary."

With which I sent her away, and the minute she was out of the room I rang up a private detective agency. The detectives made her, all right, and when I got their report I found she was a Miss Gibson and that she went straight from me to McGann's headquarters. The last straw that was. The opposition was onto me, and I didn't know who I could trust any more. If that woman had reached Reagen, say, she'd have planted a double cross on me somehow. I felt like I was sitting on loose gunpowder, catching sparks from a bonfire.

A COUPLE days later I was in the training quarters watching Bearcat get a rub down, and a little man with a mustache came in.

"Mr. Tom Cass?" he called.

"Right here," I answered.

"I represent Knight and Knight, the lawyers," says this little bird.

"Last night and to-morrow night?" I asks.

"Pretty good," he answers, "but I've heard it before. Well, Mr. Cass, you haven't answered our letters—"

"I never got any letters from the Knight brothers, dirty and dark," I answered.

"Very well, if you say so, you didn't," he went on nastily. "Anyhow, we have received no reply to letters addressed to your hotel, so I'm here to warn you on behalf of Miss

Gibson that if you don't make good and marry her, we'll sue you for fifty thousand dollars."

Everything went spinning around my head.

"Say," I said, "how do you get that way?"

"We don't," he answered, "but how do you? Do you think there is no law in this country? D'you think you can do as you please with a girl? Half a dozen people at your hotel know that she came to see you less than a week ago. They noticed her crying as she left."

I made a pass at him, and he dodged. "Get out of here," I yelled. One of the rubbers grabbed me. "I don't know any Miss Gibson; I never heard of her."

"We'll let the jury decide on that," answered the lawyer from the door.

He ducked outside and left me in the soup, and that didn't make duck soup either. Reagen had room for just one idea in his head, and they'd fixed it so that idea was suspicion of me. He was sore on guys that treated women mean, and I'd been framed to look like the worst kind of mutt. Of course, I tried to explain it away, but I didn't have much chance. That lawyer had made his play too well.

Marcus Wade had taken a trick at my own game. He followed it up, too. Half a dozen times, when I went through the lobby with Reagen, that Miss Gibson darted up and pretended to plead with me to treat her right. Reagen used to shake his head and say: "Play square, Tom, play square." I didn't get rid of her till I complained to the police, which didn't help my standing any, as you can guess.

It was just chance that opened up a way to clean those birds. Exactly a week before the fight I happened to step into Reagen's room, and he wasn't there, and I saw a letter on the table that was signed, "Sis."

Not being a hunk of beef, I was less than a second getting the address off it, and I fired a wire off to her, with expense money going with it. "Come at once," I says. "Important. For your brother's sake."

Also, I directed her to get off at a little station outside New York, and I sent Barney Flynn, a trainer that had been with me ten years, up to get her. He brought her into town at nine o'clock at night and put her in a hotel, and I went to see her and laid the case before her.

"He'll lose sure, if you won't help," I told her, "and you're the only woman in the world, outside his wife, that he'd pay any attention to just now. Will you try and put it over?"

WELL, she was a romantical little thing, and she fell for the idea. When I explained the plot I'd doped up, she wanted to quit, but by begging hard I got her to say she'd put it over for me.

"It's not nice," she said, "but it's for brother John, after all, isn't it?"

"Yes," I answered; "and you know the old saying about all is fair in love and war, and believe me, lady, this is war."

I sent her up to a little hotel about a Hundred and Eighty-Ninth Street, and told her not to come down town until I called. Then, feeling safe for the first time in weeks, I lit a cigar and went strolling around with my chest out. At the training quarters I called in the reporters and, while Reagen was listening, I handed out an interview.

"It is now," I says, "only a few days until the big show, and the champion is in such perfect condition that there's no question as to the outcome. Dike McGann will be lucky if he lasts half a round. He'll probably complain that they turned the lights out on him just as the gong sounded, but those at the arena will know better.

"Which reminds me, gentlemen, of a laughable thing that occurred a week ago. The McGann people, knowing of Mr. Reagen's implicit confidence in me,

tried to shake his faith by sending a lawyer in here with a fake breach of promise suit on behalf of a girl called Miss Gibson. This was so ridiculous that we all laughed heartily over it for several hours, but the funny part is that no suit has ever come up. I wish, just for a joke, you would issue a public challenge for Miss Gibson to bring suit and present her proofs at once."

"That's the idea," nods Reagen. "If she's got anything on him, let her show it."

This interview caused somewhat of a sensation, and the McGann camp waited two editions and then disclaimed all responsibility for the move; and the firm of Knight and Knight rushed into print with a statement that they had been hired by a young woman who had disappeared as soon as the matter became public, so they had no intention of pressing the claim without further instructions.

At three in the afternoon of fight day we weighed in. Afterward I called up Miss Reagen and told her to go see her brother in his room in the hotel. About five o'clock she brought him into my room, which is further along the same hall.

She had red eyes and a secret wink for me. Reagen's eyes were red, too, but not around the lids. No, the red was where it meant business, and he was shivering, he was so mad. He'd forgot all his suspicion of me.

"What do you think?" he raved. "My sister has just told me that she got to know this McGann last year, and he proposed to her and then left town and gave her the laugh. My own sister! D'you know what I'm going to do to that guy? Murder, that's what. And I want you to square the police so they won't stop me."

"Oh, no, brother," moans the little girl. "Be merciful to him—but, oh, I do want you to win. Just win, that's all. So he can't have the laugh on the family for life."

"Win?" says Bearcat. "I'll say win."

SO then they left the room, and I'm not saying all the cheerful thoughts I was having there alone, except I might mention that Miss Reagen was the prettiest trick I've seen in all my long years; but I didn't have time to more than get my pill cooking.

Because, all of a sudden, I heard a little howling noise like what comes from a telephone when there's line trouble, or from a radio when there is plenty of this static.

It was just loud enough to attract my attention, and it came from behind a picture. I looked there, and found a little round black thing, a dictaphone.

Naturally, I wasn't going to put a dictaphone in my own room, so old Marcus Wade must be responsible. That newspaper interview had probably scared him, and now he was onto my whole scheme. I jumped to a telephone in another room, and got the camp boys on watch, and I anchored Reagen in his room in care of his two sparring partners, with instructions to let nobody see him.

Was I wise? Say, inside half an hour they turned away a girl that tried to make a big row and claim she was a friend of Mrs. Reagen's with a message, and two men that said they was newspaper reporters, but neither even had a lead pencil on him.

And that night when we were in the dressing room a telegram came. I read it and tore it up, laughing. It said:

"John, where is sister? She left here a week ago." It was signed, "Father." But it didn't come from out in Cleveland, where Reagen's folks lived. Nothing like that. It had been sent from a station on Twenty-Third Street, New York.

"What's that?" asked Reagen.

"Nothing," I says; "just a tele-

gram. Big Bill Watts challenges the winner."

We went down to the ring. Reagen got in and fretted until they shook hands, and then began to look happy, the way a wild cat does when it sees meat. The gong tapped. I sat up on the edge of my seat, wondering if he couldn't bring it off in two wallops and save me a lot of misery.

Marcus Wade left McGann's corner and came around to me. He was grinning.

"Well, old-timer," he chuckles, "I got to hand it to you. You found our dictaphone, and you've took high, low, jack, so far."

"Yes," I said. "I wasn't asleep all the time."

"You're apt to sleep sound tonight," he comes back. "There's still another point, you know. That's game. High, low, jack, and—"

He stopped, kind of breathless. They feinted and side-stepped a little. Then Reagen started one of his rushes, smashed over a punch that made McGann turn pale, and closed in, landing a lot of jabs to the body. McGann clinched and locked Reagen's arms. I gave a yell, because that looked to me like he was desperate, to go into a clinch so quick. Then I began to feel queer.

McGann was whispering to Reagen, talking fast as he could, and hanging to him.

"Game," sneers Wade into my ear. "This is one trick you don't take. What's Dike telling him? You should ask. Well, Tom, he's telling him who sent money to his sister to come to New York, and who kept her all one week in a secret hotel uptown. He's telling him you're the man who broke faith with her, and you can't help it now."

He stopped again, gasping as the referee broke them and Reagen waded right in. This time, only one punch landed before McGann clinched and talked some more. And this time their scheme worked. McGann got Reagen worried.

The big old boy was so full of suspicion and plots by that time that he couldn't help it, I guess. As they broke he glared over his shoulder at me. Knowing what was in his mind, I couldn't help acting guilty. The way his eyes burned, I felt guilty. At that Reagen took another look, which was just what McGann was waiting for. He swung and caught Reagen on the jaw.

IT was an awful wallop. I groaned as I saw it land, and then began to shiver. Because Reagen didn't fall. He just took it. He staggered a few steps, shook his head, then bore in and met McGann's rush. He never felt that punch any more than if it was a slap from a girl.

He was too blazing, roaring mad to feel it. It's awful to see a man as mad as that. He cut loose and handled McGann like he was a gnat or a mosquito. His punches flashed over like shadows on a wall. Right, left, right, left, right and keno. The fight was finished in two minutes and thirty seconds, with McGann safe from insomnia for half an hour.

I turned on Wade.

"What was he saying?" I yelled. "He was saying put it in my soup and I'll like it better. He was saying do anything but hit me and I'll win. He was—"

Something heavy and awful whizzed past my ear, spinning me around. As I turned I realized it was Reagen's fist that had just missed me. He had jumped out of the ring, and now was being held by Barney Flynn and two policemen and three reporters, while he struggled to get loose. His eyes were still red, and he was growling like a wild man. I couldn't make it out at first. Then I had a cold chill. He was trying to get to me!

"Lemme go!" he was b e g g i n g. "Lemme go! I just plastered one ly-

ing crook, and now I want the man that's took my sister's good name by paying her bills while she stayed in a hotel here alone for a whole week."

What did I do? What would you have done? I tried to explain, but could I explain that she stayed in the hotel just to pep him up for the fight by lying to him? Could I explain without admitting that I had paid her bills? I tried, as I say, but the more I talked, the madder he got. Finally he made a big effort and almost broke away from the men that held him.

When that happened my feet began to move for me, although the rest of me felt paralyzed. Wade's dirty grin and Reagen's eyes went fading to the rear.

I went to the box office. "Give me an advance," I said. "Give me an advance, quick."

Old Arkansas Brown, the promoter, who was checking the tickets, looked sad.

"This Miss Gibson," he says, "has filed suit and restrained you from touching the funds."

I almost fainted.

"Never mind," says Arkansas, who is a pretty good friend of mine. "Never mind, it's a fake, and will be dismissed next week. Wade tells me he's framed you before the fight, when he's expecting to win. You were always square with me, Tom, so I'll help out. I'll cash your check for a couple of grand, if you want. There's no law against my cashing checks."

I wrote a check and got the money. I spent the night hiding in a ferry dock and in the morning I telephoned to Barney Flynn.

He told me that Reagen and his wife talked to the sister nearly all night and wouldn't believe a word she said about the scheme to make him win, at first, and then got sore at the idea of my dragging his sister into such a mess, anyhow.

He had taken his sister over to the station to send her home, and his wife had persuaded him to retire as champion—and then he had sworn to track me down if it took the rest of his life.

So, friend, here I am, peddling the Thompson patent rat trap that I invested in, through Marcus Wade's dirty work. I'm really a man with money, but do I dare show it by wearing nice clothes and living decent? No; because I'm too well known.

Anywhere I move, somebody is likely to spot me and put the Bearcat on my trail. And I'm too old to clinch with the Bearcat like McGann did. So he would hit me before I could talk him out of it, and when he hits it's like somebody has thrown a hammer through you.

Thank you, sir, you'll find them traps valuable. They are Thompson patent traps, from which no rat can escape.

THE END.

"Come, sir, your sword," demanded Captain Andrews

Captain Nemesis

Recognized at last and commissioned in the American Navy, Nathan Andrews and his hawks of the sea swoop down upon the English men-o'-war

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "The Sword of Vengeance," "Useless," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LIEUTENANT NATHAN ANDREWS, Carolina colonist and descendant of English naval officers, is convicted of aiding colonial deserters from his majesty's ship Avon, on a July night in 1772, through the lying testimony of his foppish rival Lieutenant John Sherburne. Andrews was unable to account for his whereabouts because he had been rescuing Molly Lancaster from a madcap escapade in a gambling house.

Cashiered, and sentenced to Botany Bay, Nathan vows enmity to the English flag. Smallpox sweeps the convict ship, and he, a Yankee ship captain named Jonathan Trumbull, an Irish surgeon Jack O'Hare, an ex-pirate Feathersoft, and some twenty other convicts survive, escaping the wreck in a long boat.

They capture a slaver's bark, renaming it the Santee; and for two years Nathan, under the name of "Captain Nemesis," raids pirates of all sorts, looting their stolen treasure. His men are disciplined and loyal, his ship run like a man-of-war. He falls in with the pirate Red Jerry, who has just seized a ship which had Molly Lancaster aboard; after a bloody struggle, Nemesis conquers the pirate, and takes Molly aboard the Santee.

Charles Carroll, of the colonies, was also rescued. He and O'Hare become close friends, the Irishman telling what

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they have been doing. Unfortunately the other pirates, hating Nemesis, have blamed him for their own worst outrages in sacking towns and torturing people. When Molly learns that Nathan is Nemesis, she shrinks from him in horror, and when he tries to explain, shoots him.

Defiant of the British, Nemesis sails into the harbor of Bridgetown, leaves Molly and Carroll, and sails out again under the guns of the forts and Sherburne's ship Argus.

Late in 1776 he sails into St. Bartholomew to refit; and the friendly French commissioner delivers a letter from Charles Carroll, appointing him and his men to the Navy of South Carolina. It was the first they had heard of the colonies' rebellion against England!

CHAPTER XXII.

LETTER OF MARQUE.

NEMESIS quickly opened the remaining document, which was a formal Letter of Marque granted to the bark Charleston—for such the Governor had wished the vessel to be rechristened. One paragraph especially burned itself into the mind of Captain Nemesis:

> You are hereby licensed and authorized to seize, subdue, take any British Vessels and their Cargoes, and to attack and seize all vessels of war belonging to England.

"To attack and seize all vessels of war!"

His heart beat high! At last to turn on those insolent, harrying ships under the White Ensign—no more running like a frightened thief!

He turned sharply on his heel.

"Mr. Hardy!" He called his silent lieutenant of marines and briefly explained the situation, while that worthy listened with wide eyes.

"You'll take the commission?"

"Aye, by God, that I will," growled the marine officer. "I'm not of the colonies, but if it's to fight the damned English then I'm your man! Look!"

Swiftly he unbuttoned his yellow jacket and threw it on the deck, then pulled up his shirt, laying bare a back that was scarred with rows of horrible red ridges. "Ah! God, how I hate them—pressed I was, and because I'd not pick up the handkerchief of a high and mighty drunkard of an officer. He lied, and this is what they did." Hardy's thin lips parted in a malevolent snarl. "Just to get at 'em I'd die a thousand times."

Shocked by the marine's outburst, M. le Fragon started back, disgust written on his facile features, as he gazed at that mangled flesh.

"*Pardieu*," he murmured, "François le Fragon thanks God he is French. I would not now like to be ze Engleesh sheep that meets ze—what you call her now?—ze Charleston?"

"I know you've suffered, Mr. Hardy," said Nathan gravely as he at last tucked the precious piece of sheepskin in his belt. "So have we all suffered at England's hands and now, gentlemen, we have much to do." He turned to the marine officer again, who was buttoning up his jacket. "I pray you, sir, have your drummer sound the long roll."

As the sullen rattling roll of the drum sounded across the placid lagoon, there came a sudden activity in St. Bartholomew's. The Santee's men, hearing the alarm, dropped whatever they were doing and bolted helter-skelter for the water's edge and, crowding into the gigs, pushed off with frantic speed.

"What's up?" they asked one another as they toiled at the oars.

"The damned British?"

"No, it can't be—the French said there's no ship outside. Why should the long roll sound then?"

Very quickly the Santee's company lined the decks in orderly ranks and

stood in apprehensive silence until Nathan read the momentous news, then as he drew to a close, there burst out a storm of shouting which sent the islanders rushing to arms, fearing that a mutiny had taken place on the pirate ship.

"Down with England's bloody flag! Hurrah! Hurrah!" There was something awesome in the patriotic frenzy of those homeless, friendless men. "Hurrah for the United Colonies of America! Hurrah for Carolina!" They cheered and cheered, while the amazed sea birds circled far out over the bar in alarm.

VAINLY Nathan attempted to speak further. But when the bronzed seamen saw him, tall and dignified at the taffrail, the cheers doubled in intensity, while Nathan's heart throbbed with joy at the tribute from his hard-fighting sea dogs.

"Nemesis! Bully Boy, Nemesis!" they howled, their upturned faces a mass of black, brown and white. "Nemesis!"

At last from sheer exhaustion they fell silent when Nathan gestured for an opportunity to address them further.

"Men," said he in a grave voice, which sounded odd in contrast to the unrestrained outcries reëchoing among the hills back of St. Bartholomew, "men, God in His infinite mercy has given us the opportunity to return to that life for which I believe every one of us yearns. Let us enter into the service of South Carolina with true earnestness and fixity of purpose."

He studied those scarred brown faces below, now become serious. "Among us there are some upon whom the embattled Colonies have no claim—to them I wish Godspeed, should they not wish to remain with us."

"No! No!" rang scattered cries. "We're for ye!"

"Men," continued Nathan, while his gaze wandered over those hard, familiar faces, some of which had fought by his side in countless battles, "men, I shall call upon those who wish to leave the Santee to cross the deck—to the port rail yonder. To them shall be given their full share of the treasure, together with money against their lodgment in St. Bartholomew until the corvette comes to bear them elsewhere. Now"—Nemesis's deep voice rang to the farthest part of the ship—"decide!"

There was considerable craning of necks and shifting of positions among the disordered ranks along the trim, snowy decks, but beyond that no movement.

"Come," called Nathan, when the port rail remained deserted, "do you not understand? Those men who don't wish to take service in the Charleston are to go to the port rail. Come, be brisk, my lads."

Still there was no movement, the port side yet remained tenantless.

"What? All of you?" Nemesis started back in amazement, knowing as he did that a full quarter of the men had been born and bred in England.

"Aye! Aye! Hurrah for Captain Nemesis! Down with the flogging Johnny Bulls!"

Out flashed Nathan's sword. Like an Olympian thunderbolt it flashed on high, while the crew yelled in a delirium of enthusiasm.

"Never shall this sword be sheathed till the flag of an English man-o'-war hangs from its guard."

So saying, Nathan hurled the glimmering steel into the pine boards of the quarter-deck. The weapon stuck there, swaying gently from side to side.

"Nemesis! Captain Nemesis!"

"Nay," cried Nathan above the tumult. "Captain Nemesis and the Santee are no more! In their place are Captain Andrews, and the Charleston in the service of South Carolina."

"Do you think, *messieurs*," suggested M. le Fragon with a deep bow, "that on this so glorious occasion, there should be a grand fête? *Oui?*

And, *mes amis*, I have put by a little champagne, what say you?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FAT PRIZE.

FOR three long weeks they overhauled the Charleston, as the bark had been rechristened. They brought her in shore and by means of blocks and tackles rigged to the palm trunks, careened her so that the sweating seamen could remove the thick incrustation of barnacles, weeds and the other growths accumulated by long months spent in the warm waters of the South Atlantic.

The toilers sent down the spars, ruthlessly condemning those which showed the least crack or flaw, tarred the rigging afresh, and generally overhauled and refitted the bark against the strenuous cruise she was about to undertake.

"Well," observed Trumbull one fine evening, "a brand new ship is the old darling, and can show her heels to any ship o' the line. What were the orders, Cap'n Andrews, concerning our cruise to Charleston?"

"Why," replied Nathan as he leaned on the rail and watched the sunset tint the white walls of St. Bartholomew a deep orange red, "to pick up any stray ships, with especial regard to such as might be laden with munitions of war. Mr. Carroll stated in his account that the colonists are devilish hard put to it to find weapons and money for the Army."

"Money," mused Trumbull, "that at least we've got. 'Twere a main fine thing o' the lads to halve their shares for the good of the State Treasury.

"But, Nat," Trumbull's brown face became serious, "ye should not give yer whole fortune, man. Some day ye'll be picking out a brave lass for yourself, and then—"

"No, Mr. Trumbull," Nathan shook his head deliberately as he felt the old wound touched, "that I'll never do. So you see, it's better that my gold go in a worthy cause. With it the State can fit out four stout ships as good as this."

"Aye," grunted the shipmaster dubiously, "but they'll never find men like you to sail 'em."

Nathan broke into a laugh, which suddenly ceased as he chanced to face the inlet. A brig was crawling into the lagoon, her mainmast a splintered stump, and badly scarred about the hull by shot. That she had suffered terribly in battle was very evident from the fact that her crew were too few even to furl the sails properly, and that she had no boats.

"Put over a boat, Mr. O'Hare," called Nathan sharply, as the stranger's anchor splashed heavily. "I've a notion yonder brig has news."

And she had—a tale of battle, storm and bare escape which all but defied credulity. Her skipper, a wan, ague-shaken man out of Baltimore, told the tale between gasps of his punctured lungs, as he lay on a blood-splotched mattress in the shade of his broken bulwarks.

"Two days agone," he said, "we raised a fleet o' four sail, and hauled off to port, but there was a calm. A whole day we lay in sight of these four ships; Britishers they were, out of the Barbadoes. Three fat-bellied merchants and a trim nasty bulldog. With the night came a breeze, and we tried to escape, but found the man-o'-war a better sailer. For a space she deserted her convoy, which by their course I judge bound for the port of New York. 'Tis there the English have their army headquarters, damn their souls!"

The wounded skipper coughed and spat redly. "But our Indian Prince was no mean sailer, too. When we'd led him a merry chase away from his convoy—so he feared to lose 'em in the dark—he let fly with his broadside and nigh killed the poor Prince. Six

of our little company were slain outright, and four died later, and poor Phil and Jack are like to go any minute." The wounded skipper looked up at Nathan with anxious, pain-brightened eyes. "God knows what I'll find to say to poor Jack's mother, a widow she is, in Provincetown."

SILENTLY Nathan heard the story to the end, of how when the man-o'-war had given up the chase, a sudden storm had carried away the mainmast and sent the Indian Prince flying northward with her cargo of dead and dying.

"And these merchant ships," queried Captain Nathan Andrews, "are they fast sailers?"

"Nay," said the Providence man contemptuously, "heavy-laden and slower nor slow, no Rhode Island skipper'd touch 'em, fat old scows. I tell ye, sir, the man-o'-war was fair chafing at such slow progress."

"What manner of vessels were they?"

"An old-fashioned brigantine with a high poop, a schooner, and a brig with a new strip o' canvas to her mainsail, and the man-o'-war's a full-rigged ship—"

"Of how many guns, think you, Master Shipman?"

The wounded captain scratched his unshaven chin dubiously and looked about the shattered decks uncertainly. "Mought be twenty-five or thirty, then again it mought be more. I couldn't say rightly, sir," he answered at length, "I was a sight too busy to be accounting exact."

Captain Andrews bowed deeply. "I am in your debt, sir. Now one more question and we'll be off to take a look at your friends."

"Eh?" The wounded skipper looked up sharply from his mattress on the poop. "What? Go after him?"

"Why not?"

"He's bigger nor you, sir, and besides all the convoys carries few guns apiece," cried the other in surprise. "I pray you, sir, let be; they've easy got twice the metal of you."

"Nevertheless," insisted Nathan, "we're prodigious keen to meet this convoy. And now, sir, can you tell me what manner of flag fly the ships of South Carolina?"

The wounded man coughed, and then pulled thoughtfully at his long nose.

"Well, sir," he said, "there's so many flags in the colonies these war times, I been't sure, but seems to me it were a pine tree on a white field. Am I right, Esek?"

The crippled brig's second mate shook his head. "No," said he with the air of one who knows whereof he speaks, "that's a flag of New England—the Carolina's flag is blue, with —let me see, a yellow crescent in the upper flagstaff corner."

Hurried as they were to be off, Nathan nevertheless paused at the lovely little residence of M. le Fragon to bid that astonished gentleman an affectionate farewell.

"But, *messieurs*," he protested in dismay, when he appeared at last in dressing gown and skullcap from his interrupted siesta, "but Captain Andrews, you had not planned to leave us yet for three days! What of the ball to-morrow night?"

"The next time we come, I hope, but now we're off, friend le Fragon," cried Nathan, as he wrung that agitated gentleman's hand, "and, if God wills it, to overtake a rich convoy. In the meanwhile, we shall ever be in the debt of St. Bartholomew and you. Pray God, some day we shall be able to repay your help in act, if not in coin."

"Ah! you American colonials," protested the fever-worn Frenchman, "such energy, such verve! I think our friends, *les Anglais,* are in for—what you call it?—one fine drubbing. No? Then you will come back an admiral with a fleet, *n'est-ce pas, Monsieur le Capitaine?*"

From the door of his flower and vine-grown mansion the sorrowful Resident waved the eager Americans adieu. As an afterthought the Frenchman ordered the guns on his futile little bastion to fire a salute of thirteen guns, as the Charleston brought her anchor up on the run and stood out to sea over the lagoon, with white sails falling into being, and men manning the rail in respect to him, M. le Fragon. He sighed a little wistfully and seemed to see in that departure an image of the *beau jeune homme*, François le Fragon, who years ago had gone forth to conquer a kingdom for the Fifteenth Louis of France.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PURSUIT.

CATCHING the strong northeast trades, the bark soon left the luxurious green haven of little St. Bartholomew below the horizon, and started in pursuit of that convoy of which the Indian Prince's skipper had spoken.

That evening the lookout caught the dark line of British Anguilla, a tiny islet thrust up against the sunset to port. With lookouts at the fore and main mastheads, and another on the bows, Nathan shaped a course up the seventieth meridian, trusting to find the convoy following the straightest line to New York.

"Faith, and she's felt the ould weight lifted, same as the rest of us," observed O'Hare, as the Charleston buried her bows to hawse holes in a great blue roller. "The ould darling fair leaps along, with never a worry or shame."

And so it was; never had the swift black bark sailed better. Like a homing swallow she flew along, eager to catch the rich, heavily-gunned fleet ahead.

Day followed night and still no welcome hail from the mastheads. Then the Charleston ran into a heartbreaking calm which held the bark prisoner for forty-eight hours in the blazing sun, while her crew cursed and fretted at the thought of their quarry drawing farther away.

On the day following the end of the calm, good fortune met them in the shape of a Spanish schooner which reported a fleet of four sails had passed the day before. Yes, one of them had appeared to be a ship-rigged vessel, but whether she was a frigate or not, the Spaniard could not say.

Jubilantly, Trumbull clapped on sail, after sail, until the Charleston whirled along with masts that bent like reeds, and flashing spray rose high over her sharp bows.

The following morning a sharp-eyed marine noted a bright yellow orange peel floating alongside, then, later, a discarded tompion was seen, signs which showed that the gap between the privateer and her quarry was rapidly being closed.

Then one crisp autumn morning, a day or so later, Nathan heard at last the cry for which his ship hungered.

"Sail off the weather bow!"

"Set the port stuns'ls, Mr. Trumbull," directed Andrews, "and let's take a look at the stranger."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"We'll be up with them come noon," observed O'Hare as he watched the sails of the distant ship rise higher above the horizon.

"Aye, that we will," replied Trumbull, "if the winds don't fail us again."

While Nathan chafed and tramped the quarter-deck like a caged leopard, three smaller sails were also raised, and at last he permitted himself to believe that indeed he had found the ships he sought. Through his mind ran snatches of Mr. Carroll's supplementary letter.

"Our poor Continentals are hard put," he had written, "they lack guns, powder, uniforms, everything indeed that a soldier needs. With winter ap-

proaching, they will suffer terribly." And again: "It is hard to see the enemy surfeited with food and supplies, while our poor rogues go naked, with scarce enough powder to last a skirmish. If the Cause is to survive this year we must have money, powder and supplies—"

And as the Charleston drew closer to the distant vessels, Captain Andrews registered a solemn oath that those ships ahead would never reach New York to comfort the red-coated troops of Hanoverian George.

"WE may not be able to capture 'em," Captain Andrews remarked to O'Hare, "but at least we can sink 'em!"

Almost angrily the Irishman turned on his superior. "I declare, captain," he said "there are times when I think you are mad—mad as a hatter. Man, don't you realize we've a regular commissioned man-o'-war of the British Navy to deal with?"

Captain Andrews nodded gravely.

"And you speaking of capturing the convoy!" O'Hare gave an expressive shrug. "If we even cripple the bulldog, I'll be happy. And don't forget this is the first time we've really fought a naval vessel. This'll be no awkwardly scrambling corsair. Faith, no! I tell you, Nat,"—in his excitement O'Hare discarded formality — "I'm worried. We can shoot, 'tis true, but so can they. We'll be lucky to cut out a single ship and not go to Davy Jones ourselves."

"Nevertheless I have great faith in our gunners," said Andrews shortly, but the good O'Hare's words had their effect none the less, sending a frown to Nathan's brow as he descended to the deck to superintend the preparations for battle.

High above the deck, seamen were passing chains about the yards, securing them to the mast with this double protection, lest grape and canister sever the hempen ropes which served for every-day use. Chains were also slung from the lower halyard for the same purpose, and as the wind died a mixture of alum and water was splashed on the canvas with intent to lessen the chances of fire.

Spare tiller ropes of rawhide were prepared to steer the ship, should the wheel be carried away. Although the enemy ships were yet more than three miles distant, younkers, the young members of the ship's company, rated below ordinary and able seamen, brought up hammocks full of bedding, and commenced to lace them over the bulwarks to minimize the danger of flying splinters. Others rigged the boarding nettings with minute care and elsewhere men ran to and fro, preparing the ship to the last detail possible, while the wind weakened and weakened until, just as the hulls of the distant ships became visible, there remained barely enough breeze to move the Charleston through the water.

Long and anxiously her officers studied the enemy through their glasses, shifting from one to the other.

"A sloop-o'-war she is," remarked Trumbull with a shake of his little gold earrings, "and a damn big one, too, just like the craft we fell afoul of at Bridgetown. God send she ain't the same; d'ye remember how she smashed us?"

This was indeed a relief to O'Hare, who feared that the ship-rigged vessel might indeed be a frigate of overwhelming force. But there were deep furrows on his forehead as he studied the remainder of the fleet.

"Mark that schooner, sir," he said, and pointed his stubby forefinger at the next to last vessel in the distant convoy. "She'll mount all sixteen guns over and above the man-o'-war's broadside—hum, we have a hot day's work ahead, sir, and no mistake."

Strings of signal flags suddenly began to crawl up yards of the man-o'-war, evidently commanding the two smaller and slower merchantmen to

make all efforts at escape, for those vessels drenched their canvas with sea water to hold the wind. The officers on the Charleston could see the flash of their buckets going over the side in an endless procession. But the sloop and the big schooner shortened sail and sheered off, waiting for that impudent bark to come up for annihilation.

EVEN the stoutest spirits on board the privateer became silent, as gun port after gun port appeared in the white streak of the sloop's side.

"Eighteen guns to her broadside and nine to the schooner," calculated a veteran, as he clung to the weather shrouds and studied the waiting ships; "that makes twenty-seven to our fifteen—"

"Or a total of thirty against fifty-four," commented a gap-toothed marine.

"Main heavy odds, lads," said the first speaker, with a dubious shake of his head; "there'll be a lot of us seeing his last sun to-day."

A beautiful sight it was, to see the Charleston come up to engage her enemies, the great blue expanse of sea tenantless save for those ships directly interested in the approaching struggle.

All three craft had prepared for action by dropping their gun ports and running out the ugly black muzzles of the pieces. All three were reduced to battle canvas, spirit-sails furled on the riggers, and with tops manned by eager, hard-shooting marines.

What wind there was, came from the Charleston's starboard quarter in fitful failing puffs. All three ships were cruising in roughly parallel lines, engaged in ascertaining each other's speed and handiness.

The white-painted sloop-of-war was slightly behind the schooner and nearest to the privateer. Presently a great shout went up from the Charleston, when at last the diminished distance permitted the ships' names on the broad flat sterns to be deciphered.

"The schooner's called the Neptune, and the sloop—"

O'Hare gave a sudden cry of surprise as he squinted into the telescope, his head bare and his cocked hat held in his left hand. "By the powers, it is! It is the damned old Argus, her that raked us so bad at Bridgetown!"

As the name was passed about, a fierce yell arose from the privateer's decks. Never had the black bark's crew forgotten the vicious wounds dealt by that ship.

"Ah! now we'll pay our shot!" they yelled. "Remember Harry and John—and give the Johnny Bulls a drubbing! Pay 'em every shot we owe 'em!"

The sea was now almost smooth beneath the torrid rays of the sun, with only a slight breeze ruffling the water over which crawled the three ships, now rapidly coming into range.

"Ah! At last!" Strong, fierce joy surged in Nathan's veins at the prospect of coming at last to grips with that smiling scoundrel, who for four years had made Nathan's life a hell and lost to him a girl whose lovely face and laughing eyes yet tortured his dreams. At last the hour had struck when he and John Sherburne would stand, one against the other, ship to ship, and soon, sword to sword.

As he realized that all the pent-up hate of endless bitter years was soon to be loosed, he felt suddenly carefree and joyous. But a look at the tense, serious faces of his crew quickly dissipated that factitious joy. He could see in an instant they were dwelling on the memory of the deadly accuracy of the Argus's guns, so, like the born commander he was, Andrews stepped to the rail.

"Men," he called through his speaking trumpet, "we go into action in the cause of Right and the defense of our oppressed homeland. To-night that sword yonder must be plucked from our quarter-deck—to-night we must have taken the convoy. Fear not: though the enemy shoot well, you'll

shoot better. Not a man of you but is here because he is better than the average. Do you remember the ceaseless drills? The difficult marks you've hit? Here's an enemy we all hate and with reason—hit him hard and often. Keep your heads and hearts, and fight for the glory of freedom!"

Even while the cheers were yet ringing, the men stripped off their shirts, cramming them into the intersections of the hammocks and revealing a strange array of crude tattooing and old, whitened scars.

By each black gun were great round shot, immobile in rings of heavy hawser which prevented their rolling to the Charleston's slight motion. Sweat-streaked seamen toiled up from below with heavy leather budgets of powder, dealt out by Feathersoft, the master gunner who worked behind a triple row of water-soaked blankets sheltering the magazines from stray sparks.

The gun crews, of eight men each, still rearranged their paraphernalia to satisfaction, placing tubs of vinegar and water handy to the gun swabbers, scattering sand about the decks lest they become slippery with blood, and testing the flints of their gunlocks. One of the last acts was to empty the long boats of their live stock. Sheep, pigs, and hens were all trussed and borne below to the cable tier where they bawled out their protests into the unsympathetic layers of musty hemp.

CHAPTER XXV.

BROADSIDES.

AT last all was in readiness, from the marines in the tops with their long-barreled muskets to the half-naked carpenters' mates, who waited with strips of oakum and sheets of lead ready to stop shot holes.

Finally, each man fell silent at his quarters, while the hot bright sun beat down, throwing an intricate black design of shadows from the rigging on the white planking and naked backs. The gunners with their handspikes and priming irons, the gun captains with the lanyards in hand and wearing smoldering matches ready behind their ears lest the gunlocks fail.

"See," said O'Hare, quietly, "your friend Sherburne sends the schooner ahead and drops back to meet us—wants all the glory to himself, thank God!"

At that moment a hail came faintly over the shimmering water.

"What ship is that?"

"Cruiser Charleston, Captain Nathan Andrews," shouted Trumbull. Then in his turn: "What ship is that?"

"His Britannic Majesty's cruiser Argus, Captain John Sherburne. Heave to, ye rebels, and strike that rag you fly!"

"Hardy!" called Captain Andrews, on inspiration, "his answer isn't worthy of a gun; let a marine fire his musket."

Amid complete silence a musket cracked from the main top and a ball raised a diminutive water spout under the English sloop's glossy counter.

"That 'll bring him out," observed O'Hare, "now we'll feel his range without giving ourselves away."

Hardly had the words left his lips than a tremendous crashing broadside roared from the Argus's side, as at the same time the flag of Britain rose to all three mastheads, there to flutter feebly in the breeze.

"Faith, we haven't so many ensigns," observed O'Hare, "but ours is just as good." While the bugle sounded a point of war, he and the other officers gravely stood to salute, as the bark's new flag, crudely made from the wounded skipper's description, soared aloft.

The enemy broadside had fallen short, throwing breath-taking geysers of spray into the windless atmosphere and creating concentric rings of wavelets which spread rapidly over the glassy sea.

"Poor gunnery, short by a hundred yards," remarked Nathan calmly contemptuous. "And now we'll try one of our own. Pray, tell the captain of Number Five gun to try the range."

Almost at once the spotless white gun carriage was trundled back with a deep rumble.

"Stand to the gun!" barked the gun captain.

Automatically Captain Andrews's all-seeing eyes checked the position, saw the three handpike men line up behind the gun captain, watching the quoins being withdrawn to elevate the muzzle, saw Number Four standing close to the ship's side with dripping sponger held behind him as he should, lest a shot drive the bar into his body. Behind Number Four stood the assistant sponger, who was Number Six, and the others—loaders, assistant loaders, and second gun captain—all in position.

Nathan's practiced eye followed the length of the deck line and saw the diagram repeated about each of the fifteen dull black monsters that formed his starboard broadside.

"READY?"

The gun captain, his half naked body agleam in the sunlight, leaped back and jerked the lanyard. Deafeningly in the dying wind, the report crashed with a swirl of choking white smoke. Like a live thing, the gun leaped up and backward, hurling itself madly against the stout yellow manila breeching.

The Charleston's officers stood rigidly watching for the spurt of the shot which came just under the sloop's counter. From below, the voice of the gun captain rang out amid the smoke.

"Run in!"

And the crew heaved for dear life on the tackles which, by means of a ring set on the deck, hauled the smoking tube backward away from the gun port, as the captain deftly thrust a plug into the smoldering touch hole and recocked the gun lock at the same time.

"Sponge ho!" Number Four leaped lightly over the yellow tackle ropes which had dragged the gun back, and thrust the sponge on its long handle, down the yawning black muzzle from which still swirled a few spirals of gray smoke. Twice he spun the shaft, then drew it forth with a quick heave that bunched the muscles on his bronzed back, and leaned the sponger against the bulwarks.

"We've got the range of him by a good hundred yards," exulted O'Hare. "Praise God! We may yet give the Johnny Bulls a prime drubbing!"

Meanwhile, the Number Three man inserted the fresh powder cartridge in the muzzle and pushed it home to the limit of his reach, then he crammed the thick brown wad in after it, just an instant before Number Five heaved a smooth round cannon ball to the lip and gently eased it in. Then, with Number Six helping him, he set his weight on the rammer with a grunt and rammed the whole charge home, leaving the rammer in the muzzle.

Swiftly the second gun captain sprang forward and thrust down the touch hole with his spiral-shaped priming iron, to pierce the cloth covering of the powder cartridge. Finding it to his satisfaction, he leaped aside with a sharp "Run out!" Number Four had scarce time to snatch the rammer out of the muzzle before the gun car creaked forward on its heavy oaken wheels, once more thrusting the muzzle of the reloaded monster out of the gun port.

Even as the piece rolled forward, the gun captain inserted a quill of powder down the touch hole and ripped apart the exposed end, allowing the powder to spill, black and smooth, in and around the touch hole, ready for a spark which would hurl the shot across at the ominously waiting sloop-of-war.

"Number Five gun ready, sir," bawled the sweating captain.

There was a bright spark in Nathan's eye as he watched the maneuver, and

his face flushed with pride; not wasted were the endless, tiresome gun drills, and ere long the British would feel their benefit.

So light had the wind become, that it took a good half hour for the Charleston to maneuver into the position desired by Nathan—at the extreme limit of his own range and outside that of his dangerous adversary. It would require careful calculation; a mere hundred yards can soon be overridden.

Again the distant Argus fired, this time with somewhat better aim. The round shot splashed into the languid oily swells but a few feet short, sending a spatter of water on the sails and decks of her target.

Still the Charleston crept on through the vivid blue water while the sun beat down unmercifully. Then, at last, Nathan was satisfied. Quite deliberately, he picked up his scarred leather speaking-trumpet and set it to his lips.

"Starboard battery!" he shouted. "Target, sloop's gun deck!"

WITH a thunderous, reverberating roar which shook the bark from stem to stern and filled the air with strong successive air currents that smote the gunners in the face and set the idle sails to flapping crazily, the broadside was fired. Anxiously, the officers watched, and they sighed as they saw but few of the shots take effect. The range was still too great.

"Cease fire!" At once the Charleston crept nearer to the sloop which meanwhile held her fire apparently realizing full well that her enemy was out of range and disdaining to waste powder.

Closer to her enemy came the bark, until Captain Nathan Andrews could make out the red coats of marines in her tops and the flash of weapons aboard the Argus. He trained his spyglass on the enemy's quarter-deck, searching the blue and gold figures one after the other. Which was Sherburne? If all went well, in less than an hour he'd have the fellow at his sword point! At the thought, an exultant excitement shook him.

Then the enemy fired again, and, strangely, the Charleston suddenly found herself to be well within range of the enemy's guns.

"The curse of Crummel!" raged O'Hare, pounding the rail with his sword hilt, "the damned English have tricked us neatly—fired confounded low on their first broadside."

At the same time Trumbull anxiously studied the sails and saw them lying all but limp. "No use," he cried to Nathan, "they'll lace us bad if we wait to haul off!"

"Good!" said Nathan grimly. "Then we'll fight it out now. Starboard's battery!" he shouted as the crews fell into position after reloading. "Five rounds a gun—and give 'em blazes!"

His voice was drowned in a tremendous explosion, when the broadside was launched, then from across the water came a similar roar. Those two sounds were the last consecutive events of the action that Nathan remembered in after years.

At that moment began a battle such as the turbulent Atlantic had seldom seen. Two ships almost evenly matched, commanded by men of unusual ability, each of whom hated the other venomously, each determined on victory at any cost; one upholding the honor of an ancient glorious service, the other unknowingly setting an example to a newer, yet equally distinguished navy that was to be born of many such fierce struggles.

Two ships, sloop and bark, each confident of her own extraordinary marksmanship and discipline, of her superior handling, and each ready to fight as long as two planks hung together.

The sun, blazing down on the two stately vessels lying all but motionless on the broad bosom of the sea, saw the high billows of smoke arise amid the panting cheers of both crews.

The first effective broadside from the Englishman wrought appalling havoc, knocking Charleston boats to splinters which flew like lances among the gunners, severing braces and shrouds by the dozen, and stretching the crew of Number Eight gun in a terrible, moaning heap.

O'Hare was already below in the cockpit waiting for the bleeding, mangled wretches to be brought down to where the Irishman valiantly wrestled with Death to save them.

Louder grew the crashing, stunning thunder of the guns, pounding Nathan's eardrums until they felt ready to burst, as he coolly trod to and fro across the weather side of the quarter-deck, giving his occasional commands in a level, unhurried voice, though his soul was sick at the carnage. Everywhere was that heart-shaking crunch of riven timbers, the high brittle snapping of wood, sounding much like kindling being broken by a boy's ax, sounds that told of hard-shot iron going home in the ship's vitals. The air was filled with screaming, moaning bullets and scraps of iron.

Something rushed by Nathan's head with a loud roar and tore a great hole in the mizzen mainsail, ripping the white canvas into great hanging shreds over the boom, like an old man's beard.

THE two vessels steadily closed in until the sharp, distinctive "crack" of the marines' muskets overhead joined in the indescribably terrific uproar of the cannon.

"Keep at 'em!" Nathan lifted his voice in encouragement during a lull. Amid the drifting strata of powder smoke he could see dim shapes flitting back and forth to the main hatch, where the powder boys passed up cartridge after cartridge to the eager men above. Everywhere rang the hoarse shouts of the gun captains, and an occasional cheer rose from a gun crew as their shot went home in the enemy's side.

"Sir!" panted Trumbull, as he dashed by on his way to the helm, "we're bad hit! Three guns gone!"

"Keep at them!" cried Nathan and, catching up a musket he fell to shooting methodically at the figures on the nearing quarter-deck of the sloop.

Once more came the hellish blast from the Argus, a chorus of shrieking, screaming demons in the shape of round shot struck the Charleston, shattering her stern and hurling a rain of splinters about Nathan. One of them struck him in the face, momentarily blinding him and hurling him to the deck, while blocks, pieces of spars and strips of canvas rained to the planking about him.

Shrieks, howls of agony rose from the bark's gun deck. Nathan felt sickened. Never in her turbulent history had the old Santee received such a fearful, death-dealing broadside. How truly had old Trumbull spoken, how just had been O'Hare's wrath at his captain's sublime overconfidence. Then, for the first time, the realization came that his ship might be riddled, shattered, and wrecked, as so often her enemies had been by her might.

"No," he murmured, and set his teeth in the effort to get up. To his infinite relief he found himself uninjured save for the splinter wound that made his head ring like a tuning fork. "No, by Heaven, we can't lose! Those ships and supplies—" He stared wildly about the shattered quarter-deck, across a broken spar of some kind, and saw the wheel sawing aimlessly to and fro.

"Damn that coward of a helmsman!" he raved, but checked himself abruptly as he saw the upper half of the poor fellow's body stretched in a bloody welter, cleanly cut in two by a passing round shot.

When he leaped across to the deck and caught the spinning spokes in his hands, he found that he could see very little of what happened around him, for in the breathless baking heat, the smoke

hung low over the water, hiding the enemy ship in an opaque fog.

Down on the gun deck, cannon still roared defiance, and muskets hidden in the grayish pall above, snapped like firecrackers; evidently there were still some of the Charleston's crew left alive.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TO THE DEATH.

THE smoke cloud lifted a little, revealing the gun deck. Nathan stared in agonized amazement. Gone were the familiar white planking, the orderly rows of guns with their stiff silent crews and their gleaming weapons. In their place was a wild tangle of writhing ropes, bits of sail and pieces of débris.

Six of the fifteen guns were out of action; two with their muzzles burst, three overturned on their splintered carriages, and one canting vacantly skyward with her annihilated crew lying about her. It was incredible, unbelievable, and Nathan's heart turned to ice as he was forced to realize that the struggle was going against him.

"Cease fire!" The cry had to be repeated with the full force of Nathan's lungs before the smoke-blackened, bleeding gunners paused in their rhythmic firing to stare in amazement at the white-faced figure in green at the splintered taffrail.

"Cease fire!" roared Nathan again, when a gun far toward the bows boomed heavily. "Wait till you see the enemy—clear the decks. Lively now!" Snatching up hatchets and axes, the men fell to clearing away the hampering wreckage while others caught up the limp dead and, after the manner of the day, dropped their still warm bodies into the placid ocean. Very swiftly under Captain Andrews's alert eyes they did what they could, hearing with relieved satisfaction the enemy guns hurling shot harmlessly behind them.

"Gawd, sir," bawled old Feathersoft, with a twirl of his sweaty cap. "We'll smash 'em yet, sir!"

He turned to the main hatch and caught up a glistening round shot, just as the yellow-clad body of a marine, hit in the tops, fell to the deck with a dull thump and lay broken at his feet like a vivid toy.

At the sight one soot-streaked gunner uttered a savage growl, and a man with a terrific body wound, that showed his gray-red intestines, lurched over and pointed at whip marks on the lifeless back.

"Remember, lads, those are the devils that did this!"

The wreckage was cleared aside with incredible swiftness. Then, too, the Argus fell silent and the piercing howls of the Charleston's wounded below arose as from an inferno.

While the survivors stared horror-stricken at the crumpled body, there came a sudden shrill cry from the forward companion which drew every eye. A small blue pig squealing in abandonment of terror had escaped from the cable tier and galloped down the gore-spotted deck past the amazed men. It reached one of the overturned pieces, placed its fore-trotters on it, and with usually mild blue eyes alight, pointed his little snout toward an unsympathetic heaven and squealed his best in the direction of the Argus.

With one accord those quivering, overstrung men burst into a roar of Homeric laughter.

"Have ye struck?" demanded a voice that sent a surge of blood through Nathan's head. It was surprisingly near, but the heavy pall of gun smoke completely hid the enemy from sight.

"Have you?" bellowed Nathan through his trumpet, and he noted half-consciously that a musket ball had pierced the tube.

"No! Damn you for an insolent rebel—ye'll learn manners soon!"

"Fire!" Nathan cried. During the exchange of hails, the Charleston's vet-

eran gunners had trained their pieces by sound of voices. This time, instead of the eerie screech of the round shot, there sounded the distinctive whirring of grape shot. An instant later, the rattle of shot striking the unseen side could be heard, followed by a deep chorus of shrieks and cries.

"Faster!" yelled Nathan. "More grape! Faster! You've got 'em going!"

BEFORE he knew it, he was at the gun whose crew had been killed, and, with the help of a wounded marine and his silent black steward, who had valiantly joined in the struggle, Nathan loaded the gun.

Fierce joy was in his heart, as he thrust in the priming quill and ripped the top off with a savage jerk. "There!" he cried. "That's for Spithead!" and fired.

Gasping in the swirling fumes, he plunged back again along the line of flaming guns, urging the panting men to greater effort, filling gaps in the crews, and toiling like any able seaman on the tackles. It seemed as though the thundering, spouting flames from the Charleston's remaining nine guns were endless.

"Run in!" "Sponge!" "Well!" "Load!" "Fire!" The deck of the privateer was a symposium of uproar. Then the Argus, too, commenced to fire in kind, sending grape shot from the smoke cloud, but her fire seemed a little slower to Nathan's fevered imagination. Was it pure fancy?

Suddenly, from nowhere, came a vagrant puff of wind, which drew aside the veil of smoke, leaving the antagonists a clear view of each other, for the first time.

From the sorely stricken Charleston a deep groan went up. It seemed that the Argus was scarcely touched; all her masts yet stood and the sails had only here and there a hole in them.

Nathan was filled with frenzy at that sight, as he compared it to the crippled condition of his own ship. How could it be? How could his men have shot so badly? In heart-sick disbelief, he stared across at the sloop, lying some hundred yards distant, with her gun ports flaming periodically and her great white ensign flaunting in the languid air.

Black, blinding rage overpowered Nathan, as he saw those banners unharmed and aloof.

"Canister!" he roared. "Ye blind dogs, ye couldn't hit a cow on the tail with a shovel!" Tears of wrath streamed down his smudged and singed cheeks. Was it for this that he had labored five long years? To have his men crack, the first time they stood to a man-o'-war?

Burning with shame, the gunners worked their steaming guns with a new energy, while the shot from the enemy crashed all about, reaching their human targets, killing men, here and there, with deadly accuracy.

To Nathan came the thought of Sherburne's hateful mocking face as he would receive the colonial's sword; the thought of a return to England and prison—to be hanged as a renegade and traitor! With a bitter curse, he wrenched over the wheel.

"Gunners ye may not be," he called stridently, "but wi' the cutlass it's your necks, ye can't fail and ye know it!"

He ordered one more broadside of round shot before heading for the sloop, and he raved with disappointment when the breeze died and left the smoke again obscuring the results of the Charleston's halting, pathetic effort. But in truth, it was a blessing, for the bark, as she crept toward her enemy, was shielded from the hissing grape and canister.

White-faced, the carpenter rushed up to say that he had sounded the well and found four feet of water. "We're sinking!"

"Back, and stop the leaks!" snarled Captain Nathan Andrews. "We'll fight on!"

Then came Trumbull, bleeding from a musket ball wound in the shoulder, a dark red stain creeping down his green jacket which, because of the heat, had been ripped open at his corded brown neck.

"The foremast's done!" he cried. "She'll go any minute! Half the braces are parted—one more volley from that damned Britisher, and we're done! There are no less nor seven shot between wind and water."

"Back to the gun deck, sir!" thundered Nathan. "We'll fight on!"

THAT they were drawing nearer to the enemy was proved by the fact that the musket balls increased in number, one of them striking the quartermaster dead. He fell with a strangled grunt and, for a moment, kicked furiously, spinning round and round on his side like a gigantic beetle on a pin, while the blood spurted out from beneath his long braided pigtail. Pathetically his cutlass point stuck up, as though in a gesture of defiance.

"Marines up there!" called Captain Andrews. "What do you see?" He cupped his hands at the dimly seen yards.

"Argus ahead, sir!" came the answering hail.

Suddenly Trumbull came up and plucked Nathan's ragged sleeve.

"Have you noticed, cap'n?" he cried above the incessant thunder from the bark's gun deck, "that the Argus's fire has slackened away to nothing?"

And indeed it had. From her came no sound beyond the snap of an occasional musket, while the Charleston nosed blindly ahead into the wall of smoke. Abruptly the stubby point of a bowsprit appeared, piercing the smoke eerily, with three or four ropes dangling limply from it, like muscles from a severed limb.

The sight of it set a spark to Nathan's brain. There it was, the sprit of a British man-o'-war and, with a desperate resolve to fulfill his vow made at the court-martial, he darted forward, snatching up a cutlass as he went.

"Boarders away!" he cried in a spasm of savagery. "Boarders away! Come, lads, be brisk! There they are, at them! Boarders away!"

From the bows came a dull grinding sound, as the two ships collided; then, with catlike agility, three of the Charleston's company hove grappling irons into the tangle at the sloop's gaudy figurehead, while the marines streamed down from the bark's tops, a mere handful of them, wild-eyed and yelling like fiends. Up from below came the little powder monkeys, brandishing pikes as big as themselves.

Up came the blackened, sweating gunner's mates, headed by hard old Feathersoft. Fresh from the magazines they were, hungry and anxious to join at last in the active fray. Gunners, carpenters and seamen gathered in one yelling mass at the bows. Nathan saw O'Hare, still girt in his reddened surgeon's apron, brandishing an ax snatched up as he dashed from the horrors of the cockpit.

Then, in spite of their new rank and service, a familiar shout arose: "Santee! Santee!" as, stirred to their depths, the fierce sea dogs howled out their well-remembered battle cry.

Torn by savage conflicting emotions, Nathan sprang to the Argus's shot-scarred rail, filled with the mad realization that now he could seek out the man who had ruined his life and have his reckoning at last.

As the swaying deck of the British ship appeared before Nathan's eyes, he paused, thunderstruck, while the eager, shouting colonials swarmed up beside him. They, too, fell suddenly silent, just as two muskets from the top cracked in a pitiful, yet noble, gesture to repel the boarders. Among the Charleston's men there was a single clear cry, and a figure reeled to the Argus's deck. But Captain Nathan Andrews was too stunned by the sight before his eyes to notice the occurrence.

Like an idiot he gaped, staring at the indescribable shambles which stretched away the length of that charnel ship. The dead and dying were everywhere, sprawled in weird, outlandish positions, battered and mangled into forms scarce human, by repeated storms of steel. The heavy cloying smell of blood hung like a miasma, mingling with the bitter reek of wood smoke and gunpowder.

Not a single figure was erect upon the deck of the sloop, and the dismembered bodies lay everywhere, recognizable parts and ghastly shreds of flesh, a huge horrible pile of jackstraws, strewn among the dismounted and riven guns.

VAGUELY Nathan's eyes wandered along the riddled, splintered bulwarks, through which the gleam of water could be seen, to the poop. On that eminence stood a solitary figure, leaning heavily against the wheel, dreadfully alone on that ship of death.

A movement of the sails caught Captain Andrews's attention, causing him to look up and behold undamaged spars and sail which contrasted oddly with the fearful condition of the sloop's hull. Only then did Nathan realize how unbelievably accurate, how fearfully deadly, and how completely crushing had been the fire of the Charleston's guns.

But somehow he lacked elation, as he reflected upon the dogged courage of the shattered, dying English, working their guns until the last gunner fell, conquered with their flags still flying. Heaving a dull sigh, he started across the blood-slippery deck toward that solitary, stricken figure at the Argus's helm.

It was difficult going; great holes yawned everywhere, and tumbled, riven pieces of the bulwarks lay jagged and treacherous in his path. So occupied was he, with his progress across that ghastly deck, that it was not until he stood in the waist of the stricken sloop that Captain Andrews looked up again.

He stopped, frozen, as he recognized that solitary man who remained erect on the deck. It was Sherburne, gripping the spokes of the partially shattered wheel, with his life-blood draining away down his white knee breeches in a meandering course. His body swayed with the motion of the ship, and he made pitiful efforts to hold up his deadly pale face, as he watched the man he had betrayed advancing across the wreckage.

For those two, the stricken ship did not exist; they only saw each other's eyes in a species of dreadful fascination. Onward stalked Nathan, his undimmed cutlass flashing in his hand, a host of memories flashing through his brain—the court-martial; the convict hold; the chief warder's expression as he lashed Nathan across the face, on the Cerberus; Molly whirling back in disgust—these and other fragments of his wild, hopeless career returned.

As Nathan neared the ladder leading to the broken quarter-deck, he paused, reading the other's resignation to death. As a man but half conscious, he set foot to the ladder, a terrible rage consuming him. At last! At last! His double reckoning had come.

"By God! He'll see me rip that damned flag down and throw it on the deck." It was odd how clearly he thought of that all of a sudden. "The blackguard 'll see that, before I kill him!"

He went up, hand over hand, while the silent crew of the Charleston watched him from the bow. He reached the last rung and raised his head above the level of the deck. There, not ten feet away, stood his mortal enemy, John Sherburne, swaying on his feet, his slender white hands fixed on the brown spokes of the wheel.

"Surrender!" demanded Nathan harshly. "Surrender to the sovereign State of South Carolina."

The blue-clad figure behind the wheel

nodded briefly, its coal-black eyes somehow splendid in their agony.

"Nathan Andrews," he said slowly, "Nathan Andrews, and it is you who have done this!" He laughed a pathetic, feeble laugh. "'Tis monstrous apt, all this, I suppose. 'Lo and thy sins shall find thee out,' as the Bible has it. Well, sir, I am ready."

"Come, sir, your sword."

Never had that high-bred rake looked handsomer, his dark hair stirred by the faint breeze.

"I PRAY you, sir," said the Englishman steadily, "draw it out—"

His glance dropped to the ivory and gold hilt glittering at his side. "I fear me I'll fall, if I let go—I—I'm monstrous feeble just now."

Just then the Argus rolled suddenly in a great smooth swell and twitched the wheel from Sherburne's hands, removing his support and allowing him to sink slowly to the deck. But his great black eyes never left Nathan's face.

As though paralyzed, Nathan Andrews saw Sherburne roll to the deck at his feet and with a sense of shock saw the gold of his epaulettes tarnished with bright arterial blood. Suddenly he realized that Sherburne was beyond Nathan's power to exact retribution.

"Nay, Andrews," sighed the English captain, "be not aggrieved that you lose your revenge." A spasm of pain quivered his white features. "For all the woe I caused you—I now suffer a thousandfold and more. I—I die, having seen that happen which I deemed impossible. To see an English man-o'-war beaten—ah, God! How terribly beaten."

The dying captain paused, as his eye caught the flutter of the White Ensign being pulled down by eager triumphant hands. "And my going is the more bitter as I see"—there came a ring of prophecy in his tone—"as I see more, many more, of our burning, riddled, sinking ships. My ship was the pride of the Atlantic fleet—yet"—he turned aside, his face twitching in the agony of his disillusion—"yet a damned Yankee privateer—oh, God! The shame of it!"

Nathan knew not what he thought; all he could see was the suffering, broken man before him.

"Yet, sir," Nathan struggled to force out the words, "yet you fought prodigious well, sir—"

Suddenly Sherburne collected himself with that final flare of strength that comes before death.

"Your pardon, Captain Andrews," said he in firm clear tones, "I had forgot. My—my sword—"

His trembling, blood-streaked fingers fluttered toward the sword hilt, but Nathan, though he never knew why, suddenly shook his head.

"Nay, Sherburne," he said. But John Sherburne had lived just long enough to see that movement of Nathan's head. A sudden light illumined his eyes, a light which flickered out as his body suddenly relaxed and he sank back on the bloody deck of his ship.

"Here's the bulldog's flag, sir!" Old Feathersoft had appeared at the edge of the quarter-deck with the great white flag clutched in his powder-blackened hands.

"I swore to throw it on the deck!" said Nathan in a strangely low voice. He suddenly stepped forward and laid the flag gently over the still body of the man who had defended it so well.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN.

THE Argus was in a sinking condition, as the victorious colonials quickly perceived from the increasing slant of her deck and the warning rumbles from below. Accordingly, Nathan ordered a quick search for such wounded as might be found, then secured the two flags from the sloop's

other masts. They had barely time to take the ship's papers and return to the Charleston before the sloop commenced to go down by the head so quickly that the master carpenter cut free the grapnel lines rather than delay.

Before beginning the depressing task of counting their own losses and burying such of the dead as had not been flung overboard during the action, the Charleston's company turned to watch the last of the Argus.

Like a man of stone, Nathan saw her settle on an almost even keel. Down, down she sank, until the broken bulwarks were level with the oily water. Then, quite suddenly, she went under, her white sails flashing to the last as she disappeared from sight.

"And now!" Nathan drew a deep breath and faced the dreadful disorder on his own deck. "We'll mend, and go after the others."

Thanks to the almost windless atmosphere, the balance of the convoy had not gone very far, so their easy capture was practically assured.

As Captain Andrews collected himself to superintend the repairs, the shrill, incessant cries of the injured men below drew his attention.

"Why isn't Mr. O'Hare with the wounded?" he demanded of a passing marine.

"Why, sir, didn't you know?" At the expression on the honest fellow's face, a deadly presentiment gripped the captain's heart.

"No! Not—"

"Why, Mr. O'Hare's dead, sir," replied the man haltingly. "He was hit just as we boarded that damn sloop. He—he's below—" The marine turned aside hastily, his shoulders quivering. Strong was the hold O'Hare had held on those rough and simple fellows, and with one accord they mourned him, silently and unfeignedly.

"O'Hare dead?" Nathan paused, bewildered. Jolly, reliable O'Hare dead? It couldn't be. He turned and made his way below, where Trumbull knelt beside his shipmate's body. He roused at the sound of Nathan's entry.

"Jack O'Hare's gone," he muttered, "gone on fer a higher commission—died like he lived, an officer and a gentleman, that he did!

"'Twas him that told Mr. Carroll about you," said the New Englander gruffly, "'twas him that got us the Carolina commissions. Before he ups anchor, he says: 'Tell our Cap'n Nat to have faith—faith in his love.' And then he spoke a little of his home in Ireland, and died quietlike. That he did."

As the Charleston set out in grim pursuit of the lumbering convoy, a wandering sunbeam entered through the cabin port and, in passing, paused a moment to light in golden glory the still face of the man they loved.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAROLINA.

CHARLESTON was in fête. From one end to the other, that gay city was decked with flags of all sorts, but mostly with the new red and white and blue, recently adopted by General George Washington. In a steady tide, the city's whole population streamed to the water's edge, agog with excitement and anticipation.

Old, young, high and low, black, white and brown, Charleston's inhabitants made their way to the great stone quay at which was moored a schooner captured by the State's own cruiser. Two days before she had arrived in charge of a prize crew under a dour, silent officer in a strange yellow uniform, on the epaulettes of which were worked a flowing letter N.

"'Tis most marvelous!" cried a radiant young girl to her escort. "Father says the Charleston's great victory will change the whole campaign. Just fancy, Louis dear, muskets enough for two regiments, blankets, uniforms—"

"But our men don't wear red!" objected her companion with amusement.

"They'll dye them, silly!" retorted the damsel and sprang aside with a little cry of alarm, as the mayor's elaborate gilded coach whirled by in the midst of a squad of cavalry, whose burnished helmets glanced bravely in the morning sun.

From the distance came a dull booming report of cannon, which set the eager crowd to shouting excitedly.

"They come! They come! Captain Andrews and the Charleston! Hurrah!"

At the end of the flag-and-bunting-draped quay, stood old Mr. Carroll, straight and upright as ever in his snowy wig and severe black clothes. He turned to the mayor with a gentle sigh.

"'Pon my word, it is they!" he cried. "See, Harry, three ships! The one with the raking masts is the Charleston—I'll never forget her, sir, sailing out of Bridgetown Harbor with her guns going and her sails full. 'Pon my word," he confided, "until this moment I scarce dared believe Lieutenant Hardy's story—'tis a miracle Andrews wrought, a most inspiring miracle; 'twill put the hearts in our cruisers for years to come!"

Grandly the little fleet sailed in, with the blue flag of Carolina whipping from all three mastheads, and as the eager throng caught sight of a tall, straight figure on the black bark's quarter-deck, they fell to cheering like mad.

"Andrews! Andrews! God bless Captain Andrews."

The frenzied cheers vied successfully with the band of the South Carolina Light Infantry in bidding welcome, as the scarred but trim vessel was warped to the quay.

After the speeches were made, the eulogies spoken, and all manner of homage rendered, Nathan escaped below and, stationing a grinning marine at the door, prepared to open a thin envelope which Mr. Carroll had passed him under cover of applause.

His fingers trembled ever so slightly as he held the fragrant missive and read the delicate handwriting. There were but few words:

> NATHAN, MY DARLING:
>
> If you can find it in your heart to forgive, come to me. If not I'll not think hardly of you, but love you, Nathan, my sweetheart, as long as the world endures.
>
> MOLLY.

IT was that hour when the shadows are long over the earth, when the field hands straighten their aching backs and lift their voices in song as they start homeward, when the red, red sun, striking the broad Santee, glances up to fringe the hoary Spanish moss with gold, so that the ancient live oaks seem to be shedding tears of fire.

Mistress Lancaster sat by the water's edge, watching the reddish mist creeping out from among the reeds on the far shore, as the great crimson disk sent random beams of gold from among the twisted black trunks over yonder. Two days ago the triumphant Charleston had docked, and yet no Nathan had arrived. Miserably she hung her head with the realization that she alone was to blame.

"Oh, thou of little faith," she reproached herself, and broke off short at the sound of steps. Jonadab coming to call her to supper. As though she wanted to eat!

"No, Uncle Jo," she murmured, "I'll wait a bit longer. I'm not hungry, tell them to go on without me!"

Still there was no sound of departure, no rustle of departing feet. She turned and stared, then swayed forward toward him who stood in the full glory of the sunset, his great arms outheld, a look of infinite tenderness on his radiant face.

"Oh, Nathan! My Nathan!"

He answered nothing, content to hold her close, very close, while the sunset died and the timid evening star commenced to twinkle over the broad Santee.

THE END.

"Jeff! Looky there!" she cried, p'intin' excitedly 'cross the mesquite

The Wildcat's Playmate

Jeff, poor white and struggling farmer, hadn't ever had anything but trouble —but he never knew the meaning of the word till this happened!

By JOHN N. PREBLE

"JEFF! Jeff! Come a runnin'! Oh, Jeff!"

The shriek come from the missus, squallin' like she was in a steel trap. I leaped straight up, snatched my hog-leg offen the nail in the kitchen, and bolted outside to sling lead at what I figgered must be a rattlesnake. Lucy was standin' there in her faded gingham, her gray hair streamin' in the wind, and with her mouth wide 'nough to swaller a hailstorm. For a second I reckoned the snake bite had par'lyzed her.

"Jeff! Looky there!" she cried, p'intin' excitedly 'cross the mesquite. I followed her tremblin' finger, which was d'rected toward the wildcat oil derrick in the pasture where they had been messin' round for some few months.

Sight on earth! Things was shore happenin'. A pow'ful black stream was spoutin' up through the derrick on a wild and lonesome, and may I die in my tracks ef it wasn't shootin' a hunderd feet over. Sprayin' down, the oil shone dirty yaller. And noise! Say, thet yowlin' wildcat would have drownded out a ragin' cyclone!

"Ain't it the most marvelest thing?" breathed Lucy, with the all-overest expression on her wrinkled face.

Jane and Elsie run outen the house and hugged their maw, and the boys, Bill and Geraldus mater'lized yellin' 'bout the gushin' wildcat and how rich we-all was a goin' to be.

"We shore are lucky!" cried Bill, and the rest of 'em j'ined in the chorus.

"Lucky! Wow!" I exploded. "Thet ornery oil is messin' up the hull pasture, and you calls it luck!" And away I hot-footed it for the derrick in a mighty upset condition.

Talkin' 'bout luck! I shore had had an overdose of the evil brand all my life. For thirty-seven year I had struggled along scratchin' a pauper's head and fightin' ninety-two vari'ties of trouble, but in all my years put together this here calamity was the shore 'nough climax. But, believe me! They wasn't goin' to tear down in a short settin' my labor of years. Not while I was alive and kickin'!

When I bought the old farm for two hunderd and fifty dollars an acre cash, it had been a sorry lookin' layout, and I had stood to the rack most of my life clearin' off rocks and cockleburs and mesquite thickets. Year after year trouble had followed trouble. The boll weevils 'd chaw up the cotton or drouth 'd burn up the cotton and wheat, and when I did make a fair crop, they wouldent be no fitten price. Sometimes the cotton wasted in the field—dident pay to pick it.

Then one spell I was gittin' a nice herd of cattle together and the hull smear died off with tick fever. Thet same year I broke my leg and was laid up all winter. It shore had been a hard scramble!

AFTER years of toil I had jest begin to git a toe holt when along comes Sykes, the oil man. I should of knowed better, but he was a smooth talker, and in a moment of weakness I leased him the oil rights of the hull farm for fifty cents an acre cash, so's I could buy me a high class bull.

The bull died, and I savvied my mistake right quick. I tried to git my lease back, but Sykes was too foxy. Anyways, I had hoped his dirty well would be bone dry. Then he'd git done drillin' and leave me be in peace. But here he goes and hits pay dirt, messes up the farm, and it looks like I am in for the hottest kittle of trouble of my spotted career.

When I jumped onto the slimy derrick floor, outen breath, the oil had done quit spoutin' into the air, but, oh, man, it was spewin' out the side plumb into the crick! The critters' water hole and the only place for 'em to drink! Say! I proceeded to cuss the world by sections and rushed up to Sykes. He was laffin' and jokin' as ef he had the world by the tail with a down-hill pull.

"Sykes!" I shrieked. "See what yo're doin'! See what yo're doin'! My cattle 'll starve for water!" For an instant he looked bung-fuzzled and then slammed me on the shoulder.

"Ah! Millionaire," he cried with a broad grin that sparkled with gold, "soft pickin's for you. One-eighth of it is all yourn without turnin' a hand. Think of it! You're a genuwine oil magget!"

"Shet it off! Shet it off!" I yelled, p'intin' to the stream of oil. "The water! The cattle!"

Sykes shrugged his beefy shoulders and grinned like a fiend. "Let 'em booze somewhere else."

I tiptoed up close to him and fanned his nose with my fist. "They ain't no more water on this here farm, and you know it! Shet thet oil off, you coyote!" I screamed.

"All right, all right," he answered, the smile gone from his face. Shakin' his head, he give the high sign to one of the roustabouts to turn the valve off, but the damage by thet time had all been did.

"We was just cleanin' out the well," he explained. Then he sidled up close, patted me on the back, and swelled all up. "Say, Mr. Bluberson, you don't need them scrawny, moth-eaten cattle no more," he argued very pressin'ly. "Sell 'em off or give 'em away; it don't make no odds—you're a sure 'nough oil man from here on out."

"Lissen, Sykes, you ole horse thief," I spat, tappin' him on the chest, "don't you run down my critters or dictate what I'm to do. Cow raisin' is my bizness. Fu'thermore, I made a livin' offen 'em long 'fore I knowed you, and after yore dirty well plays its last tune, I'll continue."

"But, Mr. Bluberson," he persisted, "you're rich. And besides, this ain't goin' to be no place for cattle."

"Oh, hain't it?" I sneered. "A heap you know 'bout it." I shook my finger at him and bawled: "You clean up thet crick or hell 'll be a poppin'!"

As I turned on my heel and eased away, he slung out: "You ole fool! I'm makin' you independently wealthy and this is the pretty thanks you give me!"

But I dident pay no mind.

The cry of the oil discov'ry swept round the country rapidly like as a prairie fire—and as disastrous—and inside a couple hours a howlin' herd of sidewalk mourners, oilmen, and farmers was arrivin' in wild-drivin' gas waggins, on hoss, on the hoof—anyways to git there. They tore down my fence in a dozen places so my cow critters got a-loose, and the crazy deedees run all over the cotton and wheat.

Was I hot? Whew! I hollered myse'f hoarse as a frog and cussed till I almost had applexy; I run hither and yon tryin' to head 'em off, but it was like tryin' to stop a wild herd of stampedin' cattle. All thet night I dident bat an eye.

'FORE sunup next mawnin', bizness went from bad to worser. Loads of lumber, machin'ry and all manner of contraptions rolled in like the circus was a comin' to town, and a rough-lookin' gang went to work settin' up iron oil tanks. The noise was turr'ble! Another crew of greasy, swearin' men begin to hitch together some pipe to run the oil to town.

Sykes shore was an up-to-do lad, dod gom his low-down hide! Vis'tors in herds romped round. You'd 'a' thunk we was stagin' a rodeo. Some of 'em come as fur as a hunderd miles. What they seen in hit, I shore dunno. I wouldent have walked out in the rain with a double-lined slicker for the hull rotten outfit.

But what het me up to a hunderd and eight was thet smack in the middle of my twenty-acre cotton patch they set out to th'ow up two new derricks. In a panic I rushed over to the well where Sykes was sup'intendin' the play.

"Stop 'em, Sykes!" I yelled, all haired up. "You can't stack up them derricks over yonder!"

"Why not?" he drawled with a frown on his face as ef he was beginnin' to git sick of the deal. (But I'll tell you he wasn't half as sick as me.)

"You'll ruin my hull cotton crop flouncin' round over there!"

"Mebbe so. But oil is more important."

"Lissen," I whooped, "you got oceans of oil already. Ain't you satisfied?"

Sykes shook his head and scratched his bald spot. "Mr. Bluberson," he explained, "they's oil, worlds of oil, wastin' under thet cotton, and we gotta get it. Don't worry, you'll git your share. It 'll pay you a thousand times more'n thet sickly cotton."

"Sickly cotton! Bah!" I snorted. "Thet cotton 'll make half a bale to the acre. Now you mosey over and order them men to quit."

"Not so's you'd notice it!" said he in a rather aggervated tone. "My lease covers thet cotton field and thet's where we're goin' to set and dig."

"Ef they don't quit," I shot at him, "I'll chop the dad-blamed derricks down shore as yore a foot high!"

Figgerin' he'd change his tatics and try to run a windy, he growled threat-'nin'ly:

"Don't you try to git too gay round here, or you'll see who's master of the situation. Two can play this here game as well as one."

They was no use to argue with a thick-skulled mule like Sykes, so I wagged it into town, and helt a pow-wow with Sam Fuller, the sheriff. I tolt him he had to git his steppin' close on, and save my pore ole home from destruction. After I laid down the hull deal, he shrugged his bony shoulders and said he dident see no way to git shet of Sykes.

"A fine Law you be!" I handed to him with contemp'. "Yo're so brainy you oughta be sweepin' the streets!"

In disgust I pushed into Mayor Ferguson's office and put my dire distress 'fore him. "What you want me to do?" he asts, cool-like, as ef he objected to me comin' to him for justice.

I answered him sharp with plenty of impatience: "Why! Run this here Sykes offen my place. Air him out! Git shet of him 'fore he ruins my farm altogether!"

"How can I do thet?" he asts as ef my demand was the impossible. "He paid you to leave him dig."

"Yuh! He paid me!" I flared, gittin' riled at his silly attitude. "Paid me sixty-five dollars so's he could make a total wreck outen my forty-five-hunderd dollar farm! Don't tell me yo're goin' to sit here like a bump on a log, and let him make a greasy bog outen the only home I know!"

He shook his head and kept mum, so I headed for the door. There I hesitated long 'nough to th'ow at him: "Yo're a right smart mayor, you be. You oughta be drivin' the town garbage waggin!"

TAKIN' a last shot, I dropped into make medicine with Lawyer Dickerman. When I got done with my tale of woe, he looked out the window for five minutes, rubbin' his rough chin. He ast me sev'ral questions, and fin'lly said:

"This is a difficult case. But pay me a fee of one thousand dollars, and I'll see what I can do."

Ough! That was like a kick in the stomach. "Never you mind," I says, wear'ly, "I ain't got myse'f no money."

But thet dident faze Dickerman none. He smiled very friendlylike and patted me on the back. "That's perfectly all right. Don't worry about a small matter like that. You'll have the money some time. I'll take your note."

I wrote my name on a paper for him and he shook hands right smart and promised he'd go to work on the deal right quick. "We'll give this here oil man a run for his money," he says, meanin' he'd take right after Sykes. His words brightened the outlook consider'bly, and as I hustled out to my place I figgered thet Sykes was now done for. When I arrived, the oil man hisse'f was talkin' to Lucy at the stoop.

"Jeff," said the wife, soothin'ly, "Mr. Sykes wants to proposition you, and I think you oughta lissen to him."

At thet he eased over, smilin' and stuck outen his paw, but I dident take no notice of it.

"Mr. Bluberson," he begun, smooth and easy, "I'm pow'ful sorry things happened like they did, but they wasn't no way to prevent 'em. If you jest can fergit past diff'rences, I'd crave to make a trade with you. How much you want to sell out?" Ef he'd pulled a gun it wouldent have surprised me half as much.

But he dident catch me nappin'. I was onto his little game quicker'n a flash. Ef he could buy me off, he was all set. I glared at him. "How come you figger I aim to sell?"

"Why, brother, this is the time for you to make your big killin'," he argued, "and besides, this ain't no place for a rich ranchero like you to live."

"Yes, Jeff," spoke up Lucy softly, "I think we-all 'd be happier somewhere else now."

"Looky here, Sykes," I growled, "Mebbe you done succeeded in p'isonin' the wife's mind, but it ain't a goin' to do you no good! I've toiled and

sweated through ev'ry adversity to better the ole farm, and I shore ain't a goin' to let you whip me away now. No, sir!"

But he was a persistent cuss. Seein' as gentle talk wouldent go, he proceeded to get reckless. "I'll give you two hunderd thousand dollars cash for the old place," he offered, jest like he was talkin' 'bout the weather, "and thet's twicet what it's worth. You can take your money and smack it down on the slickest ranch in Texas."

They was a gasp from the boys and gals who had drifted outen the house, and Lucy entered, "Jeff, please grab a-holt of thet cash money for the offsprings' sake!"

I give her a hard look for hornin' in, and then shook my fist under Sykes's nose. R'arin' up I hollered: "You glutt'nous buzzard! I know it would give you a heap of satisfaction to run the ole man offen his ant-hill! But this here farm is my piece of dirt, and here I stick!"

Sykes disregarded my rantin' and continued: "If two hunderd thousand ain't enough—why, go on and name your price."

"They ain't no price!" I yelled.

"For the last time—will you sell?" he demanded with exasp'ration.

"I'll see you in torment 'fore I sell!"

Sykes th'ew his hands in the air like he knowed he was beaten. He seen he had somebody 'cept a sucker to deal with, so after waggin' his head hopelessly, he up and git.

FEW days later, a pipe-line comp'ny I never heerd tell of sent me a check. When I read the numbers on't, I most fell through myse'f. Twenty-one thousand dollars! At fust, I figgered Sykes was tryin' to buy me off, but they tolt me it was my gravy for ownin' the farm. I should of tore it up, 'cause when the fam'ly got a-holt of it, they proceeded to go hog wild.

Right off they all blossomed out in store close. Lucy ragged herse'f out in fancy silk dresses with all the fixin's. I most couldent recognize her. In fact, they was all strangers to me. Then the wife up and boughten me a two-carrots diamont stickpin! I dident have no use for a locoed doo-dad like thet, but she was all cut up when I wouldent wear it. With thet cut glass in my shirt front I felt mighty oncomfortable. It all give me an awful sickenin' feelin'.

Wasent many days 'fore I dident know my own place. New derricks and new shacks sprang up like mushrooms. I hoped and prayed no more wells 'd blow in, but they kept comin' nigher and nigher the house. I done my best to stop and block 'em, but the tide wouldent turn back. Nobody 'd he'p me. Even Dickerman did nothin'.

All he knowed how to do was ast for money. Oh, for a twister to blow away the hull outfit!

What a clutter! The cotton and the wheat was a total wreck, most of the mesquite was broke down, and the land ever'where was cut up worser then a sow's bed—practic'lly wore out. Day and night they pounded away like they dident have a minute. T'other side of the crick a cheap lodgin' house, two cafés, and a couple of stores had been th'owed up. When I rec'llected how peaceful and clean the farm had been wunst, it made me so mad, I hunted out Sykes and cussed and threatened. But he kept rompin' on.

My pore cow critters! Wasent no use tryin' to graze and herd 'em round no more. I had to up and sell 'em.

A flood of checks rolled in till I was swamped, and ev'ry mother's son this side of Bitter Crick must have been notified, 'cause salesmans swarmed out to pester me like a flock of vultures. I bought various reddios, gas waggins, talkin' machines, pyanos, furniture, table wear, cookin' wear, washin' machines—ever'thin' you can think of and many you can't. Filled up the house and filled up the barn. I dident want

any of the dad-blamed truck, but somehow I couldent he'p buyin' it.

One mawnin', after I got back from town where the pipe line comp'ny made me a present of a thirty-seven-thousand-dollar check, what hurts my eyes but a new derrick stackin' up directly between the barn and the house! Dawg my cats! I went after thet cussed oil man with my tongue out.

"See yere, Sykes!" I bawled. "This is gittin' too all-fired crude! You pull thet derrick down. Yo're hittin' too near!"

"Well, it is ruther close," he agreed.

"Too many so for comfort! I ain't a goin' to have you tear up my own house. You done kicked me from pillar to post long 'nough!"

"But there's oil under there, and we got to git it," he declared, cool-like and calm. "Anyhow, my lease says I can drill there."

"Lease or no lease," I roared, gittin' red-hot, "you quit or I'll stop yore clock from tickin'!" To make shore he understood, I slapped the big ole forty-five in my belt. I rode off, leavin' him scratchin' his bald spot.

'Thout delay, I galloped for town and busted into Dickerman's office. Very suddently I give him the lay. Then I barked: "Git yorese'f in the saddle, 'cause they ain't no time to waste. You gotta shoot straight and shore and right quick!" I whammed down with my fist and split the desk top.

Dickerman swallered his head, and when he come up he stuttered: "Mr. Bluberson, it's a great disappointment! I've been through the whole case thoroughly. The verdict is: Sykes has us licked!"

"Don't you dare tell me the law 'll let him dig plumb up ag'in' my house?"

He nodded his head slowly and ser'ously. "It's your own fault," he accused. "You made a big mistake. You should never have leased the land around the house. That's when you cut your throat."

Them words took 'bout all the fight outen me. My feathers fell. I shore did feel blue!

COUPLE days and they was a-grindin' away. Mud from the hole run right by the stoop, and the oil from the b'iler oozed round so's we was always gittin' our feet in hit, and trackin' it all over the house. Good guv'nor! It was a rough go-round! The roarin' b'iler, the shriekin' steam, the chuggin' engyne, and the grind and clank and crash of the rest of the works was deaf'nin'. At night they was no use tryin' to sleep yorese'f. I laid in the bed and counted up all the different noises, and sometimes it made me so mad I was for gittin' up and blowin' 'em all away with my six-gun. It shore got old!

After puttin' in a week without no sleep I had to admit to myse'f I was a low-down coward and couldent hack it no more. With my checkbook in my keister and with no idee where I was headed, I saddled the fust train thet pulled out. I fin'lly wound up in New Mexico. For ten days I cruised round and the best piece of dirt I seen anywheres was the Jarvis ranch in Lincoln County. You can tell yore people it was right up to snuff! Mr. Burnett had fell for one of them expensive movie queens, and was sellin' out so's he could git to Californey. One hunderd and seventy-five thousand dollars cash he wanted, but I beat him down five hunderd dollars. I spent my money and hauled for home.

Ef I live to be a hunderd and ten I ain't a goin' to fergit the unholy sight thet met my pore eyes when I reached the old farm. Mankind! The well ag'in' the house had done blowed in and drenched the ole place with filthy oil! The windows was smashed in, the walls was black and drippin', and the furniture and beddin' was all ruint! The fam'ly was nowheres to be seen. Two-three times I called for Lucy, but they wasent no answer. My pore head

pounded like it would split. I staggered outen the house fearin' the worst. When I found Sykes I was almost scairt to ast him where they was.

"Oh, they scattered like a flock of quail," he said, easylike. "Guess you'll locate 'em in town."

When I fin'lly found 'em put up at Ma Goodwin's boardin' house, Lucy fell round my neck, weepin', and the kids was as happy as a nest full of larks. I tolt 'em all 'bout the Jarvis ranch, and we all talked 'bout how happy we'd be wunst more far away from oil wells and oil men. Thet shore was a ev'nin' I won't never fergit!

Day 'fore we was to load out for New Mexico I was settin' out under the shade of the cottonwood at Ma Goodwin's in a most contented frame of mind. The ev'nin' previous Sykes had done paid off like a cash register—three hunderd and twenty-five thousand dollars cash for the pore ole farm, and I had done washed my paws of it for good and all. It was a fine large mawnin', and I was dreamin' how peaceful it was a goin' to be on the Jarvis ranch. No more deaf'nin' clatter; no more filthy oil! Jest quiet land, and gentle grazin' cows. The hull world shore did look level to me!

Jest then Lucy roused me up. She was wavin' a newspaper and talkin' excited 'bout somethin' I couldent tell what. I grabbed it outen her nervous hands and slipped on my specs, preparin' to read, I figgered, 'bout another Chicago murder or a brand new dyvorce in Hollywood. But I dident need no specs. My cryin' need was a stiff drink!

The screamin' headlines was:

NEW MEXICO WILDCAT BLOWS IN!

Gigantic Oil Gusher on Jarvis Ranch!

THE END.

Gorillas Show Deep Affection

GORILLAS rank high in intelligence. The animals possess many traits that are characteristic of humans. A gorilla has been observed moaning its grief over the body of its dead mate in a manner that is as human as it is pathetic. Kneeling down beside the body, its ugly face indicating deep despair, the gorilla will moan its sorrow, large, glistening tears rolling from its eyes. At other times the animal has been seen lifting the dead body gently to a sitting position and then stroking its hair tenderly back from its face. Then it chattered to the lifeless one in a sad crooning tone. No answer forthcoming, the ape laid the body gently down again and resumed moaning its grief.

Big game hunters, after having shot one gorilla, make use of this trait to get the dead ape's mate, if the latter succeeds in making its escape in the forest. The dead animal is left on the ground. Its mate can be depended on to return within twenty-four hours to mourn. The hunter then dispatches it.

Few gorillas are killed by native hunters—first, because of the ineffectiveness of the natives' primitive weapons against the great anthropoids, and second, on account of the natives' fear of the beast's nearly human intelligence. Cases have been recorded where a gorilla has revenged its slain mate by entering the village of the native hunters after nightfall, wrecking the huts, dragging forth the sleeping inmates and tearing them to pieces. For this reason the cautious white hunter is always anxious to get the beasts in pairs, especially when he has his camp in the immediate vicinity.

William P. Schramm.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

THE MOSLEM MULLAH

"JUST who are these mullahs who stir up so much trouble in India?" we asked ourselves when finishing Talbot Mundy's new serial, "By Allah Who Made Tigers," which starts in this issue. Mr. Mundy's answer is interesting and may help you to a clearer understanding of these odd and powerful figures. He writes:

The Mohammedans have no priesthood corresponding to that of the Christian or any other extensively professed religion. The original meaning of the word *mullah* derives from the Arabic *maula*, a term expressing the relation between a former owner and his manumitted slave. Thence it came to mean a learned man, a patron, a teacher, and was finally applied to doctors of law. In India the mullah is the man who reads the Koran, and frequently his sole claim to distinction is his ability to do that. In Afghanistan, however, and among the tribes on the northwest frontier, the mullahs have assumed far greater authority and it often happens that they exercise more sway than the actual amirs or chiefs. This is not due to their official standing, since they have none. They are usually Hajjis, meaning they have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, which gives them a claim, of a kind, to special consideration; and even those among them who are not well grounded in theology, invariably know by heart enough of the Moslem scriptures to be able to confuse and confound in debate the "faithful" who happen to be more ignorant than themselves.

Very many mullahs are keenly intelligent men, who, in other lands, under more favorable systems of government, might readily work their way to the top through political channels or by the recognized rungs of the ladders of organized religion. Lacking such means, they turn to fanatical leadership as the only available means to power. Some themselves are fanatics; others are keen psychologists, who understand the trick of stirring, swaying and guiding the fanaticism of others and their power becomes all the greater, since there is no organized authority that can discipline them. The result is that they are always a force to be reckoned with and one that must be adroitly conciliated by whoever seeks political, or even military control of those countries. Having nothing to lose and everything to gain, they are as dangerous as hornets.

Outstanding instances of the power of the mullahs were the risings of 1897-1898 on the Indian frontier, when the Mad Mullah of Swat led the attack on the Malakand. Similarly, the Hadda Mullah stirred and led Mohmands, Afridis, and Orakzais. In neither instance did the Mullah have the slightest official standing, in the occidental sense, but their power over the tribesmen was, for that very reason, all the more difficult to cope with.

The Mad Mullah of Somaliland was another gentleman who made war as he pleased and directed it masterfully from 1899 until 1910, although he was without authority from church or state.

Assumed madness is more often than not the mullahs' key to power. The theory among the more ignorant, and therefore more dangerous elements of the Moslem population is that he whom God has touched with madness is a spiritual wizard, who can hear voices and see visions unheard and unseen by ordinary mortals; consequently his advice is most likely to be excellent when most apparently absurd by any ordinary standard; also, whoever follows him can follow only into paradise, the madman being God's elect. It follows that the shrewdest and most artistic madmen in the world are to be found among the mullahs beyond the northwest frontier where the rule of "find the mullah and you have 'em" is as dependable—perhaps even more dependable—than our occidental adage "cherchez la femme."

THIS WEEK'S NEWCOMER

JOHN N. PREBLE, author of "The Wildcat's Playmate," joins our ranks this week and stands up to introduce himself:

I was graduated from the Massachusetts Agricultural College while serving with the United States Army Ambulance in a dugout on the Western Front; at least, that's where I was when the sheepskin reached me. After a year and a half hauling wounded, and touring France, England, and Italy, I came home. I didn't want to, but the war was over, and Uncle Sam didn't want us any more. Having majored in Pomology in college, I undertook to become a financial reporter.

But the lure of the pot of black gold drew me to the Southwest. For three years a crew of us drilled on a wildcat oil well on the banks of the Red River northwest of Burkburnett. We didn't have a pay day in the three years. We took stock for wages; the

company supplied the food and tobacco. What trouble we had! Every variety in the dictionary. After getting down to the thirty-two hundred-foot level, the poor old outfit finally fell all to pieces financially, and we dragged "over the hill"—broke.

After that I did almost everything to make a dollar. I tried my hand as roughneck, derrick man, fireman, pipe liner, undertaker, painter—mostly billboards—carpenter, actor, farm hand, ranch hand, cook and hobo. Since returning to the East I have married and started to raise a family and am now in the real estate business.

My thoughts, however, are often of my free life in the glorious West, and the many good pals I had then. In spite of the hardships and dangers, those days are recalled with tender pleasure. JOHN N. PREBLE.

ANOTHER list of favorites. Incidentally, Erle Stanley Gardner will soon be with us again.

Boonton, N. J.

I have been reading ARGOSY since "The Bandit of Hell's Bend," and I don't expect to miss a copy as long as you keep up your wonderful variety. As you can see by the coupons I'm inclosing, I like all your stories. Some are, of course, better than others, but I haven't skipped a story yet, because it wasn't interesting in some way. My favorite authors are: MacIsaac, LaMaster, Footner, Wirt. "He Rules Who Can," by Brodeur, was great; tell him to give us more like that. I'd like to see more of Erle Stanley Gardner; his stories are great. I'm pretty well acquainted with his work, having read a lot of it in other magazines, and you must admit "Rain Magic" was good.

I don't think there is a magazine on the market that I haven't had a copy of at one time or another and two or three I buy regular. But "ARGOSY forever." It's the best, bar none, regardless of price, and I would not miss a copy if you raised the price to fifty cents. H. N. ANDERSEN.

ANOTHER idea for an authors' popularity contest is suggested by Mrs. Williams:

Sulphur Springs, Fla.

I note John Mahon's suggestion that you conduct an authors' popularity contest. I wish to disagree with Mr. Mahon to this extent: I think a popularity contest would be fine, but why not let each reader name the ten best stories he has ever read in ARGOSY, regardless of the author. This would give the editor a better idea of what kind of stories the readers like, as some stories by an author are fine, while others by the same author are punk. Take Johnston McCulley, for example. "The Curse of Capistrano" was one of the best stories I ever read, but its sequel, "The Further Adventures of Zorro," I did not like. Slater LaMaster is another example. "The Phantom in the Rainbow" was good, but "Luckett of the Moon" I did not like at all.

L. G. WILLIAMS.

"THE SPECTRAL PASSENGER" seems to be running neck and neck with "The Phantom in the Rainbow" in the popularity race:

Washington C. H., Ohio.

I was so enthused over the story "The Phantom in the Rainbow" that I just had to write and thank you for the best story I have ever read in my nine years of being one of your fans. "The Spectral Passenger" promises to be almost as good. Please give us more of this type of story.

HORACE C. KENDALL.

AND a few more favorites:

Bellingham, Wash.

Do not, under any conditions change the stories that have been running in the ARGOSY for there are all the different styles and types that any one could want.

I do not just remember the first ARGOSY that I read, but it was many years ago. The stories by Garret Smith, I remember well. I liked "Brass Commandments," by George Washington Ogden. I think that Hulbert Footner's *Mme. Storey* serials are good. Not forgetting to mention George F. Worts, Fred MacIsaac, Ray Cummings and many others.

Cover the same ground and give to your readers the same as you have been giving for years and ARGOSY will remain the foremost weekly sold. FRANK H. DUNFEE.

Chicago, Ill.

I've read the ARGOSY for eight years, and it gets better every week. My favorite authors are George M. Johnson, Hulbert Footner, Charles Alden Seltzer, Fred MacIsaac, and Slater LaMaster.

Slater LaMaster's "Phantom in the Rainbow" is the best story I've ever read.

M. ALMY.

HE gets his money's worth, Mr. Dennison concludes:

Fresno, Calif.

The ARGOSY is just what it claims to be—the biggest ten cents' worth of entertainment ever got together under one cover. The editing of it is as nearly perfect as one could hope for in the choice and variety of stories.

First acquaintance with the ARGOSY began several years ago, and I have been at it ever since, with a few lapses. Occasionally there are stories I do not like, but I have never seen what might be characterized as a "rotten" or "punk" story in the ARGOSY.

Western stories are generally passed up, and I seldom get past the first chapter of any of them. But "The Raider," by Charles Alden

Seltzer, was an exception. It was a dandy yarn.

There's no use trying to comment on all the good ones that you have published. There are too many of them. But the outstanding ones, in my mind, are "Bookplated," by Fred MacIsaac, a delightfully improbable yarn, where everything breaks just right for the hero; "Buccaneers of the Air," by Eustace L. Adams, out of the ordinary, and the best adventure story in many and many a day. Just drop him a note and tell him to come again; he's too good to lose.

"War Lord of Many Swordsmen" was extremely good; lots of adventures and hairbreadth escapes to it. I got intensely interested in *Norcross* and *Miss Dudley*. Can't Mr. Wirt give us another adventure yarn wherein these two pit their wits against each other? That story makes you want to hear from them again.

"The Phantom in the Rainbow" is just concluding, and it's another fine yarn.

When some of the knockers start their song, mainly about what they don't like, I would suggest you take a week's vacation, let them sit in on the job and see what they could do; they'd be surprised at what they found. But the magazine wouldn't be able to withstand the ordeal. O. E. DENNISON.

SLANDER the cowboy, will you? Buck Ross has a few words to say about that:

New York City, N. Y.

I have something to say concerning Mr. C. L. Sutherland's argument about Westerners, especially where it concerns that some cowpunchers can't hit a tin can about ten feet away with a six-gun. He's all wrong on that. The cowboys he has seen were those that came into Los Angeles, show and rodeo men. He ought to have been with me two years ago on a remote Wyoming cow range, where I witnessed a cow-puncher on horseback with a rifle down an airplane that was making trouble for the cattle industry. And how about downing two buzzards with a six-gun. Who ever heard of it or saw it done? I did, last year, in the vicinity of the Double OO ranch in Nevada. Pipe down, Mr. Sutherland; the West which I saw is just about as tough as in the old days. Now the law is more active, that's all. BUCK ROSS.

THROUGH the years Mr. Wetherwax has grown up with ARGOSY, each keeping pace with the other:

Port Chester, N. Y.

The last issue contained a letter from "the first issue" reader, which constrains me to write this: I wonder if Mr. Wheeler got the same thrills that I felt as I waited for each issue of the *Golden Argosy* to reach my home town—Castleton - on - the - Hudson—when my young mind thrilled at the tale of the struggles of "The Boy Broker," by Mr. Munsey, and as I followed the fortunes of the "Young Editor," by Matthew White, Jr., and "No. 91" and "Ned Newton the Newsboy" and "With Cossack and Convict." As they say in the style of speech of to-day, "Oh, boy! and then some."

As the *Golden Argosy* merged in the ARGOSY and then followed by the title as at present, the stories grew more serious, and I seemed to grow "older" with them, so we have really "grown up" together—size and date of issue—monthly, twice monthly, *et cetera*. I have followed the dear old ARGOSY a good many years, never missing one issue.

Back in, I think it was 1918, the editor of the *Log* gave me the title of "rear admiral," so you see I have been officially recognized before.

All of the stories are good. Jones likes one kind, Smith likes another, but—we all can find enough in each issue of our magazine to please each individual taste to more than repay us for buying the ARGOSY each week.

Let me sum up and say that the *Golden Argosy* entertained and thrilled my young mind with its splendid boy stories, when I was a boy. Now it has the same effect on my "adult mind" as the stories fit, and have fitted in with the growth and development of my mind as I grew up to manhood.

Long life to the ARGOSY, and may the memories of the "kids" stories never grow dim.
ALFRED H. WETHERWAX.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

4-27

Looking Ahead!

Two Promised Features Next Week!

SWORDS ARE OUT!

A New Serial

by W. WIRT

Ever since the publication of "War Lord of Many Swordsmen" we have been bombarded with requests for a sequel to that story. Here it is. The scene is again laid far back in the mountainous interior of China in the domain of the Princess Ch'enyaun. When trouble threatens on all sides the call for aid goes out to John Norcross—and his prompt response gives us a story that is a fitting sequel to the popular "War Lord."

The opening installment appears next week—in

THE ISSUE OF MAY 4th

TEXAS JOINS THE ARMY

A Complete Novelette

by LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER

comes in response to the demand for a sequel to "Texas Comes to West Point." In it we follow Tex Griffen into his military life—and into a stormy Mexican border adventure.

COMING DURING THE REST OF MAY

MAY 11—RALPH MILNE FARLEY, FRED MacISAAC and WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

MAY 18—FRANK L. PACKARD and ANTHONY M. RUD

MAY 25—J. ALLAN DUNN and JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

ARGOSY

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A magnificent cluster of 7, fine quality, full cut, sparkling, blue-white, genuine diamonds is set in a solid platinum disk. Disk is set in an exceptionally popular, beautifully hand engraved, 18 Kt. solid white gold mounting. This gorgeous cluster has every appearance of a $600 solitaire.

18 KARAT

No Red Tape **10 Days Trial**

SEND NO MONEY When you get the ring, pay only $5.00 to the postman. If you keep it, pay only $1.00 a week for one whole year. All credit dealings kept strictly confidential—No credit orders accepted from persons under 20 years of age.

We are sold **Money Back GUARANTEE** firm of diamond importers. **You take no risk.** If you are not satisfied that the ring is the biggest bargain you ever got, return it and **we will refund every cent that you paid.**

PRICE CUT TO $60.00 —WORTH $100.00

You can now buy this gorgeous ring at the **wholesale price.** Compare it with similar rings at $100. We guarantee it to **stand any test or comparison.** Greatest bargain offered by any Diamond Importer. **We allow 8% annual increase** in exchange for a larger diamond ring.

Write for FREE Illustrated Catalog

It brings our large Jewelry Store right into your home. Gives weights, grades and complete description so you can buy diamonds like an expert. Gives you information that other jewelers dare not tell.

Genuine Blue-White Diamonds as low as $197.00 a Carat.

AGENTS WANTED—EARN $100 WEEK. Write for details.

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DIAMOND IMPORTERS—$1,000,000 STOCK—ESTABLISHED 1879
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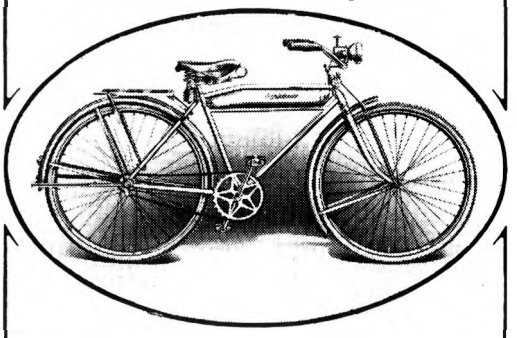
IVER JOHNSON

Supreme!
America's Finest Bicycle



The Super Mobike $50
Completely Equipped—the latest and best.

The Mobicycle
Without Extra Equipment $45

Finished in Iver Johnson Blue Enamel with white DUCO head.

For Strength, Long Service and Beauty nothing equals an Iver Johnson

Send for illustrated catalog in colors showing other models from $32.50 to $67.50

IVER JOHNSON VELOCIPEDES *and* JUNIORCYCLES

(Sidewalk Cycles) are the same high grade as our bicycles.

Any Iver Johnson Agency will show you these famous products.

Dealers should send for Proposition B

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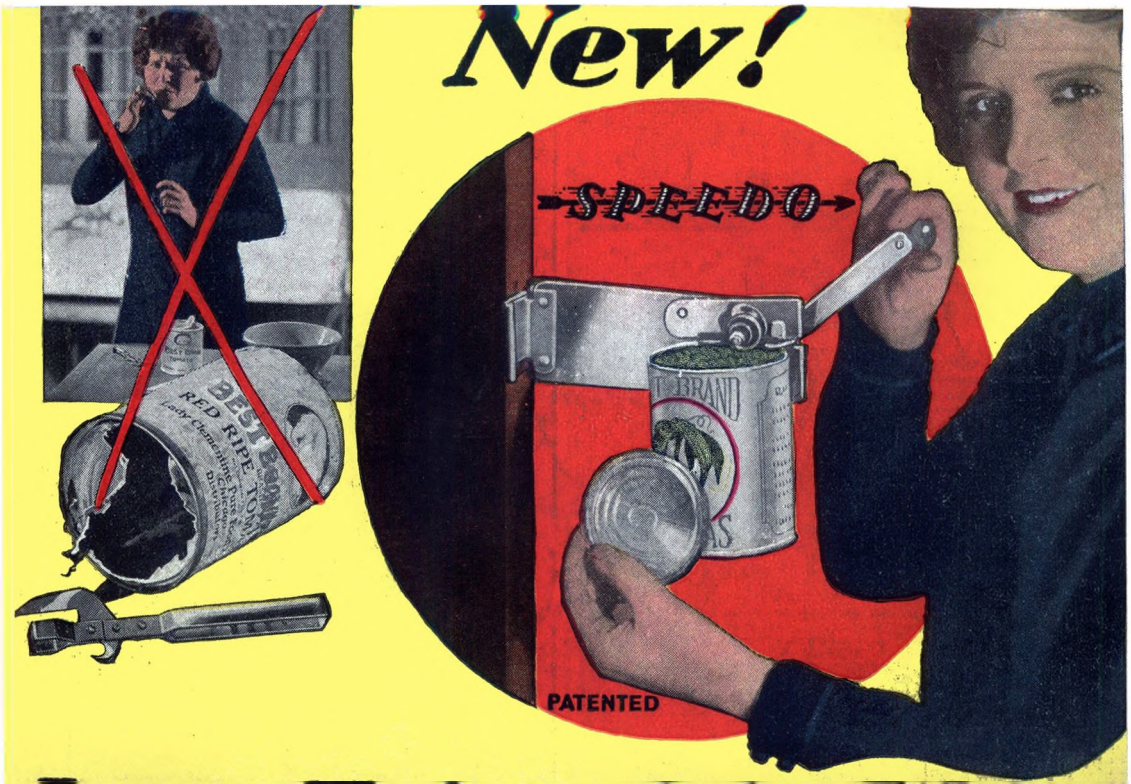
JUNIORCYCLE VELOCIPEDE



Just a Twist of the Wrist

Banishes Old Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap

and Brings Agents $5 to $12 an Hour!

WOMEN universally detest the old-style can opener. Yet in practically every home cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine then, how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful job. With the wonderful little Speedo can opener you just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

A "Million Dollar" Can Opening Machine

The Speedo holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! And no wonder Speedo salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make up to $10 an hour either spare or full time.

Generous Free Test Offer

Frankly, I realize that the facts about this proposition as outlined briefly here may seem almost incredible to you. I'll grant you that the profit possibilities are so tremendous that it's impossible to give more than a mere hint of them here. So I've worked out a plan by which you can examine the invention and test its profit possibilities without risking one penny of your own money.

Mail the Coupon Today

All I ask you to do is to fill out and mail the coupon below. You do not obligate yourself in any way whatever. I'll rush you the details. Get my FREE TEST OFFER while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about $75 to $150 a week with Speedo. I'll also tell you about another fast-selling item in the Central States line that brings you two profits on every call. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

SPEEDO

Patented Household Specialties

AGENTS!

$265 in a Week

"Here is my record for first 30 days with Speedo:
June 13, 60 Speedos
June 20, 84 Speedos
June 30, 192 Speedos
July 6, 288 Speedos
Speedo sells to 9 out of 10 prospects."
M. Ornoff, Va.

PART TIME
14 Sales in 2 Hours

J. J. Corwin, Ariz., says: "Send more order books. I sold first 14 orders in 2 hours."

SPARE TIME
BigMoneySpareTime

Barb, W. Va., says: "Was only out a few evenings and got 20 orders."

READ!

One of my prospects told me she could get along with her old can opener. Two weeks later her husband ordered a can opener from me saying his wife had cut her hand badly.—W. L. Godshalk, Pa.

CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO.
Dept. D-792
4500 Mary Ave. (Est. over 20 years) St. Louis, Mo.

Central States Mfg. Co.,
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St. Louis, Mo.

Yes, rush me the facts and details of your FREE OFFER. And tell me how I can make $75 to $150 a week.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

( ) Check here if interested only in one for your own home.