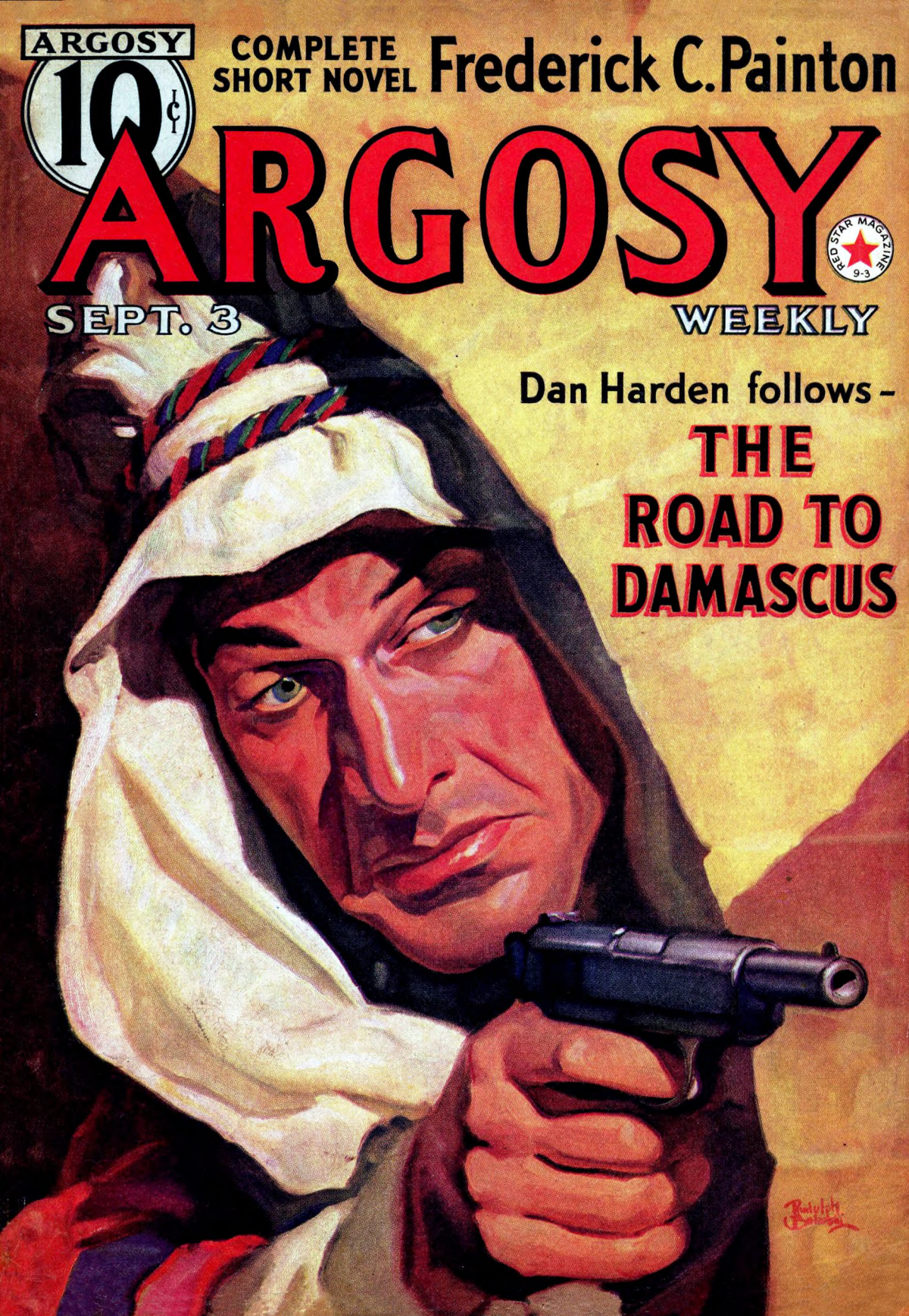
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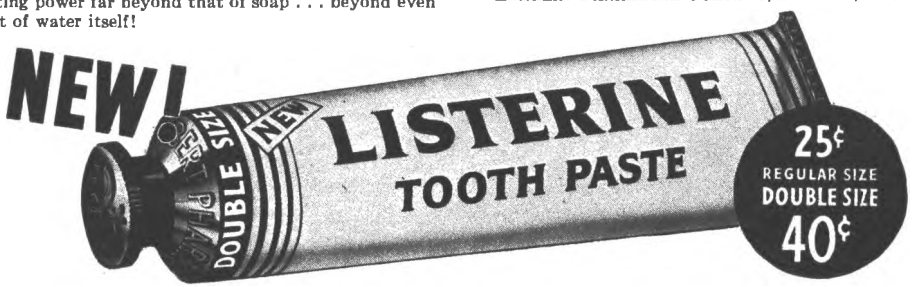

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Volume 284 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 3, 1938 Number 3

Cover by Rudolph Belarski
Illustrating The Road to Damascus

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GOOD PAY IN RADIO

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by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

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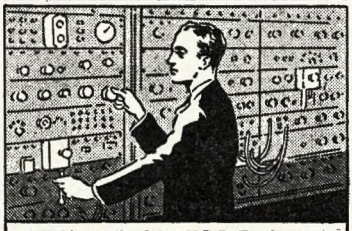

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"I am Sheik Amur Abdullah," the haughty leader announced

The Road to Damascus

Susie skipped the bell-boy—and led Dan Harden beyond the Jaffa gate into a sweltering land where, more terrible than Arab guns, waited the silent menace of the plague. A complete short novel

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

Author of "The Invasion of America," "Pharaoh Had a Tomb," etc.

I

IN AN organization like the International Surety Company (We Insure Anything—Anywhere), freak messages from clients were not unusual. When you insure a man against triplets or guarantee a one-armed flag-pole sitter against a case of hives, such messages are to be expected. But even so, the cables from Jerusalem were unusual.

The first cable arrived at nine o'clock of a bright Paris spring morning. At 9:01, André Pierre Armand Touchard, president-founder of the International, swept ponderously into the office of Dan Harden, his chief claims investigator.

"M'sieur Dan, where is he?" cried Papa Touchard, pulling at his white Santa Claus beard.

"He has not yet arrived, *m'sieur*," replied Dan's secretary.

"Nom d'un nom!" growled Papa Touchard. "For fifty years these offices have opened at nine o'clock. Why is he not here?"

"Je ne sais pas, m'sieur," said the secretary. "He is but just back from his honeymoon. Perhaps he is fatigued."

"Nonsense," snapped Papa Touchard. "A honeymoon is a honeymoon, and when it is done it is done, and work begins. Call him on the telephone at once."

The telephone between the twin beds in Dan Harden's Passy apartment jangled. Valerie, his wife, did not move. Dan turned over. The movement shook up the devils playing ping-pong on his skull. He groaned. The telephone continued to ring.

"Hell!" said Dan and sat up. He clutched his head and said, "Oh!" The telephone continued to buzz like an angry rattler. Valerie turned over and groaned, "For the love of Heaven, darling, throw the thing out the window."

Dan groped, found the receiver and muttered, "Hello!" A moment's wait and there was Papa Touchard's voice booming on the wire.

"It is important, *cher* Dan," he cried "It is a cable from Jerusalem. From Madame Proctor. The wife of Professor Barnard Proctor. Her daughter is missing, kidnaped."

"Her daughter," repeated Dan, stalling for time to clear away a champagne fog.

"Her daughter, Susie. Listen, I read: Insureco, Paris, Susie missing twenty-four hours. Believe she is kidnaped or murdered. Send help at once. Harriet Proctor."

"Anybody with the name of Susie ought to be kidnaped," muttered Dan.

"Hush, *cher fils,* this is no time for the wise-crack. You must go at once, on the first plane—which is at noon. Professor Proctor, he is world famous. More, we have a blanket policy for one million, two hundred and fifty thousand francs on him and his family."

Dan tried desperately to clear his brain and only partly succeeded. "A wet night on the ocean, Papa," he muttered. "I'll call you back in thirty minutes."

"There must be no delay—oh, *sacré bleu! Attendez!* A new cable has come. This one reads: Insureco, Paris: Certain now Susie is dead please hasten help. Pack your bags, *cher* Dan, I will make reservations for you—and of course for Madame Harden."

DAN hung up the receiver and fell back against the pillow. His head enlarged and contracted like a bellows. He finally managed to stagger to the bathroom where he drank six glasses of water in swift succession and then another that had bicarbonate of soda in it. Just as this was well down the telephone rang again.

"Dear Heaven!" he muttered. "Papa ought to know I don't want to go to Jerusalem. It's hotter than Tophet in Palestine in spring." He answered the call.

It was not Papa Touchard. Instead, a

loud, cheerful voice bellowed, "Hi, Dan, my boy! How's the old eight-bottle guy this A.M.? Chipper as a herring, I'll bet."

A wild expression of panic swept Dan's lean tanned face. Hastily he seized Valerie's beautiful shoulder and shook it.

"Your cousin Greg Borden from America," he muttered. "You talk to him. I—I can't."

"Neither can I," moaned Valerie.

"You've got to, he's your cousin," snapped Dan. "He and his wife came to see you, not me. It was your idea to show them Paris, and Europe, and the battlefields; and you included Asia, too, after the last bottle."

He seized her and by the slack of her silken pajamas pulled her to the phone. In a dulcet voice he said, "This is Madame Harden's maid speaking. Madame Harden will talk to you. Hang on."

Thereupon, he fled to the bathroom, turned on the ice-cold shower and with a prayer to Heaven dived under it. "I should have married," he shivered, "an orphan who knows how to alienate friends and arouse hatred." The ice-cold needles of water pounded merrily on his shrinking skin. But he stayed under the shower until he was certain that he'd live.

Dan was not accustomed to drinking champagne. Not much of it, anyway, and last night he had had plenty. The reason was the arrival in Paris of Gregory Borden, Valerie's cousin, and Greg's wife. They were tourists; they wanted to go places and see things; and Valerie and Dan took them. A wild night, starting with the Moulin Rouge and ending at the Paroquet.

That was bad enough, but Greg and his wife were going to stay two weeks. Two weeks of showing Paris to tourists would kill Dan and he knew it.

His thoughts were abruptly broken by Valerie reaching through the shower curtain and socking him on the chest.

"Stop that gurgling and shouting and cease pounding your chest as if you were Tarzan."

"Yes, Scrumptious," Dan was suspiciously mild. He thrust his head through the shower sheet. "What did your cousin want? Another quart of champagne? A great card, your cousin Greg."

"Hush," Valerie implored. "Greg is all for having six hairs off the dog that bit him. Or maybe seven. He wants to leave for Verdun and the battlefields. He's ordered a car, a case of champagne, and he's going to open a bottle at every spot where the Yanks won the war in 1918."

Dan moaned. "No, I'll be damned if I will."

Valerie said, "What did Papa Touchard say?"

"Wants me to go to Jerusalem. A gal named Susie has been kidnaped." He paused. Then: "I'll call him back and say no."

"You'll call him back and say we'll take the first plane."

"What?" cried Dan, amazed. "You said you adored Paris in spring. You wanted to stay, you said. And Jerusalem now is hotter than a sheriff's pistols."

"It can't be worse than touring the battlefields with a case of champagne," shuddered Valerie. "I told Greg we were going, and we're going. Get out from under that shower and give a gal a chance to live."

DAN got out and Valerie slipped under and shrieked as the needles thumped her slim figure. Dan went to work cutting the stubble from his face.

"You're right," he muttered. "Susie may be a tough case but your cousin is tougher. We go. Get packed right away."

He arrived at his office at ten o'clock. Mademoiselle Minton, who adored Dan, had all the files out and also a new cable from Harriet Proctor. She paused long enough to stare sadly at Dan. "M'sieur Harden, you have lived six years in Paris. In that time one learns not to drink champagne after dinner."

Dan winced. "Don't remind me. It was the visiting firemen."

He plunged into the file marked Pro-

fessor Barnard Proctor, Ph.D., L.L.D., Sc. D.F.R.G.S.F.A.A.S. Looking over the number of policies, Dan was dumbfounded. There were policies covering accident or death to Proctor or his coworkers in their archeological excavations near Canaan; policies against loss or theft of equipment; policies against weather delay; policies against loss, theft or damage to scientific discoveries. And, finally, of course, the "floater" policy of fifty thousand dollars covering Professor Proctor and his family.

"This guy was insured against everything but the end of the world," he muttered.

"*Mais oui,*" said Mademoiselle Minton. "He is a nuisance, that one. While you were in America he once telegraphed eight times a day about the disappearance of a steam shovel."

"Maybe it slipped through a hole in his pants," said Dan.

He read on, digesting Professor Proctor's record as one of the world's greatest paleontologists and noted authority on pre-Assyrian civilizations. He also recorded the fact that Professor Proctor had been married once before and was widowed. This Harriet Proctor was evidently his second wife.

Her name reminded him of the third cable.

CANNOT REACH HUSBAND FRANTIC WITH WORRY OVER SUSIE STOP WHY CANNOT YOU SEND HELP IF WE PAY PREMIUMS HARRIET L. PROCTOR

"I don't see any mention of any one named Susie in this file," said Dan to Mademoiselle Minton.

Papa Touchard, who now entered with the plane reservations on the British Imperial Airways, replied, "It is doubtless Mrs. Proctor's daughter. She was married once before she married Proctor."

"Proctor has a daughter, too, named Lillian," said Dan.

"It isn't she. All the cables say Susie," replied Touchard.

He put the plane reservations down. "Dan, you must go."

"Lower your voice, Santa Claus," said Dan. "You haven't any argument. I'm going."

Papa Touchard pulled at his pure white, chest length beard. His rubicund cheeks lifted in a vast smile. "*Alors, magnifique!*" he cried. "Usually you hate to leave. You said only a few days ago about Paris in springtime—"

"That was before my wife's cousin came to Paris," sighed Dan.

Papa Touchard roared with laughter. "Ah, *mon fils,* I know. I know. When I was married my wife's twelve brothers and sisters came to live with us."

At eleven he picked up Valerie. Her hair was burnished gold; her eyes gorgeous. She looked sixteen years old and fresh as a dewy violet. "I just ducked Greg. So hurry. And if you finish this case early, we'll stay out there until Greg goes home."

"Right," said Dan.

At noon the big British Imperial Airways plane took off for Brindisi, Italy, the first stop.

Dan looked down at the Rhone Valley gliding beneath the wings. "This case might not be so simple," he muttered. "Palestine is a tough country these days."

"A hunch?" asked Valerie.

"Yes."

And though Dan couldn't know it then, his hunch was right. This was to be the most puzzling mystery of his career.

II

OUTSIDE the frowning Jaffa Gate which leads through massive walls into the Biblical Jerusalem, a new Jerusalem has sprung up. A Jerusalem of Bronx apartments, hotels, wide streets and modern motor cars. A Jerusalem that is a pain to the eye and the heart. In the Allenby Hotel, one of the less ugly hostelries, Mrs. Harriet Proctor stared out at the Mount of Olives, grayish-green in the harsh, brilliant desert sun. Her boldly handsome face was set in deep thought. The arrival of a motor car at the entrance below broke her concentration and she

frowned. She saw a slim dark-haired girl climb out. The slim girl blew a kiss to the yellow-haired boy behind the wheel and ran into the hotel. Mrs. Proctor's full, red, provocative mouth flattened angrily. She turned from the window, muttering, "She disobeyed me after all."

Mrs. Proctor was a tall woman, and well corseted, so that her figure was shapely despite her forty-three years. With her big dark eyes, her jet-black hair and boldly cut features, she betrayed the deep passionate intensity of her nature. She could love devotedly or hate terribly.

The door burst open and the dark, slim young girl came in, joyously radiant. She stopped short at sight of Harriet Proctor, and her radiance left her.

"Oh, hello, Harriet," she said. "Any word of Susie?"

Harriet Proctor ignored the question. "I forbade you to see Kenneth Seagrave again."

Lillian Proctor had a narrow attractive face, touched with the bloom of youth. Her dimpled chin came out stubbornly.

"I told you I would see him when I liked."

"Kenneth Seagrave is a silly young fool, a no-good piece of Oriental white trash. He's an adventurer who wants to marry you and your money."

"You've said all that before," replied Lillian quietly.

"And I'll say it again. You're only nineteen and you must obey me."

Lillian went to a taboret, selected a cigarette, lit it and stared at the up-curling blue smoke.

"Don't be horse-and-buggy, Harriet," she said. "I happen to love Ken, and come a day when things look bright for him, I intend to marry him."

"Married, at nineteen! Ridiculous! If your father thought—"

"Stop it!" said Lillian sharply. "You're my stepmother and I suppose under the law you have authority over me. But not concerning Ken and me."

"Your father—"

"My father hasn't answered my letters, but when he does you'll see that he approves. I'm no half-baked girl who doesn't know her own mind. I've known Ken Seagrave for a year. He's swell, and I love him, and I'll marry him when I choose."

Harriet Proctor's eyes flashed fire. "You'll never marry him."

"Won't I?" laughed Lillian. "Just because you've been married to my father a year—"

"Go to your room!"

THE slim dark girl flicked away the cigarette and went silently to an adjacent bedroom. Mrs. Proctor went to the wall telephone and called the desk downstairs.

"Is there an earlier ship for America than the *Italia?* . . . The *Exochorda?* Good. Change my reservations—two adjoining staterooms—to the *Exochorda* then. Yes, I wish to leave as soon as possible."

She had barely hung up when the buzzer at the sitting-room door sounded loudly. She touched her hair with long fingers, gave herself a quick glance in a mirror and then, forcing a pleasant smile, opened the door.

"Mrs. Proctor?" said a tall, dark, good-looking man.

"Yes."

"I'm Dan Harden, chief claims investigator of the International Surety. This is my wife, Valerie. You got my cable that I'd be here today?"

Mrs. Proctor underwent an amazing transformation. She simpered and giggled. "Of course! Of course! Come in. Thank Heaven, you're here. I've been practically out of my mind about Susie. Isn't it just dreadful?"

She extended her hands to Valerie. "Come in, darling, and I'll pour some tea. We can talk over tea better; at least I can."

Dan's glance met Valerie's; this was certainly a cool way to take the fact of a daughter kidnaped or murdered. Mrs. Proctor rang and a turbaned, *djellahed* Arab arrived with the tea things.

"Most mysterious," said Mrs. Proctor. "I mean how Susie vanished. I still don't think I quite understand. You see, she was out with Saki who was taking her for some air—"

"Had she been ill?" asked Valerie.

"No, not especially. "It was this climate! So hot in the spring! That's why I left Barnard at the dig—the excavation, you know. He'd found some pre-Hittite stuff and wanted to continue another month or so. But he thought we should go on to the States and open the summer place. I'm sailing next week on the *Exochorda,* and—"

"You were talking about Susie," interrupted Dan.

"So I was. How silly of me! I get to talking, you know, and—ah, yes, about Susie. Well, Saki took her for a walk to the park, along Allenby Avenue. He's the bell-boy. He was talking for a few moments with a girl—his girl, he said—and when he looked around Susie was gone. Completely disappeared."

Dan's steel-gray eyes widened. He put away his paper wads and rubber band.

"Would you mind telling me," he said, "who or what is Susie?"

"Susie? Didn't I tell you? How stupid of me! Susie's our springer spaniel. Wait—I have a pitcure of her. Here it is. Isn't she just beautiful—champion of breed and many times winner of best of show."

SHE returned with an enlarged photograph of a pop-eyed springer spaniel with flopping ears and long curly brown and white hair. Valerie stared at Dan with dancing eyes and face red with suppressed mirth.

They heard a sudden sound and looked up at a slim dark girl who had entered.

"Susie's my dog—mine and Father's. I grew up with Susie."

Mrs. Proctor gave her step-daughter a hostile, cold look.

Dan could take it. His bland expression never changed. If he was furious at traveling two thousand miles for a dog, he did not betray it.

"I'll do what I can, Mrs. Proctor," he said. "The blanket policy covers er—Susie. Give me all the details."

While Valerie choked and coughed into her handkerchief, Mrs. Proctor, assisted by Lillian, told what had happened.

The springer was ten years old and asthmatic. She had to be taken for her airing. She was very obedient and not taken on a leash. What possessed her to run off neither Mrs. Proctor nor Lillian knew.

"I advertised in both the Jewish and Arabic papers and offered a reward of one hundred dollars," concluded Mrs. Proctor. "But I've heard nothing. So I fear she's dead."

There was a silence. Then Lillian said, "Susie had been acting strangely these past few days."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Proctor. "You imagine that."

Lillian shrugged and did not press the point. She said, "Susie was my darling, Mr. Harden. Please find her or let me know what happened."

Her sudden sadness was childishly sweet. Dan said gently, "I will."

Presently he rose and led Valerie out. Lillian accompanied them downstairs to get some stamps. So Mrs. Proctor was alone. But not for long. Five minutes after Dan had gone a soft rap thudded on the door. She opened it to admit a tall man with a finely made face, dreamy eyes and a shock of prematurely white hair. Harriet Proctor flung herself into his arms and kissed him passionately.

"It's all right, sweetheart," he whispered. "Did you do as I asked?"

"Not yet. I'll wait a while," and she told him about Dan.

Basil Manders nodded. "You did right."

She kissed him eagerly again. . . .

Downstairs in the bar Dan sat over a tall Scotch and soda. Valerie fiddled with gingerale and looked thoughtful.

"If I know anything," she said, "and sometimes I doubt it, that woman is a clever split-personality. She's not a silly, stupid woman at all."

"What goes on in your head, chile?" Dan demanded.

"This is not as funny as it appears," said Valerie. "It—"

"It couldn't be," grunted Dan. "But imagine her summoning me about a dog! Why—" he ceased speaking, a suddenly puzzled expression on his face. He was suddenly grim, purposeful.

His wife perceived it. "What's biting you, darling?"

"The dog! And no pun intended. It's impossible for that dog to disappear."

"Dogs will roam, get run over."

"Wait till I explain. In walled Jerusalem and out here there are probably fifty or a hundred thousand dogs—all mutts, mongrels."

"I saw that many myself on the ride over," said Valerie, "so what?"

"Susie's a champion, a thoroughbred. Probably the only full-bred dog in all Palestine."

"All the more reason for stealing her."

"No. Arabs don't go in for that racket. Dog-stealing is an American custom. Arabs like dogs. If Susie really ran away and an Arab found her, he'd keep her until he learned to whom she belonged. A reward would make him return her all the quicker. Even if she were stolen, a hundred dollars to an Arab is the same as a million at home. He'd bring her at a gallop for that money."

"What you mean to say is," said Valerie, "that you think Susie is dead."

"Yes," said Dan. "But that isn't all. If Susie's dead as I think, she's been murdered."

"Are you making a joke about this?" Valerie asked sharply.

"Not me," replied Dan. "No Arab would kill a dog unless by accident. If Susie was a victim of an accident, her body would have been found. Her body hasn't been found; she hasn't been returned. So she's been killed deliberately."

Valerie looked at him admiringly. "Nice going, Herlock. But why was Susie murdered?"

"When we find out, you'll see it was for nothing trivial," said Dan grimly. "Scrumptious, this is going to be good."

III

IN HIS wanderings across the face of the globe, Dan Harden had picked up many odd acquaintances and queerer friends. Of these Hussein beni Shureff, better known as Hussein the Magnificent, was the queerest. Hussein was a Bedouin of six feet two inches, built like a Greek god and possessed of the dignity of Mahomet himself. In his thirty years Hussein had been a camel thief, a rider of *ghrazzu*, a picker of pockets on occasion, and a robber of violence more often than not. Despite this, Hussein was a most lovable, goodnatured young man, lashed to crime by an ambition that was an obsession.

Hussein lived only to be a rug salesman in Paris. Those of you who have seen Arab and Turkish sellers of rugs pester and torment the drinkers of vermouth *cassis* and bock beer at the Café de la Paix will understand what is meant. One of Hussein's cousins had been such a purveyor of rugs and had died wealthy with forty-six wives. He it was who had filled young Hussein's mind with such dreams.

Hussein had been saving for eight years to get steamship fare and sufficient funds to purchase rugs. He had never accumulated enough because he loved to bet on white racing camels.

Dan knew that Hussein was familiar with Jerusalem. So he summoned the Bedouin the next day, gave him a description of the dog and told him to find it.

He told Valerie to make friends with Lillian. "I want to know more about the family," he said. "Find out why Professor Proctor hasn't come down to see his family off."

On this point of Professor Proctor he got a puzzling lead on his own. He was interviewing Saki, the bell-hop who had taken Susie for the fatal walk. The boy told the same story as Mrs. Proctor had

related save for one point. "When I looked around, *Effendi,* Susie was gone. There was nearby only a man in a striped *delabiah* walking toward the Jaffa Gate."

Dan made a note of this for Hussein. Then he asked, "Has Professor Proctor been here recently?"

"He was here two days before you arrived, *Effendi,*" was the surprising reply. "He gave me ten piasters for getting him a box of cigars."

Later Dan heard from the bartender that Professor Proctor had been in Jerusalem a few days previous. He had purchased five bottles of Scotch whisky before leaving.

This puzzled Dan. In her cable Mrs. Proctor had distinctly said that she could not get in touch with her husband. Dan went up to see her.

"Yes, Barnard was here," she said calmly. "But, if you must have the truth, we quarreled. He wanted Lillian and me to stay on with him. I refused. It's so hot and deadly on the desert. So he went back in a huff and wouldn't answer my telegrams about Susie."

Dan tried to check this version through Lillian who was with Valerie. Valerie brought him a report.

"Lillian was in Jaffa for two days. So she didn't see her father at all."

Dan shrugged. Was he making a mountain out of a plain? Trying to create mystery where there was none? After all, the private affairs of the Proctors, quarrels or no, were none of his business. However, he summoned Hussein and gave him the description of the Arab in the striped *delabiah.*

"I am a fine man, *Sidi,*" said Hussein. "I will find him. Give me one British pound for expenses."

"But you can't have spent what I gave you last, Hussein," Dan protested.

"Wallah!" exclaimed Hussein. "Why in Allah's name (and on him be prayers) should I? How shall I get steamship fare to Paris if I spend what is given me?"

"It's a thought," grinned Dan, and gave him a pound.

THEN, to add to his puzzlement, he met, on one of his visits to Mrs. Proctor, the tall good-looking Basil Manders. Manders was affable and winning, and talked about art with authority. He indicated that he was an artist who would some day do something. Valerie also found him charming. "But he's a weakling," she said. "I've seen dilettantes like him before."

"That may be," muttered Dan. "But Harriet Proctor worships him."

"Right," said Valerie. "And maybe that's it."

"What do you mean? The mystery is her affair with Manders?"

Dan shook his head. "It's more than that."

The next day he got a cable from Touchard:

HAVE YOU GONE MAD WASTING TIME AND EXPENSE FINDING DOG STOP PAY MADAME PROCTOR FOR DOG AND RETURN AT ONCE BIG CASE IN MUNICH

Dan sighed. "Go back to your cousin? Never!"

Dan wired:

GO TO MUNICH AND TRY THE BEER STOP MURDER IS MURDER THOUGH IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

"That," said Valerie, "will make him tear out his beard in vast chunks."

"It's long enough to stand a couple of tears."

On the fourth day Hussein, tall and dignified as an oracle, bowed before Dan.

"Sidi," said he, "I am a great man, and I have done a great thing. I have found an accursed Bedouin who now has four five-pound English notes. This camel-dung never had before in his life two pieces of silver to clack together. Allah (upon whom be prayers) will witness the truth of my speech."

"Ah," murmured Dan. "This sounds good. Who's the Bedouin?"

"The steamship fare to Paris, *Sidi,* is great."

Dan held out a one-pound Bank of England note. It vanished within Hussein's *delabiah.*

"His name, *Sidi,* is Ali Mo'zen, and if you will follow me I shall lead thee to him."

"You know more than you've told me," said Dan sharply.

"And if it be so, and Allah knows I hope it is, it is because this accursed dog has no right to so much money."

"You will blackmail him?" asked Dan, getting his hat.

"The fare to Paris is much," said Hussein, caressing a curved knife in a chased silver scabbard.

Dan left a note to Valerie, telling her to cable Papa Touchard and get the details of Mrs. Proctor's history. Then he followed Hussein.

The way led through the towering Jaffa Gate into the narrow, ancient streets, scarcely wider than Dan's shoulders. Here the hubbub of the Orient dinned in his ears with physical force. Gabardined Jews shouted at him to buy wares; story-tellers chanted. Arabs stared insolently at him and noisily ate sheep meat and rice and drank mint tea. Hucksters howled, and donkeys brayed. He passed the Holy Sepulchre into which moved an unending stream of devout believers. He walked down the Via Dolorosa to the Wailing Wall where bearded Jews sobbed for the return of the Temple.

HERE he climbed a pair of stairs past the Mosque of the Omar where Arab beggars beseeched for alms. At length Hussein entered a filthy square little building of brown mud and called, *"Salaam Aleykum!"*

A shifty-eyed Arab pulled aside a curtain and said, *"Aleykum salaam,* upon thee and thine be peace in Allah's name."

"And on thee be peace, my brother," said Hussein. "I bring thy fortune. Let us enter."

Dan spoke good Arabic in three dialects, but he chose to let Hussein do the talking. He stared at this Ali Mo'zen in the yellow light of a kerosene lamp, and he didn't like what he saw. Mean close eyes, predatory mouth, and greedy face.

After the usual Oriental dilly-dallying, Hussein said, "Thou art rich, brother, but thou canst be richer."

"That is as Allah (upon whom be joy) wills. What meanest thou?"

"Thou hast received *ferengi* money for stealing a *ferengi* dog. He who is with me, my brother, and they friend, will pay thee double the silver thou hast received if thou wilt say now where is the dog and lead us to it."

"This *ferengi* is of the police," said Ali Mo'zen fearfully.

"By Allah's perfumed beard, I swear he is not. Look, here is thy money, if thou wilt but speak."

Hussein reached out a hand to Dan. Dan inwardly swore; Hussein made the offer too generous. But he gave Hussein forty British pounds—two hundred American dollars. Ali Mo'zen's eyes glittered. His dirty hand came out for the money. Hussein held it back.

"First, we see the dog. Then I swear by Allah (upon whom be peace) to yield all the silver to you."

"Come, then, in Allah's name," said Ali Mo'zen.

He led the way through a revoltingly filthy bedroom into a square enclosed compound like a patio, now filled with debris and rubbish of all kind. Ali Mo'zen had brought his kerosene lamp, and by its light he used a mattock to uncover a half of a Jaffa orange crate. As this was exposed Dan gasped, "Whoof!" and nearly gagged.

The dog had been dead several days.

But it was the springer spaniel. Of that its brown and white markings, the long silken ears, left no doubt. Dan mastered his sudden nausea and bent down to make a closer examination. He straightened up, puzzled.

"The dog hasn't a wound on him," he said. "Did you poison him?" Ali Mo'zen shrugged and did not reply.

"Did you kill him?"

Once again Ali Mo'zen refused to speak. Dan leaned down again over the dog. This time he saw a piece of rotten meat

that had evidently fallen from the dog's opened jaws. This gave off, even now, a peculiar odor of bitter almonds. Dan's heart hammered.

"Prussic acid!" he muttered. "You poisoned this dog with cyanide of potassium."

"I do not know the words you use," said Ali Mo'zen stolidly. "I wish only my silver as promised."

Dan offered another twenty pounds for Ali Mo'zen to tell him the truth. But although the Bedouin's eyes flamed greedily, he refused to incriminate himself. He said he found the dog and buried him. Hussein whispered, "Wait, *Sidi.* I will find out for you."

Dan was forced to let it go at that. Back at the hotel he sat down and shot paper wads at a picture of King Feisal of Iraq.

"A European ordered that dog killed," he thought, "and supplied the poison for the job. An Arab, left to himself, would slit a dog's throat, or blow out his brains. Or perhaps use an Oriental poison. But not cyanide. This dog was killed by white orders."

But why? What was going on?

Valerie suddenly burst into the room, breathless and deathly pale. Dan leaped to his feet. "What's happened?" he cried.

She looked him full in the eyes. "Old Professor Barnard Proctor is dead."

"Dead!" Dan repeated. "Do you mean murdered?"

"Mrs. Proctor says no," Valerie rejoined. "But I think he was. He must have been. It's sort of in the cards."

IV

ALL the fluffy talkativeness of Mrs. Harriet Proctor had vanished when Dan again faced her. She had donned a black dress and she carried a crumpled white handkerchief, and looked like a picture of mourning out of a Victorian print.

"It—it was bubonic plague," she murmured in a low tone. "The telegram came late last night." She gestured to the folded blue missive. Dan took it and translated the French.

PROFESSOR BARNARD PROCTOR AND ASSISTANT LARS LARSON DEAD BUBONIC PLAGUE STOP BECAUSE OF LAW GOVERNING INFECTIOUS DISEASES BOTH IMMEDIATELY BURIED DAMASCUS EXTREME CONDOLENCES.

The telegram was signed by Dr. Etienne Reynau of the Damascus Hospital staff.

Dan knew of Dr. Reynau. The man's professional integrity was unquestioned. The hospital was of high repute. And yet—suppose Professor Proctor were murdered. From the adjacent room came sounds of sobbing. Valerie arose and went silently to Lillian. Dan looked at Mrs. Proctor. The woman was a picture of restrained grief.

He said, "You saw your husband last Thursday?"

"Yes. Here."

"And today is Monday," mused Dan. "He must barely have gotten to Canaan when he was stricken."

"Yes," said Mrs. Proctor. "And he might have taken us back to die."

There was a moment's silence. Suddenly Mrs. Proctor gave Dan a bold full glance.

"Would you go to Damascus for me?" she asked.

"I, go to Damascus?" Dan was startled.

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Proctor. "I—I am afraid to go. Bubonic plague is so infectious. There is nothing I could do there for poor Barnard. Yet something must be done."

"What do you mean?"

"I—I want to make certain Barnard is dead."

Dan jerked upright. "Make certain he's dead?"

"Let me explain," cried Mrs. Proctor hurriedly. "Barnard was mortally afraid of being buried alive. A phobia, of course, doubtless brought on by his own work among the tombs of the dead. He used to say to me a hundred times, 'Harriet, when you're told I'm dead, you make certain. Be absolutely sure before you let them bury me.' "

"I see," said Dan, but he did not see at all. Once again he felt like a man thrusting through thick veils of mystery. If Proctor had been murdered, then why should she want him to view the body? He remained silent, thinking.

Mrs. Proctor misconstrued his silence as one of contempt for her cowardice. "I'd go in a moment but for Lillian. Bubonic plague—I'm afraid, and I couldn't do any good. Yet I want to carry out his last wish."

Dan nodded grimly. "I'll go. We shall have to pay you fifty thousand dollars and I must have a death certificate."

"And can you go at once? This shock—I wish to leave this terrible country. And sail next week."

Dan went to the doorway and called to Valerie. "I'll catch the plane in the morning," he promised.

AS HE waited for Valerie the outside door suddenly opened and the tall, handsome Basil Manders hurried in. He went directly to Harriet Proctor and took her hands.

"I came as soon as I could," he half-whispered. "I'm—if there was only something I could do."

She straightened and reclaimed her hands. "There is nothing, Basil." Her eyes flicked to Dan. "Mr. Harden is going to Damascus tomorrow."

Manders nodded. "That is the best way."

Mrs. Proctor turned to the bedroom. "Go, now, please. I have to comfort Lillian."

She disappeared and Valerie came out, her eyes wet. Silently the three went to the elevator.

Basil Manders said to the Arab elevator boy, *"Talatah!"*

Dan looked at the man. "You speak excellent Arabic."

Manders appeared startled, then smiled. "Yes, I've lived in the desert for years. Trying to paint those unrivalled colors."

The elevator stopped at the third floor and he got out. He bowed slightly.

"Mrs. Proctor might have an alibi," muttered Valerie, "but Basil Manders hasn't."

"Hush!" said Dan. "Proctor couldn't have been murdered. Reynau is well-known and so is the hospital."

"Even so," said Valerie. "Suppose the germs of bubonic plague had been er—put in his food—or something."

"Don't go melodramatic on me," said Dan.

As soon as he reached his suite he put through a call to Mrs. Proctor. She responded after a long time.

"Who were your husband's lawyers?" he asked.

"Why do you wish to know?" she instantly snapped.

"My dear Mrs. Proctor, the International must pay his estate fifty thousand dollars and—"

"Oh, of course. They are Olmstead, Fanway and Olmstead of New York."

Dan was not always foolish with expense money but he did not hesitate to put in a radio telephone call to New York. It took him an hour to reach Anson Olmstead, senior partner, and three hundred dollars toll charges, for thirty minutes, but it was worth it.

After he had explained who he was and why he was calling he said, "I'd like to know the contents of Professor Proctor's will. There is suspicion of murder."

Olmstead's hr-rumph drifted over five thousand miles of ocean and land and probably cost two dollars in time. But presently he read his notes: "First, Professor Proctor left a trust fund of two hundred thousand dollars to his daughter, Lillian.

"Second, provided that he had been married to the present Mrs. Proctor for one full year, he left her outright two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—"

"But if he wasn't married to Harriet Proctor for one full year," cut in Dan, "who gets that money?"

"His daughter Lillian. Hr-r-rumph! I get your viewpoint, sir. Just when did Professor Proctor die?"

"Forty-eight hours ago."

"That would be the seventeenth. Well, then, I can say that Mrs. Proctor will get her share of the estate because the one year period of marriage was up on the fourteenth."

Presently Dan hung up and turned to face his breathless and beautiful wife. "Three days after Harriet Proctor had been married to Barnard Proctor one year, he ups and dies. And leaves her a quarter of a million dollars."

"It's murder, darling," cried Valerie. "Don't you see? If Proctor died before the one year period was up, she gets nothing. So she waits until the period has passed and then has him killed."

"She was here in Jerusalem."

"Manders could have done it. Harriet loves him and he loves her, and there's the money to make them both rich."

"Plenty of motive," muttered Dan. "Call the Airways and make reservations for Damascus."

As she did so Dan said, "If it's murder it's clever as sin. And I'd have a tough time proving it."

THEY went to Damascus the next morning. Dan scarcely looked at the historic Holy Land and the Sea of Galilee. He was puzzled and irritable. As they went up the world-famed Street Called Straight, plagued by beggars, he said, "If she had murdered the guy, why did she want me to take a look at him and make certain he was dead?"

"In time of peril, the boldest course is often the best," quoted Valerie. "With you certain Barnard is dead of bubonic, you'll pay the fifty thousand."

"She must think I'm dumb."

"All women think all men are dumb, darling."

At the hospital Dan was fortunate enough to find Dr. Reynau in. The French physician listened intently as Dan explained his suspicions.

"Your suspicions, *monsieur,*" he said when Dan had concluded, "are preposterous. There was an epidemic of bubonic at the excavations in Canaan. More than fifteen Arabs died and the rest all ran away. Professor Proctor and his assistant were unfortunate."

"Did you see Dr. Proctor yourself?" Dan asked.

"No. He was dead when brought here—it is a long trek from Canaan—and he apparently died enroute as did his assistant. Dr. Defoe saw the body, however, and in spite of the rapid decomposition, made out the characteristic signs: swelling of buboes, the glands beneath the arms and in the groin."

Dan nodded slowly. Dr. Reynau said, "Professor Proctor was a martyr to science, *monsieur.* He stayed on after all others had fled. Some will say it was stupid, but he had uncovered a pre-Assyrian civilization that will some day throw great light on the world's beginnings."

"I suppose so," said Dan. "Now I'd like to see the body."

"But M'sieur Harden, it's very dangerous. Bubonic, you know—"

"I've got to see the body," Dan repeated grimly.

Dr. Reynau shrugged and led Dan to the cemetery maintained in connection with the hospital. The plain pine coffin was spaded up and the lid unscrewed.

Dan looked down at the purplish, rotting flesh. Professor Proctor had been buried in his working clothes. The body was dressed in bedford cord riding breeches, a suede brown wind-breaker and high-laced boots. The man's eyeglasses were even on the dead flesh of his nose. Professor Proctor had been a big man.

Dan said, "You're sure that *this is* Professor Proctor?"

"But of course," cried Dr. Reynau. "I have treated him before. I know him better than I know you."

Dan said, "Is it possible to deliberately infect a man with bubonic plague germs? Murder him that way?"

Dr. Raynau laughed. "Absurd, sir. Bubonic plague is carried by the fleas that infest certain rats. The flea bites a man and infects him. There is no other way

unless he who holds the flea would be himself infected."

Dan shrugged. "I guess that's that. Let me have the death certificate."

An hour later he rejoined Valerie at the airdrome for the return trip.

"Proctor died of natural causes," he said wearily. "We haven't got a leg to stand on."

Valerie patted his back. "You lost this hand, darling, but you'll uncover the mystery yet. Go back and start with Susie."

On the plane Dan brightened. "That's a thought," he said. "Ali Mo'zen's got to give."

V

HUSSEIN the Magnificent came at nine that night. Glorious in new *djellab, kaftan* and with an *egale* (horsehair rope around the headcloth) that had threads of silver in it, he touched chest and forehead to the *sitt,* as he called Valerie, and bowed to Dan. Dan got his automatic pistol.

"Take me to Ali Mo'zen," he said. "I want to know who paid him to kill that dog."

"*Sidi,* I doubt if he will tell you, even for much gold. He is waxing rich on his knowledge and so am I."

"How?" demanded Dan.

Hussein shrugged and smiled boyishly. "The *ferengi* who ordered the dog's death buys Ali's silence. Ali buys my silence."

"You know who ordered the dog's death?"

"No, *Sidi.* But I know the police want Ali Mo'zen for another thing. So, between us, we are rich."

"He'll tell," said Dan grimly. "Even if you have to get tough with that knife."

An hour later they entered Ali Mo'zen's abode.

Hussein called his summons before the dirty blanket that covered the entryway. This time there was no reply. "Ali may have gone out," he said. "We will enter and wait."

He led the way into the room where the kerosene lamp with the smoky chimney cast a saffron radiance over the hovel. On the low table were dirty coffee glasses, a cold plate of greasy mutton and soggy rice. Hussein moved onward and suddenly shrank back, throwing up his hands.

"*Wallah!*" he yelled. "In the name of Allah the good, the magnificent—!"

He darted across the room. Dan saw the sprawled body and jerked at Hussein's *djellab.* "Don't touch him," he warned. He bent over the dead body that lay sprawled on a pile of sheepskins and blankets, apparently the bed.

It was Ali Mo'zen all right, and he was quite dead. There was a bullet hole through his chest directly over the heart. The Bedouin's eyes were wide and glassy and filled with fear. Dan searched the wallet of Ali. It was empty. There was no trace of the intruder in the room until Dan forced open Ali Mo'zen's right hand. It held a small black button such as decorate men's coat cuffs.

"That's proof a white man killed him," Dan muttered. "But I doubt if it's good for anything else."

Hussein was lamenting his lost fortune. Dan interrupted. "You do not know the *ferengi* Ali was blackmailing?"

"No, *Sidi.* He refused to say. Oh, that he had, for now I would be rich beyond dreams."

There was a silence. Suddenly Dan exclaimed and raced to the compound and flung on the switch of his flashlight. The ground had been dug up with a mattock. The smelly part of an orange crate was there, but the body of Susie, the springer spaniel, was not.

"I thought so," Dan muttered. "I haven't even got the dog for a clue now."

IT WAS a bad check and he knew it; and he was moody and silent all the way back to the Allenby. He walked in to find Valerie with her arms around Lillian Proctor, and the slim dark young girl weeping hard.

Valerie was saying, "Of course, you can go. I'll help you. So will Dan."

"I'll help what?" asked Dan, irritably.

"Mrs. Proctor's up to her tricks," snapped Valerie. "She and this Basil of hers are going to fly to Cairo and take Lillian with them. So she can't marry Kenneth Seagrave."

"Marry!" exclaimed Dan, looking at the girl. "She's hardly old enough to wear long dresses."

"Hush!" said Valerie. "The younger generation grow up faster now. Listen, Lillian darling, call Ken. Tell him to come to me here right away. Then go up and pack a bag. We'll see you off to Baghdad."

Lillian nodded tearfully and turned to Dan. "Don't you see, with father dead, I don't want to stay with that woman? She hates me. I'm afraid of her."

She went to the telephone, talked hastily and said, "Ken will be right over." Then she hurried out.

Dan sighed. "By golly, if it isn't one thing it's six." Valerie made him a drink, kissed him and said, "Give!"

He told her what had happened. "So we're just back where we started from—even worse because Susie's body could have convinced the police something was wrong." He jumped up. "Something is wrong. But what?"

Valerie poured herself some sherry wine and sipped it. "Darling," she said, "you've got to pull a Dan Harden rabbit out of the hat. Play a bluff."

"It's a thought, only I haven't even deuces to bluff on."

He retired with his Scotch to a corner chair, sipping and shooting paper wads at the portrait of King Feisal of Iraq. He reviewed every fact and tried to put it in its proper place. He had the sensation of being on the verge of a discovery. As if a single fact discovered would make this pattern plain. Valerie did not interrupt his thoughts.

He got to thinking about the will and suddenly the missing fact hit him in the face. He leaped to his feet. "Darling, I've got it."

"Got what?"

"Listen! Remember that section of the will that said if Harriet Proctor wasn't married to Proctor one full year she got nothing?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose Proctor up and died on her before the year was up? She'd get nothing."

"Go on, I'm all ears," breathed Valerie.

"Suppose this epidemic swept him off within a couple of days of the end of the year period—" Dan jumped to his feet. "Decomposition! Of course! Reynau gave me the clue and I couldn't see it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said Dan, "it's a nasty point but important. Reynau said that Proctor died enroute from Canaan to Damascus. Say that trip took four days by motor—ten by horse. I'll have to check that. Well, in the dry desert air the body wouldn't decompose too rapidly."

"No, I expect not."

"Well, suppose that Proctor died and they kept his body hidden and then finally brought it in, and dated his death as three days after the year period had elapsed. That would account for the undue decomposition."

"It's a swell theory, darling," said Valerie regretfully, "but you forget Proctor was in this hotel last Thursday, which was the day after the year was up."

"Yeah!" said Dan ruefully, "that's right. I guess that's out, only it fits so perfectly—" A knock at the door interrupted his reflections. Valerie answered and admitted a handsome, yellow-haired youth of twenty-two or so who grinned embarrassedly at them. "I'm Ken Seagrave," he said.

VALERIE came to him, frankly appraising him. She liked what she saw and gave him her hand. "Come in, Ken, and meet the man I live with. He thinks he's a good detective—and he is sometimes."

The boy's blue eyes were clear and honest, his grip firm. Dan liked him, too. But he was irritated by his failure to solve this mystery and retired into his

thoughts and left Valerie to carry the burden of the conversation.

He was aware that the boy was talking about himself—trust Valerie to bring that out. Apparently Seagrave's father was a consul in some town in Persia.

"Mrs. Proctor accused me of wanting to marry Lillian for her money. But that's a lie." The boy's eyes flashed. "I wouldn't care if she didn't have a dime. I'm going to wear the pants in my family."

"You'll be the first man in any family who does," said Dan, throwing a grin at Valerie. Then he sobered quickly. This was important. Hastily he consulted his notes on the Proctor will.

Mrs. Proctor was guardian and administratrix (providing the year was up) and, hence, would administer Lillian's two hundred thousand until the girl was of age.

"Of course," thought Dan, "she doesn't want the girl married because then she'd have to surrender it."

Out of all this one fact was clear: under the present situation Harriet Proctor got a quarter of a million dollars from her dead husband; fifty thousand from insurance; and control of Lillian's two hundred thousand. A half-million in all. It was a motive worthy of the scheme, if scheme it was—

Valerie, jumping to her feet, interrupted him.

"Lillian's had plenty of time to pack," she cried. "Why isn't she here?"

"If I could explain why Susie was killed and Ali Mo'zen," Dan muttered, "I'd have the answer."

"Dan! Forget the crime a minute. Lillian hasn't come down. I'm afraid something has happened to her."

Ken Seagrave jumped up. "If they've dared to hurt her—" he began.

Dan held him back. "Easy, boy," he said. He led the way to the stairway and to Mrs. Proctor's suite. Young Seagrave and Valerie pressed after him. For a space of time Dan paused before the door. His lips thinned and his eyes grew hard. He rapped smartly on the panels of the door.

It was almost a minute before there was any response. Then Basil Manders stood on the threshold. He had on a hat and topcoat. At sight of Dan his dark eyebrows went up.

"I want to see Lillian," said Dan.

"At this time of night?" Manders shook his head.

"Yes," nodded Dan. "I want to ask her some questions. About her father."

He spoke deliberately and watched for the effect. So far as he could see, there was none. Manders' expression did not change but his gaze shot past Dan to young Seagrave.

"No," he said. "Lillian cannot see you nor Seagrave. She's under age and her mother forbids."

"Let Mrs. Proctor tell me that," rapped Dan.

Manders shrugged. "Very well. Harriet!"

Mrs. Proctor appeared with suspicious alacrity. "Lillian has told me everything," she said. "And I refuse to permit her to marry Seagrave now or any time."

Dan saw that she, too, was fully dressed. His foot thrust forward and his weight blocked the door against Manders' pressure. For a moment Manders exerted all his strength. It was of no avail. His self-control cracked.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "What right have you to force your way in here? Harriet could have you arrested."

"Why doesn't she?" growled Dan. He was thoroughly angry.

Manders made no reply. Neither did Harriet Proctor.

Dan said, "Are you going to get rid of her as you did her father?"

Manders did not flinch. "You talk like a madman."

"As you did the dog? As you did Ali Mo'zen?"

Manders tried again to shut the door. He failed. And suddenly his hand streaked to his pocket and came out with an ugly automatic pistol.

"Under British law," he said quietly, "this suite is Mrs. Proctor's home and castle and any one trying forcibly to enter may be resisted to death."

"If they don't go, shoot them," said Mrs. Proctor in a hard voice.

VALERIE, having often seen Dan in action, knew he was fast. But she had never seen him move as swiftly as he did now. Manders was pressing his weight against the door. Dan relaxed so that the door closed three-quarters of the way. The movement threw Manders off balance. Before he could recover, Dan hurled his shoulder at the door and his right hand grabbed Manders' right wrist. There was a twist, a cry of pain and Dan had the gun. He backed away, suddenly grinning.

"Thanks," he said, chuckling. "Maybe a ballistics expert could trace the bullet in Ali Mo'zen to this gun."

He backed away. Manders' face had paled and now he suddenly slammed the door. Dan, still chuckling, led the way to the staircase. Here he turned on Seagrave.

"There's a linen closet two doors from the Proctors. Hop into it and watch their door. And don't sleep."

"Okay," said Seagrave, "but Lillian—"

"Watch that door, and Lillian will be all right. Come right to me if the Proctors and Manders go out."

He went down to his suite. Valerie said, "Your bluff didn't work that time. If Manders shot Ali Mo'zen, he didn't use that gun."

"No," said Dan, "but he's frightened, darling. I wanted to force his next move and I have. I'll bet you a silver fox cape on that."

Later, as she started to undress, Dan stopped her. "You're going places before dawn, so lie down as you are."

He telephoned to the desk for a car and a chauffeur to wait. "A car equipped for perhaps a long ride."

Then he lay down himself and smoked cigarettes chain fashion. An hour later the telephone rang. Dan jumped up. But it wasn't Seagrave. It was Papa Touchard.

"I have amazing news," came Touchard's voice over four thousand miles of telephone wire.

"What?" asked Dan.

"As you know, my boy, Mrs. Proctor was married before. I have just found out who her previous husband was."

For a space Dan's eyes gleamed. He took a deep breath.

"Holy Joe, Papa, don't tell me it was—"

"Basil Manders! *Mais oui,* it was he who first married her."

Valerie came off the bed with a squeal of excitement.

"Basil Manders," nodded Dan. "Somehow it fits into the picture. Tell me all about it."

Papa Touchard spent one hundred and eighty dollars in tolls to do so. It appeared that Harriet Crosby and Basil Manders were married in Paris in 1934. Manders was an art student. There were no details of Harriet's past life. In December of 1936 they were divorced, Harriet claiming cruelty. In January she married Professor Barnard Proctor.

"She had been seen a lot with Professor Proctor before she got the divorce," Papa Touchard concluded. "People expected Manders, who was practically penniless, to sue for alienation of affections but he did not."

Dan was grinning like a satyr. "That's what I've been waiting to learn, Papa," he said. "I can wash up this case in twenty-four hours."

He hung up and smiled at Valerie. She smiled back.

"But what does it mean?" she asked. "When a woman divorces a man for another, she rarely re-marries him—and Harriet's going to marry Manders as soon as she can."

"That's all part of the scheme," chuckled Dan. "She meant to—"

Rapid pounding on the door cut him short. He bounded to it and threw the catch.

Seagrave stood there, his nose bleeding, his clothes torn.

"They're going away," he croaked. "And they're taking Lillian with them. He—he—"

Seagrave choked and would have fallen. Dan caught him and called to Valerie.

"Ready, Scrumptious? Come on and see Manders stage Custer's Last Stand."

VI

AS THEY reached the curb in the bitter chill of the desert night, Dan saw a long, powerful De Dion Bouton racing car pull away from the hotel with a roar of open cut-out. He caught a glimpse of Manders' taut face and Harriet Proctor beside him. Next to her was a limp bundle that could only be Lillian.

The night doorman whistled as Dan came running out. A *djellabed* Arab behind the wheel of a paintless 1918 Cadillac shouted and eased his car to the awning. Dan looked at the car and his heart sank.

"Cripes!" he ejaculated, "that's a museum piece."

"Wallah!" cried the driver. "Enter, *Sidi.* This car will go to the world's end and back."

Dan saw the blinking crimson glow of Manders' car's tail-lights turn into the Beirut road. He could not delay. He thrust Valerie into the back, and ordered Seagrave in. He was about to climb in beside the driver when Hussein the Magnificent leaped out of the darkness to the running board.

"Sidi!" he yelled, "I have great news."

Dan seized Hussein's *djellab* and jerked him into the car. In Arabic he said, "Follow that car into the Beirut road. And on thy face be failure!"

With a sound like a threshing machine, the Cadillac leaped forward. Dan listened to the internal crash and clatter and groaned. This car could never catch Manders. However, there was one consolation. Roads in Palestine are few. Manders was heading north and there was no place for him to turn off this side of Nazareth.

"Sidi," said Hussein, "I have found—"

"Dan," cried Valerie, "why can't you get help from the British desert police?"

"On what charge?" Dan asked. "I have no proof Manders killed Susie, and if I did I doubt if it's a crime. I can't prove he killed Ali Mo'zen. And it is no crime for him to take Harriet Proctor and her step-daughter for a ride into the desert."

He swung around to the Bedouin. "What did you find, Hussein?" he asked.

"Sidi, the dog—" began Hussein.

"Why are you following Manders then?" demanded Valerie. Hussein cursed savagely in Arabic and sulked.

Dan said, "Manders is desperate. I've got to take the law into my own hands."

"Lillian," moaned Seagrave.

"Take it easy. She'll be all right."

At the little town of Bethlehem, now connected to Jerusalem by a wide military road, the De Dion Bouton stopped near the famous chapel that presumably covered the very spot where Jesus Christ was born. An Arab leaped into the car and it started immediately. But Manders did not drive wide open—not then, anyway. It was as if he were taunting Dan to follow. Manders drove thus slowly until he turned into the Damascus-Baalbeck road.

This puzzled Dan. "He could lose me in five minutes," he muttered. "But he doesn't. It's as if he wanted me to know where he's going."

He sensed that Manders was following a well-thought-out plan. Forty miles Dan kept the car's tail-lights in sight, this despite the fact that the Cadillac's radiator was boiling like a geyser. Then the De Dion Bouton racer turned off on a trail into the desert. A trail barely perceptible in the brown gravel. Now the De Dion speeded up. In less than five minutes the ruby tail-lights were lost in the desert.

Dan grunted. "That's the road to Canaan. There is no turn-off. He can't be going anywhere else than to the excavations. And he deliberately wanted me to know it. Now, why?"

"He's dangerous, darling," said Valerie. "He's a rat."

At the word "rat" Dan jumped as if stung. "Of course!" he exclaimed. "He's going to do for all of us—including Lillian." He swung to the Arab driver. "Drive only that this car shall reach Canaan. Fail to get there and I blacken thy face before all men."

"Before Allah, I do all man can do, *Sidi,*" said the Arab. Boiling and rattling, the Cadillac jounced over the sun-bleached desert.

Twice in the next ten miles the car bogged down. The radiator spouted. Dan cursed. "We'll never arrive."

"Wallah!" yelled the driver. "I always arrive."

HE HAD strapped extra bidons of gasoline on the running board, also two ten-gallon cans of water and extra oil. He refilled the radiator and tanks, prayed for the safety of his tires, and they started again. Dan and Valerie prepared to pass a miserable night.

Hussein, who had been sulking, growled, *"Sidi,* I would have told you for a pound. Now, what I say will cost two."

Dan remembered the Arab. "Two it is, Hussein. What hast thou found out?"

"About the man, *Sidi,* who paid for the dog's death and killed Ali Mo'zen."

"You know who the man is?"

"Yes, *Sidi,* I can give you his name. But first the money, *Sidi."*

Dan found two one-pound notes. Hussein folded them and put them in the huge pocketbook like a woman's that he wore under his *djellab* and over his *kaftan.*

"Allah be praised and all prayers to him," he murmured, "five pounds more and I shall start for Paris."

"The man—what did he look like?"

"Hearken, *Sidi.* I only know this. On the night Ali Mo'zen was killed, a beggar sleeping in a doorway was awakened by his dog. The beggar's dog had not been fed—the day's alms had been poor—and he was moaning. The beggar woke up—his own belly was empty—and he smelled that which had made the dog ravenous and to cry out. The dead flesh of a thing long dead. A man was carrying it in a sack, going by. He did not see the beggar in the doorway, but he did see the dog. The beggar's dog was leaping up, trying to get at the parcel which was in the man's hand. The man cursed—in English, *Sidi*—and kicked the dog. He kicked hard, and in doing so lost his balance and almost fell. In doing this his face came into view of the moon. The beggar saw."

"Yes," cried Dan eagerly, "what did he see?"

"He called Manders *Effendi.* He it was who spoke the desert tongue and has lived as an Arab. He it was, I swear by Allah upon whom be peace."

Dan nodded. "Proof, but not enough." He paused. Then: "You say Manders lived in the desert?"

"Aie, Sidi. Remember when thou wast with Sheik Mitkail?"

Dan nodded. Years ago, on another case, he had lived with the Arabs for six months. It was then he learned Arabic.

"Manders also lived with the Beni Suref. He put paint on canvas—did woman's work."

"Did the beggar follow Manders?" Dan asked.

"Surely, *Sidi.* Had he a knife he might have done the *ferengi* harm; because he loved his dog and the dog's ribs were broken by the kick. Manders went to the road in the Valley of the Kidron. Here he scraped a hole under an olive tree near the mount and buried the package. He covered it well. But it can be found."

"And you can find it?" Dan's eyes glittered.

"For ten pounds, *Sidi,* I can find anything."

Dan leaned back. "That dog, my brother, will hang Manders. Thou hast done well and I am pleased."

HE RELAPSED into a brooding silence. The desert becomes very cold at night after the stone and sand have lost their heat, and at three o'clock in the morning it seems that the chill comes down like winter. Dan and Valerie were ill-prepared for it, and snuggled into each other's arms to keep warm. Hussein drew his *djellab* over his head and snored with strangling sounds. The ride seemed eternal. Ken Seagrave also huddled into his coat.

Occasionally they dozed, to be awakened while the Arab filled the steaming radiator

and poured gas into the tank. Then the sun came up in a faultless sky and ahead was nothing but sand and gravel, smooth as a race-track, the road tracks almost vanished.

Dan was worried, fretful. Lillian was in terrible danger. Suddenly his brooding was broken by a savage curse from the driver.

"Look, *Sidi,*" he cried. "We are undone."

Dan looked across the heat-shimmering desert. Three dark specks lay against the horizon, growing larger each second.

"Thieves!" said Hussein uneasily. His hand appeared with a long-barreled Webley pistol of 1918 make.

Dan swore. "Thieves out here?" he cried.

"*Aie, Sidi.* The bus from Baghdad to Damascus makes its turn just ahead. The sheik of the bus line is supposed to pay tribute to keep the bus from being robbed. Now that times are troubled, it may be that the desert tribes are angry—or this may be a new sheik wishing to buy some more camels."

Dan swore. The big eight-wheeled busses, the only connection between Baghdad and the coast of the Mediterranean, ran by compass and sun in the day and by compass and stars at night. There had been trouble, but tribute and the British armored cars and airplane control had ended it. But individual cars were still fair game to an Arab who is a robber at heart.

He watched the rapid approach of the black specks. They proved to be three Buick cars, scraped clean of paint by sand and weather. They had no tops, and they careened over the desert, filled to the brim with Arabs. Arabs packed the tonneau, and two more rode on the running board, their white clothes whipping in the wind.

Hussein said, "Since the *ferengi* have taken to motor cars, the sheiks have abandoned their camels. However, have hope, *Sidi.* I am of the Rouella and it is perhaps that these are men known to me."

Dan got out his pistol. His face was suddenly pale. Life to an Arab is cheap; and especially now, when the Arabs hated the white man bitterly for dividing up the lands of Palestine between the Jews, the town Arabs and the British. This might be worse than mere delay. The Buicks rapidly closed in on the slower Cadillac.

Dan said grimly, "Get your gun out, honey!" To Seagrave he said, "You have no gun so you'd better lie down on the floor and keep out of sight as much as possible."

IT SEEMED hopeless to resist. He could count twenty-seven Arabs and they were all armed. The Buicks closed in. Arabs hanging to their flanks fired off their rifles. The bullets went wild but the gesture was unmistakable.

Hussein put his hand to his eyes to see better. "*Wallah!*" he groaned in dismay. "They are of the Beni Sakr, and by Allah's perfumed beard, they are blood enemies of me and mine. We must fight to the end, *Sidi.*"

Whereupon, resting the muzzle of his Webley upon his left wrist, he fired at the careening car coming alongside. Dan knocked up the muzzle just as the weapon roared.

"Hold it, you fool," yelled Dan.

The Arabs in the Buick, driven by a tall sheik with an enormous beard, saw the hostile move and yelled, "*Thi-hahum bism er Rassoul!* Kill in the name of the Prophet."

Leaning against the wind, the Arabs inside the Buick leveled their guns. Some of these were *dak-ōhs,* old muzzle-loading *moukkalahs,* but three or four were modern deadly Winchester repeating rifles.

Dan was pale and hurled Valerie to the floor of the Cadillac. Coursing alongside, the Arabs at thirty yards couldn't miss with such a fusillade.

"Slow down and stop," Dan yelled to the driver.

Then louder, in a voice that boomed above the clatter of the ancient motors, "I am *dakhile,* sacred to the Beni Sakr, and my blood is on thy face and on the face of

my honored friend, Sheik Mitkail ibn Sau'd. In the name of Allah (upon whom be peace) do not fire."

The Cadillac was stopping. A Buick wheeled in front to block off its further progress. One came up on the left as well as the one already on the right.

"Throw down thy gun, Hussein," muttered Dan, "or by the Lord we'll all die in the next five seconds."

He hurled his own automatic to the sand. Hussein's mouth twitched. "I am a dead man for doing it. They and mine are vowed in blood feud." But his gun sailed through the air to the sand.

Dan jumped to the ground, squinting in the glaring sun. Instantly a score of rifles were trained on him, behind them scowling angry faces.

VII

THE sheik with the enormous beard descended from the seat of the car and, protected by three riflemen, approached Dan. His face was sullen and angry.

"Thou hast called on my overlord Sheik Mitkail ibn Sau'd. Speak out and if thou liest then by Allah's breath thou shalt be repaid."

It was a tense moment. Dan knew men; desert and city men alike were human, and here were marauding Arabs, already aroused to hatred by the political acts of the British, and looking for an excuse to torture and kill. He wondered if even his persuasions could save Valerie, Seagrave and himself from death. He saw, while pretending not to, that Hussein the Magnificent had been brutally seized by three Arabs from the car on the left and was struggling, his arms wrenched cruelly behind him. Seagrave rose from the floor of the car and received a blow from one of the Arabs.

Two Arabs, sneering at the thin *sitt*, guarded Valerie.

"Thy name, Sheik," Dan said boldly.

"Now, am I Sheik Amur Abdullah, and once had I a thousand camels and many sheep before the accursed *ferengi* spat in my beard with wrongs."

"Then hearken, Sheik Amur Abdullah," said Dan. "I am an American from across the sea and certainly thou hast heard of him from across the ocean who helped thy overlord, Sheik Mitkail, when he was among the Franzawi? And came to live as brother with Sheik Mitkail in the desert?"

A gaily bedecked slave, holding a huge curved scimitar, exclaimed, *"Wallah!* So I have, master, and grateful was our lord, for he was sore beset."

"Look!" Dan jerked up his sleeve and exposed his right wrist. "See the scar where Mitkail, thy overlord, and I mixed our blood together, his from the left and the heart, swearing for me blood-brothership, and putting me on his face forever and upon the face of all the Beni Sakr."

A murmur passed among the Arabs. Blood-brothership among the Arabs is a sacred thing; for it makes him whose blood is mixed a member of the tribe and all the tribe must shed blood to save his.

Sheik Amur Abdullah was impressed but he was still angry and his sullenness continued. He eyed Dan's wrist-watch.

"Now, am I foresworn, a man who has taken but can give not," he growled.

"O, Sheik," said another older, grayed Arab, "how can thou be-est foresworn? For when the money passed thou didst not know that this one we were to kill was sacred on thy face and ours."

"Aie," came a murmur. "To touch him or his is to be outlawed and hunted of all men."

Dan listened and his eyes snapped wide. "Lord!" he thought, "Manders arranged this. "That's why he delayed to be sure I'd follow him. One of these Arabs met him in Nazareth."

It was now or never, a tense moment, and again Dan struck boldly. "For me and mine I claim thy protection and escort to Canaan where I go in haste."

SHEIK AMUR ABDULLAH grunted. On a sudden motion he drew from his wallet a handful of British pounds, at

least a hundred, and hurled them to the ground.

"Allah curse the luck," he cried. "With many camels to be had, and sheep once more to graze my land, I must give it all back because I cannot kill thee as promised."

Valerie muttered, "By Golly, Dan, this guy was laying for us. Manders put him up to it."

Dan's mouth grinned. "On thy face be it, Sheik Amur Abdullah, to speak straight. Was it he of the white hair and the fast car who passed this way at dawn who told thee to kill me?"

"My answer is on thy honor and face?"

Dan suppressed a sigh. If Sheik Amur Abdullah told him under such oath, then it was in utter secrecy, and for Dan to tell others, say the police in testimony, would be to violate a promise now requested. Yet he must give that promise.

"On my face be the answer, Allah witnesseth," he said in the formal reply.

"Then it was he, *Sidi* Manders, who is long known to me and one who has befriended me and mine."

The tension had relaxed. Hussein had been released and was shrugging his brilliant *djellab* into place. Valerie was smiling at a very tall Arab. "Dan," she said, "they're the handsomest men in the world —next to you."

She repeated the compliment in Arabic, and the Arab said, "*Sitt*, thou needest many meals to make thee beautiful."

Dan said, "Sheik Amur Abdullah, since enemies of thy tribe may lay between me and Canaan, I demand on thy face escort and protection."

"I can but give it, but only to sight of Canaan," said Amur Abdullah. "Within where *ferengi* dig in the earth like foolish moles is the disease that kills in the night. This I will not risk. But to the sight of Canaan I pledge thee on my face."

Dan helped Valerie back into the car. "Get it?" he whispered. "Bubonic plague is still in Canaan. If Lillian should get it and suddenly die—then Harriet would get a half-million dollars."

"Then we must hurry," begged Valerie.

The Arab driver, not pale now, and cocky with relief, drove like a maniac over the rolling desert, dodging dunes and valleys, heading into the north and west, with the three rusty Buicks careening in escort. Nothing else was in the air or on the ground except an airplane that swooped low, circled them and zoomed. The Arabs fired a volley at the plane. Presently it droned away. Dan saw the cocards and knew it was an army plane.

"Reconnaissance," he said to Valerie. "We'll have armored cars here before dark."

The ride continued recklessly. Dan began to fire paper wads at the speedometer.

Valerie stopped him. "Is Lillian in so much danger?"

"The worst in the world," said Dan grimly. "Manders brought her here to kill her."

"But why?" cried Valerie, "and why try to have us killed?"

"He's hiding a man's body," rejoined Dan. "A man's body he fears I'll find."

"What do you mean?"

Dan said, "Remember I worked out the motive of this thing? I said that Professor Proctor had up and died on Harriet before the full year of marriage was completed? Remember I said that the whole scheme started to hide the fact of his premature demise?"

"Yes," said Valerie, "and I told you that Professor Proctor was seen in Jerusalem on Thursday—two days after the full year was up."

"Yes," nodded Don. "You said that. And that's where we went haywire. The man seen in Jerusalem was not Proctor. He was an impersonator. And it's this man's body that Manders has hidden. It was his fear of this body's discovery that has kept this murder ball rolling."

"Wow!" breathed Valerie. "But how can you prove this? How can you find the body?"

Dan sighed. "I guess I'll have to pull a trick out of the hat."

The arrival within sight of the tiny vil-

lage of Canaan made Dan think of Valerie's peril. Bubonic plague. Dancing rats and infected fleas. And a man who had been driven from one crime to another until now he could not stop.

Suddenly Valerie said, "Ken is ill, darling. He's delirious."

Dan looked at the boy. The blow he had been struck had evidently been more serious than they had believed. Seagrave had his eyes closed and was twisting and muttering incoherently.

Dan sighed. If it wasn't one thing, it was six. The cars came to a halt about two hundred yards from the village wall.

Dan said, "You stay with him, Scrumptious."

"And let you go in there alone—no!"

"But you'll stay," said Dan grimly. He climbed out and spoke to Sheik Amur Abdullah.

"Sheik Amur Abdullah," he said, "I go into the town to my destiny. Into thy care here I entrust all that I love. Guard her and her health be on thy face and in Allah's name (on whom be peace) I swear to give thee the hundred pounds *Sidi* Manders had paid for my death."

The sheik's face lit up with joy. "*Wallah,* here speaketh a man!" Swiftly he turned over the hundred pounds Manders had given him. "Return this, then, brother of my tribe, and say unto Manders I am not foresworn but that thou-art blood brother and hence sacred, and I am no thief but return his money."

"Don't go alone, Dan," pled Valerie.

"Hush," said Dan. "It won't be long now."

Dan faced the few brown mud huts that held the deadly plague and walked deliberately into the compound.

VIII

THERE were perhaps twenty oblong square houses, looking like brown boxes in the sharp sunlight. Beyond, to the eastward, was the hill through which men had been digging since 1820, tracing the rise of man from pre-historic caves. Dan could see the Ionic pillars of the Greek civilization, built when Alexander had come this way; and the arches of Rome and Tiberius. And here, stretched out to dry, were piles of tablets with cuneiform writing on them.

But he ignored these all; he had seen the low racing car drawn up near the entrance to a group of oblong mud buildings over which an American flag flew at half-staff. The headquarters of the Proctor expedition.

He saw that the village was deserted; nothing moved under the hot sun, and the crops in the small irrigated gardens stood untended. Death had been this way and nothing was left.

Dan was only human: he felt the intense desire to stop breathing, hold his breath and keep out the dread germs that the infected rats had spread here. But he kept on walking into the compound. Within he encountered Basil Manders, standing with arms folded. The man made no movement of surprise as he saw Dan, whom he must have thought dead. Dan had unwilling admiration for this calm. For a moment they faced each other in silence.

Dan thought, "I know the truth but I couldn't convict this man in court. I've got to bluff him—and he is not easily bluffed."

He forced a grin and took out the roll of English banknotes and threw them at Manders. He watched warily as he did so.

"Sheik Amur Abdullah couldn't murder us for you," he said easily. "He's a blood brother of mine."

Manders carefully picked up the money and pocketed it. He did not speak.

"Now," said Dan, "if you'll just bring out Lillian, I'll be on my way."

Very carefully Basil Manders put on a pair of rough camel's leather gloves.

"You have no right to take her from her mother's protection."

"Her step-mother's," corrected Dan, "and to hell with my right. I want her."

"If you threaten," said Manders, "I must obey. Come this way."

He came down off the single mud sill. Dan was prepared for violence, but not for what Basil Manders did. As Dan took a step forward, Manders whirled and dived like a blocking football tackle. His arms were outstretched. His face was a mask of white hate and fear. Dan drew his gun in one swift motion. But in that divided instant when Manders was hurtling through the air, Dan guessed the meaning of those gloves.

Rough, abrasive gloves! Covered with the crushed bodies of fleas. Fleas infected with bubonic plague. The gloves would scratch Dan; the germs would do the rest. In that space of time when the outstretched clawing gloves were less than a foot from him, Dan understood and acted.

Dan dropped flat on his hands and knees. And Manders, unable to stop his forward dive, struck Dan's arched back and went flying in a sprawling drop. Dan was up instantly, whipping up his gun. Manders was whirling, clawing. Dan swung the gun muzzle and the barrel smashed against Manders' skull. The man croaked and sprawled limply, senselessly.

From the doorway came a scream, "You've killed him."

DAN looked around. Harriet Proctor, resembling some magnificent black panther, was rushing toward Manders, her face twisted by such agony and fear as Dan had never seen before.

With a quick movement Dan intercepted her, held her helpless. His gray eyes were grim and ruthless.

"Where is she?"

With a strength surprising in a woman, she tried to wrest free. "You've hurt him," she cried.

"Where's the child?"

"I'll never tell you. You've no right—"

Dan bent over and, holding Harriet with one hand, he brought Manders' right arm up so that the infected glove was within inches of Harriet Proctor's shrinking face.

She cried out in horror.

"Where's Lillian?" Dan repeated. "You'll tell me or so help me—"

Harriet saw the black fury of his face. Felt his strength thrusting her toward the gloved hand. There was no movement from Manders. She was helpless and alone. A sob burst from her pent-up lungs.

"In the tunnel," she whispered. "In the tunnel on the left—to the pre-Hittite excavation."

For a second after she spoke Dan stood utterly motionless. Then as full understanding of what she said dawned on him, a low cry of horror broke from his lips.

"You witch!" he growled. "You inhuman witch!"

He flung her from him with such force as to send her sprawling on the hard baked ground. He turned and raced out of the compound toward the excavations. Bursting through the doorway he nearly fell over Valerie. She stood there, small gun in hand. And never before in her life had she seen such an expression of horror on Dan's face.

"Go back," he gasped. "Get ready to go —Damascus—hospital—Lillian—"

He remembered the need for haste and burst into a run.

"But Hussein and the Arabs," she called.

Dan did not hear. He was panting up the slope, the blood pounding in his ears. He reached the pre-historic excavations. The open space of the uncovered columns, the piles of ancient cooking and eating utensils.

"Lillian!" he yelled.

He clicked on his flashlight and ran into the tunnel. Other shallow excavations gave off to right and left, carved carefully around some vestige of an older civilization. Dan turned his flash into each of these. He gasped and swore.

He saw his flashlight's reflection in beady iridescent eyes. Rats. And other rats dead. Swarms of them. The smell made him gag. The black plague in all truth. And every rat covered with swarming fleas which carried the dread germ of this fatal disease. Dan felt his skin goose-pimple; his neck skin was stiff and so was his hair.

He went on another hundred feet. And he found more rats; rats that did not get out of his way; that would have bitten him if he had stepped within reach of their long ugly teeth. Rats staggering in a wild drunken dance. He went on fifty feet farther.

Then the light of his flash found Lillian Proctor.

She was bound hand and foot. And she was gagged. She was conscious and rigid from utter terror. Dan never forgot that picture.

Beyond her, in a deep recess in the limestone rock, was a long human-shaped pile of something over which glowed the greenish-yellow of phosphorus. Toward this a line of rats went boldly. Another line came away, their sharp muzzles also phosphorescent. In their desire to feed on the phosphorescent pile they had so far ignored Lillian. All but one rat which was crawling toward her.

Dan sprang forward and the roar of his pistol echoed in that dreadful place like a cannon discharge. The rat spattered blood. In the silence that followed the scurrying of the rat's fleeing feet was full of unforgettable horror. Dan jerked out his knife, cut the gag and the bonds. Reaction made her limp. He swept her up in his arms.

"Did they—did they—" he began.

"No," she whispered. "They were feeding on—" she fainted, collapsed against him.

Dan began his retreat out of that place. He tried to keep her silk-clad legs covered; the tunnel swarmed with fleas from dead rats. Far ahead was the faint glow of the blessed sunlight. Around him the rats, emboldened by their disease, staggered in a macabre dance. He thanked Heaven for the high boots, the tight cordovan riding breeches he wore.

At last the dead smell was lessening. He could click off the flashlight. He emerged into the blinding sunlight squinting, scarcely able to see.

A gun roared not forty yards away. Dan staggered and both he and his burden crashed to the ground.

IX

DAN lay very quietly and presently heard the harsh grate of boots in the gravel. His eyes were better accustomed to the light now, but unfortunately he could not swing his cramped body in time. His gun was wrested from his hand before he knew Basil Manders was on him.

Dan forced a grin. "You got me all right," he said.

Manders looked down at him, his face blank. Then, suddenly, he cursed Dan.

"Why did you have to interfere?" he raved. "Why didn't you stay out of it. Do you think I want to kill and kill and kill?

His face was tortured into an insane horror. Dan saw then into the soul of a man driven by necessity from one crime to another. A weakling urged on by the indomitable will of the woman he loved.

"Stop it, Basil," cried Harriet. She came over the edge of the shale pile. "Get them into the cave. We've got to run. I knocked out the girl Valerie but she escaped."

"Pursued," muttered Manders. "Always we shall be running. Running."

"Tie him up, darling," cried Harriet. "There's happiness for us. I know a place—"

"Ghosts," said Manders. "At night."

"Stop it," half-screamed Harriet. "We haven't lost. You'll be a great painter. You'll have peace, quiet, security."

She came closer, urging, "Tie them. Leave them for the rats. Who can prove anything? We're still safe."

She was pushing Manders toward Dan. Dan tensed himself, gathered his strength. Harriet was urging Manders on.

"What can be proved? The body of Jenkins can never be found. Who cares about a dog? Who can trace you to the house of this Ali Mo'zen?"

Manders was within three feet of Dan.

"Suppose they find Lillian and this Harden and his wife? They'll be dead of bubonic and who can blame you?"

She passionately kissed Manders. "Don't you see? We've won. It's all ours—"

Manders turned his gaze to her eager uptilted face. Only for a fraction of a second but it was all Dan wanted. He came up off the ground as if he were propelled by springs. Every movement had to be right and he made them perfectly. His right hook was a white blur followed by the sharp *spat* of sound as the knuckles struck Manders' jaw. The man went backward, throwing up his arms. As he flung up his arms, Dan grabbed the right, twisted into a flying mare hold and hurled Manders over his head. The man's body smashed into Harriet Proctor and she and her lover fell to the ground. Manders' pistol had been twisted from his grip. Dan stooped, picked it up.

"I think, Manders," he said, "you've reached the end of the line and there are no transfers."

Behind Dan a new voice said calmly, "Now that you've possessed the weapon, suppose you drop it."

Dan turned to face a lieutenant and two privates of His Britannic Majesty's Desert Patrol. They all had Webley pistols aimed at his stomach.

"Well," said Dan, dropping the gun, "trust the British always to come in time for tea."

MANDERS struggled upright on the ground. "Arrest him, Lieutenant," he said huskily. "He was trying to kidnap Mrs. Proctor's daughter and would have succeeded but for you."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Proctor, "that's true. I swear it. He's persecuted us."

"Not bad," said Dan, "not bad at all. Only Lillian here will swear differently."

"She's my daughter, under age—"

"Stow it," said Dan. "Lieutenant," he turned, "arrest Basil Manders for the murder of Ali Mo'zen, an Arab of Jerusalem and for the murder of an unknown man."

"An unknown man?" said the lieutenant.

"He's mad," cried Manders. "How can I be charged with the murder of someone he does not know nor ever saw?"

"I saw him," said Dan gently. "But he'd been dead some time you see."

Manders blanched then. Harriet Proctor gasped. "You saw—saw him."

"Exactly," said Dan. "In the excavation." He pointed to the gouged hillside. "You see, Manders, the man must have had phosphorus matches in his pockets. The rats had picked him over some, but I saw the phosphorus and I saw him."

"You saw what?" Manders gasped.

"Of course. Did you forget that in the Orient matches are still made of mostly phosphorus and just sufficient sulphur to ignite them? How could I miss seeing the man? Only, as I say, I don't know the man except that he impersonated Proctor in Jerusalem."

"He's Carter Jenkins, an English remittance man I had befriended," said Manders sullenly. "The cursed fool tried to blackmail me when he thought—"

"Don't say that," screamed Harriet.

"Hush," said Manders. "Harden knows everything. Everybody knows Carter was a friend of mine. We were seen together too often. We were seen coming up here. If the body hadn't been found—but it has, and I want to speak. Anyway, it isn't going to make much difference in forty-eight hours."

The lieutenant stepped forward, his young pink face stern. "Then you confess to the murder of this Carter Jenkins?"

"Yes, and of Ali Mo'zen. I and I alone assume all blame. Harriet Proctor did nothing, and is entirely blameless."

"You poor fool," cried Dan. "She egged you on. First she had you have the dog killed because the dog was Proctor's and didn't like Jenkins and she was afraid that would arouse suspicion."

"You lie," screamed Harriet Proctor.

"Then Jenkins wanted blackmail and you killed him and hid his body in there." Dan pointed.

"Yes, in the left tunnel," said Manders.

"Ali Mo'zen threatened to tell the police about the dog, and she told you to kill him."

"No, no," moaned Harriet.

"Yes, from one to the next I was driven by the black fear," said Manders.

"Then she decided to kill her own stepdaughter and suggested that you lure me and my wife out and get rid of us."

"I swear I knew nothing. Manders thought of it himself," shrieked Harriet.

"So," said Manders quietly, "you'd betray me and let me stand in the dock alone."

"No, darling, only I'm afraid."

DAN, the British lieutenant and Valerie, who had hastened up, were the witnesses to what followed. Manders, with a quick movement, pulled Harriet Proctor's head to him and kissed her. Harriet jumped in pain and uttered a muffled cry. When Manders took his lips away there was blood on her mouth where he had bitten her. Before she could speak Manders turned to face Dan.

"Is there anything else you must know?"

"The original motive," said Dan almost gently. "It started when you and Harriet were poor while you studied art, didn't it? And she loved you but she liked good clothes and good times. And ran around with men?"

"Yes," assented Manders. "Then she met Proctor and he was fascinated. She came to me with a way to get us happiness and security. She suggested that I divorce her and let her marry Proctor. At the end of a year or so, she would divorce him, claim big alimony and we would be re-married."

"But Proctor suspected her and put the peculiar clause in his will," amended Dan, "and then died of bubonic plague before the year was up."

"Yes," said Manders, "and we thought of hiding the fact and impersonating Proctor somewhere so as to get the money. Then we got you out here to be a sort of witness—so that there would be no question about Proctor's death."

He sighed. "That started us on the trail —the trail that led here. You found out too much."

Harriet cried, "No, you fool, you are putting the rope around both our necks."

Dan turned to the lieutenant.

The young Briton's face was grave. "I'll have to take them in."

"To a hospital," amended Manders quietly. "Though I don't think it will do any good. I've got bubonic and Harriet will have it presently."

Then Dan understood the reason for the bite. He saw the buboes swelling. Manders had fallen victim. Harriet understood, too, and screamed with horror. She flung herself on Manders and tried to claw him.

Manders held her tightly. "Darling," he said. "I wanted you with me. Isn't it better this way than the other?"

The lieutenant had his men come up from the armored car section to carry them away. While he waited he said to Dan, "Tell me where that body—the body of Carter Jenkins—is. I'll have to produce the *corpus delicti*, you know."

Dan shrugged. "I don't know. You'll have to ask Manders."

"You mean," cried the lieutenant, "that you never knew where the body was? That you tricked him into confessing?"

Dan said, "I guess so."

Manders looked up quietly. "The body is in the pre-Hittite section. Just beyond where you found Lillian."

Harriet moaned. "You let him trick us."

"Hush," said Manders. He looked at Dan. "What did you see?"

Dan shrugged again. For some reason he felt strangely sad. "A pile of moldering wheat," he said. "It also throws off phosphorus glow, and it gave me the idea. I had no proof against you—that is, not enough to convict."

AGAIN Harriet moaned. But Manders comforted her and was still comforting her when the soldiers from the armored car came to take them away. Dan carried Lillian out of the compound. Valerie was beside him, telling him what had happened.

"The airplane that spotted us," she said, "must have flown to an armored car base and warned them. When the cars came in sight, Amur Abdullah flew the coop, and I

had to leave Hussein with Kenneth. I went to find you, and Harriet socked me."

She rubbed her bruised face. "She hits like a man."

Dan muttered, "And thought and schemed like one, too. That poor devil!"

Valerie told him Seagrave was still delirious, so Dan borrowed a high speed car and crew from the British lieutenant and made a quick journey to Jerusalem. Seagrave and Lillian were installed on the same floor of the hospital.

"They ought to get married as soon as they can," Valerie told him later.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Dan, looking up from the airplane timetable. On the day that Valerie and he left by airplane for Paris, he received word through the young British lieutenant that Harriet Proctor and Basil Manders were dead of bubonic.

"She was ruthless, and he was a weakling in the grip of a dominant will," he said over and over again. "She was the most dangerous woman I ever met."

"Yet she loved him," said Valerie.

"Yes," said Dan.

However, by the time the airplane dropped down on Le Bourget field, Dan had recovered his spirits and looked forward to a brief holiday in Normandy with Valerie. He went directly to the office because there was fifty thousand dollars to pay to Lillian Proctor and the rest of the policies to straighten out. He worked most of the afternoon and did not start home until seven.

He was cheerfully funny with the taxicab driver, his depression mood lifted, and he was looking forward to a cocktail and a swell dinner. He let himself in.

"Hi, Scrumptious," he called from the hallway, "all out for cocktails and dinner."

A voice answered him but it was not Valerie's. It was a voice that made him turn pale, stagger and groan.

It said, this voice, "Hi, yuh, Dan, old boy, old boy. Dinner is right and buckets and buckets of champagne."

Into sight hove the hearty red face of Valerie's cousin, and behind him was the cousin's wife.

"We postponed our trip to the battlefields, so we could take it with you!"

Somehow Dan staggered to the kitchen where Valerie was cooling some sherry. She looked at him wistfully. Dan looked at her sadly.

She took his hand. From the next room Valerie's cousin and his wife raised voice in song.

"Drunk last night, drunk the night before, gonna get drunk tonight . . ."

Valerie's cousin breaking in, "Dan, a magnum of champagne I can put you under the table before dawn."

Dan shuddered. He walked to Valerie and kissed her thoroughly. He walked to the kitchen table and took out a long glittering carving knife and rubbed his finger along the razor edge.

Valerie exclaimed and ran to him. "Cut mine first, darling," she whispered.

. . . swimming toward that fabulous rock where life had no price

The Devil's Mushroom

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Author of "The Spider's Gold," etc.

While John Byng lives, the adventurers have not died. . . . A thrilling tale of the secret Mediterranean

CAPTAIN JOHN BYNG, swimming strongly, became suddenly fearful of the rising moon. A rufous moon hurrying up out of the silent Aegean Sea as if desirous of helping the sharp-eyed guards on The Devil's Mushroom. Byng increased his speed, eager to get within the shadow of the island.

Now that he was close to the rocky islet it appeared unreal. Something fabulous. It reared up out of that old sea of the ancient gods like a monstrous toadstool, the stemlike base of black basalt supporting an overhanging head.

The snaky currents of the Sporades had gnawed at that base for untold centuries, but the cap, out of reach of the waves, had retained its original form, so that the erosion at sea level had produced an island that looked like an enormous fungus.

An evil-looking rock. Homer mentioned it as the abode of sea devils. Ulysses shunned it on his homeward voyage to Ithaca. Wandering rovers from Tyre, sighting its cobralike hood, hoisted their purple sails and fled, tossing white meal and the blood of black goats on the waters as gifts to Poseidon.

Fifty yards from the rock Byng glanced upward. For an instant he thought that the basalt column was moving towards him with evil intent. It would surely topple over and crush him. Fear whipped his arms. He thought to turn and swim seaward, but a swirling current caught him, sucked him into a small cavern and beached him clumsily.

He lay exhausted on a flat rock. The swim from the motor-boat had been more than two miles. It was thought unwise for the boat to approach closer.

Lying in the thick darkness of the cavern Captain Byng's thoughts went back to far-off boyhood days when he swam in the Charles River at Boston. There was a small island in the Charles which he often visited, and there, naked and alone, he would recite verses from that old "Booke of the Byngs," the fine saga of his race. Curiously, above the gurgling of the Aegean Sea, he seemed to hear his boyish voice of long ago declaiming two lines of the poem which intrigued him greatly. They ran

When men on gentil dedes ride forth the angels pray,
Let Clan of Byngs remember this when girding for the fraye.

The lines brought a query into the brain of Captain John Byng, one time of the city of Boston. Was his present quest something that could be described as a "gentil dede?" He wondered. Lying in the darkness at the base of The Devil's Mushroom he reviewed carefully the details of his enlistment. . . .

* * *

IT HAD occurred in one of the most modern of Mediterranean resorts. Quite the newest and most cunningly baited trap for the social moths. Stucco and sticko. Guests who came by fast expresses and stately yachts were flayed cleverly by the suave sutlers of the army of pleasure, and then, Marsyas-like, they crept away. Sometimes, lacking the fare to take them elsewhere, one or two stayed in the cold stillness of the morgue.

It was a yacht that brought the old man and the girl. A gay white yacht bearing the name of *Helice,* the beloved of Zeus, who sits among the stars under the name of *Ursa Major.* Byng, lounging on the *terrasse,* idly watched the two passengers as they came ashore at the private landing of the hotel.

The beauty of the girl attracted him. A sadness, indescribable and strangely appealing, was upon her finely formed features. She was tall and slim, and possessed a carriage so wonderful that Byng, watching her ascend the stairway, had a belief that the stone steps had suddenly come to life and were lifting her without any movement of her body.

He thought of her during the long hot afternoon. Had she come to flirt with Dame Chance, to watch hipless mannequins parade, to sit over poisonous-looking but harmless drinks and rise from time to time at the invitation of limp and bleak-faced young men to hop around to the flailing of a jazz band?

He was still wondering as he sat on the *terrasse* after dinner. The harbor was a garter-blue bowl dotted with winking riding-lights. He was staring at the dim outline of the *Helice* when his name was uttered close beside him. He rose to face the old man and the girl.

"It is, I believe, Captain John Byng?" said the old gentleman. "Please permit me to introduce myself. I am General Michel Castal, this young lady is my niece, Francisca Gayrhos. We have come here to find you, and we are delighted to succeed so quickly. The Marquis de Montfaçon gave me your name and a note of introduction."

Byng thought that there was about the pair the mystic aura of blood. The imaginative might see around them an escort of ghostly forbears; knights and statesmen and wise church dignitaries. The tall adventurer was elated at knowing they were seeking him.

They had the corner of the great ter-

race to themselves. Somewhere a singsong voice that came all the way from London told of marvels.

There's a roadhouse on the Milky Way,
my dear,
Where angels brew a most delicious beer;
Where oft the King of Betelguese is seen
A-frolicking with Aldebaran's Queen.

An unbeliever choked the lyrical liar, and into the soft silence the old man poured a wonder story. A story that was huge and colorful, that battered down the walls of incredulity, that took disbelief by the ears and hurled it into the jewel-blue harbor.

The thin whispering voice of the old general built up an island that, to the listening Byng, appeared like the wash drawing of an insane artist. He spoke its name in soft Greek, translating it into "The Devil's Mushroom."

Where was it? Ah! Could Captain Byng fling up before him the Aegean Sea with its five hundred islands? *Yes?* Well, if one steered due south from Skyros heading for the Cape d'Oro one would sight it. Out of the deserted sea it thrust its snakelike head.

There was some queer quality in the old man's voice. One saw the Lady Truth walking through the passages, italicizing a word, accenting a syllable. Now and then lifting a finger of caution to the listener. A terrible lady is Truth.

The general whispered a name. A great name. "He," he said, and the word was like a sword thrust, "he is on that island."

Captain John Byng was startled. "You mean," he stammered, "you mean that he is buried there?"

"No!" snapped the old man. "*No!* He is not dead! He is alive! He is a prisoner there!"

The lights in the harbor winked at Byng. "Humbug," said the lights. "Don't believe everything you hear in this joint."

Byng looked at the girl. She believed! Her eyes washed the uncertainties from his mind. This story of an island in the Sporades on which was a man thought dead, was, to her, believable! Yet he, Byng, recalled the scareheads of the dead years. "Great Figure of the War dies on Shipboard" . . . "Buried at Sea" . . . "Man Who Knew Much Secret History."

The old general guessed the thoughts of Byng. "He was taken off the steamer," he said softly. "Taken off at night and carried to The Devil's Mushroom. He is still there. Yes! An armed guard watches over him, and there is a small patrol boat that halts anyone atempting a landing. He has secrets that must not be known. Terrible secrets .If they—if they were known the world would be wiser. They might save us from another war."

DOWN the coast in the blue wash beyond the harbor lights was the Isle Ste. Marguerite where the Man in the Iron Mask spent long dreary years. The island seemed to drift closer in the silence. A whisper came from it. "It's quite possible. Mattioli, Marchioly, or the twin brother of the *Grand Monarque*—whatever historians wish to call him—was here for untold years while the world rolled on in its silly way."

Again Byng looked at the girl. She leaned toward him. "He is my father," she whispered.

Terrible were those four words. Terrible in their convincingness. They hung in the perfumed air. *He is my father.* The man on the island in the Aegean Sea was the father of the girl!

Now her voice took up the story. Embroidering the bare facts that the general had stated. Putting forward a plan. A plan in the center of which stood a ghostly Byng—a ghostly Byng that she was bringing to life with words that Circe might have uttered. She was, with silky sentences, changing the tall adventurer into a god.

He would go with her and the general in the white yacht. They had important news. The patrol boat needed refitting. It would cross to Eubia for ten days. The Devil's Mushroom would be left to the guards. Three men and an officer. A man

—a brave man could be taken close to the island, swim the intervening distance, and land secretly.

"Then?" asked Byng.

"You will find my father," she whispered.

The radio broke forth afresh. Someone in Paris was telling of the hasty fabrication of gas masks. The kind government! There would be a mask for each and every one of the lowly populace. Mother and child and babe . . .

Two men passed along the terrace, talking in whispers. Byng had seen them whispering into each other's ears for days. They were, so rumor said, millionaire warmongers. Possibly planning an Armageddon in which millions would be murdered and maimed. He wondered if they knew that the supposed dead man was on The Devil's Mushroom? They might. Dark and fearful secrets were stored in the hearts of that brace of strife makers. *Agents-provocateurs internationaux.*

General Michel Castal leaned forward and breathed a figure. A sum that was immense even when whispered in that gay stewpot of Mammon. Byng did not hear him. He was thinking how he could avoid that encircling loop of sound made out of *"You will find my father."*

He would be gracious and considerate in making his excuses. Some other work. His word pledged. A million regrets.

He leaned toward the girl to express his sorrow when a bellhop approached and presented a note. *"Pour le Capitaine John Byng,"* he murmured. *"Urgent, monsieur."*

Byng begged permission to glance at it. It was written in pencil and was unsigned. It ran

> Keep your damned Yankee nose out of the business you are now discussing. If you butt in you will run up against forces of which you are entirely ignorant.

Byng turned to the girl. "It is nice of you to think that I could find your father," he said. "It seems a difficult task but I could—I could try."

BEFORE the dawn—the sky a strange mass of cirrous clouds that resembled pale yellow sheep—Byng began a survey. While resting he became possessed of a belief that the island resented his presence. It had, like many of the places that formed the heart-core of the ancient world, gathered to itself a quality of watchfulness that bred fear. It had seen too much. Through the dog-eared centuries it had changed into an island of pain.

There was, so General Michel Castal believed, a sort of rough stairway leading from the wave-gnawed base to the cap of the Mushroom. It wound around the base of basalt, cunningly beavered out of the rock. The stairway had been constructed in Homeric days when the island had been a temple dedicated to Melkarth.

Byng found the stairway when he had nearly given up hope. Its seaward steps were concealed in a small cave, and from there it spiraled upward, at times taking advantage of rocky galleries, at other times nothing but a perilous and unprotected ladder high above the sea.

The steps were cupped by the feet of the ages. They were covered with sea-slime. Here and there upon the rocky wall were inscriptions, carvings of the Phoenician *ankh*, the symbol of life; the names of Astarte, Ba'al, Cronus, and long-forgotten gods.

The place, so Byng thought, held memories of the days when "blood was sacrificially tendered." He thought, curiously, that the odor remained. The odor of blood and the echo of chanting voices. The black rocks retained them. They would be there for ever and ever.

Now, as he moved cautiously upward, the place mocked his doubts about the truth of the story that had brought him here. Here, breathed the rock, anything is possible. A distinguished prisoner? Why not? You might find anyone here. Polyphemus might be lying in wait at the next twist of the stairs. You might find Calypso resting on her bed of blue violets. Minerva herself might be sitting on the crown of this place.

The stair ran through a scooped-out cavern in the side of the rock. A dark and unpleasant passage that was the sleeping place of sea-fowl. Again it moved into the open, a bare and slippery footway, curling upward. Far below the morning light reddened the sea.

Byng was conscious of his nudity as he clung to the slippery ledge. A little ashamed of it. If he did succeeed in outwitting the three guards and their officer how could he appear before the distinguished prisoner? He was relieved when the pythonlike track led into another gloomy gallery into which little light filtered.

He was halfway through this second tunnel when the awfully noticeable silence was battered by the *clop, clop* of wooden shoon. Byng thrust himself against the wall. Prickly that wall. Points sharpened by the wind.

A FIGURE filled the cleft through which the path ran from the cavern into the open. A huge man. Byng had a hope that the gloom would shield his body from the other, but the hope fled. The man pulled himself up with a jerk. He was popeyed. In that first instant he thought the American a ghost.

He uttered a squeal of fear and started back up the stairway, but Byng was on him before he could leave the cavern. They fell on the slimy floor. They rolled over and over till they were at the lower opening of the gallery where the unprotected steps hung over the sea. Byng fought to keep the struggle within the safety zone. He stopped the spluttering squeals of the fellow with a hard jolt to the jaw. Another to the same spot ended the struggle.

Hurriedly Byng stripped the fellow of jacket and trousers. His own nakedness was distasteful to him. The distinguished prisoner on the Mushroom was her father. What would he think if six feet of nude American manhood came a-rescuing? Later, if the attempt was successful, he, the father, might mention the matter to her.

Inch by inch, he dragged himself up . . .

Tell her how shocked and hurt he was.

The stunned guard was making whimpering excuses. He was denying authorship of something. Byng, with fist close to the fellow's jaw, tried to understand. The guard spoke the queer dialect of the

Tshakones, the people of Kynouria, but out of the gabble Byng understood that the man was asserting that he had not committed a murder.

A murder! Byng shook him roughly. What murder? Quick! Quick! Was it the prisoner? The high prisoner?

Dry-lipped Byng awaited the answer. No. It was Eustache who had been killed. The servant of His Excellency. Eustache had cheated at cards. Someone had stabbed him and thrown his body into the sea.

"And His Excellency is well?" Byng's whisper was tense.

"Si, si, signor!"

In the choking silence Byng thought he heard her voice. *"You will find my father."* God in heaven, if he had been robbed of the joy of obeying her command! His anger was so visible to the squirming guard that the fellow started to beg for mercy.

Byng gagged him, tied his hands and feet, then, unfeelingly, thrust him into a corner of the cavern. He choked a murderous impulse within his mind. He had a conviction that the fellow was the killer of the valet, and that he should, if he got his due, follow the unfortunate Eustache down the side of the cliff. It was difficult to control the impulse. He was surprised at the manner in which it fought for fulfillment. It was so easy to roll the fellow off the stairway!

A SHOUT like a burst of gunfire startled Byng. "Stefanos!" It rolled down the stairway from the cap of the Mushroom. It seemed to splash into the sea. It had weight. It had substance. Byng had felt it as it slithered by.

It came again "Stefanos! *Stefanos!*" Byng knew that Stefanos was the person he had just robbed of coat and trousers. The fellow struggled with the gag. Again came that desire to roll him into the sea. He was surely a murderer if he wasn't actually the killer of Eustache. Murder had wiped her bloody fingers on his evil face.

The seeker of Stefanos was coming. Another voice, thinner, more metallic, was shouting instructions. The owner of the thin voice seemed disturbed. Byng wondered if his presence on the island had become known. They could not have seen the boat. It had returned to the *Helice,* cruising out of range. It would not come near till midnight.

Now the searcher was close. Byng waited at the upper end of the cavern. What had she said? *"Three guards and an officer, but a brave man—"*

The fellow plunged into the cavern, tripped over the thrust-out leg of the American and fell on his face. Byng leaped on top of him.

This man, though taken at a disadvantage, was nobody's baby. He hunched his back in a peculiar manner and flung Byng completely over his head, then, with the quickness of a striking serpent he was on top of the man from Boston.

He had tricks. Quantities of tricks. Byng, fighting for his life, thought of Milo of Crotona, greatest Greek wrestler. Sure. The Greeks had been wrestlers from time immemorial. And this fellow was a good one, with all the modern tricks added to the honest play of Olympian days.

Byng blocked his effort to gouge out an eye. Difficult too. The fellow was persistent. Wanted to dig the optic out with his thumb. He, Byng, would look well going back to the yacht as a Cyclops!

From the corner of the cavern came noises. Grunting noises. The gagged guard was trying to cheer his comrade. It had been foolish to choke back the desire to roll that brute off the stairway. Well, there might be an opportunity later.

Once at a country fair in Maine Captain John Byng had challenged a wrestler who called himself The Masked Marvel. He had learned a few tricks from that encounter. Possibly this guard didn't know of them.

Byng defeated another attempt to remove an eye, then sprang a trick that The Masked Marvel had played upon him years before. It had the same effect upon

the guard as it had had upon the youthful Byng. He unloosened a howl of pain. He forgot attack for the moment and applied himself solely to defense. He rolled toward the lower opening of the cavern, intent only on getting out of reach of Byng's iron fingers. And Byng, filled with resentment against the tactics of the fellow, followed, forgetful of the danger if the two rolled from the cavern onto the unprotected ledge.

The gagged guard realized the peril. His muffled grunts were fat with warning, but the two didn't hear. The eye-gouger was trying to escape from the devilish grip, and Byng, vicious under the gouging tactics, was intent on making the most of the clutch. Pain blinded the one and revenge the other.

Possibly Byng's reflexes were better. The blinding light of the ledge awakened him to the danger. To get free of the fellow was the urge of life itself. To unwind himself from legs and arms. To cling to the slippery path while the skeleton fingers of death clawed at him.

Some will to live gave to his whole body the power of one of those leather 'suckers" that he had made as a boy. He was a human limpet. Something had him by the ankle. He thought it was the hand of Death. He kicked madly. He was free of it.

He opened his eyes—they had closed in that moment of horror. He was alone on the ledge. Quivering a little, feeling slightly squalmy, he edged back into the cavern. The gagged guard was making queer animal noises. Snuffling and sobbing.

TWO! Byng's brain shouted it. Two were left as active adversaries. And what had he to do after he had disposed of them. Ah, he remembered! He had to find her father! Find him, and then, when the night came down, signal the motorboat to stand in to take them back to the yacht. It was strange how convinced she had been that he would be successful. But the "Booke of the Byngs" had a line or two about the intuition of women. He recalled it as he started up the stairway. It ran:

For women live muche closer to the Spirit, then
The female Byngs are wiser muche than men.

This ledge was mountaineering plus. Climbing along the Matterhorn had nothing on it. Would the old fellow be able to negotiate it, or would he, Byng, have to carry him down to the water? That would be a ticklish job.

A bullet sang by his ear. Another splattered on the stone stairway. Someone on the overhanging cap had taken a shot at him. The war was on. Two down and two to go. Byng broke into a run. The sooner he got to the top of the island the better. He was clutched by a sudden terror. They might, fearing a rescue, do away with the prisoner. Hurl him off the cap into the sea.

The ladder ran through another tunnel. Here he was sheltered from the marksman on the cap. Through a break in the tunnel he glanced down at the sea. He made calculations. He had surely covered two-thirds of the path to the top.

He broke from the tunnel and started up a tricky bit of hacked-out pathway. He stopped, turned and made a leap back to the shelter. There had come to his ears a sudden tearing sound that sent skewers of fear through his body! It increased. It came swooping down from on high. Thunder of the gods!

A section of rock, weighing a ton or more, struck the spot that he had just vacated and went plunging down into the sea. The silence after it struck the water was more frightening than the roar of the descending rock. The stillness was a mouth that waited for food. Food made out of great noises. The little pecks of revolver explosions didn't please it. Byng thought the quiet waited for the island to explode. It, the quiet, like the whispering war-mongers back in the resort of stucco and sticko, wanted crash and clamor.

Running swiftly up the stretch over

which the avalanche had swept, Byng wondered if the two war-mongers had sent him that note telling him to keep his Yankee nose out of the business of The Devil's Mushroom. Perhaps. War-mongers were clever lads. This old prisoner on the island might know something that would stop a sale of five million rifles, thousands of machine guns, and tons of ammunition. What cared they of the dead? The dead for whom:

. . . no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells.

A bullet splattered so close that the hot lead pricked his cheek. A rock struck his shoulder and staggered him. Six steps above him the stone stairway ran into the shelter of a cavern. Gumming himself to the rocky wall he plunged upward.

He made it. He was in the cavern. In it, but as far away from the cap as if he was on the shore. For this cavern, he found, led directly to the top of the island, and, as he entered it, a sort of trapdoor was clamped down on a circle of white light that marked the end of the stairs of terror!

Byng crept through the darkness to the trapdoor. It was of stone. A huge circle of stone that might have been the grinding wheel of an olive-mill in the days of Homer. He put his shoulder under it, but any attempt to move it was childish. A little faint from the smashing blow delivered by the falling rock he sat himself down to consider the situation.

THROUGH the long not hours of the day Byng waited. Waited for the night. Now that he was close to the actual prison of the man he sought he became convinced that the prisoner had a message to tell to the world.

Possibly the old man, realizing that an effort was being made to free him, was trying to impress the rescuers with the value of the news he possessed. Byng thought so. Through that wheel of stone came spirit whispers urging him on.

The night came slowly. Creeping over the Aegean. The dark, dark sea of the gods. Regretfully Byng shed the clothes that he had borrowed from the guard. Now, if he succeeded he would have to appear before the father of the girl without clothing. For his plan forced him to use his bare body as a *gecko* uses his toes.

It was a dangerous plan, but there was no other. He had decided to take a chance where the odds against him were great. At the point where the stairway ran into the cavern he would attempt to scale the nearly perpendicular outer wall and thus reach the top of the island!

Through the long afternoon, by thrusting his head outward, he had memorized each little knob that would give him a foothold, so that when the darkness came, his groping fingers would find them one by one. Now he was ready. If one of the little outjutting bits of rock failed him the wonder girl would have to find another man to make the attempt.

He lifted himself from the stairway. Snakelike he clung to the cold rock. Far beneath the sea sighed softly. Exploring fingers reached for a higher knob. It was there. How cleverly he had memorized them. His brain, his fingers, his toes, his skin, were working in unison. He was thrilled with their precious collaboration. They understood. They had a work to do They were splendid loyal helpers.

Lord, how strong were his fingers as they drew him upward! How cleverly his toes found tiny niches in the worn rock! How close his body clung to it! As he moved upward he felt the body suction relax for an instant, then, the moment the upward movement halted, the skin of chest and stomach, and thighs seemed to fasten to the rocky wall.

Now there came a doubt. Would the two men on the cap suspect the attempt and be waiting for him? He consulted the fingers and toes, and the leeching skin. They comforted him. The two on the cap of the rock would never think he would make the attempt. Those two were resting secure in the belief that no single invader

could move the circle of stone that guarded the top of the stairs.

Byng looked upward. Now he was near the top. He saw it like a black braid running under the cobalt-blue of the sky. A little more difficult here because his examination of the afternoon had not located the higher nodules of rock. Bloody fingers groped for them. Bloody toes, reaching them later, found them wet and slippery and harder to cling to. Then—then a groping right hand found the edge!

The hand sent a joyful message to the toes and the limpetlike body. The right arm called to the left. Byng chinned the edge, drew himself upward and lay flat and panting in the black shadows of the cap.

SLOWLY, very slowly, the buildings on the top of that lonely island took shape. There were three one-story constructions of a curious type. In the largest of the three a lamp was burning; the two others were in darkness. There was no sign of life. A frightening silence was upon the place, a silence that seemed to question the intrusion of the man from Boston.

Where were the two guards? Byng crawling on his stomach moved through the darkness. The silence was a biting acid that ate into his bones.

He crawled behind the rear of the largest building and edged cautiously towards the front of it so that he could examine a sort of courtyard. He had a belief that the opening of the stairway was in this courtyard.

Inch by inch he crawled along the side of the building and peeped. Squatting each side of a hurricane lamp in the very center of the court were the two guards. They were playing a game of cards, intricate and absorbing. Beside them was the mechanism for lifting the big stone that covered the stair opening.

Their silence was remarkable. Not a word. Hardly a movement beyond the motions of laying down the cards. Beside their wine cups were their revolvers.

Byng picked up a pebble. He had to separate the two. He tossed the small stone to the other side of the courtyard so that it fell beside the meanest of the three buildings which he, Byng, took to be the cell of the prisoner.

The pattering noise of the falling stone disturbed the two. They turned and stared at the spot where the pebble had dropped. Byng tossed another. The backs of the guards were turned to him now, and he could not repress a smile at their attitude. Both had grabbed their revolvers. One, evidently the officer, muttered an order. His subordinate got to his feet and marched off to investigate.

When the searcher had reached the far side of the courtyard Byng made his rush. A stealthy wolflike rush with a flying leap at the end. He landed on the neck and shoulders of the man sitting on the ground, and the fellow went into dreamland.

Byng tore the revolver from his hand and rose to meet the other guard who had turned on hearing the sound of the scuffle. They fired together. Byng felt a sharp searing pain on the left side where a bullet touched him. The guard was less lucky. He dropped in a heap and lay still.

"You will find my father!" . . . The words—her words—were doing a wild sarabande through the brain of the adventurer from Boston. This little building was surely the cell of the prisoner. Byng rushed to the door. It was locked. He ran back to the stunned officer, thrust his hand within the fellow's jacket and found the keys. Back to the door again, carrying the hurricane lamp.

There was a man on the shabby cot. An old man, white-haired, pale, and frightfully thin. Blinking fearfully in the light of the lamp. The figure of the big American seemed to terrify him.

Byng spoke hurriedly. He had come to rescue him. Out in the Aegean was a yacht on which was the old one's daughter and his friend, General Michel Castal. Did he understand? Did he? *Did he?*

The man opened his mouth and pointed to it. Byng flung the light full on the pain-scarred face. He cursed softly. The people

who had kept the old man prisoner had made doubly sure that he wouldn't spill the secrets they knew he possessed. He would never talk again.

Filled with fury Byng rushed onto the courtyard. He had to light a signal for the motorboat. He snatched at bits of timber, chairs, an old mattress, a table, piled them high and set fire to them. The flames roared up into the night, and from far to the eastward came the answering signal. They had seen. The motorboat was heading toward the island.

Byng rushed to the mechanism that lifted the stone. Back to the old man now. He tried to explain. He and the old one must go down the stairs to the water-edge to meet the boat.

The old man was terrified. He tried to wrap himself in the tattered bedclothes. He didn't wish to go. Possibly he remembered the stairs up which he had been brought in the long ago. He preferred to die on the cap of that lonely rock sooner than descend by them.

There was no time for discussion. Byng wrapped the poor old squealing thing in his blankets and put him on his shoulder. His was the weight of a small child.

A perilous descent, but the tremendous joy that flowed through the body of Captain Byng swept away the horrors of the slippery path. He had accomplished what she commanded him to do. What she was convinced he could do.

He paused at the lowest cavern to untie the bonds of the guard with whom he had first come in contact. The fellow was a whimpering idiot. Byng instructed him to climb the stairs when he had restored the circulation of his numbed limbs and attend to his stunned officer.

From far below there came a hail from the motorboat. Byng answered it. The old man was gasping and moaning. Byng thought that the fear-agony had brought some sort of seizure upon him. He was horrified lest the old fellow would collapse before he got him on the yacht.

Now he was at the bottom of the stairway. The boat came skilfully in to a pebbled beach. Byng carried the old fellow aboard.

IN THE cabin of the *Helice* they gathered around the lounge on which the old man lay. General Michel Castal, the girl, and Byng. Sobbing was the girl. The excitement of the rescue combined with the terror brought by the journey down the stairs had been to much for the prisoner. Death was hovering around him. The girl had her arm beneath his head; her cool fingers were stroking his brow.

The old man opened his eyes. Feebly he made signs that he wished to write. General Michel Castal rushed to a desk, grabbed a block of paper and pencil and carried it to the lounge.

Furiously the old man wrote. A sort of frenzy was upon him.

He covered a page, then, suddenly, the pencil dropped from his hand. He gave a little sigh of contentment and all was over.

Captain John Byng, looking over the shoulder of General Castal, read the words that the old man had written. No, he didn't read them. Those words were unreadable in the sense that the brain to which they were brought was immediately stunned by their import. Their terrible import. They upset all the rules of logic; they laughed at reason.

A wild storm of words that carried a message. Surely a message, but one which would require hours to digest. It was there. Byng knew that it was there. The old general knew that it was there, but their ability to clutch it quickly was lacking. It was an assembly of words that had within them a sort of *shamanism,* a sort of magic. It was a revelation. A statement that would have to be studied closely, pored over and mentally decoded. It was pregnant with meaning. There were names—great names; there were figures that seemed to be the strength of armies, countries, cities, and statements incredible.

The fainting girl beside the couch claimed their attention. General Castal locked the paper-block in the drawer of the desk; Byng lifted the fainting girl and

led her away. The message-giver had gone to a happier world.

But, even as Byng sought to comfort the girl, those penciled words that he had seen lashed his brain. They urged him to make an effort to understand their import.

Leading the girl to her cabin Byng wondered: Did those of old to whom came tremendous revelations understand their meaning immediately, or did the true import come after days of study? When did they arrive at the true interpretation? Surely not in the first moment when the rush of knowledge had upset their formal thoughts and deluged them with new ideas, with new visions, with a wisdom that staggered them. Surely it was only by long and patient study that the truth emerged.

He left the girl at the door of her cabin, then after begging her to rest, he hurried back to the salon. This cryptic message was maddening. Behind it he knew was a great lesson, but it was beyond his mental powers.

The general was awaiting Byng. Waiting like a hunting dog that cannot be unleashed without his mate. Together they moved toward the desk.

The shaking hands of the elder man turned the key. He clutched the book and pulled it forth. Shoulder to shoulder they stared at the page.

Something was happening. Something horrifying. The words, the pregnant words were becoming faint! They were disappearing.

Disappearing! Slipping away as if they had decided they were too terrible for human sight. Too portentous!

General Castal uttered a cry of horror. He clutched at the page as if he would seize the disappearing words and hold them for examination. Wide-eyed, horror-stricken the two men stared. Fainter and fainter the writing.

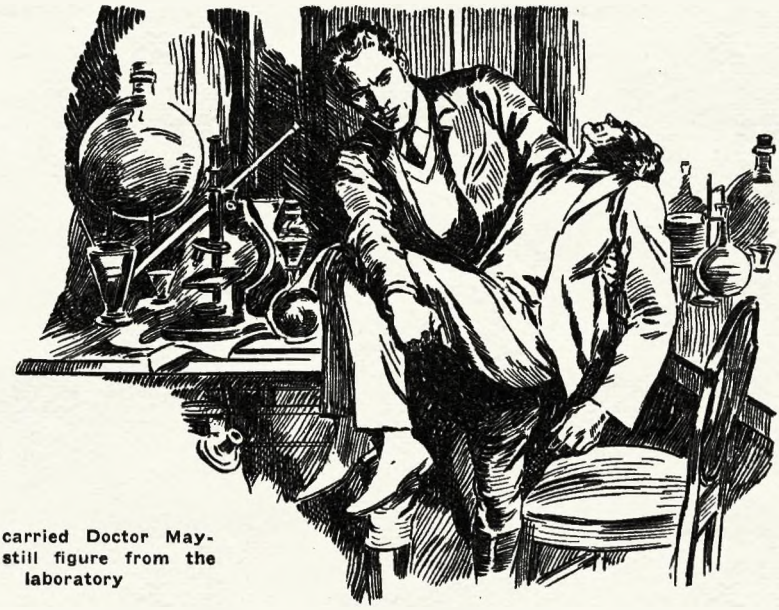
The two stared at a blank page, white and wordless. It was unbelievable.

After a long time General Castal rubbed an exploring thumb over the sheet of paper. "We have been tricked!" he said hoarsely. "Some devil on this yacht doctored the paper! Some devil who knew—who knew that he would wish to write what he couldn't tell us with his tongue!"

He turned on Byng. "Is it possible that you have memorized any part of it?"

Captain John Byng shook his head. "I couldn't," he answered. "I seem to see them now in my brain, but they fly like great black birds when I try to get hold of them."

General Michel Castal put the block of paper back in the drawer and locked it. "It is sad," he said. "Very sad. I have given instructions to make for Rhodes." Like men recovering from some terrible concussion the two stood and stared at each other. The dead man on the lounge seemed to be smiling at their discomfiture. They wondered if he, wiser now than when he wrote the message, thought it better that they should not know its awful import.



David carried Doctor Mayhew's still figure from the laboratory

Lost House

By FRANCES SHELLEY WEES

Begin now this intriguing novel of mystery in the cypress darkness of Canada's wilderness

THAT beautiful morning in the Canadian forest David Aylesworth believes himself to be quite alone—until he hears someone whistling *Faust* and a very small and lovely girl appears suddenly from nowhere. He learns that she is Pamela Leighton and that she lives in Lost House, a mansion erected on an island in the lake nearby. There, she says, she has spent her life with her mother who for years has wanted to return to England. They take in boarders at Lost House now—very select people and, Pamela thinks, rather dull ones. . . . Abruptly she decides she has told this young doctor too much of her history and leaves him.

Back at Lost House there is a small mystery over the disappearance of an undergardener, Danvers. But Pamela's mother, breakfasting in bed and efficiently giving orders to the housekeeper, refuses to worry over the matter. So Pamela goes off to play hostess to the paying guests. They are an unusual lot: Shane Meredith, not-too-famous tenor with languorous eyes; James Harrod Payne, novelist; Lady Revel and her son Lord Geoffrey, the listless young man intended to be a match for Pamela; the Misses Lessington whom no one can tell apart; and, most peculiar of all, the Archdeacon, a huge, silent man, seemingly composed of steel springs.

DAVID AYLESWORTH, the young doctor Pamela met in the forest, at last explains the disappearance of Danvers. He rides up to Lost House later that morning to announce that he has discovered Danvers' body. After an investigation, Doctor Mayhew, one of the guests, agrees with Aylesworth that the under gardener did not die by drowning; the body is badly bruised. Mrs. Leighton and Doctor Mayhew seem particularly anxious to pass the death off as an accident, but David Aylesworth insists politely that he must report to the police. And so at length a wire is sent to Vancouver.

Aylesworth accepts an invitation to stop over at Lost House, and Pamela is pleased

This story began in last week's Argosy

about that. But the Danvers mystery puzzles her — and when one of the elderly Lessington twins confides some rather melodramatic suspicions to her, Pamela is the more confused. Miss Lessington is convinced that the Archdeacon has followed her and her sister all the way from England. He is no archdeacon, she claims; more probably an Arch-fiend. Furthermore, she has received a strange note which she gives to Pamela. It says merely: IN TOP LEAVES OF GRASS. . . .

VI

Lost House,
June 20,
11 A. M.

"THIS," Pamela said, pushing on a narrow rustic bridge under green over-hanging trees, "is the rock garden."

David put his hands on the railing of the little bridge and surveyed the picture. From somewhere on the west of the island a little brook came splashing down over miniature waterfalls. The water slid into round pools edged with moss, and crept again over grained and colored stones. Beneath the bridge it lay in a long quiet pool on the surface of which water-lilies floated against their green pads. Tall reeds grew up from the interstices of the rocks below the pool; and along the banks and spreading back from the water a myriad blue flowers clung to the gray stones. The water sang a faint song; the sun came through the trees and flecked Pamela's pink dress with shadow.

"It's a beautiful garden," David said.

"This spot is McQuittie's particular pride and joy," she replied.

David stared unseeingly down into the water. "Sure you've told me everything, now?" he asked her.

Pamela drew a long breath. "I think so. It sounds rather a lot, doesn't it? And just this morning—just a few hours ago I told you Lost House was stuffy. But even then I had all these things on my mind. And since you've found Danvers—I mean, since he is dead . . ." she stopped. "Mother says I love melodrama," she said. "Perhaps I do. Perhaps I've been mixing up a cake with nothing in it but spice, and that's why it tastes so horrid."

"It probably isn't a cake at all," David said cheerfully. "It will probably turn out to be a whole row of little mud pies, and they'll dissolve when we pour water on them. But let's see if I've got everything straight and in order.

"Last summer, a year ago, Doctor Mayhew fits up his sitting room as a laboratory and begins working behind locked doors. Next, this spring your mother received a very strange letter from Lady Montana, who is her best friend but also the wife of the man who is head of Scotland Yard. This letter has at present disappeared. Third, about a week ago a stranger, a sick man, gets off the train at Dark Forest and inquires if there is not a big rest-home in the neighborhood. Because of his illness and his apparent inability to travel further, you are forced to take him in to Lost House and no one has seen him since his arrival save Doctor Mayhew.

"You cannot help wondering why he did not continue on the train to Corbett, only eight miles beyond Dark Forest, where he would have been sure of medical attention. Fourth, yesterday Miss Lessington receives this note which you have shown to me, and, fifth and last, Danvers disappears last night and is found dead this morning. That's the lot?"

"Yes. Except—oh, never mind that," Pamela said. "It's too silly. One thing that seems obvious is that Miss Josie's note came from somebody in Lost House, someone who enclosed it in her own old envelope. Even if—if everything else is little mud pies, there isn't any way to pour water on that note."

"What's she like, this Miss Josie?"

"She's a darling," Pamela said positively. "You can't suspect either of the Lessingtons of anything queer."

"Is there anyone you do suspect of anything queer?" David inquired, breaking splinters off the bridge-rail.

"No," she said, and then, "I don't know. It frightens me, somehow. I mean . . ." she stopped, head bent, thinking.

"THE sick man," David said finally. "Doctor Mayhew would know, surely, if he were bluffing." He watched Pamela's face.

"Yes," she replied in a low tone. "He would know, wouldn't he?"

David compressed his lips. So that's what was worrying her, too. Doctor Mayhew.

"I'd rather gathered that Doctor Mayhew was an old family friend, who'd been here for years," he said. "Am I wrong?"

"He is. He's been our best friend. He was immensely clever in London and had a marvelous reputation. But his wife died, and he had a bad nervous breakdown afterward; and then when my grandfather built Lost House, Doctor Mayhew asked if he might come here too. He was my grandfather's best friend. He has no people of his own. His two sons were killed in the war. He has always been sweet and darling, and he's done everything for me from teaching me French and Italian and carving a doll's house to taking out my tonsils. But he's old, now, and he isn't strong. And—"

"Well," David said abruptly, "what would you say if we did a little ferreting about? I mean to say, I'll be here until after tomorrow's train, and I'll be glad of something to do. There's this note, for instance—I suppose you have a library at Lost House?"

"Library?" Pamela echoed, staring at him. "Of course. Yes. My grandfather had hundreds of books and so had my father. Do you mean to say you've already got an idea about that note? Something to do with a library?"

David had begun to answer her when a large figure in clerical black appeared on the other side of the brook at the approach to the bridge. Head bent, hands locked behind his back, the Archdeacon blundered along noisily over the path, evidently lost in some deep inner speculation. Not until he was almost upon them did he look up. He blinked his eyes rapidly and jerked at his white mustache. "Er, sorry," he said gruffly. "Ah, that is, sorry."

"It's perfectly all right," Pamela said. "Archdeacon Branscombe, do let me present Doctor Aylesworth."

"Hrrum," the Archdeacon said indistinguishably, and put out a big well-cared-for hand. His grip was firm. "Very glad," he muttered. His eyes were clear and bright as he glanced from David to Pamela and back again. "Family," he decided, aloud. "Eh?" he inquired of Pamela.

She blushed. David was sure she blushed. "No," she said hastily. "Just a guest. For a day or two."

"Ah," he said. Then, "Nice day. Taking the air."

"I hope you're feeling well," Pamela said.

The clear eyes came down to hers. "Better. Thanks," he said.

Pamela moved a little away. David followed. The Archdeacon moved, too, along his own path. Pamela walked fairly decorously until he was out of sight, and then she picked up her ruffled skirts and ran. David lengthened his steps. At the edge of the shrubbery she paused, threw him a laughing glance and began to walk across the lawn. She led him in at a side door and down a wide shadowy hall from whose panels gleamed a hint now and then of burnished copper and faded tapestry.

SHE opened a heavy door after tapping at it and getting no response, and they were inside a square room paneled like the hall, not a large room, but a beautifully proportioned one, with a wide fireplace, deep red leather chairs and a wonderful Chinese rug on the floor. The walls, between the panels, were lined with bookshelves stretching to the ceiling. Pamela shut the door behind them.

"I'm afraid I was thinking of something simple," David told her. "Whitman, you know. *Leaves of Grass.*"

Pamela stared at him. Then she went across to a dusky corner and took down from the shelf a green volume with gold letters across the back. "Here it is," she announced. "Now what?"

"Well, that *is* the question," David

agreed. He took the book. "The note says 'in top leaves of grass.' This is *Leaves of Grass,* but I can't see what 'top' means."

He opened the book and went through it carefully, making sure that it was an ordinary book with ordinary pages. The cover was fastened close and did not seem to have been tampered with. "I don't get it," he decided. "Do you?"

Pamela had been watching him. Now she caught her breath and moved back suddenly into a small alcove beside the fireplace. She brought out a stepladder and set it against the shelves from which she had taken the Whitman. Standing on the top, she put her hand up into the shadow and ran her fingers along the backs of a row of books packed tightly on the topmost shelf. She made a little choking sound and toppled on the ladder.

David reached for her and caught her as she staggered. She was very tiny and very sweet, gathered into his arms so. But he straightened her out and set her down at once. She pushed her hair back with a dusty hand and left a black smudge on her temple. "Got it," she said, and held her treasure out to him. It was a second copy of *Leaves of Grass,* in an old-fashioned brown binding. Its leaves were yellow with age.

"There!" Pamela said with shining eyes. "There's nothing in it now. But isn't that the top? Isn't that what Miss Josie was to put something into?"

"Pardon me," said a languid voice from the doorway. David swung round on his heel. A tall individual lounged in the doorway. He looked past David. "Ah, there you are, Pam," he said. "Been searching for you high and low."

"I didn't hear you open the door," Pamela said crossly.

"Practically noiseless," he admitted. "I'm very good at that sort of thing. It saves a fellow's nerves, you know." His eyes drifted to David, standing with the two books in his hand. David was suddenly conscious of his khaki breeks and leather jacket. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure," Lord Geoffrey muttered.

"No, I don't think you have," Pamela agreed, not too sweetly. "This is Doctor Aylesworth. Doctor Aylesworth, Lord Geoffrey Revel."

Lord Geoffrey put out a languid hand. "Hah d'ye do," he drawled. David took the hand, but before he could speak the other man went on. "Not fond of the breezy poet myself," he said, and glanced at the titles of the books under David's arm.

"He's one of my favorites," David said heartily. "We were just discussing the great debt American literature owes him. Don't you agree, Lord Geoffrey?"

"'Fraid I don't know about American literature," Lord Geoffrey decided. "Well, I'll get along. See you at lunch. What ho," he murmured resignedly, and took himself off. Pamela turned furiously to David.

"There," she said. "You see? Not only are they stuffy and perfectly hopeless, but they clutter up the place until a person can't breathe!" Then she said curiously, "Why did you tell him such a fib? I mean, after all—Lord Geoffrey . . ."

"We had to tell him something," David reminded her. "He asked for it. Didn't he?" He moved across and slid the books back into their places. "Does he always get about so quietly?" he asked.

"If you think he was slipping about and listening," she replied, "I know you're wrong. Because he hasn't brains enough. I mean, he simply *hasn't.*"

DAVID did not argue the point. He stood before the window and gazed out across the green lawn to the other wing. He turned. "Do you suppose I could see that letter from Lady Montana?" he inquired. "Of course, if you mind, or if your mother would mind—"

"I wouldn't mind a bit. As for mother, I don't intend to pay a bit of attention to her. She's like a piece of iron over this whole thing. I've tried and tried to talk to her about it, but she won't be talked to. There isn't anyone else, either, except Doctor Mayhew, and now he . . .

"But I can't get the letter," she said

hastily, "no matter how much I'd like to show it to you. Because it's gone. It's quite gone, and mother doesn't know. I searched her desk for it twice this morning, and it's gone. She is the tidiest person in the world, and never mislays a thing, so somebody else has taken that letter from her desk. I would give anything to know who took it and where it is. That's part of the big mystery, isn't it?"

"Sure you didn't just overlook it?" David inquired. "It's fairly easy to miss a paper."

"I'm positive," Pamela said. "But I'll go and look again. You stay here. If mother's in her sitting room, I can see her from the hall, and I'll come right back." She went out into the hall.

David remained at the window, his eyes fixed on that other wing. It was the rear wing, the one that contained Doctor Mayhew's laboratory, and for some moments David had been wondering just what else it housed. He watched it carefully while Pamela was away.

She was not gone long. When she came in again her face was pale. She shut the door and came over beside him.

"It was there," she said. "It was exactly where it ought to be. But it wasn't there this morning. I counted Lady Montana's letters this morning. I always count everything. I can't help it. Flowers, and leaves on a bough and strawberries in a basket. I counted these letters, and there were twenty-two. Now there are twenty-three, with this. So I'm sure. And there wasn't one in this morning's mail, to make it come out, because I saw mother's letters this morning." She spread the letter before him on the window sill.

"My dear Eleanor," the words leaped at David in bold sprawling letters. But before he went on he touched Pamela's hand lightly.

"Look up at that window," he said in a low tone. "The one just this side of Doctor Mayhew's laboratory. Tell me whose room it is. The room with the white curtains tied back."

"That's the hospital," she said promptly, "where the sick man is." Then she caught her breath, and watched him. Inside the room a man was walking ceaselessly up and down, up and down, so that only occasionally could they catch the gleam of a hand and the dusky movements of garments back and forth. The blind was half drawn; from no other point than this could anyone have caught that movement.

"Could it be Doctor Mayhew?"

"He's on the front veranda. I just saw him. No," she said evenly, "that's the man who's supposed to be so desperately ill," and put a hand out to clutch his sleeve. "I'm absolutely scared to death," she said. "And I am sorry about Danvers. And I can't help worrying about Doctor Mayhew. But isn't it marvelous?"

"Perfectly marvelous," David agreed steadily, and turned with her to read the letter.

VII

The same;
11.30 A. M.

My dear Eleanor:

I hope you will have a pleasant and uneventful summer at Lost House this year and that you will find your guests to be congenial. You do indeed run a great risk of getting people whom you do not yourself like in the least, no matter how popular they may be with your friends, who recommend them. I do earnestly hope that all of your guests this summer, even after the most careful consideration on your part, will prove to be such people as you would have chosen yourself.

You would be greatly surprised if you knew how much interest has been shown here in Lost House and in you. Since my return last autumn I have been completely besieged with questions and inquiries regarding you and the policies of Lost House, from what might seem to be the most unlikely quarters. Gerald, for instance, who is always so completely submerged in his work, has shown great interest. I was so surprised to discover that a number of people know exactly what guests you have had for years back, and that their intense interest does not stop at guests but covers yourself as well.

Eleanor, I wish you would promise me something! I worry about you a very great deal, particularly of late, and I should like very much to be able to keep you from unpleasantness and perhaps real difficulty. I am handicapped at the moment but I will do what I can—possibly more than I ought to do under the circumstances. But you must promise me that you will not take into Lost House any stranger this summer. This is dreadfully important. Please take me seriously. If you will take no one who does not come to you with written references from some responsible friend, then I shall not he so troubled about you.

Although I ask this promise from you I do not wish you to write it to me. Please do not mention this letter in any way when you write, or allude to it at all. Perhaps I should not like to be reminded of my nervous fears for you. I shall be here in England all summer. Circumstances will not allow of my leaving England even for a day. So write to me as often as you can and tell me about your guests and activities at Lost House in your usual open manner.

Again, my dear, I beg of you to be very careful whom you take into your isolated home. I can not possibly tell you how important I know this to be.

Affectionately,

Louise Montana

THERE's one thing you still don't know about it," Pamela said, as they came to the end of the letter. "It was posted in Paris. And you see that Lady Montana says that she can't leave England even for a day. So she must have enclosed the letter in an envelope to someone else in Paris. You can see she wasn't supposed to write to mother at all!" She looked up anxiously into his face. "What do you think of it?" she inquired.

"You haven't by any chance got the crown jewels of Czecho-Bungaria stowed away in a jade casket under the hearthstones, have you?"

"We might have," Pamela replied, the little three-cornered dimple flashing out beside her mouth.

"How about the Eye of the Indian Idol and the Bones of the Murdered High Priest of the Temple? Maybe McQuittie's got 'em buried under his rock garden."

"Pourquoi would have dug them up long ago," Pamela objected. "Pourquoi is—" But whatever she was about to remark about Pourquoi was lost. The library door opened again, and Pamela turned sharply. A girl stood in the doorway, a hopeless sort of girl with fair hair that longed to be stringy, and a muddled smile. "Oh," she said, "I'm sorry. I just came in to get a book."

"It's quite all right," Pamela said kindly. "Do come in, Sylvia. And let me present Doctor Aylesworth. Miss Mainwaring," she murmured to David.

Sylvia flushed a dull burnt pink and muttered something under her breath. "I don't really need a book," she told them. and backed out. But she bumped into the edge of the open door, flung out a hand to steady herself and knocked a bookend off the small table against the wall. David picked it up and put it back on the table. "No damage done," he announced. But Sylvia was scarlet now, and looked thoroughly miserable. She got herself through the door without a word and pulled it shut. It slammed after her.

"She's really quite nice," Pamela sighed. "But a person has to spend so much time being sorry for her that there isn't much left to like her in."

She put Sylvia away with a wave of her hand. "It seems to me the library is a perfectly hopeless place for any kind of conspirator's business. I mean, supposing Miss Josie had known what that note meant and had come here to leave something in the book; the whole house would have blundered in and caught her before she was half through."

"Oh, it would have been the dead of night," David objected. "But I think we'd be better out of here just now. Even the most nonchalant detectives—and they're the good ones, aren't they?—wouldn't hang about the scenes of their discoveries, particularly when they don't know who the criminal is. Or are. Mind if I keep this letter for a bit?"

Pamela paused with her hand on the door. "Where will you be going when you go?" she asked lightly.

"Oh, over the hills and far away," David replied, just as lightly. He put his hand on the door just below hers. She lifted her eyes to his for a moment and then dropped them.

"Sometime," David went on, "fifty or sixty years from now, when you're the Dowager Countess of Loch Lomond, I'll come over to England and see you. And we'll talk about Lost House, shall we, and the beautiful mystery we solved together in an hour or two on a bright June day when we were young."

The soft red lips were pressed together. She would not look up. David put his hand for a moment over hers, and, when she lifted her eyes, smiled at her cheerfully and opened the door for her to pass through.

THEY walked together into the great front hall of the house. It was carpeted in blue, with white paneled walls and a white domed ceiling. Against the walls hung a veritable gallery of family portraits, with ancestors in ruffs and swords, in stiff white collars and sober brown clothes, in high upstanding wing collars and elaborate stocks, and long tight pantaloons. Pamela did not glance at the portraits as she and David passed by, but he saw them all; and remembered with a twist of his mouth the plush album on his grandmother's center table back in Ontario, the plush album filled with the old tintypes and more modern horrors of which the old lady was so proud.

They emerged into the sunny spaciousness of a wide veranda stretching all across the end of the central wing. It was furnished as an out-of-door living room, with comfortable sofas and deep chairs and convenient tables laden with books and magazines. A good many of the chairs were occupied, and a number of heads turned toward David and Pamela as they hesitated in the doorway. The face to catch David's instant attention was that of Mrs. Leighton, as she stood alone against the railing at the western end of the veranda.

She had apparently turned as they came through the doorway, and had seen them at once. There was in her expression something very like consternation. Quite plainly she was wondering how this chance passer-by, whose very existence she had almost forgotten, could be on such obviously friendly terms with Pamela. Other matters, this morning, had occupied her attention; and here was Pamela neglecting her proper duties to entertain a stranger, a man to whom she had certainly not even been introduced, a person of whom they knew nothing. But Lord Geoffrey was sitting not a yard from the door, facing Pamela and David. He must not guess that Pamela was so indiscriminating. Mrs. Leighton moved forward.

"Ah, there you are," she said brightly. "I hope you have had a pleasant morning, Doctor Aylesworth."

"Thank you," David replied.

She turned. "Lord Geoffrey, I wonder if you have chanced to meet Doctor Aylesworth? His people are old family friends, and he has just dropped in as he happened to be passing through."

"Had the pleasure," Lord Geoffrey told her. He put his hands on the back of the chair as if he needed support.

"Oh?" Mrs. Leighton said, a little startled.

"In the library," Lord Geoffrey explained.

"Oh, I see," Mrs. Leighton murmured. Then, "Pamela, my dear, will you go and amuse Mrs. Clarkson? She is on the terrace." She smiled at Lord Geoffrey. "You will excuse us, won't you?" she begged. "I must have a little chat with Doctor Aylesworth." She moved away across the veranda, and David, perforce, followed. Pamela flung him a momentary glance, and went obediently in the opposite direction.

Mrs. Leighton sat down and indicated the chair beside her. They were well out of earshot of the group of people who

were conversing with animation at the far end, beyond Lord Geoffrey.

"I am sorry that I was a little untruthful just now," she said candidly. "But you understand my position."

"Quite," David assured her gravely.

She lifted her head in a movement exactly like one of Pamela's, and her eyes questioned his gravity. But his expression was perfectly respectful.

"No one must suspect your true reason for coming here," she went on. "I suppose the man *was* Danvers?" she asked. "Jackson hasn't yet returned and Doctor Mayhew hasn't had a chance to tell me."

"Jackson took the body to Dark Forest. Yes, they agreed that the dead man was Danvers."

She sat for a moment, thinking. She sighed. "I suppose Jackson planned to wire the police from Dark Forest?"

"I think he did," David replied. She frowned.

"Well, I hope you will be comfortable," she said at last, but the words were not quite graciously said. She rose. "Perhaps you will be interested in the magazines on the table beside you," she murmured. "If you will excuse me . . ."

David looked at her. "I shall be very comfortable," he said quietly.

She held her head high and went into the house with her shoulders straight, while David sank back into his low chair and began to piece together at last all the bits of the puzzle. There was one piece that Pamela didn't possess, that made all her pieces a great deal more important. Pamela didn't know, as David did, that Danvers had been murdered. Perhaps it was too strong to say that he knew, when he couldn't prove it, not to the satisfaction of the police. But in his own mind he knew.

Danvers had been murdered, and something very queer indeed was going on at Lost House, a something that did not stop at murder. And Pamela lived at Lost House. So a chap might very well swallow his pride and be thick-skinned and stubborn, and refuse to be driven away until he was sure that a competent and intelligent police investigator had come to take his place.

VIII

The same;
1 P. M.

THE silvery notes of a Chinese gong floated through the doorway from the house, and the group of people at the end of the veranda stirred to activity. David glanced at his watch, and it was one o'clock. Before the first of the guests reached the door, Mrs. Leighton came hurrying through it and up to David. "You will have lunch, won't you, Doctor Aylesworth?" she said sweetly. "Do come in with me."

"You are very kind," David assured her, and rose. She glanced at him sharply. This tall, quiet young man disconcerted her. His manner was grave, but his eyes twinkled a little as if he might be thinking all sorts of things there behind them. But, after all, he didn't matter. He was part of an unfortunate accident that would soon be settled and forgotten. So David read her mind.

He followed her into the house. Before they sat down at the table she had murmured a number of introductions as the other guests came up to them, introductions that placed him perfectly as a person of no importance. Lady Revel, tall and imposing, scarcely looked at him.

Mrs. Mainwaring, a blocky woman with a loud masculine voice and draggled tweeds, looked at him very carefully indeed, as if he were a possible purchase, and gave him a sharp walrus smile. David did not quite understand until he saw that Sylvia was in the chair beside his, and noted her utterly miserable and frightened expression. Evidently Sylvia was a problem to her mother, too, as daughters of marriageable age are, either one way or another. David sat down beside Sylvia, smiled at her cheerfully, and turned away until she should regain her lost composure.

He turned away to one of the Lessing-

tons, recognizable not through Mrs. Leighton's indistinguishable introduction, but through Pamela's description. The small white-haired lady smiled up at him with complete friendliness. "Will you be staying long at Lost House?" she inquired.

"I don't think so," David told her. "I'm on a holiday trip through the mountains with a traveling companion named Delilah. She has a wandering spirit and doesn't like staying in one place."

"Traveling companion?" Miss Lessington repeated. Her eyes were wide. Then she smiled again. "You were teasing me," she said reproachfully. "Is Delilah a dog?"

"She's a white pony, and much more company than a dog."

"And why do you call her Delilah?"

David looked down with a twinkle into the sparkling blue eyes. "Because she lures me on," he explained.

Miss Lessington smiled back at him. "I like you," she said contentedly. "You don't talk to me in the least as if I were sixty. You've no idea how boring it is to be sixty. People think they have to discuss nothing more exciting than rheumatism. Jennie doesn't mind at all. She rather likes rheumatism as a topic, but I despise it. I've heard nothing but that sort of thing since I was born. When we were young we were never allowed to discuss anything more exciting than embroidery stitches, and illness—refined illness, of course, such as a sore throat or a neuritis in the shoulder. You know, of course, a delicately nurtured woman was supposed to be interested in nothing on earth save the household arts and the care of the sick."

She leaned forward in her earnestness. "All my life I have longed for excitement," she confided. "And nothing has ever happened to us, not one thing, except that a number of years ago one of our nieces eloped with the chauffeur. *That* didn't happen to us, of course. As a matter of fact it didn't even happen to Veronica. I think if one were truthful that one would have to confess it happened to the chauffeur. Veronica was so masterful."

"You must be Miss Josephine, then," David decided. She looked at him. She was very quick.

"Does it matter?" she asked, and then, "You've been talking to Pamela!"

FOR a moment David did not answer. He raised his eyes and glanced down the table and across at Pamela, sitting demurely at the foot of Doctor Mayhew's left. Lord Geoffrey, on her own left, was speaking to her, but although she appeared to be listening intently her eyes lifted at once at David's glance. She smiled back at him, a faint quick smile.

"You couldn't blame me for talking to Pamela," David said lightly, deliberately misunderstanding.

"Blame you?" Miss Josie repeated. "I wouldn't blame you if you picked her up and carried her away on your Delilah." Her voice was low. "Why don't you do it?" she suggested.

"Well, really," he said weakly, "I mean to say, after all . . ."

"Nonsense," she said briskly. "That's Jennie's word, but it's perfectly correct in this instance. Nonsense. You're a decent and clean and handsome young man, aren't you?"

"Well," David said modestly, "yes. Certainly. I have rather a nice disposition, too. But I'm extremely untidy. I never can find things I've put away. And I do not post letters well. Also I sing discordantly while shaving. So there are drawbacks."

"Now you're quibbling," she said reproachfully. "Don't quibble with me. I'm sixty years old, and I'm just beginning to find out what living is about, and I haven't time to quibble. Here is Pamela, as pretty a girl as there is anywhere, and as sweet. Isn't she?"

"Well," David said, "yes."

"And here are you, tall and manly and nice. *I* like you at once. I trust you. You would make a beautiful couple, you and Pamela. And you're both young and lighthearted yet. I can't see any difficulties."

All round the table was a great hubbub of voices. Mrs. Mainwaring was talking harshly across the table to Mr. Payne. Beside David, Sylvia Mainwaring had turned her back and was deep in some intimate conversation with Mrs. Clarkson, looking small and timid and unhappy in her widow's black.

After Pamela's descriptions these people were not difficult to place. The Archdeacon at the upper end of the table rumbled away to Mrs. Leighton, and directly across from David Miss Jennie Lessington seemed to be listening with intense interest to a long tale of woe from Shane Meredith, the singer. His topic was obvious. His white hand went from time to time to his throat; he thrust out his chest and explained to her in inaudible detail the anatomy of music. "Mi, mi mi mi mi," he whispered once, guarding his precious tones with care. At the lower end of the table Lady Revel ate in magnificent silence, and Doctor Mayhew sat crumbling his bread and watching with a curious intentness the other faces on both sides of the long board.

DAVID turned back to Miss Josie. He smiled at her. "Don't you care anything about psychology?" he asked her.

"Psychology? I don't know anything about it. Not a thing. I suppose you mean to imply that marriage ought to be more carefully considered, since it is a union of two minds. You are suggesting that you might be doing Pamela a great injustice by carrying her off and not considering all her little quirks and foibles and likes and dislikes. Well, I'll tell you one thing that perhaps you don't know, psychology or no psychology."

She hesitated a moment, and her veined and wrinkled little hand rested on the cloth beside her plate. "I'll tell you this: all those little quirks and foibles in a woman mean nothing. Do you understand that? I don't know how to be clear. I mean, she builds up a kind of superficial character out of them, but a man shouldn't pay any attention to them, not when the girl is as young as Pamela is. As she gets older, perhaps her superficial character sets and must be taken into consideration as part of her. But Pamela is as soft and sweet and natural as—as a cloud in the summer sky, and she wants what every girl wants—her knight to come riding and carry her away. She wants him to pay no attention to her resistances and her objections; they are all assumed. They're just lines in her stage part, if you follow me. There."

She looked at Pamela again. There was a sort of wistfulness in her look, as if she were seeing a time forty years ago and remembering not too happy things.

David buttered a piece of bread absently. He raised his eyes and considered Lord Geoffrey, talking lazily to Pamela in an undertone. Lord Geoffrey was limp and he was languid, but no one could have said that he was not handsome in a tall, fair, unobtrusive sort of way. Quite astonishingly handsome, when one really looked at him. And, once or twice through this luncheon, David had found himself wondering if Lord Geoffrey were quite as limp as he appeared. On those occasions David had looked up suddenly to meet his eyes, and, opened, they had been as keen and sharp as any man's.

"I haven't any money," David said at last to Miss Josephine. "I never will have very much."

"Money!" she said scathingly, "do you think that Pamela cares about money?"

There came a sudden lull in the conversation around the table. Everyone, it seemed, became suddenly self-conscious, or ran out of words. In the little pause Doctor Mayhew leaned forward in his chair and spoke up the table at David. His eyes were alight, his thin old face eager.

"Doctor Aylesworth," he said, "I think we should all be extremely interested if you would give us the latest news of this strange disease that seems to be baffling the scientists. We have spoken of it here before now, once or twice, and I have been

asked a number of questions which I cannot answer. I should like to know whether or not the cause has been discovered, or if there has been found any way of treating it."

His quiet voice fell over the assembly like a spell. Everyone turned with one accord to look at David. Mrs. Leighton was a little troubled. Perhaps she did not think disease a happy topic for a carefree luncheon table, but the obvious interest of her guests compelled her own.

"No changes have occurred in the situation, sir, as far as I know," David said courteously.

"What are they doing for it in your hospitals?"

"We haven't had many cases. It seems to be more or less concentrated in the larger cities. All that can be done is to keep the patient quiet until it is discovered what form the attack is to take."

"There's very little of it in England," Mrs. Mainwaring said in a tone of satisfaction. "The United States has far more of it."

"I'm afraid the percentage is rising in England," Doctor Mayhew told her regretfully. He turned back to David. "I suppose you have seen it," he said. "I should like very much to see a case. Very much, indeed."

"Good Heavens!" Mrs. Leighton remonstrated with him. "Not at Lost House. Oh, never!"

"Oh, not at Lost House, Eleanor," he agreed. "Although this would be an excellent place to treat it. And it isn't a germ disease, you know. One doesn't contract it from another. As a matter of fact," he said after a moment's hesitation, "they rather think it is brought on by the use of a drug, do they not?"

"Something of the sort," David admitted. "Although they can't identify the drug, and the patients deny having taken any sort of drug, and there are no needle marks or such evidences that they do take one. And there's considerable mystery as to how and in what form a drug could be so widely used without being known!"

ALMOST curious tension had suddenly been produced around the table. Dr. Mayhew was gazing at David with a strange triumphant expression on his face. Lord Geoffrey had not changed. His pose was listless, his eyes beneath their drooping lashes were apparently not interested.

Sylvia Mainwaring, beside David, was twisting her handkerchief in her lap beneath the edge of the table. Beyond her, Mrs. Clarkson lifted her water goblet slowly and took a sip. The Archdeacon sat staring at David with his mouth open. David could not for the life of him decide who had been affected by this mention of a drug, but someone was, and very powerfully. It was as if a galvanic battery had been suddenly connected in the room and was pouring current through them all.

"Do these people all die?" Mr. Payne asked briskly. His manner was thoroughly professional. As a novelist, human beings were as much his material as they were a physician's.

"It would probably be better if they did," David said calmly. "Those who aren't paralyzed—after the first queer period of hysterical excitement is over—go mad. The mildest case I ever heard of was blind and dumb. One would almost think that it was the amount of drug, if it is a drug, which makes the difference. A great deal paralyzes, a lesser amount affects only parts of the nervous system."

Across the table Shane Meredith was staring at him. He put his hand to his precious throat. "Isn't there any preventative?" he asked in a thin voice.

"There isn't even any cause, yet," David reminded him.

"As I understand it," Doctor Mayhew said, "the first symptoms are a kind of wild and uncontrolled exhilaration. Am I right? Like an alcoholic intoxication, only exaggerated?"

"That seems to be it," David agreed. "Exhilaration is exactly the word."

"Yes," Doctor Mayhew said musingly. He drew a long breath.

"Very interesting," Lady Revel decided firmly. She looked across the room at her son. "Geoffrey, what was the name of the very charming book I read just before I left London? I can't just recall it."

Lord Geoffrey answered. The table fell gradually back into general conversation. The water-ices were served by Jackson, his face as imperturbable as if he had spent the morning doing nothing more disagreeable than polishing the glass dishes to serve them in.

Lunch was at an end. Mrs. Leighton rose, and the guests wandered out again to the veranda, where the tea things were set on a low table in the sunshine. David hoped that he might get a word or two with Pamela, but her mother drew her over beside the tea table and David found himself standing beside Meredith.

"I say," the singer said to him in a low tone, "you're sure a chap can't get this horrible thing through a germ? I mean to say, my throat's been damned bad. You're sure I mightn't have picked up the germ on the train? I haven't been as careful as I should. I didn't dream so much of it was floating around."

"I don't know anything more about it than you've heard me say," David told him coldly. The man was such a fool. Miss Josie looked up from a settee and caught David's eye. He moved across to her. "May I sit here, Miss Josie?"

She looked up at him and gasped. Then she looked at her twin. "We were both looking at you," she said. "How in the world could you tell which was which? Nobody else ever does. Or were you just leaping in the dark?"

"I can do it nine times out of ten," David assured her. "That is, if you don't play any tricks on me."

THEY were both interested. They looked at him with identical expressions. From their faces he could never have told them apart. But he put out his hand and touched the narrow ribbon on Miss Josie's watch, half concealed by her full flowered sleeve. "This," he said.

She followed his glance. "Of course," she said. "We *are* stupid, Jennie. But no one else has noticed, either." She turned to David. "We find it much simpler to dress exactly alike because very few people can seem to remember who is wearing blue and who is wearing gray today. They are always saying, 'now, I was going to be so clever and remember which . . .' and then they muddle around and waste time. So we dress alike, and if they think we're Jennie, we are, and if—oh, well, you know what I mean," she said contentedly, as he laughed.

"As for the wrist-watch strap, mine was exactly like Jennie's, but I broke it on the train, and then I found this bit of blue brocade on the floor of our room—very mysterious, because where did it come from? And I made it into a strap. There was just enough. Then, of course, the mystery was dissolved, and I discovered where it had come from. Mrs. Clarkson has a little flower that she has worn occasionally and it's made of the same material. I always mean to speak to her about it, but I haven't. I suppose she was sewing with it and the maid brought a bit into our room on the broom." Then she stopped suddenly and looked at him. Her eyes were round.

"What is it?"

"Why, I always wondered," she said slowly, "how it was that something happened to me and not to Jennie. Both times to me, I mean. Nobody can ever distinguish between us. But if you can, then of course . . ." she said, and immediately fell into a long silence, thinking.

Lord Geoffrey stood before David with a battered cigarette case. He held it out. David noted the crest in the dull silver as he accepted. "Thanks," he said. "This is the new kind, isn't it? Do you like them?"

"Very much," Lord Geoffrey drawled. "I find them most—exhilarating."

David did not think of the emphasis on that last word until Lord Geoffrey had passed on. Then it caught at him, as he tried to remember where he had heard it before. He had spoken it himself, in

reply to Doctor Mayhew. "A kind of uncontrolled exhilaration," Doctor Mayhew had said, and David had answered, "Exhilaration is exactly the word."

He looked at the cigarette for a long time, seeing the name printed on the paper. VERVE. Had he imagined Lord Geoffrey's emphasis? He became conscious of a gaze, and looked up. Lord Geoffrey was sitting beside Doctor Mayhew, who had just lit one of the cigarettes. He waved it at David.

"Everybody's smoking these, I hear?" he said.

"Yes," David replied slowly. "Everybody's smoking them."

IX

The same;
11.30 P. M.

IT WAS late evening. In his room, David sat in darkness save for the small lamp with its parchment shade on the writing desk against the inner wall. The long French windows opening on the balcony were ajar, and the scent of the roses in the garden below stole in to him through the dusk. His thoughts of murder and plot and evil were interspersed with memories of Pamela's face as she had sat at lunch with her long lashes lying on her cheek; of Pamela's voice; of Pamela's hands. It was all no good, of course, but while he was at Lost House he could scarcely be expected to put her out of his mind.

He was far ahead in the future, a famous physician with a huge practice and plenty of money at last when a tiny sound caught his attention, and he came back to the present. His window was swinging open, and beyond it, on the balcony, he could see dimly someone moving.

He rose noiselessly and stood waiting; fingers appeared around the edge of the window. His heart thudded against his ribs. Then, in a flurry, a small figure stepped over the low sill and inside the window. It was Pamela. She pushed the window shut quickly, and turned to him with merry eyes.

"I'm sorry I couldn't knock," she apologized. "But I knew it was all right because I looked through the window first." She lifted her arched brows. "You don't look exactly glad to see me!"

"I'm still breathless. I thought you were a ghost. Of course I'm glad to see you, but you shouldn't be here, Pamela."

"I don't see why not," she said comfortably, and proceeded to latch the window. She came into the room and curled herself into the small blue armchair across from his. She was dressed in something brown and thin and clinging, net stuff, with soft ruffles at the shoulders. She was charming.

"Mother would die," she went on, once seated. "But she doesn't know. I came along the balcony so she wouldn't see me. I had to talk to you. Why didn't you come down to dinner?"

"Well," David explained, "we tried Jackson's short coat on me, and it was all right as long as no one went round behind and looked at the row of safety pins lapping it over. The trousers were the real difficulty. We planned to make tucks down the sides, but what happened was that Jackson got the sewing machine caught in the leg and couldn't get it out. So there you are."

She regarded him gravely. "I suppose you didn't want to come because mother hurts your feelings when she tries to snub you."

"SHE doesn't hurt my feelings. Matter of fact, I get so puffed over her attitude that it's a wonder I couldn't wear Jackson's clothes quite tuckless."

"Puffed?" Pamela repeated, and thought it over. "You mean—if she—that is, if she thinks that I . . . oh," she finished, and stopped. "Oh," she said again, and dropped the long lashes.

David sat looking at her. After a moment she raised her head. She gave him one quick glance and turned away.

"You—you've been smoking a dreadful lot," she said hastily, her eyes on the big ashtray beside him.

"Yes."

"I like those Verve cigarettes," she decided, glancing at the package beside the tray. "I don't smoke very much, but I like these when I do. They have rather a stimulating effect. Don't you think they do?"

"Yes," David said after a moment, "I think they do."

"You say that very strangely."

"Do I? Perhaps I'm a little lightheaded. I've just sat here and smoked thirty of them in a row, and they *do* seem strangely stimulating. And the whole world is smoking them, Pam. The whole world."

"I think you're frightening me," she said in a low voice. "You sound so queer."

"Sorry. I didn't intend to. I was just thinking what a tremendous lot of money Verve must be making for somebody, whoever invented this particular blend. They've become so popular in such a short time—only a couple of years."

"There's something in them," Pamela said vaguely. "I mean to say, the manufacturers advertise something invigorating, or something. Harmless, but different."

"I know it's different," David agreed. "And I'm convinced that it's harmless. I suppose it does have to pass Pure Food tests, or something of the sort. And I know people who smoke two or three dozen of these things a day. So . . ."

"You sound all upset," Pamela commented. "Why are you troubled about these cigarettes?"

"Let's not bother about them," David suggested. Then, "I suppose you feel that you can trust all your servants here implicitly?"

"Trust the servants?" Pamela repeated.

"Well," David said, "somebody sent Miss Josie that note, Pam. Somebody dropped the blue ribbon on her rug. If one of the guests had been haunting her rooms, it would have been rather noticeable. But a servant—one of the maids, the housekeeper, even Jackson himself—don't you see?"

"No," Pamela said, frowning, "I don't. I don't see anything."

"Don't be cross. You don't like to have me question the integrity of Lost House." He hesitated. "I'm afraid it has already been questioned, Pam, and in high places. Don't you see? That's what Lady Montana's letter means."

"Go on," Pamela said after a moment. "I was just being feminine. Sorry. Tell me what Lady Montana's letter means."

"WELL, to boil it down, it means that through her husband she has discovered that Scotland Yard is much concerned over something decidedly criminal in import which is going on at Lost House and has been going on for years. *She* knows your mother is innocent, but the Yard doesn't, and her own husband won't believe her.

"Lady Montana is of the opinion that this business—oh, don't ask me what it is, I can't answer that—is carried out somehow through the guests who come here. She isn't particularly concerned about the affair for its own sake, but she is desperately afraid that your mother is not going to be able to clear herself. So she warns her a dozen times in that letter not to be intimate with her guests and not to accept anyone as a guest on her own responsibility. If some other responsible person vouches for a guest, you see, and that guest is later implicated in this business, whatever it is, then your mother is exonerated."

"Scotland Yard?" Pamela said, and then, *"Mother?"*

"As I see it," David went on, "there's some kind of an organization already in Lost House. Each year one of the guests, more than one, probably, comes as a messenger, but he is unknown to the organization here. The Lost House chap drops some useless article in each incoming guest's room. If the guest makes ostentatious use of it, he identifies himself.

"Quite by accident, Miss Josie made

a watch strap of a bit of blue brocade she found on her floor. She and her sister had probably already caught the eye of the chap here, because, being identical twins, they would make such excellent messengers. They'd be so difficult to trace and identify, if they really wanted to get down to business. Well, the brocade is dropped and Miss Josie promptly makes use of it, through a series of coincidences —the breaking of her own strap, the smallness of her own wrist, the fact that blue is a color she particularly likes.

"I do not forget that another of your guests, Mrs. Clarkson, also appeared with a flower made of a scrap of the blue brocade. So Miss Josie says. Well, Miss Josie is accepted as an accredited agent. She gets a note, telling her to leave something —which she is supposed to have with her —in a definite place. This something might be money, but I'm more tempted to believe that it is a card or some small and finally identifying article. The proper messenger knows beforehand that a book in the library, to be named when he or she has made the first response correctly, will be named as the receptacle for it.

"Well, it all goes wrong. The book is named to Miss Josie, but she doesn't do what she should do about it. The chap who sent the note gets panicky and begins to wonder if he's stepped off on the wrong foot. To make sure, her room is searched from top to bottom while she is out."

Pamela sat with her luminous eyes on his face. There was a long silence.

Then "Go on," she said. "You've explained Lady Montana's letter. And Miss Josie's note, and the searching of her belongings. Can you explain the Archdeacon? Maybe he did follow them. She's been right all the other times."

"Well, of course, there's Scotland Yard," David said. "They'll have a man here. Won't they?"

Pamela gasped. "Yes. Of course. Of course they'll have a man here."

"Who sent the Archdeacon? Who vouched for him?"

"Lady Montana. But she sent a lot of other people. It was almost as if she were trying to fill Lost House with her own friends. She sent the Revels, and the Mainwarings, and Mr. Meredith."

"It's rather a bad muddle," David said at last.

"I think it's horrible. I wish I'd never heard of it. I wish I'd never said anything about Lost House being stuffy. Because I wouldn't mind any of it if it weren't for Doctor Mayhew. But if he's in it, it can't be bad, David. It can't be wicked. Not if he's in it."

"Scotland Yard doesn't go about scotching uplift movements," David said dryly. "But don't worry about Doctor Mayhew, Pam. I mean to say, I'll tell you about him in the morning. I had a note from him on my dinner tray. He wants me to come up to the laboratory at midnight. He says he has something of great importance to discuss with me."

X

The same;
Midnight.

DAVID helped Pamela out of his window to the narrow balcony that ran along the side of the wing. They walked along it quietly, waking no echoes. Pamela clutched at David's sleeve as they walked. "Have you got any sisters?" she asked in a whisper.

"Two. One of 'em's married. I've even got a niece. Quite a family man."

"Have you got a brother?"

"I certainly have," David said with a grin. "He's a young devil, too. Full of beans. His hair is ten shades redder than McQuittie's, and his face is one large freckle. He's fifteen. He's going to join me up at Windermere next week. He's a great kid. Boy Scout, with a large admixture of Pirate of the Spanish Main and Bronco Buster."

"He sounds like my favorite kind of boy," Pamela said wistfully.

They went down the steps and across the lawn, with Pamela still clutching

David's sleeve. Approaching the area doorway, through which she was supposed to go into the house, she said, "Are you sure you don't mind going up there alone?"

"Mind?"

"Well, I mean I keep feeling eyes over my shoulder, you know. And what I've been terrified about all along, down underneath, is that Doctor Mayhew himself . . . you know, shut away here year after year, and much too clever to have nothing to do . . ."

"That's probably what he fitted up the laboratory for, Pam. To give himself something to do."

"I know. Of course he wasn't sitting idle, not for a minute, or brooding. But he has one idea that he's terribly set on, you know, and it got him into trouble in England. What he keeps thinking about is how to kill every kind of disease there is and make the world all clean and new. He talks about it all winter long, when we're alone, and I think he's marvelous and darling, of course, but he does have queer ideas in a way. He doesn't care much about the individual at all. He would be perfectly willing to snuff out whole countries of people to kill a disease, without thinking about the people at all.

"I've heard him talk about India, for instance, and how he'd like to be God, and go over India with an omnipotent hand and sweep out of existence all the millions and millions and millions of the physically and mentally and morally sick people and give the others a chance to live. I'm not sure that his ideas like this aren't what brought on his breakdown in England. He insisted on writing articles about his beliefs and plans for cleaning up the world, and they weren't popular. He got a dreadful lot of criticism from people who didn't understand that he was the kindest and sweetest person in the world, and the most anxious to help them. I've been remembering all these things lately, and wondering. I can't help wondering." She looked at him. "So I'm not so sure about having you go up there alone at midnight," she finished. "After all, maybe he has something new. I mean, if he isn't quite—quite sane, on this one idea . . . and it does seem a very queer time to ask you to come. Doesn't it?"

"He wants to make sure of an uninterrupted chat, I imagine."

"I suppose I shouldn't let my imagination run away with me. But I dragged you into this, and I don't want anything to happen to you," she finished, almost inaudibly.

DAVID put a hand up and touched a strand of hair at her temples. "You're a sweet little kid, Pam," he said gently, and dropped his hand.

"Come on, you've got to go in," he told her briskly. "It's almost midnight. As for your worries, you go to sleep and forget them. Nobody can hypnotize me, you know, and I'm six feet tall and weigh a hundred seventy-five in my stocking feet and I'm a darn good rugby player if you don't ask the coach. As for your other ideas, I think you're a bit off, if you don't mind my saying so. That's what imagination does to a girl. My impression of the old chap is that he knows exactly what he's doing every second."

"Maybe he does," Pamela said forlornly, and put her hand on the knob of the door. "So you won't let me come, then," she said crossly.

David laughed out. "I believe you were putting on that show to make me shiver in my shoes and take you along for protection. Oh, Pam, you are a crazy little idiot!"

"Oh, well," she said disgustedly, and went into the house.

David swung off through the darkness toward the end of the house. Far up in the sky only the smallest stars were out tonight. The big house was silent and dark. He ran up the steps of Doctor Mayhew's balcony, and wondered at the darkness within the room. There was no light in the bedroom next the laboratory, either. Queer. He hadn't been mistaken. The note said "midnight" and the old man certainly didn't show any signs of losing his

memory. David stopped at the top of the steps and considered.

Danvers had been murdered. Why? Because he was where he had no business to be? Because he was curious? How did he, David, know that the note came from Doctor Mayhew after all? Why shouldn't the man who had murdered Danvers, whoever he might be, think that David was too inquisitive, as well?

One man had blundered on Pamela and David in the garden. Two people had seen them in the library. This was a big thing, if it was what he suspected it might be. There had already been a blunder or two, but they still would be passed over smoothly if nothing were said to the police.

He stood for a long time on the stairs, making no sound, listening intently. A yard away and to his right was the long French door leading into the laboratory. He moved across to it silently and stood against the closed half, his senses alert, waiting, listening. The open door . . . the darkness . . . then, at last, he became conscious of a sound within the room. A strange sound, and for a long time he could not make out what it was. It was a little like the sound made by a bottle boiling furiously with the lid on too tight. No, no. Then out of his memory came a picture of himself as an interne, listening anxiously at the door of a patient who was very ill, and he knew what the sound was, now. He was sure.

HE HAD no torch, and Heaven only knew where the switch was. But he was sure of that sound, and although there might be something else in the room before him, something sinister, he had to go in, of course. Surely the switch would be beside the door.

He stooped, lifted noiselessly the bolt that held his half the door shut, flung it open suddenly and stepped into the room. Then he put his hand out and groped against the wall, and the switch was there. He snapped it sharply. It made a noise in the room like a pistol shot. No one stood near him. No one had been waiting in the darkness.

But over at the long desk against the inner wall, Doctor Mayhew sat stiff and straight in his chair, looking at the wall before him, and his breathing made a ghastly boiling choking sound. David went to him swiftly and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Doctor Mayhew!" he said sharply.

No answer. The muscles beneath his hands were rigid. He bent and looked into the eyes, and the lids did not flicker. That the eyes saw him he could not be sure. But the awful breathing went on and on, harsh breathing, drawing air into lungs that seemed stiffened and useless. The pulse was wild, erratic.

David strode through the door into Doctor Mayhew's bedroom and turned on the light. There was a bell beside it. He pressed the bell and held it imperatively. Then he flung back the covers of the bed and went again to the laboratory. He slid his arms beneath the old doctor's light body and carried it to the bed. The limbs retained their bent position. Very gently, watching the staring eyes every second, David straightened them. No sign of feeling or knowledge came into the eyes. Whether the brain was asleep with the body, David could not possibly tell.

A knock came at the door. "Come in," David called, and lowered his voice as he remembered the sick man in the next room.

Jackson entered, his hair not quite smooth, the buttons of his vest undone. He had eyes for nothing but the still figure on the bed.

"What's happened?" he asked David in a terrible voice, a voice that sounded as if he, too, had been walking in fear that was being realized now.

"It looks like a paralytic stroke," David said steadily. "I'll have to have help. Where does he keep his medicines and supplies?"

Jackson stared at him. He ran a hand over his hair. His eyes were wild, distracted. "Long cupboard," he muttered.

"Against the outside wall. What happened?"

"I don't know. I came up to talk to him and found him in the laboratory like this. Undress him, will you, and get him under the blankets. Is the cupboard locked?"

Jackson bent forward and searched through Doctor Mayhew's pockets. He drew out a leather key-case and handed it to David.

"My God," he said to himself, over and over, but David was gone.

There ensued a space of time during which David lost all awareness of his surroundings save as they concerned his patient's necessities. He gave orders to Jackson in a low voice, and Jackson, once past his first shock, obeyed them with speed and despatch.

It was all so desperately unreal. His every thought and feeling seemed to be encased in heavy felt.

He waited anxiously.

Sometimes during that first hour or two Mrs. Leighton came into the room. But David was scarcely conscious of her presence. Once the infirmary door opened and a tall gaunt man in a dressing-gown stood on the threshold. David moved across to him.

"I should be glad if you would go back to bed," he said.

"What's happened?" the tall man said weakly. His eyes rested on the still figure on the bed in something like consternation. "Doctor Mayhew?"

"He has had some kind of paralytic attack," David explained. "We are doing what we can. I am a doctor. If you will go back to bed I will come in and see you later."

The man looked at him levelly for a moment and turned.

PAMELA came in, wrapped in something white and loose. Her lips made words, but no sound came. "Will he die?" she asked.

"I don't know," David told her gently. "You go to bed, too, Pamela. I've an idea that there's something I shall want you for in the morning."

Without a word she turned and went out of the room, a small and beautifully valiant figure.

David watched after her, a moment.

"You may as well go, Jackson," David said finally, with a sigh. "There's nothing more we can do. It isn't for lack of medicines. He's got everything on earth in that cupboard. I'll take care of him now. After all, tomorrow's as heavy a day for you as all the others."

Jackson spoke his first word. "What brought it on?" he asked, his voice hoarse with fatigue.

David shook his head. "He's an old man," he replied.

"Have you seen cases like this before?"

"Several times."

David's voice, his brief gesture were mathematically noncommittal. But his eyes let show just a little of his anxiety.

"Do they get better?"

"Usually not."

Jackson thought it over, his heavy face lined and troubled. He began to speak again, and stopped. Then he said, "Will he—go out—like this?"

"Probably," David said evenly.

Jackson went away and David was left alone in the quiet room. Dawn was beginning to break beyond the hills to the east. A rim of paleness spread above their summits, making them stand out black and stark against it. The lake water caught a faint light, and the white mist began to curl up from the darkness. Below, under the window, a sleepy bird stirred and cheeped once, drowsily, then drifted off again. The light spread. Beyond the northernmost hill a sudden beam disclosed a sharp spire against the massed clouds, a spire bathed in a momentary rosy glow.

The night had passed and a new day mistily stirred.

The hospital door opened again, cautiously. The sick man looked out. "How is he?" he inquired.

"Very ill." David went across to the man and took his arm. He led him firmly back into his own room and to his bed. The man dropped down on it and put his head into his hands.

"I suppose it's the end for him?" he asked, in such bitterness that David was startled.

"I hope not. He was a friend of yours?"

"He has been, since I came here. He's a prince."

"I've heard about you, of course," David said. "I understand that you are a stranger to Mrs. Leighton and that you came off the train. Since your only contacts here have been with Doctor Mayhew, I'm afraid no one else knows just what is your trouble. I understand that you have been very ill. Will you tell me what your trouble is?"

"Gastric ulcer," the other man said at once. "Doctor Mayhew mixed me up some stuff that helps. I can't move about much. If I keep still and live on milk, I'm all right. I—the train was too much for me. I had to get off at once or I should have died."

His manner was frank and open. And he looked ill enough.

"I see," David replied. "I'm afraid we shall be moving about considerably out here. Perhaps you will find it most disturbing. I think it would be better to ask Mrs. Leighton to give you another room."

"No, don't do that," he protested quickly. "I don't mind the disturbance. No, I don't wish to be moved."

"Can you tell me Doctor Mayhew's movements last night?" David inquired after a moment. "When did you last see him?"

"About half past eleven," the man answered at once. "He came in here for a chat and then he said he had an engagement."

PAMELA came in again with the first real sunlight. "I couldn't wait any longer," she said. "What is there for me to do, David?"

"Perhaps I could have told you last night. But I wasn't sure then. I think I'm sure now."

"Tell me."

"I want you to send a telegram. To my father. Here—I've written it out, but it's pretty scrawly. I'll read it to you so you'll be sure and get it straight. His name is David Aylesworth, too. I mean, mine is the 'too.' Send it in care of the University Hospital, Edmonton. They can track him down quicker than anyone else. Here's the wire:

HAVE PATIENT HERE WITH PARALYSIS LIKE CASE IN 219 IN APRIL. IF THERE IS ANY NEW TREATMENT PLEASE SEND ME AT DARK FOREST CARE MISS PAMELA LEIGHTON.

DAVID

Pamela listened. She lifted dark frightened eyes to him. "I'm afraid I begin to understand," she said slowly. "The thing you were talking about at lunch. Is that what you think this is?"

"It looks very much like it. I'm sorry I have to worry you with it, Pam, but I can't leave him to send the wire myself, and it's got to be somebody I can trust who will send it and give me the answer word-perfect. If there *is* anything for Dad to answer," David said.

"Can't—can't you cure him, David?

Her hand clung to his arm.

"It depends on that wire."

She started for the door, and then came back quickly. "Someone you can trust!" she repeated in a strange voice, as if the words had just reached her. She looked at the quiet figure on the bed who was seeing nothing, presumably hearing nothing, *being* nothing.

"Does that mean you think, David, that whoever is the person in Lost House who was—who is—oh, surely this can't have anything to do with all the impossible things we talked about yesterday!"

"I don't know," David said steadily. "But we can't take any chances. Don't let it get you, Pam. I can't have you cracking up now."

"I won't crack up," she said with decision. "You needn't worry. I won't. If this is true I need my wits, if I've got any. I'll be all right. But what about you?"

"There isn't anything about me," David told her with a smile. But the flesh at the corners of his eyes, when he smiled, was stiff, and hard to move.

"Oh, yes, there is," Pamela protested. "You look perfectly ghastly right this minute. There are circles under your eyes and you didn't get a wink of sleep. I know you didn't. What are we going to do? If there's nobody in Lost House you can trust, nobody you can leave him with, what are you going to do, David? I will come and stay with him, of course, no matter what mother says. Will that be enough?"

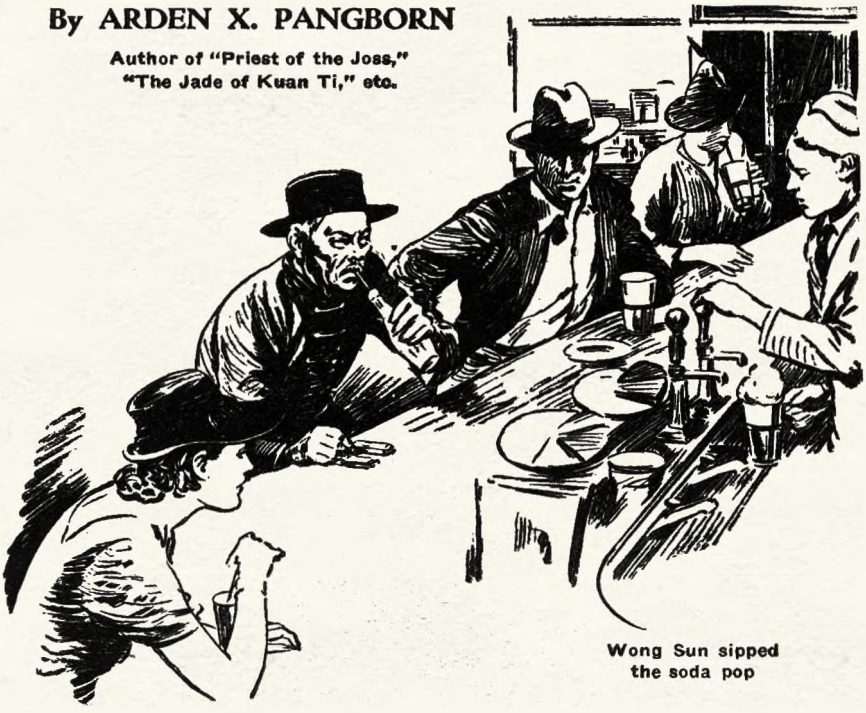
"It will be a lot easier after the noon train comes in," David reminded her, and dropped his voice, remembering the man on the other side of the hospital door.

"Oh!" Pamela replied. "Yes!" she said, and the color flooded back into her white face. "We'll have the police, won't we?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

By ARDEN X. PANGBORN

Author of "Priest of the Joss," "The Jade of Kuan Ti," etc.



Wong Sun sipped the soda pop

A Cell for Wong Soo

The followers of Confucius will believe that Wong Sun enjoyed success because he burned nine candles before Kuan Yin; but one hundred percent Americans will say chewing gum was the answer

"*Ai YA!*" exclaimed Wong Sun, the old jeweler, as he scanned the saffron faces about the table in the square room above the Glittering Happiness Hall of Chance. "*Ai ya!* It is an evil omen. Let us delay for a day the transportation of the money. Remember, it is said only a fool refuses to carry an umbrella when it rains. Let us not refuse to carry the umbrella of caution against the rain of threatened misfortune."

About the table, the seven Chinese stirred. Their eyes, like seven pairs of black opals, swung to the frowning wooden image of the God of War on a makeshift altar draped with scrolls and banners at the end of the room. Before this fearsome presence, three bowls of incense sent weak spirals of bluish smoke into the acrid haze that hovered in the still air. Three white candles stood with blackened wicks beside the incense bowls.

"For the third time the candles have gone out," old Wong went on. "And there is no draft. It is an evil omen."

"Perhaps," protested Wah Bo, the merchant, "the candles are of poor quality. Let us remember, there is great need in the Middle Kingdom. Let us remember, time is of value. If the foreign invaders are to be driven out . . ."

"Wah Bo is right," put in Chu Sun, the dealer in books. "The messengers are here. Let us adhere to our original plan

and transport the money tonight. Tomorrow, when the Chinese-American bank opens its doors in Newark, a draft can be drawn—"

"Better the draft be drawn a day late," objected a voice from across the table, "than not at all. Only a fool ignores the warning of the gods. I, for one, would heed the words of Wong Sun."

"And I," echoed another.

Old Wong's slender shoulders rose in a shrug beneath the blue cotton of his jacket. "A small man may make large errors," he admitted. "Only a fool refuses to admit the possibility of mistake. Since there is lack of agreement, let us listen to the words of Sing Fo, under whose guidance the money has been collected."

"Hiee," chorused the men. "Let us hear from Sing Fo."

Sing Fo, the fish peddler, rose from his heavy blackwood chair, his thin face serious. For several seconds, he stood without speaking, so that the only sounds in the room were the scuffle of slippered feet, the breathing of men, the muffled rumble of distant traffic.

"The ears of the deaf are not offended by bad music," Sing Fo said at last, speaking slowly, his dark eyes bright in the yellowish light from a lamp upon the table, "nor the eyes of the blind by bad painting. Let our ears be deaf to the music of delay and our eyes blind to the painting of fear."

There was a babble of excited voices, then silence again as Sing Fo held up a saffron hand.

"Tonight we have collected six thousand dollars to help drive the Japanese from the Middle Kingdom. In the outer room, awaiting instructions, are the messengers. There is Wong Soo, the eldest son of our honorable friend, Wong Sun, who will represent the interests of the bank; and there is Jimmy Lee, of the honorable family of Lee Yet, whose courage and discretion are of wide repute. Certainly we can trust these messengers to carry this package safely across the ferry to Newark tonight."

"Hiee!" chorused the men about the table.

Old Wong shook his head sadly, but Sing Fo reached for the package at his elbow. It was a square package, wrapped in white rice paper, with two great red seals of wax. "Let us admit the messengers," he said.

When the messengers were gone and the others milled about the room, seeking their hats and talking of the war, of the mounting price of dried shrimp, and of the night draw of the Ten Associations' lottery, old Wong continued to sit at the table, his scrawny arms folded in the floppy sleeves of his jacket. "It is an evil omen," he murmured again, more to himself now than to the others about him. *"Ai ya!* We shall regret this night before the change of the moon."

THE light hum of a whirling lathe filled the dim interior of the Happy Dragon jewelry shop on Mott Street the following morning when the brass bell above the door set up a sudden excited jangling. Old Wong laid aside the bit of Cantonese jade upon which he had been working, and the tuneless strains of the "Song of the Weeping Cherry" died on his lips.

He padded behind the counter, clasping his hands before him as he bowed in welcome.

"The presence of the white detective honors the humble shop of this insignificant person," he said, observing the formalities with a smile that touched only his lips.

Sergeant Mitchell, head of the Chinatown squad, stood in the center of the shop, his feet spread apart and his red face glowering beneath the brim of his sloppy felt hat.

"Can the chatter, Wong Sun," he snapped, his sharp eyes fixing the old jeweler with a saber-like glance. "I ain't here on a social call, and I don't want any of your stalling this time, either. Where is he?"

A mask settled over the old jeweler's face. "A thousand and ten thousand par-

dons, but the miserable intellect of this unworthy person fails to understand. . . ."

"So!" the sergeant shoved his hat back on his egg-shaped skull. His bushy brown eyebrows worked furiously. "So! The same old gag. Now, listen, Wong Sun, I gave you plenty of chance to slip me a little info now and then, and you wouldn't do it. Now it's too late. Where's that son of yours—Wong Soo?"

Fear flickered in Wong's bright eyes, but for only an instant. When he spoke again, his eyes were as inscrutable as those of his fat cat, Ling, who considered the scene from the end of the counter with an air of detachment. "Still I do not understand. Wong Soo is on duty at the bank."

"He's not at the bank and you know he's not at the bank. You're not fooling me any, Wong Sun. A bunch of you Chinks collected six thousand bucks last night and gave it to Wong Soo and Jimmy Lee to take to Newark all done up in a fancy rice paper package with red seals. Before they went a block, Wong Soo hit Jimmy Lee over the head and escaped with the dough. Now what I want to know is where is he?"

Old Wong gave no sign of the emotion that surged through his withered body. "Jimmy Lee has told you this?" he asked.

"Jimmy Lee couldn't tell us anything. Wong Soo hit him so hard his skull looks like a strawberry box somebody stepped on. We dug him out of the basement entrance to that vacant barber shop on Pell Street half an hour ago. All I want to tell you, Wong Sun, is that you better produce that son of yours and produce him pretty fast, or it'll go hard with you as well as with him."

The sergeant wheeled and stalked out, sending the brass bell into another hysterical jangle. When his fat shoulders and bull-like neck vanished from view beyond the dusty windows of the shop, Ling, the fat cat, hopped from the counter to the floor and, stretching himself, opened his mouth in a large yawn.

The hint of a smile touched Old Wong's lips, in spite of his worry. He tossed Ling two dried shrimp from a cigar box beneath the counter and padded to his tiny living quarters behind the partition in the rear, where he kept his black skull cap on a peg above the coffin his four sons had given him on his sixty-eighth birthday.

"It is a wise man who knows he has only ten fingers," he murmured to himself as he locked his door and shuffled into Mott Street, turning toward the fish market of Sing Fo.

HALF a block away he pulled up sharp, faced by three determined figures. There was the fat, dumpy figure of Wah Bo, the merchant; the lean, stooped figure of Chu Sun, the dealer in books; the tall, wiry figure of Sing Fo, the fish peddler.

It was Sing Fo who spoke. "*Mei yu kuei chu.* There is no circle of right conduct, nor square of right action. We were on our way to see you, Wong Sun."

"I have just heard. The white detective has only this minute departed from my shop."

Sing Fo hesitated, a little ill at ease. "In the Central Glory, the transgressions of the family are the responsibility of the father. We have called a meeting for tonight in the room above the Glittering Happiness Hall of Chance."

Old Wong spoke softly. "Yes . . ."

"It would be well," said Sing Fo, the warning in his voice but thinly disguised by the gentleness of his tone, "it would be well for you to produce the money or Wong Soo by the hour of eight."

"The head of a calf sits poorly upon the shoulders of a man," exclaimed Wong Sun with sudden fire. "Certainly you cannot have been taken in by the words of the white detective. Wong Soo has held a position of trust in the Chinese-American bank for many months; at the tips of his fingers has been many times the sum of six thousand dollars." He halted abruptly, realizing from the stony faces of the three men that his words were wasted. He lifted his thin shoulders in a shrug of resignation,

the movement rustling the blue cotton folds of his jacket. "At eight o'clock?" he asked.

"At eight o'clock," repeated Wah Bo, the fat merchant. "And the penalty for failure . . ." He smiled, but there was no humor in the smile.

Old Wong turned on his heel and shuffled back toward the shop. New creases wrinkled the crumpled parchment of his cheeks and a far-away look dimmed the brightness of his eyes.

"Mei yu kuei chu," he repeated to himself. "There is no circle of right conduct, nor square of right action."

As he re-entered his modest establishment, the faint odor of newly burned tobacco struck his nostrils. He wrinkled his nose and padded hurriedly across the oiled floor toward his living quarters, the brightness returning to his eyes. Only one person besides himself possessed a key to the shop. That person was Wong Soo.

The younger Wong sat on the edge of the ancient cot upon which his father had rested his creaking bones during the nights of twenty-odd years. The fingers that held the cigarette trembled a little as he looked up to face the old jeweler.

"Ai ya! Grief has fallen upon us, honorable father. I escaped as soon as I could. Look." He held up his hands, so that the cuffs of his coat slipped back to display wrists swollen and chafed. "They tied me with ropes in a basement room in Bayard Street, and through the door I could hear them talking about how they would dispose of my body after they murdered me. All night I worked at my bonds, but only minutes ago, when they went out in search of a trunk, could I get away."

Old Wong stood perfectly still. "Waste no words, younger one. Time wears wings. Who were these men?"

"I recognized only one. It was Chin Pei-chi, who is a dealer in the blackjack game at the Glittering Happiness Hall of Chance. The other one I did not know."

"Chin Pei-chi! Are you sure, younger one?"

"I saw his face, and there is no mistaking the marks of small-pox upon it, nor the scar across his right eyebrow. We had gone but a block from the meeting room when they stepped from a darkened doorway with guns in their hands. Jimmy Lee tried to resist and Chin Pei-chi struck him over the head and kicked him down the steps of the vacant barber shop in Pell Street. There were people within sight, but no one seemed to notice."

He took a quick, nervous drag at his cigarette. "I was to disappear, so that the police would blame me for the murder and the theft of the money. That was their plan. There was a third man, who came to the room in Bayard Street today. I could hear his voice, and it sounded familiar, but I could not place it."

"Chin Pei-chi," repeated old Wong softly. "I shall pay Chin a visit. Remain here, younger one."

BUT Wong Soo was not destined to remain in the shop, for at that moment there was a clatter of heavy feet on the other side of the partition, and Sergeant Mitchell, puffing a little from unaccustomed haste, barged into the tiny room with two plainclothesmen at his heels.

"There he is," the sergeant exclaimed, jabbing a stubby forefinger in the younger Wong's direction. "I knew we'd find him if you watched this place long enough. Come along, you. We've got a nice cell all fixed up for you at headquarters. You're wanted for murder."

Old Wong shrugged. "Remember, younger one, it is said the poor man is not afraid of the thief, nor the innocent man of the law."

The sergeant wheeled on him. "One peep out of you and I'll take you in for being an accessory after the fact. I ought to run you in, anyway, on general principles."

Wong Sun, recalling a recent overnight sojourn as a guest of the city, shuddered a little. His bones still ached from that night. "Without proof," he told his son, "his suspicions are as empty as a pauper's pocket. It is best you accompany him. I shall see Harry Lee, the lawyer."

"You'll need more than a lawyer to square this beef," snorted the sergeant, and turned to stamp out with his two cohorts bringing up the rear, Wong Soo between them.

It was nearly forty minutes later and old Wong had made the necessary financial arrangements with Harry Lee, the lawyer, when he entered a dilapidated old rooming house on Bayard Street. Following the directions given him by his son, he padded down the long bare hallway and descended a flight of steps to the basement. Before a thin wooden door marked with a rusty metal letter B, he halted. He rapped twice and, when there was no answer, he took a ring of keys from beneath his sash and tried them in turn until he discovered one that would fit the lock.

Inside, his glance swept the room. There was an oilcloth covered table, a gas plate some cheap kitchen chairs. Wong considered them briefly and without interest as he crossed to the inner room where his son had been held captive. Here there was a white iron bedstead, a dresser with a cracked mirror above it, a wash stand with a heavy white China pitcher.

But it was none of these things that caused old Wong to suck in his breath with a sharp, hissing noise. Instead, it was the evidence of hasty flight: the opened drawers, the clothing kicked into a pile in the corner of the single closet, the path in the dust where a suitcase had been dragged across the floor.

"I have been a fool," he muttered half aloud. "While I wasted time with the attorney, they returned to find Wong Soo gone, and now they have fled."

His thin shoulders sagged a little as he turned back to the outer room, his disappointment etched in the wrinkled leather of his face. "A wise man eats his rice before it grows cold. I have been a fool," he repeated.

He started to leave, thinking of his son in a detention cell at headquarters and of the seven men who would gather that night about the teakwood table in the room above the Glittering Happiness Hall of Chance. Halfway across the outer room, his old eyes lighted upon a crumpled wad of pink waxed paper on the oilcloth table cover. It was a tiny wad, the size of a garden pea, but Wong halted abruptly.

"Small voices sometimes speak loudly to a man with sharp ears," he thought, spreading the paper out and scanning both sides for possible writing. There was none, and he sighed, turning the paper this way and that in his scrawny fingers, his dark eyes clouded with thought. He was still engaged in this scrutiny when a rustle of sound pulled him upright.

HE tucked the paper beneath his sash and turned, his face inscrutable despite the surprise that surged through him. He said, "Sergeant Mitchell," and bobbed his black skull cap three times in greeting.

"So!" exclaimed the sergeant, stamping into the room. "Surprised to see me, ain't you? What are you doing here?"

"I came to visit a friend. He was not at home. I have been awaiting his return."

"Friend, huh? Friend, my eye! You're not fooling me any, Wong Sun. Who is this friend of yours?"

"His name is Chin Pei-chi."

"So! Chin Pei-chi, huh? Awaiting his return! I suppose you don't know Chin Pei-chi was just found murdered down by the river. I suppose you don't know your kid just spilled us a cock-and-bull story about being held captive in this room here. Well, you know what I think? I think Wong Soo and Chin Pei-chi figured this thing out together. I think Chin pulled a fake stickup and killed Jimmy Lee. Then Wong Soo killed Chin Pei-chi, so he wouldn't have to split the money, and showed up with that story about being held captive. Furthermore, I think you came over here to pick up the swag."

The sergeant ran his stubby hands roughly over the old jeweler's body. "It's just a lucky break I got here before you got a chance to get away with it. Where is it?"

Old Wong remained motionless. Chin

Pei-chi murdered! And Chin was his only connection with the killers of Jimmy Lee and the missing money. His heart sank. Aloud, he said: "Dried peas in a drum make more noise than a wise man's tongue. I know nothing of the money, nor of the death of Chin Pei-chi."

"Oh, you don't huh? No, you never know nothing. But listen to me, Wong Sun, I'm going to take this joint to pieces—and if I find one scrap of that rice paper package with the red seals or one scrap of that money, it's going to go hard with you as well as that kid of yours. I'll slap you in the cooler and keep you there the rest of your life, and don't forget it. Now I got work to do. Get outa here before I change my mind and take you in right now."

Wong Sun clasped his hands before him and bowed. "Long life and many sons," he murmured, heading for the door.

Twice during the afternoon as the hands of the ninety-eight cent clock on the counter of the Happy Dragon jewelry shop crawled toward the hour of the meeting, Old Wong brought the slip of pink paper from beneath his girdle and scanned it.

He had just tucked it away for the second time when Harry Lee, the attorney, dropped into the shop to tell him he could visit his son in jail at seven o'clock if he wished. Old Wong offered his thanks and poured tea from a kettle which steamed on the top of a smelly oil stove behind the counter. When the attorney had gone, he fed Ling, the cat, with two bowls of rice and a piece of salt fish, and locked his shop.

On his way to headquarters, he halted at an American drug store on Canal Street and indulged himself in his lone vice, a bottle of strawberry soda pop. He counted out a nickel and ten pennies, taking two packages of chewing gum from the rack on the imitation marble counter.

If any worry remained within him as he greeted Wong Soo in the detention cell, he gave no sign of it.

"Be of good hope," he counseled. "After much thought, your unworthy parent has devised a plan. Tonight I shall ask for an extension of twenty-four hours."

The younger Wong remained glum. "I have just heard of the death of Chin Pei-chi," he said. "Without Chin to connect us with the others, what is twenty-four hours or even twenty-four moons? *Ai ya!* The gods are conspiring against us, honorable father."

The old man smiled gently, more to himself than to his son; his thoughts seemed far away. "Men may plan," he murmured, "but it is Heaven that decides what the results shall be. I shall burn nine candles before Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy; and nine candles before the tablets of our ancestors." He roused himself. "You will find the floor more comfortable than the cot. I can tell you from experience. Good night, younger one. May you sleep without dreams."

IT was eight-thirty and the customers were beginning to dribble into the Glittering Happiness Hall of Chance when Wong Sun padded down the long flight of steps from the meeting room on the second floor. On the sidewalk, he paused for a moment to bid good night to Chu Sun, the wrinkled book dealer, who accompanied him.

His almond eyes were as bright as opals and darted as restlessly as humming birds. They saw all, missed nothing, and never faltered in their search.

Chu Sun cleared his throat a little hesitantly. "It is good," he said finally, "that you have been granted the twenty-four hours. I, for one, shall be wishing you success, Wong Sun."

"A thousand and ten thousand blessings," murmured the old jeweler. He turned right and shuffled slowly along Pell Street, but only for a dozen steps; then he vanished in the shadows of a darkened doorway. From his hiding place, he watched the dim figures of the others who had attended the meeting appear by one's and two's on the sidewalk.

Presently, he slipped from the doorway, following one of the figures. His trail led

out of Pell into Mott, and finally into the long, dank hall of a rooming house near Chatham Square. On the third floor, he watched his quarry disappear into a rear apartment. He pressed his ear to the thin panels of the door, and his old eyes narrowed sharply as muffled voices came to him.

"Hola! What is the news? Without the solace of poppy gum, the minutes drag."

The voice of the other was calmer and more insistent:

"Patience. Wong Sun has been given twenty-four hours. But there is nothing to fear. He is baffled and the white police blame the younger one for the passing of both Jimmy Lee and Chin Pei-chi."

"Ho. It is good. Chin Pei-chi should not have demanded a larger share."

Again the calmer voice, reasoning and utterly cold.

"If he had not demanded a larger share, there would have been less for us."

"There is wisdom in thy words. Let us drink in rice wine to the many ounces of poppy gum these dollars will purchase."

There was a sound of scraping chairs and the sucking of a thick cork from the mouth of a jug as old Wong's scrawny fingers dropped to the doorknob. The knob turned in his grasp.

The moment for delay had passed. This was a time for action, daring as a tiger's, swifter than a snake's, and less merciful than either.

Two men stood on opposite sides of a small, round table, the jug between them and porcelain cups in their hands.

Old Wong advanced silently, closing the door behind him with the heel of his slipper. He thought: "The other man is Sam Fong, who also was a dealer of cards in the Glittering Happiness Hall of Chance." Aloud, he said: "We meet again, Sing Fo! I have come for the money."

Sing Fo whirled. His slender face paled to a sickly yellow. The wine cup trembled in his fingers so that its contents splashed over the edge to the thin straw mat on the floor. He tried to speak, but no sound came from his lips.

Sam Fong gasped: "Wong Sun!" Suddenly he flung his wine cup directly at Wong's head. He leaped forward, whipping a knife from the sash about his stocky waist. Old Wong gave ground, shaking his head, as Sing Fo, recovering from his momentary paralysis, also leaped.

Then Wong was crowded into a corner and the two men were upon him. Fire burned in the old jeweler's eyes.

"Fools!" he spat, and, from the sleeve of his jacket, bright steel flashed into his wrinkled fist. The blade darted out, once, twice, with the speed of a snake's tongue.

The fire died from Wong's eyes, and a sad smile crossed the crumpled parchment of his face. "Only a fool seeks fish in a dry stream," he muttered to himself.

Presently, he stepped over the body of Sam Fong. He began a search of the apartment. In the right-hand drawer of an old sideboard, he found the bundle of money, still wrapped in its rice paper package, with only one corner torn off to disclose the stack of greenbacks within it. Wong dropped the package upon the table beside the wine jug, and, with a last glance about him, shuffled out into the hall and down the stairway toward the street.

His face was smiling now and the parchment wrinkles grew.

IT was nearing noon and old Wong was preparing his mid-day meal of rice and bean cakes when Sergeant Mitchell strode into the jewelry shop. The sergeant's red face wore a look of triumph and his voice boomed with self satisfaction.

"Ha! Fast work, if I do say so," he announced, working his bushy eyebrows. "I've recovered the money and solved the whole thing. What do you think of that?"

The trace of a smile touched the old jeweler's lips. "It was this humble person's understanding you solved the whole thing with the arrest of his unworthy son."

"Oh that!" The sergeant grunted. "Wong Soo didn't have anything to do with it. I knew that all along."

Wong's smile broadened. "Perhaps that is what the white detective meant when he said it would take more than a lawyer to free Wong Soo from jail."

"Never mind that." The sergeant shoved his felt hat back on his close cropped skull and hooked his stubby thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "Just get a load of this. The guys that got away with the dough were Sing Fo and Sam Fong, and we just found 'em dead in a room over by Chatham Square."

"Sing Fo and Sam Fong," murmured the old jeweler. "It seems impossible."

"It's the dope, all right. And they were both seen alive after Wong Soo was in jail, so Wong couldn't have done it. The way I figured it, Sing Fo was the tip-off man and, after the job was pulled, he and Sam Fong killed Chin Pei-chi to save splitting the loot with him."

"There is a saying in the Central Glory that greed is a cat that scratches out men's eyes."

Mitchell scratched his head doubtfully.

"The way I figure it," the sergeant went on, "is that Sing Fo and Sam Fong got in an argument over the swag and carved each other up. The package with the red seals was right there on a table. Furthermore, I figure you ain't as smart as I always thought you were, Wong Sun. Any really smart guy would have figured out that the only ones who could have known about the transportation of that money, besides the messengers, were the people who attended the meeting, so one of them had to be mixed up in it."

Wong nodded his old head. "Wisdom is a jewel," he murmured. From his counter, he picked a package of chewing gum. "Would the white detective care for a stick?"

The sergeant snorted. "Chewing gum!" Then his sharp eyes narrowed under their bushy brows. "Say, since when have you started chewing that stuff? You old Chinks don't go in for things like that."

A far-away look crept over the old jeweler's face. "The white detective is observant. It is true that the habit of the white devils is scorned by the elders of the colony. Still, I have heard a saying about the exception proving the rule, and perhaps there are a few. . . ."

"Say, what are you driving at? There's something on your mind."

"It is nothing. A coincidence, perhaps. Only last night I offered chewing gum to those who attended the meeting and, of the group, only Sing Fo accepted."

He did not smile.

"Well, what of it? What's that got to do with it?"

A shrug lifted old Wong's thin shoulders. He removed the wrapper from a stick of the gum. "Nothing," he repeated, crumpling the waxed paper into a little pink ball the size of a garden pea. "Nothing at all."

MEN of

The SAVIOR of BUDAPEST

ON LIBERTY SQUARE IN BUDAPEST STANDS THE STATUE OF AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WEARING THE SERVICE KHAKI OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, ERECTED TWO YEARS AGO IN THE MEMORY OF HARRY HILL BANDHOLTZ, CALLED BY HUNGARIANS THE DELIVERER OF BUDAPEST.

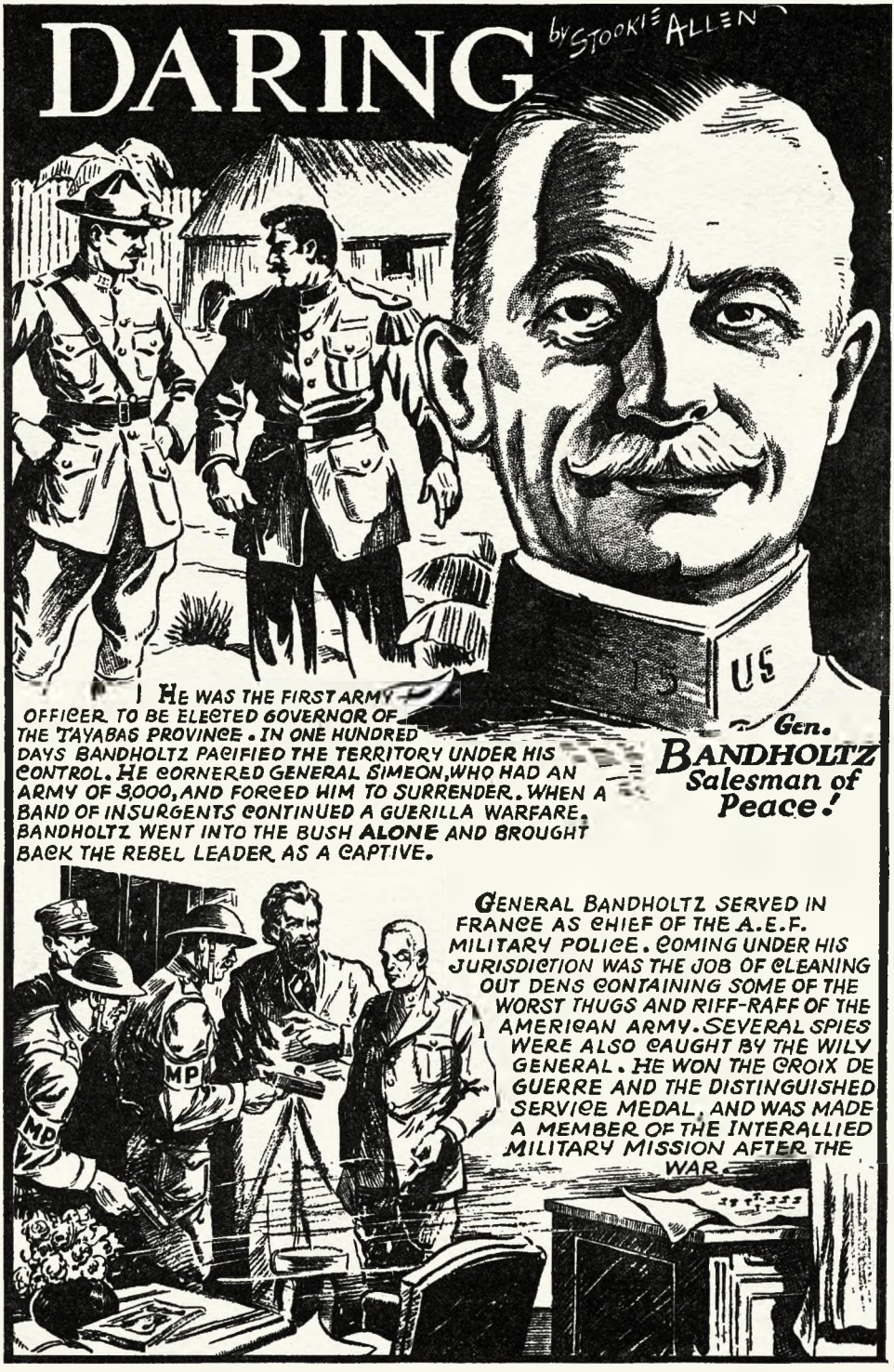
BANDHOLTZ

A MEMBER OF THE INTER-ALLIED MILITARY MISSION, BANDHOLTZ WAS SENT TO BUDAPEST IN 1919 TO STOP THE INVASION OF RUMANIAN TROOPS WHICH WERE POURING INTO HUNGARY, DEFYING THE ALLIED SUPREME COUNCIL AND PILLAGING THE HUNGARIAN CAPITAL. BANDHOLTZ'S JOB WAS TO DRIVE THEM OUT.

ONE EVENING A RUMANIAN REGIMENT ATTEMPTED TO LOOT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM. BANDHOLTZ DEMANDED THAT THE TROOPS LEAVE. THEY REFUSED. THEN, ARMED ONLY WITH A RIDING CROP, BANDHOLTZ TALKED THE REGIMENT OUT OF THE MUSEUM; HE BURNED THE EARS OF THE RUMANIAN OFFICERS SO EFFICIENTLY THAT THEY COMMANDED THEIR MEN TO WITHDRAW. THAT COURAGEOUS CHALLENGE BY A LONE OFFICER PLAYED A VITAL PART IN CURBING THE RUMANIAN INVASION.

BANDHOLTZ, A WEST POINTER, SERVED IN CUBA AND WAS CITED FOR GALLANTRY. LATER IN THE PHILIPPINES HE WON MORE HONORS. ALONE, HE ENTERED THE CAMP OF THE INSURGENT LEADER MAXIMO ABAD, PREVAILED UPON ABAD TO SURRENDER AND RETURNED TO HEADQUARTERS WITH THE INSURRECTO AND HIS ENTIRE COMMAND IN TOW.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week



Coming: Stunt-Jacks of All Trades

Off the Record

Another ARGOSY scoop: For the first time the true history of that corny vogue, Joe Fenner, as culled from documents and other unassailable sources of the period

By HOWARD MARSH
Author of "The Davis House—Very Red," "Partners in Ossi Osser," etc.

ALTHOUGH the true history of the Fenner Affair will probably never be known—and certainly no one who was involved in it will ever willingly divulge it—we are convinced that any reader who peruses the following collection of clippings, telegrams, and the like will be able to answer, at least to his own satisfaction, the burning question: Is the place for a good brass-man (to wit: Joe Fenner) in a barber shop or in the aisle of the nearest church?

Friends, read for yourselves the following, painfully garnered *ana* of the Fenner Case. Let him who is without sin among you cast the first trombone. The defense rests.

The Barber Trade and Beauticians' Magazine

HELP WANTED

Wanted: Good Barber who can play cornet, help in church and good poker player for mining community. $100 per month guaranteed for right man plus possible additional. Write full particulars Box 444.

Chicago, Illinois,
February 23, 1938.

Dear Box 444,

My name is Joe Fenner. I am 38 yrs. old. I graduated from Cook County Tonsorial College. Sure I play the cornet but the slide trombone better. At penny ante I

am generally apt to win. I got a daughter 18 yrs. old. Is your place O. K. for her? Dear Box, please tell me frankly.

Yours Truly,
Joe Fenner,
12,682 S. W. Ave.

P. S. The only reason I can't get a big job at the Drake Hotel or the Athaletic Club is because they don't hire bald barbers. I don't mind church and I got a good tenor.

I hope you will write me right away about this.

Lost Horse,
San Bernardino Co.,
California.

Dear Mister Fenner:

We liked your letter best of all which answered. The other guy only played the mouth organ. We got a desert mining town here and 151 people including 17 women which would be good company for your daughter. The climate is hot in summer and windy in winter, but O. K. for health resorts. We got a P. O. and a new jail combined in the basement by WPA labor only costing us $656.50 for materials. We need a barber and a cornetist for the band but we got plenty of tenors but we need another trustee for the United Church and a fellow to fill out the third table at Bill's Place for Sat. P. M. poker. We guarantee $100 per mo. for barbering and you keep your poker winning if any. You telegraph me at Barstow and I will meet your train.

Signed,
Jake Turnbull, Sr.
Village Trustee
Lost Horse, Calif.

JAKE TURNBULL
VILLAGE TRUSTEE LOST HORSE
BARSTOW CALIFORNIA
ME AND CORNET AND DAUGHTER FLORENCE ARRIVING SANTA FE MISSIONARY SATURDAY MARCH 5 ALSO SLIDE TROMBONE
JOE FENNER

San Bernardino County Sun

LOST HORSE NEWS

J. Turnbull, Jr.
Spec. Correspondent

Lost Horse, March 10: Again this mountain and desert resort has been chosen by a prominent Easterner as his home. This time it is Mr. Joseph George Fenner, well known in the Drake Hotel and Chicago Athletic Club circles, Chicago. He arrived Saturday night from Barstow where J. Turnbull, Sr., met him in the village work car and brought him across the desert to his future home. With Mr. Fenner was his charming and beautiful daughter, Miss Florence Farragut Fenner, who will add greatly to the young set in Lost Horse. Mr. Fenner is an accomplished musician. He is making elaborate plans to open a Tonsorial Parlor between the new Post Office and Bill's Place. All Lost Horse welcomes the two newcomers to this progressive village.

ADD Fenner Case: the following notations later discovered written on the backs of menu cards.

Bill's Place, March 12
Jake Turnbull, Sr.
I O U $36
Thirty-six (36) dollars
Acct. of Poker Signed, Joe Fenner

Bill's Place, March 19
Jake Turnbull, Sr.
I O U $48.50
To come from my 1st month wages. (Acct. Poker)
Signed, Joe Fenner

Bill's Place, March 26
Jake Turnbull, Sr.
I O U 89 dlls. even $89
Part to come from both my 1st and 2nd months' wages
Acct. Poker
Signed, Joe Fenner

Lost Horse, Calif.
March 30, 1938.

Mr. Joseph Fenner—

Dear Mr. Fenner:

It is a great pleasure for me, as representative of the United Church, to welcome you to our congregation. It is an added pleasure to inform you that at last night's meeting you were elected a trustee. You have been a regular attendant at the church since your arrival and it is our hope that you will continue to be so. As

trustee you will be asked to assist in the collections each Sunday morning and to appear at the regular bi-monthly meeting. I extend to you the hand of fellowship.

Sincerely yours,
Granger Breathwaite, Pastor.

THE next exhibit consists of a few pitiful gleanings from tickets issued by one Yonkel Gruenberg, pawnbrokers. Reader, be warned.

Square Way Loan Shop
Barstow, California
Ticket No. 16762
Article—1 Slide Trombone
$12.00—Twelve dollars
April 2, 1938—Y V W X

Square Way Loan Shop
Barstow, California
Ticket No. 16802
Article—1 Cornet
$6.00—Six Dollars
April 19, 1938—O T A

And there follows a document, coldly official in tone, which brought the whole town of Lost Horse to its feet in horror.

WARRANT FOR ARREST

State of Illinois
County of Cook, ss.
The People of the State of Illinois to any Sheriff, Constable, Marshal, or Policeman:

Complaint upon oath having been this day made before me, Thomas J. MacGregor, a Justice of the Peace, by the Householders Finance Company, that the offense of removing contract goods from the state, to wit: one gold cornet and one slide trombone, has been committed and accusing Joseph G. Fenner, also known as Joe Fenner thereof:

You are therefore commanded forthwith to arrest the above-named Joseph G. Fenner and bring him before me forthwith at the Criminal Building.

Witness my hand and the seal of this State at Chicago, Illinois this 15th day of April, 1938.

SHERIFF
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
CALIFORNIA
WE HOLD WARRANT FOR ARREST OF JOSEPH G FENNER CHARGE REMOVAL CONTRACT PROPERTY LAST ADDRESS LOST HORSE YOUR COUNTY CAN YOU LOCATE

SHERIFF COOK COUNTY
SHERIFF COOK COUNTY
CHICAGO ILLINOIS
HAVE JOE FENNER UNDER SURVEILLANCE WRITE PARTICULARS SEND WARRANTS
SHERIFF SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

THE next exhibit comprises a holograph reproduced from the back of a menu card, a penciled memorandum, a letter, an item from the *Sun* and part of a page torn from a book, and sundry items.

Bill's Place
To J. Turnbull, Sr.
I O U—$216.50. This is the total to date and cancels all other I O U's.
Signed, Joe Fenner
Apr. 23, 1938.

Confidential

Dear Mr. Fenner: Before you began taking up our collections in church we averaged $12.80 each Sunday. Recently this sum has decreased to an average of $4.60. Have you any explanations to offer in private?

Sincerely,
G. Breathwaite, Pastor.

Dear Jake Turnbull: Junior, dear, you know I am awfully fond of you but at the present moment I have changed my mind and I will not run away to marry you. My father is all alone in the world and I cannot leave him. He has to have his meals regular and plain simple cooking. Besides, I think he is in trouble. He owes your father a lot of money and he has pawned his cornet and trombone. He also worries about the church. So I will be a dutiful daughter and I will not meet you any more at night up by the mine shaft. It isn't because I don't love you because I am almost crying now.

Florence Fenner.

San Bernardino County Sun
LOST HORSE NEWS
J. Turnbull, Jr.
Spec. Correspondent

This village is aghast over the arrest of Joe Fenner, popular barber. Warrants have been sworn out in Chicago on charges of removing contract property. Fenner is in the jail awaiting decision on his case. He refused to return to Chicago and it is doubtful if extradition papers can be secured. Prospects are that he will remain in jail for a considerable period of time until the difficulties are adjusted. He is the first occupant of the new jail built by WPA labor in the Post Office basement.

Sent to Miss Florence Fenner
KNIGHTS OF THE HIGHWAY
by an Ex-Knight

"One thing about jail that is beneficial to health is the fact that the hours are regular. Breakfast comes promptly at six-thirty, dinner exactly at noon and supper at five-thirty. The food is never elaborate, of course, but in every northern and western jail in which I have been the meals are healthy, even if simple and plain."

On margin of page was scribbled: "Dearest Florence: Your father is well taken care of now. He has regular hours and plain simple meals from Bill's Place. Let's run away to San Bernardino like we talked. After that maybe I can help your dad. I am going crazy without you.

Your loving Jake.

The reader who examines the bill of sale below must not be misled by its seeming innocence.

BARSTOW HARDWARE STORE
To J. Turnbull, Sr., Lost Horse

1 Shovel	$1.50
1 Pick	1.65
1 Crowbar	1.70
	$4.85
Sales tax	.14
	$4.99

Delivered to J. Turnbull, Sr.
Paid May 2, 1938.

The following document nicely clinches one of the minor but important developments in Fenner's conquest of Lost Horse.

County Records

San Bernardino County, California.
County Clerks' Office

Marriage license—Jacob Turnbull, Jr., 20, Lost Horse, San Bernardino County; Florence Farragut Fenner, 19, Chicago.

San Bernardino County Sun
Gold Rush Sweeps
Lost Horse Canyon

Excitement and another gold rush has swept over a great portion of San Bernardino County during the past few days. Hundreds of prospectors are arriving at the little village of Lost Horse in Lost Horse Canyon where gold was discovered last week. Claims have been staked out over the entire canyon and far back on the desert following the uncovering of one of the richest veins in California's history. The main vein appears to center directly in the village of Lost Horse on land which has been put under lease to Jacob Turnbull, Sr., a village trustee.

The manner of the discovery was distinctly unusual. One Joe Fenner, a barber from Chicago, had been placed in the county jail on charges involving the removal of contract property from the East. In some manner unknown to the authorities he secured a shovel, pick and crowbar. With them he was endeavoring to tunnel his way out from the basement jail when he struck an abandoned shaft. Following it, he was impressed by a vein of white quartz which later proved to be fabulously rich in gold. Abandoning his plan of escape, he told of his find and delivered samples of the quartz to Jacob Turnbull, Sr. The latter immediately put all the surrounding land under lease.

News leaked out and the gold rush started.

Since the days of 'forty-nine, there has not been so much excitement in this, our Fair State. Once more California cries: Eldorado!

Latest assays show the ore to run as high as $1000 a ton in gold. According to old records, the original Lost Horse mine which undoubtedly has been rediscovered by Fenner, was abandoned for unknown

reasons in 1869. While in operation it was one of the greatest gold producers of the country.

A DOCUMENT of high and profitable import to all concerned:

I, Jacob Turnbull, Sr., do hereby agree with Joe Fenner as follows:

To cancel all I O U's from him to me;

To take his cornet and trombone out of pawn;

To settle his difficulties in the East;

To give him one-third of all profits from the operation of the Turnbull Gold Properties, Inc.

Consideration for this agreement is the fact that Joe Fenner found the gold mine on the property I have leased. (There follows a sentence which has been heavily marked out but which originally read as follows: With tools I furnished him to escape from jail because we needed him in our poker game.)

May 10, 1938. Signed J. Turnbull, Sr.

San Bernardino County Sun

LOST HORSE NEWS

by Spec. Correspondent

The gold rush has produced intense activity here which centers around Bill's Place who is doing a profitable business. . . .

Formation of the Turnbull-Fenner Gold Properties Corp. has been announced. The corporation has already sold one-third interest in its new mine to Eastern interests for $20,000. . . .

Mrs. Jacob Turnbull, Jr. (nee Miss Florence Farragut Fenner) held a housewarming on Rhyolite Road for the ladies of Lost Horse yesterday afternoon. . . .

Mr. Joseph G. Fenner, industrialist, has shown his benevolence by giving $300 cash to the United Church. . . .

Jacob Turnbull, Jr., has resigned as special correspondent for the *Sun* because of press of business as secretary of the Turnbull-Fenner Corp. . . .

Mr. Joseph Fenner, philanthropist, is reorganizing the village band in which he will play the slide trombone, doubling on the cornet. A new barber will be hired who can play the piccolo. . . .

Mrs. Jacob Turnbull, Jr., is going to Barstow today to buy a trousseau for her recent wedding. She is accompanied by Mr. Jacob Turnbull, Jr. . . .

"You shouldn't have come," she said. "I can't help you—I won't"

Cut Loose Your Wolf

By BENNETT FOSTER

THE little Western town of Franklin is the scene, partly through coincidence, partly through design, of a strange reunion. First there is Larry Blue, elder, orphaned son of Tom Blue, hanged years ago for a murder he did not commit. Larry has made his own way in the world and has returned to Franklin to help his brother Don who is beginning his career as an attorney. Larry wants Don to come back to Denver where Larry, as half-owner of the city's largest gambling house, is a wealthy and influential figure. But Don is determined to see his job through in his own way.

Judge Lester, the magistrate who sentenced the boys' father to hang, has made himself partially responsible for Don. Now Don is trying to straighten out the affairs of Archer Bolton, who has died intestate, and to secure the larger part of his estate for Bolton's nephew and niece, DeWitt and Constance. Contesting this arrangement is Luella Andrews Seemans—Archer Bolton's half sister—and her husband, Mayor Seemans who controls Franklin's politics and its justice. Seeman's partner, the town prosecutor, is the same Whiteman who, years before, had committed the crime for which Tom Blue died on the scaffold.

Larry, however, has never learned the truth about George Whiteman.

DON is in love with Constance Bolton, and part of his reluctance to leave Franklin with Larry is on her account. Larry meets and admires Constance and is forced to remind himself that she is his brother's girl. He finds too that he still feels a great affection for Annette Bondreaux, a childhood playmate, who is now the star of a fourth-rate theatrical troupe playing an engagement in town. Larry, to ease Don's way to success, forges a fake will which leaves Bolton's property to Constance and DeWitt. Don half suspects the forgery, but he cannot be sure, and hesitates to destroy so important a card in his game. Larry, in an attempt to reach an understanding with Don, goes for a carriage ride with Constance. The horses bolt and the driver is flung from his seat. . . .

CHAPTER XX

WORDS WON'T DO IT

WITH that first lurch, Larry's muscles tensed. He came to his feet, holding to the arm rest of the seat. Constance Bolton, clutching wildly, found a hold, was thrown loose from it and caught at another.

This story began in the Argosy for August 6

"Hang on!" yelled Larry Blue, and, swaying with the rocking lurches of the barouche, went up, catlike, over the back of the driver's seat.

The reins were gone. Larry did not even try to retrieve them. He looked back, swiftly, saw that Constance was in the bottom of the barouche, holding fast to the little edge of the body, and then, leaning forward, Larry caught the dashboard with his hands, swung his body and like some circus acrobat rehearsing a simple act, went down to the bounding tongue.

His hands, releasing their hold on the dashboard, caught at backstrap and crouper on either side. A flying hoof brushed his leg, almost upsetting him. Then Larry was on the lunging back of the near bay, legs locked, body giving to the horses' lunges. Now hands went out to catch the flying reins; now Larry leaned forward and caught at the bit of the off horse. His voice, steady, calm, more controlling than the hands, was in the ears of the bay team.

"Whoa, whoa, you fools. Think this is a time to run away? Whoa. Whoa, now!"

Voice and pulling hands had their effect. The bays were gentle as kittens. They had been frightened, they had run; they were running, but now that mad gallop was controlled. They swung into the abandoned road. Steadily the hands pulled in, steadily the voice, softly cursing but not angry, soothed them. From run to lope, from lope to trot to walk and then to panting stop, the bays came. Larry Blue slipped down and his strong arms gathered up the girl who lay, eyes closed, on the floor. He held her against his chest.

Her face was pale. Long lashes lay against a colorless cheek. The jaunty tendril of hair beneath the coquettish bonnet, now disheveled, was like the curl of some little girl asleep. Larry, looking down into that face, feeling the soft body in his arms, was filled with sudden rage and fright and something else. This girl was Don's! This woman, desirable, beautiful, in his arms, was the woman his brother loved. All his life he had done for Don, had given to Don. His every move and thought had been for Don. But why?

"You might do something for Larry Blue. . . ." It seemed to Larry that Annette's voice spoke again. Why should he give up for Don? Why should he—?

THE bays stood panting in the road. Felipe, his face bloody from an encounter with mesa rocks, his coat torn, came running up. Larry Blue, lifting Constance, stepped into the barouche.

"Señor," panted Felipe. *"Señor!"*

"Damn you," swore Larry Blue fiercely. "Drive home!"

Constance had recovered before they reached Judge Lester's house. The girl sighed, and opened her eyes. Larry, releasing her, helped her to sit up. The color flooded back into the girl's cheeks and she looked, wide-eyed, at Larry.

"It's all right, Miss Bolton. It's all right now. They just got scared and ran. They're all right now. Gentle enough."

"I saw you go up over the seat," said the girl, her voice faint, "I saw you and then you were gone and I thought—I couldn't see you and I thought . . ."

"I had to stop 'em," said Larry earnestly. "It's all right now."

The girl said no more. She began to arrange her disheveled dress, to straighten her bonnet, and with small pats to order her hair. When they reached Judge Lester's he helped the girl to alight, holding her small, mitted hand in his stronger, broader palm.

"I can't thank you now," said Constance, her voice small. "But—you saved my life. You must come back, Mr. Blue. You must come so that I—"

Larry smiled reassuringly. "I'll come to see that you have no bad effects from your fright," he said. "Of course I'll do that; but you mustn't say I saved your life. The team would have stopped running anyhow and—"

"Come soon," urged Constance, interrupting. "You must come soon, Mr. Blue. I . . ." Her voice faltered.

"I'm keeping you standing here." Larry was contrite. "You go in and lie down. You'll feel all right pretty soon. I'll come back tomorrow and see you." He led the girl to the door, opened it and saw her inside. Felipe was still sitting on the seat of the barouche. Larry walked back to him.

"You better take that team to the barn," he said sternly. "And next time don't go to sleep!" With that admonition he left Felipe and walked slowly down the hill toward the center of town.

IT WAS late when Larry reached his hotel, almost seven o'clock. Don's note had said that he would come at seven, and so going to his room and making a hasty toilet, Larry returned to the lobby to wait for his brother. Seven o'clock, and no Don.

At half past seven Larry went out of the hotel and walked along the boardwalk in front of it. Going back into the lobby at eight he sat down and tried to compose himself. Don was late, but then Don was busy and had not been able to get away. It was not until eight-thirty that he appeared. He came through the door, resplendent in full dress, and Larry was sorry that he had dressed so hastily himself. Don took Larry's hand briefly. He was frowning.

"Where can we talk?" he asked.

"I thought that we'd have dinner," Larry said, "then we can do whatever you want."

"I haven't time for that." Don glanced at a watch that he took from a vest pocket. "Can we go to your room?"

"Why sure." Larry, surprised, turned and led the way to the stairs.

In Larry's room, Don refused a seat. The frown he had worn when he came into the hotel was a scowl now, directed at Larry.

"We're all very grateful to you for what you did this afternoon," Don announced abruptly. "DeWitt and Judge Lester and I. Constance fairly sings your praises."

"Pshaw!" Larry waved that aside. "The fool coachman wasn't watching and the team ran. It wasn't much of a trick to stop 'em."

"Nevertheless we're grateful." Don's language was precise, his tone formal. "I haven't much time, Larry. Constance and the Judge are waiting for me. We are going to the theater. Constance has a foolish idea that she wants to see this woman with whom DeWitt is so enamored." Larry knew she must mean Annette Bondreaux.

"Oh?" said Larry, his eyebrows lifting a trifle. He waited for Don to continue. It seemed logical to Larry that Don should ask him to join the party.

"I wanted to talk with you about that will," Don announced. "I kept Judge Lester from probating it. I talked him out of that idea, but I couldn't keep him from showing it to Mrs. Seemans and her husband. Larry, *did* you write it?"

Larry was hurt that Don preferred the company of others to his own, and he was just a little angry. Don was acting as though Larry had committed a crime. Don had a chip on his shoulder and Larry Blue in all his life had never failed to knock off an offered chip.

"You can make up your own mind about that," he snapped. "What do you think?"

"I think you did."

"Then why didn't you tear it up?"

"Because if you did not write it, I would be doing Constance a great injury."

"What about her brother? Doesn't he count?"

"Of course he counts. But Constance—"

"You're in love with the girl." Larry grinned at Don.

Don flushed darkly. "I want to know about that will," he insisted obstinately.

"And you can't find out," Larry drawled.

Don spoke, his tone conciliating; and so made matters worse. "There is no use of our quarreling, Larry. I came to ask you a question. You won't answer it. You place me in a difficult situation."

"Never"—Larry was sententious—"look a gift horse in the mouth, kid. You might find out something that you don't want to know."

Don drew himself up. "I'll tell you this," he said. "If you did write that will, if you committed a forgery, then you are directly responsible for whatever comes of it."

"All right," Larry made casual agreement. "If I wrote it I'm responsible. Then what?"

"Then—then Judge Lester is going ahead. He will probate the will. He thinks that Archer Bolton wrote it. He—is an honest man, Larry. I wouldn't—"

"And I'm not!" Larry snapped the words. "I'm your no-account gambler brother that you're ashamed of. You'd better trot along to your friends. It won't do to keep 'em waiting. After all they gave you everything, remember? Everything except a backbone. You think you're in a tight spot and you come to me. Grow up, boy. Do your own deciding for once. And don't be so high and mighty. Take what's given to you, like you've done all your life, and be thankful for it."

The instant that the words were out of his mouth Larry Blue was sorry he had spoken them. He had not meant to hurt Don.

Larry came to his feet. "Don," he began, "Don—"

But Don Blue was gone, the door slamming shut behind him.

LARRY reached the door, put out his hand to open it and stopped. After all there was no recalling what was said. Larry's momentary contrition was lost. Let Don go. Let him go with the people he thought so highly of. He would, lacking an invitation to his brother's party, have a little party of his own. Snatching up his hat from the bed where he had tossed it, Larry pulled it on savagely and, blowing out the light, stamped down the stairs.

When Larry reached the cab rank at the corner his searching eyes found Duck Bunn. Duck was leaning against his hack, his battered plug hat tilted down over his nose.

"We're moving out a little," Larry said crisply. "You and me, Duck. We're going to see the bright lights and hear the eagle scream and the owl hoot. Come on!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Duck. "What's got into yore craw?"

"There's nothing in my craw that a little liquor won't help," Larry snapped. "You're my company tonight, Duck. You and me are going to prop up Franklin and put a chunk under part of it. Come on, shake a leg! I've got a thirst and I've got the money to do something about it. Come on!"

Duck looked searchingly at Larry Blue. Duck had seen men like Larry before this, men with a wild light in their eyes, men with something eating into the mind behind the eyes. It would never do to turn Larry Blue loose alone, not when he felt like this.

"You want to get drunk, huh?" asked Duck Bunn. "Come on then. I'm your huckleberry!"

CHAPTER XXI

LET'S SPEAK OF DEATH

AS MAYOR of Franklin it was logical that Abraham Seemans should live in the best house in town. That he did not own the house or the blooded team he used, or any of the various appurtenances of wealth that he displayed, bothered Seemans not at all. He had their use and if his wife Luella was in actuality the owner, still Abe Seemans was the front. Now, in a chair in the parlor of the house, Luella Seemans sat stiffly upright and spoke to George Whiteman while Abe took his ease upon a horsehair sofa.

"I will not be cheated," stated Luella, her eyes agate hard. "What is justly mine is mine and I want it."

Still a handsome woman, Abe thought, looking at his wife. She might begrudge him money, might be so parsimonious as to border upon the miser, but still she was handsome. And she did not spare

money upon herself. Her dress was heavy silk; her shoes, the toes discreetly peeping out from beneath the dress, were the finest that money could buy. Her hair, with only the single streak of gray, was arranged in style.

Only the wrinkling skin of her neck betrayed her age, and only the harsh lines about her nose and the corners of her mouth, betrayed her disposition. If Luella would only be more free with her money, if she did not force him to subterfuge in rendering her the accounts of the Crystal Palace and of the other houses on San Sebastian street, he would be happy.

Abe glanced almost fondly toward George Whiteman. Whiteman had engineered the marriage and hoped to profit by it. After all Whiteman had his uses. Whiteman had come chiseling in on Abe Seemans, but—Abe reluctantly admitted this—he had profited by Whiteman's chiseling.

"You can't go against a will," Whiteman said flatly. "You had a claim as long as Bolton was intestate, but now that a will had turned up you've lost out."

That was another thing that Abe Seemans envied. George was not afraid of Luella. He showed his lack of fear in the very deliberation with which he loaded his pipe from the beaded buckskin tobacco pouch.

"I used that property for years when I owned the ranch," Luella stated. "Surely that gives me some claim upon it."

Whiteman lighted his pipe, disregarding Luella's frown. She did not like tobacco smoke to scent her curtains and drapes. "That only gives them a claim on you if they want to push it," he drawled. "I take it you didn't pay Archer Bolton a lease?"

"I did not!" Luella was fuming now. She loved a dollar, did Luella, almost more than life itself. "I tell you, George, I want my money from that river land."

Whiteman grunted. "Try to get it," he growled.

There was silence in the parlor. Abe Seemans stirred uneasily. He did not like silence. Usually it presaged trouble.

At his motion his wife turned. "*You* might suggest something!" she snapped. "So far your contribution has been that you and George have a drink."

Under his wife's stare Abe twisted. His eyes strayed from Luella's face to a picture on the wall. There was a small safe behind that picture. Abe had never seen the inside of the safe. He lacked the nerve to open it. Long ago he had possessed himself of the combination but he had never tampered. "We might trade something," he ventured. "Maybe you have something that you could trade to Lester—"

"Why should I trade anything?" Luella's voice was harsh. "I want what is mine. There is one-hundred-thousand dollars tied up in that river land. The smelter company will buy it tomorrow. They want the clay for a brickyard and the limestone for something in their process. You can sit there and let me lose thirty-thousand dollars and not offer a suggestion. Trade something indeed!"

WHITEMAN puffed on his pipe, his long front teeth showing when he removed the pipe from his lips, and his eyes colorless slits as his mind revolved the question. "I'm not sure that Abe isn't right, Luella," drawled George Whiteman after an interval. "You might work up a trade."

"And what is your bright idea?" she asked.

Whiteman put the pipe back, puffed once more and drawled an answer. "Just suppose that young Bolton got into trouble, Luella. Don't you think that Lester would be willing to trade any interest in that property to keep DeWitt from being hanged?"

Luella leaned back in her chair. She had been sitting primly upright in the position she always assumed when laying down the law. Now she wanted to think, and so relaxed. "Hmmmm," she said slowly. "Just what do you suggest, George?"

Whiteman shrugged. "Suppose that your

dear nephew was in jail for—let's say, murder. Don't you think you could get a quit-claim deed to that river land if you got him out?"

"I won't spend a cent on it," Luella warned. "I won't—"

"Abe would come in handy there," Whiteman continued. "It seems to me that Abe would help a lot. He has political connections, you know."

Luella, turning to observe her husband, sniffed. "It would be the first time he was useful," she stated. "Go on, George. Speak what's on your mind."

"You might not like it," said Whiteman slyly. "After all they are your niece and nephew."

"Tell me what you're planning and stop being sentimental," Luella snapped.

Whiteman touched the tips of his fingers together and eyed them, the pipe forgotten in his mouth. "Well then," he said, "suppose that DeWitt killed someone. He is arrested for the killing. We are in a position to get him off with a light sentence or to set him free. Wouldn't that be something to trade?"

Luella proceeded to pick holes in the scheme. "In the first place," she objected, "DeWitt would probably be killed instead of anyone else. He is a child in arms. In the next place we must have witnesses we can depend upon. I—"

"There's Fernald and Morton," Abe Seemans suggested sleepily. "You remember I caught them knocking down on us at the Crystal Palace. I think we could depend on them. And DeWitt's stuck on that Bondreaux girl. If he killed her because he was jealous—"

"No," Whiteman's objection came swiftly. "We could never get him off if he killed a woman. Besides—"

"Besides you want that girl yourself," said Luella shrewdly. "I'll grant that Morton and Fernald might do, but who would do the real work? Whom can we trust?"

She looked at George Whiteman as she spoke. Seemans too looked at the lounging man. Whiteman shrugged. "If it was worthwhile," he purred.

"It would be worthwhile," Luella stated. She was a business woman, Luella Seemans, despite the fact that she allowed her husband to steal from the receipts of her various enterprises. She knew that he stole but he dared not take too much. "After all we would get the whole amount for the river land in place of just a third. I would trade a third for two thirds."

"Thirty-thousand dollars," said Whiteman musingly. "That would make the thing worthwhile."

Luella got up from her chair. "I'll leave you two to settle the details," she announced. "After all you are men. But there must be no slips, George. No mistakes. I won't spend a penny on either of you if things go wrong." She rustled out of the room, Whiteman following her with admiring eyes. When the door had closed he relit his dead pipe and puffed it into life.

"Sometimes," Whiteman said musingly, "I wish I'd married her myself, Abe. She's a fine figure of a woman and she has a brain."

ABE SEEMANS nodded. He was often surprised at his wife. She was smart and unscrupulous and Abe knew it. Still he believed that he was as clever as she was. "Who have you got picked out, George?" he asked. "How you going to frame it?"

Whiteman puffed upon the pipe. "I tell you," he said, not answering Seemans, "she's smart. She hired me to get the Deaf Smith tanks for the Cross C when Andrews had it. I got 'em and the tanks made the ranch. The only fool thing I ever knew her to do was marry you, and I got her to do that." Smoke trickled up from his lips.

"I had a little to do with it," snapped Seemans. "Don't take all the credit, George. Now go ahead. How do you plan to do this?"

Whiteman, pursing his lips, removed the pipe. "Wayne Justice is getting pretty big for his pants. He's moving around a lot and—"

"And he's got an inside track with Annette," Seemans grinned.

"Yes, and he's got an inside track with Annette," agreed Whiteman unruffled. "Now I can use Annette to get Justice and young Bolton together. One of them could give a party for her and invite the other. That would be the best way. Have it upstairs in the Crystal Palace, in that private room. Then—"

"You could be around," said Seemans, sitting up on the couch.

Whiteman scratched his ear with the stem of his pipe. "I would be around," he agreed quietly. "You'll have to handle some of it, Abe. You're the mayor."

"I can have Morton and Fernald on hand," said Seemans, "and two or three of the boys from the police force. I think they'd do about what I wanted them to." His voice carried satisfaction. "I can throw a bug into Levine's ear if you say so. He owes me a favor."

Whiteman nodded. "We'll work it out," he said. "Abe, when are you going to give me some money?"

"I haven't any money," said Seemans defensively. "Luella—"

"But you know where she keeps it," Whiteman interrupted. "You and I had a bargain, Abe. Suppose I went back on it? Suppose I talked about the city funds and a few other things I know about?"

"You don't bluff me, George." Called upon, Abe Seemans could be as hard as Whiteman. "I can talk some too. About that Haslip murder that old Tom Blue was hung for; and about you and those halfbreeds downing old Cardwine when he started checking up on you. You've even got Cardwine's pouch in your pocket, full of tobacco. Suppose I spoke up about them?"

"Then I'd kill you," Whiteman stated placidly.

"If you had the chance," Seemans retorted. He stared steadily at Whiteman; Whiteman met the look. Abe Seemans was not as smart as George Whiteman; he lacked Whiteman's cleverness, but he was every bit as unscrupulous. He didn't share Whiteman's cold-blooded willingness to kill, still he had a sort of cunning that stood him in good stead.

"Don't forget that you helped out in the Haslip affair," said Whiteman. "Don't forget—"

"We've got too much on each other to be sitting around makin' threats," Seemans stated placatingly. "You know I'm with you, George, an' you know I'll get you some cash as soon as I can. Haven't I always divvied up?"

"And you'll keep on!" threatened Whiteman. "All right, Abe, we'll drop it. Now about this other thing. . . ."

DUCK BUNN was disappointed in Larry Blue. Larry drank in saloon after saloon but it seemed to have no effect upon him save to increase the high, keen edge of his unrest. A good comfortable drunk and a headache the next morning would fix Larry about right, Duck thought. He had seen that prescription work before. The trouble was that Larry would not get drunk.

"And now where?" Duck demanded when they came out of the sixth saloon and went to the cab. "Now what's the next thing? This is the last saloon in this block."

Larry considered gravely. "We'll go to the show," he announced. "Drive to the theater."

At the Empire Opera House Duck waited, ill at ease, while Larry bought tickets. The show was more than half over. The ticket seller shrugged.

Larry took the tickets and joined Duck. Larry had paid enough for his seats to assure that they would be well down in front. He and Duck disturbed a number of people in gaining their seats, settled into them and Duck asked, loud enough to cause heads to turn in his direction, what he should do with his hat. Larry advised him to sit on it and someone behind advised them both to shut up.

They settled back, preparing to enjoy the last act of the play. When the curtain had fallen, the house lights were

lit, and Larry had a chance to look around. He saw, in a box to his right, the familiar figure of his brother. Beside Don was Constance, and Judge Lester, the pleated white bosom of his shirt gleaming, stood further back in the box. The anger in Larry and the liquor surged for control. He stared steadily at the box.

Constance saw him, Larry knew. She smiled and touched Don's arm. Don turned his head, saw Larry and turned away.

Ushers extinguished the lights, curtains parted, and from the stage a number of raucous voices informed them that:

"We are merry, merry maids; we play and sing all day."

Larry morosely watched the stage. He saw the chorus, plump-thighed and waists laced to thinness, perform various evolutions that might charitably have been called a dance. Then Annette Bondreaux came on stage and Larry forgot the chorus.

Annette sang. She had a voice, not strong but true and sweet. She danced. Larry watched her flashing feet and ankles as her big skirt swirled. He saw Annette smile at the boxes; saw her coquette with men in the front row, heard their guffaws. The liquor in Larry Blue began to take hold. That was little Annette Bondreaux up there. That was the little kid he had played with so long ago.

"It's a shame!" announced Larry, loud enough so that about him people turned to look. "A downright, dirty shame."

Duck Bunn put his hand on Larry's arm. He knew the symptoms. When men who held as much liquor as Larry held began to talk about things being a shame then they generally decided to do something about it.

"Hot in here," Duck whispered. "Let's get out."

"I'm not goin' out," Larry stated. "I'm staying."

Duck shrugged.

"What do you mean, 'a shame,' neighbor?" the bald man on Larry's other side demanded. "Don't you like the show?"

Larry stared at the speaker. The man who sat next to him was burly and what he lacked in hair on top of his head he made up with the hirsute adornments on his face. It was a glorious growth. Larry did not like the man who sat next to him. "Walrus," he observed. "Damned shame that she's got to sing to a walrus like you." It was a witty comment Larry thought, and he laughed.

Larry's neighbor did not see the humor. His breath was heavy with liquor and he was a surly drinker. "Lissen, squirt," said the bald-headed man, "anytime I got to take talk off'n a guy like you—"

Larry reached over and seized one handlebar mustache. With a sigh Duck Bunn reached back for the life preserver in his hip pocket. Hacking in Franklin was no peaceful pursuit and Duck went prepared.

The Empire Opera House of Franklin catered to all classes. The Empire was prepared to handle emergencies of all kinds. There were already three burly ushers and the house manager coming down the aisle when Larry pulled that mustache.

They had reached the row of seats by the time Duck swung his life preserver and they were evacuating the non-combatants when Larry hit the man beyond the handlebarred gentleman.

The ushers were trained and their teamwork was perfect. They had no trouble with Duck who went peacefully, but they had to carry Larry up the aisle. On the stage the show had stopped, to resume haltingly when the turmoil died.

In her box Constance Bolton caught at Don Blue's arm. "That was—"

"That was my brother," Don finished, coldly.

"Will they hurt him?" Constance gasped. "You had better go, Don. You had better—"

"He can look out for himself," snapped Don. "Haven't you had enough of this, Constance? Don't you want to go home?"

Judge Lester leaned over the girl. "We had better leave, my dear," he urged.

A mixture of emotions on her face, Constance arose from her chair. "I—" she began and then, swiftly, "Yes, I'll go. I've had enough."

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN COYOTES HOWL

AT MID-MORNING of the following day, Larry Blue groaned and opened one eye a trifle. Duck Bunn, sitting beside a table, head in his hands, straightened and walked over to the bed. "Comin' to life, are you?" growled Duck. "It's about time."

With an effort Larry got the other eye open. His surroundings were totally strange. Adobe walls, roughly plastered with mud, were on four sides, and through an open doorway the sun streamed in. Somewhere close by an engine bell was clanging, every stroke of the clapper finding an echo in Larry's head. "Where—?" demanded Larry thickly.

"My place," said Duck. "Here's part of the dawg that bit you. Lord, what a night!"

Taking the little glass of liquor, Larry drank and grimaced. "Tastes like a bucket of soap," he complimented. "What happened?"

"I'll give you one more little drink," announced Duck, squinting at the glass. "Last night? Oh yeah. You remember gettin' throwed out of the opery house?"

Larry nodded glumly and flinched as the engine's whistle sounded. "I can go that far back," he affirmed. "We got mixed up some after that."

"*You* got mixed up," corrected Duck. "I stayed sober. After we got throwed out of the theayter, we went places an' done things."

"I feel like it," Larry agreed ruefully. His two small drinks had taken hold; his head was clearing, and now he swung his feet over the edge of the bed and sat up.

"About one o'clock," Duck spoke with unction, "you was buyin' wine in the Crystal Palace. There was some disturbance upstairs an' the po-lice came. I got you out of there an' poured you in the hack an' brung you home. I wasn't goin' to take you to no hotel."

Larry nodded. "I made a first-class fool of myself," he said. "Thanks for playing nursemaid, Duck."

"You got a talent for makin' a fool of yorese'f," Duck agreed, disregarding the thanks. "Yore brother an' a girl seen you in the show. I reckon they thought highly of you. Anyhow yore brother didn't show up none."

"No reason for him to." Larry was terse. "I'll get dressed, Duck."

"I took care of the team," Duck said when Larry was dressed. "Now I'll go harness up an' take you back to the hotel. You'll want to eat."

Larry groaned. "I won't eat for a week."

The old hack-driver waddled out.

From what Larry could see of himself in Duck's fly-specked mirror, he looked like the wrath of God. Duck came back in, whistling cheerily. Larry flinched and followed Duck out of the adobe. The hack, with the team harnessed, stood beside the shack. Larry looked around.

Duck's home was on the far western edge of Franklin. The railroad yards were at his front door and only a little below the house. There was an engine puffing about the yards. Over beyond was the river.

"Nice place you got, Duck," Larry commented. "Nice an' quiet. A man can sleep good."

"You didn't complain none last night," grunted Duck. "Git in. You look like hell after a hard winter."

THE ride refreshed Larry. The air cleared his head and when he alighted from the cab in front of the Plaza Hotel he felt a great deal better.

In his room Larry washed and adjusted his clip holster under his right arm. As a matter of habit he removed the short-barreled gun from the holster and inspected it. The gun, a Smith & Wesson tip-up model, had been altered by the best gunsmith in the Rockies.

The barrel was cut off so that but two inches remained, the butt rounded, and the front of the trigger guard cut away. Larry had trained himself to shoot left-handed because he knew that in a jam an opponent would watch his right hand. Satisfied with the condition of his armament he put the gun away and slipped into his coat.

Larry was ashamed of himself. He had blown off steam the night before and, along with his headache, a natural reaction had set in.

Larry sat down in a chair in his room and considered the opposite wall. He remembered the things that Duck had said, and particularly he remembered that Don and Constance had been present during the display at the Empire Opera House. The fact that Constance had seen him expelled from the theater hurt. Thinking it over, Larry decided that he had better set matters to rights.

He could go to Constance and apologize for his acts but before he did that he had better see if Constance would receive him. He owed Don an apology too. Larry flushed when he thought of what he had said to Don. He would have to make that right with Don if he crawled to do it.

So resolved he got up from the chair and left his room, locking the door behind him.

When he reached Judge Lester's office he found the door to the anteroom open. Larry went in. Standing in the doorway he saw that Don's door was closed. Larry advanced a step and Judge Lester appeared in the door of his office.

Larry was shocked at his appearance. His face was deeply lined about mouth and nose, and the skin clung, skeleton-like, to his cheek bones. The eyes were deeply sunken under the white eyebrows, and Lester's voice was hoarse when he spoke.

"Good morning, Mr. Blue."

Larry said, "Good morning," and waited.

"You have come to see Don?" asked Lester.

"Yes," said Larry. "I want to see him. It strikes me that I made kind of a fool of myself last night and I wanted to tell him so."

"Don will be here soon," Lester said. "He is busy now. He— A terrible thing happened last night, Mr. Blue. DeWitt killed a man."

Larry's eyes narrowed. "Yes?" he asked evenly.

LESTER nodded, and walking across the anteroom sank down wearily into a chair. "He killed a man named Justice," announced the old lawyer.

Larry nodded.

"DeWitt was with Justice and the Bondreaux woman and Mr. Whiteman and some others," Lester continued, his voice lifeless. "They had a party at the Crystal Palace. It seems that DeWitt and Justice quarreled and DeWitt shot him. He had been drinking, of course. They had all been drinking."

"Who saw the shooting?" asked Larry crisply. "Annette?"

Judge Lester shook his head. "She was out of the room at the time it happened," he said. "So was Mr. Whiteman, I understand. The men who saw the actual shooting were Mr. Fernald and a Mr. Morton. Mr. Morton is the proprietor of the Crystal Palace."

"They were in the restaurant?" Larry asked.

Lester shook his head. "Upstairs in a private room," he answered. "DeWitt remembers nothing about it. He had a weapon, a gun that he bought shortly after he came to Franklin. That was beside him on the table with one cartridge discharged. They are holding DeWitt without bond pending hearing."

"And Don—?"

"Don is with DeWitt and Constance now." Still that lifeless lassitude in Lester's voice. "Constance insisted upon seeing her brother and Don . . ."

"I guess I'll wait for Don to come in," Larry announced.

The judge remained a small, sunken

shape in his chair. Presently he raised his head. "Don had an engagement with you last night," he said. "I am sorry that he did not stay with you. Constance insisted upon seeing this woman with whom DeWitt is infatuated, and of course Don and I could not let her go alone."

"Of course not," Larry agreed. Walking over to the old lawyer, Larry stood before him. "You said one time that Whiteman and Seemans were pretty bad," he observed. "Will this get Don into a tight spot?"

"I don't know," answered Lester, wearily. "I wish that Don had gone with you. I wish that he were away from Franklin."

Larry shrugged. Don was here and Don was in this, and if Larry knew anything about his brother, Don would stay in it. The thing was, of course, to protect Don.

Steps sounded in the corridor and Don Blue came into the anteroom. He looked at Larry and through him, no recognition in his eyes, and spoke to Judge Lester. "Constance is down stairs in the carriage," he said. "Why don't you take her home, Judge? Take her home and get some rest. There is nothing that we can do now." Don's voice was gentle.

"I believe I will," agreed Lester, wearily. "Are you coming, Don?"

Don shook his head. "Not right now," he returned. "I'll get a bite to eat and then talk to some of the witnesses. You go along, Judge."

Lester was courteous. He bowed to Larry and, taking his hat from the rack, went to the door. "If you learn anything, Don, you had better come to the house," he said pausing beside the door. "I will be back here later, of course."

"I'll come out, Judge," promised Don. The judge went on out to the street.

WHEN he was gone Don turned to Larry, apparently seeing him for the first time. "Well?" he said bitterly, "why have you come here?"

Larry was frank. "I made a fool of myself last night," he answered. "I talked like a fool and I acted like one. I'm sorry."

Don's face softened momentarily, and then hardened again. "You know what happened?" he asked.

Larry nodded.

"As dirty a frameup as I've ever seen," Don continued. "DeWitt did not kill that man. DeWitt was too drunk to talk when Judge Lester and I were called to the jail this morning. I'm going to get to the bottom of this if it is the last thing I do."

"Let me help," Larry offered eagerly. "I kind of know about things like this, Don. I've seen the inside of some pretty seamy deals."

"I have no doubt of it." Don's voice was curt. "Odd, isn't it, that this happened as as soon as that will turned up?"

Larry started to speak, then decided to remain silent. Don was not finished.

"I think, Larry," Don went on, "that you've done enough damage. Constance saw you last night in the theater. Naturally it gives her no greater consideration for me to know that my brother is a drunken rowdy. If it is just the same to you I'd rather that you kept hands off. I thank you for your offer, but I believe that I can handle this without your help."

Again Larry made ready to speak, and again he stopped. There were steps on the stairs, several men ascending. They came on toward the office and both Don and Larry turned so that they faced the door.

Abe Seemans entered, with puffy jowls and beady eyes almost hidden by fat. Behind Seemans came a long-faced, buck-toothed man with eyes so light a color as to seem almost white. Judge Lester followed the long faced man. It was Lester who spoke.

"I met Mr. Seemans and Mr. Whiteman coming to the office, Don," he explained. "They want to talk with us about DeWitt." Lester saw Larry Blue and stopped. "If you are busy—" he began after a moment's hesitation.

"I'm not busy," said Don. "Come into the judge's office, gentlemen."

Seemans and Whiteman, obeying that in-

vitation, walked past Larry. Seemans nodded as though Larry were an acquaintance, but Whiteman gave Larry only a long, hard stare.

Lester followed them, and Don, turning from Larry without another word, went into the office and closed the door. For an instant Larry eyed that closed door, then with a shrug he walked toward the corridor. . . .

ABE SEEMANS took a chair beside Lester's desk, Whiteman sat in another chair against the wall, and Lester lowered his tired body into the seat behind the desk.

"George and I thought that we had better come to you, Judge Lester," Seemans began. "We wanted to talk to you concerning that affair last night. It is very bad."

Don watched the speaker, and Judge Lester nodded. "Very bad," he echoed.

"Of course we don't want to be too hard on young Bolton," Seemans continued, his voice fat and unctuous. "In a way he is my nephew. His aunt is very much distressed over the whole thing."

Lester said, "I can imagine," his voice dry. Under pressure the old man was rallying.

"Now George and I have come here to make what arrangements we can," Seemans went on. "Feeling as I do, of course I will help all that I can. Still, you understand my official position." He cleared his throat ponderously.

"Yes," said Lester.

"George and I know that the young man was deeply enamored of Miss Bondreaux," continued Seemans. "We understand that jealousy led to the difficulty which resulted in DeWitt's shooting Justice. In fact George here heard the quarrel start."

"They fought over the girl," Whiteman said bluntly.

"We appreciate your concern, gentlemen." Don took a hand in the talk. "Now if we can come to business . . ."

"Ahem!" Seemans cleared his throat again. "As you know, Mr. Morton and Mr. Fernald were witnesses to the actual shooting. They have already testified before the coroner. Miss Bondreaux was spared that ordeal and Mr. Whiteman, as prosecutor, could not—"

"Mr. Whiteman's being a witness automatically disqualifies him to take any part in the prosecution," Don broke in. "Certainly in defending DeWitt I shall call on Mr. Whiteman to testify."

Whiteman started to speak but Seemans interposed. "And very properly, too," he agreed. "However, there is a possibility that it will not be necessary to defend DeWitt."

"What do you mean?" Don snapped the question.

Seemans cleared his throat again. "I—ah—I have certain connections, as you know," he said. "I am acquainted with Mr. Morton and with Mr. Fernald. Now if they were to testify that DeWitt shot in self-defense there would be no case and no prosecution. You gentlemen can see that."

"Yes," Judge Lester took up the burden of answering, once more. "We can see that."

"Mr. Morton and Mr. Fernald might be approached," continued Seemans. "They—ah—they—"

Whiteman was tired of this beating around the bush. His voice was direct and blunt and bespoke his weariness with diplomacy. "Abe means that Morton and Fernald can be reached," he said. "But it'll take a lot of money."

"I won't—" Don began.

Judge Lester stopped him. "What is the proposition, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Just this." Whiteman gave Seemans no chance to answer. "If Morton and Fernald are seen by the right party and paid enough they would change their testimony."

"This is—" Don began.

Again Lester interposed. "How much money?"

"A good deal." Seemans spoke now, Whiteman having brought the business to the climax. "I am afraid more than you or than Mrs. Seemans and I can raise.

Now I had this in mind: There is that property of Archer Bolton's. Both the children and my wife have a claim upon it. I thought—"

"You forget that Archer Bolton left a will giving that property to Constance and DeWitt," Lester spoke crisply.

Seemans coughed. "A will which we will protest," he announced. "Mrs. Seemans has every legal claim upon that property as you well know. However, let that pass. If Constance and DeWitt sign a quit-claim deed to that property I am sure that I can raise sufficient money to satisfy the demands of Mr. Morton and Mr. Fernald. I dislike anything so smacking of bribery, but there it is. Surely DeWitt's life is more valuable than—"

"I'll be damned if we will!" There was a ring in Don's voice. "We won't turn that property over to anyone. If these men can be bribed they can be discredited in court. I intend to fight this case. I'll use every legal method to protect DeWitt, but if DeWitt killed that man he is guilty and should be punished. I strongly suspect, however, that he did not kill Justice. This visit—"

"Don!" Lester's voice, raised and sharp, stopped the younger man.

"What were you going to say, Blue?" That was Whiteman, ominous and sinister.

"I was going to say—" Don began.

"Gentlemen," Lester spoke swiftly in interruption, "you must forgive Mr. Blue. He is overwrought and young. No— Not a word, Don! I—"

Again Whiteman spoke, low-toned like the growling of a dangerous dog. "I hope that Mr. Blue will live long enough to recover from being so young. Witness or not I'm going to prosecute this case. We've done what we can for you. You can take this offer or—"

"Or what?" Don flared.

"You'll find a wolf cut loose," Whiteman concluded. "Let's go, Abe."

Seemans was still oily, still unctuous. "We will give you time to think the matter over, Judge," he said. "You can get word to me. Good day, Mr. Blue."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ONLY DECENT MAN

WHEN Larry Blue reached the street after leaving Don's office, he turned left and started back toward the Plaza. He had taken but a few steps when his name was called. Glancing up from his study of the board sidewalk, Larry saw Constance Bolton sitting in Lester's barouche beside the curb. She was looking at Larry and as their eyes met she beckoned. Removing his hat, Larry approached the girl.

"You are walking, Mr. Blue," Constance said when Larry came up. "Can't I take you to your hotel?"

Larry hesitated. "Why—thank you," he said.

"Get in," Constance moved on the seat. "We will go to the Plaza Hotel, Felipe."

As the barouche moved along, Larry looked at the girl beside him. Constance had been weeping. Larry wanted to offer solace to the girl, but did not know how to begin.

Constance came to his aid. "You know about DeWitt?" she asked.

Larry nodded. "I heard," he answered hesitantly. "If I—if there is anything . . ."

"DeWitt has always been wild." Apparently Constance had not heard his offer. "He—I thought that if we came to Franklin he might change. He is my brother and I love him, but—"

"He's pretty young," Larry apologized.

"He is as old as you are. He is older than Don, and Don doesn't—"

"Don's got reasons to behave," said Larry, eyeing the girl. She flushed pink under his scrutiny. "Me—I'm not an angel," he continued. "Sometimes I . . ."

With a movement of her hand Constance checked Larry's self-accusation. "DeWitt is weak," she said. "You—you are not weak, Larry."

The name fell softly from her lips. Larry realized that she used it unconsciously. "You—you have been our good genie, Larry. Don found the will my stepfather left because you asked him to look again. You . . ."

Larry turned from the girl, not hearing her. He knew why DeWitt Bolton was in jail, accused of murder. He knew why Constance was weeping and troubled. It was because of the will. He had thought to bring things to a head; thought that the document would clear the way for this girl and her brother.

But that had not been the real reason for his forgery: He had wanted to help Don. And now, because of his action, Constance was troubled, DeWitt was accused of murder, and Don—Don was alienated. And still, Constance sat beside him, her very presence a joy, her eyes soft and lighting when he looked into them, her voice sweet when she spoke his name: "Larry."

"Don said that you would go back to Denver after—after last night." Once more Larry caught the thread of the girl's words. "Don't go. Don't Larry. I—we need you here."

"I'm not going back to Denver yet awhile," said Larry, and then, the words odd to the girl because apparently they had no revelance: "I stand by what I do. My bets stick."

FELIPE pulled the carriage in to the sidewalk in front of the Plaza, stopped his team and turned and looked at his passengers. Constance Bolton's hand lay over Larry's and her voice was very earnest when she said two words, "I'm glad."

Larry realized that they could not sit there in the barouche talking. He pressed the girl's hand where it lay in his palm, and rising, got out of the carriage.

"But—Don won't take it kindly," he said gravely.

"I am disgusted with Don." The girl flushed again. "Last night I wanted him to help you and he would not. He thinks—"

"Don't quarrel with Don about me," said Larry. "I'm not worth it."

The girl's eyes were veiled by her long lashes. "Perhaps—perhaps I don't feel that way," she said. "I—I must go now. Drive home, Felipe."

Larry watched the barouche roll away, then turning, he went into the hotel. He wanted time to think and a quiet place to do his thinking.

When he had made himself comfortable upon the bed in his room, his feet propped up and a cigarette rolled, Larry squinted up through the smoke and let his mind work.

A man lying on a bed, smoking a cigarette and thinking about a girl can build air castles. Larry Blue did. . . . In Denver Larry could build a house, set up an establishment. He could quit gambling. Royal, his partner, would never say a word except perhaps: "Play your hand out, kid." It would be all right with Royal. In Denver . . . But what was he doing thinking about Denver? He was in Franklin and there were things to be done. Don . . .

It always came back to Don. All his life things had centered about Don. Why shouldn't he let Don go, let him hoe his own row?

He sighed, and thought of practical things.

There were three witnesses against DeWitt Bolton. Annette Bondreaux was one of them. He must see Annette. The other two witnesses were planted. Who had Lester said? A man named Fernald and another named Morton. Annette was a showgirl. Her reputation was none too good if the clerk's wink had meant anything. She might, perhaps, be discounted a little. The other two . . .

Larry began to get ideas about the other two, ideas that crystallized into movement. He swung his feet down from the bed, got up and slipped into his coat. He would talk with Duck Bunn and then perhaps he could get some action.

Duck's hack was not in the cab rank at the corner. The other drivers, interrogated, did not know where Duck was. Larry was angry. It was late afternoon, he had not eaten all day, and Duck was not on hand when he was needed.

"You tell Bunn to come to the Oxford for me when he gets back," Larry in-

structed the driver he had questioned. "Here. Here's for your trouble. Tell him to get down there."

The driver looked at the bill. He grinned. "Yes, *sir*," the driver agreed. "I'll tell him. Want me to take you down there?"

"I'll walk," Larry answered, and swung off toward the Oxford.

AT THE Oxford Hotel the clerk greeted him obsequiously. The clerk remembered the other visit and the tip. Miss Bondreaux was in her room and the gent could go right up. Larry swung away from the desk.

Annette was dressing. Her hair was fluffy about her head. "I was hoping you would come, Larry," she said. "I had meant to send you a note. I wanted to see you."

"I wanted to see you, Annette," said Larry briskly. His voice was commonplace, no meaning note in it. Annette's eyes lost some of their sparkle. "I want to talk to you about last night."

"Oh," Annette said slowly, "last night. It was an awful night, Larry. It seems like a nightmare."

"Pretty tough, all right." There was no sympathy in Larry's tone. "I imagine it upset you. You were pretty sweet on young Bolton?"

Sudden anger flared in Annette. "I hated him," she answered. "He was always—he tried to . . ."

Larry stopped the girl. "He's just a kid," he apologized for DeWitt. "You've got to make allowances for him. Don's going to defend him, Annette, and I came over to see if you could help any. I'd like to know what happened last night."

"It's always Don," Annette's voice was bitter. "When we were kids it was Don—Don—Don—I'm sick of Don. Let him look out for himself!"

"But confound it, Annette," Larry's temper was short, "Don's my brother. This young Bolton—"

"He killed the only decent man in Franklin, as far as I'm concerned," Annette flared. "I came back into that room and there he sat, drunk, with his gun on the table beside him and Wayne . . ."

The girl turned, flung herself down on the bed and sobs shook her slim body. Larry, helpless, looked at the disaster he had wrought.

"Now just a minute, Annette," he beseeched. "Now don't get upset. I just wanted—"

"You're like all the rest." The girl turned, sat up, her eyes flashing. "You want. You want! All I ever hear from men is what they want! How big they are. What they will do for me! The only man that didn't follow after me like a bloodhound was Wayne Justice, and your precious brother's client killed him."

This would never do. Larry knew that he was off on the wrong foot. He tried another course.

"DeWitt's sister is about crazy over this thing," he said, softening his voice. "She's crying her eyes out over her brother. You're a girl, Annette and—"

"And I have cried my eyes out over a man too," Annette flung the words at him. "Larry—" Her eyes lost their hard look and became questioning. "Do you like her?" Annette asked.

Larry nodded. "She's a lady," he said, and unknowingly cut deeply with his words. "She—she doesn't belong to the same kind of people that we do, Annette. I—well, I like her." His conclusion was awkward, saying more than the words themselves expressed.

"Are you in love with her?" Annette's eyes were searching.

Larry flushed. "Don's in love with her," he equivocated. "I didn't mean to talk about Constance. I just wanted to know if there was anything that would help Don. He'll put you on the witness stand, Annette, and he'll make it pretty tough I'm afraid." There was a warning in that.

Annette's face hardened. "I'm used to things that are tough," she said. "Do you think working in a show like this one is a bed of roses?" Her laugh was high and unnatural.

Larry blundered on. "I just didn't want you to get hurt, kid," he said. "I know that you've had it tough. Maybe I could make it easier for you. I'll talk to Don."

"I don't need your help!" Annette threw the proffered kindness back into Larry's face. "You can tell your brother that I don't know a thing that will help him get that murderer off, and I'll go on the witness stand and swear that as far as I know, Bolton killed Wayne Justice. You came here talking about helping Don and all the time you're thinking about that girl. You're in love with her. Get out and leave me alone. Get out. Get out!"

Annette flung herself face down on the bed once more, the robe tight about her, her slim body shaken with the grief within it. Larry, bewildered, looked at the girl and then slowly, a step at a time, backed to the door, opened it, and went out.

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE THING TO DO

DUCK BUNN'S cab was at the curb when Larry emerged from the Oxford Hotel. Duck, standing beside the hack, tried to explain his earlier absence, but Larry, shaken, was in no mood for talk. "I want to go some place where I can ask you some questions, Duck," he said.

Larry climbed into the hack and Duck drove off.

Twice on the way to the western edge of town he stopped and went into stores, making purchases. When they did reach his adobe Duck got down and broke into Larry's silence. "Look after the team," he commanded. "You don't need to take off the harness. Just unhook an' water an' feed 'em."

Larry was glad for something to do. At the little barn behind the adobe, he pumped a trough full of water for the horses, threw down hay from a little stack, and found a battered tin pail in which to measure oats from a meager store.

Returning to the house after the team was cared for, Larry found Duck frying steak.

"Duck," Larry announced, "I need some information. Not food."

Squinting his eyes to avoid the smoke of hot grease, Duck made answer. "You can have it if I got it," he assured, turning the steak. "Set the table. This meat's a'most done. You gotta eat."

Larry found utensils in a cupboard nailed to the wall. While he placed them he spoke. "Here's the layout, Duck: DeWitt Bolton's in jail for murder and I've got to get him out. I got him in, I reckon."

Duck, dishing the meat, paused with his fork in mid-air. "You got him in?" he said incredulously. "How come?"

"I just feel that I did."

Larry freed his mind to old Duck Bunn. He knew that talking to Duck was like throwing it down a well, it would never turn up to bother him again.

And so he told of writing the will, of Don's actions, and of how Don wanted to stay with Lester. Constance Bolton came into the tale. And Annette Bondreaux.

By the time Larry had finished, they were through eating and Duck had stuffed a pipe while Larry rolled a cigarette.

"Yeah," said Duck Bunn, lighting his pipe, "I reckon yo're some responsible, Larry. Findin' that will kind of brung things to a head, it looks like."

Larry nodded glumly. "They made the frameup on DeWitt when the will came to light," he said.

Duck squinted solemnly at the smoke. "Luella Seemans likes a dollar," he announced. "She's closer'n a burr in a sheep's hide. I reckon she's behind it."

Again Larry nodded.

"An' that Bolton girl," said Duck. "You think yo're in love with her." He did not ask a question, simply stated his belief.

Larry flushed. "She's Don's girl," he said. "I—well, I like her . . ."

"You think yo're in love with her," Duck repeated stubbornly. "Better forget it."

"Why?" Larry was alert and perhaps a little angry.

"She ain't our kind," said Duck. "She's been raised gentle. She ain't never saw the rough string, Larry. Better forget her."

"What do you know about it?" Larry snapped.

"I was in love onct." Duck puffed placidly. "Preacher's daughter back in Ioway. I wasn't her kind nor she mine. We found it out in time. I know plenty about women, I do."

Larry sniffed, and Duck, his calm ruffled, took the pipe out of his mouth. "Yo're nothin' but a kid," he said scornfully. "Women's a life study, boy. You don't learn 'em in a minute. Wait 'til yo're as old as me."

"All right, grandpa," Larry said. "Then tell me what I did wrong this afternoon when I went to see Annette."

"You let her know that you was stuck on the other gal." Duck put his finger unerringly upon the weak place. "That's what you done wrong. Still I wouldn't be surprised if she come through for you. There's a gal"—Duck's tone was admiring—"that a feller wouldn't have to look back to see was she along. She'll do, Annette will."

"Well," said Larry, "I'm no judge of women. Let it go at that. Now what about Fernald and Morton?"

"Morton runs the Crystal Palace for Abe Seemans," stated Duck. "Fernald lives over to yore hotel an' caps the games. He drags in any strangers that look like they had the dinero. Seemans owns 'em both."

"I thought that, but where can I get hold of them?"

"You can't buy 'em off," warned Duck. "They'll have to go through for Seemans. He'd kill 'em if they didn't, an' if he didn't get 'em, Whiteman would. They know it."

"I wasn't figurin' to buy 'em off," said Larry. "I want to talk to them."

"Together?"

"If I can."

"Then you can find 'em in the Crystal Palace restaurant along sometime after midnight," Duck stated positively. "I've seen 'em there every night I looked in."

"Then I'll look for them tonight," Larry stated. "Maybe I could get them to come out here and talk."

"Not unless you had 'em at the end of a gun," said Duck.

"Well," Larry drawled, "I've got a gun. You'd drive me out, wouldn't you, Duck?"

"Sure. But gettin' 'em . . ."

"I made a fool of myself last night," Larry stated. "Now it looks like I could maybe use that. Here's what we'll do, Duck. Listen." He bent forward across the table, and Duck Bunn, pipe forgotten, listened closely.

WHILE Duck and Larry talked, Annette Bondreaux made up her mind. As quickly as she could, she dressed, and called a carriage to drive her to Judge Lester's. Directing the driver to wait, Annette asked for Miss Bolton. Invited to enter, Annette stood in the hall, her hands nervously touching her hair or rearranging her dress until Constance appeared.

"I am Annette Bondreaux," the girl announced when Constance came to meet her. "I—I wanted to see you. Is there some place we can talk?"

Constance hid her surprise and smiled wanly at her visitor. "We can go into the music room," she said. "I didn't expect you, Miss Bondreaux."

"I didn't expect to come," Annette interrupted. "I thought— Well," calmly, "I just wanted to see you."

Constance led the way into the music room and gestured toward a chair. "Is it about DeWitt that you have come?"

"In a way it is about DeWitt. I—Miss Bolton, did you ask Larry Blue to come to see me?"

The surprise on Constance's face was answer enough. Annette went on rapidly. "Have you talked to Larry Blue?"

"Yes." Constance was frank. "I talked with him. I asked him to help us if he could."

"And what did he say?"

"He promised to help. I don't know why I tell you this. I don't know by what right you come here. After all my brother —my brother would be here with us now if it were not for you. You infatuated him. You—"

"Can't we leave that out?" Annette's voice was weary. "What I've done doesn't matter. Will you answer one more question?"

"There is no reason why I should." Constance was firm and cool. "After all—"

"One more question: What is Larry Blue to you? Do you—?"

"Mr. Blue is a friend!" Constance drew herself rigidly erect. "He has been very kind. His brother, of course, is DeWitt's counsel. Naturally Larry would—"

That one word was enough. Larry! Annette lowered her eyes. "I think I understand," she said softly. "I've come to help you, Miss Bolton. Can I speak to Don Blue or to Judge Lester?"

"Why—why yes!" Constance was eager. "They will be here in a moment. I didn't understand, Miss Bondreaux. I didn't know that you had come to help. Sit down. As soon as Judge Lester comes—"

"I can't wait." With an effort Annette controlled her emotions. "Tell him this: Tell him that Wayne Justice said that he was going to get your brother. I'll swear to that on a witness stand. I'll swear to it!" Annette's voice had risen until it was almost a scream. Constance Bolton, moving toward the distraught girl, caught at Annette's shoulder.

"I don't understand," she began. "I don't know—"

"Judge Lester will understand." Annette pushed aside the restraining hand. "Tell him what I said. I must go now. I—I must go."

She brushed by Constance, hardly seeing her, reached the door and caught at the jamb.

Then, more steadily, she passed through the opening and when Constance reached the hall, Annette was at the outer door.

She let herself out, Constance running after her, went to the cab and got in. The cab rolled away just as Constance Bolton reached the doorway of Lester's home.

Constance looked after the cab, watched it as it turned out of the driveway and started down the hill, then reëntered the house. Constance Bolton's mind was in a turmoil, but the seething within it was as nothing to the tumult that raged in Annette's brain.

Annette had scarcely entered her hotel before George Whiteman stepped from the curbing and approached the driver.

"Miss Bondreaux, wasn't it?" asked Whiteman of the driver.

"Yeah." The cabman nodded, pocketing the money that Annette had given him. "Want to go some place, Mister Whiteman?"

Whiteman shook his head. "Where did you take her?" he asked.

The driver gestured.

"Up to Lester's. Waited for her an' brought her back."

Whiteman stepped back to the curb and favored the front of the Oxford with a long, slow stare. Presently he turned and walked slowly down the street. He went a few steps, turned, and retraced them. Pushing open the door he went into the lobby.

Annette had just taken her key from the clerk and reached the foot of the stairs, when Whiteman's call stopped her.

"Annette!"

The girl turned. "Yes?" she said, and then seeing who had called to her, she paled. Whiteman, smiling, came to her side. "You have had a distressing day, my dear," he said gently. "Are you too tired to have supper with me tonight? Just a quiet supper at the Crystal Palace. We'll go to the restaurant."

Annette hesitated. She was tempted to refuse. Then she smiled at Whiteman and nodded. "I'd like to, George," she said disarmingly. "Just we two."

"And no one else," assured Whiteman.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

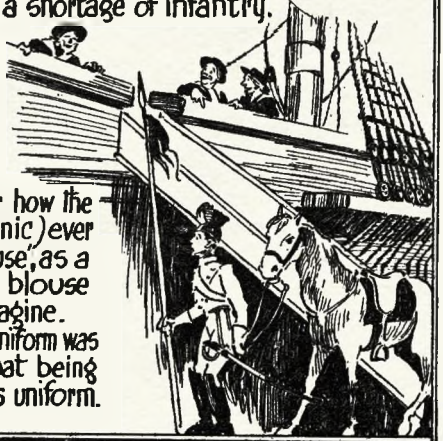
ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS

·PYRRHIC VICTORY·

Today means victory gained at too great a cost. King Pyrrhus, after the battle of Asculum (279 B.C.) compared his own staggering losses with those of the defeated enemy. His officers congratulated him on his triumph and he replied, "One more such victory over the Romans and we are utterly undone."

·HORSE-MARINES·

Although Marines have served as mounted troops, the name "Horse-Marines" is only used humorously; but as a matter of fact in Queen Anne's reign, the Royal Lancers were once assigned to ship duties owing to a shortage of infantry.

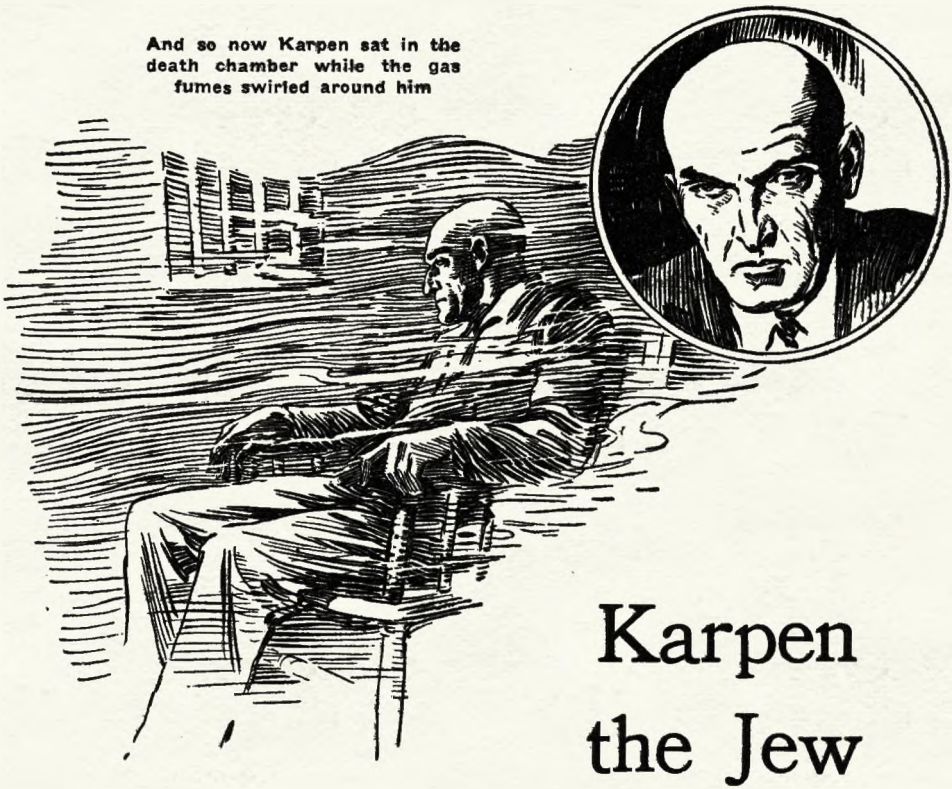


·BLOUSE·

Many civilians wonder how the army service coat (or tunic) ever came to be called a "blouse", as a garment more unlike a blouse would be difficult to imagine. Originally the undress uniform was actually a blouse, the coat being worn only with the dress uniform.

· SASH ·

Military sashes were first used not as a mere decoration, but to make litters for carrying wounded from the field.



And so now Karpen sat in the death chamber while the gas fumes swirled around him

Karpen the Jew

Around the great table in that impregnable room were gathered the ambassadors of the four great ones of the world—and with them, unseen, sat the envoy of an even Greater One

By ROBERT NEAL LEATH

Author of "Fighting Grannie O'Grady," "The Golden Pitcher," etc.

AFTERWARDS, the newspapers screamed that John Albertson, president of Consolidated American Steel, accidentally had fallen to his death from a window of his suite on the sixth floor of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco. Four monstrously important diplomats swore to it.

I was there. Karpen was there also. It didn't happen like that. Probably the diplomats believed what they said and they looked at me with amazement afterwards and called me a liar. They said they had never seen me before. Okay. Select the truth for yourself. But I'm telling it my way because Brenda, she of the gardenia skin and the deeply exciting eyes, had a baby this morning and I fear to watch that baby grow, for it is also the baby of Karpen the Jew and I wonder how very long it might live.

I met Karpen through Silverstein, the third night before Christmas Eve. Silverstein was violently shivering, although the fog was not particularly cold that night. I let him in and he sat down, shivering, holding his hat between his knees, and said, "Have you got a drink, Jack?"

"Why, yes. Of course."

I gave him the bottle and he chose a water glass and drank whisky from it.

I thought a slug that size would knock him cold, he shook so badly, but it didn't.

"You read the newspapers?" Silverstein asked. He was state executioner at San Quentin, the guy who operated the lethal gas chamber, and I'd met him in a beer joint. I will meet anybody, provided he is not fighting ugly from drink, and I'll listen to anybody, if he will talk, particularly in beer joints. I had known Silverstein thirteen months.

"I do read 'em," I said coldly, because Silverstein certainly couldn't have forgotten I was a newspaperman.

He said, "This morning we tried to execute Karpen," and looked at me with the dark brown eyes of his race almost starting from his head.

His words had had a shock punch behind them, and I'd felt it.

"Tried?"

Suddenly Silverstein let his head fall forward where his hands could hold it, and he began to sob. "I tell you!" he said with a gasp. "We tried at ten A.M. on the dot. The lever did not fail. You know how the chamber works? I trip this little lever, see, and a cyanide egg drops into sulphuric acid, and that makes the gas. But within a few seconds I knew there was something wrong. Karpen failed to squirm. He didn't choke nor gasp, the horrible way they do," Silverstein said. "Nothing happened whatever. And there the gas was, rising round him—"

I TOLD Silverstein to take more whisky, and when he realized what I was talking about he did. He gulped the whisky from the water glass and it didn't hit him, it only made him hold on to himself a little.

Silverstein said, "I watched the indicators, I tell you! Enough gas to kill a herd of elephants. We blew the chamber out and Karpen smiled. We put a white rat in there with him and dropped another cyanide egg and the rat ran about, frantic, squeaking, and went into convulsions and died. But Karpen kept on smiling. After twenty minutes they took Karpen back to his cell. I—I went to see him there."

Abruptly Silverstein's voice was a horrified whisper. "I hadn't really looked at Karpen in the death chamber, but I looked at him now and—God help me!—I remembered him from some time long, long ago! I had never seen him during all my life, but I remembered him. From some time long, long ago," Silverstein whispered. "They were going to try again at ten o'clock tonight. But—" and here Silverstein's voice rose to an almost uncontrolled screech— "they didn't."

I looked at my clock. Twelve minutes past ten P. M. My reason told me that Sliverstein could not possibly know whether the execution had been attempted a second time, or not; because you can't cross the bay from San Quentin to San Francisco in anything even close to twelve minutes. Karpen, I knew, was a murderer, condemned to death for the apparently unprovoked slaying of an international banker.

"Why not?" I said.

"Because—I let Karpen out," Silverstein said. "I—I *remembered* Karpen the Jew from some time long, long ago. I tell you I remembered Karpen the Jew!" Silverstein screamed.

I said, "Excuse me," and started out into the hall where I had a telephone. I figured he was nuts. I figured I could shut the door into the hall and call some help. You never know what a nut might do—especially a nut who has been earning a living as an executioner. Nobody, I thought, can "let" a condemned murderer out of San Quentin, except a court or the California governor.

"Don't telephone," Silverstein said dully. "It's not what you think. I've got my right mind."

I don't know why I believed him. I came back and stood in the middle of my living room.

"Why do you come, now, to me, Silverstein?"

"Because you are my friend," he said, "the only one I have."

From his manner I guessed there was

something else. He was holding something back.

"What else?"

"Because Karpen said your name," Silverstein strangely replied, lifting his head. "Karpen is waiting outside in the hall. Can he come in?"

WELL, that was something, all right. Perhaps you know that feeling when your spine seems suddenly to chill and the hairs rise on the back of your neck and between your shoulder blades. A condemned killer, fugitive from a death house, waiting outside in my hall. Wanting to come in. A killer whom I'd never seen in the flesh although I knew his features quite well from pictures—but who could have been acquainted with my own name only through some circumstance unknown to me. *Can he come in?*

"Has he got a gun?" I said.

"Why no. No, of course not," Silverstein said, and queerly added: "I think he does not need a gun."

I did. I needed a gun and I had one. I got it out of my desk and put it in my right coat pocket. I said, "Open the door."

Silverstein obeyed and Karpen the Jew came in.

He was wearing an old, dark suit that needed pressing. He was tall, well over six feet. He was gaunt, with wide shoulders and long arms and the slightest trace of a stoop, although he held his head erect. His head was entirely bald; no single hair was on it. His skin was very dark and his face was wide across the cheek bones and rather flat, as though his blood had been peasant's blood some time long ago.

He looked in the vigorous middle of life, although I could not then, nor did I ever, determine his precise age. But despite all the extraordinary qualities of his appearance I thought most striking of all was the extraordinary, deep sadness in his eyes.

There were a couple of severe wrinkles down his cheeks, a couple more across his forehead, but he had a complete absence of small wrinkles. I thought, without being able to put my finger on my reason, that he looked somehow unlike any other man I'd ever seen. He took the poorest chair and sat down, clasping his knobby hands together on his lap.

"Would you like a drink?" I said. "Whisky?"

"Please," he said.

What else could you say, what else could you do for a man who had just skipped a date with death—save offer him a drink? "I haven't much time," I said. I wanted to get out of there. "I'm taking a plane for New York."

Karpen said, "You don't mean Washington?"

I stared at him.

No, I very carefully had not meant, nor said, Washington. But I'd been lying. Washington was correct. I had a tip on the damnedest story any newspaperman could hope to get. I had the address of a Washington house—a palace, really. I probably wouldn't be able to get inside that house, but merely to try was worth a hop across a whole continent.

"Don't bother," Karpen softly said. Then he added in a swift monotonous tone, as though parroting from memory: "You've got a tip, Jack Murphy, on the damnedest story that could ever come a newspaperman's way."

He wasn't reading my mind. Nobody can read your mind, my reason told me. But—I strangely questioned—*can* nobody? I felt sweat coming out of my skin and my voice was harsh, metallic.

"How do you know that?"

Karpen smiled.

"Don't bother," he repeated. "Their plans have been changed. I need some money. Let's take a walk."

My brain was whirling like an off-centered top.

"Whose plans?" I demanded savagely.

KARPEN put one big hand out, palm upward, and ticked the names off with his fingers.

"The plans of five men. John Albert-

son. Prince Taguchi. Bahkmeteff. Callieri. Sturmer. They won't meet in Washington. Taguchi was delayed."

I said, "Taguchi arrived here yesterday morning on the *President Cleveland.* He started east immediately."

"No. Taguchi's brother arrived, using the name of the Prince. For purposes of dissimulation. Prince Taguchi is coming on the *Asama Maru* and the *Asama Maru* survived a slight collision with a barge in Tokio harbor. Nevertheless the ship was delayed sixty hours."

"I'll check that," I said, and stood up.

"The other four men are coming west to meet Taguchi, using a special train. They left Washington yesterday morning. Not by plane. In the air you must keep moving forward to keep on living. Truly important men may invest in the air but they themselves travel on the surface of the ground and the sea. The four will meet Taguchi in the Mark Hopkins Hotel on Christmas Eve."

"I'll check that special train, too," I said.

Silverstein had no idea what it was all about but he said with strained conviction, "You will find Karpen is right."

On my way to the telephone I looked in a mirror. My face was blotched, whitish. Karpen the Jew, within the realm of normal possibility, could not conceivably have known about that scheduled Washington conference. In addition to myself, only a very few other persons in the world were supposed to know. One was a woman.

John Albertson, in secret, sometimes went haywire and blew his top off with drink. He drank with his mistress—a blonde and strange and generous girl I'd loved some years ago, during college. Never mind her name. She's still around. Maybe some day she will get on long-distance again and send me another tip, because she still has some affection for me and understands I've got to move up in this newspaper racket and I can't do it without a lot of very special information. She wasn't Brenda. Brenda, you remember, is handsomely dark.

Yes, the office said, it was true that the *Asama Maru* had sustained a minor collision in Tokio harbor. The *Asama Maru* would reach San Francisco Christmas Eve. The office did not, of course, possess the passenger list of the *Asama Maru.* Even had the office had it, the list wouldn't have done any good. Checking Karpen's statement about the special train took more time. More than an hour—and a big telephone bill. I called our Washington staff man and he called me back.

"There's nothing but a rumor," he said. "A special train probably did pull out of here. You may be right. You named four guys. Not one of them can be located in Washington any place he ought to be."

"Thanks," I said.

I returned to my living room. Karpen looked up.

"Let's go out and walk around," he suggested again.

I WENT with him. I was—temporarily, as usual—managing editor of the *Clarion,* but the shop didn't expect me back till the shop saw me coming. My tip had been too important, and I'd decided to run it down myself. But something must have gone screwy with my reflexes and reactions that night. It's the only way I can figure it now.

Yet at the time it seemed perfectly normal that I should go with Karpen instead of doing a lot of other things. There was nothing screwy about the working of my brain, I feel sure. I realized with perfect clarity that Karpen's freedom was itself a spectacular yarn which I should have hopped on with both feet. But perhaps you yourself have had some such experience—a time when, for no reason you can afterwards adequately isolate, your accustomed manner of acting simply does not seem important, and you act differently.

Well, Karpen was there when he should have been in San Quentin or dead; I knew he was Karpen all right because I'd okayed plenty of his pictures for

Page One; and I should have hopped on it fast, trying to discover how he had escaped, and perhaps myself recapturing him.

Instead, Karpen insisted and we went for a walk. Silverstein mumbled that he had to get back to the prison and he left us, moving away hastily with a queer motion as though his legs were just recovering from some sort of paralysis.

There were pinpoints of water hanging in the night air and filling it—not rain, exactly, nor San Francisco fog, but something between the two. Round every street light a nimbus glowed and the occasional lighted windows in apartment houses and residential hotels looked cheerful and warm and secure against the night and against all the warped things that walk by night, against all dark violence brooding in the strange minds of men.

We came to Powell Street and turned into the brighter city and there were late people upon the sidewalks, buttoned and furred, some few desperate homeless men who wanted fifteen cents each for beds and who would want it again tomorrow night and always, of people with comfortable slugs of alcohol inside them going home and a few drunks and a ruddy cop named Percival said hello to me and didn't look at Karpen and strolled on. I wanted to find out why Karpen had done the killing.

"Why was it, really?" I said. "Why did you kill Franklin?"

Franklin had been the banker—a gambling thief who had stolen the savings, the security and food, of a hundred thousand men and women and children, yet had not gone to jail.

"I?"

A look of surprise wrinkled Karpen's face.

He said patiently, "I didn't. Franklin was dead already. Jack, you would have said he was insane, if you could have seen clearly the inside of his mind, but my word for it was dead. Franklin had that peculiar cunning insanity which can defeat any scientific test. I merely executed a fiend, a mind in a body which, soulless, stalked the earth. Merely executed a walking, ruthless greed before it could do any further damage."

I stopped where I was, because my own mind burned suddenly with a group of words I'd not brought up from my memory in many a year. "Vengeance is mine—saith the Lord."

"Who do you think you are?" I snarled, frightened. "God?"

"No," Karpen replied softly, humbly. "Only one, particular, servant of—the Son."

"I'll see you later," I said. Courage greater than mine was required here, in panic I told myself. But somehow I didn't flee. Perhaps because Karpen had his bald, hatted head cocked to one side, as though he listened to some directing clear sweet distant voice. "I need some money," he was repeating, and then: "Let's turn up here."

WE LEFT Market and walked, I think, about two blocks. This street was darker than most; standing on our right was a skinny brick building where I remembered a speakeasy used to be, and Karpen hesitated and again he seemed to listen.

"It ought to be here," he said, peering about on the sidewalk. We couldn't see very well but within a few seconds Karpen stooped and rose with a wallet. The wallet was full of money—$357—it had three one-hundred-dollar bills in it, four tens and seventeen ones.

Karpen took the money out as though he had known all the time he would find it there. He put the money in his pants and tossed the excellent wallet and the rest of its contents into the gutter and I forced my lips apart.

"What about the guy who lost all that?" I said.

"He won't be hurt," Karpen replied. "You and I have three nights and two days to pass. How about beer?"

I wanted to get away from Karpen the Jew more than ever, then, but the

midnight *Examiner* was on the street and when we returned to Market I bought a copy and looked at the headlines across the top and then I could not leave Karpen at all.

The line of black type screamed:

KARPEN EXECUTED IN SECOND TRY

Now I am not a religious man and I know no more than any other what may be the awful abilities of the human spirit, nor to what special terrific power one particular human mind might attain, given time enough for development. In our day, men do claim they do not believe anything save those matters which exude evidences of their reality in laboratories—upon ammeters and in test tubes, through spectroscopes and chemical stains and electrical stimuli.

Yet such a claim is patently smug and false, since that thing which is most completely real, life in its strange inexplicable arrival and residence and departure, cannot be identified in any such way that a scientist may say, "See, this is life. This is the mainspring which makes this body tick."

And all the days of any man's earthly life are spent in further confusion. Believing himself armed with test tubes, millions of him nevertheless swarm the churches each Sunday, there to listen to splendid words, splendid meanings which make no recordings whatever on scientific instruments.

A girl's eyes are only a couple of eyes, two ingenious spheroids of fluid and veins and muscles set in a skull, yet if she loves you you can see her spirit shining deep behind her eyes, and you recognize its reality so well that you are willing to blend with her spirit all that you have, your own life—willing to give into her keeping your own unprovable spirit which you do not understand . . .

KARPEN EXECUTED IN SECOND TRY

On its front page the *Examiner* had a picture, too. A picture of the man who even then walked Market Street at my left elbow. Karpen's picture. The *Examiner* said Karpen had been gassed to death yet here he was, walking.

I put a hand out and gripped his arm hard and it was a real arm, all right, the flesh firm and muscular under the worn cloth of his coat, and my reason was wildly crying out that this entire happening could not be true yet it *was* true; it was blackest magic yet there is no magic upon the face of the earth, everything has a natural explanation if you can only find it; and abruptly I found my wild reason wondering how much one man might learn of exotic but scientific arts such as hypnotism, if he had the time. A great deal, I thought—if!

So much learning that he might walk out of a death house, leaving the witnesses to watch an execution and even a burial which did not really occur.

If!

If he had the time!

If he had centuries. Of time—of life. Centuries, to study.

BUT no normal man does live for centuries. No—I thought—and then told myself with a reasonableness I still do not understand, that Karpen the Jew was no normal or ordinary man. Already tonight he had used up his earthly time yet here he was alive and walking at my side.

My heart was wildly pounding and we came to a beer joint, a rather tough place patronized considerably by sailors. There were girls, some of them temporarily without male companions, but we didn't do anything about the girls. Karpen had a tormented look. His eyes glowed with torment and he kept his hat on.

I said, "You don't want beer. You've got to see your wife."

His sigh was almost a groan and he moved his great shoulders forward.

"It will not be considerate," he said. "Cruel. But you're right. Come on."

"Me?" I said, surprised.

"Yes. You must stay with me three days," Karpen said. "You must stay with me till the ambassadors of the great ones

have met and you must see what happens then. Nobody will believe you but you must write it down."

Well, the great ones planned to start the killing again. Coldly, deliberately, as all wars are started. That had been my monstrous tip, telephoned by John Albertson's mistress. The ambassadors of the great ones would meet, fix a schedule of dates, determine last details of an agreement which doubtless had been in process of formulation for months. Write it down? You could bet your living lungs I would write the story down, if I could only get it.

Karpen said, "Machiavelli was quite a guy."

I was startled. I said, "Sure."

"Machiavelli once remarked," Karpen said, "that if a prince, a dictator, a despot of any sort felt himself tottering, the only certain way to restore the power of his despotism was foreign war. Arouse the patriotism of stupid men in any unworthy and needless cause. Wave the flag and beat the drums."

A new feeling of even greater strangeness surged through me. Not from Karpen's meaning, but from the arrangement of his words. And I heard my strained voice asking, "Did you get that out of a book, Karpen?"

"Why, no," he said. "No . . ."

Machiavelli. A Florentine philosopher, a writer, an adviser to potentates—who had lived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A cold-blooded priest of violence and subjection. How would you, living, know what such a man had said, unless you did get it from a book. *Or unless*—my mind cried out—*unless that long-dead man had spoken to you directly—in person—before he died!*

"You knew Machiavelli?" I ridiculously stammered. And then I leaned on our table and said quickly, loudly: "Who are you, Karpen?"

BUT he didn't reply, and I was glad he didn't because I felt with abrupt terror that I already and certainly knew who he was. I remembered an age-old, persistent, never-explained legend from human history. The tale of how a tormented Man once struggled along a grievous dusty road bearing his Cross, and sought to pause and rest a moment upon the doorstep of a mean hut but was denied any pause, and of how He uttered a calm and terrible judgment upon the Jewish laborer dwelling there. A curse that the Jew also must never rest, not even in death, but must wander the living earth forever, immune from death, unkillable.

And a waiter who had been staring came to our table and said to me, "You better go home now, buddy. When a guy starts talkin' into his beer he better go home."

The waiter didn't look at Karpen. I think now he didn't know Karpen was there, couldn't see Karpen at all. Probably the waiter thought I was tight, but I was not. I'd had nothing alcoholic in twenty-four hours except that one half-finished glass of beer.

We went out and a taxi took us to an apartment house in Taylor Street. Brenda opened her own door. She was Karpen's young wife and she spoke not a word, she only moved within the circle of his arms and I felt acutely embarrassed, so complete was their kiss. Her great love for Karpen, her entire sweet and passionate and scientifically-unprovable spirit came up into her eyes as she stepped into his arms.

It wasn't till many days later, when everything was over, that I remembered she subsequently asked no questions, no explanation of the bewildering fact of Karpen's freedom. Although obviously she had been weeping, I think now she never believed Karpen the killer had really died, nor would die, no matter what the newspapers said.

She took us into her rooms and sat down. She folded her small, capable feminine hands in her lap and she looked at Karpen as though she could never stop looking, her eyes big and soft and shining and a little wet. And I knew that if

any man can make a girl love him like that, mister, he's got something—but particularly if the girl is like Brenda.

She was completely and astonishingly beautiful. Skin like gardenia petals, as I've said. Large, long eyes so brown they were almost black. Sleek, intensely black, soft hair.

But it was the composition of her features that made a clock in my mind. I'm nuts about museums. Give me a museum and I can wander there a long time, happily and oddly excited by these collected tangible inheritances from ancient peoples who were human the same as we are human, but who thought, acted, believed differently; who perhaps possessed strange knowledges which we will never possess again.

Therefore I knew Brenda Karpen at once. I had seen those features—not precisely the same ones, but the same unmistakable type—many times before, carved in stone and copied from death masks of queens of the Nile, of Assyria, Babylon. Features strong yet delicate, the nose straight, the proportions beautifully classic.

And Brenda's possession of them might have been rare among women, but it was certainly not unique. Look around you. The races are mixed now, and confused, but the flawless features of the ancient queens have never died. The girls are generally Syrian, Jewish, Armenian—but you can find them anywhere, among Mexican Indians, in France, Spain, Russia, Park Avenue or the slums of Boston.

"How long has this been going on?" I said.

Karpen lifted his eyelids and I thought a spark was there.

"How long do you think?"

My spine was ice again but I said, "Two thousand years. You will have many wives waiting for you, Karpen, and each will be a copy of the others."

He said with a deep sadness, "I—hope they do not wait. I've instructed Brenda she must—not."

She smiled. It was sweet, enigmatic, secret. The nearest thing to the Mona Lisa smile I'd ever seen. "What little time you've had for me, Karpen, will be always in my heart," she said. "I'm going to have a child of yours."

"It won't be like me," Karpen said. "The child will die when his time has come."

"Listen!" I screamed, because now I had to know. *"Who are you?"*

He stared at me and replied dully, "Why, merely Karpen. A Jew."

I STAYED there till Christmas Eve. I slept on a couch and thought not once of the office. My spirit was filled with a mounting, swelling dread. Not for Brenda. She, I discovered immediately, was not rich but she had an income which would support her, and any child, in comfort, no matter what happened to Karpen himself. But dread of what Karpen might do when the ambassadors assembled.

We left Brenda's apartment only once during that period, and then to visit an exclusive men's store. There Karpen outfitted himself from head to foot in the finest evening clothes the place could supply, and insisted that I purchase similar gear for myself. The salesman who attended to our wants scarcely opened his mouth; his air was one of fascination, and his face was white and troubled, as though he ought to remember Karpen but could not.

And indeed, the fact that such a strange dark man with the build and rugged countenance of a laborer, the bald head and the wide knobby brow of a wise and ancient spirit, should require the formal tails of highest society, doubtless was enough to silence any salesman. And if he failed to lose his troubled look even when we departed—well, I suppose very few persons would remember and identify any convict, not having known him personally, after newspapers had declared him officially dead.

"Just why are we doing this?" I had growled when the man left us alone a moment.

Karpen replied slowly, with an odd dignity, "I, too, shall be an ambassador of a Great One, and we must do Him honor. We must not appear less well provisioned —than the others."

Afterward, when I had written it down and thought it over, it sounded unnatural, stilted, a trifle absurd. But I wrote it down the way he said it and that was it. "I, too, shall be the ambassador of a Great One," Karpen said.

Afraid? I was plenty afraid. Each meal time, food and wine would appear on Brenda's table. She refused to permit any contribution from me, and Karpen offered none, and then Christmas Eve had arrived and we set forth—tail-coated, top-hatted, caped, gloved. Just Karpen and I. All day Brenda had been very gay, then inexpressibly sad, by turn. She kissed Karpen goodbye, a kiss even more intense than that first one I had unwillingly witnessed, and held him off by his shoulders looking into his eyes.

"You won't be back, Karpen?"

Miserably he shook his great head. "I have—so much to do."

We walked. The night was crisp, clear, chill. The stars shone bright and a slivver of moon hung in the night sky and we did not hasten.

Karpen asked suddenly, "How old are you?"

"Thirty-four. You know that."

He nodded. He counted back, on his fingers. "The last one ended in 1918. You were—"

"Fourteen."

"A Boy Scout?"

"Yeah," I said. "I sold Liberty Bonds going from one office to the next. I had a Boy Scout uniform, I was a runt for my age, I had a lot of badges, an Eagle badge, and I sold plenty of bonds."

"YOU don't know how it was, then," Karpen said and his voice was a sword, steel, bitterly slashing. "The next men never remember, never know till they see new killing, themselves. A few of their fellows turn into animals, ruthless, themselves safe, slavering with power-lust. The few start the bands, the flags. Wave the flags, blow the trumpets, beat the drums. A few start the new men, the next crop who don't remember, again into the killing. No, you're a new one and you don't remember. Nothing of the hush hospitals, where bodies which are only hunks of living meat still do live in this day, souvenirs of violence which the new men are not permitted to see. Nothing of the dawn, and young men whimpering or savage in mud and filth and vermin, hungry, afraid, awaiting zero, awaiting the dreadful top tick of a watch, then scrambling up, slipping and scrambling in mud, the air screaming and bursting, themselves quiet, only the rifles blasting, themselves moving to death, to dreadful torn flesh and shattered bone, themselves become animals when they ought to be at home, safe, working, loving their lovely young women, children and dogs in front of a fire, music and warmth and peace and wine and sunlight, all gone."

"What are you going to do, Karpen?" I muttered urgently. "Your grammar is punk."

He didn't reply. The Mark Hopkins. We entered an elevator, ourselves the only passengers that trip, and Karpen said, "Sixth floor."

The boy stopped the car in front of a blank wall. "You can't go there, sir," he said. "You must have made a mistake."

Karpen's eyes seemed to glow. His chin was a rock. "No mistake," he said.

The frightened boy let us out at the sixth floor. The corridors contained perhaps two dozen men of assorted nationalities. Well-dressed; but tough and hard-eyed men, for all that. Secret police, I thought.

To my astonishment we walked directly through the swarming guards and not one let his glance stop on us, not one attempted to block us. We might have been invisible. I—think we were.

Karpen took a key from one of his pockets and opened a door. I followed him through one room empty even of

rugs and furniture and into a second. The second room was long, big. At a long table the conference of the ambassadors was already in session.

Karpen and I selected two chairs against the nearest wall and sat down. Nobody turned a head. Nobody, in fact, seemed even to be aware of our presence till Karpen acted, hours later.

Right now John Albertson was speaking. Later the others spoke, sweated, bargained, approached exhaustion and refused it, spoke again. I think my mouth soon must have dropped open, and stayed that way, because afterward I needed a lot of water to dispel the dryness of my mouth.

Bahkmeteff was there, representative of the new dictator of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. Callieri was there, from Italy. Prince Taguchi, from Japan. Sturmer, a tall German with a monocle, a horse face, and utterly blank blue eyes. Each man acting not for his people, but for his master.

There was no single dictator in the United States; only a dictating group, an oligarchy. Given continued peace, the United States eventually might overwhelm its oligarchy and become truly democratic. Therefore John Albertson was there also, representing not the President nor the people of the United States, but himself and his group—cunning men who understood the waving of flags and the beating of drums, for profit and personal power.

They used English, in the cultured and conversational tones of gentlemen. So it wasn't their tones that dropped my mouth open. It was the things they said, their terrible calm meanings.

OF COURSE I had known that no modern major conflict ever occurs unprecedented by definite agreements between all powers which may be affected. Later any conflict may get out of hand, but its beginning is always a matter of premeditation and not of passion.

Yet I had never watched the machinery mesh. The ambassadors of the great abhor newspapermen whom they cannot control. Yet there I was, beside Karpen the Jew, and the ambassadors in cultured voices were calmly and cunningly trading in violence, in the lands, the wealth, the human lives and blood of other nations. They calmly estimated how many of their own men would be slaughtered upon the various fronts of attack.

The presence of Bahkmeteff, of course, had amazed me most. Callieri and Taguchi and Sturmer—fanatic fascists. In the next world war the fascists must inevitably fight all the rest of the world but mainly the communists, as they'd been fighting so long and horribly now in Spain. And yet here, in this hotel room, these fascist leaders were making parley with the enemy.

For peace?

I must have been quite unsophisticated that night, to have felt even that one tingling thrill of hope.

Because these men had assembled not to avoid blood and death, but to cause them and agree upon the details of their manufacture.

"As you know, gentlemen," Bahkmeteff said suavely, "war, to the Russian dictator, is an immediate necessity." Lately, he reminded them, handwriting had appeared upon the wall. Lately the Russian people had demanded that no more foodstuffs be exported from the Soviet Union—a demand which had risen after two decades of cruel, animal-like labor, raising tremendous crops only to watch those crops dumped into foreign world markets at ruinous prices in exchange for machinery which the Russians might use but certainly could not eat—a demand so ugly that wisely it had been granted, at least for the present. But war would lift the minds of the Russians off their bellies —and only war.

Mussolini and Hitler, too, were tottering. The Ethiopian burlesque was past and Italy long ago had seized that luckless African land for its oil. (Since warships burn oil and there is no oil under

Italy.) And Checkoslovakia was Hitler's but he needed flames round the earth before he moved to regain Germany's lost and more distant colonies.

And Japan was invading all the markets of the world with manufactured goods and underselling all competitors but going bankrupt doing it, and now additionally needful of war to keep her people whipped up to the proper frenzy of obedience.

And in America all the business men were desperate from taxes and the insane spending of the government, but America still had no dictator; yet John Albertson thought that war might create a dictatorship and in any event war would bring monstrous profits to the steel industry.

Sturmer and John Albertson, Callieri and Bahkmeteff agreed. Prince Taguchi mentioned a date when Japanese fishing boats would attempt to blow up the U. S. Pacific Fleet and block the Panama Canal, and Japanese warships would shell Manila and Alaska. The Germans were interested, Sturmer said, primarily in France, Belgium, and Southern Africa, but would attack Russia as a matter of form, not really concentrating any force there.

Oh, the ambassadors, personally, and John Albertson, were safe enough in their planning. Not one of them, not one of the dictators for whom the ambassadors spoke, ever would see an actual firing line. They were as impersonal as though they were playing chess. War is always impersonal to those who start it. It becomes personal only to those hundreds of thousands of younger men who get the bullets in their guts; and then John Albertson was speaking again.

THE bands and the flags were ready, he said. Geniuses of publicity—ready also. Nothing would be simpler, to trained propagandists using an oligarchic press, to orators and politicians, than hurling the United States into war—on either side.

Karpen bent toward me and his face was stiff.

"You have heard," he said. "We look now upon one man who is already dead. All here are drunk with power, with ambition, but only John Albertson has already died, a greed-torn dead man who must sell bullets and armor plate."

Fascinated, I watched Karpen rise from his chair. Fascinated, I saw the startled bewildered faces of the diplomats turn to Karpen as though wondering how in the name of highest heaven any man save themselves could be here in this room—a room now guarded by secret police and secret strongarm men from each of their separate nations.

I watched Karpen slowly stalk to John Albertson and I saw Karpen's great hands deliberately close round Albertson's throat, while I myself and the other four men in that room stared in stunned horror.

There was a small stifled scream from Albertson, president of Consolidated American Steel. Then he was off his chair, his legs wriggling and attempting to brace themselves, his hands viciously and desperately clawing at those other great hands which had his throat. John Albertson was moving across the thick carpet toward a window and when Karpen the Jew had brought him there, Karpen deliberately withdrew one strangling hand and got the window open.

Then he looked down upon Albertson, sadly, and—I thought—compassionately. With the deliberation of an automaton Karpen lifted John Albertson high, held him squirming and screaming thus a short moment, and flung him into space.

Albertson's screams diminished and then, abruptly, sickeningly, ceased.

Karpen turned and faced the ambassadors. His rugged face was gray now.

He spoke in a voice more cultured, tremendously more gentle than any of theirs had been. He said, "Gentlemen, I give you a promise. Each of you is powerful. Not so powerful as the great dictators whom you represent, but still each of you wields colossal influence in his own land. I promise you that if the wars occur which you have agreed upon tonight, each of you shall die in ways far more horrible than the way you have seen John

Albertson die. I say to you, ye shall not kill!—and in your own bodies yourselves remain secure! Take my message also to your masters. Should this war occur, *to each great dictator I also shall find my way. And I shall come,"* Karpen said, *"to kill!"*

Then he turned and left them, without haste.

I went out following Karpen and that was the way it had happened. If the ambassadors afterward called Albertson's plunge merely a tragic accident—well, perhaps they really do not remember what they saw Karpen do and say, at least not in their conscious minds. But each of those four ambassadors, I notice, has retired now to a private and sedentary life.

And as Karpen reached the street, the paved hill-top where the Mark Hopkins sits, it didn't even occur to me to warn him that for this latest crime he now must surely die. For I understood he would never die, so long as men lived upon the earth. A lethal gas chamber? Probably that had been his last forlorn *hope* of death. . . .

THE street throbbed with excitement, of course, and police and an ambulance were here. But we walked unimpeded past the police, past the broken mashed object that had been John Albertson, and went down into the town. Freshly dressed, quiet people were going into the churches on that Christmas Sunday morning, and there were tollings of bells in the air.

"I can do so little," Karpen was saying. "So very little."

"You've done plenty lately," I said.

"One man—in all the world. Why don't the others help?"

"Some of them do."

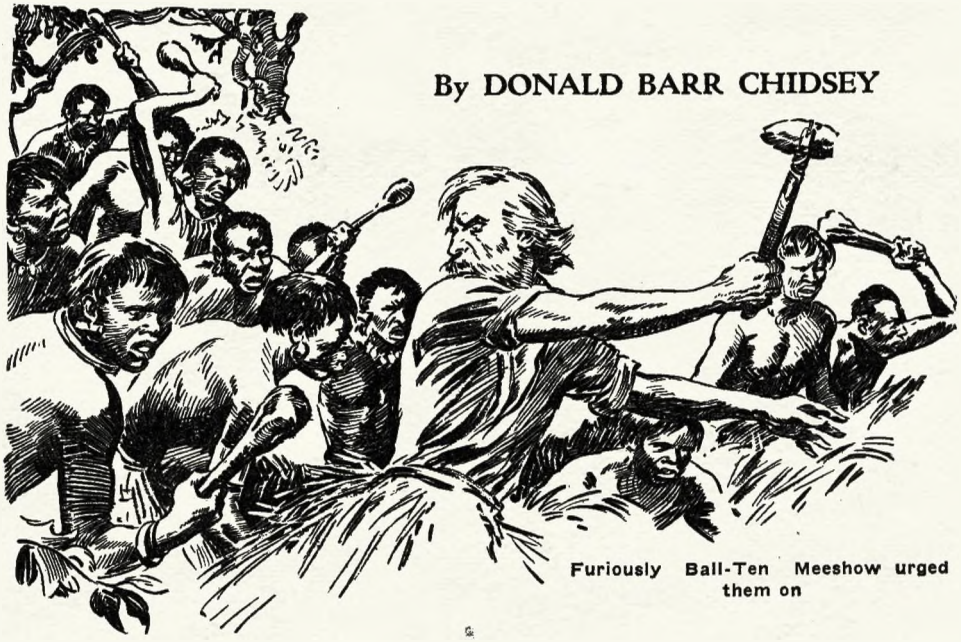
There was nothing mystic, nothing supernormal in the sardonic glance which this living Jew turned on me then. Nor in his hard, practical words. "Hear me!" Karpen said. "This is the United States of America. I've been here many times. You have a Constitution, the highest law of the land. Adopt an amendment. Say that each member of the Congress who votes for any war or who fails to vote against it, shall upon formal declaration of such war automatically lose his office; immediately shall be compelled, regardless of age or physical competence, to become an infantry private, ineligible for promotion, ineligible for furlough even if wounded, and assigned to front line combat until dead or until the war ends. Send also to the front any President who signs a declaration of war. Adopt that one simple basic law. Challenge other nations into providing likewise for their own leaders. And then," said Karpen the Jew, "you wouldn't have very many wars."

He halted without warning, and added: "But the nations will not be permitted to do it. The great rulers are never the ones who fight."

He was looking at me, but his eyes became strangely opaque. Perhaps he wasn't seeing me any longer. His head cocked to one side and again I had that curious impression that he was listening to some voice which I myself could not hear. Within a few seconds, however, his pupils cleared. Hastily and with a queer formality he shook my hand, murmured, "I have so little time!" said goodbye, and was gone.

So little time! All eternity he had—yet Karpen the Jew was pressed and had to hurry. And Brenda's son was born today —Karpen's son—and although Karpen had assured her the child would not be like himself, I cannot help wondering. I pray it will not, because Karpen, the last I saw of him, was walking away in Christmas sunlight while bells tolled, repeating that another child, a Christ had been born; walking down a city sidewalk, through the moving crowds in their fine new clothing, stalking the world, himself one symbol of his entire deep and peaceful and homeless race, one lonely man accursed forever to the choking task of all mankind's salvation.

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY



Furiously Ball-Ten Meeshow urged them on

Midas of the Mountains

IN 1894 Pierre-Etienne Michaud was sentenced for a particularly brutal murder and shipped to the island of Noumea in the South Pacific. For two years he remained in that terrible prison colony—and then he escaped. It was known that in fleeing he killed three men, but there was no further trace of Pierre-Etienne Michaud. . . .

In 1938 Burton Chinnery, flying Professor Edward McAvoy Reeves and his lovely niece Stephanie to Port Moresby, crashes in the heart of the New Guinea jungle. For a night the three remain there, hoping that the next day a rescue plane may discover them, but the morning brings a very different fate. First Chinnery finds that the wrecked plane has mysteriously disappeared; then, before they can act, the little party is surrounded by a band of Kuku-Kukus—dwarfed, savage head-hunters.

Burt Chinnery, Professor Reeves and Stephanie are brought before the ruler of the Kuku-Kukus, and they discover with amazement that this is no dwarfed savage but an aged, bearded white man who speaks French and English. He is Ball-Ten Meeshow—known forty years before as Pierre-Etienne Michaud.

THE three are kept prisoners in the Kuku-Kuku village. Ball-Ten Meeshow allows them a certain amount of liberty, is anxious to talk with them, but Chinnery knows that there is a taboo land not far away, guarded by the savages. At last he manages to escape the guards; he finds his way to a cave in the mountain, and there in the dim light of a match he sees an enormous cache of gold. This is the secret of Ball-Ten Meeshow. While Chinnery gazes at it, the white chief makes a sudden appearance. Then Burt learns why Pierre-Etienne Michaud is keeping them captives; he plans to return to civilization with the gold, masquerading as Professor Reeves whose speech and manerisms he has been studying.

The next day he calls the three prisoners before him. His grim promise is this: if they will assist him to perfect his impersonation of Reeves, their death will be swift and painless; if they refuse, they shall die by slow torture. . . .

The first installment of this three-part serial, herein concluded, was published in the Argosy for August 20

CHAPTER VIII

DANCING MEN

THE first four days and nights Burt made no move to leave the hut into which they had thrown him. It was not that these prison walls were strong; on the contrary they consisted of grass thatch through which he could very easily have pushed. The doorway had no door, but it faced one of the aimless streets of the village. There were no windows. The roof was *kunai* thatch and bamboo, the floor bamboo.

On the fifth night, very late, with no warning, no preliminary scuffles, he stepped out of the doorway and dropped without a sound to the ground.

Though he heard nothing, he was instantly surrounded. He was picked up bodily and thrown back into the hut.

Well, that told him something. It told him that they were maintaining a real watch this time. Michaud wasn't taking any more chances.

The next night he stuck his head out of the doorway for a look-around. Instantly an arrow slished through the *kunai* two inches from his ear. He pulled his head in again.

The seventh night was rainy. It had rained all day, thundering upon palm fronds and banana trees outside, but falling without a sound into the thatch. Very late, again, Burt made another try. Cautiously, slowly, with his hands he worked a hole in the thatch of the back wall near the floor. It had been softened by moisture and was giving to the touch, but even if it had rustled such a sound could not be heard above the roar of the rain. Nevertheless when Burt tentatively thrust a hand outside, that hand met with a shock of pain. He drew it back, stifling a cry. A club, no doubt. Even in such a downpour they were watching him scrupulously.

All the next day his hand hurt him.

Having nobody to talk to and nothing to do, having only the anticipation of what was coming, was horrible. Three men brought him food once a day, husky warriors who carried no weapons, but they never said a word to him; and he wouldn't have understood them if they had. He often stood in the doorway—there seemed no objection to this—and watched the Kuku-Kukus move back and forth. He never saw Stephanie or her uncle. Paul-Étienne Michaud was twice carried past on his litter, but though Burt called to him, and even shouted insults in the hope of stimulating some reply, the Frenchman pretended not to hear.

One ray of hope he had, but it was a slight thing, a flicker, instantly gone. Only a desperate man would have considered it.

He was standing in the doorway on the afternoon of the ninth day when ten or eleven pygmies were driven past. "Driven" is the only word to describe it. Kuku-Kukus, mostly women, were behind and on both sides of them, shouting, beating them sometimes with sticks, or tossing stones at them. The pygmies plodded along, weary men, with bowed heads. They didn't even cry out when they were hit.

Among them Burt recognized the one Dr. Reeves had called Taloo. Though he stood scarcely more than four feet, he was the tallest of the lot. He seemed the brightest, too. Like the others he walked with head bowed, and his bare feet stumbled pitifully, for he was exhausted, but Burt noticed that his fists were clenched in instinctive rage. As he passed, he lifted his head an instant and glanced at Burt.

It was no more than that—a glance. And surely there was no expression on the pygmy's face. Yet had Burt seen in those dead-seeming eyes a glint of something that cried "Hope!" Or was Burt simply getting soft-headed? Dr. Reeves had once said he thought their only chance for escape might lie in these pygmy prisoners and particularly in Taloo. Had Dr. Reeves concocted some revolt, and was Taloo trying to signal news of this?

DISCOURAGEMENT returned that night. There was dancing in the village, but Burt's guard instead of being

relaxed was at least doubled, as he saw once when he popped his head outside the doorway. At least a dozen armed warriors must have been there. Two or three, lifting their clubs, instantly started for him; and he pulled his head back.

For three days after that, and three nights, he watched and prayed for a sign from Taloo, but though the pygmy passed his hut several times neither he nor any of his fellows ever glanced at Burt again.

Three times he heard airplanes, but they were far distant. He doubted whether from above they could even see the roofs of this village. Soon, whether he lived or died, his friends from Salamaua and Lae and Port Moresby would cease to go off their course each time they crossed the island. Burt Chinnery and his two passengers, they would say, were either dead or just as good as dead.

And they would be right.

There was another dancing. When he heard the first sounds, soon after full darkness had gripped a place dim enough even at high noon, Burt began to experience real, immediate, personal fear.

He must have counted wrong. Was this the thirteenth night, or was it the fourteenth? Two weeks, Michaud had said And Dr. Reeves was a marvelously stubborn man.

There would be sure to be some sort of dancing. The fugitive from Ile Nou would give them a show. He lived and derived all his power from just such affairs.

Besides, a torture party at night, to the sound of drums and *tidirs,* and in the pale glow of a coconut-husk fire, would be that much more difficult for the Reeves to endure. Michaud would think of this.

Burt wondered whether he would scream. He hoped not; but he was worried about this. They had not fed him well since his solitary confinement, and perhaps he would not have the strength to keep his mouth shut. After all, two weeks without any sort of exercise—

Or was it only thirteen days?

Well, he knew what he was going to do. He had long since made up his mind. Whether it was tonight or tomorrow—he didn't know, he didn't care—whichever it was, the next person who came through that doorway was going to be hit. And thereafter Burt would fight. If he could possibly do so, he'd *make* them kill him. He might run outside and try it right now, only he wished to wait until the last possible moment.

He lay in the back of the hut, facing the doorway, listening to the sounds of the dance and watching the light.

Yes, he would spring at the next person who appeared. He wouldn't let them tease a scream out of him. They'd have to beat him into unconsciousness before they could carry him to the place where the dancing was.

For a long time he lay there listening to the monotonous music and the scuff-scuff of dancing feet, and wondering about Stephanie, about Stephanie's uncle too. Would Dr. Reeves hold out? He was a stubborn man, and an angry one, and Burt knew that it was his inclination to stick to his refusal, calling Michaud's bluff. The trouble was—and Burt at least knew this well—Michaud *wasn't* bluffing. The movie-villain manner undoubtedly was in part affected, intended to impress the Kuku-Kukus; but a lot of it, too, was real. Michaud meant what he said when he talked about torture and slaughter. Burt wondered whether Dr. Reeves would learn this too late. He had not seen Dr. Reeves or Stephanie for thirteen days. Or was it fourteen days? He waited.

After a long time, some hours perhaps, his muscles relaxed insensibly; and for all his tenseness and anxiety he began to nod. Perhaps it was the music, the pauseless beat of drums, unvarying in pitch and rhythm. Possibly it was sheer exhaustion.

HE AWOKE with a start, knowing that it was very late, feeling in the air, though he could not see the sky, that the dawn was near. The dancing and music went on unchanged. But there were closer sounds.

(*Please turn to page* 112)

"Son, meet my best and oldest friend"

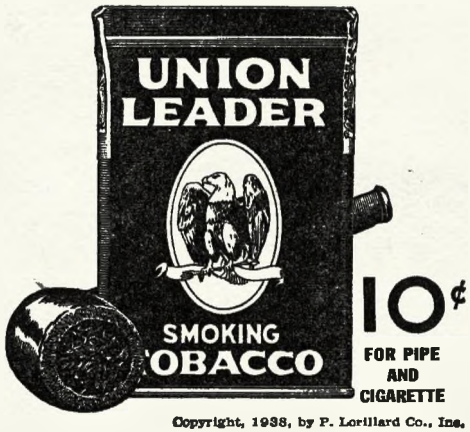
SURE! I'll try new-fangled notions, too. But I've learnt there's a *few* things that just can't be improved on. Like your Ma's cookin'. . . and Union Leader Tobacco.

S'pose you light up a pipeful of Union Leader. Then *you* tell *me* . . . if it don't bring to mind yellow corn roastin' in the coals . . . or hickory-smoked bacon . . . or fresh-mowed clover.

For 30-odd years, Union Leader's mellow mildness has eased my leisure minutes . . . while its modest ten-cent price has eased my conscience, too. But then . . . a good friend *should* be generous like that.

Union Leader

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE



10¢ FOR PIPE AND CIGARETTE

Not more than a few feet from the doorway he heard a soft grunt, a low slapping sound, a thud. Then silence for a moment. Were they coming for him? The bamboo ladder creaked thinly. A head, then a pair of shoulders, appeared above the floor. They made a silhouette against the reflected light of the fire, a black smear framed upon dull pinkish foliage.

Burt Chinnery had awakened, as he had gone to sleep, with the thought of fighting. He had with him in all its original strength the determination to make these beasts buy his life at a good stiff price.

Bamboo creaked again, the head and shoulders were lifted a bit, and firelight skittered across skin wet with perspiration and bunched with muscle.

Burt jumped.

His outstretched hands hit the man's chest, and he and the man tumbled backward to the ground, landing with a thump. It must have knocked the breath out of the man, who lay still; but Burt was on his feet promptly, fists swinging.

He saw another shadow, and another.

His right struck a neck, and there was a squeal of pain. His left swished empty air, spinning him around.

They were on all sides of him, though standing back. He started for one.

"You fool! Stop it!"

The voice was a low tense whisper. A long white shape loomed, and a hand grabbed Burt's elbow.

"Get under the hut! Do you want them to hear us?"

"Dr. Reeves!"

"Sh-sh-sh."

Stephanie was under the hut too, crouching, trembling. He could see her only as a blur of face set with a pair of huge green eyes, but he felt for and found her hands. He kissed her in the darkness, and she returned the kiss.

"Not a sound!" whispered Dr. Reeves.

Some pygmies were carrying into the shadow the man who had started to enter the hut. He was recovering his breath. It was Taloo.

Other men were there too, as Burt was able to see presently. They were Kuku-Kukus, but no longer dangerous.

After a moment Dr. Reeves whispered, "Sorry I couldn't get you word to expect us. Impossible. Taloo tried to tell you once with a look, but he didn't dare try again. We're making a dash for it. We waited until just before dawn."

Burt whispered, "How many pygmies?"

"Fifteen. All that's left. One died yesterday of a beating they'd given him, and two more were killed a little while ago grappling with the guards."

"How did they manage it so quietly?"

"I don't know. But if you think *we* hate the Kuku-Kukus you should see *them!* They took the guards one by one, from behind, with stones they'd been sharpening for weeks in secret. It made a little noise, but I don't think we've been heard back by the fire. We've got six or seven war clubs too. No arrows. But come on."

A pygmy hissed a warning, and they crouched back in the shadows under the hut. They crowded together there.

TWO Kuku-Kukus were strolling toward them. They carried long wooden clubs, and evidently they had been told off to check on the guard around Burt's hut. They could not see the white people and the pygmies, who were in dense shadow, but would they see any of the slaughtered guards?

They stopped, glancing around. Their eyes, reddened by the fire, were of little service here except in the cleared avenue between the huts. Everything was quiet.

Obviously the Kuku-Kukus were eager to get back to the dancing. They heard nothing irregular, and for a moment they saw nothing. One shrugged and turned. His companion grunted, muttered something, and started for the prone body of a guard.

That guard's throat had been cut from behind, but the warrior could not perceive this. All he saw was that the man lay motionless, and no doubt he assumed that he was asleep. He went to the corpse, kicked it twice, growled something at it.

Then he stiffened. He looked around. He bent low over the body, touching it with one hand.

He sprang upright, whirled around, said something swiftly to his companion, and started on a run toward the fire.

The pygmies could not possibly have reached those warriors in time to stifle an outcry. They did the next best thing. They threw the clubs they had captured from the guards.

One warrior fell. He rose unsteadily to one knee, but another club caught him in the head and he went flat.

The other was struck in the legs. He spun around, stumbling backward. When he caught his balance he was facing three pygmies and Burt Chinnery, who ran toward him. He opened his mouth and yelled.

But he did not run. His duty was done when he let out that single yell. Thereafter he stood and fought.

His club brought down the first pygmy. He side-stepped another, swung at the third.

By this time Burt Chinnery had reached him. Burt punched his belly, hard. The savage doubled over. Burt's left fist came up to the chin. The savage straightened, rocking dizzily on his heels. Burt gave him a straight right from the shoulder, and the savage went down.

All this took scarcely an instant. But the damage had been done. That yell had given the alarm. For a moment there was silence around the fire, and the echoes of the music subsided swiftly as though frightened. Then came a babble of sound, a clatter of weapons, and the voice of Paul-Étienne Michaud loud and clear and commanding.

There was no time to count noses or plan a flight. The pygmies put their heads down and sprinted. Dr. Reeves called, "Come on!" and grabbed one of Stephanie's arms, hurrying her toward the stockade. Burt ran just behind them, glancing once over his shoulder to see the mass of savages looming through the smoke and flare of the fire.

The first pygmies, though more familiar with the village forces than Burt, either did not know or in their excitement didn't remember that a guard was posted outside of each gap in the palisade. Burt yelled a warning, but he was far in the rear. Three pygmies dashed through the gap, then the others, Dr. Reeves and Stephanie in their midst.

There were two guards this night, not one, and they had been warned by the clamor. The first three pygmies probably never knew what happened to them. The others in a terrible rush literally overran the guards, who stood their ground until they were knocked down. Burt snatched a club from one. Then the jungle swallowed them.

CHAPTER IX

THE VALUE OF GOLD

FOR what seemed hours they tore along, slipping, stumbling, falling over twisted slimy roots, their clothes torn by spiked creepers, their faces and arms slashed by *lianas* that dangled snake-like from branches they couldn't see. They splashed through pools of stagnant water. They caromed off monstrous invisible trees, rotten and soft, rank with parasites and spongy moss. But they kept going.

When at last they stopped, huddled as though by instinct, there was no sound anywhere except that of their own breathing. There was no faint hint of sky. The wet jungle pressed upon them from all sides and above; and they could feel, though they couldn't see, choking slow steam which rose out of the muck they had disturbed.

Burt slipped his arm around Stephanie.

Dr. Reeves began to whisper in pygmy, and a single voice answered him. It was a low voice, and it quavered, yet somehow it carried a certain assurance. It was the voice of Taloo.

Odd, Burt reflected, that a knowledge of ancient Australian dialects had been the means of their salvation—if you could call this salvation!

They were too winded, all of them, to run again now; but they knew that they must run soon.

Dr. Reeves felt for Burt in the darkness.

"We haven't a chance of outdistancing them. We'd hoped to get a good start before the alarm was given. But now—"

Burt panted, "I know. They'll surround us and pick us off one by one with arrows. They'll drive us into some rocky *cul-de-sac*—this country's full of them—and they'll slash us to pieces at their leisure."

"Taloo says there's only one place he knows of where we might be able to hold them back."

"The high place, yes."

"Could you find it again?"

"I don't think so. I haven't any idea where we are now."

The low quavering voice again. Dr. Reeves interpreted.

"Taloo says he thinks he can find it himself. After all, they've been there lots of times."

"Good. Let's go. How's your ankle?"

"My ankle will hold out," Dr. Reeves said grimly. "Come on!"

The moonlight was dazzling. Even to those fortunate persons elsewhere who were accustomed to it, it was probably very bright; to bruised, exhausted fugitives who for almost two hours had been slashing through darkness so deep that they were not even sure of their own numbers, it had a blinding force. They came suddenly out of the jungle to the upcropping of rock where this moonlight was. They stood blinking, stunned.

Stephanie Reeves leaned against Burt, an arm across his shoulders.

"It—it's good to see the sky again."

He nodded. It *was* good to see sky, and the stars, and the moon.

They learned that there were now in the party only nine pygmies, including Taloo. The others had either been killed in the rush past the palisade or had been lost or overcome by exhaustion in the meanwhile. They called softly back, but the jungle vouchsafed no reply; the jungle swallowed their voices greedily, as though leering at them, as though it defied them to escape from its grip. Steam-like, the air absorbed all voice, and there was not even an echo.

They pushed on.

Burt had a captured war club. So did Dr. Reeves. Most of the pygmies who previously had had them, had cast them unthinkingly aside; though a few, later, on the slope leading to this place, had wit enough to scoop up loose stones.

Stephanie whispered, "You say there's a cliff back of this?"

"Yes. Straight drop. Must be five hundred feet or more."

"They'll probably capture us sooner or later, won't they?"

"They'll know they've been in a fight first!"

"I'm sure of that." She was quiet, seemed thoughtful. "But they *will* capture us? They could starve us out anyway, couldn't they?"

He said "Yes," in a low voice. He couldn't lie to Stephanie.

"When that time comes, Burt, I want you to push me over the cliff. Will you promise?"

"I won't push you over. I'll pull you over with me!"

She squeezed his shoulders, smiling up at him.

"Good," she said.

THE guiding cries into the jungle clearly were wasted. They would not bring back the missing pygmies, and they might serve to attract the Kuku-Kukus. There was nothing to do but climb to the top of this natural fort, and wait.

Despite the light, the last hundred yards of open ground, solid rock, very steep, were harder than all the struggle through the rain-forest. Long before they reached the top their knees, the heels of their hands, their elbows, were lacerated.

Dr. Reeves said, "Now let them try to get us!"

His colleagues at the university would not have recognized this celebrated student, this prize product of civilization. His linen

suit was in shreds. His shirt was dappled with blood. The upper part of his face shone with sweat and glistened with blood, and blood was clotted in his tangled hair and in the stiff, outthrust, gray-white beard weeks away from a razor had given him. The glasses still rode high on his nose, and through them his blue-gray eyes shone with a hard, defiant brilliancy. He swung the stone-headed club.

"Come on! They'll be with us any minute now. But they'll need both hands to scramble up that slope, and if we keep pelting them from behind these rocks we can hold them off!"

Burt asked, "Pelting them with what?"

The glasses joggling on his nose, glittering furiously in the moonlight, Dr. Reeves looked around.

"Damn it! There aren't many stones, are there?"

He purpled with indignation, swishing the war club. He might have been a peppery old colonel who finds just before battle that some subaltern has failed to supply his men with cartridges. But the circumstance had no effect on his fighting spirit. He barked orders in what was gibberish to Stephanie and Burt, and pygmies ran here and there, collecting stones, piling them behind the boulders along the edge of this platform-peak.

"Here comes one now!"

A Kuku-Kuku had stepped out of the jungle below. He was bathed in moonlight, and stood very straight, his club over his shoulder.

The pygmies, excited, began to throw stones at him. He ignored them, even when they came very close.

One pygmy even threw a precious war club. It clacked upon the rock half way down to the jungle line, and rolled the rest of the distance, coming to rest harmlessly against a tree five or six yards from where the Kuku-Kuku stood.

"Here, you idiots! Stop that! We've only got a few, and we've got to—" He broke into their own tongue, suddenly remembering that they didn't understand English.

Thereafter the pygmies held their fire.

"Now we haven't got more than twelve or thirteen—"

"I'll get some ammunition!"

Burt wondered, as he raced back toward the cave, how he had ever forgotten Michaud's little gods.

Stephanie was standing near the boulder that blocked the entrance. She was staring down upon the silvered top of the jungle far below.

"So this is the cliff?" she said softly.

"That's the cliff." Burt threw himself upon the boulder, finding strength he hadn't known he possessed. "Better not get too close. And watch out behind you, too. They'll be charging us soon."

"I'll watch out," she promised. "What are you doing?"

"Getting ammunition."

She helped him with the boulder, and it rolled aside.

"Wait for me," he said dropping to his knees.

It was pitch-dark in the passage, and Burt scrambled in blind, desperate haste around a turn, around another. He stood up. Around still another turn—then he was in the chamber. It seemed to him that he could feel the glow of gold beating against him from all sides. He went to a wall.

When he came crawling back to the moonlight Stephanie was waiting for him.

"They've started the rush," she said quietly.

BURT had seen that instantly. The steep rocky slope was alive with savages. The pygmies, yelling and screaming in excitement, threw stones furiously. Savage after savage was hit and tumbled back, sometimes carrying two or even three of his fellows with him. But they continued to come. More and more came out of the jungle all the time and with no hesitation started to climb the slope. Though Michaud himself could not be seen, his voice was heard urging them on.

Burt dropped the can-shaped pieces of gold.

"Take these to them! As many as you can carry! I'll be back."

He dodged into the cave again.

Five times he made that trip, and each time when he returned it was to find all the gold gone, while Stephanie waited for more. She could not have carried as much as he did, she wasn't strong enough; she must have made twice as many trips; she had moonlight to guide her.

These missiles were better than stones. Heavier, for one thing. And each was the same size and weight, and the same shape, which after a time made for better aim.

They bounded and clanged down the slope, flaring in the moonlight, spinning, turning. Where they hit they hurt, breaking bones.

The fifth time Burt emerged the girl gasped, "They want you. Quick! Father asked for you."

Gold and all, Burt ran to the breastwork. He passed four pygmies on the way. They were running back toward the cave. He thought they were running away from the fight, and he shouted at them and tried to stop them, but they slipped past him.

Dr. Edward McAvoy Reeves, O'Connell Professor of dead languages at the University of Sydney, was a volcano. He cursed in a dozen ancient and modern tongues. He was so angry when he saw Burt that he almost forgot to use English.

"Damn it! Why didn't you tell me about this stuff sooner!"

"I told you the other day," Burt reminded him.

He dropped the chunks of gold, all but one which he threw at a climbing Kuku-Kuku. The Kuku-Kuku screeched, twisted in pain, and rolled backward, over and over, carrying several others with him. The others got to their feet and started up the slope again, but the man Burt had hit did not move.

"Well, even if you did? Why do you go off there alone? We need you here! You damn fool! Don't you want to fight?"

"I don't mind it," said Burt, smiling a little.

He threw another piece of gold. It glanced off a shoulder, struck rock, leaped magnificently into the air, and fell against a great black chest. Once more there was a little clump of sliding, screaming, tumbling Kuku-Kukus.

"I've sent some of the little fellows back to bring this stuff up. You're a halfwit, Chinnery, but at least you're worth four or five of them!"

"Thank you," murmured Burt.

"Now don't stand there star-gazing! What do you—"

He broke off. Near-sighted, in spite of his glasses, he was yet able to see that the savages were quitting the uncovered slope faster than the missiles of gold were driving them off. He scented the trick. He whirled, motioning with his arms.

"Down, Chinnery! They're going to—"

Burt wasn't even there. The professor cursed again, then shouted commands in the pygmy language. He himself ducked barely in time.

UNTIL now, no doubt in fear of hitting his own warriors, possibly too from reluctance to supply the enemy with weapons, Paul-Étienne Michaud had withheld his primitive artillery. Now he suddenly ordered a retreat from the slope and at the same time cried a command which brought bowman out of the jungle.

Abruptly the air sang with arrows. They click-click-clicked with an electrical spitting across the tops and side of the boulders, and when the flattened men looked up they could see them as streaming, jerking black ribbons against the moon.

They stopped.

Dr. Reeves was on his feet instantly.

"Look out! They'll charge again now!"

He was right. Under cover of the barrage Paul-Étienne Michaud had reassembled his warriors or brought up fresh ones, and he stopped the arrows and sent these men up the slope with the same command.

They had a good start, and the element of surprise, the greatest thing in warfare, was on their side. The pygmies were frightened and uncertain; three of them, who

hadn't ducked in time, lay wounded; the others were afraid for a moment to lift their heads above the boulders. Michaud's men were half way up the slope before the first pieces of gold were thrown.

It was good tactics, and almost successful. Three of the Kuku-Kukus reached the boulders before rocks of gold sent them crashing back. One big fellow actually surmounted the breastwork, careless of all danger, fight-mad. He dropped to the inside, flourishing his club. He sprang toward Dr. Reeves.

The professor saw him coming. But the professor too could stand his ground. It happened that he held no weapon of any sort, and certainly he did not have time to snatch one; but he didn't run; his fists went up.

The war club would have killed him at a blow. It never fell. Something flashed by Dr. Reeves; and Burt Chinnery, in a flying tackle which he himself later admitted would have been too high if the savage were charging properly, threw his arms around the Kuku-Kuku's hips. As they fell to the rock together Burt viciously twisted his grip. The Kuku-Kuku's head was cracked open. Two pygmies sprang upon what was then no more than a corpse, and in wild primitive ferocity started to pound the face and head with gold. Burt hauled them off, pushed them toward the breastwork, gestured for them to devote themselves to live opponents.

But the attack was ended. When it didn't work immediately it couldn't work at all. The last cannibal tumbled or nervelessly rolled back into the jungle, and everything was still.

Dr. Reeves said, "Nice work, Chinnery. Sorry I cursed you a moment ago. I get rather excited sometimes."

"Hell," said Burt amiably, "don't we all?"

"I couldn't find you when the second attack started. "What happened to you?"

"I guessed what was coming when I saw some of them deliberately crawl back, even though they hadn't been hit. A Kuku-Kuku doesn't run away unless he's got some reason for it. And I was afraid about Stephanie. She was standing by the edge of the cliff back there, where an arrow might reach her. Even if she wasn't hit, she might step backward in the shock of the first flight—and go over."

"Is she safe now?"

"She's safe. I forced her to lie down behind the boulder I'd rolled away from the entrance of the cave. But I'd just done that when the arrows stopped. I barely had time to get back here to help meet the rush."

Dr. Reeves said slowly, "I think you know more about fighting than I do, Chinnery. Thanks. After this you give the orders and I'll just relay them on to the pygmies. I mean that."

Burt shrugged, embarrassed, and spread his hands.

But after that they got on better together, these two men.

"Will you watch things here while I go back and see Stephanie?"

"Sure. Go ahead. But keep those little fellows bringing out gold. We'll need it."

Dr. Reeves rose. He looked down the slope, smiling. The slope itself was bare in the waning moon—for dawn was heaving itself over the horizon—but the edge of the jungle, from whence no sound came, was littered with unmoving Kuku-Kukus and motionless, glowing can-shaped chunks of gold.

"Well, as you said, Chinnery, they'll know they were in a fight!"

Burt grinned.

"We must have hit them with a quarter of a million dollars," he agreed. "But we're rich men. We've got a lot left."

The trouble, they were both thinking, was that in another day or so, assuming they lived that long, they would be willing to swap every ounce of the stuff for a loaf of bread or half a dozen hard-boiled eggs. Still, it didn't do to talk about such matters.

Dr. Reeves cleared his throat.

"Stephanie's taking it well."

"She's taking it beautifully."

"I—uh—I happened to overhear what

you said to her when she asked if you'd push her over the cliff as a last resort. I hope you meant that, Chinnery?"

"I certainly did!"

"Good . . . Good . . . Well, I'm off."

He hobbled away. His ankle was very bad now, and he could scarcely put his foot to the ground.

Burt sat and waited for the next attack.

CHAPTER X

THE WICKED LAND

CAPTAIN GLAISTER had no passengers, but he had the kind of cargo he didn't like. He could have and perhaps should have refused to carry the stuff; but that would have meant that he go to Lae immediately, in a straight line; whereas with this load to make the trip a paying one he would be justified in flying a little out of his way.

This was the first trip he or any other pilot had taken across the island in almost a week. He had plenty of fuel, and he took a course far to the west of the usual one, in the direction of the Dutch territory.

He was indignant because more searching planes had not been sent out, that they were not being sent at all any more. There was, of course, precious little chance of finding Burt Chinnery or the wreckage of Burt's plane, but Glaister couldn't see why they shouldn't keep trying. *He* did. He felt very badly about Burt Chinnery. He had always liked him. A fine sport. A good flyer too.

Sago swamp slid past beneath him—he looked out all the while, his chin on the window ledge—then a belt of pine forest, and then he was among the craggy mountains.

They swooped and rollicked, covered with jungle except here and there where a bare place showed upthrust toward the sky. But the bare places were all rock, knife-like, irregular, small too. Captain Glaister once had flown from Rangoon to Batavia across the Siamese and Malay jungles; but he thought that even that country could not compare in sheer wickedness, from the pilot's point of view, with this.

Thousands of square miles of it, and never a break, never an open, flat space. A plane falling there would almost certainly be lost to sight forever. And the pilot, assuming that he survived, might spend weeks of hopeless floundering, never able to see more than a few yards in any direction, never able to gaze again at the sky.

Burt had had two passengers with him too, a girl and an old man. Glaister hoped, really hoped, that they had been killed instantly. It would be better.

One thing was certain, he reflected grimly. If he himself happened to crash on this trip, with this load, there would be no question of a temporary survival. He'd go to bits—just like that.

When he saw the field he could scarcely believe it. The field, if you could really call it such, lay far to the west, further west than he had intended to fly, but he made for it without hesitation. If for no other reason at all, it was important to report a discovery like this. Certainly nobody had ever flown over this field before: Glaister would have heard of it. He checked his navigation.

It was several hundred yards long, at least fifty yards broad, and covered with very short *kunai* grass. It seemed somewhat bumpy, but perfectly dry, and, for these parts, amazingly flat. There wasn't a tree on it, though there were some remnants of trees, he saw as he got closer. He flew low over it five or six times.

The trees were probably a species of low eucalyptus, rare in these parts, and they must have been struck by a blight, or perhaps by a fire which because of a sudden tropical rainstorm had gone no further. There were some rotten, twisted stumps; not many that he could see; but there might be others hidden by the grass.

"I suppose a landing could be made there, in a real emergency," he muttered to himself, "but I'd hate like hell to have to try it!"

He rose again.

WHEN he had first seen the field he hoped that it might show some trace of Burt Chinnery. If Burt, wandering after the crash, had come upon such a place he would certainly have contrived a signal, knowing that this field would attract any flyer in the vicinity. But there had been nothing of the sort, no sign of any kind of human being. Burt, of course, even if he had crashed near here, might wander for weeks or months and never come upon this field. So maliciously thick was the jungle that he might even walk within a hundred feet of the field and never observe a break in the foliage.

Glaister sighed. There was a sizable, bare-topped mountain just ahead, and he flew back and forth several times in order to make enough altitude to cross it. That was the trouble with this country: it went up and down so viciously, so mercilessly. When you went low to search a valley it was like flying down into a hole, and you had to back and fill, wasting time and petrol, in order to return to safe air.

He crossed the peak with not too much to spare. He glanced at his instruments. He thrust his head out of the window again. And his eyes bugged out almost against his goggles at the sight he saw.

The side of the peak which faced the valley was sheer bare cliff, but the other side, the side he saw now, showed a scene he could not for half a minute believe.

He flew back and forth across it twice, blinking.

Up the steep bare slope dozens of savages were crawling on hands and knees. They held war clubs, and they paid no heed whatever to Cap Glaister and his plane. They were intent upon something else.

On the top, where there was a sort of natural platform, there were nine, ten, eleven men. No, he saw as he swooped lower, one of them was a woman! A white woman too! And two of the men were white men. They were waving at him. They would wave for an instant, then stop to hurl what looked like gilded food tins down the slope at the savages.

From the way they picked them up and threw them, the tins must have been extraordinarily heavy, or else the people were extraordinarily weak. Four of the people were lying down. Except for the white ones, they were very small.

To Captain Glaister, seated back of his two thundering engines, the scene was fantastic and unreal. He heard no sound from it. Yet he could see from the way these men moved that they were fighting a life-or-death battle.

He went lower. He leaned far out of the window, and slipped off his goggles. It was then that he recognized Chinnery.

He should have known it promptly, but he had been flabbergasted. Of course he would have done whatever he could to help these people anyway. Naturally! But when he saw that there was a fight in progress, and that his friend Burt Chinnery was on one side, a horde of screaming savages on the other—then he did something he would not previously have believed possible.

Burt wasn't waving up at him any more. Neither was the other white man, nor the white woman, nor any of those tiny fellows who still kept their feet. They were much too busy throwing what looked like gold bricks. They did not have many of these gold bricks left.

Glaister banked, rose, turned, came down. For a man of his experience he was doing some desperately close flying here. The scene swam into his field of vision again.

Savages were swarming up the slope by the score, by the hundred. They didn't seem to know what fear was. Again and again one of those can-shaped objects would flare like a rocket, hit in their midst, and send a whole pack of them tumbling back down to the jungle; but each time they came back for more—or most of them did. They had the fury and insane persistence of ants.

AT THE edge of the jungle, now, Glaister espied a tall man clad in a sort of grass skirt and shirt. He had long

white hair, a long white beard, and he too seemed white. His mouth was open, his arms waving, and he seemed to be shouting at the savages, urging them on.

Glaister couldn't understand it. A white man on the other side, too.

What he could understand, however, was the fact that Burt Chinnery was in trouble.

He banked and rose again—he had to—and for a moment he tended to his controls, not daring to look below.

"If I only had a machine-gun," he muttered.

He didn't have one, of course. He didn't have even a cap pistol. The only possible sort of weapon—

His chin jerked up, his eyes grew enormous, he glanced back toward the cargo which was piled in small cardboard cartons in the space ordinarily reserved for passengers.

"Do you suppose if I—"

He made a little more altitude, flying away from the battle, feeling a coward to do so. He quit the controls for a moment, reached back into the passenger compartment, got a carton. He broke it open. It contained six sticks, each wrapped in tissue paper, each about eight inches long and the thickness of his own thumb. It contained also some twine fuses.

He wrapped one of these sticks tightly in newspaper upon which he had previously been sitting. With his little finger he tamped a hole in one end. He packed a fuse into that hole.

Then, very, very carefully, holding the stick far away from him, he took a pack to cigarettes from a breast pocket, worked one into his mouth, let the others drop to the floor. He fished out a box of matches. Still only using one hand, he jiggled a match out, propped it against the side of the box, struck it.

It was an old parlor trick of his. Usually, when he did it, it didn't make any difference if he failed. This time—

Low again, he saw that the savages were half way up the slope. They had apparently been driven back a bit.

He went very low indeed.

He saw black faces turned up toward him for the first time. They must have supposed, those devils, that he was going to crash right down into them. But they stood their ground.

He touched the fuse to the cigarette. He tossed the stick out of the window. He threw the plane into a climb.

The explosion was terrific. He couldn't hear it, but it shook the plane violently. He missed the tops of the trees by mere inches. He banked, turned, came down again. He hadn't practiced strafing in the Royal Flying Corps for nothing.

By the time he came down the second time he had another stick ready. Once again he touched the fuse to the cigarette. Once again he threw something down among the savages.

They were tough, eh?

CHAPTER XI

THE GOD HAS FALLEN

FOUR of the pygmies had been killed by arrows the first day. Another, the second day, had gone completely mad: he had climbed over the breastwork and slid screaming and kicking down in among the Kuku-Kukus, who forthwith beat him to a wet red pulp. Nor were the rest much good. They were not naturally fighting men. Desperate, they could rise to heights of bravery; but the strong, firm, oaken courage needed to endure a siege was not in them. They whimpered now, half crazy with fear.

It was up to the professor, the pilot and the girl. There was no longer any question of keeping her behind cover, making her lie down, protecting her. She was one of them now, and she fought by their sides.

Hunger was bad enough. They were so weak that they could scarcely lift the gold to throw it, and dragging it out of the cave was a long process of agony, ameliorated only by the fact that the cave at least gave protection against the sun. It was the only shade they had, and ordi-

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narily they could not trust themselves to it.

Hunger was bad; but thirst was worse. Not a drop of rain had fallen in this wild high place where ordinarily it rained most of the time. Nor was there any in the cave, though they felt over every inch of walls and floor with their fingers in the dark. They'd had nothing to drink in more than fifty hours. And the sky above was clear and blue; the sun battered upon them with cruel, unremitting violence.

When they first heard the plane they did not believe it. Not one, indeed, even mentioned it to the others. The surviving pygmies chattered among themselves, but Stephanie and Burt did not understand them, and the professor, who was dizzy with pain, probably didn't hear. But the professor heard the plane, though he did not say anything.

They stood shoulder to shoulder. They had to make every chunk of gold count now; and they had long ago ceased the forced cheerfulness of jokes about how fast money goes these days and what annoyance it is to be down to one's last million. They were down to a great deal less than a million. For a little while, in the beginning of the fight, the Kuku-Kukus had obligingly thrown back some of the gold. But at that time the defenders had not stood in notable need of it. The gesture had never been more than that, for even the strongest savages could not throw a chunk of gold from the base of the rocky slope to the breastwork, and the slope itself offered no foothold for this.

The Kuku-Kukus wouldn't have had sense enough to stop it. Michaud had done that.

Michaud wanted them alive. They were sure of it. Otherwise he would not have spent all this trouble attacking them: he would simply have sat down in the jungle and starved them out. But he wanted them alive. His prestige was at stake, his kingship. If he could not conquer them in open fight, no matter how many men he lost doing it, he would be ruined. He must capture them, and torture them very slowly with appropriate ceremonies.

They heard the plane, and said nothing. They heard it come nearer and nearer: it was somewhere behind them.

Stephanie was the one who broke at last.

"It is! It is! It must be!"

She whirled around, almost falling to her knees.

"It *is!* Look!"

They all looked then. But only for a moment. For the Kuku-Kukus once more were pressing the attack.

They didn't remember much of what followed. They turned to signal the plane, of course, whenever they had an opportunity; but that was not often; and curiously, it didn't seem to mean much. Yet the plane lingered. It went back and forth. It flew dangerously low.

They were groggy. Dr. Reeves was sometimes a little hysterical, laughing or trying to sing. The girl never made a sound. Their heads were ringing, their eyes stung, their throats were white-hot. They had difficulty standing, and when they fell to their knees, which was often, it took a long while to get up again.

THE explosions, somehow, didn't matter much at first. They didn't sound very loud; and though their effects were extraordinary, and set the pygmies jabbering in fright, they did not immediately register upon what remained of the reason of Stephanie Reeves and her uncle and Burton Chinnery. They were just another noise. It was odd the way the Kuku-Kukus disappeared, odd too the way great patches of jungle were torn and mangled; but everything was odd anyway.

They had been standing here for years and years, just standing here fighting, just fighting because they didn't know any better, for years and years, they had been just standing here, they had been fighting—

It wasn't until the third blast that even Burt Chinnery realized what was happening. He pointed to the sky, without looking up.

"Fishing," he said, and giggled.

"Easy, Burt," the girl said.

"No, no! I know what you think. But I'm not crazy. He's fishing, the pilot up there. Dynamite. They use it for fishing in New Guinea. The plantation men along the coast who have hundreds of native laborers to feed. They have boys throw dynamite sticks over the water, and it stuns the fishes, and they float up to the surface, and then the boys scoop them in wholesale. Fishing. No sport, but it works."

"But would a plane carry—"

"He must be! What else is it? They explode just like that: I've seen 'em. I don't know why anybody would be sending them by air freight, but that's the only explanation there is."

The fighting was finished. Not only was the slope clear of living Kuku-Kukus but so also was the jungle in that immediate vicinity. For they could see into the jungle now. The plane had gone back and forth across it, dropping stick after stick of dynamite, and trees were blasted, vines were blown to bits, huge hanks of parasitic plants had been torn apart. The jealous jungle had been opened, a little.

"Look out! He's dropping one here too!"

Had the man gone mad? He was flying directly over them now, and they could see him reach out of the window and toss a stick. He was puffing at a cigarette.

The stick fell, swift and slim, shining in the sunlight.

They pulled Dr. Reeves down with them. Stupified, he had not realized what was happening. They covered their heads with their arms. They waited for death to strike.

They waited a long while. And when at last Burt looked up he saw that the stick had fallen within ten feet of them. Covering their heads with their arms wouldn't do any good now, if the thing went off. Had the fuse gone out?

Then Burt saw that there was something white attached to the stick. He hadn't noticed this before.

Very slowly, with weary labor, he got to his feet. Unsteadily he walked toward the stick.

It was a fountain pen. It was a light green fountain pen, and under its pocket-clip had been stuck a folded piece of paper. Burt took out the paper. He unfolded it.

Now the others had joined him. The pygmies, however, would not budge.

Follow my engine. Field near. Carry on!

Cap Glaister

Dr. Reeves shook his head. He leaned against one of the boulders, and his arms dangled lifeless at his sides.

"Whoever he is, he's mad. Follow his engine? What's he think an engine is, a will-o'-the-wisp? Can you fancy it leaping coyly from bush to bush, egging us on?"

Stephanie cried, "He means follow the sound of his engine! Look: he's flying back and forth there now. He's signaling to us that nobody's left down below. The Kuku-Kukus must have run away."

"But a field?" her uncle cried. "A field —around here?"

He shook his head. He started to slither down, his feet slipping under him, his back against the boulder.

Burt caught him under the arms, straightened him, shook him.

"Listen here: I know Cap Glaister, and if he says there's a field, then there *is* a field! Come on! Shake up those pygmy pals of yours. If they've got nerve enough to follow us they might be rescued yet."

He took Stephanie's arm.

"Come on. You'd follow a man I trust, wouldn't you?"

"I'd follow *you*," she said quietly, "anywhere in the world."

GLAISTER saw them slide down the slope and plunge into the jungle, and later he saw them crawl down the natural path in the cliff which he had previously noted and to which he guided them; but thereafter they were lost to his sight. He flew back and forth, half a mile ahead, somewhat less than that back. It was difficult, indeed it was impossible, to estimate how rapidly or how slowly

they might move through the jungle below. He himself, he had to remember, was cruising at eighty miles an hour. At last he landed in the field.

It had looked bad. It was worse than it looked. That he didn't ground-loop was a miracle—and ground-looping with half a ton of dynamite would have been no fun. But he made it, somehow.

He taxied the plane downwind. He kept the engine turning over, cutting it as low as he could. Then he unloaded.

That fool planter who needed dynamite so badly that he was willing to pay for it air freight, would just have to wait for another trip. It was too bad.

He took it all out and stacked it on a far side of the field where he couldn't possibly collide with it in taking off. From time to time he'd stop and tamp a stick, wrap it, insert a fuse, light it, throw the thing. He lighted them from his cigarette.

"You must always throw the dynamite away and hold the cigarette," he muttered in sing-song, "and not throw the cigarette away and hold—"

He looked up, thinking he heard something. But the jungle was silent. He lighted and tossed another stick. They couldn't hear the idling engine, but they might hear these. Had he come down too soon? He hated to take off again in search of them; he probably couldn't find them anyway. A take-off, another landing, another take-off: it was too much to ask of a field like this. He'd had one miracle already, and he was praying for another. But not for four.

Burt Chinnery came limping, but smiling. He was quiet, almost off-hand in his manner.

"Hello, Cap. Thanks for picking us up."

"Don't mention it. Glad to help. All here?"

"All but a few who fell by the wayside. Too bad. No carrying them, though. We haven't got the strength."

"Five of you, eh? What in the world are those two midgets? They look like monkeys."

"They are, more or less. But they'll be sensations when we get them before the gray-whiskers. Say, Cap, you haven't any water to spare, have you?"

They stumbled into the cabin, the pygmies frightened but obedient. Dr. Reeves had picked a stick of dynamite and a fuse from the pile, and he was staring at it stupidly, dazed.

"Is this what did all the damage? This little thing?"

"Come on, Doctor. Let's go." He explained to Glaister. "Make it as fast as you can, won't you? There's a flock of Kuku-Kukus just behind us. I think they were afraid to grab us after those explosions, but they've got a white chief named Ball-Ten Meeshow who isn't afraid of anything, and I think he'll be catching up to them soon."

The second miracle happened. Three times they thought they were going to pitch over, and eventually the landing gear clipped leaves from the tops of trees. But they got up.

"There's Ball-Ten Meeshow now," Burt cried.

Glaister banked the plane.

"I want another look at that fellow," he explained.

"Personally," said Stephanie, "I've had all the looks I want."

She dropped into a chair, threw her head back, and was going to go to sleep when Burt dashed past her. She looked up. Her uncle stood leaning out of a window back toward the tail, and he was holding in one hand a stick of dynamite with fuse attached, in the other hand a lighted match. His head rocked insanely. His eyes had a wild stare.

"Look out! That'll go off!"

"Of course it will go off," Dr. Reeves said mildly, and touched the flame to the fuse. "That's what I want it to do."

Smiling, he dropped the thing out of the window.

Paul-Étienne Michaud, standing in his litter, knew when he saw the plane soar that everything was lost. He knew without glancing at them that already his men were muttering among themselves and giv-

ing him strange looks. He had held power over them for many years, by bluff, by strength, by sheer force of will. He couldn't do it any longer. He'd been beaten, and they had seen it. It didn't make any difference how many men he killed, either of his own or other tribes; that didn't matter, now; what did matter was that he had been beaten by somebody else. They looked up at him, muttering.

Michaud knew this even while he climbed to his feet in the litter and raised his two fists to shake at the plane, and even while he was shouting curses. The plane came back, slightly higher, headed now for the coast. Michaud saw the thing dropped from the window. He guessed what it was. He didn't care.

In fact, he smiled.

This was perhaps the best way after all. When the story of that gold reached civilization men would come here in swarms. His Kuku-Kukus could not hold them back, even supposing that he himself somehow lived down this present disgrace and was their king still. No, he'd go under. He'd have to.

And this was the best way. He saw the thing falling right toward him, and he smiled. This way he would always be their god.

The plane banked, making altitude, and when it came back across the field it was much higher. They all looked down, Stephanie, Dr. Reeves, Burt Chinnery, Captain Glaister, even the two scared pygmies. They saw that Paul-Étienne Michaud wasn't there any longer, nor were his litter, nor his carriers, nor his attendants.

There was only a hole.

THE END

LOOKING AHEAD!

SOUTHBOUND FOR SINGAPORE

It's ho for the China Seas! But never had the *Dixie* heaved anchor with more potential dynamite stowed in her ancient hold. Captain Jim Blair was worried most about the howling, bring-'em-back-alive zoo, but there was also a shipment of Bibles that for some mysterious reason had to be handled like glass, a peppery redhead with espionage in her eye, and a lunatic Chinese cook with a wicked knife to give the captain trouble. Beginning a rollicking novel of seafaring adventure, by

ROY DE S. HORN

COLONY OF THE DOOMED

A great Empire once shipped her most vicious criminals across the sea to a land where law and honor were forgot. In the wilderness of the Antipodes, one man faced a den of thieves and murderers armed with nothing but his courage. A novelet by

PHILIP KETCHUM

THE SON OF HANDSLED BURKE

There's a strength bred in some men that cannot be downed. And neither the hard-bitten North nor Two-Horse Swen could have had an apter pupil than the son of the greatest trail-man who ever hit the Arctic Circle. An exciting novelet by

C. F. KEARNS

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—SEPTEMBER 10TH

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

WE DON'T mean to be critical—and we're always glad to hear from them—but there is something about scientifically minded readers that makes them extraordinarily touchy about their pet subject. It's probably the scientist's eye for detail and passionate love of accuracy to the 'teenth decimal place that causes it. Other experts aren't nearly so sensitive. We've already told you about those sandhogs who found Borden Chase's novel completely satisfactory. And comparatively few Californian Argonauts became particularly wrought up about the Rathjen flood story, you remember.

But we get more letters screaming in utter anguish about a small slip of fact or figure in one filler than you could shake a printer's stick at. Eric North is the latest target for the howls of the laboraticians. . . . The funny thing about it is that they almost always, after having torn a story to pieces, nailed its hapless author to a cross of chemical scorn, piled sulphurous epithets on our battered heads and carried on in general, end up by asking us to "please print more of this type of story."

The way we usually feel when we've survived a session of this kind, expresses itself in a formal vow taken by the staff-at-large never again to let so much as one test tube creep into any of our stories. You can—that is the rest of you—see how we feel.

And here's another reader with a barrowful of sackcloth for the author of "Three Against the Stars."

J. MASON

I have recently begun to take your magazine, the chief reason for this being Eric North's intriguing serial "Three Against the Stars."

Mr. North's story, in its third installment, touched upon astronomy and I am sure he has made some small slips. In the first instance (I make reference to the seventh paragraph on page 82) he said (or his character Dr. Montague said) "Mars is the smallest of all the planets except Mercury, and like Venus he has no moon."

Ah! but has the author never heard of the planet Pluto, discovered in 1930 by Lowell. It is smaller than Mars and although its incredible distance from the sun (nearly 3,800,000,000 miles) doesn't permit accurate measuring of its diameter it is thought that it is partially a twin of Mercury.

In the next instance, although it is only a matter of personal opinion, doesn't Mr. North, in his portrayal of Dr. Montague, the sagacious scientist, err in having Dr. Montague think that the cosmic germs would die or at least be rendered incapable of action in the atmosphere of earth. Personally, I don't agree.

The "star germs," as they have been called are in their most primordial state of existence and as has been proved time and again life in an early stage adapts itself to conditions it finds itself in. Why not so with the "star germs"?

It is one of the theories of the beginning of life upon earth that the life germs have come from other planets, maybe other systems, and fallen upon earth. Now in its first home there would be very little chance of the life, when fully matured, resembling the life on earth today. But, falling on earth, the likely different conditions made it adapt itself to the aforesaid conditions.

So, there we are. If Mr. North would like to defend himself against your ruthless correspondent I'd be glad to hear from him.

ARGOSY is a fine mag but I'd like to see more "science fiction" in it. I was extremely sorry about missing "Drink We Deep."

Congratulations anyway—keep up your present standard.

Toronto, Ont., Canada

WE HAVEN'T room to print all the letters we've received in the same general tenor as the ones following—we've

chosen these to speak for the rest because they're a good deal shriller and more concentrated than the others.

RICHARD T. PRIDLEY

This letter is going to be old stuff to you. Because I'm writing merely to get on the Hornblower bandwagon—and apparently it is already pretty crowded. But for a story like "Ship of the Line" there is always room for one more rooter.

The rugged captain is about the finest character I have ever come across in a story. Some time back you made some pretty vague promises about getting Hornblower back into ARGOSY. That was fine and I slept better after learning that the captain might be with us again. But you can't hold the public off like that forever. Be definite. We want Hornblower, and when are you going to do something about it?
Dubuque, Ia.

All right, all right. We gather that Mr. Pridley considers us procrastinating and incompetent. Let him wait for:

HOWARD J. QUEENSTOWN

Well, you've been promising for weeks and weeks to do something about the resurrection of that Hornblower guy. I've been waiting. And waiting. So now I'm beginning to think you're just stalling.

We want—I guess there's more than just me—Hornblower. We don't want hints and promises. You're carrying on just like a fond but slightly nitwitted parent on the night before Christmas. "Hush-hush now, kiddies and you'll have your presents first thing in the morning, and my how you're going to enjoy your rol—Oops, I almost told you what one of them was going to be."

I haven't believed in Santa Claus since I was four months old. (My nurse gave it away.) And I don't want to wait until Christmas morning to see my presents—not if you're going to be so doggoned aggravating about it. So—come on, now—when is Hornblower coming back? And why not sooner?

Congrats on an otherwise swell book.
Chicago, Ill.

In case you hadn't noticed that announcement on page 61, Mr. Queenstown and all you Hornblower-minded mates, you'd better hoist sail and scud right back there for a look. Sure—we've gone and been unprecedented again. Hope you're satisfied now.

Says Everybody is Hypnotized

If there is any lack whatever in your life—if you suffer from poverty, fear, doubt, disappointment, disease, discord, inferiority complex, or failure—if your life is not a continuous record of abounding health, success, wealth and happiness—very likely it is because you're hypnotized! Such is the astounding declaration of Edwin J. Dingle, well-known explorer and geographer. He tells of a strange method of mind and body control that leads to immense powers never before experienced. He found the method in mysterious Tibet, often called the Land of Miracles.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength, ability, and mind-power, capable of prolonging youth, defying sickness, developing great talents, and achieving dazzling success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized, our powers put to sleep, by suggestions of associates, by what we read, and by various other experiences. To realize their really marvelous powers, men and women must escape from this hypnotism. The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing people of such hypnotizing ideas. Send today for the free 9,000 word treatise revealing the startling results of this strange system, by which men in the Far East can do things never equalled in the Western world. No obligation. Simply send your name and address.

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