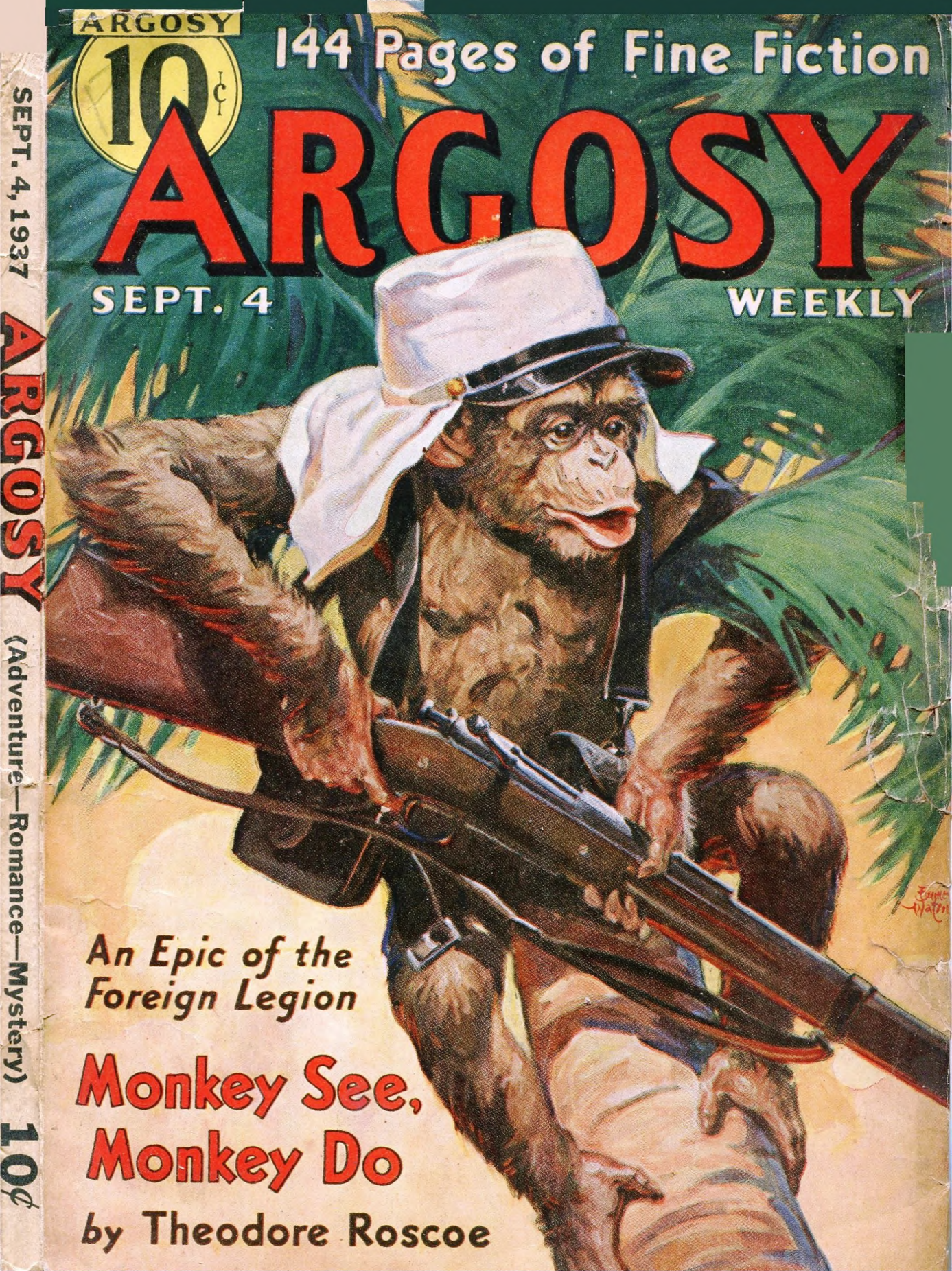
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WEEKLY
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Monkey See, Monkey Do
by Theodore Roscoe
SEPT. 4, 1937
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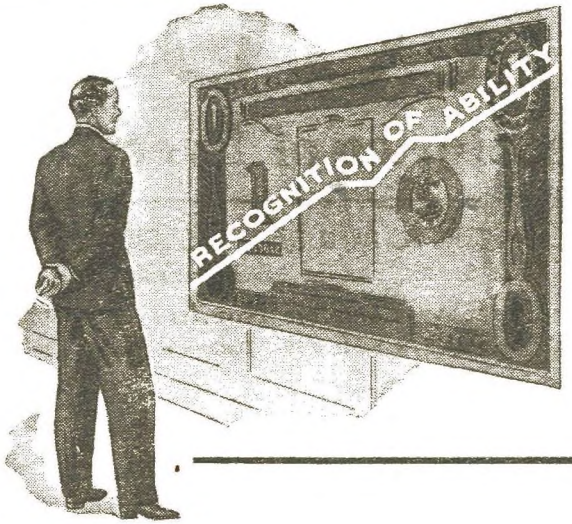

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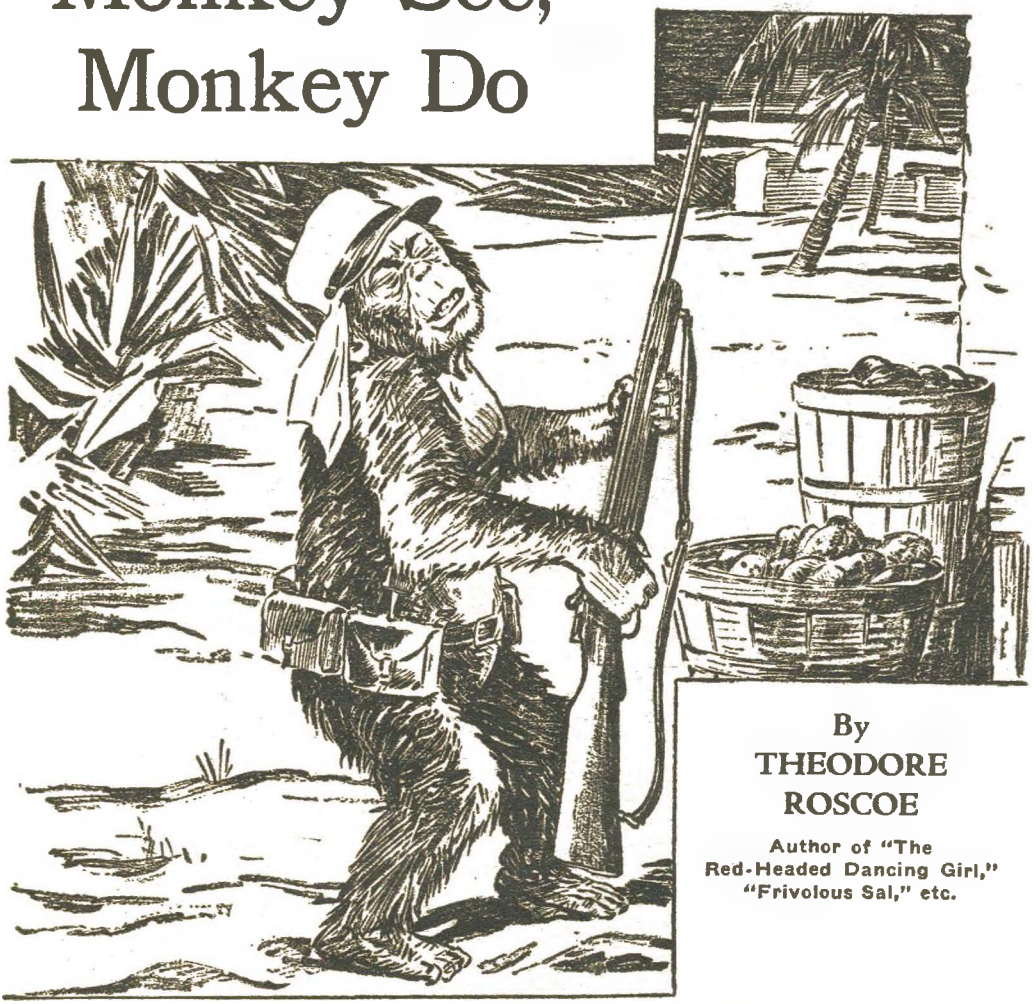
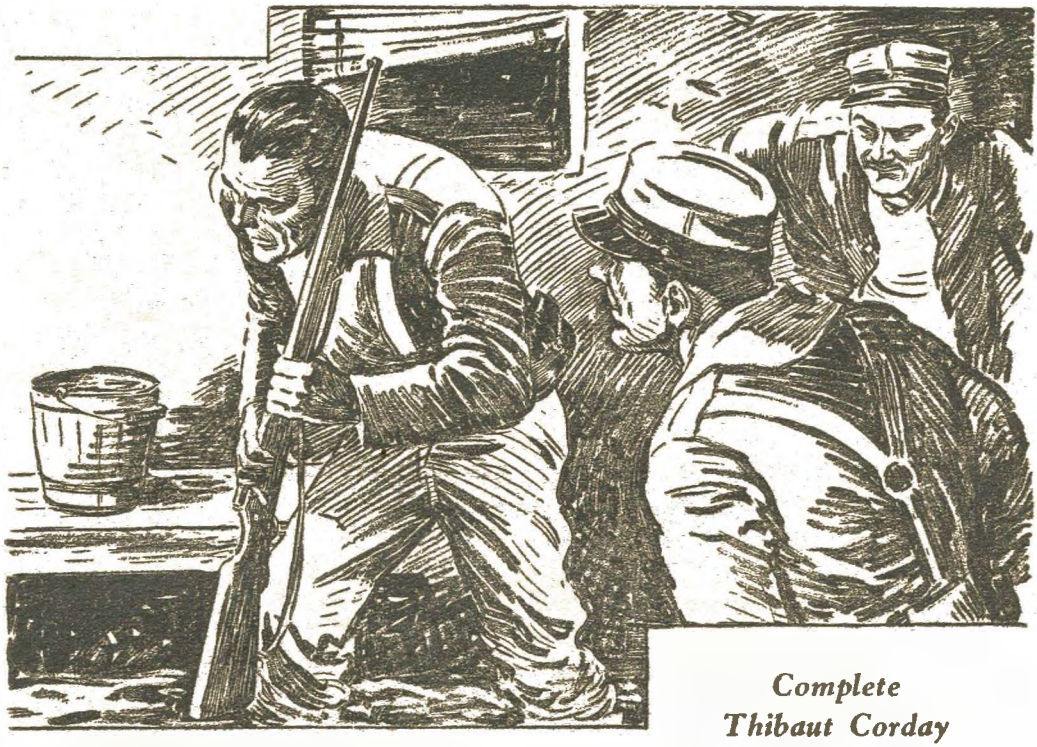


By
THEODORE
ROSCOE

Author of "The Red-Headed Dancing Girl," "Frivolous Sal," etc.

SOMEONE mentioned the Darwin Theory; and Baker, the young British consular agent, said that judging by the way things were going in Europe these days he could readily believe that men were descended from monkeys. March, the doctor, thought it ought to be the other way around—men were descending *to* monkeys.

Old Thibaut Corday felt the theory was insulting to the monkeys, either way. "*Morbleu!*" The old soldier of fortune snorted a puff of whatever it was he used for tobacco. "Do you believe the monkeys would admit to racial heritage with such common clay? What self-respecting chimpanzee would confess any relationship to some of our present-day dictators, much less the dolts who flock after them? What honest baboon would admit the same family tree as our frenzied dollar-grabbers, office-chasers and factory slaves? *Non,* if the little fellows were articulate, I am sure they would protest at thus being classed our ancestors." He shook his head emphatically. "Never underestimate a monkey."



Complete Thibaut Corday Novelet

Baker laughed. "Corday sounds as if he considered mankind the missing link."

Vehemence kindled the old veteran's eye. "Certainly the monkeys are not. Regard. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity —have not the monkeys achieved those noble ideals while we remain squabbling in the mud? Are the insane asylums full of monkeys? Are the divorce courts full of monkeys? Are the jails, cinema theatres, war cemeteries and Fascist armies full of monkeys? *Zut!* Monkeys have more brains. They are independent. They are individualists. They have a sense of humor. They are too clever to go to jail. Try to put something over on a monkey. Take care! At our own game, too, they can beat us. When it comes to craft, a monkey can make a Machiavelli look simple by comparison." Old Thibaut Corday clinched his point. "As for mankind being the missing link—*voilà!* Merely look at the French Foreign Legion!"

The oldest survivor of that famous army paused to give the Algerian scene beyond our café awning a jeer. Yanking his pipe from his cinnamon beard, he spat acridly. *"La Légion Etrangere!* What is that but an entire collection of missing links? No orang-outang in its right mind would think of joining such an outfit. Any kinkajou would have more wit than voluntarily to sign a five-year contract to fight in Africa for a penny a day. A gorilla would refuse to associate with such lowbrows.

"Eh, but then from this Legion I can furnish the example of a man who, in contrast to a gorilla's, had a forehead as low as a Niger River crocodile's, no more heart than a hyena, and

the soul of a mamba in the grass. Another in that same august company with less spirit than a mouse hiding in a cheese. Then a monkey did something to both of those men. *Oui,* it needed a monkey to teach those two missing links a lesson. What? I have never told you of Captain Batraville and Big *Singe* and Little *Singe—?* The story of the vanishing bullets, and the monkey who went up before the firing squad?"

"Went up before the firing squad?" Baked stared. "A monkey?"

"For murder," Old Thibaut Corday's voice harshened. "And such a murder, *messieurs,* as you would not imagine to hear of in the Foreign Legion or out. Believe me when I tell you, such a murder as you have never heard of before. But you must listen through to the end, or you will not believe."

He halted to load his pipe with that something which looked—and smelled—like camel's hair. Twilight whispered in lilac veils down from the Kasbah Quarter and went soft-footed over the ramp fronts of Boulevard Sadi Carnot. In a park somewhere distant a band was playing *La Casquette du Père Bugeaud,* and the echoes of brass mingled strangely with the alley-muffled pulse-beat of an Ouled Naïl drum and the far thin call to prayer of muezzin in minaret.

Blue pipe-smoke of reminiscence was curtaining Old Thibaut Corday's eye. When the curtain lifted, the stage was set miles to the southward in equatorial jungle.

"Pause to consider," the old man bade us, "Senegal."

I

YOU may recall Senegal (he went on) as that country festering at the base of the skull-like map-profile of Africa: scene of that delightful affair of the red-headed dancing girl who was hunted as a murderess and turned out to be merely a tatooing on the assassin's arm. That happened the first time I was there. Shipped to that African boneyard for a second time, I thought anything could happen and I would not be surprised. You will see how I was wrong.

Fort Defi is the outpost: about sixty miles down the Senegal coast below Port Dakar, which, itself, is halfway to hell. Fort Defi, when we got there, was all the way.

We had been sent down to pacify a native uprising, only those rebellious Senegalese blacks had the same idea about pacifying us. *Oui,* they had a way of soothing Legionnaires. Crooning them to sleep with bullets in the back of the head. You stopped in the jungle to pick a banana. *Ping!* and your appetite was gone. You sauntered down to the beach to wash your singlet. *Spank!* and you were sorry you bent over.

Every time you turned a corner or put your back to a palm tree you were liable for permanent duty in the garrison cemetery. The jungle crouched close around the fort; one never could tell where the next shot would come from; and for the past six months those black snipers had been scoring a hit a week. Those Senegalese rebels were led by a half-breed werewolf who called himself King Solomon of the Thousand Rifles and had boasted personally to exterminate the Legion. *Sacré!* that outpost was about as safe as the back shelf of a shooting gallery, and a white man around there felt like a clay pigeon at a sharpshooter's convention.

Figure to yourself the state of mind

of a batch of missing links cooped up in such a danger zone. Marching in as reinforcements, we found ourselves in a sort of zoo. Morale in that garrison was bad. Very bad. Snipers shoot more than their victim; they shoot the nerves of all survivors. That post was in such a state when you said hello to a corporal he was apt to spring at your throat. On the walls the sentries prowled like panthers; in the barracks the men snarled, snapped and glared at each other like carnivores in a cage. Our detachment had hardly arrived before there were a dozen fights, and for defending ourselves against assault, my *copain* Yankee Bill and I were promptly handed the odious punishment of mess duty.

"This place is a madhouse," Yankee Bill the Elephant raged. "We're here five minutes, and get garbage detail. The whole outpost is *cafard*. Did you ever see such demented brutes as the dogs in this garrison?"

I pointed to a row of mounds in one corner of the drill field. "Doubtless it will work on our nervous systems, too. But you are right, my old; we seem to be stabled with a lot of wild animals."

Dieu! I had scarcely spoken when Yankee Bill grabbed my arm; pulled me right-face to see something that gave me a shock. It did so! We had rounded the corner of the garrison cook house, and behind that cook house was a sight that rocked me back on my heels. What do Americans call it? K.P.? All right; huddled on a bench behind this mess kitchen, paring knives in fist, vegetables in a bucket, peelings everywhere, behold—a couple of mess punks engaged in K.P. Not an extraordinary sight behind a garrison cook house? Very extraordinary behind that one, with the jungle shadows creeping over the high fortress wall, the hush of African sundown, the smell of orchids and decay and frying meat. Very extraordinary when you picture that pair of onion-peeling mess punks as two apes.

Apes, you comprehend. Monkeys! Two hairy brown monkeys seated side by side on that bench, peeling onions. Chattering with their heads together. Stopping to scratch an armpit or swat a fly. Twitching and nudging each other in simian buffoonery as they went at those fuming vegetables.

There was one about as big as a man, sitting with its back toward us. A gangly animal costumed in a pair of ragged Legion trousers, its brown hide covered with patches of tawny fuzz, on its scalp a close-clipped tuft of black hair. It was huddled over with the onion bucket between its toes, chirping as it peeled at a legume, and there was something almost human about the big pink ears cupped on either side of its wry-necked head.

The other monkey was hardly bigger than a boy, the color of nutmeg, its hair as long and straggly as an uncombed Saint Bernard's. It wore nothing save a dirty cummerbund about its middle and a Tirailleur's tarboosh—one of those red-felt flowerpots such as hand-organ monkeys wear—on its head. I said they were peeling onions. Actually the big one was peeling; the smaller one, a higher type evidently, was chopping them up in a dishpan. Truly it gave me a turn there in the twilight, the scene blurred by shadows and a buzzing fog of flies. It remained for Yankee Bill to startle me more.

"The one wearing the hat," said Yankee Bill, "is the monkey!"

At that they both jumped around, and it took me a minute to realize my American friend was right. To invert the comment: the one without a hat

was a man—he was a Legionnaire.

Certainly I had to look twice. The long-armed weedy body, the bare prehensile feet, the head-in-neck cringe of the shoulders were possibly human. But the face pinched between those ears, the black brushcut painting in a V down the wrinkled forehead, the pale eyebrows, wrinkled nose, wide upper lip and puckered chin—that expression of old-man childishness, as if the creature were a shriveled boy—and most of all the beady sore-rimmed eyes blinking in nervous fright—that face was down out of a tree, or the face of an idiot. Do you wonder I gaped like a Gascon at a country fair?

THE authentic monkey scorned us, stuck out its tongue, turned its back on us, and went on about the housework. His companion cringed on the bench, blinking up. "One would believe," I glared, "that this sacred Foreign Legion is recruiting its members from Noah's Ark."

"Or does this outpost boast two mascots?" Yankee Bill gulped.

Sacred stove! if that creature on the bench did not astonish me by human speech, catching at my sleeve in the gesture of a mendicant whining for alms. "Do not tell! I beg of you, Legionnaires, do not tell the commandant. If he knew my monkey was helping me prepare the evening meal—"

"Doubtless he would prefer the chef of a Paris hotel," I suggested, staring at the smaller ape. "Which one of you is company cook?"

Word of honor, the fellow was at me groveling. "I am. Do not tell on me. This cursed outpost—until your detachment arrived I have been without any assistant. Snipers have killed too many—short-handed I have had to work the kitchen—*non,* only today I have taught the monkey to peel a few miserable vegetables." The creature was almost in tears. "Look, say nothing of this, and all the extra food you can eat will be yours!"

"Agreed," said Yankee Bill, promptly sitting down and putting his back to the cook house wall. "Glad to let the monk substitute any time."

For me, I was still staring at cook and monkey-helper in suspicion of my sanity. My oath! as the twilight thickened it was difficult to discern the difference between human or animal. "No Legion cook gives out extra rations for nothing," I snapped. "What is this, *vaurien!* A game?"

The fellow shrank back before my tone, begging at me with his eyes. "*Non, non,* there is no game. Only that the commandant hates monkeys. The commandant — Captain Batraville—hates everything! You do not know the commandant here!"

I was beginning to think I did not want to know anyone there. An outpost of caged maniacs surrounded by sharpshooters; the barracks like a tiger's den; the kitchen run by apes. The way that cook's monkey-face paled to citron at mention of the post commander filled me with foreboding. *Dieu!* Yankee Bill, tough-skinned as always, was grinning amazement at the actual ape.

"Do you really mean you trained that varmint to pare onions?"

I wish you could have seen the change that came over our chef at that question. From tearful appeal, his manner altered as if at a blow to fierce indignation. His eyes went fervid—blazed topaz at Yankee Bill.

"Varmint?" He squeaked the word. "Pare onions? This monkey can do a whole lot more than skin a vegetable, *mon gar!* Perhaps you do not know it,

but you are looking at the best educated monkey in all the world. That animal can do anything. Anything! You do not believe me? Listen, for three years I have been teaching this monkey; he is trained like a Prussian Guard! Vegetables? Regard this, then! And I trained him all by myself!"

TURN me into a pepper mill! but that inhuman cook snatched a rifle from his kitchen doorway; handed it to the grinning monkey. Then: "Attention!" — "Present arms!" — "Port arms!"—"Parade rest!"—"At ease!" Can you imagine the thing? That hairy brown ape going through the entire manual of arms? Briskly and without a blunder? Better than any recruit could have done it, I tell you, and as well as I could do it, myself. Only somehow it was a horrible parody of the thing, a sickening grotesquerie, a lampoon of mimicry to show a soldier how simple-minded the whole military system was!

I suppose I was pop-eyed, and Yankee Bill's jaw was hanging as if broken. Do not ask me which was the more incredible: monkey playing soldier, or cook playing officer! When that bit of drill was concluded, our chef grabbed the rifle from the beast, propped it on the doorsill, wheeled on us with all the triumph of a parent who has just exhibited a child prodigy.

"You see? You comprehend what I can do with this monkey? Rollo, the Educated Ape! Maurice, the Monkey that Acts Like a Man! Have you any idea the sensation we would be"—he pointed to the monkey and himself—"on the stage?"

On the stage? I stared at him. I could have told that Legion cook that as far as I was concerned he would never be more sensational on a stage than he was behind that outpost kitchen right then! *Bleu!* The fellow sat down on the bench beside his monkey, put an arm around the beast and began to talk. Without our asking for it, he began to tell us about himself and that monkey as a prospector might blurt out to two strangers the story of a gold strike. Eyes bright as fever, cheeks blown, he piped us such a recital of pent-up ambitions, life's hopes and secret dreams as I had never heard in that Legion of strange biographies before.

Not in so many words, you understand, but in the pantomime of his features, the glow of his eyeballs as he told us how he'd trained that monkey. You could fancy that as a boy his secret dream had been to be an animal trainer. That! In some Paris garret he had experimented perhaps with mice. You could visualize him, then, as shuffling into some circus tent where the ringmaster's baleful laughter at his cringing shoulders and clumsy hands had reduced his dream to stove ashes, relegating him to the coal scuttles and kettles of the cooking wagon.

One wondered how he had filtered through the Devil's sieve to be with that residue in that Legion sink in Senegal: he did not say. But whatever odyssey of felony and ill fortune had strained him into that kitchen at Fort Defi, this Cinderella had clung to his supreme ambition; clung to it through two Legion enlistments, through the rattle of pots and pans, the daze of soups and dishwater, the eternal curse of hungry mess kits, the endless cookings and bakings attendant to feeding a garrison's stomach.

"And I did it! Three years ago I found that monkey in the jungle. I've trained him from a baby. Sat up nights! Fed him my own share of

chocolate! Not a trick that monkey cannot learn. One more year," the fellow panted at us. "One more year, and I will be out of this curst slave-driving army. And then—!"

And then? You could read it in his exultation. Paris. The Cirque Hiver. The stage. Spotlights and spangles. Audiences flocking in. Name in headlines. Crowds astounded, spellbound, cheering. And with it all the laurels of success—wine, women, song. And gold. "They will pay you a million to see that monkey. I have taught him to roll and smoke cigarettes. He can eat with a knife and fork. Look! You have not seen half—!"

Forthwith he put the beast through a few more antics, and I want to tell you when he said he could teach that monkey to do anything he was almost right. Then do you conceive the idea that if the monkey was remarkable, this half-baked cook was equally so? The way he could make that dumb brute understand him was wonderful. That man had something the circus owner who'd once laughed at him had overlooked. An affinity with monkeys. A genius for training animals.

SUFFICE it to say he put on an astounding exhibition, there in the dusk and fly-buzz behind that cook house. Mess time forgotten. Something burning on the garrison stove and pouring in smoky pungence from the kitchen's gloomed interior. *Voilà!* For years he had been waiting to try that act out on an audience who'd never seen it before, and Yankee Bill and I, new to the outpost, gave him all the satisfaction of open-mouthed astonishment.

"Have you ever seen so wonderful a monkey? It would take me an evening to show what he can do. I tell him to bring a cup from the pantry, he will bring it. I ask him to fetch my *brodequins* from my kit, and he fetches them. As a retriever he has no equal. He knows every article of my uniform. Once I lost a canteen in the jungle; told him to go and find it. He was back with it in half an hour. Look. I will send him into the cook house after my Legion *képi.*"

Tapping his head to illustrate, he gave the specific order, and that educated simian waddled into the smoky door like some outlandish valet. But that was to be the last act of our cook's performance. The last act for that show, I mean. There are several types of headgear in a Legion company, you see. The cook may wear a greasy bonnet; in the jungle we sometimes have the *casque;* generally Legionnaires wear the *képi,* our famous white cap with the square leather brim and a little gold torch on the front.

There is also the commandant's cap, distinguished by its braid, and red across the top.

That was the cap which came out of the cook house just then, and no monkey bringing it, either. The monkey came flying out in front of it, I tell you, and the creature with that cap on its head was a gorilla. A squat, thick-chested gorilla with hairy black hands and gnashing teeth; wearing an officer's uniform for costume, but unable to humanize the fury of a red-eyed, ravening, black-mottled face. *Dieu!* but in the thickened dusk this monster was a figure straight from the horrible Guignol. Confronting monkey and cook, this greater ape stood swaying, pumping up its chest in rage, swelling in purple passion.

"Saligaud!" the roar came out like a dynamite explosion, blowing the cook back against the fort wall. *"Vilain*

camus! Dirty pot-rattler! Where is the dinner I should have been served five minutes ago? Answer me!" he screamed at the palsied cook without waiting for an answer. "Must I wait starving at table while you take all night preparing your filthy slum? Must I sing to get my supper? Ha! With every man in the post doing double duty, the garrison short-handed, the rations running low, I come to this stinking kitchen and find the soup boiling over while you waste your time on *that!*"

At the word *that,* he dealt the monkey a kick that lifted it almost as high as the cook-house roof. The monkey screamed and came down in a sprawl of agony, but it was the cook who sagged as if he were going to faint. Whirling, the officer had snatched up the rifle from the doorstep, and he was aiming at the monkey where it crawled whimpering along the ground. Lucky he did not see Yankee Bill or me where we were hugged back in darkness; he might have shot us for insubordination, the temper he was in.

"Captain Batraville," the cook was moaning. "Please! Please do not shoot—"

And the officer squalled: "I told you the next time I saw that ape around the kitchen I would blow off its head!" pulling the trigger.

Click! Nothing happened. Nothing except that gorilla of an officer clicking the trigger like a sewing machine while the monkey crawled off into darkness and the cook's face whitened in the gloom like an agony of death. *Messieurs,* that was a brutal scene. And a queer one, too. For that cook's countenance went whiter at every click of the rifle; he seemed to have forgotten his prize monkey had escaped.

"It was loaded an hour ago!" Pop-eyed, panting at the commandant. Like that. "I swear I cleaned and loaded that gun this afternoon!"

Black in the face, that officer was. Black! "So it is empty now!"—lowering the rifle and advancing on the shrinking cook like implacable menace —"You loaded it this afternoon, but now it is empty! You know what that means? Another clip of cartridges gone! More bullets vanished to the enemy! More ammunition for King Solomon to shoot us down with! Comedian!" the roar broke to a scream. "While you play out here with that ape twin of yours, the thief strikes again, steals your cartridge clip from under your very nose, makes another getaway! Sluggard! *Bourrique!*"

Screaming, he brought the butt of that empty Lebel rifle down smashing on the bare foot of that wretch. *Bash!* Almost you could hear the foot-bones crack. The cook went down in a screeching, groveling pile, clutching his foot in a monkeylike contortion. At the kitchen door, our commandant looked back.

"Take warning from that for your malingering! Step lively, now! And try to report that to General Headquarters and I will see you sent to the Bat d'Af for military neglect and criminal insubordination. Tonight I will investigate the matter of that rifle. Meantime, not so much salt in the soup! I will expect my supper in headquarters, and I will give you just five minutes!"

II

WELL, that was our introduction to Big *Singe* and Little *Singe* and Captain Batraville—a pretty introduction, was it not? *Singe* is the French word for monkey, and those were the nicknames that garrison had

bestowed on our chef and his pet, making the distinction of Big for the cook and Little for the monkey. When I learned their names from a veteran of the outpost that night, I could not help but feel they were appropriate. Together they were referred to scornfully as The *Singe* Twins.

There were also appropriate nicknames for Captain Batraville, but they do not bear translation.

"You think you have known tough officers in this Army of the Damned?" Our veteran informant smiled discouragingly. "Believe me, my boys, this Batraville is a fiend from the Pit. Not only is he a maniac for discipline, he is a slave driver, a butcher, a fire-eater, an Inquisitionist. He is sore because the War Office has transferred him to Senegal, and he takes his temper out on the men. Fortunately he takes most of it out on that idiot cook and his monkey. That cook is his private whipping boy. But mark you, keep out of his way. Above all, never lose sight of your rifle or cartridge belt. Understand? Things have been happening in this outpost, and our commandant grows madder than a gorilla."

Gorilla. That Legionnaire's own term for the man. Whereupon, he told us how affairs stood in that fort, although we were to hear it from other sources soon enough. The reason why that outpost was suffering a nervous breakdown. The explanation to the evening's strange finale behind the cook house. There was something more than expert sniping going on around that outpost. Something more on the inside than a lot of demented Legionnaires and a monkey. There was also in that place another sort of missing link.

I told you those Senegalese rebels were led by a renegade who called himself King Solomon of the Thousand Rifles. His followers were native soldiers who had mutinied and walked off with their guns. But ammunition was something else again. There are no ammunition factories in that African jungle; the Senegal borders are guarded like a blockade; in two weeks those rebel snipers should have run out of bullets, comprehend. And they had kept up constant firing for six months. That was the link which was missing around Fort Defi. Where were those fresh bullets coming from?

Alors, it seemed they were coming from Fort Defi. Our own Legion outpost was supplying that black gang with ammunition. Not a week went by but what some Legionnaire's cartridge belt was stolen. Or a box of shells disappeared from the arsenal. Or a clip had vanished from a rifle. Driblets, you comprehend. Petty thefts. Small amounts that could leave the outpost in a pants pocket and reënter the outpost into some victim's head. Enough to keep those snipers busy. Enough to show that the thief was somewhere inside and making himself a fortune passing those bullets to the outside. Cartridges sell for their weight in gold in a jungle like that, and some devil was getting rich stealing bullets by sleight of hand and sneaking them to the enemy.

No wonder that garrison was short on *esprit de corps.* To know that some Legionnaire among them was, in effect, loading the rifles of their executioners! For days those men had been watching each other like hawks, Captain Batraville, roaring and searching, the barracks turned inside out, and what? No thief had been caught. The bullets continuing to vanish. Coming back in over the wall to pick another victim. I could understand our veteran survivor when he told us the weather

in that fort was ten degrees hotter than hell.

BUT this is the story of Little *Singe* and Big *Singe* and Captain Batraville—the mystery of the stolen ammunition, the crazed garrison, King Solomon and his sharpshooters serving only, along with the jungle's reeking wall, as background for the more astounding drama. The drama that was to take place between our savage commandant, our subnormal cook, and the monkey.

Alors, it was not the matter of the bullets, nor yet the possibility of dying by pot-shot, that occupied my thoughts that night as I stood my sentry duty on the outpost wall. I was thinking about the exhibition I'd witnessed behind the cook house, and the memory of that monkeyshine got under my skin. That almost-human beast paring onions and shouldering a rifle. That almost-animal Legion cook with his Cinderella story of circus ambitions and starry hopes, showing off his trained ape as the evidence of a long-cherished dream about to come true—only to have the dream collapse under the brutal hobnails of that ogre of an officer. Every time I thought of how the commandant had kicked the monkey it made me sick. And I could not cleanse my ears of the sound of that gun-butt stamped down on the cook's bare foot.

Do you see it, then, as I saw it from the first? That cook who was the punching bag for a barbarous officer's temper? That pinch-souled galley slave, sniveling and groveling among his pots and pans? Childish Simple Simon that he was, he had just the mind that could run on a level with an animal's; a common understanding, if you will, that gave him the perfect perception with which to tame and train a monkey. But never, never, never—I had seen this from his cringing shoulders, his weakling acceptance of blows, his blubbering eye—never could he face a man. There was something for thought, *messieurs!* A wild animal trainer afraid of men—!

But I was to witness another act of this strangely forming drama before I slept my first night in Fort Defi on a bed of bad dreams. At midnight I was going off sentry duty, walking in the dark for the barracks. Unfamiliar with the ground, I lost my way, and thereby blundered on an oblique course as far as the cook house, and found myself at a kitchen window staring in. I will bet you a thousand francs you can't tell me what I saw. Agreed? It is a wager.

Moonlight slanted through that kitchen window, and there in the dimness of that unwholesome interior, among the smoky shadows and moonsilver, the ghostly pots and pans—Big *Singe* and Little *Singe*—the cook and his monkey. You thought that, of course. But you did not think of what that couple were doing. Both limping, both whimpering in commiseration of similar injuries—the man with his lamed foot bandaged like the gout; the ape with his sprained back bound in adhesive tape—they had their similar heads together in a corner—the cook showing the monkey how to load and unload a rifle!

"You throw the breech this way, *mon gar.* Like this. Try again."

I could hear the monkey fumbling with the bolt; the method demonstrated by pantomime once more; the lesson repeated. Now that monkey was as big as a baboon, with the tremendous strength of such animals in its arm, and it could handle that rifle as if it

were a broom-straw. But it curled my hair to see it tinkering with the trigger. It was awkward with that delicate device, but its teacher was patient, enticing it to learn with rewards of chocolate.

"Try again, little comrade. You can do it. You want to put on the greatest animal act in history, do you not?"

NAME of a name! but as he whispered, the cook kept pointing to an oval of red cloth that was pinned to the kitchen wall—a piece of felt that I recognized as cut from the monkey's tarboosh. "Learn to load and unload quickly," he was telling the monkey, "and then try aiming at that. Think of what an audience would pay to see you playing sharpshooter—"

Do I win my thousand francs?

I suppose I made a strangling sound, for they both whipped about in startlement and saw my face at the window. The man gave a yelp of cold fear, and the monkey fled under a table. I think the cook would have gone after him if I had not lifted a restraining hand.

"Go on with your animal training," I gave him, annoyed by his gibbering terror at my appearance. "I am no garrison spy. Continue with your pastime."

The fellow's subhuman face was like a child's frightened in a morgue, and the breath wheezed through his teeth with the sound of wind through the broken reeds of a stale mouth organ. "You will not tell—?"

"Mazette," I gibed him, "do you fear everyone as a tattletale? Who am I to interfere with a man and his games? But it seems a strange affair, nevertheless"—I lowered my voice below my beard—"for a man to stay up all night jittering pipe dreams to an ape when he might merit bigger applause by standing up for his rights in the daytime."

"What do you mean?" he moaned.

His spiritless shrinking annoyed me beyond bounds. "These great ambitions of yours! These air castles you have built around that monkey! Look," I sneered. "You have indeed trained him as a wonder. In effect, you have in your hands a gold mine. But what? You remain a lousy Legion cook. Having found your bonanza, you will never exploit it. You will never reach Paris, the circus spotlights, the stage. You have eternal stage fright. A showman must have nerve. Look at your performance this evening. You are afraid of men."

He was twisting at the middle like a corkscrew. "You mean Captain Batraville?"

I pointed at his foot, and spat the whisper. "Any other Legionnaire taking a smash like that would do something about it. We are soldiers, not quite slaves. At least you could report that brutality to the General Headquarters at Dakar."

I suppose I should not have talked that way, or said that "at least." But the creature's miserable conduct outraged all human dignity. I tell you, the fellow swayed forward and caught the table. Never had I seen a face so repulsive in fright.

"Non, non, he would send me to the stone quarries—the Bat d'Af—crucify me! Tomorrow I go on Discipline Drill for failing to guard my rifle. If I reported, he would kill me! He would kill my monkey! That monkey is my only friend in the world! For seven years the commandant has been torturing me! I can do nothing—nothing!" He collapsed on the table, weeping. "What can a man do against an officer in this Legion?"

Well, in truth there is little such justice in the Legion. Mainly because the officers are not such barbarians, and those few who are—they seldom reach the attention of the High Command as their cases are handled in more immediate fashion by the men. Eh? A knife in the back from nowhere. A stray ricochet in battle. So your tough officer singles out a dunce for his tantrums, one ninny on whom he can vent the major portion of his spleen. If he is smart he chooses the company mongrel, despised also by the other men, one who will not fight like a rat with its back to the wall.

I saw this was the case between Captain Batraville and our cook. Back to the wall, our cook was a mouse. At least that was the way I saw it that night when I left him sobbing on the kitchen table. And as I turned to walk away in disgust, I saw the monkey come out from under the table, climb up on its master's knee and put an arm around that weakling's neck. That was where Captain Batraville (and I) missed the figuring. Neither of us reckoned with the monkey.

III

I WENT to sleep that night and dreamed the good Captain Batraville was smashing my feet with a rifle-butt while a monkey peeled onions and looked on; and I woke up sweating at dawn to find my cartridge belt was missing. That was how things went in that outpost. That was the first furore.

Sapristi! Captain Batraville outdid the devil. He was a raving storm that turned the fort inside out like an old umbrella. Assembly was blown, and every man searched. Marching kits, blankets, equipment in the barracks, everyone and everything was combed. Not just the veterans of the place, but those of us who had come in as replacements were grilled. Guards who had been on sentry detail were questioned. There was hell.

But no prowling thief had been seen, and my cartridge belt remained unfound. Our commandant foamed at the mouth. Publicly announced was his determination to find this sneak-thief and nail him alive to a tree, and we were deployed from the fort to look for tracks. The good captain declared those stolen bullets were being thrown over the wall at night, and some black emissary from the enemy must have been around to pick them up. It was dangerous work, hunting around the jungle out there for tracks. No Legionnaire hunted any farther afield than the captain, either. I tell you, the commandant was raving. He squalled for his horse, and galloped in widening circles around the fort, thrashing the thickets with his saber, bellowing at the men to come after him. He charged off through the palm forest, and came back slavering. Not a track, in the end, did we find. Not a trace of the traitor who had filched those bullets, or a clue to where they had gone.

That mad commandant gave me a tongue-lashing that left its scars on my soul to this day, and handed me a month's double guard duty on the most exposed part of the outpost wall, saying that would teach me to keep an eye on my equipment and perhaps I would get one of my bullets returned. You can fancy I had a creep, knowing some invisible thief had visited my bedside, and that my stolen bullets might be given back to me—in the head.

"Blood of a hangman!" I swore to Yankee Bill the Elephant. "I would like to get my hands on the jackal who is slipping our ammunition to those

black fiends out there. Shot by our own bullets! That is nice!"

We were mounted on the parapet as I said that, and my very complaint was punctuated by the crack of a rifle, I marked no flash in the jungle's green camouflage, but I heard death go by. *Nnnnng-pah!* Like that. Not I, but a young Bavarian ten feet away, who had been foolish enough to tip up his head as he drank from a water bucket, swirled and fell dead. One of my bullets, it seemed, had been returned. For three minutes after that, the air was a blizzard of bullets, and when the smoke rolled away there were six more candidates for the local bone-orchard. That was the second furore.

And that was the way things went in Fort Defi—the pattern, as you might say, for the following days. Conceive, if you are able, a week in that place. Magnify the week to a month, the month to a blazing, stifling African summer. Looking back on it, I wonder we did not all go mad and cut each other's throats. A barracks haunted by an unknown thief. A garrison in which no man trusted the next or knew when death would knock him down. An outpost ruled by a Satanic commandant. The recurrent and unsolved robberies, the inevitable and increasingly violent inquisitions, the consequent funerals—little surprise that in such a background I lost sight of a bigger drama going on.

But the threads were there. In retrospect I can see them, weaving their way through the evil pattern with the sinister convolutions of snakes. Big *Singe*. Little *Singe*. Captain Batraville. Those personalities inextricably tangled in that malignant tapestry.

YOU can see Captain Batraville going madder and madder as the poison of that villainous state of affairs worked through him. He was a violent man, and his outpost was running badly. Dispatches from General Headquarters were asking him what the hell. His command was being shot out from under him, and apparently he could do nothing to stop it. Temper? He drove us as the Roman galley masters drove their chained oarsmen! Drills! Punishments! Abuse! Never did I soldier under such a devil. But not too much, you comprehend; his cruelty had a refinement that knew when to stop before inciting a mutiny; the cream of his venom he saved for our miserable cook. The way he took it out on that droll fellow. The beatings. The constant punishments. The little tortures. If he did not knock the creature down twice a day, he missed his exercise. He raged about the meals; threw hot soup in the fellow's face; laughed at his cries; kicked him in and out of the cook house door. Day after day it went like that.

Then you can see that cook taking it. Whining and groveling and going about with his figurative tail between his legs, more and more beaten down, more and more shrinking and frustrated and futile, more and more a mouse. *Dieu!* it was not a pretty picture to behold, this pusillanimous conduct in a man. The lowest pantry-servant would not have endured such treatment. Bah! The garrison despised him as a leper, and added their own share to the persecution. "Brother of a monkey!" they would scream at him. "Bring this! Fetch that! Improve the food, or take another beating!" You can see the cook taking all of it, scourged and outcast, retiring more and more to the companionship of that one friend in the world he had—a flea-bitten ape.

And you can see the monkey—!

Non, but in those days that followed, you could not have seen that monkey much in evidence around our hell-post. That monkey made itself scarce around there. Mighty scarce. Maybe the man would suffer tortures at the hands of a slaver, but the monkey knew better. I do not know where he went in the daytime, but I have an idea he was somewhere over the wall, waiting in the peace of the jungle for nightfall and the summons of his trainer's whistle.

Then only did I glimpse Little *Singe,* and such glimpses were shadowy and infrequent. Through the cook house window. Late at night. Perhaps a dozen times when, impelled by disdainful curiosity, I prowled on my way off guard-duty and stopped by the kitchen for a peek at this wretched pair.

So I would hear them there in the darkness, cook whispering to monkey of his silly dreams, the stage, the Paris circus, the fame and gold their act would draw. Or he would be sobbing a recital of his wrongs; the story of that day's misery at the hands of the commandant. Always, then, there was a repetition of the animal training I had seen that first night—the practice and pantomime, the clandestine instructions of how to load and unload a rifle, the demonstration of how to aim at that oval of red felt on the wall.

"Keep the bull's-eye in the sights, my friend. *Non, non, non,* bring the gun up slowly. Ah, what an act it will make! You will learn; you will do it soon!"

Somehow it made the hairs tickle on my spine. That ape was actually learning how to aim a rifle, as I saw on my last several peeks. But it was not that It was that this sniveling cook should resort to such companionship for comfort; should have sunk so low that his only confidant was a monkey. I said that cook was a mouse, but the term was wrong. I wish you could have heard him squeaking and chittering to that monkey there in the dark. Do you see the point? That monkey, learning those antics, was becoming more of a man. And the man with his whining and jittering, his crazy-house hopes and miserable fears—the man was becoming as a monkey!

SO I SAW the characters forming in that zoo of an outpost—the captain a gorilla, the cook degenerated to monkey, the monkey turning into a man. With the garrison a menagerie of missing links, the outpost a bloody circus, is it not appropriate that Yankee Bill the Elephant should have raised the curtain on the next to the last act?

Listen! The Yankee lost his cartridge belt. Inspection one evening, the whole post on parade, and Captain Batraville had gone through the barracks and reported our quarters, for once, above reproach. For this we were awarded the rare gift of *sortie,* an evening to go to the beach and launder our fleas. The cartridge belt had been there at the time.

"It's gone now!" the Yankee snarled to me, "and by heaven, before I report it, I'm out to do some snooping on my own. Listen to me, Corday, I think I know who's stealing these bullets of ours!"

"Fichtre!" I blurted. "You don't say!"

"I been doing some figuring," he told me in a deadly voice. "It can't be one of us replacements who come in last spring because it started before that."

"Right."

"It ain't one of the veterans who's been killed, because it keeps going on."

"True."

"It's got to be one of th' original garrison, see? One that ain't being shot at by the snipers. One that wasn't on that parade inspection while that damned captain was going through barracks."

"But the whole post was on parade—!"

"Like blazes," he told me. "Come on, Corday. We're looking for a cook. And a monkey!"

IMPOSSIBLE to describe my state of mind when my big comrade's speech finally penetrated my brain. It hit me like the explosion of a dumdum bullet, tearing the fragments through my head. Those little glimpses I had seen. Those midnight confabs between cook and monkey. Those lessons between trainer and pet, the whispered instructions, the rifle drills, the pantomimes of loading and unloading. Those were the fragments that exploded in my skull just then, and I want to tell you, I saw red.

I saw something more than red when, breathless, cursing in certainty, we reached the cook house and saw no sign of man or beast. What I saw in that deserted, fly-blown kitchen was pure scarlet.

"Sac à papier!" I flung at my companion, the Elephant. "The commandant has issued the creature leave with the rest of us. Do you see? He has gone on a jaunt somewhere with that accursed monkey of his. I would wager they are out in the jungle right now, trading your cartridge belt for a fistful of gold!"

In hoarse tones I described to Yankee Bill the things I had seen, and his eyes burned like pools of gasoline as he listened.

"So you have seen them, too?" He shook his fist in the air. "Well, I have kept my eyes peeled around here, my boy, and I've seen the same thing. What's more I've seen that monkey sneaking in over the wall after dark, and running across the barracks roof to reach the cook house. I didn't say anything because I kind of felt sorry for that stinking snipe of a cook. If I ever get him now—!" He put his fists together and made a wringing gesture. "Come on. We'll reconnoiter around outside."

Hot under the collar? As we went out of the fort and started for the beach, I saw crimson. Funny how, once given a key to a puzzle, the whole thing seems to fit together. Cook and trained monkey. Unknown thief. Bullets stolen and no trace of how they reached the enemy. Now that I thought of it, what better base of operations than a garbage-dump garrison kitchen run by a spineless Cinderella whom no one would think to suspect? What nimbler thief than a monkey?

"Who else could be behind it, Corday? That animal of a cook! In barracks every man's been watching the next like a wolf watches his brother, but the rat living alone in his dirty kitchen—!"

"Who else but that monkey could spirit those bullets over the wall without being seen by the guards—without leaving any track?"

"Sure, he jumps from the wall to those palm trees out there and goes kiting along the jungle-tops!"

"So that is what this sacred *farceur* has been training his monkey for—!"

Our conviction grew. Grew as our minds piled up the circumstantial evidence against that rat. Name of a name! when the sentry at the gate told us the creature had gone skulking down to the beach with a basket of laundry, we broke into a run. We did not report

our story to any officer. Those murderous thievings of ammunition were a personal matter that had cost us punishments for neglect, threatened our very lives; and the matter wanted personal redress. Stealing is the cardinal sin of the Legion; and he who steals a Legionnaire's purse steals trash, but he who steals his bullets robs him of his only chance of survival.

THE beach was perhaps a quarter of a mile from the outpost gates, and we got there in perhaps a quarter of a minute. In peacetime it made a promenade, miles of sea-swept sand and coral, a strip of African coast where a Legionnaire might lave his skin, or stroll with whatever he could find in the near-by fishing village, or stare at the ocean's purple horizon and long for home. In warfare, with snipers around, it was bad for your health. But that evening it was like a breath of sanity—twilight the color of burgundy; blowing wind; long rollers plunging in, splashing the air with white fountains and salt. Cooped up too long for caution, our Legion primitives sported and clowned in the astringent surf, careful only to keep their rifles on their backs. That fateful evening almost every fool who could get off duty was there.

But not the one we were looking for! *Non!* Cursing, red-eyed, Yankee Bill and I charged up and down the sand, but the cook was nowhere visible in that merry throng. Our fellow soldiers-of-misfortune had not seen the scab, or wanted to. How Yankee Bill cursed! The big American's eyes were two tigers hunting a meal.

"The cur couldn't have gotten far! He has to get back for roll call."

"Maybe he doubled back into the jungle," I yelled above the crash of surf, "but it is worth your life to go in there at sundown." We had left the beach party quite a distance behind, and were trotting toward a coral promontory that jutted like a sea wall out into the slamming breakers. There the jungle came close to the water's edge, and I was eying it nervously.

Suddenly my companion was down on one knee. "Tracks, Corday! They came out of the palm thatch over there. Going toward that headland!"

They! Aunt of the Devil; the two of them. Their tracks as plain as those of Crusoe's cannibals in the sand—the long dank feet of the cook, and the finger-toed footprints of the ape! Yankee Bill was off like a sprinter at a starter's gun, with me at his heels. Speaking of guns—!

We had almost rounded that coral peninsula, and *spank! spank!* Two deadened reports above the wet thunder of surf. Two shots. Two puffs of smoke blooming up from behind the coral rocks and whisked away in spray.

Yankee Bill was over those rocks in four bounds, and if I say it for myself, I went with him, at the cost of considerable bravery, expecting any second to be riddled from ambush. And in truth, I was. Mentally riddled! Brought to a standstill—and so was Yankee Bill—shatterpated by the sight that met us behind that little deadland.

Picture a big nest of coral and driftwood, screened by flying spray and tossed weeds. That twilight seascape! Ocean on one hand, Africa on the other; and there in the foreground, spray-wet as a mermaid, a big brown monkey squatting on the sand with a smoking Legion rifle hugged to its chest. *Oui,* grinning and chittering and making faces, twitching its head up and down and sideways in that nervous way monkeys have; and that Lebel, I

repeat, clutched in its grip, and smoking.

That! And thirty feet away our Legion cook, capering in crazy excitement, grinning and chittering and making faces, too, and pointing, *messieurs.* Pointing at that little oval of red cloth which was pinned to a stump of timber upright in the sand.

"You've done it! You've done it!" I wish you could have seen the narcotic shine of that crazy man's eyes. He whirled and kicked the big laundry basket at his side. Reached down and flung handfuls of sand in the air. Ran back and forth between monkey and timber stump, squealing. "You've done it! My fortune is made!"

Dieu! from monkey to man to oval of red cloth my eye leapt in staggered incomprehension, and then I saw! Punched through the heart of that target, two bullet-holes. Smack in the center. As clean as any marksman would have scored it. Bull's-eye!

IV

DO YOU wonder Yankee Bill and I could not speak? On the fringe of that scene we stood dumfounded. That cook was laughing hysterically. He rushed over and embraced the monkey. He pranced down the sand. Facing the ocean, he struck an attitude that would at any other time have been funny. Hand to bosom, he threw back his head, pouted his chest, stood pompous as a statue, made a flourish. Can you see that scarecrow posturing there? Assuming his greasy rags for scarlet and braid! That beach the apron of a stage! Ocean for audience; surf for thundering applause!

"*Messieurs et mesdames!*" I can hear his voice yet; see him twirling an imaginary moustache. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have just witnessed the most remarkable feat of animal training the world has ever known! Marko, the Monkey Marksman! The World's Only Animal Sharpshooter! Behold, Ladies and gentlemen! Two shots through the bull's-eye! Two!"

I can hear his voice ringing above the boom of brine; see him bow in the spotlight of a gold setting sun; see him flourish and turn about, and in turning— Ah, that actor! That dramatist! That master of all make-believe! In turning, the pompous strut fell from him as his shoulders lost their cloak of gilt for soup-stained rags. The gold went from him as a sundown alchemy. Before a reality of audience, he staggered and cringed back, stage-struck; seemed to shrink and shrivel, deflate like a punctured balloon, turn as if at a wand-wave from princeling to menial, once more the groveling droll of the kitchen slops. He stared at us, aghast.

"You *saw—?*"

I started to say something, and Yankee Bill started to say something, but it was a voice behind us that blurted the oaths. Then I saw that the American and I were not the only holders of box-seats at that show. We were not. Those two crack shots had echoed farther above the surf-roar than one might have guessed they would. That whole bathing party had heard them, and, thinking to catch a sniper, had come running hotfoot up behind us. So those other Legionnaires were standing shatter-pated, too; staring from cook to monkey to target; petrified. . . .

"*'Cre nom de Dieu!* It is the *Singe* Twins here!"

"That Gascon has taught the monkey how to shoot!"

"Holy Saint Anselm! The ape has hit the target!"

"See! Big *Singe's* monkey with that rifle. Twice a bull's-eye!"

Jostling, they crowded forward, surrounding the monkey, bug-eyed, blurting ejaculations of amazement that must hace come as music to the quailing trainer's ears. But there was no such harmony in Yankee Bill's voice, crackling out. "Wait, rat-face!" he pointed at the cook. "Where were you and that baboon of yours at inspection time when my cartridge belt was stolen?"

Didn't that animal-training slop-disher go pale, then? White as Mont Blanc. He stared at Yankee Bill, opening and shutting his mouth as if he were choking on an apple. But before he could answer that question, or before the Legion crowd who heard it could understand it, there was another interruption to that seaside scene. Hoofs pounding, and the Devil's own yell. Thousand thunders! Crashing out of the jungle at our backs came a horseman. Nobody had to tell us who that rider was. Correct; Captain Batraville!

We Legionnaires went one way, and that trained monkey went another, and the cook went a third. But *monsieur* the cook did not get very far. Steeplechasing out of the palms, our commandant sprang from saddle like a cowboy and got the seat of the cook's pants just as they were starting to take the tide for South America.

"Blageur!" the captain was screaming. "Ill-born shrimp! Foul inhabitant of a swill bucket, what are you doing here?" Never had I seen the officer's temper as volcanic. His eyes were little furnaces, his mouth a raging blast. He was sweat-drenched and covered with jungle-thorn, and the pores of his empurpled face seemed to be bubbling grape juice.

"What are you doing here?" he squalled at his captive, dragging him back from the water's edge and holding him at arm's length as if he were a jiggling marionette. "What are you doing here playing on the sand of this beach?"

"But you gave me leave," the cook gasped. "Leave with the others—"

"Half hour's leave to come down here and wash my shirts!" was the blasting retort. "Not two hours to play with your cursed twin brother of a pet. Do you know, *coquin,* what has happened while you dabbled down here? Then where is your cartridge belt? Answer me that!"

MY FAITH, the cook's jaws were rattling like castanets, but if his eyes were frogged out of his skull by that question, so were Yankee Bill's and mine. "My cartridge belt?" he sobbed. "Why, I left it in the cook house. Hidden, *mon commandant.* Where no thief would think to find it. In the vegetable bin!"

"Where the first thief would think to look for it!" our captain roared. "Where the robber who is stealing our arsenal out of powder certainly found it. Do you know it has been taken from you, monkey-head? Did you know that while you played in the sand a sentry on guard duty saw some prowler duck out of your sacred kitchen with a bullet belt under his arm? Of course the sentry was too blind to see the man's face, but he saw him as a shadow going around the corner of the cook house—a shadow wearing a dark cloak. And of course the sentry missed the shot and so your belt is gone. What do you think of that?"

I could not tell what thoughts were harrowing the cook's fizzled brain, but I know what I was thinking and what Yankee Bill must have been thinking, too. That thief had pulled another job, and it wasn't the one we had counted

on. With cook and monkey here on the beach—

Captain Batraville loudened his roar for the whole Senegal coastline to hear. "The sentry ran to headquarters, and I assembled all the men on duty at once. All had been at their posts, accounted for. By myself I have searched the jungle—no tracks— Nothing! That brings it down to one of you Legion dogs on *sortie!*" Black veins swelled on the commandant's forehead, and his eyes swept us balefully. "Listen, vermin! Tomorrow Colonel Fayette and his staff come here from General Headquarters at Dakar. This garrison will be grilled like bacon on a grid. But discipline commences now!"

He cocked his elbow; yanked the cook within fist-range. "Do you recall, you rascal, what I said would happen the next time I caught you malingering? What I said would happen to the next fool who lost his bullets?"

Wham! Under the impact of that driven fist, the cook's jaw seemed to flatten like a burst paper bag. As if lightning-struck, he went down.

"Get up!" the commandant screamed. "Attention, swine! Stand!"

He did it somehow, groggy, blubbering, pushing himself up like a failure in a prize ring. Again the blow; again the scarecrow in collapse; again the order to rise.

"On your feet, comedian! How dare you lie down before an officer!"

Another knock-down. And another.

But I do not like to relate how that wretched jellyfish hauled himself to attention a fourth, a fifth time; stood swaying and sobbing, bloodied and bowed, in whipped-dog obedience for that captain to knock him down. The sun had gone out, and the beach was gray. There was no gilt theatre, now; no triumphant pantomime; no audience cheering applause. This was a Roman arena; a butchery; a nincompoop shamefully bowing to the blows of disaster. Who could feel sorry for such subservience? He made no protest. He made no fight for survival, for honor, for liberty. Five times he stood up to allow that officer the privilege of smashing his jaw. Not once in his own defense did he raise his hand.

Which brings us back to the original point of this story. Only worms and the fools who live under dictators today would submit to such trampling. Monkeys? Never! And we onlookers to that scene had forgotten all about a monkey. Ha! He came back into our memories like a shot from a siege gun.

There was a scream, a rush, and something went by me in the African dusk that might have been a small cyclonic sandstorm. Like fury unchained, that monkey hit the officer's back; was on him, around him, over and under him, biting and snarling like a mad dog. *Bleu!* the animal clamped its teeth in the commandant's shoulder, and for a moment in the swirl around Captain Batraville there seemed to be a thousand monkeys. What a fight that was! Hands clawing air, lungs bellowing, plunging and striking about, our captain was the picture of a man in delirium tremens. Skin ripped and fur flew. Commandant and monkey went down together, and on the sand became nothing but one dreadful contortion.

When I think of that! When I think of a monkey standing up for the rights of a man! The cook was the monkey's confidant, you understand—the monkey was fighting for his friend. I do not wonder that cowardly kitchen poltroon tried to bury his head in the sand. I do not wonder the rest of us stood like so many totems, unable to move.

That monkey was the captain's

match in violence, then, but only half his size. In frenzied jiu jitsu they tore at each other's throats. Even-Stephen, the monkey might have won, but the man, unfairly, had a gun. Somehow the commandant unloosed his service automatic. He did not shoot. Blinded by sand and blood, he could not aim; but in wild fury he struck out, lashing the heavy barrel across the dumb brute's face. He could have pumped him full of lead at that moment, for the monkey, stunned, let go, and the squalling officer sprang to his feet, wiping his eyes.

I think he would have shot Little *Singe,* and Big *Singe,* too; and he might have shot the rest of us for not aiding him, the tantrum he was in. But the night's evil, now, was beyond all control—too long that little corner of Senegal had been festering—at last the boil had come to its ultimate head. It was lanced, if you do not mind the comparison, by a bugle call. A steely trumphant-blast that stabbed through the darkness in piercing echo; cut the night's nerves; left the gloom around us in quivering alarm!

Almost instantly there followed an angry crackling of rifle fire. Captain Batraville spun and stared. A man broke from the jungle's wall, and raced up the beach toward us, screaming.

"The fort! *Mon commandant! Mon commandant!* The natives are attacking the fort!"

V

I DO NOT know how we got back into Fort Defi, and knowing what I do about it now, I will always wonder how any of us ever got out. King Solomon's black pawns had surrounded the outpost, and they were doing no sniping this time, but sweeping the fort walls with a hurricane of lead that shook the jungle like a barrage. That fort was in a ring of flame when we got there. I will not soon forget how we raced up the beach-path, broke from cover and fled to reach the outpost gates, our mad commandant out in front.

"Inside!" he was screaming. "Get into the fort, you sons of camels! It is your only chance!"

His voice whipped us after his flying heels, and we raced to reach the gates like rabbits trying to make a hole. I did some fancy open running on the Marne where the German machine-guns were tickling our stomachs with crossfire; but machine-gun fire never crossed my path the way those bullets were coming from the jungle-hidden Senegalese.

It was wonderful the way our captain went through that river of shots. Not a bullet scraped the man. I lost a piece of my left ear, and the seat was shot out of my britches. Of the fifty in our beach party, at least ten went down in that rush. It was murder to take us through the enemy lines like that. The gates of that fort seemed like the gates of Paradise when at last they let us in. But Fort Defi was not Paradise, either. Walls are not for the protection of Legionnaires, *messieurs,* but merely something to stand them up on.

Enfin, we were clay pigeons, bull's-eyes, targets on the shelves of a shooting gallery. Our good commandant ran the gallery, and ordered us up to the gun ports for the customers to shoot at. Those black boys were ringing the gong that night, too. They were blowing out candles all over the place. Of the garrison who had not gone bathing, a mere handful had survived the first assault; the dead and dying were scattered on the firing-step like debris, and the carnival was only beginning.

Talk about Liege! Talk about Verdun! But for a lifetime in hell, I give you that all-night battle in Senegal with an army of black monsters coming from all sides, and a commandant in the middle, gone stark mad. We were slaughtered, I tell you. Slaughtered by the jungle demons outside, and by that madman of an officer within. He threw us at the enemy as one throws confietti into a furnace. He drove us over the walls in suicidal bayonet charges. He ordered men up to the high watch-tower above the gate, and cursed them as snipers shot them down. Kicking the wounded to their feet, he flung them back to their stations to die. He raged at the dead; ran up and down the thinning line, propping the riddled bodies up as puppets to face that murderous fire. The living he spat at for cowards—"Dodging your own bullets are you boys?"—"Fight, you yellow clapper-claws! Stand up and meet the consequences of your folly! Stand up and fight!"

Sacré Dieu! I remember thinking that monkey's bite must have given our captain the rabies. I remember the diabolical glow of his eyes, his hateful laughter at our fear, his raging commands that spared us nothing. How, to show us what a man he was, he would leap to the most exposed wall-top and stand there in the bullet-blast, leering and beckoning, screeching at the blacks to come and get him.

And how those black devils came! In droves. In herds. In waves that swept out of the jungle and smote our walls with a roar that made them flutter. As they scaled the masonry to reach us, we stabbed them down. We shot them off the very parapets. As they came on charging, we stacked those tar babies in steaming piles like creosote ties.

SMOKE. Din. Gunflame. Screams of black and white joining to a long-drawn crimson chorus-shriek. The night streaked with fire. Our fort becoming a shambles under a tempest of lead that raked us from every side, piercing our uniforms, our canteens, our bootstraps, our *képis*. I remember that as one recalls the formless hurly-burly of a choking nightmare, and in the red splinters of a terrible midnight assault one segmentary incident. That attack going on, and the dead heaped up on the firing step like carcases in a charnel. Can you see our mad captain coming down the line, then, booting those fatalities as he came, propping them up, grabbing them by their collars, hauling them upright, glaring hatred at their empty faces? *Non,* but not until then did I realize his purpose in doing so.

Beside me an Armenian had fallen with more lead imbedded in him than raisins in a cake; Captain Batraville kicked this one aside as useless, and came at me furiously.

"Where is he?" he was screaming. "Where did he go?" He clutched his chewed shoulder as he spoke, jabbing the smoke-fog around me with murderous glances.

"If you mean the monkey," I shouted—"up a tree!"

His eyes slapped my face. "I do not mean the monkey, *canaille!* That cook came into the fort with the rest of us, and I have not seen him since. He is a candidate for that watch tower, dead or alive!" Pointing at the tower where the bullets flew thick as bees, he slit his wicked face with a grin. "No man has reached that crow's nest as yet, and I would like to give our circus star a chance. However, if I canot find him, I will reserve the honor for you!"

Good Captain Batraville! He went

raving off among his dead, and I will always regret that I did not shoot him in the back. To be ordered up that tower—a thirty-foot climb, and the ladder on the outside—was a death sentence, you comprehend. I thought of our sniveling chef ascending those rungs, and I did not look at that death-tower again. It was to be supposed our commandant found his victim, for the honor did not revert to me, and I was left to die in comparative safety.

Comparative safety, you understand. One after another the Legionnaires around me were dropping, plunging over, tumbling back or squatting down in the ludicrous postures of death. One after another the tidal waves of black men surged forward. One after another at what seemed like a million-a-minute the bullets came whistling at our heads. Ah, those Senegalese rebels had no shortage of cartridges that night. They had been saving stolen bullets for a good many months, and it makes me sick to think of how we were poisoned by our own lead pills.

Alors, I did not think of it in the hours after midnight. I did not think of anything. In the gunflare and flying shadows, the blackness and pell-mell and powder-reek, all but death remained forgotten. It was touch-and-go that night, my friends. Almost total annihilation. My shoulder still groans from the endless recoil of my Lebel-butt; my back aches at memory of those hours of loading, firing; my blood turns to vanilla at recollection of the Grim Reaper's scythe. It never shaved me closer, I can tell you that. There are five scars on my scalp, three more under my beard to show you how close it came. That was nothing. Afterwards, my *copain,* Yankee Bill the Elephant, found every last button had been shot from his tunic.

AFTERWARD? But there are, too, miracles! I give you this one, *messieurs.* I give you gray pallor creeping up the night's negroid cheek, and six Legionnaires living to see it. I give you first daylight bringing to view green jungle-tops, and six Legionnaires shooting at three hundred charging wild men below. I give you six tatterdemalion, fire-blackened survivors holding the walls of that smoking ruin as six jackals might have remained for the dawn to find on the ash heaps of Gomorrah.

If actually there were seven in the outpost to see that final onslaught, those of us who waited death at the gate did not know it until later. Later? I repeat, *messieurs,* there are miracles! Six Legionnaires, counting the captain, at the gate of a charnel house waiting to die. Three hundred Senegalese wolves storming the fortress walls to kill us. Guns going like ten thousand snare-drums. The gate shot to splinters. A black mob coming in solid-packed savagery to crash the portal. And then—

And then, as I am here to swear it, that mob stopped coming. That black mob swerved as a stampede of cattle might swerve from the rim of a cliff. Broke up. Scattered. Fled back into the palm jungle as if melted away by the heat of the rising sun. In the east there was deafening thunder.

Oui, on its eastern fringe the whole jungle-wall broke out in gunfire. Out of the palms came a cavalcade. Mounted Legionnaires! Men, mules, machine guns. I saw them debouch from the jungle trail and go racing after those scattered licorice devils as our *chasseurs* once chased the Uhlans at Alsace. I thought it was indeed a miracle until I saw riding out of the sunrise a colonel in an escort of staff

officers, and I remembered the promised inspection party from Dakar.

I will always remember the bugle call which sounded that glittering advance. I will never forget how, as the brass echoes pealed away, there sounded somewhere in the sunshine one long clear whistle-note that quivered high in the air, as if an invisible bird were cheering our rescue. I will always remember, too, the voice of Captain Batraville among us, hoarse as a death-rattle as he reeled back from the ruptured timbers of the gates.

"Colonel Fayette and his staff! *Mon dieu!* Ahead of time—!"

We looked at our commandant—we who were left. As might have been expected, his face was queer. Under the tipped brim of his officer's cap his eyes were burnt-rimmed cigarette-holes in a slab of raw beef; his grin was a surgeon's incision, an opening to reveal the white bones of his gums. From boot to collar the man's uniform hung in smoke-stained rags, but his cap of authority was whole; and until I die I will always recall how—when he must have been wanting to faint—he squared his shoulders, drove himself erect, took off and dusted and set back on with its oldtime bulldog jaunt that officer's cap.

"Attention, Legionnaires!"

He was the devil of a man, you understand. By every way of looking at him, a gorilla. Behind him, his outpost a bloody welter. On the walls his men hanging massacred. Yet he could click his heels, snap hands to sides, and march past us out through the gate to meet the High Command as Horatius might have paraded on review, out to get a medal after saving the Bridge.

FORGET that? *Enfin,* when I am dead and skeletal you can find that scene lithographed on the ceiling of my skull. Guns were snapping in the jungle where our rescuers were chasing cannibals, but between our fort and the oncoming colonel the battlefield was cleared, and Captain Batraville walked out there alone. A hero, you see? The defender of another Verdun. A candidate for high honors in that school of military science which judges the importance of a battle by the casualty lists and awards its gaudiest medal to that officer who bravely sacrifices the most men. Thus placing our commandant in line for the highest of decorations.

But he was never to get that expected accolade, *messieurs.* I saw him start toward that astonished colonel and his staff. I saw him marching up that palm-bordered road like the Kaiser used to march the *Unter den Linden.* Heroically. Eyes front. Squarely erect. Head thrown back. Colonel and staff drew rein to watch him come, and halfway there our hero brought up his hand in superb salute. Which was his hand's last act, *mes amis.* It was so. Other actors were waiting to take the stage.

Above the jungle's lower *rat-a-plan* of gunfire, four quick metallic explosions echoed high. Shots! Captain Batraville stepped over two puffs of dust; stopped suddenly; pitched forward on his face. He was dead before he hit the dirt, I say. Cerebral hemorrhage is hasty.

And that was the sort of hemorrhage our gorilla captain had suffered. Cerebral! It was the sort of hemorrhage I almost suffered myself when I got a close look at the body and diagnosed the case. The little remnant of Legionnaires from Fort Defi reached the body in collision with the rescue party, and so we were on hand to see the colonel, in white astonishment, bend down and snatch off and hold up for inspection our dead commandant's cap.

Perhaps you recall the nice distinction of French officers' caps? Look down on one, then, and you will notice it is red across the top. Also in that perspective you will observe it as oval.

Looking down on that cap from Captain Batraville's grounded head, you would have noticed further marks of distinction. Two punctures centered in the crown. Two round, dark-circled bullet holes. Scores, you might have said, in a target. Two perfect shots in a bull's-eye.

I wish you could have seen that colonel's face when he poked his two fingers through the holes in that cap and finally realized our commandant had been shot through the top of his head. The shadow of a palm-trunk fell across the body; and the colonel was standing on the shadow-design of fronds, and he jumped off that shadow as if it had burned through his boots. *Non,* but you should have seen his face when he jumped away from that tree and looked up.

Not often one sees a sharpshooter roosting in a palm-top! At least, that type of sniper, high against sky in a lofty perch of cocoanuts; grinning and chittering, making impudent faces down through aerial green fronds, scratching fleas with one hand and hugging with the other a smoking rifle. Never in the history of the world had there been such a sharpshooter, and it will be a long time before the history of that one repeats itself.

"But that," the colonel kept saying as if trying to convince his reason, "but that is a monkey!"

Yankee Bill snared my sleeve and whispered something else. I did not understand his foreign idiom—perhaps I was not hearing very well but I presume it had reference to the greatest act of animal-training the world has ever known. As I remember it now, the big American's words were these:

"That cook sure knew his onions—!"

VI

ALORS, the drama is almost over, *messieurs,* and I see from your facial expressions that this climax has been hard to swallow. Doubtless. Then think of my own throat as I stared up into that tree. Think of the throats of those other Legion dogs—those Fort Defi survivors who also had witnessed the early animal-training and that rehearsal on the beach—who realized the significance of that target practice. Think of the throat of that colonel from Dakar who had never seen this monkey before!

That colonel was swallowing, all all right. His Adam's apple was bobbing up and down his throat like something stuck in the neck of an ostrich,

and finally it popped into his mouth and exploded like a bomb.

I told you the monkey went up before a firing squad, and in a manner of speaking, he did. The roar that came out of the colonel's teeth was, "Shoot that monkey, you fools! Bring down that ape!" He flung at us shouting, pointing at the palm-top. "Don't you see that brute has found a rifle somewhere and killed your brave commandant by accident? I want that beast brought down dead, I tell you. Ready! Aim! Fire!"

Maybe that colonel was a fool, but the monkey wasn't. He was a little too quick for that sort of military routine. At the shout of "Ready!" he sent his rifle flying down through the palm fronds at the colonel's senseless head; and at "Aim!" he was five palm trees away and only getting up speed. Even so, we would have slain the animal if an interruption had not frazzled our marksmanship, just then.

A cry, *mes amis!* Shrill. Ear-stunning. A cry that drowned out the order to fire and started us into bringing down nothing but a shower of cocoanuts. From a quarter so unexpected that we dropped our Lebels and spun empty-handed to stare. Thunderstruck by that voice, I give you my word.

"Stop—stop—! Do not kill the monkey!"

Messieurs, if you believed it hard to swallow that monkey-sharpshooter, swallow this! That riddled watch-tower looming above the gates of our fort. That evil turret peppered with so many bullet holes it was leaning on its base like the Tower of Pisa. There was a man at the top of that tower! A face hollering down from the tottery summit, in desperation aloft like a lookout in the crow's nest of a scuttled ship.

Can you see that face up there above an outpost of the dead? That seventh survivor who had lived to see the dawn? That mysterious whistler who had echoed the rescuing bugle with a cheering summons of his own? The face of that Cinderella-dreamer, animal-educator, ringmaster of the pots and pans—in short, the face of that cook who knew his onions—Big *Singe?*

"Do not kill the monkey!" he was crying. "It was faked! Faked! He never learned to shoot; no monkey could ever learn to shoot! I pretended to train him—let the garrison think I was training him—on the beach that time, I fired those holes through the target, myself; put the rifle in the monkey's hands to make the Legionnaires think he had done it! *Non, non!* I sent him up that tree before sunrise, knowing he would fire at the captain's red-topped cap when he saw it—but never, never, never could he hit the mark. Little *Singe* is innocent. Before God, he did not kill Captain Batraville—!"

Non, you cannot see that cook's face, because it was not the same as when I introduced it. I swear I would never have recognized the man. *Mon dieu!* he came swinging down the rungs of that precarious tower ladder, crying down at us as he came, and he was not the same man we had known.

We stared at him in idiotic astonishment.

Do you recall the captain's threat to send him up that tower? That he should have reached the top alive—and lived after getting there — was something But it was nothing to the miracle of him when he came down. He reached the ground and came walking toward us where we stood like pallbearers over the captain's corpse, and the nearer he drew the harder he was to recognize.

FOR ALL his nickname, he had never been exactly big, if you understand me. Physically a sort of scarecrow. Rags and old bones. Monkey-like in aspect. With a cringe. But he was big that morning, I would have you know. Simian cringe, pallid stage-fright were gone. Man-sized, he walked toward the ossified staff party as Captain Batraville had tried to walk when he marched from the outpost gates to get his prize awards. *Oui,* halfway to the colonel, Big *Singe* cocked up his hand in superb salute; and maybe you think that colonel from Dakar was not swallowing then!

"What madness is this?" he glared as if the sun were in his eyes. "If that monkey did not shoot your commandant—who did?"

Ah, Big *Singe* was a big man then. He did not hesitate or falter. Only once he smiled at the palm-tops green with sunshine, and once at the blood-crimsoned body on the ground. Then, facing the colonel, he struck an attitude that would at any other time have been funny. Hand to bosom, he threw back his head, thrust his chest, made a flourish. Can you picture that scarecrow posturing there? Assuming his greasy rags for scarlet and braid? That muddy field the apron of a stage; staff officers for audience; gunfire drumming across the jungle for applause?

And yet there was something in his manner that made you think of the grandiose bravado of a spangled, pink-tighted acrobat as he rubs his handkerchief between his palms and, with a pirouette, tosses it to his partner just before performing his most audacious trick. His face was just as self-conscious and smug as though it were centered in the focus of a battery of spotlights, the target of an eager audience's eager eyes.

This was his moment—and he knew it. He might never actually find himself standing behind the trench of footlights, but this was almost as good. He was pathetic and proud and cocky and trembling all at once.

"Mon colonel"—you could almost see him twirling an imaginary mustache—"the monkey did not do it, as God is my witness. An autopsy would prove his innocence, but that will not be necessary. Little *Singe* fired twice from a Lebel rifle, not so? That captain was slain by a pistol of smaller caliber. I would not wish you the job, *mon colonel,* but if you care to go mining in that *salopard* commandant's dead head, I am sure you will find some steel. On the jackets of two bullets, I guarantee. Two steel-jacketed bullets, *mon colonel,* from an American Colt automatic, thirty-eight."

Taking hand out of tattered shirt-front, he smiled and bowed. And handed to the colonel an American Colt automatic, thirty-eight.

OLD Thibaut Corday concluded his story on a thirty-eight caliber oath; and it was quiet under the café awning as the oath, in a cloud of tobacco smoke, drifted off. As the old soldier of fortune himself would have phrased it—it was mighty quiet. March, the doctor, sat in stiff and breathless attention, wine glass forgotten in his hands. Baker, the young British consular agent, was a statue of incredulity, leaning forward, mouth open a little.

Forming another smoke-cloud in front of his beard, Old Thibaut Corday blinked brightly, admiring in the pungent mirage some new recollection that pleased him. Presently he said:

"But imagine that man handing over the evidence, confessing to those two

fateful shots! Imagine him going to the wall for murder after all those months of preparation, cooking up that wonderful alibi, establishing its improbable possibility, coaching that monkey for the role of guilt. He could have put that monkey act over, I tell you! It was a flawless performance. But when he saw us aiming our rifles at Little *Singe*—"

"That's it!" Baker's incredulity had to interrupt. "That's what I can't swallow, Corday. Do you mean to tell us that fellow gave himself up to save a monkey?"

"I mean," Old Thibaut Corday snapped hotly, "he gave himself up to save a friend. That monkey had been his confidant, his comrade, his only friend through years of loneliness and persecution. He gave himself up to repay the only friend who had fought in his defense. And I told you that monkey taught two missing links a lesson. That was the first one! The monkey taught that cook to be a man!"

"And what was the second lesson?" the doctor asked.

Old Thibaut Corday chuckled. "The one he taught Captain Batraville. Too bad his trainer went off with him to Paris to go on the stage before we could tell him about it. Big *Singe* would have cooked him the finest dinner of his—"

"Wait a minute," the doctor cried. "What's this about Paris? I thought you just told us that cook had given himself up for mur—"

"So he did, *mon ami.* And on the strength of his own confession, they stood him up against a wall as quick as that colonel could find the breath to yell. But they forgot all about the monkey, and that monkey was a whole lot better trained than his master would have had us believe. Listen! Big *Singe* was grinning at the firing squad—his back to the wall as it had never been before—when there came this final bolt from the blue.

"And when I say it came from the blue, I mean from the blue. Something that flew down from the yellow morning sky and lit *slap!* on the ground at Big *Singe's* steady boots. Something flung from a palm-top, its return accompanied by an acrial chittering laugh. Deep in Big *Singe's* bared throat that jungle-top laughter was answered. You recall him telling us what a wonderful retriever his monkey was? Look! At the condemned man's boots lay a cartridge belt, *messieurs!* The cartridge belt that had been frisked from his kitchen the night before. By the seven sacred names of a cross-eyed little good man! That ape had raced off into Senegal somewhere, and come back with his master's belt. *Tiens!* down there in Senegal I would never be surprised at anything. For there was a message on that cartridge belt when Little *Singe* returned it from the jungle —some writing penciled on the belt's thick webbing. A message that stayed our cook's summary execution! As God is *my* witness, a reprieve!"

Corday paused, with a flourish.

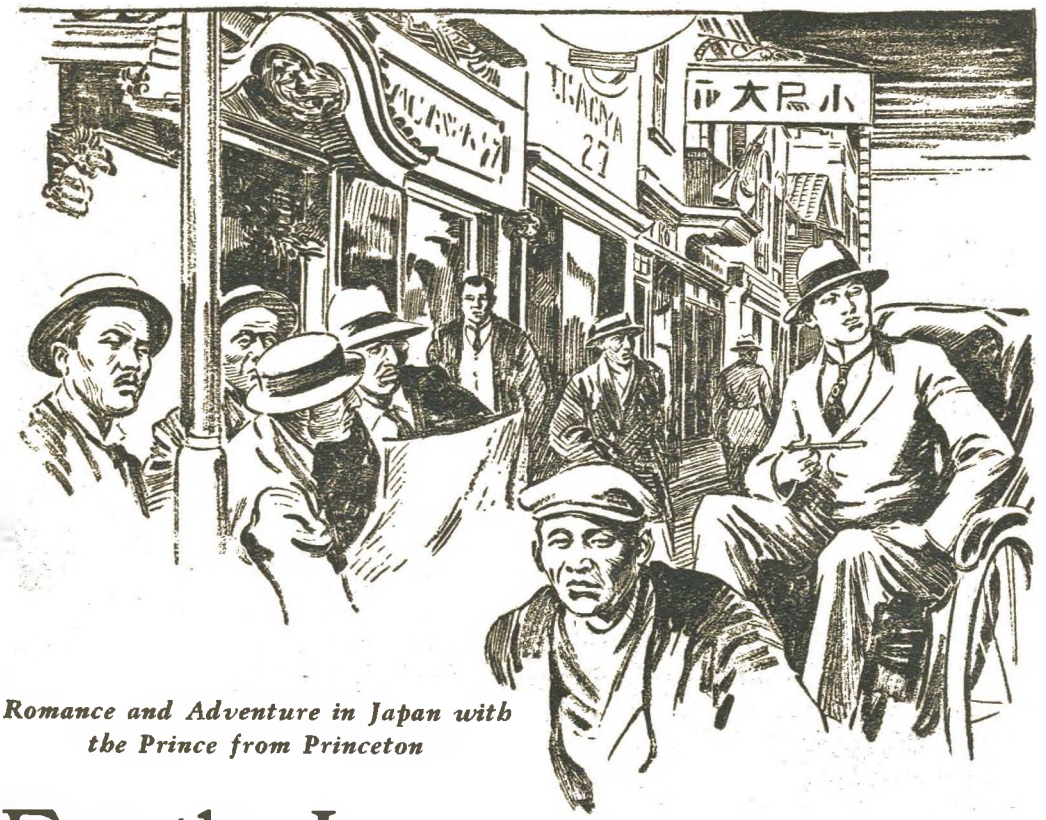
In the act of filling his wine glass, the doctor slopped cognac. Baker, the young consular agent, gasped, "Good heavens! Corday, you don't expect us to believe that monkey had learned to write!" and Old Thibaut Corday plucked the cognac from under the doctor's hand, drained an inch from the bottle, chuckled harshly.

"Why not?" he reproved the Anglo-Saxon skepticism. "Why not, my young friend? I believe that monkey could have learned anything. Anything! For example: the following day. After Big *Singe* had been reprieved.

After cook and monkey had been sent to Dakar, both recommended for highest honors. We survivors of that cursed garrison were given leave of the outpost to salve our nerves, and Yankee Bill the Elephant and I were strolling at the seaside. Suddenly the American turned to me, plunged a hand into his britches pocket, held something out on his palm for me to behold. Two shining little pellets. Bullets, I saw. Steel-capped, and not the kind one fires from a Legion Lebel. *'Mon ventre!'* I said, 'what are those?' The American snickered. 'Thirty-eights, you cabbage-brain. Thirty-eights from a pistol.' I suppose I turned green as damp-rot. 'What sickening phrenologist are you,' I panted, 'to go poking around in a dead man's head?' Do you know what he told me? *Non,* it would be impossible to guess. Never in a thousand years could such a thing happen again. Never in a million! 'They didn't come from no dead man's head,' the Yankee told me. 'Know where I dug 'em up, Corday? Remember how there was four shots rang out, and two puffs of dust at the captain's feet? Well, I got to thinking about it, and this morning I went out there and dug around in the dirt where those two shots landed. The cook never killed that skunk, after all. Get it?' I got it, *messieurs;* and that is why I believe that monkey could have learned anything."

Pouring another cognac into his beard, the ancient veteran survivor of the Legion laughed grimly. *"Alors,"* he concluded, "the monkey did not write that message on his trainer's cartridge belt, as a matter of fact. *Non!* That message was written by a gorilla. Written to that renegade King Solomon by the thief who stole the belt, the mysterious traitor who had been robbing our arsenal, our barracks rooms, our beds. It told King Solomon that a party of staff officers was expected from Dakar. That this would be the last theft for some time, as General Headquarters was growing suspicious. That it was too dangerous to continue riding out into the jungle under pretext of searching for tracks, delivering the stolen ammunition to a hollow tree. That if King Solomon wanted to wipe out Fort Defi he must strike immediately, and the price for this information would be leadership in his army if the revolution proved successful.

"Oui, that message was written by a gorilla," Old Thibaut Corday finished in a baleful, steel-edged rasp. "The handwriting was that of Captain Batraville!"



Romance and Adventure in Japan with the Prince from Princeton

For the Love of Mike

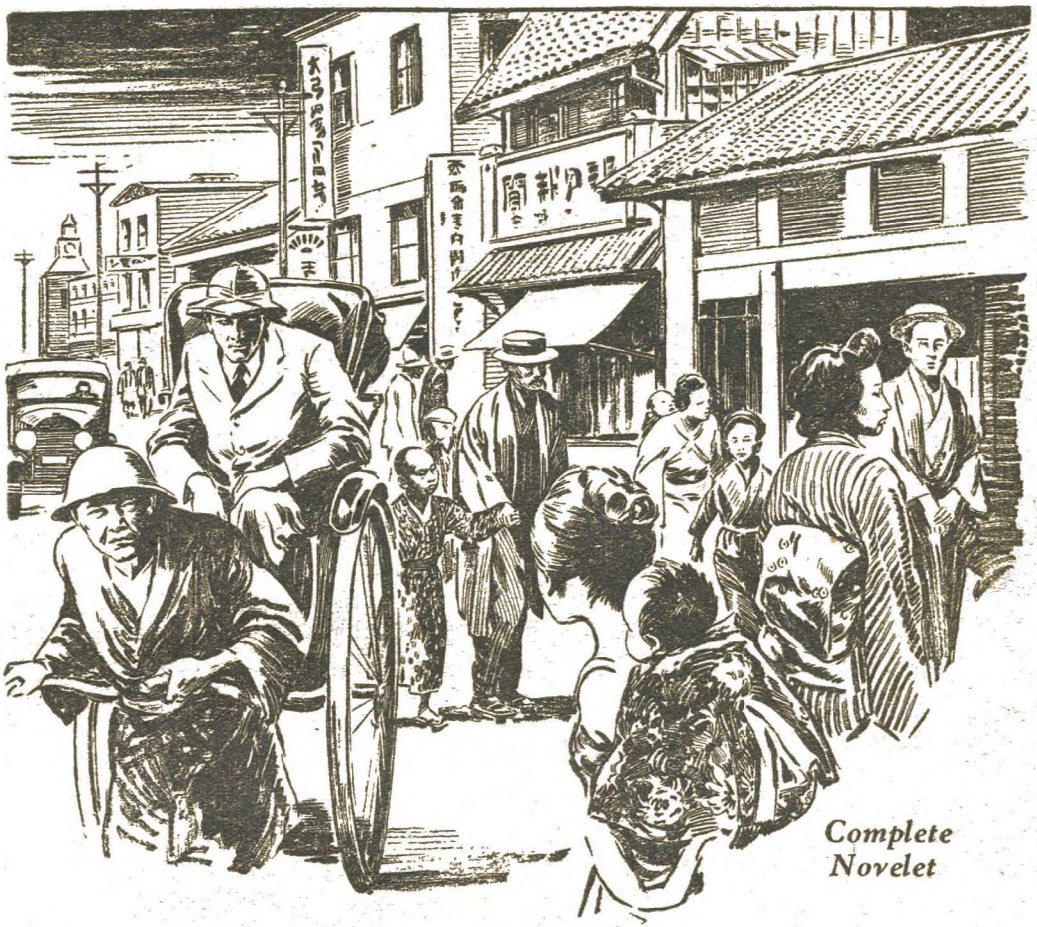
By
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "A Strange Place to Be," "Call Me Mike," etc.

I

IT HAD been a regular *sukiyaki* dinner, held in the *zashiki* of the *Myanosha Maru* the night before we were to dock at Yokohama. Japanese stewards, polychromatic in native costume, had waited on us, hissing and bowing, bobbing and smiling, while we sat cross-legged on cushions and tried to pretend we were comfortable. It was all very quaint; but I didn't care for it. I was worried about our host, Prince Mikuud-Phni Luangba, heir-apparent to the throne of Kammorirri—Mike Lang on the passenger list—who was the greatest little guy in the world but a genius for getting into trouble.

Prince Mike was returning to his native land, a wild but very wealthy sultanate between Laos and Burma, at the southern boundary of China, after four years at Princeton. He had no retinue, only a single servant, being incognito; and he was carrying jewels and personal effects on which the company I worked for had written a quarter of a million dollars insurance—travel insurance good only for this trip as far as Saigon, French Indo-China, where Mike would be met by an honor guard of Kammorirrian warriors.



Complete Novelet

Money meant nothing to the lad, whose father, the Sultan, was one of the wealthiest men in the world, but it meant a lot to my employers. In other words, my job was to see that nobody stole those jewels. And if you think that was easy, with a guy like Mikuud-Phni Luangba, you're crazy.

He sat there this night, beaming and smiling, clapping his hands, crying *"Banzai!"* and putting away a prodigious amount of warm *sake*. Cross-legged, he seemed as comfortable as though in a chair, which was more than any of the rest of us could say. He was in full evening clothes, except of course for the shoes—you don't wear shoes at a Japanese dinner: you leave them outside. In his shirt glittered two monstrous diamond studs, while diamond links were in his cuffs, and his fingers were splendid with diamond, ruby and emerald rings.

He was not more than five feet tall, had incredibly small hands and feet, and was pretty as a girl. But don't get the idea that Mike was a sissy!

I stuck around when the dinner was over and Mike was seeing the guests off, practicing the Japanese he had picked up from the stewards: *"Kon'ban wa!"* —*"Doitashi mashite!"* —*"Dozo mata irasshai!"* When the last one had gone, he turned to me.

"Ah, my Georgie, we have met such nice people on this trip!"

I said "Um-m" doubtfully. There were three guests I didn't trust, and

Mike knew it. There was Landseer, an Englishman who didn't talk much, and who, as I happened to know, packed a Webley pistol. There was Doucet, a too-polite Frenchman with an artificial frozen smile and a habit of snooping around my stateroom. And there was Sidney "Mase" Mason, an American racketeer whom I remembered from my days with the San Francisco police. Some one of these, I was sure, and maybe all three, had designs on Mike's jewelry.

Now Mike laughed. "Somebody tried to kidnap me in Honolulu, and so you fear kidnapers everywhere, my Georgie!"

"Yeah? Well, you don't know what a temptation those trinkets of yours are to any real crook! It would be too hard to swipe them while most of them are locked up in the purser's safe, but once we're on land it wouldn't be hard to snatch *you* and demand the whole Latch of jewels as ransom."

"You still think of Honolulu. I tell you, my Georgie, that was a local gang."

"Yes, but they were directed by somebody who knew about you and had seen those gems. Otherwise they wouldn't have attempted a job like that. There are three guys it might have been, and they were all here tonight. As long as you're on board you're safe, but I don't like the idea of you being ashore."

He only laughed again. He took my arm and led me out through sliding doors, leaving the stewards to clean up the mess we had made in a noble attempt to eat with chopsticks. We went down several small steps to the place where the shoes had been abandoned. Mike's tiny patent-leather pumps and my own huge brogans were the only ones left.

"Nice people," Mike said. "They would not hurt anybody."

I said "No?" and stuck my right foot into a shoe. Then I withdrew the foot, stuck my hand in, and pulled out a small folded piece of paper. I opened it, read a message printed with pencil. "No?" I handed Mike the note. "Read this, if you think they're all so nice. The stewards couldn't have written it because they don't know English. It must have been one of your guests."

Still smiling, Mike read the message, which was:

Marlin: Do as you are told in Tokyo—or else.

That was all, no signature. Marlin, of course, was me.

Mike said: "Somebody knows your fears and is being funny."

"Yeah? Well, then, somebody's got a lousy sense of humor. Anyway, joke or no joke, I'm going to break a Japanese law tomorrow and carry my gun when we go sightseeing."

THERE was only Mike and me that next morning. Mike's servant, who was on the passenger list as George Washington, presumably because Mike thought his real Kammorirrian name would be too difficult for either Japanese or Americans, refused to go along. George Washington was a small silent fellow, pretty old, though wiry; and he knew nothing and cared about nothing but his master, Prince Mikuud-Phni Luangba. In the four years he had been in the U.S.A. with Mike, George Washington had not mixed with anybody and had picked up practically no English at all. Mike was his whole existence. No, he didn't care to visit Yokohama and Tokyo. He would stay aboard the *Myanosha* and press his

master's trousers, every pair of them.

I thought it wasn't a bad idea. I would just as soon have stayed on board myself, passing up Japan which, after all, I could see on my way back; but of course there was no holding Mike.

Yokohama's not much—big, but flat, not colorful, a seaport and factory city, nothing calculated to thrill a tourist. We took a taxi to Tokyo, which is right next door, and went to the Imperial Hotel, where we had a few cocktails. Then we got into rickshas and started out to see the sights.

Mike's ricksha was ahead of mine most of the way, and he was forever turning to wave back to me or to shout something. He was like a kid at a circus. In a way I couldn't blame him. When he got back to Kammorirri, which is mostly jungle, he would be obliged to settle down to the business of learning to be a Sultan, a business which would occupy the rest of his life. So he was determined to have a good time while he still had the chance.

It gave me a start when we passed one of the main gates to the Imperial Palace grounds and Mike turned to yell back: "Ah, my Georgie! If only I were here officially we could go in and call on the Mikado." It gave me a start, I say, because I realized that, after all, Mike was of royal blood, for all his clowning and his drinking; and if he had wanted to—though I was sure he didn't—he really could have dropped in for a chat with the big-shot behind that immense moated wall.

Maybe I was a little too startled by this thought. Still, I think that what happened would have happened anyway, for it must have been well planned.

A small sedan sideswiped the left wheel of my ricksha. There was a sound like the crunching of a hundred-thousand matchboxes, and I found myself flat on the pavement, while the puller, six or seven feet away, screamed with the pain of what later proved to be a broken ankle.

Fireworks were doing an act in front of my eyes, and my ears rang furiously. I got to hands and knees, shaking my head. And at that instant the shooting started.

I rolled over to a sitting position, tugging out my pistol. Dazed, it was a split-second before I could understand just where the shooting was. It seemed at first to be all around me. Then I realized that it came from the small sedan, which had toppled over Mike's ricksha and puller as well as mine; and it also came from somewhere in back. However, I had no eyes, only ears, for the back. My concern was with Mikuud-Phni Luangba. And in that split-second, before I had a chance to raise my gun, I saw two arms reach out of the sedan, which had skidded to a stop; I saw two hands grab a dizzy swaying Mike and yank him inside; and then the car sped away.

TOKYO is a crowded city. An unbelievable number of those tiny yellow men crowd its streets which are also crammed with vehicles of all sorts, big cars and little ones, bicycles, motorcycles, trolley cars, buses, rickshas, barrows.

In no time at all, where there had been a big crowd there was a much bigger one; and everybody ran around yelling. My ricksha puller left off screaming and proceeded to faint, but as far as the noise was concerned he wasn't missed. Mike's puller was on his knees in the gutter. His face had been scraped raw and he was holding his two hands over it, while blood appeared,

dark red and sullen, between his fingers.

The small sedan was gone—out of sight. And so was Mike.

Even more excitement centered around a ricksha which at the time of the snatch must have been about fifty feet behind mine and going in the same direction. The puller had run away, panic-stricken. The passenger had been pitched forward and now lay sprawled between the shafts. His face was not visible. His right arm was extended in front of him, and in his right hand was grasped a Smith-Wesson .32 automatic, at the muzzle of which hung a wisp of gray-blue smoke.

People were jabbering and shrieking all around me, and in another minute I would have been the center of something like a mob. So I snapped my gun back into its holster, and I ducked my head and bent my knees, and I set about to try to make myself invisible. If I were arrested, at the scene of a shooting, an alien with an undeclared gun, it wouldn't be pleasant. The Japanese can be wonderfully polite sometimes, but when it comes to guns in the hands of anybody but their own soldiers or cops they are the most suspicious people on earth. Caught, I had a good chance of spending weeks or even months in jail; and in the meanwhile what would happen to Prince Mike? So I ducked, wriggled, and ran.

As I passed the group around the ricksha behind mine I glimpsed the man who held the Smith-Wesson. Somebody had turned him over, and for the first time his face was visible. There was a blue-black hole smack between his eyes, and he was plenty dead. What's more, I knew him. I knew those cold, dark, cynical features.

Here was, or *had* been, Maximilian Doucet.

Doucet — my fellow passenger aboard the *Myanosha Maru,* and before that, from Frisco to Honolulu, aboard the *Uloa.* Doucet—who the previous evening in the *zashiki* had been squatting by my side struggling with chopsticks.

But I didn't hang around. I had something better to do.

It was a miracle that I lost myself; and even when I was certain that nobody was following me, five or six blocks away, it scarcely seemed possible that I could escape. Japan is a country of little people and little things. The doorways are low, and so are the washstands, tables, bathtubs, desks and everything else. *I* happen to stand a little over six feet one and a half inches and I weigh two hundred and twenty pounds. So you can see that it would not be easy for me to hide in Japan.

In fact, the only article I could remember having seen that was really man-sized was the bar at the Imperial Hotel. So I went there.

There was another reason why I went there, a better one: Trying to chase the sedan would be foolish. Reporting to the police would involve answering, through interpreters, many embarrassing questions; and it would certainly mean arrest for me. What was more important, it would as certainly mean the death of Mikuud-Phni Luangba. Guys who pull a daylight snatch in a busy city street are not going to stop at a little thing like murder.

They wanted Mike's jewels. I had no doubt of this. To get them, they would have to come to me. And the logical place for them to seek me was the Imperial.

So I ranged up to the bar and orders a highball and made a pretense of drinking it. I was positively sick from fear. If I had ever liked anybody in the world it was Mike. No wonder I

couldn't make an honest dent in that highball!

II

TWENTY minutes later—a sweet example of the smoothness with which these babies operated—the message came. A page boy went through the bar room holding aloft a small blackboard and ringing a bicycle bell. Since pages and bellhops in the East have a hard time pronouncing European names, this is the way they do: My own name was written in chalk on the blackboard the boy held. Seeing it, I hailed him.

"Yiss, pliss, sir! Telee-phone for you, pliss, honored sir!"

I took it at the registration desk in the lobby. The English-speaking clerks were busy and paid no attention, and the party at the other end did not waste time. His voice was low, steady, fast but distinct.

"Marlin? Listen carefully and do exactly as I say. Leave the hotel and turn left and walk until you come to the Ginza. Turn right on the Ginza without crossing it, and keep walking until a ricksha boy accosts you by name. Don't say anything to him. Just step in. Don't have anybody following you and don't carry hardware."

Then the line went dead.

Well, I obeyed instructions to the letter. I took out a room in the hotel for the sole purpose of having a place to hide my gun and a certain key—I put them under the mattress. Then I walked to the Ginza and turned right. After a couple of blocks a man who was to all appearances an ordinary ricksha coolie popped in front of me, unsmilingly, and lisped: "George Marlin, pliss." He said my name as though he had been taught it carefully and knew no English at all. I did not answer. I simply stepped into the ricksha.

That puller must have been smarter than he seemed. He never looked back, never hesitated. Naturally I was lost in no time at all. As far as that goes, I had been practically lost when I started.

We must have gone five or six miles, up one street and down another, before we stopped in the middle of a block of neat yellow wooden houses. The street was clean, and deserted. Yet the doors of all these houses were wide open. I later learned that this was what we Americans vulgarly call a red-light district, but at the time I didn't know this: it was scrupulously respectable in appearance.

The puller lowered the shafts; and then he simply stood there, not looking at me, not looking at anything in particular. The house before which we had stopped was exactly like all the others. There was a tiny garden in front, and the sliding doors, paneled in paper, were wide open, showing a clean bare entrance hall. There were a couple of tiny taborets, three of four vases containing chrysanthemums, a row of felt slippers for indoor wear, and nothing else.

I looked at the ricksha puller again, but he didn't stir. So I went into the house.

There was a door on the right, with two little steps leading up to it, and a door on the left, both closed. There was no sound, not even the ticking of a clock. The walls were as bare as the scrubbed yellow floor. Outside, the street was gay with sunshine, but nothing moved. The ricksha boy had trotted away.

Maybe ten minutes I waited, nothing whatever happening in that time. Then

the door on my right was opened about two inches, and a clear voice, the same voice I'd heard on the telephone, said: "Come in here, Marlin." I went up the steps and pushed open the door.

I was in a dim hallway, very short, and another door was just ahead of me. This door, too, was ajar. From behind it the voice said: "Clasp your hands behind your head, Marlin, and come in."

By this time I was getting jittery. Ordinarily my nerves are okay, but ordinarily I don't get bossed around by people I can't see. Still, I obeyed. I clasped my hands behind my head, footed open the door, and walked in.

THREE men were there. The windows were covered with shutters, so that I could not see much. A man immediately in front of me did all the talking. His was the telephone voice. The other two crouched in corners. They were Orientals; I was sure of it. The face of the one in front of me I could not see, but though he was in European clothes, unlike the others, and though he spoke good English, I had a hunch that he, too, was a Jap. His hands looked it. I could see his hands where I couldn't see his face. They were clasped in his lap, and there was a silk handkerchief over the right one, concealing something.

"You were wise to do what we told you to, Marlin. You'll be wise if you keep on doing it. Where are the gauds?"

"Where is His Highness?"

The man said slowly: "I'm asking the questions on this party."

I said nothing. I was only hoping I'd be able to hold my temper. I wasn't afraid about my own life. They would not kill me unless they had to, since with me dead they would not be able to get Mike's gemmery. No, what I was frightened about was Mike himself. And being frightened like that made me twitchy.

The man said: "We're going to frisk you, Marlin. Stand perfectly still." He spoke in Japanese to one of the men, who sidled across the room toward me. Pretty soon that man's hands were on me. They were sly, supple hands, and they frisked me thoroughly. They began to get rough.

"Cut that out," I said.

The fellow was in front of me at that moment, feeling under my armpits. He snarled something back. His eyes were bright with hatred, and he spat in my face.

Maybe he didn't mean to do that. Maybe it was only his way of talking. I didn't stop to find out. I went wild and poked him one on the button, and he tumbled floorward with a crash. He was up again instantly. He sprang at me, and a knife came out from under his kimono. I caught his right wrist and kicked him in the shins, and he fell, squealing with pain.

At the same instant the man in the other corner yanked out a huge black automatic and let fly. It made a terrific noise. I dropped flat. The master of ceremonies yelled something in Japanese, and all action ceased just like that.

Smoke curled from the mouth of the automatic. The guy I'd kicked crawled back to his corner, whimpering. The boss spoke sharply to both of them again, though what he said I don't know. The man with the automatic put it away. The boss had moved, had risen in his excitement, and I saw now that he too held a big black automatic: it had been under the handkerchief.

He said angrily, but in a low voice: "Stop it, Marlin! You know better than that!"

I said: "Well then, tell your punks to lay off. Anybody can see by this time that I'm not heeled."

"All right! All right!"

The man spoke to the baby I'd slugged, and that fellow limped outside. I suppose he went to see whether the shot had been heard in the neighborhood and whether there was any fuss in the street. For fully five minutes I just stood there, and so did the other two, none of us moving. Then the guy came back and spoke to the boss, and the boss grunted and sat down.

By this time, much to my own astonishment, I had recognized this man. When he got up he came out of a shadow and I saw his face. He was Henry Karasuma, half Japanese, half American, but a subject of Nippon. It was not strange that I remembered his face, for I'm pretty good that way, but it was funny that I even remembered his name. I had seen him about five years before, in the line-up at San Francisco police headquarters. He had been in on some kind of assault rap after a fracas in Chinatown, and the federals wanted him because he was in the U.S. illegally. I had not seen him since that time, but I had heard that he served about five years in San Quentin and was to have been deported.

"Well, we'll go back to where we were," he said bitterly. "Suppose you tell me where those articles of jewelry are."

There was no sense stalling. It was a matter of life or death for Mike. So I told the truth. The jewelry, except for a few pieces his highness had been wearing or carrying, was locked in a couple of safe deposit boxes in the purser's vault on the *Myanosha Maru.*

"That's fine. Do you have a key for those boxes?"

"I have one, but not here. It takes two keys to open each box."

Karasuma said blandly: "I know that. Here's the other one, which His Highness was carrying." He produced it. "Now you know and I know, Marlin, that you have access to those boxes. provided you have both keys. You're guarding His Highness' jewelry, and the purser will let you take it out any time you like."

"That would be all right," I reminded him, "if I could get on board again. But the *Myanosha's* not due to be in Yokohama very long. She sails at four o'clock, and it must be a quarter of four now."

Karasuma nodded, unabashed, and looked at a watch.

"Exactly a quarter of four," he confirmed. "But the *Myanosha* goes to Kobe, stopping there tomorrow and sailing the following day at noon for Shanghai. All right. Here's what you do. You take the Fuji Express tomorrow to Kobe and catch up with the ship there."

"And His Highness?"

"His Highness will not sail with you."

"Then I don't go."

"Now wait a minute! We're not as dumb as you think. We've got this thing well figured out. Here's what you do—"

III

WE HAD passed Shizuoka and it was sunset. Fujiyama had been in sight, off and on, for several hours, a mountain seemingly floating in mid-air far away, its blue-gray base blending with the blue-gray sky, while its snow-capped peak was dizzily and perfectly white, an exquisite, unbelievable thing. At any other time I would

have been fascinated by the sight. I'm not a guy to go around eye-rolling and breast-heaving about the beauties of nature, ordinarily; but I don't know when I'd ever seen so lovely a countryside as this; and Fujiyama itself nobody could possibly forget. However, I wasn't thinking of that, but of Mike.

It was time for dinner, but I wasn't hungry. I sat in the observation compartment alone. It was the back half of the last coach, separated from the rest of the coach by a door without windows. I sat in a big chair, glowering at nothing.

Was it my fault that kidnapers had got Mikuud-Phni Luangba of Kammorirri? Perhaps not; but it would certainly be my fault, I told myself, if he didn't come back alive. I sat there, loving that kid so much that it hurt, and wondering if I had done anything wrong, if I was messing up the most important job of my life. I felt like smacking somebody, even killing somebody.

That I had kept clear of police so far was a miracle. I expected at every station to have them come aboard the train and take me off. The only reason they didn't, I figured, was because people at the scene of the murder and kidnaping had given three-dozen conflicting descriptions of me, as witnesses usually do when they try to remember, afterward, what had happened.

But what *had* happened? I didn't know myself. Mike had been kidnaped: this alone was clear. What had been the reason for the shooting? What was Doucet, that cold suspicious man, doing a short distance behind my ricksha, with a gun? What part did *he* play in the business? Was he connected in any way with Mase Mason, whom I knew to be a crook of the worst sort, or, more likely, with the enigmatic, alway silent Landseer? I had often seen him conferring in a quiet voice with Landseer, on the ship, and I had seen them studying me when they thought I wasn't looking. Where was Landseer? Where, for that matter, was Mase Mason? One of those men must have had something to do with the crime.

Mason, I knew from past experience, would be in a position to duck into the clear at a moment's notice. He had a habit of coming out technically innocent. He was noted for that in San Francisco, where for all his record, the cops never had been able to pin anything definite on him and get him back of the bars. If Mason was engineering this snatch, then he was doing so from the background, from behind the scenes. That was the way he worked.

At no time did I doubt that I had contacted the real kidnapers. For one thing, Karasuma had got in touch with me less than half an hour after the snatch itself, long before it could have been reported. In fact, as far as the English-language papers were concerned—and I'd pored over them—the crime was not reported at all.

Another reason I was sure Karasuma and his boy friends were the ones who held Mike was because of the key Karasuma had given me. I knew that key. It was Mike's, and he had been carrying it with him.

What I did not know was whether I could trust them to let Mike go free once I had handed over the jewels. I never hesitated for an instant, in my mind, about those jewels. Company or no company, job or no job, it was a matter of Mike's life and I was going to give up that fortune in diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls, promptly and without complaint. But I did not know whether the kidnapers were as smart as they thought they

were, and whether their plan, which sounded fantastic to me, as much as I had heard of it, would work. This was what troubled me—this and the fact that I would probably never get a chance to sock one of them.

Glooming along like this while the Fuji Express thundered and swayed toward Kobe, I hardly heard the door of the observation compartment open and shut. I did hear it, but I didn't pay any attention. Not until I heard a latch thrown, and realized that the door was being locked, did I look up.

Eric Landseer stood facing me.

Ordinarily this Englishman was a guy who showed no expression at all, a deadpan who seemed to think it beneath him to share the usual emotions of mankind. He had a frozen mouth topped by a stiff toothbrush mustache, and eyes of ice.

But now, standing there, he was actually excited. What's more, he was sore—sore at me.

HE HELD the Webley in his right hand, close to his hip, and it was pointed straight at my innards.

"Did you kill Doucet?" he asked in a low, tense voice.

I rose, very conscious of that gun, but at the same time boiling with rage. I had been wanting to smack somebody, and I had never liked this snooty Englishman anyway.

"No," I answered. "Did you?"

"Don't be insolent, Marlin! Where is His Highness?"

"How the devil should I know?"

He took a step closer until the muzzle of the Webley was almost against my belly. His face wasn't a foot away.

In a whisper he said: "Marlin, you'll either tell me right now, this instant, where Prince Mikuud-Phni Luangba is, or else—"

"Or else what?"

"Or else I'll kill you," he finished.

What's more he meant it! Even while I stood there trying to think of some answer, I saw his thumb snap off the safety catch of the gun. My face began to feel cold, and my legs were like rubber bands. I slowly folded my arms, which probably made me look defiant —though that wasn't why I did it.

"Before you do that," I said, "suppose you take a look at what I have in the breast pocket of my coat here."

He was puzzled, which was natural.

"You've only got a silk handkerchief there!"

"Sure. Only a silk handkerchief. Except that in one corner of the hem of this handkerchief there happens to be a little pellet of lead. It's sewed in there. Take a good look, Landseer. You won't see the pellet, but you *can* see that my right hand has got a corner of this handkerchief? Well, that happens to be the corner diagonally opposite the one with the lead. Catch on?"

"I—I— See here, I don't understand!"

"I'll explain. I move around in some pretty tough company back in Frisco sometimes, Landseer, and I've got to know how to take care of myself. I've practiced this trick so often that I couldn't possible miss. With one flick of my wrist I could have that handkerchief out, and I could snap it where I wanted to snap it before you knew what was happening. *Now* do you catch on? You've got the gun on me, yes. You could kill me if you wanted to, yes. But as you squeezed the trigger my right hand would snick out with this handkerchief, and at the instant you fired, Landseer, you would be losing one of your eyes!"

I was quiet for a while, letting that sink in. The train rocked on, and we

stood facing one another, feet spread wide.

Landseer probably had plenty of nerve. But facing death and facing the prospect of losing an eye are two different things. Have you ever noticed how men who are afraid of nothing else are afraid of losing their eyes? Landseer was like that. Most of us are.

"If you think I can't do it in time, or if you think I'm likely to miss," I went on slowly, "you've got one sure way to find out. Just shoot."

He went white to the very lips, not suddenly but gradually, as his imagination got to work. His eyes trembled. Sweat sprang out, glittering and fierce, on his forehead and at his temples.

I said: "Don't move your head. But lower that gun."

For just an instant he hesitated, defiant, but I knew I had won. I moved the thumb and forefinger of my right hand a fraction of an inch, pulling the silk handkerchief out a little. And without breathing he lowered the Webley which was what I was waiting for.

Then I stepped to the right, grabbed his gun wrist with my left hand, and hooked a whole-hearted one into his breadbasket. He staggered, dropping the gun, temporarily paralyzed. I took a backward step and sent one straight to his chin.

That punch ought to have knocked him cold. It had behind it everything I could give.

But Landseer, his fear for his eyes gone, had all the courage in the world and amazing strength. He rocked backward, but he kept his senses, and when I stepped in again, astounded at the need for doing so, he had the presence to roll his head to my punch and close in throwing his arms around mine and holding them.

HE KNEW how to use his mitts, that Englishman! For all the fact that he was groggy, probably sickened by my body blow, he held on to me as I slewed and twisted all over that observation comparment, trying to get my fists free. He held on until his dizziness was gone. We knocked over chairs and a table or two; but he held on.

Then suddenly he released me, jumping back. I went after him. I guess I was a little too eager to finish the job. Anyway, the next thing I knew I was on the floor.

I saw Landseer reaching for the pistol. I had just sense enough to kick his hand. He withdrew it, cursing. And I got up in time to meet a charge.

We stood toe to toe then, for perhaps two full minutes, both of us raging mad, both of us forgetting any boxing science we had ever known; we just stood and slugged one another. And I'm not being the modest hero when I say that it was sheer luck that one of mine landed in the right place. It might just as well have been his.

Anyway, he went backward over still another chair, and I stood gasping and panting, swaying not only from the motion of the train but also from the motion inside my own head, which was like a merry-go-round.

Landseer rose very slowly, pulling himself up by a windowsill. By then I had the Webley in my own hand and I was straightening chairs. There was a knock on the compartment door. I pointed to a rightened chair.

"Sit there," I commanded, and I saw Landseer stagger to it and drop into it as I unlatched the door. I opened the door an inch or two. A guard was jabbering something.

I said, "Everything's fine. The gentleman's just a little drunk, that's all, and he fell down."

The guard said "*Arigatoh*" doubtfully and looked as if he would like to continue the discussion, but I shut the door in his face. I had been holding the Webley behind my back. Now I sat down, and put it in my lap.

Landseer panted: "It's a libel. I never get drunk."

I grinned. I like a guy who can behave like that after a free-for-all.

"All right," I said. "Now let's get this straightened out. Why is it that you've been giving me dirty looks ever since we sailed out past the Golden Gate? Why is it that you came in here just now and waved this"— I waggled the Webley—"at me?"

He answered promptly: "Why, because from the very beginning you have been much too interested in making yourself agreeable to His Royal Highness of Kammorirri. You've been close to him all the time, ingratiating yourself."

"Well, what of it?"

"Simply this of it, sir. I see you as an American, a very burly one, and, if I may so express myself—uh—uh—"

"Yes, yes, go on."

"—well then, a very *rowdy* one. Suspiciously rowdy. I confess I am not wholly familiar with figures of the American underworld, but it seemed to me—uh—"

He was too embarrassed to continue.

"You knew Mike Lang didn't sail on the *Myanosha* yesterday out of Yokohama?" I asked.

"Yes, I knew that. I was there myself. Until the last possible moment. And then I returned to Tokyo and learned that Doucet had been murdered."

"How did you learn it? The newspapers certainly didn't carry a line about it? I can't understand why they didn't."

"If you knew Japan better you'd understand. It's not like the States. The newspapers here publish what they're told to publish by the police, and not more and not less."

"I see. And you figured"—I couldn't help grinning to see how embarrassed he was— "you figured I was a gangster, huh? A crook? A wise roughneck out after Mike's glassware?"

"Well, I—uh—as I explained, I'm not familiar with Americans, except through the medium of the cinema, and I confess I did for a time—that is, I rather—uh—"

"All right," I relieved him with. "Maybe I thought pretty much the same about you, if that makes you any happier. Well anyway, here's what I really happen to be—"

I took identification papers out of a pocket and tossed them into his lap. He studied them, and comprehension dawned.

"Oh . . . An insurance representative."

"A detective employed by the Great Western, which is the company that insured Mike's stuff for a quarter of a million until he reached Saigon. Naturally I'm interested in that lad's possessions! What's more, I've learned to like him personally."

"I see. I—uh—I'm frightfully sorry."

"Skip it. And now maybe it might be a good idea if you told me who *you* are and why *you've* been hanging around Mike, too?"

"Capital," he said. "I don't wish to sound mysterious, but you might call me an agent. A British agent. My exact status is something I cannot divulge."

"So we're sort of in the same business after all?" I said. "Well, that

makes sense. But why should the British government be interested in Mikuud-Phni Luangba of Kammorirri?"

LANDSEER was recovering some of his normal snootiness. And yet I liked him better, now that I'd had a fight with him.

"Ah! You are not *en rapport* with the Colonial office?"

"I guess not," I said.

"You are not acquainted with its problems in the East, and I daresay you do not comprehend the importance, at this juncture of world affairs, of the the independent state of Kammorirri?"

"Nope. I took this assignment on mighty short notice. I'd never even heard of Kammorirri before that, and I haven't learned much about it since."

"Ah, yes. Quite. Well, Kammorirri, as you may know, is situated in a most awkward spot, bordering Burma, which is an English interest on one side, and Laos, a French protectorate, on the other. Kammorirri is a wild country with no cities, very few villages even, no suitable landing places for aeroplanes. Its Sultan, His Highness' father, is not a pleasant gentleman. Not a gentleman at all, I'm afraid. In fact, he is a bloodthirsty scoundrel who would turn his tribesmen loose at the drop of a hat. Frankly both the British and the French colonial offices are afraid of him. He could be squelched, of course, but not easily. Because of the wild and mountainous nature of Kammorirri it would be extremely difficult and expensive to put him down."

"I'm beginning to see. If Mike's father ever got sore about anything he could make a lot of trouble. Is that it?"

"Ah, precisely! He could, as I say, be put down, but only with many good regiments. It would require many months, possibly even years. The Kammorirrian tribesmen, all under the absolute sway of the Sultan, are a potential danger to Burma and to French Indo-China. It is better, both governments have decided, to placate the Sultan."

"Bribe him, huh?"

"I shouldn't put it that way, no. Not exactly. The Sultan cannot be bribed in the usual sense of that word, since he's so beastly rich already. But he fancies orders. Both Downing Street and the Quay d'Orsay have seen to it that he receives them. Very beautiful ones."

"And if the Sultan's oldest son, the apple of his bellicose old eye, happened to be killed— Well, he might go berserk, and not being too bright in the first place, he might blame it on either France or England. Which would mean trouble—many lives lost, millions of dollars. All this at a time when neither England nor France feels it can afford to bury crack regiments deep in the jungle. Is that right?"

"You've put it quite clearly, I should say. Quite."

"And Doucet?"

"Doucet was a French agent, precisely as I am a British agent. We were watching His Highness every minute of the time. Which is why we were suspicious of you, sir, if you'll forgive me for reminding you of that. Doucet, poor beggar, happened to be on duty yesterday afternoon."

"Then Doucet was trailing Mike and me, and when the shooting started he tried to save the kid and took a slug for his pains? I'm sorry I misjudged that guy."

Then I settled back and told Landseer my side of the story, and told him about the plans for delivering the ran-

som. He shook his head, worried as I was worried. He rose.

"See here. Do you mind if I pop into the washroom and try to make myself a bit more presentable before we take up this matter? I'm afraid I'm not as handsome as I was before our tussle."

"Take this along with you," I said.

I handed him back his Webley. Staring at me, he took it. He even smiled—a tight reluctant smile but genuine.

"Thanks so much," he murmured. "I'll be back in 'arf a mo'."

He was back in perhaps a little less than that, looking as cool, calm and collected as ever. We were pulling into some way-station, and Landseer said he thought he'd step out on the platform and stretch his legs.

"There's one thing I'd like to ask you first," he said. "Could you really snap a man's eye out with that chunk of lead sewn in the corner of your handkerchief?"

"Well, since you bring it up," I said, "I might just as well admit that there isn't any lead here"— I drew the handkerchief, shook it out—"and there never was."

"I see," he said, nodding seriously. He was like a man looking at a celebrated sight which he recognized from pictures. "That, then, is what you Americans call 'bluff'?"

"Yes, that's what we call bluff."

"I see," he said again, and went out, still nodding thoughtfully.

I settled back. It was dark now, and Fujiyama was no longer visible. On the platform Japanese men and women, looking peculiarly toylike, scuffled back and forth. An announcer was bellowing something which sounded like "blah-moo-blooey-blah," being Japanese; but then, I reflected, the stuff called out by most train announcers in the U.S.A. sounds like that too.

It felt good to know that I had somebody to work with. It gave me more confidence. Landseer might have been an Englishman, and a little slow about some things, but he certainly knew his business. And in a strange country—me who had never been more than a few miles from San Francisco—I felt that I could use a guy like that. What's more, I felt that he was thinking the same thing about me.

If there was any way to save both Mike Lang and his jewls—though Mike himself was much the more important—I had a notion that Landseer and I could figure it out somehow between us.

I was thinking along these lines, and not in the least worried about my face, which must have looked like an overturned supper table after what Landseer's dukes had done to it, when a chorus of screams and yells from the platform jerked me out of this trance. I looked through the window. Two women had fainted, one man was leaning against a pillar being sick and everybody else was running around squawking like panicked chickens. Well, I'm human. I went out to see what it was all about.

One look showed me; and I began to sympathize with the Japanese who had tossed away his dinner.

A train had just pulled in on another track across the platform. A man had been directly in front of that train, and the engine and two cars had passed over him. The result, mostly liquid, was pretty distressing.

Of course, the man might have slipped. Or he might have jumped. But I didn't figure it that way. I figured he had been pushed. And the reason was that I recognized him from his clothes.

It seemed I was going to arrange

Prince Mike's ransom by myself after all. I wasn't going to have Landseer to work with. Nobody was going to have Landseer to work with any more —except the undertaker.

IV

FROM Kobe, on the way to Shanghai, ships pass along what is known as the Inland Sea, which is very narrow and is strewn with all sorts of craft, large and small; then into the Yellow Sea by way of a straight called Moji, which is narrower still. In fact, the Moji is so *very* narrow that passing through it, even in daylight and in good weather, is a ticklish proposition, and large ships like the *Myanosha* approach it at no more than quarter speed.

We were scheduled to pass through the Moji at four-thirty A.M. When I say "we" I do not mean Mikuud-Phni Luangba and myself, because Mike was not aboard. There had still, so far as I know, been no official report of the kidnaping. The purser, I suppose, and the stewards and such, took it for granted that Mike Lang was in our midst but that he was keeping to his stateroom, being either seasick or heartily tired after sightseeing. And this was what I wished them to believe.

The servant, George Washington, who knew better, was wild with anxiety, and it was all I could do to keep him from seeking out the captain and babbling forth his fears.

The first time I met this fellow George Washington he had tried to stab me in the back—I mean literally, not figuratively—because he thought I was stealing his master's jewels. That little matter had since been straightened out, but George Washington, I think, continued to be leery of me. He didn't like anybody anyway, except Mike. He worshipped the ground Mike walked on. Naturally he did not know what had happened in Tokyo, and because he understood so little English it was not possible for me to explain. He clung to me, pleading in a broken gibberish for information.

"His Highness is all right," I assured him repeatedly, wishing I could believe that myself. "He's all right. He'll be back on board before daybreak."

How much of this George Washington understood I had no way of learning. It was only after much pleading that I persuaded him to return to Mike's suite and let me handle the whole matter myself. I felt sorry for the poor old guy. He only knew Kammorirrian, and if he ever returned to Kammorirri without his royal master I shudder to think what the Sultan would have done to him. Yet I don't believe it was fear of torture and death which made him panicky. I really believe it was love of Mike.

At eleven o'clock I took Mike's jewels out of the safe deposit boxes, explaining that Mike wished to make a check. I took them to my own stateroom.

You never saw such a display! Belt buckles, wrist watches, collar pins, stickpins, cigarette cases and lighters, studs and links and fancy dress waistcoat buttons, a couple of gold fountain pens encrusted with diamonds, and dozens of rings. There were emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topazes, opals, more diamonds than you could count. The real things, too! Beautifully cut and beautifully set. The company I worked for had not been overestimating when it wrote a quarter million dollar policy for this collection. It was worth every cent of that and more. And yet I was prepared to hand over every piece of it

to a pack of murderous rats—I, the very guy appointed to guard it! But I'd have done a lot more than that for Mike's sake.

My orders were to remain in my stateroom with the porthole open from two o'clock on. Exactly what was going to happen I did not know, though I could guess.

It was midnight, and I was too nervous to sit still and wait. So I stuffed my pockets with precious stones in gorgeous gold and platinum settings, and I went up to the boatdeck for a walk.

THE night was dark. The sea was almost ominously quiet, without any waves, and its surface seemed oily.

The *Myanosha Maru,* already moving at half speed, slished quietly along: I could hear the rustle of water at her bows and feel the faint throb of her engines far below.

Occasional lights, but never those of a city or large town, punctured the darkness on either side. The shores were not far away. No other large ship was in sight, but the number of smallboats was astonishing. Sampans with whole families living in them, fishing junks, cargo junks of all sizes, even glorified rowboats, passed us on all sides. Their sails, dark brown, slatted with bamboo, extraordinarily clumsy and unreal in appearance, loomed briefly and then disappeared; they were like ghost boats, thrilling and a little frightening to watch but difficult to believe. Very few carried any lights. Now and then one would appear with an open brazier of charcoal on its afterdeck, and as it tacked toward us its sail would be smeared with crimson from the flames. Then it would turn on another tack, the light would seem to be extinguished, and the junk would vanish as mysteriously as it had appeared. Some of these boats came so close to the *Myanosha* that I could see yellow faces gazing up at us.

The *Myanosha's* engines throbbed to a lower, slower rhythm, and the sound of water at her bows was even softer. She had cut speed once again. She was barely crawling.

The clouds were very low. Wisps of fog hung over the water.

On the starboard side, amidships, I found Sidney "Mase" Mason of San Francisco. He was leaning against the rail, and in his left hand he held a long nickel-plated electric flashlight. He was not using the flashlight. I leaned against the rail next to him.

"Hello, skunk," I said, softly, bitterly.

He did not even turn his head.

"I don't like cops," he said. "Get out of here."

"I'll get out," I told him, "when I'm damn good and ready. Signaling for your pals?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Nice for you. All you have to do it sit back and drag in your split. No risk. No exposure. You were always like that, Mase."

He looked at his wristwatch, holding it so that I could see it. It had a luminous dial. It said ten minutes of two.

"Isn't it late for you to be up?" he asked carelessly. Yet he was nervous. I could tell that from his voice. "Don't you think you ought to be in your stateroom, as late as this?"

"Oh, sure! I've got my orders, and I'm going to obey them. But if anything happens to that kid, Mase, I'll tear you to bits!"

"I haven't any idea what you're talking about."

"Oh, naturally! You're just up here to see the sights, at two in the morning.

You just happen to have that flashlight so that you won't fall into any holes on the deck. Is that right, you lousy sewer rat?"

Maybe I was childish; but I was under an awful nervous strain all this while, remember, and it felt good to tell somebody like Mase Mason what I thought of him. However, I guess I overdid it. He didn't like being called a sewer rat. He snarled something under his breath, and his right hand moved a little, and suddenly I found the point of a small clasp knife nudging me just underneath the ribs. Mason's face was close to mine and his eyes shrieked hatred.

"Say, listen here—"

I interrupted coldly: "Put it away and stop behaving like a ham actor! You know perfectly well that if anything happens to me you and your pals won't get any part of the crockery. You know how your Oriental friends would feel about it if that happened to be your fault."

He was pale already, and he got paler at that thought. He was running with a pretty tough pack, and he knew it.

"Put it away," I said again. "You know and I know that I'm going to obey instructions. I'll be in my stateroom at two o'clock. But that doesn't change my opinion of you. I still think you're a sewer rat. Good night."

I turned and left him, not even glancing back. What he did with his knife I don't know, but I could have suggested something.

Waiting in the stateroom was hardest of all. There was nothing to do but sit there and paw Mike's astounding collection of bijou. For convenience I packed it into two pillow cases and tied each of these to my belt. Then I sat down to wait.

That night lasted years. By the clock it was about one hour and a half before the call came, but as far as I was concerned it was 1940 or 1941.

V

THE call was much as I had expected it to be. Obviously these snatchers could not have come aboard at Kobe, taken the jewelry from me, and departed with it then and there. To do that would have meant to pass the Japanese customs inspectors, the sharpest and most suspicious in the world. No, the snatchers would take their ransom (I was sure) and return their prisoner (I hoped and prayed) at sea. In any other part of the world this would be incalculably difficult; but the Inland Sea, near the Moji, was different.

I'll give them credit: They executed the contact beautifully, just as they had executed the snatch itself. Of course they had their inside man, Mason, to help with flashlight signals, and they knew exactly where my stateroom was.

The first thing I knew of their presence was when two hooks of a small portable ladder appeared at my porthole, which had been left open in accordance with instructions.

I went to the porthole, and a low voice, Henry Karasuma's voice, called: "Climb out, Marlin, and come down."

My stateroom was a minimum price one in first class, on E deck a little forward of amidships on the starboard side. The porthole was about fifteen or eighteen feet from the water. It was large; and though I'm a big man I have no fat on me, and I'm not so old that I've forgotten how to wriggle. I wriggled through the porthole now with no remarkable difficulty.

The ladder was made of rope and slats of wood. It was narrow, obviously light, but strong. Below me as I descended I could see the power-launch faintly. It was dirty white, perhaps twenty-eight feet long, and there was a small cabin forward and an open cockpit in the stern.

A quarter of a million dollars worth of precious stones batted against my legs as I climbed down that ladder. Though it was a chilly night, my body was wet with sweat. Under my left armpit nestled my pistol. It felt very big there and awkward.

The ladder exactly reached the cockpit. It was not necessary to jump.

The first thing I saw was Mike. He was standing in the stern, grinning at sight of me, his old familiar grin. I thought he was a trifle pale, but he did not seem to be hurt. He was not gagged or tied, but one of the Japs who worked under Karasuma stood at his side with a large revolver, the muzzle poking Mike's ribs.

"Ah, my faithful Georgie," he said quietly.

"Shut up," said Karasuma.

Karasuma was standing spread-legged in the center of the cockpit. His face was drenched with sweat like mine, and probably for the same reason, sheer nervousness. He wanted to get this business over with. There was a large automatic in his right hand, and it was not too steady: it made me uncomfortable to look at it.

The third Jap, the one who had spit in my face, stood at the bottom of the ladder with a boathook. One end of this boathook he had braced against the edge of one of the plates of the *Myanosha Maru,* so that the launch was getting a free ride. The launch's engine was not going. A precaution against noise, I suppose.

I asked: "Are you all right, Mike? Did they hurt you?"

"No, my Georgie, I am all right."

Karasuma snapped: "Shut up! And gimme!"

Without a word I unfastened from my belt the two pillowcases filled with jewelry, and dropped them to the deck at his feet. He knelt instantly, started to open them with his left hand. His automatic was out of line then, and I could have snicked out my own gun and killed him. But there was Mike to think of. Mike had a revolver poking his abdomen.

"They're all there," I said contemptuously. "Well, do we go, His Highness and I?"

Karasuma had spilled jewels to the deck of the boat, and they lay there glittering somberly, a rich, dizzying mass of color and light, sapphires from Zanshar, emeralds from Muso and Sonondoco, topazes from Ceylon, diamonds and rubies from the Sultan's own mines in far-away Kammorirri. Karasuma's eyes glittered, too, when he gazed at them. But he looked up from his crouching position, and waggled his automatic, and there was a crooked smile on his mouth as he answered me:

"Do you think we're fools enough to let you get back on board and broadcast a description of us? We brought His Highness here because we were afraid you wouldn't hand the stuff over to us unless and until you saw him. But this is as far as you go."

"Do you mean to say," I cried, "that you're going to slaughter us in cold blood, here and now?"

He rose, and his thumb cocked the automatic. "I mean to say exactly that," he replied.

He spoke in a low voice to the Jap with the boathook, who dropped that

implement and made for the engine. However, the boat's momentum kept it drifting along with the *Myanosha.*

I cried: "Why, you lousy—"

"If it makes you feel better, go ahead and swear, Marlin. You want to die cursing? It's the same to me. Ready?"

IT SEEMED as though help came from Heaven. In fact it came from my own stateroom just above where we stood. But it might as *well* have come from Heaven.

It was skinny little, scrawny little George Washington of Kammororirri, the speechless valet, the hero worshipper. Unable to sleep, as we later learned, he had gone to my stateroom to plead with me once more to tell him where his master was. Getting no answer to his knocking, he had pushed his way inside, had seen that the stateroom was empty, had noticed the open porthole and the top of the ladder, had stuck his head out. The fact that a Japanese gangster was holding a revolver on Mike meant nothing to this guy. Possibly he didn't even know what a revolver was. But he sensed from the attitude of the Japanese that he was threatening Mikuud-Phni Luangba; and this was enough for George Washington. Right through the porthole he came, with no wriggling, for he was small. He did not use the rope ladder. He was in too much of a hurry to stop and fool with ladders. He simply dropped—on the Jap.

That was a good big drop, and though George Washington was not a heavy man the shock sent both of them tumbling to the deck.

The revolver exploded once. Mike's mouth fell open and he swung around in a half circle and landed on the deck as though he had been pushed. He didn't move. Neither did the others there.

Henry Karasuma had prepared for many things, having thought this business out carefully; but he had not anticipated visitants from above. It knocked him breathless almost as emphatically as it knocked the Jap with the revolver breathless, though not for so long a time. But long enough. I went for my gun.

Karasuma snapped out of it, firing twice. He was a little too anxious. He fired from the hip.

I felt something touch my left arm near the elbow, and it burned like a red-hot poker. I fired once, which was enough. Karasuma staggered back, struck a rail, then pitched forward on his face.

Spinning, I caught a flash of the Jap who had held the boathook. He held an automatic now. I went to one knee as the gun crashed. It went off five or six times in rapid succession. He must have squeezed the trigger as hard and as fast as he could, even after I had shot him in the chest. I think he didn't even aim at me, perhaps didn't even have his eyes open. He was crazed with fear and excitement. For an instant I thought that my shot had missed, so I tried another one. The Jap was at the rail by this time, and the second shot sent him right over backward into the water as though he had been kicked in the stomach. It was the last I saw of him.

Quite abruptly everything was quiet. The launch was drifting away from the *Myanosha Maru,* falling back, rocking idly in the swells. From the ship I heard cries of inquiry, but they seemed faint and very far away after the thunder of gunfire. I was the only person in the launch who was still on his feet. I went to Mike, knelt beside him.

Blood colored his shirt, but his eyes were open and he grinned up at me.

"They hurt you bad?"

"It is nothing, my Georgie. Ah! that was pretty marksmanship, my Georgie! I did not know you were so good a shot!"

In fact he was not in bad shape. The bullet from the revolver had slithered across the front of his chest, chipping a couple of ribs and tearing the flesh but not touching any vital spot; it had passed out on the other side. There was a lot of blood, but I had no trouble staunching this. Mike grinned through it all, though it must have been painful, and insisted that I examine his servant, who, after all, had saved both of us.

George Washington was stunned, bruised, breathless, but that was all. The one who had really suffered was the man George Washington had landed upon; but none of us spent any time feeling sorry for *him*.

"Now if I can only get this engine started—"

"Let me do it, my Georgie! I used to have a speedboat."

"You stay right where you are. Get moving around too much and that bandage might work loose."

"But I tell you I understand about—"

"All right then, you sit there and tell me what to do. We've had enough excitement for one night, without having you try to establish any speed records at this stage of the game!"

PRINCE Mikuud-Phni Luangba of Kammorirri testified before the ship's board of inquiry immediately previous to me, the following morning, and when I came out I found him at the bar, a group of friends around him congratulating him and asking him questions. He was childishly delighted to be the center of so much attention, and his pretty face glowed. He might still have been suffering from that bullet groove across his chest, expertly-bandaged now by the ship's doctor, but he certainly didn't show it. There was a bottle of champagne in his left hand. He was buying everybody drinks, as usual. As I came up Mase Mason was shaking his hand. Obviously Mase had been congratulating him on his escape from death. The dirty punk smirked at me, leered at me, as I approached; but he went away. I crowded the Prince off to one end of the bar, whispering:

"Please stay away from that fellow. I'm certain he was behind this whole business, just the way he was in Honolulu."

"Ah, no, my Georgie! Mr. Mason is an all righter, eh? He would not hurt anybody. He has just been telling me how sorry he was that I was wounded."

"Yeah! Sorry you weren't killed!"

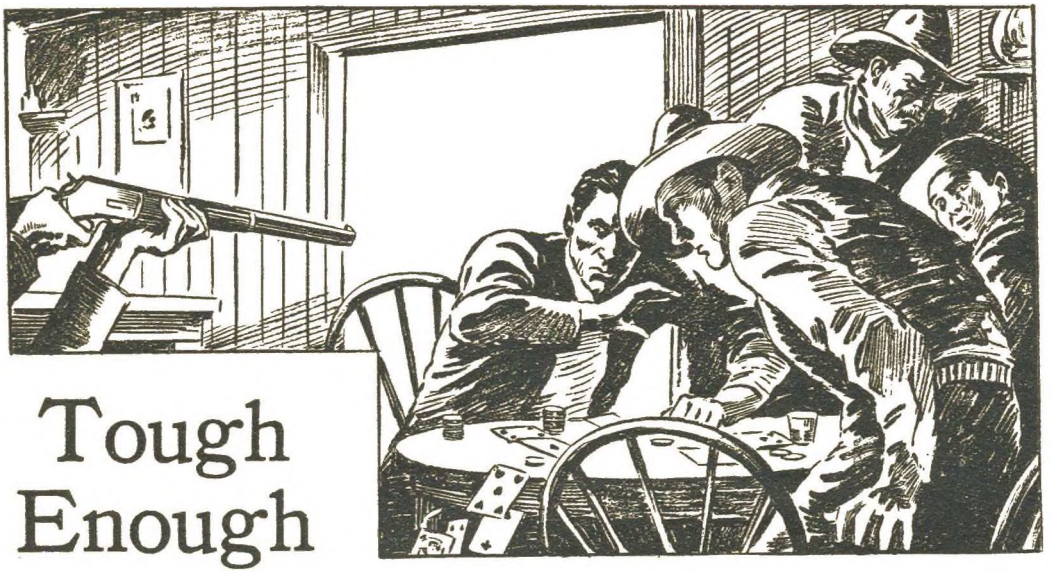
He laughed, clapped my shoulder, called the bartender to bring me a glass. He filled that glass with champagne.

"But you should not worry any longer, my faithful Georgie! Your troubles are almost over! Tomorrow we will be in Shanghai. One night there, that is all, and then we take a French ship direct to Saigon, where all your responsibility ends. Only one night in Shanghai!"

"Yeah," I muttered, "only one night in one of the toughest seaports in the world. Yeah, that's all."

"Have some wine, my Georgie. It is good for your soul. It will take your mind off your troubles. Shanghai? Why, Shanghai will be great fun for us!"

"Yeah," I said. "Oh, sure."



Tough Enough

By LUKE SHORT

Author of "King Colt," etc.

WHEN Kate saw him ride in from the north, a tall, big-boned man with caution in his manner, she thought he was one of Drury Warms' riders, and she almost looked away. But when he stopped in front of Warms' Emporium, turned in his saddle and looked sharply at the station and its stockpens, then at this single street of a half dozen buildings paralleling the tracks that was the town of Warms, she knew he was looking for something: not the hotel where she stood behind the wide windows, not the saloon which he could have seen as easily, and not for a man—most of all, not for a man. She knew that because she was sure now he was a stranger, and when he went on down the dusty road out of sight to McGrew's feed stable, she set down the pitcher of water for the window geraniums and watched.

Over where the four cars were waiting against the stock pens, she saw Wilsey Boone leave his conversation with the telegrapher, mount his horse and ride the hundred yards across the baked, sage-stripped frontage to the saloon. He was watching the stranger, his head turned down street.

A rider came out of Warms' Emporium, looked down toward McGrew's, then hurried across the street. He passed Kate at the window and went in the saloon.

"Like a rock thrown in a quiet pool," Kate thought, as she went back to the kitchen for some more water.

When she returned with the pitcher full, Drury Warms had come in from the saloon and was seated in the lobby with Wilsey Boone, and he said to her curtly, "He didn't stop here, did he?"

"No."

Drury sat quietly, the cigar poised unlit in his frail fingers, as he looked past Wilsey at the street. It was formula, Kate thought, remembering the last man who had ridden into town this way. That was three months ago, and he was still here, this George Dufreese, tending bar next door, one of Drury Warms' men. Of course, George was weak, or it never would have happened. His horse had disappeared the night of

his arrival, and, since a man must have either a horse or a train to take him across these endless sage and alkali flats, he had stayed. And he had been greeted the same way the new man had been—scrutinized from the same chair Drury Warms now sat in.

"He picked a bad time," Wilsey Boone said, and shifted his burly body restlessly in his chair, watching Warms and the street with those quiet, hard, black eyes.

Drury said nothing. He lighted his cigar now and settled back in his chair, watching, utterly patient, utterly confident.

"You don't suppose he's a marshal?" Wilsey said.

"Where would he come from?" Drury said impatiently, without looking at him.

"That's right."

Two riders came in from the north and turned and went past the window toward the saloon, and Wilsey said, "There's the boys," and got no answer from Drury.

Then Drury said, "Here *he* comes."

Kate picked up her pitcher and started toward the kitchen with it, and Drury said without looking at her, "You stay here."

KATE obediently turned and came back to the desk, her face blank, a little tight, but resigned. The only thing betraying her nervousness or her distaste was a small gesture of brushing back her hair. It lay smooth and sleek and corn-colored against her temples and fell to a low knot at the base of her neck where it met the collar of her basque.

She heard the door open and looked up from the geraniums in the window and said pleasantly, "Good evening," wanting to make up for Drury's stare.

"Evening," the man said. He was a little taller than she thought he would be, but dusty, more saddle stiff than he looked at first. There was little flesh on his skull, so that his cheekbones seemed high and sharp, but not high enough to hide the hard insolent stare he gave Drury and Wilsey while he still contrived to touch his hat. He tramped in with the heavy walk of a tired man and dropped his warbag and canteen at his feet. He leaned on the counter, while Kate pulled out the register.

"A hot ride," he said.

"Yes, in any direction," Kate answered, smiling a little.

When he had signed his name she said, "I'll show you your room," but he held out his hand for the key and said, "I'll find it."

"It's the third on your right then, upstairs."

Again he looked at Drury, this time a little longer, and then ignoring Wilsey, he walked up the stairs, his boots loud and deliberate on the treads and in the hall above.

"Well?" Wilsey said.

Drury rose and went through the side door into the saloon, Wilsey trailing him, looking up the stairs with those hard speculative eyes.

"Frank Sessions," Kate said reading in the register. No town given—as if he weren't even going to bother to bluff, as if he didn't believe this scattering of buildings fronting a railroad that ran straight across these endless miles of sagebrush flats had the power to hurt him.

She went back to the kitchen to help Mrs. Sais with supper, but she found herself unaccountably restless, expectant. But when she heard the cattle coming, she dropped her work and went back into the lobby.

She found him looking out the big

front window, his big hands rammed in his hip pockets. Out in the dusk, where minutes before the air had been so clear that she had been able to see the distinct bulk of the Seven Sleepers eighty miles to the south, there was a fog of stirred dust; and she could make out the jogging backs of a thick stream of cattle wedging its bawling way past the hotel and toward the stockpens. Five riders harried them, their cries sharp in the still air.

And then she saw Drury, who had been watching Sessions from the door into the saloon. Quickly, Kate walked past Drury up to the desk and began fumbling beneath it, her head down. Drury's step as he walked past her up to Sessions was firm, slow.

Kate rose. Drury was standing behind and a little to one side of Sessions, who had not seen him.

"Nice cattle," Drury said, removing the cigar from his mouth.

SESSIONS turned slowly, indolently, and regarded Drury a moment, his profile sharp and hard to Kate.

"They were. They've been pushed hard," Sessions said, without criticism, almost without interest.

"That's the railroad's fault," Drury said. "You drive when they can spare the train—not before, not after."

"I don't see it here," Sessions said.

Drury's bland face settled into hardness and then suddenly he laughed noiselessly. "You wait a few minutes. It'll be in before the cattle are loaded."

Sessions waited a silent moment then wheeled and went over to a chair. Drury went back into the saloon, and when he was gone, Kate felt Session's hard, inquisitive look bearing on her.

He said suddenly, "I reckon I rode in here at the wrong time."

"Yes," Kate said, almost inaudibly, then added, even more softly, "If you can, you'd better go."

Sessions only scowled, but did not move. Under his gaze, Kate picked up some paper and headed back for the kitchen, feeling her face hot as she went.

She heard his steps behind her and then his voice, "Miss . . ."—He was right there in front of her when she turned, his hard face curious, down-looking, intent—"Somebody makes big tracks around here. Is he the one?"

He was referring to Drury, of course, and she said, "Mr. Warms? Yes. It's his town."

He looked sharply at the saloon door and then back at her and grinned faintly. And then he left, Kate watching him as he tramped his heavy way into the saloon. She was still watching when Wilsey came in the front door on the heel of Session's exit, and walked past her, pausing with one foot on the stair. He jerked his head toward the saloon. "Did he leave his key?"

"No."

Wilsey went silently up the stairs, his square, bent back almost a banner of his vindictiveness.

In the saloon, Drury saw Sessions enter and go to the bar. The four other men playing poker with Drury under the newly-lit kerosene lamp, watched Drury, who said quietly, "Let's make this stud," while he shuffled the deck without looking.

The far-off wail of a train whistle sounded before the hole card was dealt, and Drury shuttled his gaze over to the two men at the far end of the bar. In answer to their look, he nodded imperceptibly. Then he called, "George."

The bartender lounged off the back bar and came over to him. He was a middle-aged man in shirt-sleeves, colorless, his saddle of sandy red hair divid-

ing his bald skull. Only his eyes, reserved, untroubled, would have given a man a key to his character.

"Go get supper, George," Drury said. George turned away and Drury said distinctly, "Tell your customer to step over, please."

In a moment, Sessions walked over.

Drury said with graciousness, "I didn't want to close bar on your pleasure, but my help must eat." He indicated the bottles on the green felt at his elbow. "Join us, if you care to."

Sessions waited for the introductions which would be Warms' quiet way of forcing him to give a name, but Drury only waited, too, silent, as Sessions regarded the players with a kind of arrogant thoughtfulness, and then reached for a chair.

"I'll even buy in the game," Sessions said quietly, "if it's open."

The train clanged in just as the first hand was dealt. George untied his apron and put it under the shelf when a man entered the room and came over to the bar.

IT was Berry, the telegrapher, and he wanted a drink. While he waited, he ripped off his alpaca cuffs, watching Drury's game, then took his own bottle and walked over to the table. As George went out, he saw Berry sit down and heard him call for a hand.

Outside, George leaned against the door a moment, listening, knowing that the time had finally come and welcoming it, but with an enormous excitement. He was a plain-looking man at best, his collarless shirt soiled at the neck, his hands white and soft and contrasting strangely with his thin and hair-fuzzed arms. Automatically, he reached for a cigar in his shirt pocket and then started back down the corridor to the dining room, the cigar forgotten.

Kate spoke to him as he passed through the dining room and he went into the kitchen and out the back door. At the pump, he made a quick racket, but did not wash. Turning away, he sought the shadow of the hotel and walked down it to the street. It was empty, dark, and he walked across it toward the station.

Out in the stockpens, by the light of several lanterns, the cattle were being loaded, the rough shouts of the riders, the bawling concert of cattle and the clanking breath of the engine giving him cover enough for what he wanted.

He went quickly in the shabby waiting room and turned to the agent's wicket. The door was unlocked. Inside, a kerosene lamp was burning low in its bracket. Crossing the room, he glanced quickly at the telegraph key and then leaned over and blew out the light. Darkness fell like a blanket and he waited a moment, motionless, listening.

The key was silent. Seating himself in front of it, he reached out and by feel and hearing he started its swift rat-a-plan—C.H., C.H., C.H., over and over in growing excitement. It was the agent's call in Jungo, a county seat, a hundred and forty miles to the west. Insistently, monotonously, he called, then ceased, ready for acknowledgment, and when it did not come he called again. The hard sharp patter of his key became more insistent. He shifted faintly in his chair as he stopped again, and then suddenly, as hard and almost as sharp as a gun report, his call was answered. He smiled a little. Out there in dry, wind-bitten Jungo, the agent was waiting.

Hard, expertly, George stuttered out his message, picking his own story out by ear in that thick darkness. When he was finished, he signalled *repeat,* and

went through it again. Then, without waiting for acknowledgment, he stood up and walked to the lamp. It was cool now. He placed it on the floor, under the desk, struck a match, lit it, placed it in its bracket and let himself out of the office.

Out in the night, he listened again for a moment, then walked swiftly back to the hotel, entering, as he had left, through the kitchen. Once there, he seemed to know what he was about. Ignoring the cook, he poured himself a cup of coffee, took a cake from several dozen lying on a floured board, and then leaned against the cupboard, eating it, watching the cook, his eyes veiled, his face impassive.

"Supper's on," the cook said, presently.

"Not hungry," George replied, setting his coffee down and grimacing. He put a soft hand to his stomach. "Too many cigars, not enough air."

"Es verdad," the cook said idly.

In the dining room, the stranger was eating alone. Kate was over by the sideboard, counting out the silver.

"Your supper's ready, George," she said, as George passed her.

"Not hungry," he said, "I ate a little in the kitchen."

Kate looked up swiftly at him, about to speak her amazement, when George, who had stopped, smiled faintly, watching her. "I said, I ate in the kitchen. Don't you remember?"

She did not answer, and George turned and walked out into the lobby, his face settling into slackness and stupidity again. One of Drury's riders was sitting in the deep leather chair where he could see the entrance to the dining room.

"How's things, George?" the rider said.

"Poco-poco. But I'm off my feed, Ed," George answered, and turned wearily into the saloon.

THE game was still going on; Berry still had a hand in the game. George put on his apron and drew out a toothpick and leaned against the back bar, picking his teeth, staring at space with that peculiar air of brooding which is the exclusive property of bartenders. After one of the McGrew kids came in with a bucket and he drew beer for her, George drew the *Stockman's Gazette* from beneath the bar, spread it on the sleek mahogany and read it—or pretended to. But he listened.

He heard Drury Warms and Wilsey Boone and Berry, the telegrapher, go in to eat. He saw Sessions come in, and Sessions asked him if he had any Oregon papers and George gave him some. Sessions sat down at a vacant table and read. Drury and Wilsey and Berry came back, and after that, the man who had been watching Sessions from the street disappeared.

Still George listened. When he heard a rider out on the walk, he looked up. The rider entered, slapping dust from his Stetson and went over to Drury and said, "All up, Drury."

Wilsey Boone and the telegrapher got up then and went out with the rider. In another ten minutes, George heard the train pull out and he breathed deeply. Turning, he poured himself a glass of whiskey and found Sessions watching him, those bleached eyes probing, curious.

George patted his stomach and grinned sourly. "You don't see many of us behind the bar drink, do you?"

Sessions said, "No."

"My stomach," George said wryly. He reached in his shirt pocket and brought out a cigar and held it up, saying, "Too many of these. They don't let

me feed right," after which he lighted up and went back to the *Gazette*.

He was glad when six cowhands, Wilsey Boone among them, tramped in and demanded drinks. He was working hard. A little of the tension had eased off now, but George wasn't deceived. Through it all, he managed to avoid watching the door, so that he didn't appear to see Berry bolt through the door and walk straight over to Warms.

"Can I see you a minute, Drury?" Berry said in a hard swift voice that stopped the game dead.

Drury got up and walked into the lobby after Berry. "What is it?" he asked, as soon as the door was closed behind him. Then, before Berry could answer, Drury said, "Kate, get out of here."

Kate picked up her knitting and went back into the dining room. "Now what is it?" asked Drury.

"Somebody's been on that key," Berry said. He told it all with a kind of bitter, frightened violence. "I heard my call and answered. It was Jungo, asking for a repeat. I says 'what repeat?' and Holden—he's agent at Jungo—says am I crazy. I said 'send it back.' " He drew a paper from his shirt pocket and handed it to Drury and Drury unfolded it, reading Berry's scrawled message:

Four carloads of stolen cattle leave Warms on No. 4 tonight. Cut out and hold and get in touch with Tuscarorah and Weybolt, Oregon County sheriffs. Refer my authority to U. S. Marshal, W. C. Preston, Reno., and come make arrests.

"Stop the train," Drury said.

"Hell, I can't. It's clear all the way to Jungo."

Drury looked at the paper, his face white with fury. "You mean you can't do a thing—can't wire it's a joke, can't stop the train, can't get it around Jungo."

"That's it, they've wired Preston and got an answer," Berry said desperately. "It's Sheriff Jelke in Jungo wantin' to verify those counties."

"Then Holden has got it to Jelke," Drury said more quietly.

"To Jelke and Preston."

Drury rammed the paper in his pocket and took out a cigar and looked at it absently, almost with surprise at seeing it in his hand.

"They'll be swarmin' over here day after tomorrow, with a railroad investigator, too," Berry said hoarsely.

"Yes."

"Ain't you—what do you aim to do?"

"What time did that message go out from here?" Drury asked mildly.

"I don't know. I didn't—"

"Go and find out then."

Berry hesitated a second, then started. At the door he said, "What will I tell Holden?"

"Details later," Drury said.

DRURY stood in that same spot until Berry came back and said, "It went out at seven three."

Drury wheeled and went back into the dining room. Kate was reading at one of the tables and looked up at him as he entered.

"Get Mrs. Sais," he ordered.

"She's gone to bed, I think."

"Get her."

Kate went out. When she returned with the cook, Drury had not moved. He had a fresh unlit cigar in his mouth, and he said, "Sit down, both of you."

When they were seated he said to Kate, "You were in here when that stranger—Sessions—ate supper?"

"Yes."

"All the time?"

"Yes."

"He didn't leave, then."

Kate said with a faint stirring of anger. "You ought to know. You had a man watching him, so he wouldn't go near the pen."

Drury did not smile; he simply ignored this. "Who all have you served tonight?"

"You and Sessions and Wilsey and McGrew and ourselves," Kate said. "That's all."

"Not George?" Drury said quickly. "He didn't eat?"

Kate hesitated a moment. "He ate in the kitchen, I think."

Drury shuttled his hot gaze to Mrs. Sais, "Did he?"

"*Si.*"

"Speak English!"

"Yes."

"Was he there all the time?" Drury asked.

Mrs. Sais' face started to go blank, the presage of that feigned stupidity which has been the sanctuary of her people, but one look at Drury Warms' face changed her mind. She said sullenly. "I don't know."

"Think," Drury said mildly. "Think hard—awful hard."

Mrs. Sais said hurriedly, "No. She's go out."

"Where?"

"The pump."

"For how long?"

"*Quien sabe?*" she said sullenly, and when Drury started to walk over to her, she slid out of her chair and stood behind it. "Veree long," she said quickly shrinking back.

Drury looked now at Kate. "I used to expect those lies from your mother. So you've started too?"

He wheeled and walked out and said to Berry, waiting in the lobby, "Get Wilsey."

When Boone came out, Drury said quietly, "George is the marshal, not Sessions. He tipped our hand to the sheriff in Jungo. Your name's on the waybill, isn't it?"

Wilsey nodded.

"Then you'll have to hide out for a stretch." He held out his hand. "Give me a gun."

Wilsey flipped out a gun and Drury took it, hefting it, then brushed back his coat tails and rammed it in his hip pocket and said, "Maybe you better come along too."

GEORGE knew what was up when Drury approached the bar, but not by Drury's face, which was as bland and inscrutable and prideful as ever. It showed in the face of Wilsey Boone, although George had not realized Boone's eyes could be more baleful than they always were. Something had gone wrong. Ten feet down the bar and under it was the shotgun—too far. George thought mildly behind his relaxed, impassive face, "Now isn't that hell? Isn't that hell?"—no more, only that, as he looked up at Drury and said, "Yessir, Mr. Warms. What'll it be, the same?"

Drury did not answer him immediately. He was looking at the array of bottles on the back bar. Then his gaze shuttled to George and he smiled thinly and said, "I've got a cold, George. Have you any rock and rye?"

"Rock and rye," George echoed and turned promptly. In the bar mirror he saw Drury's hand leave the counter, his arm bend. He laughed between his teeth even as he gripped the bottle and turned and threw it in Drury's face. Before it struck, a shot hammered out hard and flat and queerly explosive and Wilsey Boone drove into the counter, his gun clattering to the floor. George only

caught a glimpse of Sessions standing by the table, gun leveled, as he dived down for the shotgun. He came up with it cocked to see Drury Warms standing away from the bar, one arm across his mouth. The other weaving arm held out a gun which he fired, then. George just laid the shotgun on the bar and pulled the trigger and watched Drury knocked over backwards; and then it occurred to him that he had every man at the corner poker table covered—every man in this room, with the exception of Sesions.

George said quietly, "Do the right thing, boys. I've still got a load here and it's not birdshot. If you'll look down there on the floor you'll see what it can do to a man."

They were standing now and their hands came up. Berry came running in now from the lobby, and he was well within the room before he caught sight of George.

"Walk over and take their guns, Berry," George invited. "Just put them on the table. When you're through, you'd better go—all of you. There's a deputy U. S. Marshal in town tonight, and if you can beat his wire to those lower Oregon counties, you're luckier than I think you are."

Afterwards, when they were gone George pulled out a cigar and leaned over the bar and looked down at Wilsey and then at Drury—and then at Sessions.

"Why did you do that?" he asked curiously. "I thought I looked like a bartender. And if it hadn't been for you I would of looked like a pretty dead bartender."

"Instinct," Sessions replied. "I didn't even like to see a man who looks like a bartender shot in the back. I don't play that way."

There was a knock on the lobby door and George picked up his shotgun and said, "Come in. And come with your hands empty."

Kate stood in the doorway. Drury Warms was out of her line of sight, and almost casually, Sessions yanked the green felt from his table and spread it over Warms, so that it hid him.

George said, "I don't know who this'll make the happiest, Miss Kate—you or me. Warms is dead."

When Kate looked over at Sessions she noticed the gun in his hand. He did too. He rammed it back in its holster and George said, "After I light this cigar, I'm going to work. Maybe you better step back and wait for us, Miss."

She left. George took off his apron and came out and knelt by Wilsey Boone, saying, "Since you ain't allowed to take scalps anymore, this ain't so much fun."

He emptied Wilsey's pockets, and when he came to a letter, he picked it up and read the name, "Frank Sessions," aloud. He read the letter inside, taking a long time to do it.

Then for a time he sat staring at the letter, thinking.

He did not see Sessions move his chair away. He heard him clear his throat, and George said quickly, "Don't that beat hell? Wilsey Boone was Frank Sessions. I remember his description come through back when I was working with Preston four months ago."

He gave Sessions plenty of time and then looked up at him. "He's wanted for an old murder, this Sessions was," George went on, and he studied Sessions thoughtfully.

Sessions said nothing, his eyes less hard, more curious.

George said, "The way I remember it, it was a killing in one of them Arizona feuds when Sessions was a lad of sixteen."

"That's a long time to remember a killing," Sessions said quietly. "Seems people ought to forget sometime."

"Uh-huh. Seems like one of the other outfits come into a little sudden money and got a bench warrant out for all the Sessions. They tell me warrants can be bought in some places in Arizona if a man puts up a little bounty money to boot."

Sessions said nothing. George took the letter and laid it on the bar and looked down at Wilsey. "Well," he said gravely, looking at Sessions. "You killed Sessions. You feel like taking reward money? There's two thousand, if I remember right. And you're the one that brought him down."

"Give it away," Frank Sessions said in a level voice.

WHEN Drury and Boone lay side by side on the floor, George locked the door and blew the light and the two of them went into the lobby of the hotel.

Kate sat quite still, watching them, when George said, "If you'll come back with me, Miss Kate, I'll give you some help."

They left Frank there. He stood in the middle of the lobby, bewildered. That letter—it had been in his warbag. And it was found on Boone who probably stole it. And this marshal believed it—or did he? Frank Sessions could not decide.

"I've got to get out of here," Frank thought. He went upstairs. When he came down with his canteen and warbag, George and Kate were waiting for him.

"I'll walk down to McGrew's with you both," she said.

The town was really deserted now—not a horse at the long hitchrack, the only light in town at McGrew's shack, behind the stable. McGrew was gone, the stable deserted.

When they got to the corral behind it, there was one horse standing by the down poles which the other horses had been stampeded through. It was Frank's horse.

George looked at it and said, "Did you ever hear that a U. S. Deputy Marshal can commandeer a mount as well as help?"

Frank stirred a little and looked down at Kate, who was watching him. "I hadn't," he said.

"Sure." George said softly. "I'm a coward. I've got to take your horse." He looked at Kate and said, "If I wasn't such a coward, I'd stay here and see you through this, Miss Kate. If they come back, there'll be trouble you know."

"There's nothing left. It's all over," Kate said.

George saddled up and then shoved some bills into Frank's hand and mounted. "I've got to run before they stop to figure out just how big that bluff was."

"Goodbye," Kate said. "You know I can't thank you."

George reached in his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. "I almost forgot to give you that," he said to Kate.

He shook her hand, and then shook Frank's.

"You know," he said quietly, "if a man ever tried it, he'd find this was pretty good range." He wheeled his horse and rode off west, soon losing himself in the shadows of the stockpens.

They watched him go, and then Kate took the paper he had left her and ripped it in half and dropped it and started to go.

"Wait," Frank said. He knelt and

picked up the paper and unfolded it and pieced it together in the dim light of the lantern which hung in the archway. It was the page of hotel register containing his name. Below it was scrawled, "Don't burn your bridge before you cross it."

Frank looked up. "He knew. I was wondering."

"Yes," Kate said. "He knew. He knew a great many things."

"But why?" Frank asked softly. "Why did he do it?"

Kate smiled faintly. "I know what he said to me."

"What?"

"He said, 'You kick a man around long enough and he's going to get tough. He's tough enough right now.' "

Frank pondered this a moment, the paper still in his hand. Then he looked down at it again and read, " 'Don't burn your bridge before you cross it.' What does that mean?"

Kate looked at him a long moment, her face serene, calm. "You don't know?"

"No."

"My stepfather, Drury Warms, owned this town—all of it. He owned a ranch too. They're mine now. Frank Sessions is dead, buried, acknowledged so by the testimony of a Deputy United States Marshal." She paused, "Don't you see, Frank? This is the one place you can live, where your past is buried and no one will be curious?" When he said nothing, she went on, "He seemed to know about you. He told me that you were foreman on a New Mexico spread for seven years until you got word of this warrant. It's unfair. He knew it. So do I. So do you. He was trying to make it square."

"But the bridge. What did he mean?" Frank asked quietly.

"This is your bridge—this, here. Cross it to safety. Burn it, go away, and—and you'll get tough, Frank. Don't you see?"

"I see," Frank said softly. He fell in beside her as they started up the deserted street. Presently, he felt her hand through his arm, and the tightness that had gathered in him seemed to dissolve.

"Do you want the job—as my foreman?"

Frank put a very large hand on her small one and said quietly:

"I'm plumb out of matches, Kate. I couldn't burn anything—not a bridge, anyway."

Kingdom Come

By MARTIN McCALL

DOMINICK VANE, a young lawyer, and his bride were looking in a shop window on New York's Fifth Avenue. A car-full of mobsters swept into the curb and their machine gun, felling an enemy, also killed Vane's wife. Vane, raging with grief and hate, joined the Department of Justice forces, pledging his life, his every waking moment, to an inexorable persecution of all criminals.

As a G-man Vane was a sensational success. Single-handed he had accounted for the three Scorci brothers—notorious murderers—and when Corcoran, head of the department, summoned him to his office, Vane was, on the basis of proved ability, the best agent of the federal service.

Corcoran tells Vane that Ted Drewes, a brother agent, was found by a Jersey State Trooper lying in a ditch near Marshfield. Drewes' features had all been burned off and before he could speak, he died. A few days earlier, Corcoran tells Vane, Drewes, very excited, had phoned in and said that he was on the trail of something really big—a thing that would split the country wide open. That was the last Corcoran heard of him. Hardwick, the state trooper who found Drewes, followed Drewes' trail back into the marshes and pine forests. Hours later he staggered into the estate of young Philip Jaxon, nephew of one of the country's financial giants, H. R. Dawson. Hardwick had been horribly crushed internally and one of his hands was almost eaten away by acid. Concluding his account of what has happened, Corcoran sends Dominick Vane to Marshfield.

Hardwick, who has been taken to Dr. Taylor's private sanatarium in Marshfield, regains consciousness just after Vane arrives. "Men . . ." he whispers, ". . . hundreds of men . . . without faces . . . and a horrible white-haired monster . . ." Then he dies of his injuries, leaving Vane completely in the dark as to what has happened.

Who are the faceless men? Who is the white-haired monster?

Sheriff Waters, of Marshfield, drives Vane to the place where Drewes' faceless

This story began in last week's Argosy

body was found. It has rained and they can no longer find the trail Hardwick took. Sheriff Waters says that there is nothing back in the marshes and pine forests but squatters, poor, half-wild people who live a barbarous, isolated life only a few miles from the greatest center of population on earth. Vane then persuades the reluctant rural Sheriff to drive him to Jaxon's.

PHILIP JAXON and Angela Dawson, his cousin, can tell Vane nothing. He, too, mentions the isolated settlers of the pine forests, adding that they are albinos. Immediately Vane recalls Hardwick's dying words: "White-haired monster . . ." He determines to visit the people of the pine forest that evening. The sheriff demurs, saying he won't find out anything, but young Jaxon volunteers to show Vane the way. They start out, afoot.

After having penetrated some distance through the marshes and forest they become aware of an acrid tinge to the atmosphere. Choking and coughing they go on. A voice in the distance brings them up short. "Squads right . . . march!"

Vane and Jaxon look at one another. They go on. Vane finds pitted excavations in the ground and identifies them as shell craters; Then, topping a rise, they behold a company of men, men made grotesque and faceless by gas masks, drilling in the wilderness! Nearly overcome by the gas they turn and run. They fall into a pond. Then, fainting, they behold a white-haired monster on the farther bank. He is pointing a fire-extinguisher at them. Jaxon, recognizing him as one of the albino settlers he knows, calls out to him. But the monstrosity starts to pump the acid into Jaxon's face.

VANE wakes up the next morning in Jaxon's house. As he and Jaxon are discussing the meaning of what they have seen, H. R. Dawson comes in with his "associate", an evil, shady-looking, sloppy man whom Dawson introduces as Moxelli. Dawson expresses what really seems to be more than an avuncular concern for Jaxon's safety. He seems to know, too, all that happened the night before. Jaxon's girl knew what happened to him and Vane, but Jaxon swore her to secrecy and he doesn't think she would tell his uncle.

That night Vane and a force of federal agents, heavily armed and wearing gas masks, make another trip into the pines and marshes. Dead animals strew their path. All is silent. And when they get to the village of the albino settlers they find all the inhabitants dead—gassed. No clue to the marching men remains.

Next day Jaxon is visited by a real estate agent, Seaver, who says he has a client who wants to rent his estate—at any price. The man is so insistent, and finally threatening, that Jaxon kicks him out. And that night the unknown—unanalyzable—gas visits Jaxon. His horses and his stable boy are dead when he and Vane, summoned by the groom, run out. On the stable wall there is a note: "Jaxon! Get out unless you want some of this."

CHAPTER VI

INFORMER

MR. SAMUEL SEAVER slept. It was seven o'clock in the morning and since Mr. Seaver had only turned in about two hours before that and since he had been quite drunk when he turned in, he slept very hard. It was a barren little room on the top floor of a brownstone house in the West Forties that he occupied, furnished only with a bed, a table, and a couple of chairs. Cigarette stubs littered the table and the uncarpeted floor. Mr. Seaver's rather fancy Broadway clothes were strewn unceremoniously about. Mr. Seaver slept so soundly that he did not hear the sharp knock at his door. But he was rudely and startlingly awakened when the door was suddenly burst open by a man's stout shoulder. Mr. Seaver sat up in bed and saw that he had three visitors.

"Say, what the hell . . ." said Mr. Seaver, angrily And then he saw the haggard face of Philip Jaxon, and some of his assurance left him. Nor did Mr. Seaver like the way one of the

other men quietly closed the door and leaned against it. Nor did he like the cold, hard glitter in the eyes of the third man who came slowly over toward the bed.

"So these are the real-estate offices of Samuel Seaver," said Dominick Vane grimly.

"You got me wrong," said Seaver. "This isn't my office."

"Ah, so you *have* an office?" Vane's voice was dangerously soft.

Seaver squirmed a little. "Well, you see, as a matter of fact I'm sort of a contact man. Sort of a promotion man. Get it?"

"No," said Dominick Vane.

"Well, I don't work from an office. I just go around meeting them and—"

"Who was the client you told Mr. Jaxon wanted to rent his house?" Vane cut in.

Seaver squirmed some more. "I'm not at liberty to say. You know how that is, don't you? I simply—"

Dominick Vane's right hand shot out, caught Seaver by the back of the neck and wrenched him out of the bed into the middle of the floor, shivering. "There's been murder done in the last twenty-four hours, Seaver," he said harshly. "Mass murder of the most horrible sort. You know about it. Start talking quickly if you ever want to walk out of this room whole."

Roy Morse, the other federal agent, had come over from the door. Seaver, quaking with fear, found himself surrounded by three men who looked grim as death.

"You can't do this to me," he whined. "I got rights. I'm a citizen. I'll have the law on you."

Morse hit him squarely in the middle of the mouth and he fell, blubbering to his knees. Vane yanked him up to his feet again.

"I'm giving you a chance, Seaver," said Vane steadily. "Who were you representing when you called at Marshfield today? What do you know about the foul business that happened out there tonight? What do you know about those men who have been using the pine barrens out there as a drill ground . . . who wiped out a whole village last night with poison gas?"

"I tell you I don't know," said Seaver.

Morse hit him again, a jolting blow on the point of the jaw that sent him smashing back against the iron frame of the bed. "Talk, sweetheart, and talk in a hurry," said Morse.

"Who sent you to Marshfield to see Philip Jaxon?" Vane demanded.

Seaver looked around him like a hunted animal, licking his bleeding lips. "You know what would happen to me if I did any talking," he said.

"So it wasn't a client?"

"Well, not exactly," said Seaver. "There's a fellow named Lefty Brace I've done some jobs for. He said *he* had a client, and would I go out to Marshfield and—"

"Never mind the hooey," said Morse grimly. "Who is Lefty Brace?"

"He's a fellow around town. A sort of a—"

MORSE grabbed Seaver's arm about the wrist and clamped it next to his body. He grabbed Seaver's little finger and bent it back sharply. "I'll break this and every other finger on both your hands if you don't start giving us the straight dope," he said.

"You can't do that," Seaver screamed. "Even if you're a cop you can't do that. I'll have you kicked off the force. I'll—"

"Brother, when we get through with you," said Morse, "if you haven't done

some mighty glib talking, we'll just put what's left of you in the waste basket. Now. Who is Lefty Brace? And if you don't come clean I'm through kidding!"

Seaver struggled for a moment to free himself from the painful grip in which Morse held him. Then he stopped, panting for breath, sweat running off his face. Obviously he was afraid to talk, but his fear of these three grim-faced men was greater.

"I'll tell you who Brace is," he said finally, "only let up on my finger." Morse relaxed his grip slightly. Seaver gulped in his breath. "He's one of the big shots in the Red Sleeves."

"The Red Sleeves?" Vane's voice was sharp. Those drilling men in the pine barrens had worn little scarlet bands on the arms of their gray shirts.

Words literally bubbled out of Seaver now that he had begun to talk. "Sure. You must of heard of the Red Sleeves! There's thousands of 'em all over the country . . . North, East, West and South. There's hundreds of training grounds like that one out in the barrens where they teach 'em military tactics, how to handle guns, and grenades, street fighting—the works. Lefty calls 'em 'murder farms.' They're gettin' ready for a big blow-off. It may come any day now, and when it does, it'll be too bad for the ones in power now."

"Revolution?" asked Dominick Vane.

"What else?" asked Seaver with a shrug.

"Who's back of it? Communists . . . Fascists . . .?"

"Search me," said Seaver. "I only know Lefty. But there's dough back of it. These guys have got the best in equipment and plenty of it. I don't know anything more than I'm tellin' you. I don't know anyone in it but Lefty. Maybe he ain't one of the big shots, but he's the only one I know."

"Where can we find Lefty Brace?"

"You wouldn't ask me to go that far!" Seaver cried. "These fellows won't stop at nothin'! They . . ."

"We know," said Dominick Vane grimly. "Where's Lefty Brace?"

"Come clean," said Morse, and increased the pressure of his grip on Seaver's finger.

Seaver began to cry. "This means the works for me," he said. "They'll get me. They'll . . ."

"They won't get you, my friend," said Vane coldly, "because you're going to be safely hidden away in jail."

"No place is going to be safe when the Red Sleeves get going," said Seaver desperately. "They've got men in the jails . . . men ready to let out the most desperate killers. They've got men in the banks, in the railroads, at the airports, on the ships. They've got men everywhere, I tell you. Even in the Army and Navy. In all the big plants and factories, in the radio stations. I tell you, mister, these guys mean business. And anyone who plays 'em dirt . . ."

"I'm asking you for the last time," said Dominick Vane quietly, "where's this Lefty Brace?"

Seaver sighed. It was like the deflation of a balloon. He seemed to shrivel and grow smaller. "Okay," he said, in an odd cracked voice. "Maybe it don't make so much difference. Maybe in a few days none of us won't be around anyhow. When they start dropping gas bombs on this man's town people are going to be dropping in the streets like flies. You'll find Lefty Brace in the Hotel Mordaunt and for your sake I hope he don't get wise you're coming. Because he'd shoot you as soon as eat his breakfast. There ain't any of the

Red Sleeves worrying very much about law and order right now. Because in a few days—"

"Get on some clothes," said Dominick Vane. "You're going with us."

FIVE minutes later this little group of four men emerged from the brownstone house. Seaver and Morse were walking first, arm in arm, as though they were pals. Dominick Vane walked behind, the gun in his coat pocket covering Seaver.

Even afterward Dominick Vane did not know what had warned him of danger. All he knew was that he looked suddenly up the street and saw a curtained touring car bearing down on them at a terrific rate of speed.

"Roy!" he shouted at Morse. "Duck for cover." At the same instant he turned and literally hurled Philip Jaxon into the alley between the house from which they had just emerged and the next. He came plunging after and both of them fell in a heap behind a couple of metal ash cans. At the same moment the staccato rattle of a machine gun split the morning air. Dominick Vane caught a glimpse of the car as he lay on his belly in the dirt. He saw the gun spouting flame . . . saw Roy Morse and the unfortunate Mr. Seaver riddled by its bullets. And he saw more than that. He saw the face of the machine-gunner. A fat face with flabby lips that were twisted into a cruel, one-sided smile.

"Moxelli!" Dominick Vane emptied his gun hopelessly after the flying car.

Then for a moment Dominick Vane leaned against the brick wall of the alley in which he and Philip had taken cover, fighting back the wave of nausea that swept over him. The sight of that curtained car—the rattle of the machine gun—brought rocketing back into his memory that terrible day five years before when he had held the dead body of the woman he loved in his arms.

It was Jaxon who brought him back to earth; Jaxon who asked in a shaken voice: "Dominick, are you all right? You're not hit?"

Vane's teeth clamped tightly together. "I'm all right," he said. "God help Morse and Seaver!"

People were running from everywhere now, including a couple of cops who came puffing up from Broadway to the spot where Morse and Seaver lay in a pool of crimson on the pavement. Dominick Vane went out of the alley, smoking gun still in his hands, and was almost shot for his pains by an overzealous officer who thought he was one of the participants in a pistol duel. Vane showed his credentials and explained briefly what had happened. The morgue wagon was sent for and before it arrived Vane took Philip by the arm and led him down the street. The young millionaire looked as though he were about to cave in. Sudden and violent death of this sort was a new experience to him.

"Did you notice," he whispered to Vane, "Morse's fingers . . . he was gripping Seaver's wrist so tightly, even in death, they had to pry them loose. Dominick, who are these murderers? Why . . . why this wholesale slaughter?"

Vane steered the young man into a restaurant. "A bottle of brandy and two glasses," he said to the wide eyed proprietor.

"I'm sorry, sir. Our bar isn't open till—"

"Open it!" rapped Vane, "and be quick about it!"

When Dominick Vane gave orders people obeyed them. The manager returned in a moment with a bottle of Courvoisier and two glasses. His hands

shook a little as he put them down on the table.

"Those other two . . ." he said hesitantly. "They're dead?"

"What do *you* think?" Vane said sharply.

The manager filled the two glasses with brandy and went away, leaving the bottle.

"I . . . I don't think I can take it, Dominick," said Philip.

"Drink it!" said Vane sharply. He tossed off his own and refilled the glass.

PHILIP, after a little shudder, drank and then permitted Vane to refill his glass. "You could drink a pint of this now and not feel it," said Vane. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply on it for a moment or two in silence. Then he turned to Philip and that diamond-hard light glittered in his cold blue eyes.

"Philip, did you see the murder car?" he asked.

"Just a glimpse," said Philip. "I . . . I was too busy taking cover behind those ash cans."

"I saw more than that," said Vane. "I got a good look at the machine-gunner." He blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "It was Moxelli!"

"What!" Philip was incredulous.

"No doubt whatever about it," said Dominick Vane.

"But . . ."

"Listen," said Vane grimly. "I don't know what it means any more than you do. Your uncle may know him in a quite innocent capacity. The fact remains that Moxelli himself is all tied up in this mess. He knew plenty when he visited us in Marshfield yesterday. More than that, Philip, do you realize that we must have been followed, else how would they have been ready for us when we came out of Seaver's? They guessed Seaver would talk and they wanted to do for us before we made a report on our conversation."

Philip tossed off his second brandy. "Then you think all that talk of Seaver's about revolution—about the Red Sleeves—was on the level? It sounded like a fairy story to me."

Dominick Vane's laugh was short and mirthless. "Was there anything unreal about those dead pineys, or the massacre in your stable, or that murder car? Would they go in for this wholesale killing unless there was something tremendous at stake?"

Philip's hand shook as he lifted the brandy glass to his lips. "You're right, of course," he said. "What—what happens now?"

"If Seaver was telling us the whole truth," said Dominick Vane, "we've got to work with lightning speed, Philip. If the Red Sleeves are as big and powerful an organization as he says it may already be too late. But do you remember one thing he said? That there was big money back of them. You don't have to be very bright to jump to a conclusion, Philip—a damned unpleasant conclusion for you. Moxelli is one of them, and Moxelli is your uncle's friend, and your uncle is lousy with money!"

"It doesn't seem credible," said Philip. "And yet . . ."

"I want you to go to your uncle at once," said Dominick Vane. "I want you to question him as adroitly and cleverly as you can. I want you to find out as much as possible without letting him know just how much *you* know. Are you game?"

"Of course. He won't talk if he *is* involved, though."

"But you'll be able to come to a pretty definite conclusion about him," Vane said.

"Right. And you?" Philip asked.

"I'm making a report to Washington at once," said Vane. Then his lips tightened. "Then I'm going on to the Hotel Mordaunt to see Mr. Lefty Brace."

"Alone?"

"Alone," said Dominick Vane. He looked searchingly at the younger man. "Philip, I think we're up to our ears in something big. We know how cheaply life is held in this game. If you want to get out of it now . . . get! Take the first boat for Europe and stay away until it's over. There's no reason why you—"

"Don't be silly," said Philip, smiling very faintly. "You know I have no intention of getting out."

"Yes, I guess I know it," said Dominick Vane softly. He lit a fresh cigarette. "Your uncle is at his town house?"

"As far as I know."

"Good. Go and see Dawson at once. I'll meet you at the University Club in exactly two hours."

"Right," said Philip, as Vane rose from the table. "See you later, and good hunting, Dominick!"

"Thanks," said Vane.

CHAPTER VII

AVUNCULAR PLAN

DOMINICK VANE flashed his credentials on the pasty-faced clerk who stood behind the desk at the Hotel Mordaunt.

"I'm looking for a man named Brace," he said shortly. "I want his room number."

If he was surprised, nothing in the clerk's face showed it. "Room 1511," he said laconically. "Shall I announce you?"

Vane's lips were tight set. "I suppose you will anyhow the minute I start for the elevator," he said. "You can tell Brace I'm on my way up." He turned and went to the elevator. Five minutes later he was knocking on the door of Room 1511. He waited, his right hand sunk in the pocket of his coat and closed over the butt of his gun. There was only a moment's delay before the door opened to reveal Lefty Brace.

Brace was short, stocky, red-haired, with the quick, shifting eyes of a fighter. Somehow Vane knew that in the first flash of their meeting Brace had made a quick and accurate estimate of his visitor.

"Hello, copper," he said in a husky voice.

"Mind if I come in?" Vane asked dryly. He was already across the threshold of the room. He saw that Brace, too, was prepared. He was wearing a long, silk dressing-gown and his hands were sunk in the pockets. The right one bulged suspiciously.

"Why not?" said Brace, and closed the door. He moved quickly, alertly, managing always to keep Vane in front of him. "To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit, as they say in the movies?"

"Know a man named Samuel Seaver?" Vane asked abruptly.

"No," said Brace, promptly. He took a cigarette from the left pocket of his dressing gown, put it between his lips, and then struck a match with his thumb nail. "Should I know Mr. Samuel Seaver, copper?" Lefty Brace's eyes never left Vane's face for an instant.

"It wouldn't be a valuable friendship now," said Vane. "Seaver is dead. Shot to death in front of his house about an hour ago."

"Maybe you want me to bust out cry-

ing," said Brace. "But since I didn't know the man—"

"He was on his way to bring me here to see you, Brace. He seemed to know you all right."

Brace shrugged. "A lot of people know me," he said. "Up and down Broadway and at the race tracks. I'm what the columnists call a character, copper. What was this Seaver, a tout? Give you a bum steer?"

"I don't think so," said Dominick Vane. "Did you read the papers this morning about the massacre of a village of pineys out in Marshfield, New Jersey?"

"Yeah. Damn funny business," said Brace. The cigarette bobbed up and down between his lips as he talked.

"Seaver seemed to think you might know all about it," said Vane coolly. "He seemed to think you might know who murdered Philip Jaxon's stable boy last night and killed about a dozen valuable animals."

"This Seaver was screwy," said Brace.

"By the way, where were you last night from, say, ten until five-thirty this morning?"

Brace laughed. "Think I was out in Marshfield bumping off horses?"

Vane's cold eyes had a dangerous glitter in them. "Who said anything about horses, Lefty?"

Brace didn't bat an eye, but Vane saw the hand in the dressing-gown pocket contract dangerously. "Why, you did, copper."

"I said animals. I didn't say horses."

Brace smiled a tight-lipped smile. "Funny. I could have sworn you said horses. And anyhow, I couldn't have been in Marshfield, because I was down in Greenwich Village killing another guy." He laughed. "An old cobbler who forgot to put rubber heels on a pair of shoes I took in to have repaired. I'm very particular about heels."

Vane was silent for a moment. Finally he asked, in a casual tone. "Ever hear of the Red Sleeves, Brace?"

"Let's see," said Brace, adopting an elaborate air of thoughtfulness. "I got it! They sell Christmas seals!"

"Wrong," said Vane grimly.

"Funny. I was sure they sold Christmas seals. Red Sleeves! Of course I know the Red *Sox;* they're a Boston baseball club. Then there are the Redmen; that's a slang phrase for the American Indian. But Red Sleeves! I guess you got me there, copper. I give up. Who *are* the Red Sleeves?"

"They're a revolutionary organization that goes in for murder in a big way," said Dominick Vane, slowly. "I understand you're one of the big shots in the organization."

"If I am they must have made me an honorary colonel without my knowing it," said Brace. "They did that to me down in Kentucky once. Derby Week, you know. But then I never cared much for honor and glory—if you see what I mean."

Dominick Vane looked at Brace steadily for a moment. "Brace," he said quietly. "I understand the lid is coming off any day now. When and if it does, you're one guy we'll come straight after. You might save yourself a lot of grief by spilling the beans now. We won't handle you with kid gloves if you haven't helped us."

Brace's eyes glinted dangerously. "It's been fun knowing you, copper," he said dryly, "but I suddenly find myself fed up with you and your line. Suppose we cut this short—unless of course you have some evidence against me that would justify your making an arrest."

Dominick Vane sighed. "I haven't

any evidence against you, Brace. Only the testimony of a man who, very conveniently for you, is dead. I had hoped you might do a little talking, but since you won't you're just making it harder for yourself and for us. We'll get evidence against you, Brace, because you're in this up to your ears. And when we do we may not bother to make an arrest."

"Killed while resisting arrest, eh?"

"Something like that," said Dominick Vane. "And I hope I'm the one you resist, Lefty. You see, I'm very particular about heels myself!"

Color flared up into Brace's cheeks. "Get out!" he snapped.

"Be seeing you," said Dominick Vane softly.

THE butler at the town house of H. R. Dawson permitted himself a smile as he opened the door for Philip Jaxon.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Philip."

"Thanks, Remsen. Is my uncle here, or has he gone to the office?"

"He's in his study, sir. I'll tell him you're here."

"Never mind, Remsen, I'll announce myself," said Philip. He caught a glimpse of himself in the hall mirror as he turned toward the study door and was shocked at his appearance. He was very pale and there were deep hollows under his eyes. He paused for a second outside the study, and then, without knocking, let himself in.

H. R. Dawson sat at a big flat-topped desk in the center of the room. He was immaculate as usual in a gray worsted suit, wing collar, and a polka-dot bow tie. He was looking at some papers and a pair of pince nez, attached to a black cord he wore around his neck, were perched on the end of his nose. As Philip entered he looked up.

If there had been any doubts in Philip's mind as to the possibility of Vane's suggestion that Dawson had some hand in this whole terrible affair they were dispelled at that moment. The glasses dropped from Dawson's nose and his lips parted. Slowly every vestige of color drained from his face, leaving it the color and texture of old parchment.

"Philip!" It was an almost inaudible whisper.

"Yes, I am here, uncle," said Philip grimly. His hands were clenched very tightly at his sides. "No thanks to you, however."

"Why—why what do you mean, Philip?"

"You didn't expect to see me, did you, uncle?" Philip asked bitterly. "You didn't ever expect to see me again, did you?" Suddenly Dominick Vane's warning against showing his hand too openly disappeared into thin air as the tension of the last twenty-four hours suddenly smashed his control of himself. "You damned slimy murderer!"

"Philip!"

Philip laughed, a little wildly. "Worried about me, were you? Rushed out to Marshfield because Angela told you what had happened! You and your murdering side-kick Moxelli knew what had happened all right—but you didn't know it from Angela! You knew it from your hoodlums and killers! You turned them loose in my stable because you wanted me to get away from Marshfield—thought I might find out too much! Then you turned them loose on me and on Vane with a machine gun—tried to mow us down in the streets like rats!"

"Wait, Philip . . . *listen!*" Dawson interrupted sharply. "I wanted to get you away from there to save you. I—"

"Then you don't deny it!"

Very slowly Dawson raised a hand to his carefully waxed mustache. "No, I don't deny it, Philip."

"What the hell are you trying to do?" Philip stormed. "Who are these murdering Red Sleeves you're financing? Revolutionists, Seaver said. What have you to do with revolutions? What have you to do with this wholesale killing? Have you lost your mind?"

"Listen, Philip . . . You've got to *listen!*" Dawson said. His voice was suddenly hard, his gray eyes impelling. "I would have told you all this sooner or later, but up to now I haven't been at liberty to do so. This unfortunate affair in Marshfield has forced everything into the open much sooner than I expected. I don't deny my association with the Red Sleeves. They're powerful, Philip. More powerful than you dream. Hundreds of thousands of them all over the country, thoroughly equipped and prepared, ready and waiting for the signal."

"Signal for what?" demanded Philip.

"Revolution," said Dawson softly. "The time has come, Philip, to cast off the yoke of a corrupt political machine, to crush out a tyranny of petty politicians, to give America back to the Americans!"

"Bunk! Soap-box oratory! What are you driving at?"

"Philip—have you been so absorbed with your horses and your social life that you have failed to see this country careening toward chaos? We used to call it 'Depression' a few years ago. And we are supposed to have come out of it now—but we've not, Philip. Thousands are still starving, millions are existing only by government subsidy. No man knows what lies ahead. Philip, the mass mind is no longer competent to rule America; our bulky, awkward party system is tottering. Strikes—long bloody industrial sieges—are tearing great holes in our industry. The mass mind will not stop them; we have waited too long for people to act at the polls. To save America from sliding into chaos and anarchy with the rest of the world, we must act now—and by force!"

PHILIP stared at his uncle. "And where does H. R. Dawson fit into this picture?"

Dawson tugged at his mustache. "I have made my money out of America, my boy," he said. "I'm prepared to spend that money to help America back on its feet."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Philip softly. "Do you think for one minute I'll swallow that line, uncle? Who writes your speeches for you? Moxelli, your fat-faced killer? Or was it the oily Mr. Seaver—who got himself shot? Or Lefty Brace? Uncle, you have made your fortune by crushing the weak, by stepping on the neck of everybody who got in your way. You have gypped the government on oil leases, you have dealt out more economic misery in your day than any other man in the country. What *is* all this patriotic hooey from you? I know damned well that if you are backing this revolutionary movement it is because there is some gain in it for you. What do you get out of it, uncle? Are you going to be the American Hitler? Are you going to be king?"

"Philip, you're unstrung," said Dawson quietly. "You've been through a terrible experience in the last few hours. I would have saved you from it if I could. But when you understand what's behind this you'll find yourself fighting shoulder to shoulder with us. You doubt my motives in this, but in a few days the whole country will know my motives and applaud them."

"You're darn right they'll know them," Philip cried. "They'll know them before a few days. I'm going to shout them from the house-tops! The leopard can't change his spots, and a Dawson never does anything that isn't strictly for personal gain. The public is going to know that these fine-sounding speeches of yours are boloney! They're going to know it from *me,* uncle! I don't know what these murdering Red Sleeves are going to get you, but I'm going to knock some spokes out of your wheel now!"

Dawson heaved a long sigh and sank back into his chair. There were hard lines at the corners of his mouth. "I'm afraid you're not going to do any of those things, Philip. You and your interfering government man have caused us enough trouble already. If you were anything but my own flesh and blood—"

"Family ties were not weighing heavily on your mind when you turned Moxelli loose on me this morning," said Philip.

"We had to get Seaver," said Dawson coldly. "He would have done too much talking."

"I'm going to do the talking now," said Philip grimly. He turned to go, and stopped abruptly. Standing in the doorway were two men—two very hard-looking men. One of them held an automatic.

"You see, Philip," said Dawson, "we can't let you go anywhere."

Philip Jaxon had never been one to hesitate in a tight spot. Dawson had scarcely stopped speaking when Philip swarmed on the man with the gun. A vicious kick knocked the gun ceilingward. A savage right uppercut sent the man's head smashing back against the door. And then it was all over. The second man brought a blackjack down on Philip's skull.

H. R. Dawson looked at the prone figure of his nephew. He smiled very faintly. "Too bad," he said. "We could use some of that fervor in our cause."

CHAPTER VIII

"SCRAM"

REMSEN looked at the man with the cold blue eyes who stood on the doorstep of the Dawson home. The butler's face did not alter a shade in expression as he said:

"Mr. Philip Jaxon has not been here today at all, sir."

Dominick Vane's eyes seemed to bore into the man in a long, searching look. "That's very strange," he said. "I had an appointment with him here this morning." He hesitated a moment. "I wonder if I might speak to Miss Angela Dawson?"

"Who shall I say is calling, sir?"

"Simply say it's a friend of Mr. Jaxon's and that I have an important message for her."

"Very good, sir."

Dominick Vane waited in the little reception hall. Presently Angela Dawson came down the stairs. As she saw Vane her face brightened. "This *is* a surprise," she said. "Why didn't you send up your name?"

"I didn't think you'd remember," said Dominick Vane.

"I'm glad you are all right after your terrible experience in Marshfield. And the dreadful story in the paper this morning about the pineys! You're going to tell me what it all means?"

Vane looked meaningly at Remsen who stood respectfully by. "I'm very anxious to talk to you alone," he said.

"But of course. We'll go into the library. Can I have Remsen bring you something? Or do you drink highballs

in the morning? I'm a little vague about what you do to entertain gentlemen visitors at this hour of the day."

"You just talk to them," said Dominick Vane.

Angela led the way to the library, a cool, high-ceilinged room, and made a place for Vane beside her on an upholstered lounge. "I've really been terribly anxious about you and Philip," she said.

"It's about Philip I've come," said Dominick Vane grimly. "But first I want to ask you a few questions if I may. Miss Dawson, you are H. R. Dawson's ward, not his daughter—isn't that so?"

She nodded. "My father and mother were friends of Mr. Dawson's. They died when I was a baby and Mr. Dawson adopted me. He's not really my father. But he has been pretty swell to me, Mr. Vane. Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm going to say things to you that you won't believe," Vane said, "and I wanted to know exactly where I stood. But first more questions. How long has Remsen been with you?"

"Almost since I can remember," said Angela. "Twenty years or more."

"He'd carry out orders unquestioningly?"

"Of course."

Dominick Vane's lips tightened perceptibly. "And now for one last question. Have you seen Philip here this morning?"

Angela's eyes widened. "No. And I would have had he been here, Mr. Vane."

Dominick Vane lit a cigarette and dragged hungrily on it for a moment, his eyes averted from the girl's lovely face.

"I warned you I was going to tell you things you wouldn't believe," he said, "so here goes."

VANE told her about the visit of Dawson and Moxelli to Marshfield. He told her about the murder of the stable boy and the animals. He told her about the machine-gunner in the death car who had mowed down Morse and Seaver.

"But, Mr. Vane, this is all too incredible!" Angela broke in.

"I'm going to tell you more incredible things than that," he said harshly. "Things that will hurt. Can you take it, Angela Dawson?" He met her eyes steadily.

"I can take it," she said quietly. "Something has happened to Philip."

Dominick wondered why he felt a sudden sharp spasm of jealousy at her obvious alarm. Angela Dawson meant nothing to him.

"I don't know if something has happened to Philip. That's why I'm here," he said. "And here's the part that's going to hurt. I'm firmly convinced that your guardian is the financial power behind these Red Sleeves who, if Seaver's story is correct, mean to throw this country into a reign of bloody terror within a very few days. His connection with Moxelli is too much of a coincidence to overlook. Philip came here this morning to try and find out the truth. I was to meet him later at the University Club to hear the results. He didn't show up, so I came here after him. Remsen told me he had never been here."

Angela Dawson's hand closed tightly over Vane's wrist. "Something must have happened to him on the way! Oh, Mr. Vane, I simply can't believe this about Mr. Dawson. You're wrong there. But these people—these other people—must have done something to Philip before he could get here."

Dominick Vane shook his head grimly. "He got here all right, Miss Daw-

son. I had him followed! My man saw Remsen let him into the house. He hasn't come out."

Angela Dawson stared at him with horror-struck eyes. "Then—then—"

"I wonder if you'd have Remsen in here for a minute. You ask him if Philip has been here."

"Of course." Vane watched her as she rose to ring the bell. Plenty of nerve there, he thought. A swell girl!

A moment later Remsen came into the room. "Yes, Miss Angela?"

"Remsen, has Mr. Philip been here this morning?"

There was the barest hesitation. Then Remsen said, "No, Miss Angela."

Angela Dawson's voice hardened. "Remsen, Mr. Vane *knows* that Mr. Philip came here this morning. He was followed. The man who followed him saw you let him in."

Remsen looked down at the polished toes of his shoes. "The man was mistaken, Miss Angela."

Dominick Vane had been standing slightly behind the butler as Angela questioned him. Now his hand shot out, clapped the butler on the shoulder, and spun him around. "Remsen," he said grimly, "if you're in this mess yourself I know you won't talk. But if you're not—if you're just following orders you don't understand—I want to tell you that Mr. Jaxon's life is in immediate danger."

Remsen's lips quivered. "I—I—"

"You've got to tell me what you know, man," said Dominick Vane. "Do you want to be responsible for Philip Jaxon's death?"

"But—I—I—"

"Remsen, you must tell us!" said Angela tensely.

Remsen's voice shook. "This may mean my position, Miss Angela. But if what you say is true . . ."

"It *is* true," said Vane sharply.

"Mr. Philip did come here this morning," said Remsen resignedly. "He went directly to Mr. Dawson's study. I didn't see him leave, but a little later Mr. Dawson came to me and gave me orders to tell anyone who might inquire that Mr. Philip hadn't been here. He said it was of the utmost importance. I hate to think what he'll say when he knows I've told you."

"Where is Mr. Dawson now?" Vane asked.

"He's still in the study, sir. He's in some kind of a business conference with Mr. Corbett and Mr. Frampton."

Corbett and Frampton! Two famous Wall Street names! Dominick Vane's lips were tightly set. "I must see him at once," he said.

"Oh, but you can't interrupt him now, sir. He—"

"Where is the study?"

"I'll show you," said Angela Dawson decidedly.

SHE led the way across the hall, Remsen hovering in the background literally wringing his hands. Without bothering to knock, Vane wrenched open the door and stepped across the threshold.

H. R. Dawson looked up, an angry glitter in his gray eyes. John Corbett, dapper, dark steel-operator, and Paul Frampton, tall, rangy, leather-faced oilman, were seated on either side of the desk. At the sight of Angela directly behind Vane, Dawson checked what had started to be an angry exclamation. There was still an edge to his voice despite his politeness.

"Angela, dear, you know that when I'm in conference I—"

Dominick Vane cut in harshly: "Dawson, what have you done to Philip Jaxon?"

Very slowly Dawson shifted his gaze from Angela to the federal man, and there was a cold, suppressed fury in them. "I don't think I understand," he said.

"What have you done to Jaxon?" Vane repeated, enunciating very slowly and clearly.

"My dear fellow," Dawson drawled, "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about. Philip hasn't been here today."

"Oh, uncle," Angela cried, in a strangled voice, "what have you done? Remsen has already told us that Philip came here and saw you. Is it possible that what Mr. Vane has been telling me is true?"

"So Mr. Vane has been telling you things, eh?" Dawson said very quietly. He reached quickly across the desk and picked up the telephone. "I want the long distance operator for Washington, D. C.," he said. His eyes were fixed on Vane as he spoke. "I want to speak personally in Washington with Mr. Corcoran, Chief of the Division of Investigation of the Department of Justice. Corcoran . . . that's right. Yes, I'll hold the wire." He covered the mouthpiece with his hand. "I've had just about enough of your nonsense, Vane," he said grimly

He turned back to the phone and a moment later the call was connected. "Corcoran? This is H. R. Dawson. That's right. Oh, I'm fine, but I'm very annoyed with one of your men. Chap named Vane. Yes. I told you only yesterday of his unwarranted inclusion of my nephew in a dangerous business out in Jersey. Well, he's gone that one better. He's standing here now accusing me of having *done* something to my nephew. Do you have many lunatics in your division? Eh? Now get this, Corcoran. Call off your dog! And get this too. Unless that fellow is dismissed from the service immediately I'll turn your department upside down . . . I see . . Very good I'd be glad if you'd relay those orders to him now . . . over this phone." Dawson calmly handed the instrument across the desk to Vane, whose jaw muscles rippled under the tan of his cheeks Dawson was smiling—a triumphant smile.

"Hello, Corky?" Dominick Vane's voice was hard.

Corcoran's reply was one sharp word: "Scram!" he said.

"But, Corky, listen. I—"

"Get out of that house just as fast as you can leg it," said Corcoran, "and take the first plane you can get back to Washington." The receiver clicked at the other end.

Vane put down the telephone. He was angry, bitterly disappointed, and alarmed at the danger Philip was in. But orders were orders.

"Have you anything more to say, Mr. Vane?" Dawson drawled.

"Nothing," said Vane, between his teeth. He turned away. "Goodbye, Miss Dawson," he said to Angela.

"I'll see you to the door," said the girl.

"Angela!" Dawson's voice cracked sharply. "I want you to wait here!"

Without giving him a look the girl went out into the hall with Vane, shutting the study door a little more firmly than was necessary. Her hand slipped quickly into Vane's and she looked up at him with frightened eyes.

"You were right!" she whispered. "He's in it!"

"Up to his neck!" Vane said shortly. He felt his heart beating a little unsteadily as he looked down into the lovely upturned face of the girl. "I wish you were out of this house—away from him," he said with sudden passion.

"I've got to go back to Washington. Orders. Apparently Dawson has all kinds of pull. I may sound mad to you . . . but if you'd come with me . . ."

"Philip's here somewhere," she said. "Somebody's got to do something for him. If you can't, I must."

He looked at her wonderingly. "Aren't you frightened?"

"To death," she said, with a tremulous little smile.

From his pocket Vane took a pencil and a torn scrap of paper from an envelope. He scribbled something on it. "If you need me," he said, "call this number in Washington, and I'll come to you. It looks as if I were going to get the sack anyhow. If I do I'm coming back for Philip on my own. Let me know what happens here."

Her hand tightened around his fingers for a moment. "I will, Dominick," she said.

Then Vane did something that he tried for the next three hours to explain to himself. He bent down and kissed her.

"Goodbye, Angela," he said.

CHAPTER IX

MOBILIZATION

IN the private study of the President of the United States at the White House in Washington a conference was in session. In addition to the Chief Executive himself were the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, General Barrett, Chief of the Military Intelligence, Admiral Hewitt, Chief of the Naval Intelligence, and Michael Corcoran, Chief of the Investigation Division of the Department of Justice.

Corcoran, his stiff leg stuck out in front of him, had been holding the floor, his fingers caressing the game leg as he talked. "Those are the facts as I know them," he said in conclusion. "Some of them may sound fantastic to you, gentlemen, but they are the report of a man who has been one of the best operatives in the department. And you cannot get behind the known parts of the story—the wholesale slaughter of these pineys; the shell holes in the middle of the barrens."

The President was tapping a pencil nervously on the blotter in front of him. "What I cannot understand, Mr. Corcoran," he said, "is how an organization as large as you claim for the Red Sleeves could exist without some word of it having reached us before this Marshfield business. You may recall that last February the House appointed a Committe to investigate anti-American activities in the country—the McCormack Committee. They reported on many things. They even mentioned a militant group who called themselves the Silver Shirts. But there was no mention of the Red Sleeves, who must have been in existence if they are as powerful as you suggest."

Corcoran shifted restlessly in his chair. "Mr. President, with unlimited wealth and influence behind them they could have kept things secret. General Barrett and Admiral Hewitt will back me up in one respect, I think. We know for certain that this group of Red Sleeves in Marshfield had rifles, artillery, poison gas, gas masks, and other equipment. The whole facilities of the Military and Naval Intelligence have been trying to discover the source of this equipment without any success whatever. Am I right?"

General Barrett nodded. "Complete blank up to now, sir," he told the President. "But we have unearthed hints and a few clues here and there that led us to think there have been other drill

grounds for these men. In the hills back of San Diego our men report finding shell holes in the ground and many dead animals in the woods. Similar reports have come from Wisconsin in the North, Louisiana and Texas in the South, and from Vermont in New England. We cannot say whether these are the only centers of activity or whether there are hundreds more that we know nothing about."

"But where does the money come from?" the President asked. "They cannot have raised funds publicly."

Corcoran's lips tightened. "This agent of mine, Dominick Vane, has hit on one source, he believes, with absolute certainty. He tells me that H. R. Dawson is behind this thing."

The President threw back his head and laughed. "Dawson! . . . My dear Corcoran, I'm inclined to think this agent of yours is a trifle unbalanced. Dawson! . . . Good Lord, man, don't you know that revolution would strike first at capitalists of Dawson's stature?"

"Some kinds of revolution might, sir," said Corcoran earnestly. "But if Vane is right this business is directed at you and your government, Mr. President. It is not a communistic effort, sir. It is an organized attempt to turn over the reins of power to another group—a group of dictators."

"Is there any basis of fact in your agent's suspicion?" the President asked.

"A man named Moxelli visited Marshfield with Dawson," said Corcoran. "This morning that same Moxelli was recognized as the machine-gunner in a murder car who shot down and killed one of my agents and a man named Seaver who gave us our first clue to the Red Sleeves. Vane and Philip Jaxon, Dawson's nephew, who has been working with Vane, escaped." Corcoran paused. "We have records on this man Moxelli. He was suspected of being connected with a huge drug ring at one time. He is known to be a drug addict himself. He has been close to half-a-dozen brutal crimes, though he's never been proven guilty. There could be no possible business connection between him and Dawson that was on the up-and-up. Yet Dawson claimed him as a business associate."

"There is probably some simple explanation of all this," said the President. "I simply cannot believe that a man of Dawson's standing could be involved."

"Is there any significance, sir," Corcoran said, "to the fact that Dawson telephoned me about two hours ago demanding that Vane be dismissed from the service?"

The President looked gravely at Corcoran. "Where is this man Vane?"

"I recalled him, sir. He should have arrived in Washington by now. I left word at my office for him to come here at once to make his report to you in person."

General Barrett leaned forward earnestly. "I do not believe, Mr. President, that this matter can be considered lightly. I am convinced with Corcoran that there is a dangerous storm brewing and that even now we may have learned of it too late to prevent its breaking."

"I concur in that belief," said Admiral Hewitt gravely.

At that moment one of the President's secretaries came into the room. "Mr. Dominick Vane, sir."

"Show him in at once," said the Chief Executive.

DOMINICK VANE came into the study. His cold blue eyes swept the faces of the men assembled. He knew them all by sight and Barrett and Hewitt personally. Vane's face was

very pale and his left arm hung limply at his side. At sight of him Corcoran sprang up out of his chair.

"Nick, you're hurt!" he said.

"Nothing much," said Dominick Vane. "Someone took a pot shot at me as I left the Department of Justice building to come here. Winged me in the left arm."

There was dead silence in the room for a moment. Then the President said very quietly. "I should like to hear your story in detail, Mr. Vane."

Dominick Vane began to talk in short, clipped sentences. He told them everything he knew, everything he suspected, everything he feared. "And at this time," he concluded bitterly, "Dawson still has enough influence with the Department to have me withdrawn from the case, with Jaxon's life in danger—without a chance to explain my suspicions."

"At this moment, Nick," said Corcoran softly, "your life is much more valuable to us than Philip Jaxon's. It was vital that you should come here in person to present your facts to the President."

"Then I'm not fired?" asked Dominick Vane eagerly. "I can go back after Philip?"

"Oh, you're fired all right, Mr. Vane," said the President of the United States. So stunned was Vane by this announcement that he failed to notice the twinkle in the Chief Executive's eyes. He listened dully as the President dictated a press statement to his secretary to the effect that Dominick Vane had been dropped from the Government Service for official reasons.

"I guess," said Vane grimly, "that I won't be needed here any longer." He turned to go.

"Just a moment, Mr. Vane," said the President. He was smiling now, openly. "No man can hold two jobs, my friend, and do justice to them. That is why you have been dropped from the Department. I have a new commission for you.

"A new commission," said the President. "From now on, Mr. Vane, you will be in charge of a special division—a sort of flying squad of picked men—with special instructions to deal with this Red Sleeve menace. You will pick your own men—any number you wish from any branches of the service that you choose. You will act in any way you see fit, with full authority from me to follow whatever course of action seems best to you. You will be one of a committee of five, including myself, General Barrett, Admiral Hewitt, and Corcoran, empowered to deal with this business. You will make your reports to Corcoran or to me, as you think best or as is most convenient."

There was a glitter of excitement in Dominick's eyes. "Thank God, Mr. President, you recognize the danger with which we are confronted," he said fervently. "When does this commission take effect?"

"At once. You will consult with Barrett, Hewitt and Corcoran about the men you want under your immediate command. We count on you to crush this thing in the bud."

"I only hope we are not too late, sir!" Vane said.

* * *

ON upper Fifth Avenue in New York stood a great, square, stone house. It appeared innocent enough, this house. Riders on the bus-tops could see over a high stone wall into a little green patch of garden. Perhaps they wondered who, in these days of reduced fortunes, had money enough

to keep up such an establishment. One thing they never dreamed was that here was the center of a sinister plot aimed to strike at the very life blood of the country. That here was the headquarters of the Red Sleeves. No one had heard of the Red Sleeves at that time, yet in a few hours that name was destined to strike terror into the hearts of people the length and breadth of a great nation.

In a high-ceilinged library of this house stood a man who was studying his own reflection in a full length mirror set into a panel in the wall. No one could deny that his appearance was arresting. Tall, gaunt, perhaps fifty odd years of age, his face was deeply lined. His eyes were deep-set and burning, and a psychiatrist must have recognized in them the light of an unbalanced mind. His lower lip jutted out, giving to his face an arrogant tyrannical look. He was dressed in gray riding-pants with shiny, black boots. He wore a gray-flannel shirt with a black tie, and around each sleeve above the elbow was a brilliant crimson arm band. The left sleeve was empty, pinned to the side of the shirt.

America knew this man. They knew that arm had been shot away in France. They knew that the World War had made him one of the country's great military heroes. They knew that since then he had been the stormy petrel of the War Department. They knew that he had at one time attempted to form an organization of vigilantes to fight bootleggers in the dead days of prohibition. They knew him as a hero, as a martinet, as a rock-ribbed moralist, as a passionate patriot who had conceived it his duty to publicly denounce the new policies of the current administration in Washington. They knew that he had retired from the service to private life.

But there were things the public did not know about General Edward Ellison. They did not know that he was an exaggerated egomaniac, thirsting for power. They did not know that he spent hours before this full length mirror gazing at his own reflection. They did not know that General Ellison had become a powerful tool in the hands of an unscrupulous group of men bent on the destruction of a system of government that had stood firm for more than a hundred and fifty years.

General Ellison's contemplation of himself in the glass was interrupted by the entrance of a man who was also dressed in the gray uniform with the scarlet arm-bands.

"Mr. Dawson and the others to see you, General," he said.

Ellison turned from the glass. There was a perpetual deep scowl between those deep-set burning eyes.

"Show them in!"

He stood, legs spread apart, chest thrown out, the thumb of his hand slipped under the black belt he wore. As H. R. Dawson, Frampton and Corbett came into the room he held out his arm in a stiff gesture of salute.

"I was expecting you, gentlemen," he said. It was a crisp, resonant voice, used to commanding. "Your men have botched things!"

H. R. Dawson smiled that faint, almost mocking smile of his. "You mean *your* men, General," he said dryly. "Letting that government agent, Drewes, get away from Marshfield was the initial mistake."

"An unavoidable accident," said the general coldly. "But your stupidity, Mr. Dawson, in allowing yourself to be seen publicly with Moxelli has made it possible for the government to associate you with this venture before we are ready."

"I admit the mistake," said Dawson quietly. "But there is no use crying over spilled milk, General. We've had bad luck. Two attempts have been made on the life of this man Vane and both, unfortunately, have failed. We learn from Washington that he has had an audience with the President."

"How does that effect your plans, General?" dapper John Corbett asked.

ELLISON strode majestically up and down the thick Persian rug for a moment. "In five days we could have struck with complete assurance of success. In my judgment, gentlemen, to allow the government five days of preparation now might have serious consequences. It is true that certain vital preparations of ours are not completed, but without the element of surprise many important parts of our plan might fail."

Tall, angular, leather-faced Paul Frampton looked shrewdly at the general. "You think, then, that we should not delay?"

Ellison's eyes burned like red hot coals. "I think the signal to go should be given at once!" he said decisively.

The three rich men looked at each other in silent conference. It was Dawson who spoke: "We will need, General, about three hours to make certain financial arrangements. Since our connection with this affair may be known in Washington it seems important that we should liquidate certain assets before things begin."

"It will take at least that long before all the orders are passed along to our divisional commands," said Ellison. He glanced at a clock on the mantel. "It is now two P.M. I will give orders for Plan A to go into operation at precisely six P.M. Will that give you sufficient time, gentlemen?"

"It will," said Dawson.

Abruptly Ellison held out his arm in that stiff salute. His hand seemed to shake a little.

And a moment later from an upper room in that same Fifth Avenue house a telegraph operator tapped out the same message over and over:

Plan A at 17 . . . Plan A at 17 . . . Plan A at 17 . . .

To San Francisco, to Denver, to Chicago, to Boston, to Dallas, to New Orleans, to Seattle, on and on to every part of the country that message went.

Plan A at 17 . . . Plan A at 17 . . .

IN a cottage in New England a wildly excited man came rushing into the room where his wife was patiently darning socks.

"It's come, Miriam!" he said. "The signal has come!"

Color left the woman's face.

"Tonight at six o'clock!" he said. "Thank God this long period of waiting is over."

The woman twisted her fingers tightly together in her lap. "I wish to heaven I could believe in this thing as you do, Ted. I wish I believed that this terrible violence could get us what we want! Can't we get the right men in power through elections? Must we have death and destruction?"

"We've tried to beat the political machines that way and we can't. Now we're going to use force!"

"But what's to become of me, Ted? We have so little now, and without you to earn something . . ."

"The family of every Red Sleeve will be cared for," the man cried. "They have promised us that. You'll be better off now than you've ever been!"

. . . Plan A at 17 . . . Plan A at 17 . . .

In a bar-room in New York a man rushed in, his cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Double rye and soda," he ordered. He glanced around, saw only one other man seated at a table some distance away, and spoke eagerly to the bartender. "It's come, George! *Plan A at Seventeen!* It's the end of waiting. We'll do for those bureaucrats in Washington who have been putting the screws on us for years. America for Americans! That's what we're going to have now!"

His voice had risen at the end so that the man at the table looked up. "Hello, Mr. Murcheson," he said. "What's all the excitement?"

Murcheson spun around from the bar and an evil grin spread over his face. He went quickly over to the table. "Well, well, well, if it isn't Mr. Ferretti, the grocer," he said, in a sneering voice. "Oh, there's excitement all right, Ferretti. Plenty of excitement. America for Americans, that's what it is. No place for foreigners like you!"

"I guess you must be drunk," said Ferretti calmly.

"Drunk! Ha! You damn foreigner calling me drunk, eh?" Out shot his fist and knocked the other man sprawling over backward in his chair. Before Ferretti could pick himself up, the man Murcheson had grabbed another chair and brought it smashing down over the prostrate man's head . . . once, twice, three times until it splintered in his hands. Ferretti lay still, his head bloody and battered.

"Gee, Murch, the cop'll get you for that," said the frightened bartender.

"Cops! That's a laugh, George! By tomorrow there won't be any cops, the graft-taking, crooked lice! We won't have to worry about cops any more, George!"

. . . Plan A at 17 . . . Plan A at 17 . . .

Moxelli lay stretched out on a sofa in a lavish west-side apartment, squinting along the barrel of a revolver he held loosely in his hand. He, too, was dressed in the gray uniform and red arm-bands of a Red Sleeve. The gray-flannel shirt accentuated the flabbiness of his stomach. His thick lips were twisted into that curious little one-sided smile, and from time to time his greedy little black eyes glanced in the direction of a girl who stood with her back to the table in the center of the room.

"Pretty soon we'll be big shots, my sweet," said Moxelli in that soft, purring voice of his.

"That's fine," said the girl in a flat voice.

"I'm telling you," said Moxelli softly, "because you're supposed to know that a big-shot's girl mustn't have a word of scandal breathed about her. You understand, my sweet?"

"Of course, Mox—of course I understand." There was stark fear in the girl's voice—in her eyes.

Moxelli swung his feet off the lounge and stood up. He slipped the revolver into a holster at his side and walked with that slow, catlike tread over to the girl. His great hands hung loosely at his sides.

"You've got to try to forget what you are," said Moxelli softly. "You've got to remember what will happen to you if I hear of you pulling anything. Something like this!" One of his hands flashed out and struck the girl a stinging blow across the mouth. A little trickle of blood ran down her chin. Moxelli laughed. "You won't forget, will you, my sweet?"

"No, Mox." It was a whisper.

"I've got to be going," he said. "Read the morning papers if you want to know how I'm going, my pet."

* * *

IN THE offices of the M.I.D. in Washington Dominick Vane was closeted with General Barrett. Vane looked drawn and tired but his eyes had a bright, feverish light in them. During that afternoon he had selected the force of men to work under him in his new command. About twelve of them were from his own Department, about twenty from the combined forces of the Military and Naval Intelligence; four others were private investigators whom Vane knew by reputation.

"We should be ready to function within twenty-four hours," said Dominick Vane. It was then five o'clock in the afternoon. "You have a clear picture, General Barrett, of the military situation in the whole country. I'd like to know about that. I'd like to know just what we can count on from the army if it comes to a showdown."

There was a great map spread out on Barrett's desk. The chief of the M.I.D. puffed methodically on his pipe as he talked. "We're operating under The Four Army plan which was recently put into effect," he said. "Each of these Armies has an assigned area of the States. The First Army covers roughly New England and the Middle Atlantic States—as you see here. Headquarters at Governors Island in New York. The Second Army covers the Middle West with headquarters at Chicago. The Third Army covers the Texas border and the Southwest, with headquarters at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. The Fourth Army covers the Pacific with headquarters at San Francisco."

"I see," said Vane. "And how many men can be counted on for immediate action?"

Barrett looked a little grim as he held a match to his pipe. "The regular army," he said, "numbers only about 120,000 men. A year or so ago when there was a scare about a communist revolution it was said that it would take 165,000 regular army men to handle the situation along with the National Guard, which numbers about 185,000. Then there is the organized Reserve. There are about 90,000 officers in this division but practically no men. Of course many civilians have had military training and would be drafted in time of war."

"I see." Vane looked thoughtful.

Barrett gave him a quick look. "Has it occurred to you, Mr. Vane, that we have no way of knowing how many of this number, outside the regular army, we can count on. The Red Sleeves have been drilling. How many Reserve Officers and National Guardsmen have they in their outfit? If we were attacked by an alien army we could count on them all! But what of a cancerous rebellion like this? From what you tell me they have some pretty fine phrases about America for Americans, and down with an outmoded political machine and all that sort of thing. We've been through a pretty thin time in this country, Mr. Vane. I should hate to make an estimate of how many of these non-regulars would stand by the Government. They'll look on it as a family row. Both sides will be shouting their heads off about patriotism."

VANE nodded. "Of course you're right," he said. He brought his closed fist impatiently down on the desk. "If the people could only be made to see that any scheme financed by

Dawson and his crowd can have nothing but personal gain for its purpose."

"We have a propaganda department to handle that sort of thing," said Barrett. "But we'll have to work fast."

It was then twenty minutes past five.

"Can you make any sort of guess as to where the trouble might start?"

Barrett fussed with his pipe for a moment. "If they have a decently organized plan, and we think they have, it will start everywhere at once. It will have to, to have any chance of success. Of course the most dangerous places from our point of view are big cities. If they are equipped and provisioned they can subjugate the rest of the population by cutting off food supplies. They could draw thousands of recruits to their cause if it meant the difference between being fed and not being fed."

"Naturally. It would be up to the military to see that the food supplies were not interfered with."

"It would," said Barrett grimly. "And there are other crucial points that a revolutionary body would attempt to seize or destroy, such as the Niagara Falls power-plant; the Springfield arsenal; the General Electric plant at Schenectady; the Du Pont works; the Bethlehem Steel plants. If they could get control of these key situations it would give them tremendous power. If they could destroy them, we'd be—"

"General, we've got a job on our hands! When you see it in all its details it puts fear into you!" Vane said.

Barrett nodded. "If the Red Sleeves are as strong as you think they are, Mr. Vane, we're in for no tea party!"

Twenty minutes to six.

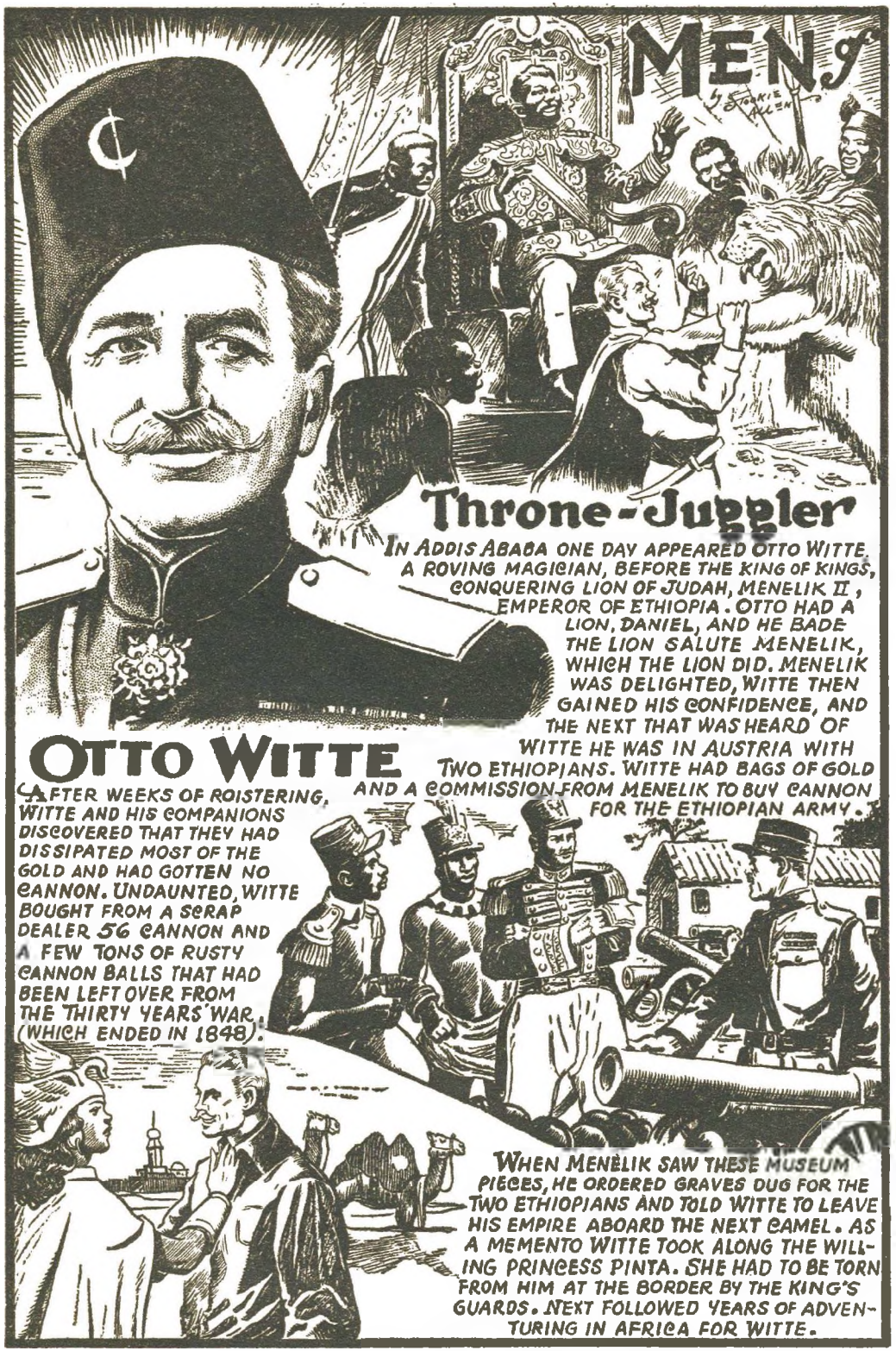
"Washington itself," said the general, "may be a danger spot. The quickest thing they could do for their cause would be crack down on the government officials here. Congress is in session and they might try to wipe out as many of them as possible. Every moment from now on the President is in the most terrible danger of assassination. He laughed it off when I told him so this afternoon. But it's true. In a mess like this no one is to be thoroughly trusted until the Red Sleeves have come out into the open."

Dominick Vane stood up. "We'll do a little cracking-down of our own, General. In the morning I'm heading for New York with a squad of my men to turn the heat on Dawson and his crowd, including Moxelli, Brace and all his killers. Meanwhile all military headquarters have been warned of the danger?"

"They have," said Barrett. "In a day or two they should be fully prepared."

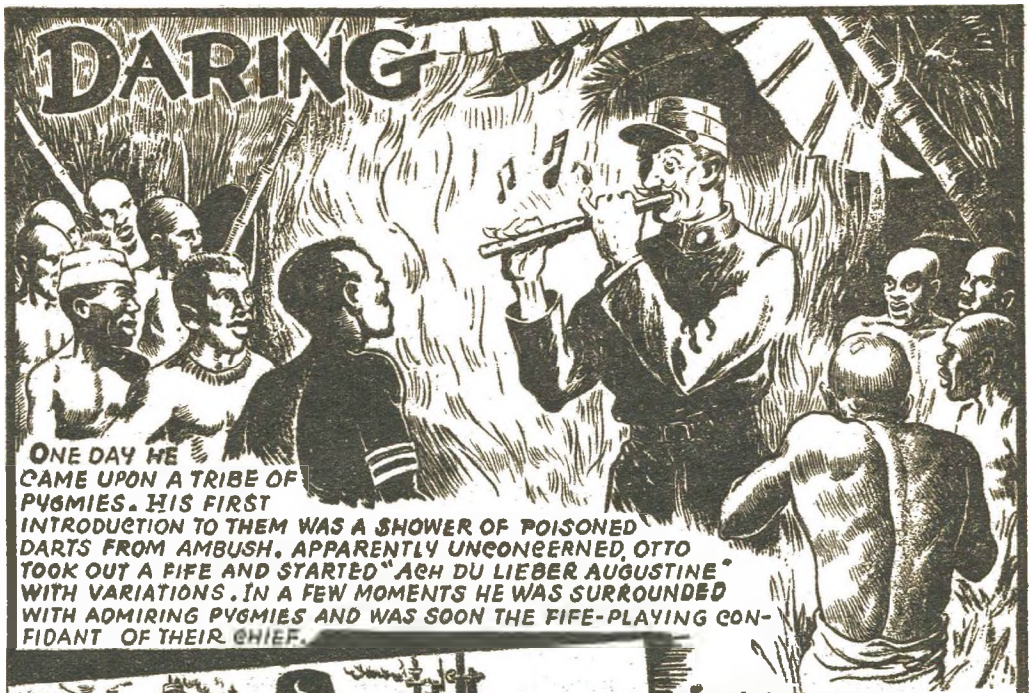
It was then ten minutes to six.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



A True Story in Pictures Every Week

DARING

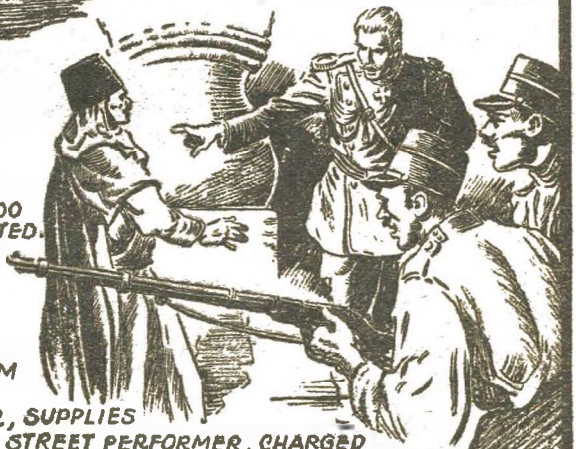


ONE DAY HE CAME UPON A TRIBE OF PYGMIES. HIS FIRST INTRODUCTION TO THEM WAS A SHOWER OF POISONED DARTS FROM AMBUSH. APPARENTLY UNCONCERNED, OTTO TOOK OUT A FIFE AND STARTED "ACH DU LIEBER AUGUSTINE" WITH VARIATIONS. IN A FEW MOMENTS HE WAS SURROUNDED WITH ADMIRING PYGMIES AND WAS SOON THE FIFE-PLAYING CONFIDANT OF THEIR CHIEF.

IN 1914, TURKEY OFFERED TO SUPPLY A NEW KING FOR KINGLESS ALBANIA. HEARING OF THIS, WITTE BOUGHT A TURKISH UNIFORM AND HAD HIS PICTURE TAKEN, THEN SUPERIMPOSED IT ON A PHOTO OF A NAVAL FLEET. HE WIRED THE ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT THAT HE WOULD ARRIVE EARLIER THAN HE HAD EXPECTED, SIGNING IT "BURHAN-EDDIE P." THE NAME OF THE INTENDED RULER.

(TAKEN FROM ONE OF HIS POST-CARDS)

WITTE WAS GIVEN A ROYAL WELCOME AND FOR FIVE DAYS HE ACTUALLY RULED ALBANIA. WHEN THE REAL KING ARRIVED, WITTE HAD HIM JAILED AS AN IMPOSTOR. BUT THE THRONE GOT TOO HOT AND OTTO INFORMALLY ABDICATED.



FOR THE NEXT 18 YEARS OTTO WAS SEEN ON THE STREET CORNERS OF EUROPEAN CAPITALS SELLING HIS "ROYAL" POST-CARDS AND REPLYING ONLY TO THOSE WHO ADDRESSED HIM AS "YOUR MAJESTY." A POLICE BLOTTER OF DESSAU, GERMANY, 1932, SUPPLIES WITTE'S EPITAPH: "OTTO WITTE, 60, STREET PERFORMER, CHARGED WITH STEALING TWO LOAVES OF BREAD." HE, OTTO WITTE, WHO HAD STOLEN A CROWN!

Next Week: Ray Woods—Dare-Diver

Even Stephen

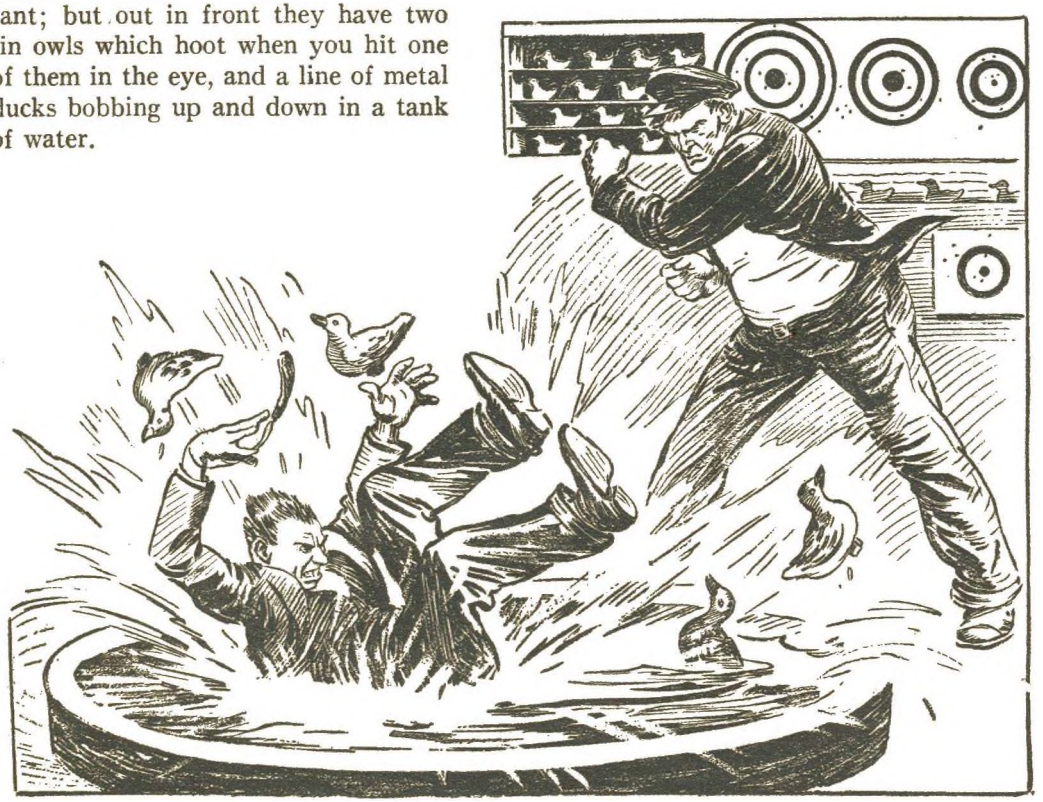
By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

A Rollicking Tale of Ships and Sailormen

IT ALL happened because Tug Raffin socked the wrong man on the jaw. Now Tug Raffin is an exceedingly tough sailor to tangle with, and his right fist has a peculiar habit of zooming out from under his armpit like a piston-rod kicking loose from a crankshaft. Around Fort Street, which is the vicinity of the Bilge and Binnacle Club, men have thorough respect for Tug Raffin's right fist; but this unfortunate incident took place over by Shroeder's Brewery in a fink joint known as Lou Ginsberg's Shooting Gallery.

What goes on in back of the shooting gallery is neither edifying or important; but out in front they have two tin owls which hoot when you hit one of them in the eye, and a line of metal ducks bobbing up and down in a tank of water.

Tug Raffin was having no luck at all with the ducks. Already he had spent six bits, and only three of his shots had connected. This was due primarily to the fact that Lou Ginsberg bends the sights on all his guns in order to keep his stock of prizes intact; but Tug Raffin did not know that, and he was scorching inside like a furnace. The group of kibitzers standing in back of him were also a decided handicap. In fact Tug felt as though he would like to abandon duck shooting for a while and concentrate on a big-mouthed foreigner at his immediate left. Old Rat-line Sam, the rope and canvas man, was on the other side. Sam had enough sense to keep his lips clamped at such a crucial moment.



"Three doks in thirty shots!" exclaimed the foreigner, scratching a mop of bristly yellow hair with his fingertips. "Lou—ain't it possible you could substitute elephants?"

"You are talking too much," said a small mousy personage, peering over the foreigner's shoulder. "It might cause trouble."

"I ain't said nodding," persisted the foreigner. "Only that the sailor can't shoot doks. Liddle doks in a tank. He can't hit 'em."

"Look," said Tug Raffin, heeling around. "There are times when a man can stand just so much. One more remark and you'll be wearing this gun for a collar!"

The foreigner gave a hollow laugh. "I am Herman G. Kroll," he stated proudly. "I don't fear noboddy; and I still say you can't shoot doks!"

Tug Raffin nodded amiably, placed the .22 on the counter and stepped toward the man, a faint smile wreathing his face. His arm suddenly zipped back like a receding plunger and with a slightly looping motion traveled rapidly in the direction of Herman G. Kroll.

The punch had everything. It was swift and packed enough weight behind it to flatten Kroll's flaring snout against his pudgy cheeks. But Herman G. Kroll was shifty, and besides he had no wish to find his snout flattened; so he ducked. Tug Raffin's fist swished past Kroll's ear and came into contact with soft quivering flesh. A rigid figure stared at Tug glassy-eyed. It was the small mousy man who had been peering over Kroll's shoulder. The man gasped like a speared tuna and crumpled.

TUG had no time to view the disturbing sight; for at this instant Herman G. Kroll sprang into action. Grabbing up a nearby rifle, Kroll swiped the butt-end at Tug Raffin's cap. Tug dodged to one [illegible] and the gun butt split in half as it *jammed* the counter. For some reason the gun went off in Kroll's hands, breaking one of Lou Ginsberg's front windows.

"Don't do it!" yelped Lou Ginsberg. "If it's got to be a fight—outside!"

Rat-line Sam was nearest to Ginsberg. He grasped the proprietor by the collar, and his eyes gleamed with an unholy light. "Stand by for rough weather," growled Sam. "A scrap like this ain't to be detained!"

He was right. Before the window glass had stopped shattering, Tug Raffin tore the broken rifle from Kroll's grip and planted a murderous left against the man's windpipe. Kroll shook his head like an annoyed bull, spread his huge arms wide and waded into Tug, preparing to rend him limb from limb. Tug pawed out with his left, then shifting his body easily, hammered something into Herman G. Kroll's eye. Although the thing looked like a fist, it felt very much like an anvil; and Herman G. Kroll backed up bewilderedly, resembling a grizzly bear who had just put his paw into a light socket.

"Knock off his barnacles!" shouted Rat-line Sam gleefully. "Scuttle 'im, Tug!"

"Help!" squawked Lou Ginsberg. He shuddered as he saw Sam reach over on the prize shelf and hurl a two-dollar lamp at Kroll's head. Scowling fearfully, he lashed an uppercut into Rat-line Sam's whiskers.

"Swab!" snarled Sam, reaching again for the shelf. A fifty-cent Kewpie descended on Lou Ginsberg's bald spot.

At this moment, an ominous delegation filed in from the back room, led by that retired stevedore, Larry the Glut. Burning joy was written on Larry the Glut's irregular features as he saw Tug Raffin exchanging blows with Herman G. Kroll. For two years revenge had been smoldering in Larry the Glut's heart—ever since Tug Raffin had booted him down the gangplank of the *Alma B.*—and now the time had come!

A warning yell from Rat-line Sam caused Tug to whirl around. Sam was being throttled on top of a pin-ball machine by two burly dock hands, and Larry the Glut was climbing over the counter waving a blackjack. Tug Raffin knew that he must immediately dispose of Herman G. Kroll and focus the brunt of his operations on Larry the Glut. Accordingly, he backed his enemy against the wall and

drove one hundred and eighty-five pounds of human dynamite at Mr. Kroll's protruding chin. Kroll took the punch squarely and plumped beside the mousy man, who was huddled comfortably around an overturned spittoon.

Odd unprintable noises issued from Larry the Glut's larynx as he swished the blackjack. Before the bludgeon could land, Tug knocked the man skating. The ex-stevedore whacked the counter with his shoulders, ripping the flimsy wooden structure from its moorings. Rifles clattered to the floor; plaster dolls crashed from the shelves. Rat-line Sam shrieked, sidled back on the pin-ball machine and kicked one of his garroters in the face. The machine toppled over, glass slivered and colored marbles rolled in every direction. Only the metal ducks remained oblivious to the conflict, gliding serenely across the tank in an endless line.

WHEN Larry the Glut scrambled to his feet, Tug pasted him severely in the center of his lumpy face. The punch did not hurt Larry the Glut much; but it sent him careening to the edge of the duck tank. Tug braced both feet on the floor and waited for the swinging blackjack to start on its backward arc. At the proper moment, Tug lurched forward and stiff-armed Larry the Glut in the throat. The blow went wide, Tug's thumb sliding across the jugular instead of under his enemy's ear. For an instant Tug was unprotected; and the blackjack swished in a straight line for his cranium.

A little blue marble out of the nickel machine put an end to everything. It rolled mischievously under Larry the Glut's left toe; and as the man bore down with the blackjack, he shifted his weight to the left. With an abrupt backward flip his feet left the floor, and Larry the Glut spread-eagled gracefully into the tank, flattening three ducks and causing a prodigious splash.

Water *flooped* from the tank in V-shaped sheets, spraying an electrical contrivance on one side. This contrivance was obviously intended to make the ducks go round and round; for when the water struck it, there was a blinding flare, and the ducks stopped perambulating. Also the lights went out.

A shrill siren sounded from the distance. Tug Raffin pivoted. "Cops!" he rumbled. "Sam—where the blazes are you?"

"On the port side, matey," returned a croaking voice. "The lubbers thought they could reef my tops'l; but I bashed their noggins when the table caved in. Reminds me of a time back in ninety-six—"

"We better scram quick," Tug warned him. "Where's the little guy?"

"What little guy?"

"The one I hit first," said Tug. "He was an innocent bystander. It wouldn't be right to leave him here—"

He dragged a limp, badly trampled figure off the floor and hefted it over one shoulder. The siren became louder. Rat-line Sam yanked open the front door and darted out to the sidewalk. A small crowd was beginning to form; but they were mostly drunks from the Elite across the street. "This way—" hissed Sam. "We can beat it through the lumber yard!"

Tug Raffin jounced his way through the crowd and pushed his burden over the lumber yard fence. In a few minutes, he and Rat-line Sam had crossed the yard and were plodding in the general direction of the docks. The mouse-faced man dangled lifelessly over Tug's broad shoulder.

"Why not dump him in some doorway?" Rat-line Sam suggested hopefully. "I don't fancy the animule's looks. Why not put him in that big garbage can?"

"No," said Tug. "He is a stranger in distress. The *Bilge and Binnacles* will offer him hospitality for the night."

The mousy man suddenly slid halfway down Tug's back. As Tug pulled him back into position, two gleaming yellow objects fell to the pavement. Rat-line Sam picked them up. They were the man's teeth: upper and lower plates both. Only instead of being like most false teeth, the plates were of solid gold, and the back grinders were capped with diamonds.

"Sink me!" gasped Rat-line Sam, in-

spècting the dentures under a street lamp. "With tusks like these, the lubber must be a millionaire! Don't drop the gentleman, Tug. I'll tell the boys you're comin'!"

His mustache bristling, Rat-line Sam stomped around the corner and headed for Fort Street.

THE *Bilge and Binnacle* Club, in case you are not acquainted with Fort Street, is located in the rear end of Istvan Karamoz's saloon. Only seamen with high social and moral standing may belong to this organization, as it was founded to promote courtesy and brotherly love among the seafaring men of our western coast. Under the firm hand of President Tug Raffin, the *Bilge and Binnacles* have become the most beloved group on Fort Street, due partly to the fact that they have nine thousand and nine-hundred dollars to their account in the Citizens Bank. It would have been ten thousand, if one of the Zymanski brothers had not accidentally torn Tony Boggio's peanut wagon apart with his bare hands. Fortunately, a few fellow club members interfered before Zymanski could tear Tony Boggio apart also. But that is another story entirely.

When Tug Raffin entered the club room with his human cargo, only a few of the members were present. Little Clancy helped Tug place the unconscious man on a cot, while Joe Lemon watched the proceedings dourly. Rat-line Sam was busily inspecting the man's billfold.

Little Clancy lifted the newcomer by the hair; stared at him queerly. "It's Stephen!" he muttered. " 'Even Stephen!' "

"You know him?" asked Tug.

"Sure," said Little Clancy. "I met him playin' Slotzheimer's bean game. He's the squarest shooter in this town. We call him 'Even Stephen' 'cause he can play the bean game all day an' come out without winning or losing."

"His real name," said Rat-line Sam, reading a card in the billfold, "is Stephen Hernandez."

"He's a foreigner," said Joe Lemon. "I don't like foreigners."

"He ain't foreign," snapped Little Clancy. "He talks nearly as good English as I do."

"Wagger!" came a faint gasping noise from the cot. "Gibbee wagger!"

Little Clancy understood. He lifted an earthenware pitcher from the table and slushed the contents into the man's face. Stephen Hernandez sat up, spluttering. "Where by deeth?" he asked, darting his beady eyes around the big room. "By deeth!"

"He wants his teeth," said Tug. "Give 'em to him."

Rat-line Sam reluctantly handed over the glittering mouthware. "I thought I had lost them," said Stephen, greatly relieved. "They are quite valuable."

"Remember me?" said Little Clancy, with a bright leer. "We played the bean game together at Slotzheimer's—"

Stephen nodded. "You must help me," he said wildly. "The fate of San Sebastian is at stake!"

"The guy's planked," said Joe Lemon. "I've seen 'em that way before."

"He was sober before I hit him," stated Tug Raffin. "I found him in the company of a party called Herman G. Kroll."

"Ah, yes," said Little Clancy. "That must've been 'Terrible Herman,' the rassler. I saw Stephen with him yesterday."

"I can explain everything," Stephen cut in. "Herman G. Kroll offered to help me. He promised to get men for me—men to man the *Manta*."

"He's cracked," sneered Joe Lemon. Little Clancy ran for some more water.

"You must believe me," pleaded Stephen. "The safety of San Sebastian is menaced!"

"Where's San Sebastian?" said Tug.

"It's a little ten-cent republic down in Central America," Joe Lemon told him. "I got a brother in the marines who told me about it."

"ALAS," said Stephen Hernandez. "San Sebastian is in grave danger from the revolutionaries. The rebels have a warship, the *Tigre*, which they bought from a country in Europe. The government now

owns a warship also; but we have no sailors to operate it. That is why I was at the shooting gallery with Mr. Kroll."

"I catch," said Tug. "Kroll promised to get seamen for you. Kroll is in with that no-good fink, Larry the Glut."

"You gentlemen are sailors," said the man, with sudden inspiration. "Perhaps you could gather a crew to run our warship."

"Nope," said Tug. "We don't fight other people's wars."

"But there will be no fighting," persisted Stephen. "The *Manta* is lying in port here. I purchased her on behalf of my government last week. All I want is a crew to take her to San Sebastian. My government will pay you each twenty dollars per day. The captain gets forty."

"Blow me down!" murmured Rat-line Sam. "That's real money. I ain't made so much since I privateered for the Rooshians durin' the fracas of Ought Four!"

"Must be a catch to it," said Tug suspiciously. "It's funny you can't get men at that price."

As Stephen started to reply, the door at the end of the room flew open, and Herman G. Kroll stood before them. Kroll's left eye was closed, his nose resembled an over-ripe squash but his mouth was bent into a vicious grimace. Mr. Kroll could afford to look vicious at this time, because in back of him stood at least ten men, among them Larry the Glut.

"Throat-cutter, chiseler—" fumed Herman G. Kroll, squinting evilly at Tug Raffin. "I haff come for my pardner. Steefen! It is me, your friend!"

"Stephen is staying with us," said Little Clancy. "I wouldn't let my pal associate with a big musk-ox like you!"

"It's a musk-ox I am, eh?" Kroll snorted. "Forward men!"

Little Clancy lifted the water pitcher; swung it back by the handle.

"Stop!" shouted Stephen Hernandez, leaping between the two men. "There must be no more trouble—"

The flying water pitcher cut him short. Instead of hitting Kroll, it struck Stephen's temple with a distinct thudding *whunk*. For the second time that evening the mousy man hinged gracefully to the floor.

Little Clancy was aghast. "I'm sorry, Stephen—" he blurted. Herman G. Kroll quickly seized him by the throat and shook him like a rat-terrier worrying a gopher. Little Clancy's red fists rapped against Kroll's chin; but the big man pushed a thumb into Clancy's eye and heaved him across the room. As Kroll pivoted, Tug Raffin smacked him on the ear, felling him to his knees. Rat-line Sam finished the job by batting Kroll on the skull with an iron lamp stand.

LARRY the Glut and his men were endeavoring to get through the doorway; but Joe Lemon kept prodding them back with a long boat hook, which he had stolen off the *San Marcos* on his last trip. The business end of a boat hook is an unpleasant thing to become connected with, and Larry the Glut had no intention of being gaffed like a turbot. Little Clancy clambered to his feet and adjusted a pair of brass crunchers on his knuckles.

"Let two of 'em past at a time, Joe," ordered Tug Raffin. "Clancy and I will teach 'em a lesson!"

"We know our rights!" bawled Larry the Glut. "You bilge rats wrecked Lou Ginsberg's shooting gallery, an' you kidnapped our good friend, Even Stephen. We'll have the law agin you!"

"Call copper then!" Tug challenged. "Either come in and fight, or get under way!"

Larry the Glut looked first at the boat hook; then at Tug. His men backed up, grumbling. Tug sneered audibly, raised Herman G. Kroll by the collar and shoved him into Larry the Glut's arms.

"You will pay for this outrage!" warned Herman G. Kroll, coming to life. "I don't forget!" He turned and, with some assistance, headed for the front exit.

Joe Lemon slammed the door; placed the boat hook against the wall. "This is a fine mess," he scowled. "I still don't know what it's all about."

"The answer is plain," replied Tug. "Kroll wants to take charge of Stephen's ship. He was intending to hire men, at the usual price, from Larry the Glut; then collect the override for himself."

"Sounds like easy money," said Little Clancy. "We ought to take advantage of it ourselves."

"But how do we know Stephen won't gyp us?" demanded Tug. "He might not kick in with the dough."

"Lissen!" hissed Rat-line Sam, unfolding a piece of paper from the sealskin billfold. "This here letter shows who the swab is for certain. Stephen Hernandez is none other than the minister of war for San Sebastian!"

Tug glanced over the paper. "That's right," he announced. "The little guy is a big shot."

"Maybe we ought to take better care of him," suggested Little Clancy. "That floor's pretty cold." He dragged the battered man across the room and placed him again on the cot.

Five minutes later, Bottle-nose Billings walked in, accompanied by Singin' Kelly and the four Zymanski brothers.

"We heard there was a swell fight," said Billings. "Up at Ginsberg's shooting gallery. The cops came and put Lou Ginsberg in jail for disturbing the peace. The rest of 'em got away."

"I know about it," said Tug. "But that is not important. Gentlemen. The *Bilge and Binnacle* Club has been commissioned to deliver a warship to the country of San Sebastian."

"I worked on board a warship once," said Bottle-nose Billings. "In Pedro. I carried halibut to the galley."

"We are not delivering halibut," stated Tug definitely. "We are delivering the warship itself."

"When do we start?" inquired Singin' Kelly.

"As soon as our friend here wakes up," said Tug, pointing to the prone figure of Stephen Hernandez. "But I am warning you—we may have some difficulty with a gent known as Herman G. Kroll."

" 'Twill make it all the better," said Rat-line Sam, pleased by the thought. "But 'tween you an' me an' the capstan, I don't figger that swab will bother us any more."

Tug Raffin shrugged his shoulders. If he had bothered to look around, he would have seen a flat, ugly face peering at him through the back window. No one noticed the face though; and it soon melted into blackness.

NEXT morning the entire *Bilge and Binnacle Club* marched down to Pier 47. "The government of San Sebastian will forever be grateful to you," said Stephen Hernandez, blinking his beady eyes and clutching Tug Raffin by the arm. "It is well I met you gentlemen, instead of falling upon the mercy of Herman G. Kroll."

"You said it, buddy," agreed Tug, unfastening the man's clawlike fingers. "Kroll would have soaked you good. Say! I don't see any warship."

"It is over there," said Stephen, gesturing to a big black patch which was keeping a lot of good sunshine out of the dock shed. "That is the *Manta.*"

"*Manta* hell!" sniffed Bottle-nose Billings. "I recognize that tub. She's the *Lady Emma.* Carried copra for a while. Tides rise an' fall in her foreward hold."

"She has been entirely reconditioned," Stephen assured him. "Plates tightened, machinery repaired—and four excellent cannon have been placed on her decks. The country of San Sebastian has spared no expense."

"Very well," said Tug Raffin. "But I don't like the looks of her. Heft your dunnage on board, men."

Single file, the *Bilge and Binnacles* climbed the gangplank. They were met on the midship deck by a dock official in a frayed blue coat. The official was generally known as Luther Glad, and his eyes looked like the sprout-ends of old decayed carrots. They were sort of greenish orange, and they had a decidedly vegetable expression.

"Whereyagoin'?" said Luther Glad, all in one word.

"This is my ship," declared Stephen

Hernandez. "We are sailing at once for San Sebastian. Here are the papers."

"Gottapaythedockfee," said Luther Glad. His words were not only run together, but they had an annoying breathy quality, due no doubt to some pulmonary affliction.

"What does he say?" asked Stephen.

"He says you have to pay the docking fee before you can remove the vessel," Tug explained. "How much is it, Luther?"

"Hundred bucks." Luther Glad managed to separate both words by handling one on the inhale and the other on the exhale.

"Fork over a hundred bucks," said Tug.

"I can't," replied Stephen sadly. "I have only ten dollars in my pocket. My expense account is exhausted."

"I knew this was too good to last," said Tug, shouldering his bag of dunnage.

"We could lend him the money," suggested Little Clancy. "The *Bilge and Binnacles* have enough to—"

Tug clamped his hands over Little Clancy's mouth. "We've had enough trouble lending money," he growled.

"Seems to me as how Stevie's intentions are honorable," said Rat-line Sam. "Lendin' money to a nation ain't like givin' it to a man. You're sure of gettin' it back."

"Ever hear of the war debt?" said Tug.

Rat-line Sam pulled at his mustache thoughtfully.

From the entrance to the wharf came a strident, spine-chilling whine. Tug whirled. It was the police siren again. "They're after us!" squawked Little Clancy. "We better hide!"

"Not here," said Luther Glad. Bottle-nose Billings shoved him aside and scuttled for the companionway. Luther Glad sneered; started down the gangplank. The police car was winding around a pile of sugar sacks, unused coffins and Deisel engines, recently unloaded from the *Peter Kerr*. Two policemen stood on the running board.

"Wait," said Tug, grasping Luther Glad's bicep. "We will pay the dockage if you don't tell 'em where we are. Sam—you're the treasurer. Write out a check on the *Bilge and Binnacles*."

Luther Glad nodded. Rat-line Sam darted into the foreward deck house. The police car squealed up to a halt and five officers approached the *Manta*. Luther Glad greeted them at the bottom of the gangplank. "Have you seen a big blond guy with a tough-looking pan?" asked a policeman. "We got a tip he'd be here."

Luther Glad shook his head.

"Guess he hasn't arrived yet," said another policeman. "We'll lay for him at the pier entrance."

"He's a bad actor," warned the first policeman. "Him and his gang beat up Terrible Herman, the wrestler, last night. Keep an eye peeled, Bud."

LUTHER GLAD watched listlessly while the police car wheeled away. When they were gone, he hustled back up the plank and whistled sharply. The *Bilge and Binnacles* emerged cautiously from their hiding places. Rat-line Sam handed the dock official a hastily scribbled check. "This check had better be good," said Luther Glad meaningly, and every word was harsh and clear. "If it bounces—" He stalked away, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"We've got to get out of here quick," said Tug Raffin. "Kroll snitched, so he could keep us from sailing; but we'll fool him—"

"This iss terrible," said one of the Symanski brothers, emerging from the fiddley. "The sheep won't get out uff the harbor."

"What sheep?" growled Tug in an annoyed manner. "Are you batty?"

"This here sheep," was the reply. "It hass got no erl."

"I knew there was something I forgot," said Stephen. "I meant to order oil; but it slipped my mind."

Tug sat down on the hatch cover, murder seething up in his heart. "You're into us for a hundred bucks already," he rasped at Stephen. "Now I suppose we'll have to buy the fuel!"

"I can see no other way," said Stephen. "But you will be reimbursed."

Grumbling angrily, Tug sneaked down

to a telephone booth and phoned the Acme Oil Company. A tank boat soon chugged up alongside, and within two hours the *Manta* was ready to sail.

"Now look," said Tug Raffin, grasping Stephen by the shoulders. "We've paid the dock fee, and we've paid for the oil. If your government don't kick through, there'll be a real war in San Sebastian!"

"You shall be rewarded," Stephen promised. "The only man we have to avoid is Ramerez the Butcher."

"Who's he?" said Tug.

"Ramerez is my brother," replied Stephen. "But we have different political views. I believe in a unicameral system of government. Ramerez is a bicameral man; and he has become the leader of the rebels."

"One of us is bugs," said Tug conclusively. "But all I'm interested in is the dough—"

"Sheet home the fore royal!" came a raucous cry. Rat-line Sam wobbled around the deck house, strangling a stubby brown bottle. "Well the lee brace! Haul to windward, you skulking lubbers!"

There was no doubt about Sam's condition. He was drunk.

Tug immediately took possession of the bottle and looped it into the bay. "There'll be none o' that on this trip!" he announced angrily. "Help Billings with the hawse lines!"

Like a creaky old whale, the *Manta* burbled out of the harbor and pointed her nose toward the horizon. Tug Raffin leaned on the bridge rail and watched choppy waves slap against the vessel's side. A large green-hulled liner knifed past majestically. Tug surveyed the liner idly through his binoculars. Suddenly he became rigid and tried to get a clearer focus.

Staring across the water at him was the bovine face of Herman G. Kroll.

ON THE second day out, Rat-line Sam was still drunk. Tug Raffin searched in vain to locate the liquor supply, inspecting the paint locker, all the cargo holds and even the muzzles of the four antiquated cannon. On the third day, Rat-line Sam was scarcely able to stand, and Tug caught a whiff of whisky on the breath of Bottle-nose Billings. Things went from bad to worse; until, as the *Manta* neared San Sebastian, there were only three sober men on board: Tug, Little Clancy and Stephen Hernandez.

"Such bums," said Little Clancy, moving the wheel slightly as he watched the compass card. "They are a disgrace to the *Bilge and Binnacles*."

"Where could they find the stuff?" sighed Tug. "Stephen says he didn't load it on board."

"When this ship was the *Lady Emma*," stated Little Clancy, "she was owned by Cap'n Greely, who was a very heavy guzzler. It is my opinion that Cap'n Greely left some liquor aboard an' that Sam found it."

"The Zymanskis are so potted they can't tell an oil cup from a furnace burner," said Tug glumly. "I have already partially disabled Joe Lemon and Bottle-nose Billings; but I can't cripple the whole crew. By tomorrow we should reach San Sebastian; and then—"

"Captain Raffin!"

Stephen Hernandez leaned against the wheel house door, has face chalky white, his nose twitching like a rabbit's. "The worst has happened!" he groaned fretfully. "Look over there—on the port side!"

"I saw her an hour ago," said Tug. "She's only a busted down tramp. I can't figure out the flag, though. It's not on the books."

"That is the flag of the rebels!" exclaimed Stephen. "The ship you see is the *Tigre*—captained by that despicable worm, Ramerez the Butcher!"

"I thought Ramerez was your brother," said Little Clancy.

"He is still a worm," said Stephen firmly.

A low, rattling *boom* sounded across the sea. A shell screeched past the foremast and plopped into the water, throwing up a wall of spray. "Golly!" gasped Little Clancy. "This looks serious!"

"We must fight!" yowled Stephen, raising a clenched fist toward the barometer. "Ramerez will show no mercy!"

Tug rushed out on the bridge. "On deck, men!" he thundered. "All hands on deck!"

THERE was no response. The creaky old ship rolled languidly from side to side. A wreath of black smoke drifted from the funnel. Not a man appeared. Tug repeated his command; then raced aft to the crew's quarters, his tanned face coppery with rage. A second report volleyed across the water, and a screaming shell clipped the *Manta's* aftermast. The mast stick crashed down about three feet from Tug and rolled over the hatch cover, making him jump for his life. Cursing furiously, Tug lunged into the forecastle.

Still there was no one in sight. The crew's quarters were deserted. Empty bottles littered the mess room, and a pair of Joe Lemon's socks hung above the water cask. Tug emitted another bellowing shout and retraced his steps, this time entering the engine room.

Familiar voices greeted his ear. Tug leaned over the upper railing and saw the *Bilge and Binnacles* grouped in a circle on the engine room floor. Singin' Kelly was playing industriously on a comb, while one of the Zymanski brothers engaged in a *kazotsky*. The big engine thumped and squealed as another Zymanski lurched perilously around the catwalks, trying to supply it with oil.

"I got no use for Tug Raffin!" bawled Joe Lemon, waving a bottle high. "Yesterday he slammed me in the jar."

"Tug Raffin is a slunge," stated Bottle-nose Billings.

"Down with Tug Raffin!" shrieked the Zymanski who was trying to oil the engine.

Half sliding on the ladder rails, Tug Raffin swooped down from above. Before anyone could move, Tug grabbed Joe Lemon and knocked his head against the elongated noggin of Bottle-nose Billings. Both men went sprawling. Singin' Kelly assumed a fighting posture; but had it spoiled when Tug smacked him across the jowls and leveled him under a work bench.

"Now listen, you slimy shads!" Tug exploded. "I'm skipper of this ship; and I'm going to be treated as such. Maybe it'll sober you up some to know that we're being attacked—"

As if to verify his statement, there was a splintering roar high above, and glass shattered down from the skylight. The ship gave an uneasy roll, nearly throwing Rat-line Sam into the crankshaft. "On deck!" commanded Tug Raffin. "Show these greasers that, drunk or sober, the *Bilge and Binnacles* can fight!"

With a wild, bloodthirsty whoop, the men ascended the ladder, growling like a pack of tipsy gorillas. Joe Lemon made for the forward gun; Billings headed aft. Rat-line Sam decided to handle the port cannon amidships. Singin' Kelly devoted his energy to lugging ammunition.

Tug Raffin ran to the bridge and ordered Little Clancy to maneuver the *Manta* broadsides. The *Tigre* was moving in closer, her single gun turret swiveling slowly as two squat mortars belched smoke from aft. The one big gun was all that mattered just now, since the other weapons merely slapped missles into the blue water at least two hundred yards from the *Manta's* hull. Adjusting his binoculars, Tug watched the enemy vessel, centering his attention on the gun turret. The metal pill box shook visibly, smoke poured from its lone gun and a loud detonation followed. Tug heard something crash and looked backward in time to see part of the *Manta's* funnel go cartwheeling over the water. When he put the glasses to his eyes again, he witnessed a disturbing sight.

Standing beside the gun turret, big and ugly as ever, was Herman G. Kroll.

TUG was indeed perplexed. One day Herman G. Kroll was in a shooting gallery. The next, he was on board a passenger liner bound for Panama. And now he was standing on the deck of the rebel ship, *Tigre*. Tug could not figure it all out.

There was no chance to figure anything out just then; because Joe Lemon was

yelling like a wild man on the forecastle head. "This gun ain't no good!" he roared. "I can't find a shell that'll fit!"

"Keep trying," advised Tug. "There's a lot of ammunition in the locker below." He scurried down from the bridge and discovered Rat-line Sam bent over the midships gun, pounding the breech block with a hammer. "Anything wrong with your ammunition?" Tug asked.

"Dunno," said Rat-line Sam *whapping* down the hammer. "It's loaded; but the blasted plug won't fit. Look at that rust—"

Tug took the hammer away from him, twisted the block gently and screwed it into place. The swivel joint was so rusted that the weapon could only be aimed up and down. Tug sighted it as best he could; then jerked the lanyard.

Whoom!

When Tug regained his senses, he was sprawled behind a bunker hatch, his feet sticking into the galley door. Rat-line Sam was nowhere in sight; and neither was the cannon. Two of the deck plates had been torn up. Twisted rails and stanchions drooped dejectedly over the side.

Besmeared with powder, his stubbled whiskers singed, Rat-line Sam crawled around the deck house on his hands and knees. "It jumped overboard," he said mournfully. "Knocked me galley west an' leaped the scupper like a crazy dolphin."

"Great stuff," said Tug, getting up disgustedly. "One cannon won't work; and the other takes a nose dive. It looks like we're licked already!"

"Lookit!" rasped Rat-line Sam, pointing across the water. "A hit! We hit the lubbers!"

Sure enough. The gun turret on the *Tigre* had a strangely disheveled appearance—like a dishpan squashed by a steamroller. Tug eyed the destruction in amazement. "We've got a chance yet!" he exclaimed. "Tell Billings to get that after gun rolling!"

The words were scarcely off his tongue when flame belched from the after deck. Bottle-nose Billings howled with delight. The foremast of the *Tigre* teetered and then whacked down on the bridge. Billings reloaded the gun, fired it again and yelled for more ammunition.

Singin' Kelly was quick to oblige. He came staggering across the after deck, a heavy shell perched on each shoulder. Although quite intoxicated, Kelly seemed to know what he was doing, and his footwork was a thing of wonder. He careened adroitly past a treacherous deck ring and through the tangle of cable which had fallen from the broken mast. One shell leaned at a precarious angle; but Kelly managed to hoist it back into place, his moonface flushed with pride. A clatter of shot zipped over his head; *whanged* against the port winches. Seaman Kelly swayed a little and resumed his journey with utmost composure.

"Don't drop those things!" warned Bottle-nose Billings. "They'll explode sure as—"

Singin' Kelly grinned, took a determined step foreward and fell on his face.

ONE of the shells landed on its side and rolled harmlessly toward the after-deck house. The other described a graceful loop and disappeared into an open manhole.

The *Manta* shivered from stern to stem. A hollow, booming sound reverberated up from the cargo hold. Singin' Kelly arose to his feet, looking very foolish. Tug Raffin was standing before him. "I am sorry," said Kelly. "I must've slipped."

"Fathead!" snarled Tug, listening to a peculiar *whishing* noise below. "You blew a hole through the plates. The ship's sinking!" With no particular warning, Tug slapped Singin' Kelly back to the deck.

"Mr. Raffin!" shouted Stephen Hernandez from amidships. "What are you waiting for? Why don't we fight?"

A shower of nuts, bolts and iron chain whammed onto the boat deck as the *Tigre* cracked loose with a broadside. With their one big gun wrecked, the rebels were cramming an assortment of metal into the tub-shaped mortars. Stephen Hernandez ran back to the safety of the deck house like

a worried badger. The *Manta* was beginning to list slightly; but her propeller shaft was uninjured, and the ship continued to grind up a bubbling white wake.

The steering engine gave a long rumble as Little Clancy changed the ship's course, veering away from the raking cannon, which were throwing everything from soup ladles to anchor chains at the *Manta's* bridge. The rebel ship, however, did not intend to be cheated out of her prey, so she pivoted rapidly and cut toward the *Manta's* bow.

How it happened, no one will ever know. Perhaps one of the Zymanski brothers threw the engine to full speed. Perhaps Little Clancy gave the helm a quick, malicious twist. At any rate, the *Manta* suddenly swooped to port and slammed directly into the *Tigre's* midships.

The shock wasn't much. It felt as though the *Manta* were nuzzling her blunt bows into a chunk of butter. But when Tug Raffin leaned over the side, he saw a battered mass of iron plating, deck rails and shattered booms. Evidently the *Tigre* was rusted and rotten clear through, because the *Manta* had cut her cleanly in half.

Like clamoring monkeys, the *Tigre's* entire crew swarmed over the *Manta's* forecastle head, wielding clubs and carbines. Joe Lemon met them with pounding fists; but was immediatley trampled under. Five husky rebels rousted Little Clancy from the wheel house and tried to toss him bodily down the bridge ladder. Screaming furiously, Little Clancy thumbed one man in the eye, squirmed away from his tormentors and scooted aft. On the midship deck he met Tug Raffin. Tug was carrying a sizeable length of iron pipe, and Bottlenose Billings followed close behind with a small paring knife which he had procured from the galley.

"They'll kill us!" gasped Little Clancy. "I seen Kroll—"

Tug shoved him into the fiddley and advanced toward the milling mob. Tug's square brown face was grim, and he wore the unpleasant expression of a hyena looking for its evening meal. A bullet whined over his shoulder and clanged on a bulkhead. Tug gripped his pipe firmly and charged.

Guns banged noisily as Tug lashed out with his pipe, swatting skulls with a deft fillip that is gained only by years of experience. Three men toppled at once, although it was difficult for the untrained eye to see how any of them could have been hit. Gaining courage, more rebels jammed onto the deck, hurling themselves at Tug's feet, clawing for the flailing weapon.

The sudden onrush of men made Bottlenose Billings quite happy. He wormed his way into the crowd, lopping off small bits of flesh, and here and there an occasional pants button. In a short time he found that removing buttons worked the greatest havoc; for as the victim grabbed for his receding garment, Tug usually managed to slash down with the pipe.

Just when the operation had been synchronized to perfection, Tug Raffin felt a thick sinewy hand circle his wrist. Tug's feet left the deck, and he sailed through the air in a neat parabola—plumping against the base of a Sampson post.

"That," said a harsh voice, "is my flying mare! Now comes the broad chump!"

Tug twisted around and saw the spherical posterior of Herman G. Kroll hurtling at him. He tried to wriggle out of the way; but it was too late. The massive body descended; and for Tug Raffin everything was darkness.

TUG RAFFIN rubbed a crick in his neck and tried to figure out who he was. He decided he was a deck plate. No. He was still Tug Raffin; but he had been mashed through a deck plate. Herman G. Kroll had pushed him through the deck of the *Manta,* and now he was seated on the floor of the fire room.

"Let us proceed, gentlemen. I notice that Mr. Raffin has regained consciousness."

Tug glanced up. A little man was standing over him—a mousy little man in gold braid. It looked like Stephen Hernandez;

but it had a luxuriant growth of chin whiskers and carried a .45 caliber Luger. Moreover, Stephen Hernandez was sitting on the soojee barrel at his left, surrounded by members of the *Bilge and Binnacle* Club.

"It grieves me to do this," said the man. "But I must take possession of the *Manta*. The pumps will keep her afloat until we reach San Sebastian; and then will come the revolution."

"There stands the traitor!" fumed Stephen. He leveled an accusing finger at Herman G. Kroll, who was aimlessly peeling asbestos from a steam pipe. "He betrayed us to Ramerez!"

"You got yourself to blame," Kroll replied. "Instead of trusting me, you hire these sailor bums. When I ain't able to stop you, I take a fast boat to San Sebastian, where I look up your brudder. I know your brudder will pay me plenty for information about the *Manta*. Ramerez is my pal—"

"Of course," interrupted Ramerez. "But now I have a duty to perform—for the good of my country. I am sure you gentlemen will understand."

Tug understood perfectly. His hands were bound in front of him, and his companions were all trussed in the same manner. The dull blue automatic spoke for itself.

"I don't like this part, Ramerez," said Herman G. Kroll, frowning. "I didn't agree for no killing. Ain't it possible you could put 'em ashore?"

"They must all die," said Ramerez in a silky tone. "These men are American citizens and capable of causing trouble. That is why I brought them here to the fire room."

"With your own hands you will do it?" asked Kroll.

Ramerez the Butcher nodded. "Even my own men will not witness the deed," he said. "The thing must be done secretly. In the top of that ventilator is a block and tackle. When I have disposed of these men, you will haul up the bodies and throw them over the side."

"I quit," announced Herman G. Kroll. "I am a rassler. I don't murder nobody, except on canvas."

"You will obey my orders!" snapped Ramerez. "Climb to the top and lower the rope!"

Herman G. Kroll shook his bullet-head gloomily. "I'm sorry for what I done," he said to Tug Raffin. "You are not a bad fella—even if you couldn't hit the doks." He ascended the fiddley ladder ponderously.

"You, Stephen, will be the first," said Ramerez, brushing a tear from his eye. "I give you that privilege because you are my brother."

"Thank you," said Stephen, deeply affected. "I shall perish for my ideals—for my country!"

"A brave man!" murmured Ramerez, raising the gun. "Have you any last words?"

"Yes," said Stephen, staring at the boilers. "Even though I despise you politically, I will always cherish you as my brother—"

"Cut the guff!" snarled Little Clancy. "Let's get this over with!"

"I never seen such blasted fools!" Rat-line Sam chimed in.

"Hey!" called Herman G. Kroll from the platform above. "There's something stuck in the ventilator. The rope is tied onto it."

Ramerez walked directly under the ventilator and looked up. "It is probably only a bucket," he replied. "They use it to haul up ashes. Give the rope a jerk."

BOTTLE-NOSE BILLINGS drew a deep breath. Rat-line Sam dug his fingernails into the soojee bucket. A block and tackle creaked high above—and a hail of glittering glass smashed down on the fire-room floor.

The bottles landed with the force of exploding bombs. One scored a direct hit, breaking into splinters on the peak of Ramerez's cocked hat. As the rebel commander crumpled to his knees, another one smacked his cervical vertebrae, destroying all active movement.

Tug Raffin stared at the limp, whisky-soaked figure and lost no time in removing the gun from Ramerez's fingers. Little Clancy commenced to saw off Tug's bonds with a sliver of sharp glass.

"Lucky we hid that liquor in the fiddley," jabbered Rat-line Sam gulping what was left in a broken bottle. "I found it in the skipper's cabin when we first came aboard. Billings an' I couldn't get it all in the bucket; so we loaded it on the top of a barrel head."

"Come on men!" Tug rumbled. He pushed Ramerez into the bilge and started into the engine room. Three engineers and a fireman were conversing by the telegraph. When they saw Tug's gun, their hands shot skyward. The Zymanskis ushered them into the tool room and locked the door. Brandishing hammers, wrenches and furnace burners, the jubilant *Bilge and Binnacles* made for the upper deck.

"Let me go first," said Tug, stepping from the deck house. "I've got the gun."

He was overruled. Little Clancy darted past him, swinging a small sledgehammer. The four Zymanskis nearly trampled him under, and Billings ran into the galley to look for another knife.

From the sagging after deck came a series of terrified shouts. The Zymanskis were bashing heads in great style and stuffing their victims into the flooded cargo hold. On the bridge, Little Clancy managed to stash three petty officers in their tracks and was chasing a fourth around the chart room.

Tug pocketed his gun and rounded the deck house. As he crossed the No. 3 hatch, he spied Herman G. Kroll. Kroll took one look and sprinted aft. Tug caught him as he reached the well-deck ladder and rifled a steaming right into the big man's eye. "So you were going to dispose of our bodies!" he thundered. "I'll dispose of you!"

"No—" blubbered Kroll. "It was all a mistake!"

But Tug Raffin was in no mood for parleying. "So you don't think I can shoot ducks!" he sneered. "I'll show you."

He sent a left hook crashing to Kroll's jaw and followed up with a blow that brought welts to the flabby cheek. Kroll tumbled down the ladder, trying to clutch the rungs as he fell. When he hit the well deck, he pulled himself to his feet and raced toward the stern.

Spang!

Herman G. Kroll barreled around, his eyes dilated with horror. Tug Raffin was leaning casually against the rail, sighting the black automatic. "Don't shoot!" bawled Kroll. "I got a wife—"

Spang! The bullet bounced off the deck, an inch from Herman G. Kroll's foot. There was no place to run; so Kroll stood trembling. "I got a wife and four bebbies!" he screeched. "Ain't you got a heart?"

"Run—you big elephant!" Tug stormed. "You said I should shoot at elephants!"

"No—" babbled Herman G. Kroll. "I meant doks! Liddle small doks! You are the best shot I ever seen!"

"That's all I wanted to know," said Tug, lowering the gun. "Take care of him, boys."

The four Zymanski brothers beamed through their whiskers and joyfully stuffed Herman G. Kroll through the manhole.

When Tug reached the bridge, the *Bilge and Binnacles* had the *Manta* well under control. Little Clancy was back at the wheel, and Stephen Hernandez was puffing a cigar in the chart room. "We have won," said Stephen pompously. "The rebels are conquered, and San Sebastian is safe."

"How about the dough?" said Tug.

"As soon as we reach port," promised Stephen, his gold teeth sparkling.

SAN SEBASTIAN turned out to be a peaceful little place with muddy streets and white houses set against the green Cordilleras of the isthmus. Overlooking the curved blue bay stood a tile-roofed mansion with hideous globular minarets which seemed to have strayed away from some Turkish mosque. This was the presidential mansion.

A sweltering noonday sun glared down at this spired monstrosity as Tug and Little Clancy trudged up to the front steps. A Jamaican flunkey garbed in robin's egg

blue opened the door.

"We come to see the President," said Little Clancy. "The President owes us some cash."

The flunkey glanced at their muddy boots, sighed and let them in. After progressing through a long, pink-walled corridor, they entered an elliptical room centered by a fishpond, with tarnished gold hangings on the wall. "I wonder what the President is like?" said Tug thoughtfully. "And I wonder what he did with Ramerez the Butcher and Herman G. Kroll?"

"They'll be shot, of course," said Little Clancy. "Ain't they rebels against the government?"

"Greetings, my friends!" A drape parted at one end of the room, and Stephen Hernandez entered.

"We've been here five days," said Tug. "There's a Grace Liner sailing from the harbor at one o'clock. My men are all ready to leave. Either kick through with the dough; or let us see the President!"

"*I* am the President," said Stephen. "The former executive resigned two days ago—on request. There has been a bloodless revolution in San Sebastian; and my brother and I have settled our difficulties."

"You mean that you an' Ramerez are friends?" asked Little Clancy, quite horrified. "Why, he was gonna shoot you!"

"An unfortunate misunderstanding," said Stephen, blinking his mousy eyes. "We talked matters over and decided to form a new government."

"We're here for the plunder," said Tug. "Twenty bucks per day for every man."

Stephen rubbed his hands and assumed a hurt expression. "That money was promised to you by the *old* government," he explained. "The new Coalition Government cannot be responsible for the old government's debts."

"You ain't intendin' to kick in?" demanded Little Clancy.

"That," said Stephen, "is what I was endeavoring to say. It is best that you leave at once. Mr. Kroll has already been placed aboard the liner— Any violence— and I shall call my guards!"

"That's right," said Little Clancy. "No rough stuff. Stephen is still my pal. He loaned me five dollars to play Slotzheimer's bean game once. Looks like he came out more than even this time!"

Tug Raffin muttered a scathing curse and stalked out of the room. He was tramping down the muddy pathway when Little Clancy caught up with him. "What time does that liner leave?" he asked.

"In twenty minutes."

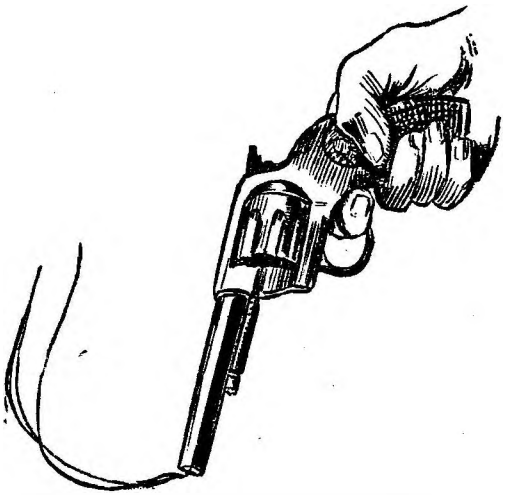
"That'll give us enough time," was the reply. "We'd better get away quick. I just left Stephen in the fish pond!"

"Serves him right," growled Tug. "I don't mind losing the salary he promised us; but we invested some of the *Bilge and Binnacle* Club's money in this trip."

Little Clancy opened his grimy fist and held up two glittering gold objects studded with diamonds. "We'll get the money back with interest," he said confidently. "But I don't know where Stephen's gonna get himself a new pair of choppers!"

Trails West

By BENNETT FOSTER



MILES TRASK, self-exiled from Tramparas, returns to the home range, not as a private citizen, but as lawman sworn to clean up the Gonzalitas rustlers. He takes a job riding line-fence as a cover for his real work, confiding only in Wink Revier and Curly Feltman, one an old friend, the other a new.

Trask suspects Deputy Sheriff Arburg and Bud Pond, but he doesn't know that behind them are his own uncle, Benbow Trask; Asa Ryland, the father of the girl Miles once loved; and Phil Heming, the man who took that girl away from him.

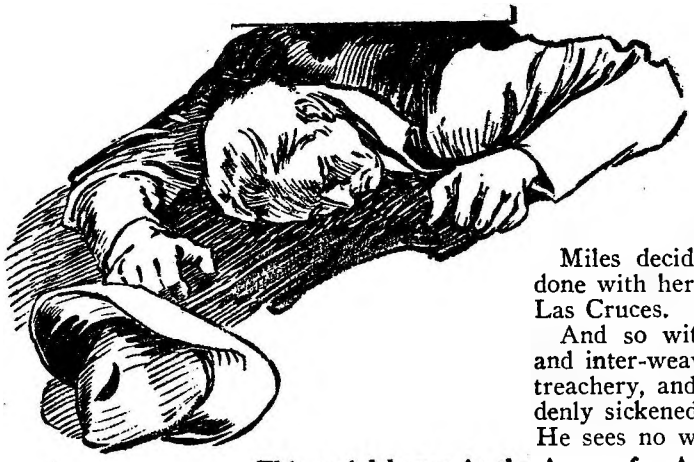
Once secure in the hands of this unholy triumvirate, the control of the rustling gang is slipping into the grasp of "Irish" Keleher —Phil Heming's red-headed foreman—and Bud Pond. When word gets around that Benbow Trask is trying to sell out and leave the country, Keleher and Pond let him know through Asa Ryland that they won't take kindly to this move.

BENBOW TRASK'S presumptive buyers are two Easterners, Grace and Lester King. King puts a good deal of confidence in Miles Trask's opinion, and Benbow knows if he is going to swing the deal, he'll have to win Miles around again. Also he needs Miles' deed to certain land around the ranch before the sale can be completed. Benbow tries and fails, and Grace King senses something of the sort. She is interested in Miles, who is different from the men she knew back East, but is puzzled by his willingness to work at the poorly-paid job of fence-riding. His apparent lack of ambition disappoints and worries her.

She cautions her brother not to go ahead with the deal with Benbow Trask, unless Miles Trask says it is all right.

"There is something wrong there, Lester," she tells her brother. "Call it intuition if you like, but I want to talk with Miles Trask—I want to find out what's behind all this. He hates his uncle, mistrusts him. You should know why before you do any business with Benbow Trask."

MILES' problems are further complicated by the fact that he has promised to take care of Jackie Belland, the daughter of a man shot down, in Miles' presence, by Arburg and Pond on a trumped-up charge of resisting arrest. Miles knows it was cold-blooded murder but at the inquest his testimony clears Arburg and Pond. Miles is not yet ready for a showdown. Jackie has sworn that she herself will kill Bud Pond, since the law has failed; and only the interference of Curly Feltman prevents her the first time she tries.



Miles decides that the only thing to be done with her is to put her in a convent at Las Cruces.

And so with all these threads spinning and inter-weaving into a mesh of violence, treachery, and double-dealing, Miles is suddenly sickened by the task confronting him. He sees no way out . . .

This serial began in the Argosy for August 14

CHAPTER XIII

WOMEN ARE TROUBLE

THE three were up early the next morning and Wink and Curly, after breakfast had been eaten, got their horses from the livery stable and started out of town. Before they left Miles asked Revier to get in touch with Leandro Chavez and find out what the old man wanted. This Wink promised to do.

When he had left his friends Miles strolled back to the hotel and wrote a letter. Having finished it he went out and visited Stern's store. There were some things that he would need if he intended to stay in town for any length of time, and anyhow he had not brought too many clothes into the country with him. Accordingly he purchased shirts, underwear, socks, a few handkerchiefs, and a new pair of bibless overalls.

Tramparas was waking up by then, the business of the little town beginning. Miles went back to the hotel, left his purchases, and walked down the street to Ryland's office.

Ryland was reading his mail. He put down the letter he held and gestured to a chair. "Sit down, Miles," he invited.

Miles made himself comfortable. "You said that you wanted to see me."

Ryland nodded. "How do you and your Uncle Benbow get along?" he asked.

"You know how we get along," Miles replied. "We don't."

Ryland nodded again. "Thought not," he said. "Miles, I am afraid that I have wronged you. I want to square myself with you."

Miles' face showed his surprise.

"When your father died," Ryland continued, "I handled the legal matters pertaining to the estate. Benbow was the executor and he brought the business to me."

"I know that," Miles stated.

"Well," Ryland wet his lips with the tip of his tongue, "since that time Benbow has continued to come to me. I am afraid that he has cheated you, Miles."

"I know he did," Miles flared. "He was partner in the ranch, all right, but I don't believe that he put in the money he claimed. I don't think—"

"Now wait," cautioned Ryland. "Am I right in believing that you want a reckoning with Benbow?"

Miles nodded.

"Then," Ryland announced firmly, "I'll help you. Now here is what I want you to do: I want you to put the matter entirely in my hands, give me a power of attorney and let me go ahead. I am certain that I can bring Benbow to an accounting."

Miles surveyed the lawyer through narrowing eyes. "You and Benbow have been pretty close to each other," he drawled.

"We quarreled," Ryland stated. "Yesterday it came to a head. I took the Kings to the YT as I had promised them, but I am definitely through with Benbow!" There was a ring of sincerity in Ryland's voice.

Miles got up. "I'll think it over, Judge," he said cautiously. If you're through with Benbow I reckon I might do what you want."

"You won't regret it," Ryland promised.

"Still," Miles hesitated in front of his chair, "there's some other things, Judge. You—"

"You mean concerning Ellis," Ryland interposed quickly. "You must not let the fancies of a young girl stand between you and what is rightfully yours. I had nothing to do wilth Ellis' decision, Miles." Again that ring of truth, that aspect of sincerity.

"You mean—?" asked Miles.

"That Ellis made her own decision in the matter," said Ryland. "I had nothing to do with it, I'll swear to that, Miles, upon my honor."

The apparent frankness of the man momentarily disarmed Miles, but only momentarily. Miles asked a question. "That power of attorney," he questioned, "would make you just about the boss as far as I was concerned, wouldn't it?"

"Not at all." Was there something bland, something a little treacherous in Ryland's voice, in the way his eyes lighted?

Miles thought there was. "I would come to you, of course, with anything that—"

"You go ahead," Miles directed. "If you'd come to me with anything that needed me you can get along without a power of attorney. You go ahead and work on Benbow. I'll be here when you need me."

Ryland lowered his eyes to hide his disappointment. This chance was lost. "Thank you for coming in, Miles," he said, and managed to put the proper subdued note of hurt into his tone. "I am sorry that you don't trust me. I will go ahead, however, as you say."

Miles nodded. "And you'll get paid for it," he promised. "Let me know how you come along."

Ryland agreed to that and Miles went on out. When he had closed the door Ryland started up from his desk. He swore under his breath. "I'll go ahead, but for Asa Ryland, not for you!"

MILES walked on down the street and as he walked, debated with himself. Miles Trask knew a good deal about cattle, he had made an excellent sergeant in the Army, and he was a good range man, ranking ace high with the Cattle Sanitary Board. There were subjects, however, concerning which Miles knew nothing. But he was no fool.

Walking along he came to a decision. If Ryland had made him an offer then there was something in it. Ryland would not work for nothing, Miles was sure. If Ryland could help him secure an accounting from Benbow Trask then another lawyer could also help. That was self-evident. Miles resolved at the first opportunity to place his information and his case in the hands of some trustworthy attorney. When he had cleaned up his job and was back in the capitol, he would seek advice. Until then he would do nothing. If Ryland was sincere, well and good; if not, Miles had lost nothing.

The morning was still young and there was the day to pass before Miles could do the thing he had remained in town to do. And he had a problem on his hands: Jackie Belland. Miles turned a corner and walked toward Colin McFee's cottage.

Bridget and Jackie were in the kitchen when Miles knocked. Bridget, her plump arms and her beaming, good-natured face smudged with flour, answered his knock.

"Come in, Miles," Bridget invited. "Come in. Jackie an' me are bakin' pies." Miles followed her along to the kitchen.

Jackie Belland was working at the stove, her face flushed and her dark eyes eager. She nodded and smiled to Miles when he came in and seated himself in a corner. Bridget went directly to the oven, opened the door and peered in. An intriguing odor issued from the oven.

"Smells good," Miles commented.

"She's teaching me to bake," Jackie announced. "I've made two pies and yesterday we made doughnuts."

"That's fine." Miles sniffed again. "Maybe if you learn to bake and keep house, you—you'll sorta settle down some."

Bridget, turning, shook her head at him but he disregarded the warning. Miles had come to lay down the law to Jackie Belland and he intended to do it.

"I want to tell you, Jackie," he continued, "you can't run around like you did. You leave Pond alone. He's bad and he wouldn't care if you are a girl."

"He killed my father, damn him!" Jackie blazed.

"Jackie!" Bridget was horrified. "I'll wash out your mouth with soap an' water. Talkin' like that! I wouldn't blame Miles if he did send you away to school."

"I'm going to send her to school." Miles was definite. "As soon as I get the money. I can't have her—"

"You watch the pies, honey," directed Bridget, interrupting. "Miles, I want to talk to you."

Miles rose from his chair and accompanied Bridget out of the kitchen. In the little parlor Bridget faced him squarely.

"You're never goin' to send her to Las Cruces, Miles? That was just talk to make her behave, wasn't it?"

Miles shook his head. "I'm going to send

her," he said stubbornly. "I promised her father I'd look after her and I will. That's the best way to do it."

"Colin an' me were talkin'." Bridget kept her voice low. "We've never had one of our own, Miles. We thought about adoptin' her."

Again Miles shook his head. "She's wild stock, Bridget," he said. "I know something about her. Her father was an ex-convict. She wouldn't do for you and Colin."

Bridget's voice was as adamant as Miles' own. "That's for me an' Colin to decide," she said. "We've talked it over. After all, Miles, you're not her legal guardian. If we want to adopt her—"

"I'm responsible," Miles set his lips together hard. Bridget couldn't help thinking how suddenly old he looked—how worried. . . .

"We'd give her a good home," she pleaded. "We'd—"

"No," said Miles.

In the little hallway Jacqueline Belland turned and tiptoed back toward the kitchen, dabbing at her eyes with one small, flour-covered hand.

Bridget McFee arose in all her majesty. "We're goin' to adopt her whether you will or not," announced Bridget. "An' it will be on our heads, too. You'll never cheat the child, or Colin an' me." With that declaration she walked out of the room, leaving Miles staring after her, bemused. Presently he grinned, stooped, and picking up his hat, went to the front door. The fate of Jacqueline Belland was settled and Miles Trask had nothing more to say. He knew Bridget McFee.

FROM the McFee cottage Miles went back to town. There he loitered, killing time. After lunch, a wind was picking up a little. A few drops of rain, dust-laden, struck the walk, leaving gray-brown splashes. The street was deserted and Miles sought shelter under the tin awning of the general store. He stood there. Behind him the store door opened; there was a flurry of movement; then Ellis Heming spoke.

"Oh dear! Raining! And I have— Why Miles!"

Miles turned. She stood near him, her arms filled with packages, and the wind, sweeping around the corner of the store, wrapped her clothes close about her body.

"Give me those packages," Miles said. "It's going to storm, I'll take you home."

Ellis surrendered the parcels with a little, nervous smile. With his right hand under her arm to steady her Miles led her along the street.

They passed the Tramparas House, heads bowed against the force of the blast. Grace King, standing in the lobby of the hotel, watching the stormy gusts, saw them pass and turned away from the window. On down the street they fought their way, the drops of rain striking them, until, at the outskirts of the town, they reached Heming's big house.

Standing on the porch while Ellis inserted a key in the lock, Miles decided to say goodbye at the door.

"Come in, Miles," she invited.

"I'd better not," said Miles. "Here are your bundles."

"Don't be silly," Ellis laughed. "You can bring in my packages, at least."

There seemed nothing else for Miles to do. He carried the parcels into the house and put them on the table. When he had disposed of his burden, he removed his hat and stood holding it. Ellis had cast off her hat and coat and stood fluffing her hair about her face, her hands moving swiftly.

"Sit down, Miles."

Miles obeyed. Ellis, her hair arranged to her satisfaction, crossed the room and stood just beside him.

"I didn't think you were coming to see me," she said. "I practically had to kidnap you, Miles."

"I've been busy," Miles excused himself awkwardly.

She laughed again, very softly. You've been afraid to come," she said softly. "Wasn't that it, Miles?"

Miles was dumb in his misery. All the old allure, the old desire for this woman,

welled up in him. He stared straight at the wall.

"I haven't been happy, Miles." Ellis put the proper amount of pathos in her voice. "Sometimes I've wondered. . . ." She let the words trail off.

Ellis Heming sat down on the arm of Miles' chair. She let her body slump until one soft arm rested against Miles Trask's shoulder. "Phil has gone to the ranch," she said softly. "Don't you still like me, Miles?"

Every nerve in Miles Trask's body tingled. There was a soft scent in his nostrils, a softer breath brushing against his cheek. He dared not look up or move. Only ironclad self-discipline held him rigid.

"I've got to go. I've got to go, Ellis."

The arm left his shoulder and Ellis Heming stood up. Her face was flushed and there was a gleam in her eyes; anger perhaps, Miles could not tell. He moved stiffly in his chair, reaching down a long arm and picking up his hat. The movement, the possession of his hat, gave him a sense of security and he stood up.

Ellis Heming had risen from the chair arm and stepped back. She was smiling now, the corners of her full lips curving. "You must hurry," she said. "It's already raining a little."

Miles followed her toward the door. "I'll come back and visit you and Phil," he said as they reached the door. "I meant to come before this."

"Do come back," urged Ellis. "Come back when Phil is here. We'll be glad to see you."

Opening the door Miles bowed to the woman, stiffly, from the waist. The door closed behind him and looking at that blank portal, hearing Miles' steps on the porch, Ellis Heming spoke one word: "Lout!"

CHAPTER XIV

DEATH WITHOUT GUNS

WHEN Miles Trask left Ryland's office, the lawyer spent some time in composing himself. Ryland was an opportunist, a man who made the most of what was offered him. At the moment he was engrossed with Benbow Trask and the YT. There was money in the YT and Ryland wanted his share of it. There was the chance that Benbow would sell the ranch to the Kings and if he did that Ryland would make something from the sale. But the Kings would not buy without Miles' approval and there was yet another obstacle: While Benbow might have sold the YT before Miles became twenty-one, and Miles had no recourse save to sue his trustee, now that Miles was of age the sale could not be consummated without his signature. The YT consisted of owned land, deeded land, and free range, and without the owned land, which controlled the water on the mesa, the ranch was worthless.

Having revolved that phase of the situation in his mind, Ryland fell to considering other questions. Suppose that he quit Benbow? Suppose that he threw his lot with Miles? He could then, acting for Miles, demand an accounting from Benbow as trustee. Ryland had handled all of Benbow's legal work—and some that had not been legal. He knew all the ins and outs of the whole procedure. He could, by going to Miles and working honestly for him, get the whole ranch for the younger Trask. Miles would be, should be at least, properly grateful. But such a procedure would mean only legal fees and surely there must be something better than a lawyer's fee in this. Ryland recalled another thing: Whitey Arburg and Bud Pond would not want Miles to have the YT. In fact, they did not even want Benbow to sell to the Kings. Much as he valued money Ryland valued his safety more and Whitey Arburg would resent any help that Ryland might give Miles, or Benbow, for that matter. It was a very nasty situation.

Having reached that conclusion Ryland again attacked the mail on his desk. He opened a letter or two, slicing the envelopes with a sharp little stiletto and putting them aside after reading. At the bottom of his pile of mail Ryland came upon a long envelope. Opening it he examined its con-

tents and then a slow, vicious smile spread over his face. What he found in that envelope, he believed, had removed one menace at least, for in the long folder was a *Wanted* list of Federal prisoners escaped, and of men indicted for Federal crimes. Halfway through the list of names and pictures was a description and a photograph.

Ryland tapped the list thoughtfully and his smile broadened. "Hasberg, alias Hasler, alias Alberg," he read from the circular. "A tall, blond man, almost white-haired. Eyes, light blue. Scar on the left hand. . . ." Ryland's voice broke off and he finished reading the description in silence.

"Luck," breathed Asa Ryland. "I've had half a hundred of these things and I've never read through one before. So, friend Arburg, you are wanted for mail robbery, for assaulting a messenger, and for killing a guard in an escape from Leavenworth! I wonder if you know it!"

Still chuckling over his discovery Ryland folded the circular and put it in the drawer of his desk. Then he picked up his hat, donned it, and walked from the office. It was time, past time, for Asa Ryland to take his morning drink.

RYLAND did not return to his office before noon but rather stayed in the Golden Rule whiling away time with a Solo game in which Gus Peters, the owner of the saloon, and a visiting ranchman, joined. At noon Ryland ate in the dining room of the Tramparas House, for since his daughter's marriage he did not use his own home except as a place to sleep. After the meal Ryland strolled back to his office. He was there when, just ahead of the rain, Benbow Trask rode in and tied his horse.

Trask ducked under the hitch rail, came to Ryland's door and entered. Walking across the room he took a chair beside the desk and sat down. Ryland nodded to the ranchman, took a stogie from a box on the desk and pushed the box across to Trask. Benbow selected a twisted black cylinder, bit off the end and lit it.

"Well," he said, around the cigar, "did you have any luck with Miles?"

"I did, and I didn't." Ryland considered the glowing end of the stogie.

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't have any luck getting him to sign a power of attorney."

Benbow puffed a moment in silence. "I didn't think you would," he said finally. "Asa, I've about decided that somethin' is goin' to happen to Miles."

Ryland shrugged. "It might," he returned. "I've about made a decision myself." He watched Benbow narrowly.

"What?" Benbow asked gruffly.

"You know." Ryland still watched Benbow closely, "we may have done the wrong thing by Miles."

"What's that to us?" grated Benbow "I've got the ranch an'—"

"But suppose," Ryland said softly, "that I went to work for Miles? Went to work honestly, I mean. Would you have the ranch then?"

"You can't do that!" Benbow dropped his feet from the desk top and came up in his chair. "Yo're in as deep as me. You—"

"I don't think so." Ryland puffed complacently. He had the whip hand over Benbow and now was the time to crack the whip. Benbow had said that he would give Ryland a fourth and Ryland believed that Benbow, under pressure, would disgorge at least a half.

"Damn you!" Benbow's face was livid. "You doublecross me, Asa, an' I'll—"

"You'll do nothing!" There was contempt in Ryland's voice, the contempt of a smart man for one not so smart. "You haven't a thing on me. I've acted for you in everything. I've simply been your attorney, that's all. If I go to work for Miles and petition the court to have you render an accounting of your trust, where will you be?"

Benbow Trask came up out of his chair like a man on springs. His hands shot out and grappled at Ryland's throat. Ryland, face pale, thrust at those hands, struggling up as he did so. He had gone too far, he realized—much too far.

Outside, the wind beat against the building and rain, fired from the blowing clouds, rattled on the window. Inside the office the two men struggled. Benbow was enraged. maddened by fear. Ryland, the larger man and the stronger despite his soft living, at first simply strove to force Benbow back into the chair, but Benbow's hands gripped the lawyer's throat, the calloused thumbs digging in, and Ryland, his calmness gone, fought for his life.

The two caromed from the wall, overturned a chair and reeled back to the wall again. From the wall the struggle carried them to the desk. Benbow, back toward the desk, was snarling like a dog grappling with another. Ryland, his big arms growing heavy, heaved at the smaller man. The two went down and Benbow beneath, struck the floor. Suddenly the grip on Ryland's throat relaxed. He struggled up from the floor, hauling Trask with him, and dropped Benbow in the chair beside the desk which, miraculously, had not been upset.

"Curse you, Benbow," grated Ryland, his hands touching his throat where that choking grasp had been. "Don't go crazy on me. You . . . Benbow! Benbow!"

Benbow Trask did not answer. He was bent forward in the chair, one arm dangling limply, and on the back of his head blood oozed from from a small triangular depression. Ryland put his hand on the man's shoulder and shook him. The arm flopped lifelessly.

"Benbow!" Ryland whispered the name. "Benbow!"

There was no answer. There would never be an answer.

AFTER a time, after what seemed years had dragged past, Asa Ryland picked up his chair and sat down behind the desk. His face was white and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. He mopped his forehead with a big handkerchief that he drew from his pocket, and stared at the dead man lolling before him. Gradually Ryland's brain cleared. Gradually his sanity returned. Fear preyed upon him but he cast it off. Benbow Trask was dead. He must get rid of the body. How? That was the question: How?

Gradually a plan was formulated. Gradually a scheme came into being and as it formed Asa Ryland's eyes narrowed. An opportunist, Asa Ryland, and a cunning, clever, treacherous man. He got up from his chair, stepped around the desk and set the dead body of Benbow Trask upright, propping the man's back, placing the limp hands in the dead man's lap. Then, with the first part of his plan complete he went to the window and standing back so that he could see the street but still not be seen, he waited.

There was little activity on the street. The rain beat steadily, and at the hitchrail Benbow Trask's horse stood, head hanging dejectedly. A man passed. Presently another came, head lowered against the wind, and Ryland moved to the door and opened it.

"Adolfo!" he called.

The walking man turned. Ryland stood in the doorway. "Do you want to earn half a dollar?" he asked.

Adolfo took a step. He was before the door now and could see into the office, could see Benbow Trask sitting upright beside the desk. *"Si,"* said Adolfo.

"Then take Mr. Trask's horse to the livery barn and put him in out of the rain," directed Ryland. "And Adolfo, have the YT buckboard hooked up and the saddle horse fastened to lead, and have the hostler deliver them at the Tramparas House after supper. Mr. Trask is going down there to see his nephew. Can you remember that?"

Adolfo nodded. *"Si,"* he said again. "YT buckboard at hotel. Mr. Trask goin' to see his nephew."

"That's right," agreed Ryland. "Here's your half dollar."

He remained in the doorway while Adolfo took Benbow's horse from the hitchrail and walking, rather than ride the wet saddle, led the animal down the street. Then Asa Ryland closed the door.

Back in the office again, alone with the dead man, Ryland stood a moment, staring down at Benbow Trask. Trask's jaw had

dropped open, showing his uneven, yellow teeth, and his eyes were blank and sightless. The eyes annoyed Ryland and he moved a step forward and closed them, using his finger tip. Then he nodded.

"This is the way, Benbow," said the lawyer, as though Trask could still hear him. "With you I'd have got a part, and with Miles a much smaller part; but when Miles is in jail for your murder, then I'll have it all."

There remained things for Ryland to do. He set about methodically to search Trask, examining the papers he took from the dead man's pockets. Satisfied that there was nothing of importance, the lawyer sat down again and went over the plan he had formed, perfecting it, rechecking details. Ryland recognized the one weak point in the scheme, one spot in which it might break down, but he accepted the risk. There is a weak link in every plan.

The lawyer sat in his office for a long time, the door locked, the shades drawn. The wind had stopped but the rain fell steadily. Late in the day when dusk had fallen, Ryland took his hat and an old umbrella from its corner and sallied out. Down the street in front of the Tramparas House, a team stood, dejectedly, hitched to a buckboard over the seat of which a tarpaulin had been thrown. Beside the team, reins tied to the hames of the off-horse, was Benbow Trask's saddle horse. Surely that team must have been noticed, must have been seen by more than one person entering or leaving the hotel. Satisfied, Ryland went back to his office and his lonely waiting. From time to time he glanced at his watch and when the hands pointed to eleven o'clock, the lawyer got up from his chair. The time for action had come. Again he put on his hat. Leaving the umbrella in the corner, he went out of his office.

CHAPTER XV

UNDER COVER

THE few street lights, kerosene lamps on posts, gave a ghostly illumination to the street, and Ryland clung to the shadows. Before the Tramparas House he was forced momentarily to expose himself and he cursed as he fought the wet knot the the team's tie rope. Then it came free and he led the team away from the hitch-rail. Not until he was in the shadows again did Ryland stop and mount to the seat. He drove quietly, using an alley paralleling the main thoroughfare, and within minutes arrived at his office. There, in the rear of the little building, he stopped. The team stood, heads hanging. Ryland wrapped the reins about the whip socket and dismounting from the seat, fastened the tie rope to a post.

Ryland was gone for some time after he had tied the team. When he returned he carried a limp body which he placed in the bed of the buckboard under the spring seat that, temporarily, had been put in the rear. With the body disposed of Ryland untied the team and climbed to the seat. Unwrapping the lines he started the team and drove toward the east edge of town. Well out of town he stopped and, holding the reins in his left hand, felt under his coat with his right. Still holding the team tightly he leaned back and fumbled with his right hand. There were two two reports, two flashes of flame, both muffled by the rain. The team ran, only to be pulled down once more to a walk. Again Ryland wrapped the lines, loosely now, about the whip socket and then stopping the team, climbed down over the wheel. Standing beside the buckboard he nodded decisively. The team stirred, moved, and Ryland made no sign to check them. The horses walked ahead, bending toward the south, putting their tails to the rain. Ryland waited until they were gone and then, turning, walked steadily toward Tramparas.

When he reached the town he went directly to his office. There in the light of his lamp he cleaned the gun he had fired, making liberal use of rags and oil. Putting the oily rags in his pocket, he blew out the lamp and locking his office door behind him went down the street again. Before the Tramparas House he paused then

boldly entered. It was past midnight and Sam Warfler, yawning, started up from behind the desk and came around its edge.

"Judge," said Warfler, surprise in his voice.

"I've come to make a little collection, Sam," Ryland said pleasantly, keeping his voice low.

Sam Warfler grunted as though the words were a blow struck below the belt. "If I'm not mistaken, you owe me something, Sam," continued Ryland.

Warfler nodded glumly.

"There was the instance of your stealing from the till here in the hotel," Ryland said crisply. "You will remember that I forgave you the theft."

Warfler nodded dumbly and Ryland continued, a cruel smile on his lips. "I haven't mentioned this before," he went on, "but I happen to know that the Colorado authorities seem to be keenly interested in your whereabouts. Someone that answers your general description deserted his wife and family in Colorado about seven years ago. At the time he was wanted for assault and when he left he took two blooded horses. Of course, Sam, I haven't seen you."

Warfler gulped and opened his mouth to speak, but Ryland interrupted. "You've been very obliging, Sam," he said, "ever since you were placed here in the Tramparas House. I hope that you will continue to be obliging."

"I know you got it on me," whined Warfler. "I been payin' you back ever since that time, Judge. Didn't I tell you just the other day about Miles Trask an' his uncle quarrelin'?"

"You did," Ryland agreed crisply, "but you've got to help me again, Sam. First, I want you to put these in Trask's room." Ryland brought the greasy rags from his pocket. "Throw them under the bed, back against the wall. You'll do that!" there was no question there, but a command.

Warfler received the rags and looked at them uncomprehendingly. "I can do that," he said. "Trask's out right now. He—"

"Never mind his being out, or . . . No! Remember it! And remember the quarrel, Sam, the quarrel between Miles and Benbow. They quarreled tonight, after supper!"

"But," expostulated Warfler, "that was Sunday. They—"

"Tonight, you fool!" snapped Ryland. "Tonight after supper. You heard them. Benbow Trask's team and rig have been in front of the hotel for two or three hours. If you forget this, I'll remember a number of things you'd rather I didn't. Now—do you remember?"

"It was tonight, after supper."

"Good! Where is Trask's room?"

"On the ground floor. Down the hall."

"Put these rags under his bed and don't forget that you heard them quarrel. You'll live to be a happy man, Sam."

Sam Warfler surveyed Ryland with piggish eyes, eyes that were shrewdly speculative. "I hope so," he said with unction.

"Good night, Sam."

"Good night, Judge."

Ryland turned and went out. Sam Warfler hesitated momentarily eyeing the greasy rags he held, then turning he shuffled across the lobby toward the hall.

WHEN Miles Trask fled from the Hemings' house he went directly to the hotel. The encounter with Ellis had shaken him, had strained his self-control until he had forced himself away, knowing that the control might break. Reaching the Tramparas House he went to his room and stayed there, nor did he leave it until supper time.

Lounging in his room, waiting for the time for action, his mind was concerned with Ellis Heming. Her face, her hair, her soft voice, the arm that had rested against his shoulder, all of those things remained with Miles; but somehow they did not please him. He could not help but compare Ellis with another girl, could not but think of Grace King. He had never seen a girl like Grace King, and Ellis Heming suffered in the comparison.

"You fool!" Miles told himself. "You poor danged fool! Thinking about a girl like that. You—" He rose from the bed

and walked across the room. Why was he a fool? A girl like Grace King was, after all, human.

At supper time Miles ate in the dining room of the hotel where he was joined by Lester King and Grace. They talked pleasantly throughout the meal and when they had finished Lester invited Miles to visit with them. Having other business Miles excused himself and went back to his room where he got his hat and returning to the lobby, went out into the rain. His first stop was at the Golden Rule Saloon where visiting at the bar he watched the lights in Stern's store across the street. After a time the lights were extinguished.

"I'd think," Miles said to the bartender, "that Stern would keep a night-man in the warehouse now, after the scare he got."

The bartender laughed. "You don't know Stern," he said. "Stern's too tight to pay out the extra cash. That was just some puncher havin' a joke last night. Gosh, but Stern was sore!"

"He was pretty mad," Miles agreed. "Well, home is a good place to be on a night like this. So long."

Leaving the Golden Rule, Miles returned to the Tramparas House where he acquired paper and pen and ink from Sam Warfler and went to his room. Some time before eleven he reappeared in the lobby and mentioning to Warfler that he was going to mail a letter on the train, went out into the rain again.

At the depot he found that the train would be on time and he waited, keeping the second-trick operator company until, with much snorting, the train came in. Miles gave his letter to the clerk in the mail car and when the train had pulled out, its lights winking red down the track, he bade the agent good night and started back toward town.

Wrapped in storm and blackness, Tramparas slept. Even the lights of the Golden Rule and the other saloons were out as Miles, walking through the rain, came to the street by Stern's warehouse.

The padlock and hasp at the back of the warehouse afforded considerable resistance to Miles' efforts. He worked with the barrel of his Colt, prying at the hasp, wrenching at it. The barrel of a Frontier Model Colt makes a fairly good, very stout bar. Miles won his argument with the lock. He slid back the door and slipped inside, pushing the door closed behind him. Match after match flamed as Miles examined the hides that were piled near the door. Over six or more of then he spent considerable time, then satisfied at last he again went to the door, slid it open and listened intently. Hearing nothing but the fine murmur of the rain and the heavy spat of water falling from the eaves, Miles went out again into the night. He could not repair the damage he had done the lock and did not try. Sliding the door until it was closed he jumped down from the loading platform and started toward the hotel. Rounding the corner of the building beyond the warehouse and store, he ran squarely into a small, dark body. Miles grappled with the person he had encountered and meeting with no resistance, rasped a whispered question:

"Who is it?"

There was no answer. The slight figure in Miles' grasp shook with a sob.

"Who is it?" Miles rasped again.

"It's me," said a small voice.

"Jackie!" exclaimed Miles. "What are you doing here?"

"You were going to send me away," sobbed Jackie Belland. "You were going to send me to the convent. I'm running away."

Miles shook the girl. His relief was so great that he could hardly repress a shout. "No, Jackie," he said, "no. I'm not going to send you away. I'm surely not going to. Bridget and Colin are going to adopt you and you can live with them as long as you want."

Small, round arms were thrown about Miles' neck, and the slim body against his shook with sobs. Miles strove to quiet the girl but with no immediate success. He talked to her quietly, reassuring her again and again that she was safe, that she was to stay with the McFees. Gradually that

calm voice, those reassuring words, had their effect. Jacqueline Belland ceased her sobbing.

"But how did you get out?" demanded Miles. "Where were you going?"

"I got out the window," Jackie answered. "I was going to run away. I don't know where. How can I get back now? Bridget has been so good, and Colin is just—just" —again sobs shook her—"like Frenchy. Oh, I can't leave them."

"You aren't going to, Jackie," promised Miles. "I'll take you back and put you right through the window you came out of. Bridget and Colin will never know about it. I'll never tell and you won't either."

And so with his arm about the girl, with Jackie Belland, childlike and trusting, holding his hand, Miles Trask moved through the rain and the dark of Tramparas.

COLIN McFEE'S cottage was unlighted. The window that Jackie had used in making her escape gave easily to Miles' hands. He opened it, helped the girl to go through and when the window was closed, turned and went back toward town. Reaching the Tramparas House he sought his room and lit the lamp. Swiftly pulling off his soggy clothing he rubbed himself down with a rough towel and went to bed. Lying there, with the velvety blackness around him, a feeling of accomplishment welled up in Miles Trask.

That night in Stern's warehouse Miles had partially answered the question he had been sent to solve. There, delving into the pile of dry hides stacked near the door, lighting match after match, he had seen brands. Some of the brands were clean, and inspected from the flesh side showed no re-burning, but others showed by the heavy tracery over one portion of the brand that they had been altered. There were Bar Quarter Circles that had been burned to a Sickle; there were Rafter T brands that had been changed to Diamond Lazy H; and there was a T Three Quarter Box that had been altered to a Window-sash. And on every altered hide there was a small hook holding-brand that he had seen on the ribs of the Diamond Lazy H heifer the day he had lost his shears.

Two things Miles gathered from the brands: First, that Whitey Arburg was crooked, that as a brand inspector Arburg was letting rustled cattle get by. That meant that Arburg was being paid, and well paid. Second, Miles knew that many, perhaps all, of the outfits in the Gonzalitas were handling stolen cattle. From that point he delved into speculation and reasoning. It was not reasonable that all of the men below the hill would steal cattle. Miles knew many of them, had known them for a long time. They were honest men and it would take a great deal to change them. Another thing he knew was the fact that the small pile of hides in Stern's warehouse could not account for all the cattle that were being stolen, nor by any stretch of the imagination could Tramparas use all the beef from those cattle. That meant that the cattle were being shipped, but who would ship them? Plainly the man or men who had seen to Whitey Arburg's appointment as brand inspector. To verify his own suspicions Miles had already written to find out who had recommended Arburg.

There were two big ranches near Tramparas: The YT and the Three Dollar. Studying it over, recalling details, revolving facts and conjectures in his mind, Miles Trask shrewdly surmised just what was happening below the hill. But conjecture is not proof and a fine theory does not stand in a court of law. Miles had enough to go on, but not enough to afford positive evidence.

But he could get evidence. There were men below the hill, a number of men, and some of them surely were implicated in the rustling. An idea struck Miles and he grinned there in the dark. Pick the right man, apply pressure, and things were bound to happen. Leandro Chavez and Primo Sisneros had closed their lips, refusing to talk. Miles did not believe that Leandro knew much about the whole thing. He recalled his meeting with Keleher at Leandro's house. Keleher was protecting

Leandro and plainly Keleher was one of the men that stole cattle. Sisneros was a hard case; no use to work on Sisneros. But there was another man, a small and excitable man who would run to the boss to talk if he were pinched: Esteban Romero. Miles would pinch Romero in the morning and then see which way he ran. Still with the grin on his face, Miles turned on his side and pillowed his head on one muscular arm.

CHAPTER XVI

GUN-FIRE

WHEN Wink Revier and Curly Feltman told Miles Trask goodbye and headed out of Tramparas they were going back to work. Both men knew that they had neglected their duties and both realized that they would have a full day ahead of them. They discussed the fact as they headed toward Gonzalitas Hill.

"First thing we know," announced Wink, "we'll get ourselves fired. The Stock Association don't hire fence-riders to go gallivantin' 'round rescuing girls that get into trouble." He looked keenly at Curly. Curly blushed and Wink, seeing that he had hit something, decided to do a little rawhiding.

"Girls are chancy critters, the best you can say," he drawled. "Now you take that Jackie: She's raised enough hell to do any one female, but I'll bet that she'll prod around and make some more trouble."

"It took nerve for her to take a shot at Pond," defended Curly.

"You kind of like her, don't you?" drawled Wink.

Curly crimsoned and Wink grinned wickedly. "French girl," he observed. "They do say that them French women make good cooks. Think you'l like French cookin', Curly?"

"Lay off, Wink," pleaded Curly. "You know—well, Miles is goin' to send her to the Sisters at Las Cruces."

"Marry her, kid, an' keep her in the country," advised Wink. "Shucks, Miles wouldn't have nothin' to say about yore wife."

"I ain't got a thing," objected Curly seriously. "I couldn't support a wife."

Wink, realizing suddenly that his joking suggestion had been taken to heart, broke in. "Look here, kid, I was rawhidin'. She's a nice girl an' all that, but she's just a kid, an' so are you. Now don't you go doin' nothin' rash."

Curly made no answer and Wink, wisely letting the subject drop, spoke of other things.

"Look," he said. "We'll throw off the road down below an' ride the upper piece of our fence. We can get in by noon or mebbe a little after. We'll do that. Then this afternoon we can ride the lower fence. It'll take all day, but that way, doublin' up, we can do what there is to be done an—"

"Somebody's got to go see what Leandro wanted of Miles."

Wink nodded. "All right," he agreed. "You do that this afternoon an' I'll ride your piece of fence. Then we'll have it all done."

"If that's the way you want to do it," said Curly.

"That's as good as any," grunted Wink. "Well, another mile an' we'll hit the bottom."

REACHING the bottom of Gonzalitas Hill they put their horses to a long trot, covering the miles, and at the end of an hour they turned from the road and swung toward the fence. Striking it they kept their horses moving. Behind them the clouds hung heavy over the mesa. An hour after they had reached the fence the first of the wind struck them, but the wind was at their backs and they made nothing of it. When the first few drops of rain fell Wink swore mildly.

About one o'clock they finished the ride, sighting the Coffin camp, and there Curly branched off, going across the horse pasture to bring in the remuda while Wink continued along the fence. Curly came in with the horses shortly after Wink reached the cabin. The rain was striking down now, coming with full force, and the storm

was working around to the north. The two saddle horses were put in the shed and the others penned in the corral, and Curly and Wink made a run for the house. Safely inside they removed their coats, swung the water from their hats, then, dividing the work, set about building a fire and getting a lunch ready.

"Pretty bad storm," Wink said as he stuffed the stove with wood. "I guess we'll lay in this afternoon."

Curly shook his head. "I'm goin' to Leandro's," he stated.

"Well," Wink grunted, "if that's the way you feel about it I'll stick on my old slicker an' ride the lower fence. You young fellow's got too much energy for us old men."

Curly grinned and Wink returned the smile. Secretly he was proud of Curly but he would not have let Curly know it for all the world.

WHILE the two men in the Coffin camp prepared their meal, some miles below them two others talked in a shack. Emelio Sisneros had come bearing tidings and Bud Pond was listening.

"Leandro," Emelio completed his tale, "sent word by Jose Valverde to Miles Trask. I saw Jose this morning an' he told me."

Bud Pond scowled. "Leandro sent word, huh?" he growled.

Emelio nodded.

"Why did you tell Leandro that Trask was a brand inspector?" Pond demanded.

Emelio's voice was excited. "I did not tell him," he refuted. "Leandro was at the house. I have been talking to Tio Segundo an' to my cousin about what you say, an' they do not keep still when Leandro comes."

But Pond grunted disgustedly. "An' what do you think Leandro wants of Trask?" he rasped.

"What could he want?" Emelio spread his hands wide.

Again Pond grunted. He had, he knew, made a serious mistake when he confided Trask's identity to the Sisneros. The Sisneros were useful, they were more than useful, but they were not particularly discreet. Bud Pond was in a predicament. His occupation of the old Belland cabin had been resented by the Sisneros. The cabin had been promised to Emelio by Arburg who had changed his mind and sent Pond down to occupy the place instead. Emelio had not liked that.

But Pond was not particularly concerned with what Emelio did or did not like. The Sisneros were too deeply implicated with Arburg and with Pond to talk out of turn. Emelio, his cousin, his father and his uncle, had ridden with Pond and Keleher. They had brought cattle from Texas back along the Cow Thief Trail and the Sisneros, Pond was sure, would not revolt against Arburg's ruling. What concerned Pond most was the fact that Leandro Chavez knew that Miles Trask was a brand inspector. There was something to think about.

Bud Pond was not a thinking man. He was a doer, rather than a planner, but he was well posted as to the actual situation in the Gonzalitas and now he was worried about that situation. It was a nice set-up if nothing slipped, but here was a chance for a slip.

Working with the Sisneros, Pond, Arburg, and Keleher, were sitting pretty. They stole cattle, preying on the herds of the ranchmen that controlled the range in the border country, and these stolen cattle were brought into the Gonzalitas where they were rebranded. Not only did Pond and his accomplices steal cattle, they bought stolen cattle. There were rustling outfits in Texas and in Indian Territory who knew that once the Gonzalitas was reached they could dispose of their beef.

In the Gonzalitas there were perhaps ten native ranchmen and thus there were ten brands. Arburg had conceived the scheme of reworking all stolen brands into one of the Gonzalitas' irons. So with ten or more brands to choose, there was hardly an iron that could not be reburned. The rebranded cattle were marked with a small holding mark and at periodic roundups were cut

out and shipped. The shipping was easy. Phil Heming or Benbow Trask, owning the Three Dollar and the YT, shipped the cattle. They used forged bills of sale and with Arburg as stock inspector encountered no difficulty for at that time there was no inspection in the central markets. Heming had been the originator of the scheme, using his own Three Dollar brand as the reworking iron, but Arburg, cunning and unscrupulous, had seen the possibilities of the idea and had enlarged and elaborated it.

THERE was, of course, no question of the coöperation of the Sisneros family. They had been in from the first; but the other native ranchmen of the Gonzalitas had been forced to become unwilling allies. They did not know, definitely, what was happening, but they did know that when they found an animal bearing their brand and a small holding brand, they were to leave it strictly alone. That fact had been impressed firmly upon them by Pond, by Arburg, and by Keleher. Even Leandro Chavez had been brought into the game for the Bar Quarter Circle of a big Indian Territory outfit, worked readily into Leandro's Sickle. Both brands were on the ribs and Leandro's Crop Right, Underbit Left earmark entirely obliterated the ear mark of the Territory ranch. Keleher had dealt with Leandro, winning the old man's confidence and regard. Leandro was too old to do a great deal of riding and Keleher, befriending the old man, had thoroughly established himself. Sometimes, Pond thought, Keleher was too good to Leandro. Pond's way was not to win friendship but to enforce obedience.

Emelio stood silent while Pond thought things out. When Pond did not speak Emelio moved nervously and finally that nervous movement annoyed Pond.

"Stand still!" he ordered. "You think that Leandro is goin' to tell Trask about what's been goin' on down here?"

"I don't know." Emelio shrugged. "Many people like Leandro. Many people come an' talk to him. All my people take his advice. If Leandro should tell Trask—"

"Huh!" Pond caught the idea. "An' Leandro sent word by Valverde that he wanted to see Trask," Pond repeated.

"*Si,*" Emelio nodded.

"We can't take a chance," Pond decided. "Blazes, I wish Whitey would show up down here. He'd know what to do."

"When will I have this house?" asked Emelio. "My cousin an' me have pulled fence for two days. We will have it down in another week. My father has talked to the Pias, an' Rufina an' me—"

"I know you want to get married!" snapped Pond. "You'll have to wait awhile."

"Arburg promised me this house." Emelio announced stubbornly.

"An' you'll get it!"

"When?" Emelio was insistent.

"When we get good an' ready to give it to you," snapped Pond. "You get on out now an' get at the fence. It's all got to come down. You can use the posts an' wire when you set up your place. *Vamos!*"

Sullenly Emelio retired, and Bud Pond, scratching his shock of brown hair, sat down to think. Being what he was Pond could see but one way out of this difficulty. The man was bloodthirsty as a weasel but he lacked the weasel's courage. He could kill a man without compunction, he could bluff and bully, but he could not meet danger face to face. He knew the potentialities of Miles Trask's presence in the country and he would gladly have killed Miles Trask, using a rifle and hiding himself in a draw, but he would not meet Trask face to face. That opportunity had been offered and Pond had rejected it. There remained, however, Leandro Chavez, an old man, a man who was not dangerous in action, and who yet possessed dangerous knowledge.

Bud Pond got up from the box on which he sat. Outside the shack a flurry of rain was beginning and Pond, growling at the weather, pulled a yellow pommel slicker from a nail. Sliding into it he went out and on down to the crude pole corral that Frenchy Belland had built. There was a

horse in the corral, a horse that stampeded to the farther side when it saw the man approaching. Bud Pond swore at the horse and, stopping at the shed, picked up his rope.

WHILE Bud Pond was roping and saddling his trembling horse, three other men were roping mounts and preparing to ride. At the Coffin camp Wink Revier complained loudly and bitterly of Curly Feltman's ambition, while he was inwardly pleased. At the Three Dollar, Irish Keleher hauled a big grullo out of the remuda and gave directions to the two Three Dollar cowpunchers who were with him.

"I'm goin' over to Chavez'," said Keleher. "I'll be back tonight if I don't take a notion to ride on over to Sisneros' place. If I don't come in tonight you two can take a load of salt out to the Bosque well tomorrow an' leave it. Then grease the well an' throw on a load of wood. The boss may be out tonight with some word for us."

Case Bride and Bert Haroldson, the two men that made up the permanent crew at the Three Dollar, nodded. These two, with the Sisneros, Pond and Keleher, comprised the working crew below the hill, the men who did the actual rustling. Not equipped with the fortitude and brains to plan, they were nevertheless perfectly capable of carrying out orders. There are such men in every bunch. Case Bride and Bert Haroldson were tools.

Having delivered his orders Irish stuck his saddle on the grullo, mounted, and rode south. And as Irish Keleher rode with the rain beating against the back of his slicker, Bud Pond forced his horse across the wind and cursed the weather, and Curly Feltman ducked his head to get the protection of his broad-brimmed hat, and bucked the storm.

Keleher had the longest distance to go and he was in no particular hurry; Curly Feltman had almost as long a way, but he pushed along. Bud Pond's ride was shorter than the others' and Bud Pond was anxious to get his business finished. Bud Pond arrived first at Leandro Chavez' house.

Dismounting from his horse and tying the nervous animal, Pond set methodically about the thing he was to do. Leandro's dog came barking from the barn but Pond paid no heed to it. Slicker dragging, he walked toward the house and, as he reached it, Leandro opened the door. Leandro stood in the doorway and then with native courtesy invited his caller to enter. Pond went in. Taking off his hat he shook the water from its brim and then replacing it began to unfasten his slicker. As he moved he commented upon the weather. Leandro answered politely. The rain, said Leandro would be good. It meant that there would be early grass.

Bud Pond finished unsnapping his slicker and allowed it to trail open. His Colt, scabbarded, was at his hip. Bud Pond pulled out the Colt, moving deliberately. He raised the weapon as deliberately as he had drawn it and standing not five feet from Leandro Chavez, he fired three times. The last slug from the Colt caught the old man as he fell.

OUTSIDE the door the dog went wild and at the fence Bud Pond's horse danced to the end of the tied reins, but beyond that there was no excitement. Bud Pond holstered his weapon and looked down at the old man, a huddled heap of clothing on the floor. Then he nodded with satisfaction and began to fasten his slicker once more.

Outside the cabin a man pulled in his horse beside the fence and, awkward in his slicker, dismounted. Curly Feltman had arrived. A quarter of a mile away Irish Keleher's big grullo came up out of the creek and struck a slow trot.

Curly, noting the other horse at the fence, advanced to the house. He was forced to move the dog from the doorway, lifting the animal on the toe of his boot and depositing him away from the door. As he put his hand on the door knob the door opened and a man in a pommel slicker came through, running squarely into Curly.

The man reeled back, snatching at the door jamb for support, and Curly recoiled from the meeting. Instantly both recovered equilibrium. Curly stepped forward.

Through the water that dripped from his hat brim he saw Leandro huddled on the floor, saw the snarling face of Bud Pond. Curly clawed at his coat, ripping it open, trying to get at the gun he wore. Pond, too, was ripping at his coat, jerking loose the fostenings. Pond reached his gun first, and Curly, still trying, jumped back. Tripping over his trailing slicker, he went down. At the fence Irish Keleher slid down from his grullo and at a run, made for the house. Keleher was wearing a walking slicker and was not hampered as were the other two. As he ran Keleher opened his coat and when he reached the house his gun was out, in his hand.

Curly came up, his Colt freed. In the doorway Pond lifted his gun, and reaching the house Keleher yelled; "Hey!"

For an instant action was suspended.

The big redhead held his gun pointed at Curly. Under its menace Curly dropped his own weapon and Pond, now that the necessity of instant action was gone, held his fire. Keleher, watching Curly, spoke to the brown-bearded man.

"What's this, Pond?"

"This damned fool came buttin' in," snarled Pond. "Go ahead an' finish him."

"Get inside," ordered Keleher.

Pond stepped back from the door and reluctantly Curly Feltman moved through the opening, Keleher behind him.

Inside the cabin the big red-headed man caught sight of Leandro Chavez huddled on the floor. He drew in his breath sharply and swinging away from Curly Feltman so that he faced Pond, Keleher snapped a question. "What did it?"

"Me," Pond answered, satisfaction in his voice. "He'd sent word he wanted to see Trask. I come over. I reckon he won't spill his guts now."

"Damn you!" Curly swore fiercely. "You murderin'— Go on an' shoot, why don't you? You'd better, because if I ever get out of here—"

"Shut up kid," Keleher's voice was calm. "So it was you, Bud?"

"Yeah," answered Pond, and then, catching something in Keleher's voice that Curly missed, said: "What you goin' to do about it, Irish?" Pond still held his Colt and as he spoke he brought it up.

But he did not complete the motion. Behind Curly Feltman a shot roared, and then another. Curly winced as those shots crashed out, and then suddenly the boy realized that he was alive, standing on his feet, and that the shots were not for him. In front of Curly Feltman, Bud Pond made a little brushing gesture with his hands. His gun thudded down to the floor and then Pond pitched back and down, the pommel slicker falling about him.

For an instant Curly stood still, then very slowly he turned. Irish Keleher was standing, his gun still lifted, his body bent forward peering through the trickle of smoke that came up from his weapon."

"Why—?" began Curly.

Not taking his eyes from the man he had killed, Irish Keleher answered that question. "Leandro," said Irish slowly, "was a friend of mine."

IN a moment he lowered his gun and turned to Curly. Keleher's eyes were bright as they searched Curly's face. Curly answered the question they asked, shaking his head. "Not me," said Curly. "I'd have done it myself but my gun fouled under my slicker an' he got the drop. You saved my life."

"He killed old Leandro," Keleher said slowly, sliding his Colt back into its holster. "He had it comin'."

"He had it comin'," agreed Curly, wondering what was next.

Keleher turned and walked to the door. Stepping out into the rain he bent and retrieved the gun Curly had dropped. Putting the gun in the pocket of his slicker he came back inside the house.

"Look, kid," Keleher began awkwardly, "would you help me bury Leandro?"

"Sure," Curly agreed. "I'll help you with 'em both if you say so."

Keleher shook his head. "Just Leandro," he said softly. "An', kid—"

"Yes?"

"When I leave here I'm goin' a long ways south. You ain't goin' to be in a hurry to tell about it, are you?"

"I ain't goin' to be in a hurry," agreed Curly.

"Well then," Keleher's voice was still soft, "let's find a shovel."

There was a shovel in the shed and working together, taking alternate turns with the implement, the two men dug a grave in the sandy soil. They dug it deep and when it was finished Keleher went to the house, reappearing after a time with a blanket-wrapped body. The body was placed in the hole they had dug and with that done Keleher fell silently to work, shoveling in sand. When the sand was mounded Keleher took poles from the corral to cover the grave, and Curly joined him.

"Thanks," said Keleher, when the last pole was in place. "You might make a ride now, kid."

As Curly hesitated Keleher pulled the youngster's gun from his slicker pocket.

"You might need this," Keleher said awkwardly. "Go on, now, kid."

Curly took the gun. "I ain't thanked you—" he began.

"Drop it, kid," said Irish. "Just climb your horse an' pull out. Go on now."

There was nothing else to do and Curly Feltman, walking like a man asleep, went to the fence, untied his horse and crawled up into the wet saddle. When he looked back Irish Keleher, a giant in a yellow slicker, was standing beside the grave.

Horse and rider disappeared into the gathering dusk and the drizzling rain. Keleher did not see them go. He looked at the poles that covered the grave and he said three words: *"Adios, amigo mio."*

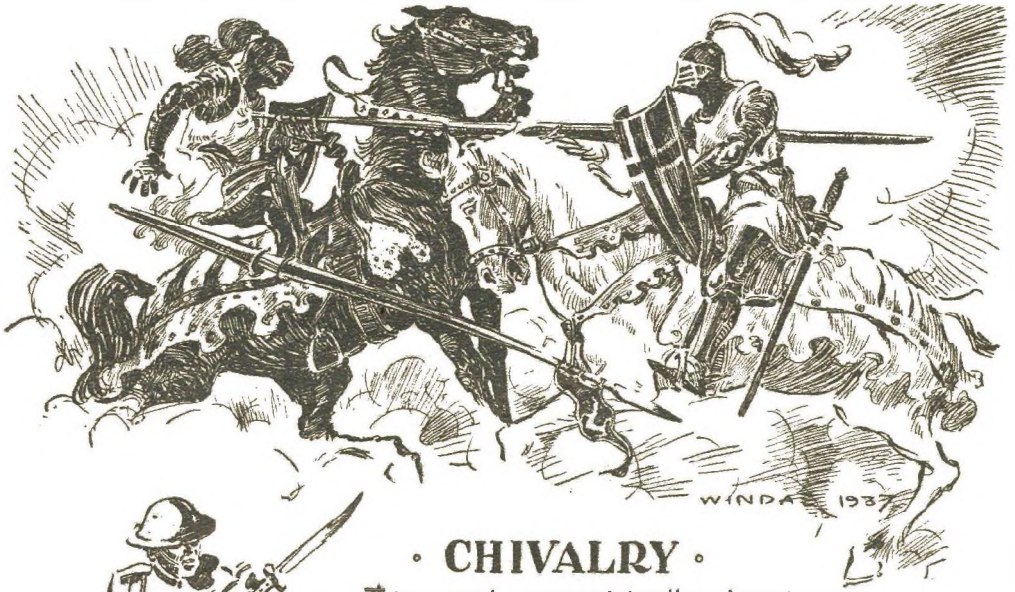
At the door of Leandro Chavez' house he hesitated, then swiftly he stepped in, caught a booted foot and hauled the body of Bud Pond through the doorway. Leaving the body beside the door where water from the eaves dripped on the yellow slicker, Keleher closed the door. Decisively then, without looking back, Keleher went to the fence.

Bud Pond's horse, a Diamond Lazy H mount, was untied, and with the reins fastened to the horn, turned free. Keleher then mounted the grullo, swung him about and with the rain still at his back, rode out from the cabin. South he went, climbing a rise. To the south was the drift fence and beyond it the roughs of the Canadian, and beyond them miles of country, dotted with greasewood and crossed by arroyas. Beyond that country, still farther south was Mexico and a place where men ran cattle. The rain beat thinly on Irish Keleher's broad shoulders and when he reached the fence he was humming *Acushla Gal Machree.*

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W-A-WINDAS

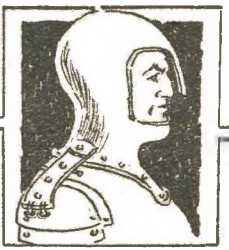


• CHIVALRY •

This word was originally almost a synonym for CAVALRY. In medieval times, when only nobles and others of high estate went mounted, one naturally associated deeds of bravery and honor with horsemen.

• HANDSHAKE •

The custom of shaking hands was introduced in Rome as a sign of friendliness. In days when all men went armed, it showed good intent to reach for a man's hand instead of your sword.



LADIES *from* HELL

A nickname given Scottish regiments because they wore kilts, and because of the violent fury of their attacks.

• EPAULETTE •

The epaulette or shoulder-strap was not always a mere decoration, but an integral part of defensive armor, protecting connecting joints between neck-armor and arm-pieces.

Blood upon the Waters

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "Hell and High Water," "China Station," etc.

YOUNG Timmy had been fighting that tuna for over an hour when grizzled old Captain Scrogg sighted the shark. I saw it next instant, too, but there wasn't much we could do about it. Cap'n Scrogg bellowed a warning and Timmy, seated in the swivel chair in the stern of the twenty-two foot sea skiff, worked like a demon to bring the tuna to gaff.

But the tuna wasn't ready to quit. Between gasps as he threw his body back to bring up the tip of the big rod and wind in the 39-0 tackle on the big Pfleuger reel, Timmy would say: "Boy, it's a big one—biggest one I ever hooked! . . . He's coming all right, he's coming . . . But my arms are tired. . . ."

His leather harness would creak as the tuna sighted the hull of the sea skiff and made another dash for freedom, the tackle singing out from the reel in a high screech despite the set of the star drag. . . . But now Timmy had to play the tuna against the shark. And the tuna was tired, which meant bad business.

It was July and perfect weather, and we had been trolling for tuna about thirty-five miles off Barnegat. We'd left at five-thirty that morning and around ten o'clock, this big boy—Timmy swore the fish was a five hundred pounder if he weighed an ounce—had struck the lure and the fight had begun.

It had been a good fight. Timmy had played that tuna well and deserved to bring him in. But now there was the shark flitting in and out and waiting until the tuna tired a little more.

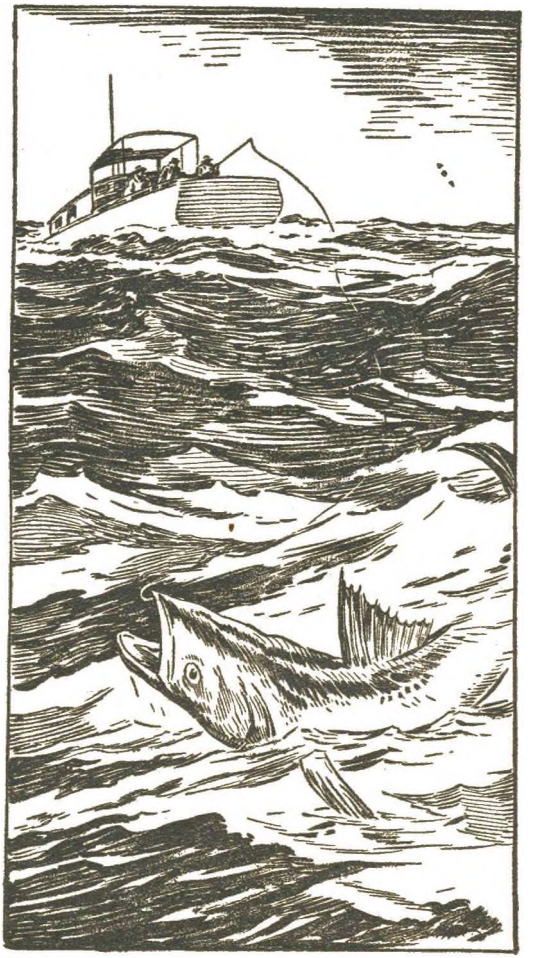
Cap'n Scrogg climbed back into the stern from the engine hatch and controlled the boat from the dual control gear and throttle aft. He spoke coolly to Timmy. "Ye can't do more than ye doin', lad," he said. "The quicker ye bring him up, the better, but ye can't stop that shark. So take it easy and jest hope."

Timmy nodded. Cap'n Scrogg then turned to me. "You, Mister Dale," he said. "Ye got a rifle in the locker fo'rard, ain't ye?"

I nodded. I had a .30 caliber water-cooled Remington automatic. Five shots.

"Get that gun," said Cap'n Scrogg, "and take some shots at that sea devil the second he breaks the surface. Hit the lubber in the head, or ye'll never kill the beast. They die hard, sharks does—"

Timmy suddenly straightened up.



"There he goes!" he yelled, at full pitch.

I stood up on the engine hatch and saw the gray shape of the shark flashing at the tuna close to the surface. I sighted quickly and fired five mushroom bullets right over the heads of Timmy and Cap'n Scrogg.

"Hell!" Timmy cried.

He began to reel in furiously. In seconds, he had landed his catch—but there wasn't much left of the tuna. An enormous head with pop-eyes and a big mouth appeared out of the ocean at the end of his hook. The rest of that glorious fish was gone, swallowed by the shark which had bitten it off behind the head in that rush.

"Dawgone it!" Timmy said mournfully. "And he was a beauty, too! I'll never hook another like that one!"

"Shore ye will," said Cap'n Scrogg quietly. "There's lots bigger'n that in this sea. But ye won't catch 'im today in this spot, lad. We'd best be gettin' on a bit."

I asked: "What's wrong with this spot?"

"There's blood upon the waters now, Mister Dale," Cap'n Scrogg replied, his face rather strained. "The sharks'll be all over the place. . . ." He paused. "And look, sir, as a favor to me, don't even shoot a gun over my head again, eh, lad?"

"Of course not!" I said. "I'm sorry I frightened you. It was the only chance I had of getting a bead on the shark. Even at that I missed him."

"Ye did right," Cap'n Scrogg replied, troubled. "And ye didn't scare me, son. It's jest something in the past and it comes back sharp sometimes."

"Is it a story?" Timmy asked eagerly, relaxing in the swivel chair.

"Wall," Cap'n Scrogg said, "in a manner of speakin', it *is* a story." He rubbed his beard briskly and glanced at us. "We've got a bit of a ride back to Barnegat yet and I might as well spin it to pass the time . . ."

SHARKS are queer critters, (Cap'n Scrogg said). They never sleep from the day they're born till the day they die. And speakin' o' dyin', I reckon as how the shark dies hardest of any livin' thing, whether in the ocean or on the land. I seen sharks pumped full of bullet holes still able to smash a swivel chair with a flip o' the tail. I seen a shark sliced in two by his own cannibal friends still a-snappin' his jaws wide when hauled in. I seen one particular shark I hooked myself. We bashed his brains in with a marlinspike and shot him dead and hauled him in. Then we cut his belly open and got out his liver for the oils. And thet doggone shark suddenly awoke up and started snappin' at us, and by glory, he et his own liver! That's the livin' truth, too.

Ye hear lots of silly stories about sharks. Mostly they're all lies. Folks don't know much about the beasts. I've been hookin' 'em for more years 'n' I can remember; and I don't know so much about 'em. And I ain't so sure of what I *do* know. . . .

Ye've heard the old sayin' that a shark flips his belly up when he attacks. T'ain't necessarily so. I never seen a shark attack like that. They rolls from side to side a little because their eyes is set far back in the head, but they can bite from topside jest as easy as from the bottom. Eh? . . . No, lads, I never seen a shark attack a man.

Wal, I'll change thet a mite. . . .

I never seen a shark attack a man because he seen the man and figgered here was a nice easy meal. Sharks is mostly pretty timid. If ye ever found yerself in the drink with a shark on your beam, ye would splash and yell and like as not ye'd scare the beast into kingdom come.

But there's one time when ye can't scare off a shark. And that's the time he gets the blood-scent. Blood-scent? . . . Why, it's the smellin' of blood upon the waters. It sends a shark mad. He can scent it way from glory be and gone and he comes a-runnin' with everything he has and swirls around and jest about acts like a maniac. When a shark is got the blood-scent, ye can't do nothin' with 'em! They'll fight and eat anything in sight—man or beast or bird.

Now this tale starts about five years

back. I was down kinda low then, no money or nothin' 'ceptin' my boat, and I figgered I'd pick up a little cash that summer by fish-guidin' some city folk out off the Shore. I was livin' up in Sea Bright then and I had me a 32-foot cruiser outa the King Boat Works in the Highlands. You couldn't beat a King boat for ocean-goin' fishin'. She had a high wide beam and hardly drew any water—a dry little craft no matter what the weather. I rigged up a pair o' swivel chairs in the stern, put some outriggers on her and built a harpoon deck on her bow and she was ready for action.

On Memorial Day the season started. It was a mite early for real fishin' because the fish hadn't started to run yet. But I'd been up inside the Hook a couple of days before and the bluefish was breakin' water up there (which was early runnin' for *them*) so it looked like business was due.

Shore enough, these two lads come along on Saturday mornin' and they ask charter of my boat. They introduced themselves and they turned out to be Ralph Macky and Jim Swain. Macky was a big salt, weighed over two hundred and had great hands and his hair was blacker 'n' tar. Swain, he was lank and kinda on the lean side and his face was sorta thin and he had a white top, real silver-like hair and plenty o' it.

"We want to charter your boat for the day," Macky said right off. "What's the price, Cap'n?"

"Fifty dollars a day," said I. "That's higher than most but I figger it's worth it 'cause this is a smart craft and I know where the fish run."

Swain, the blondy, smiled. "We heard you know your fish, Cap'n Scrogg," he said. "That's why we're here. How about it, Ralph?"

Macky, the big boy, laughed. "Fifty dollars? A drop in the bucket if there's fish in this ocean. You're hired, Cap'n."

So out we went. We made a try at the blues in the bay but they wouldn't strike the lure, so we went outside and trolled just beyond the breakin' surf for striped bass. They bit. They took anythin' we tossed over. We trolled a while and caught them and then we bottom-fished off Monmouth until we got tired o' haulin' 'em in. And then I took 'em down to Ambrose Light where the Ling Fish were runnin' and we hauled 'em in there too.

When we got back to moorin', the lads were purty happy about it. "Cap'n Scrogg," said Macky, the big boy, "we'll be out fishin' every weekend from now till September fifteenth and we'd like to make sure of you and yer boat. How much for charter for the entire season?"

That kinda took my breath away but I said: "A thousand dollars, lads, and me and the boat is yourn."

"Done," Macky said. And Swain nodded. We shook hands and sealed the bargain. They was wealthy boys, you see.

WAL, things went fine for awhile. We fished through June and up to the middle o' July. Then, one weekend, they brought a gal out with 'em and tried to teach her how to hook 'em. We was runnin' out then after the bluefish. They ain't a fightin' fish can match the blue when he hooks your line and they was havin' purty good sport. I didn't need two eyes in my head t'see thet both them fine lads was in love with thet gal. Her name was Louise Robin and she was as purty a gal as I'd ever sighted. And she kept danglin' them two lads on the string as ifn she didn't know which one she liked the better.

The followin' week, the lads came out alone. They was barely civil to one another. I looked 'em over and kinda put two and two together. Jealous over thet gal.

The first week in August and Louise Robin came out with 'em again. They didn't make no bones about bein' jealous this time. They said nasty kinda words to each other and they did their darndest to get in right with thet gal.

We were about twenty miles out trolling for school tuna which is a nice fish to catch, and I was standing for'ard with

my hand on the tiller when I felt the boat begin to yaw. I trimmed her quick and turned around just as the gal let loose a scream. Them two damnfool boys was fightin' back there, jest like I expected would happen sooner or later.

Before I could do anythin' about it, Macky lammed Swain on the side o' the head and knocked him flat into the stern. Swain didn't have no chance against Macky's weight and power and he musta known it but he had the guts to try and get back on his feet, which was kinda a task, what with Macky ready to lay him low again, and the boat pitchin' for all she was worth. The wind had freshened some and I swung around to take the waves broadside. She rolled quick so thet neither one o' them boys could stand erect and had to grip on to keep from slippin' and when I had 'em there, I bellowed:

"Come outa thet, ye lubbers! No fightin' on this craft or I'll gaff the next one who tries it!"

I wouldn't have really gaffed 'em, even if I did snatch up the murderous hook from the hatch cover, but it was good bluff. They didn't like the look o' my face, nor the look o' that gaff with its curved needle-sharp hook. A gaff's a nasty weapon.

Those boys stopped fighting and the gal quieted down and looked a mite scared because she knew twas her own fault. Swain got to his feet and said once: "I'll kill you for that, Ralph," and then he came forward and went down in the cabin and stayed there till we got back to moorin'.

The second August week, on'y Ralph Macky showed up to fish. And his heart warn't in it at all. We went out and did some trolling for blues and we didn't have much luck, so he called it a day.

I was really kinda surprised the next week when both lads showed up. They weren't doin' much talkin' together but they seemed reconciled enough and they wasn't at each other's throats. Big Macky was carrying a tuna rod with a big reel. Swain had a shark hook and a rifle.

"We want tuna today, Cap'n," Macky grinned. "Man-size tuna. This stick will take 'em up to eight hundred pounds."

"Wal," I said, "they're runnin'. They's plenty school tuna out off the Shore. But big tuna—we'll have to run way out—thirty-five miles or so."

"That's okay," said Mackay.

"But why the gun and shark hook?" said I.

Swain said: "Where there's tuna, there'll be shark. I want to hook a shark for the fun of it. As for the gun, that's to keep the sharks off the tuna we hook."

"Wal, we'll make a try," I said.

FISHIN' was ripe thet day. We caught some blues on the way out, and some croakers and kingfish, and then we changed tackle and started fast trollin' for tuna. We sighted porpoise once, and by glory we even had a white marlin break water but he wouldn't take the bait and we left him behind. Purty soon Macky hooked a thirty pound tuna which put up a battle royal. When the big fellow landed thet fish, he felt fine.

I saw him lean over to Swain as he smoked a cigarette and rested and he said: "Jimmy, I'm sorry about what I did when Louise was out last time. I lost my head, I guess. I didn't mean to humiliate you in front of her. It was a dirty trick, Jimmy. I'm bigger and heavier than you and anyone knows I had the advantage."

"You had the advantage with fists," Swain replied, lookin' kinda queer.

Macky shrugged. He slapped Swain's back. "Let's forget it and be friends again."

"Sure," Swain said without any heart in it. "Friends again." But he didn't mean a word o' it and I kept it in my head to bear an eye on him. The lad had been hurt deep, not so much by the fists but by the fact that he had been made a fool o' in front o' the gal. That kinda hurt stays a long time and don't heal and makes a man do queer things.

"I'm goin' to chum for shark," Swain said after awhile.

"Ye don't have to chum," I said. "Ye'll

have 'em around soon enough out here."

"I'm goin' to chum," he said. "Bring 'em in faster. I want to hook a shark and have some fun."

He cut open one o' the tuna in the boat and spilled a little blood out onto the waters and it made a slick behind us for the sharks to follow. Then he cut up the tuna and threw parts o' it overboard as we went along. He took up his rod and waited. He had a big slice of pork rind baited on the shark hook.

A tiger shark hit the bait about ten minutes later and for a while there it was hell and high leather. Shark is a better game fish than most fisherman'll say. They got plenty in 'em and unless ye hook 'em in the stomach, you're in for a lively hour. This feller took Swain more 'n' an hour but he finally came to the side. He wasn't big as sharks go, but he was sizeable enough and he hung over in the water there snappin' his jaw and tryin' to reach the chain leader.

I went to get the gun but Swain called and said: "Don't use the gun on this one. A club on his head and then swing him in."

So I got a club and we beat all the life we could outa thet shark. Then we put a pulley around his tail and lifted him into the stern. But thet shark warn't dead then. He thrashed around in the stern some and snapped his jaws some more.

Swain came forward and went down in the cabin. Macky stood up on the engine hatch and swore. "Why do we have to have that dawgone thing in the boat?" he said. "No good to eat, no record shark. Just a lot o' trouble and mighty dangerous. I say we get him outa here."

"Thet's a good idea," I said. "Ain't no place to put 'im but the stern and ifn ye leave him there, ye can't fish."

"Help me hoist," Macky said.

I went aft. "Maybe ye'd better wait for Mr. Swain," I said. And thet was jest as I reached him.

At the same time, I heard a crash behind me and I knew right off that Swain had fired the gun over my head. I was lookin' at Macky when the explosion came and I saw the bullet hit him in the back of the head. It was a mushroom bullet, 165 grains, and it all but tore the front of his face from his body when it came out. Macky fell headlong on top o' the shark who snapped his jaws at the big fellow's body and took off the left arm and swallowed it whole.

I wheeled around and saw Swain up on top o' the cabin with the express rifle in his hands. He cried: "I tried to shoot the shark and I missed!"

"Ye're a lyin' murderer!" I bellowed. "You shot to kill this lad and ye done it!" And I started for him.

SWAIN coulda shot me then but he got scared and lost his nerve. He leapt from the cabin right over my head to the engine hatch and he lost the gun overside when he made the jump. I turned around and went for him again and he snatched up the gaff from the stern and swung at me. He caught me with it. Glory be, what agony that was! The hook nicked me atop the left shoulder close to the neck and sunk in so that when I fell I ripped the gaff outen his hands. I fell on the engine hatch, bleeding like a pig, and I figgered I was a gone goose right then.

Swain, he came runnin' up to me and turned down the gas and took the boat outa gear. "Sorry, Cap'n," he said, wild-eyed, "but this is the way it had to be. I swore I'd get that swine for what he did and that meant I had to get you too or else burn for killing."

"Ye—poor—fool—" I gasped, with the gaff still in me and bleeding awful. "Ye'll still—burn—comin' in with—two bodies—"

"Not me," Swain said, his voice hoarse and wild. "No one saw you come out with us today. I'll say Macky and I took the boat ourselves. As for Macky, it's worked perfectly. That shark has Macky's arm in his stomach. That'll be positive proof that Macky fell overboard and that the shark got him and that I hooked the shark in return."

I couldn't speak anymore but ifn I'd

been able to, I'd had to admit there was logic in what he'd planned.

Swain went for'ard and got out the spare anchor and some hawser and he tied the anchor to Macky's body and then dragged it to the beam and finally got it overboard.

But he was careless.

The end of the hawser curled itself around his leg and afore he knew it, Swain had plunged overside right into the drink.

He was pulled down some but he managed to get the rope off his leg and he came up to the surface again. I could hear him panting in the water and probably feeling grateful that he'd got that rope free. But then he realized for the first time what he'd done to himself.

'Cap'n!" he shrieked. "Cap'n Scrogg!"

I couldn't answer. I couldn't barely move, 'ceptin' for my right arm and hand.

"Cap'n Scrogg!" he screamed again. *"I can't get back in the boat!"*

Which was the gospel truth. My boat had a high stern and a high beam and there was no hand ladder on the stern and no Jacob ladders aboard, and ifn there had been, I couldn't've moved to get it over.

I heard him sobbing once and his fingernails scraping on the starboard planks.

"Sharks!" he screamed suddenly. *"Sharks!* SHARKS!"

I summoned every bit of strength that was left in my right arm and I turned up the gas throttle and put that boat into gear and left Swain sitting in the sea behind. I couldn't get up to see where I was goin' but I took a compass readin' from where I lay and held the tiller on it as best I could.

I knew what had happened back there, ye see, and I didn't want to stay and see or hear the end.

Swain couldn't possibly have got back into the boat again. I was the only one to help him, and I wasn't able. He couldn't have swum to shore from out there, thirty-five miles. But even those things were made kinda small by the big thing.

Swain, poor devil, had stalemated himself. When he'd tossed over Macky's body, it was jest as though he had chummed for sharks. Macky was as bloody a piece o' beef as ye ever could have hoped to see. And that blood was shark chum. . . .

Yeah, blood-scent. Thet's it. The smell o' blood drives sharks mad. They'll come runnin' for blood from a mile off and they'll attack anything they find in the water when the blood scent is there.

I beached my boat off Avenel three hours later and three surf-casters pulled me out and got the gaff outen o' me and rushed me to a hospital.

CAP'N SCROGG stood up and pointed southeast. Across the wallowing blue waters of the Atlantic we made out the landfall, smoky and purple against the sky. "There's Barnegat," he said.

"Never mind Barnegat," I said. "You didn't tell us the rest of the story. What happened to you? And what did Louise Robin do when she heard what had happened?"

"Me?" Cap'n Scrogg said. He smiled slowly. "I reckon I made the grade. I'm here today cap'nin' ye in, ain't I?"

"And Louise Robin?" Timmy said.

"The gal? . . . Now she was a funny gal. She made quite a thing outa that bad business. And all the time she was engaged to marry another fella. She *did* marry 'im, as a matter of fact, about a month later."

Timmy glanced at me and then laughed. "Cap'n Scrogg," he said, "that's about the best fish story I ever heard."

Cap'n Scrogg looked back from the tiller. His eyes were clouded and his face was very serious.

" 'Tweren't no fish story, lad," he said soberly. "It's the truth absolute. Thet's why it kinda bothers me when ye shoot over my head like Swain did that time."

His shirt was open. I could see a small white scar, about the size of a quarter, situated on top of his left shoulder, close to his neck. "The truth," he said again, half to himself. "The honest truth . . ." And he rubbed that scar reflectively as he rode down toward Barnegat.

Drink We Deep

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

BOOK SIX

CHAPTER I

Interpolation by Arthur Leo Zagat, B.S., LL.B., Compiler of these documents:

THE story of Hugh Lambert's attempt to escape from Mernia and communicate with humanity is an epic that until now has never been written. How I learned its details will appear later, but this is, as nearly as I can determine, what occurred.

Seela's plan was simplicity itself. He proposed to carry Lambert straight upward from Calinore to the very roof of the monstrous cavern. At that immense height they would be well out of sight of any Surahnit between the Taphetnit's city and the Gateway Wall, and could fly to it unmolested.

There was, he assured Lambert, a shelf of rock near the summit of the great facade that kept Lake Wanooka from engulfing Mernia, and here they could land. Thus far their route would be devoid of danger, but from this point on it would be encompassed with peril.

As the reader is already aware, a constant watch was maintained by the Surahnit to hold the Taphetnit bottled up in their besieged city of Calinore. Lambert knew how slim were his chances for escape—how almost impossible it would be for Seela's white robes to go unnoticed as he attempted to fly with his burden to the ledge where the lock separated Mernia from Earth. No, the last stages of the flight would have to be negotiated by

climbing down some sort of rope from the sheer crags above. The Surahnit would be guarding that lock—perhaps with one man, perhaps with a whole squad of L.S.G., armed with the deadly *corets*.

Lambert squared his shoulders and gazed at the young Taphetnit's radiant, troubled face. "Come on," he said. "All we can do is try."

Seela nodded. "It means so—much. . . "

The rope that Hugh would need in the last, final climb was made ready, and Lambert began to take leave of those he might

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never see again. There were a few precious moments alone with Nalinah; and then Hugh Lambert took Antil's hand and shook it warmly. Once more he joined Seela and the two Taphetnit who were to accompany them.

During that long first part of their flight through the strange Mernian sky, few words were uttered. Lambert was too filled with conflicting emotions to put them into words. His whole body was keyed up with a stinging tension that is sometimes mistakenly named fear—but there was real dread in his heart, too. Not for himself, but for all those he knew and loved upon the earth—all of those he was making this final, desperate attempt to save. If he failed, what would happen to them—? No man could safely say.

Then another, more terrible dread assailed him—sharper because it was, in a sense, more personal. Suppose he was mad? Suppose everything that had occurred—this strange, unworldly Odyssey —since those nights on the shores of the Lake, was nightmare—a lunatic's fantastic dream.

Tormented, Lambert found comfort in words. He began to question Seela—asking about the origins of the Taphetnit and the Surahnit.

"We come from the upper world, Hula. But it was so long ago that there is no memory of it—nor any trace, except our memory of the sun which we worship in the column of light."

But even Seela's words seemed to have a strange ring—the half-poetry of their utterance seemed the lilting cadences of a madman's song. They did, at least, until Hugh Lambert began to remember the strange things he had seen in Mernia—the *fortlik* from which our corn might well have evolved, the *Eohippi*, the *Dicroreri*. He recalled the *kitor*, that bore a representation of the Solar System. He knew he was not mad.

"The tale was told me," Seela went on, his voice flowing as the air flowed past them in his tireless flight, "by a wise one of the Surahnit who was trying to persuade us to join them in their intention to return. He told me how our ancestors lived once on the warm surface of the earth, under a sky of blue light in which the sun hung, a great white ball, or a sky that sparkled with golden lights as the dark rock of the Eastern Wall sparkles. They lived in houses then, very like the present houses of Calinore save that they were fashioned from the substance of great plants that grew on the hills. They had crude *lusans,* and the primitive *corets,* and many other such things."

He went on for a while, describing a civilization that has been quite forgotten. And then the steaming climate began to change.

"The air grew steadily colder, and one day some Taphetnit flying far to the north returned with an affrighting tale of a great wall of frozen water that was moving slowly but surely down upon our land. Mile upon mile high it towered, they said, and the crash of the masses falling from it was like thunder multiplied a hundred fold."

"The Glacier," Lambert exclaimed. "The Great Glacier!"

"Our ancient ones could not believe at first that this doom was marching down upon them, but *thom* by *thom* and sloo* by *sloo*** the ice came nearer, till at last there was no doubt that the towering hills whereon they dwelt must be engulfed.

"Some, more cautious than the rest, had searched far and found this great bubble within the mountain, and now they proposed that the people seek shelter herein till the frozen water should retreat. Others wished to move south and ever southward before its face, believing that it would cover the land forever. Long and strenuous the dispute was waged, but it was the first party that prevailed.

"And so all the Mernian folk entered this great cavern through a small cave mouth where now is the lock to which we fly, bringing with them as much of the appurtenances of their lives as they could,

* month by month

** year by year

and their tame beasts, and they plugged up the aperture through which they came. The only light here was that which flowed from a shining pillar rising far to the west from floor to very roof of the cavern, encircled by a bottomless chasm."

LAMBERT interrupted the recital. "That pillar must be of fused quartz. It must go clear up through the mountain to its surface and it leads daylight down into this cavern. I've seen rods of fused quartz carry light around corners, and—"

"Perhaps so," Seela broke in, "but the Surahnit worship it as the concrete representation of their deity. At any rate, it was about this shaft of light that the refugees first clustered and began their life anew.

"*Sloonit** passed, uncountable *sloonit*, and still the water lay frozen against the Gateway Wall. Those first ancient ones lived, and gave life to their progeny, and died, and their descendants lived and multiplied, and died, and still were we prisoners here. Little by little, with each generation, there grew to be more and more light in the cavern, till after an unthinkable space the rocks, the beasts that had been brought from Outside, and the very bodies of Surahnit and Taphetnit, shone with some strange luminance of their own."

Lambert could not resist offering an explanation of this phenomenon also. "The rock and everything else always was emitting that light. It is an etheric vibration, a radiant emanation that is just beyond the threshold of perception of the visual organs of those who dwell in the light of the sun. A gradual evolution took place in the Mernians, a change in their very atomic structure so long exposed to these emanations, till at last they were able to perceive it. Fenton and I can see it too, though the change in us was sudden, and I think I know why.

"We were reduced in size by a reduction of the distances between the neutrons and protons in each electron of our constitution. That change affected our retinas in a single moment the same way all those centuries of evolution affected yours, but we still retain enough of our human attributes to be immune to the devastating effect upon you of the sun's actinic rays.

"You may be right, Hula," Seela sighed. "We Taphetnit are not skilled in such lore and I shall not attempt to discuss it with you.

"As time wore on disputes arose between the two races so strangely dissimilar. The Surahnit found a way to bridge the chasm about the shining shaft and erected their city of Tashna upon the island plateau it bounded. We Taphetnit withdrew eastward and constructed our own Calinore. It would take too long to narrate all that occurred here through the ages, and I shall not attempt it.

"Came a day when those who were appointed to keep watch on the Gateway Wall and that which lay beyond it brought word that there was no longer ice on the Outside. But the fierce joy that swept Mernia was quickly stemmed. The ice had melted, it was true, yet the great valley where we had roamed the hills was filled now with a waste of waters, and we were as surely prisoners as before, save that no longer had we any hope of release.

"The Taphetnit were resigned to this fate, but the Surahnit would not accept it. They devised the lock through which you were brought into Mernia, and the garments of *sibral* that would permit them to pass up through the waters and reach its surface. The first daring one who made the ascent never returned. But the Nal Surah of that time was not content, and he dispatched one after another of his subjects to the Upper World till at last it was discovered that only when a moonless darkness covered the hills could a Mernian exist there for some short space. Not by the waters but by some inscrutable change in the very elements of our beings were we now condemned forever to dwell in this cavern.

"So thoroughly, however, was the longing for the open ingrained in us, that we, Taphetnit as well as Surahnit, chanced the

*years

dangers of forays above for even the short space that it was safe for us to remain there. We found a race of gigantic beings there, who had sprung from somewhere to populate the hills out of which we had been driven. Most times they could not see us at all, but some among them, their children, a few of their adults, could glimpse us. How is it, Hula," that those who did see us never told the others about us?"

"They did," was the simple response. "They told of what they had seen, calling you Taphetnit 'fairies' and the Surahnit 'gnomes,' but those who had not the power to see you did not believe them. They were called dreamers, superstitious, or, more rudely, drunk or insane. But look here, Seela. The little people have been seen not only here in the Helderbergs but all over the world. From what you say, you Mermans could not have wandered far. Is it possible that very much the same thing as you have told me about happened elsewhere on Earth, that this old globe of ours is honeycombed everywhere by caverns like this, in which dwell the small folk of a pre-Glacial civilization we archaeologists have never dreamed existed?"

One of the other Taphetnit called out to Seela, just at that moment, forestalling whatever answer he might have made. They had reached the eastern boundary of the cavern.

ii

HUGH LAMBERT was somewhat dazed with the strange narrative that his knowledge of Earth's geologic history told him had covered in a few short sentences the events of far more than Fifty Thousand years. That long it was since the Fourth Glacier loosened its grip on the Helderbergs, how much longer since it fastened it there no one could be certain.

The human knew now that two great streams of evolution, following their own bent for five hundred centuries, were at this very moment confluent, and that upon him, upon the events of the next few minutes, depended whether one should swamp the other and obliterate it, or whether they would part again and go on their separate courses for another five hundred centuries.

The thought, the burden of his responsibility, was too appalling to contemplate. He shut it from his mind. He had to get down to the ledge below. That was the next move. That was the only thing he would think about, the next move.

He waited quietly while Seela wound the end of the leather rope over his shoulders and around his chest in a sort of harness and fastened it with a slip knot that would hold against a downward pull till doomsday, but would yield to a jerk of his hand.

"Pull once on the rope and we'll stop lowering you," Seela said. "Pull twice and we'll swing you in towards the cliff."

The two Taphetnit stepped behind Lambert and grasped the cable in their powerful fingers. Seela and Lambert stood facing each other. Then Lambert stepped off.

Little by little, little by little, that ludicrously inadequate thread lengthened. With infinite slowness Lambert moved down past the dark-glowing precipice that was first inches, then feet, then a yard from him. He grasped the rope above his head with his fingers, and he stared at the slowly mounting wall.

Lambert's fingers were tight on the free end of the slip-knot—and stayed there. Stayed there while the precipice slid steadily upward, stayed there till abruptly he saw the long ledge scarring the face of the cliff, saw the fire-curtained mouth of the tunnel, and came level with it.

His left hand pulled once on the rope above his head. The infinitely long descent checked.

A shadow darkened the sparkling curtain in front of him, and then a figure came through it, the figure of Talim. The youth stared at the man dangling in mid-air before him, his pupils widening.

Lambert pulled twice on the rope.

He started to pendulum in toward the ledge. Talim crouched, his webbed fingers darting to his belt, to the handle of a *coret*. The swing of the rope was too slow; before it could carry Lambert to the ledge

that *coret* would be out, would be spitting its scarlet death.

Too slow! Hugh Lambert arched backward, threw that magnificent torso of his forward—and jerked the rope-end that freed him from the suspending cable!

The impetus of that desperate effort of his carried his heels to the very edge of the ledge, and spent itself. For a split second he swayed there, which way he would fall in the lap of the gods. Time stood still.

Something, the luck of the greatly daring, the prayer that winged itself from his tortured brain, some effort of which he was unconscious, sent him forward. A scream shrilled from Talim's throat and Lambert's fist knocked the *coret* spinning from the Surahnit's hand.

It struck the wall, stayed there. Lambert's hands were on Talim's throat, squeezing. The youth's fists battered the human's chest but the blows were fly-flicks to Lambert's perception. Talim went to his knees.

Other figures burst out of the tunnel's mouth, soldiers of the L.S.G., their weapons fisted. They looked about them for a confused instant, glimpsed the struggling pair. Their *corets* jabbed pointblank on Hugh Lambert.

CHAPTER II

Editor's note: It is remarkable that in the midst of the appalling experiences through which Hugh Lambert was passing, with death always imminent and the fate of a race dependent on his lonely struggle, he should have contrived to maintain as complete a record of events, as detailed a commentary upon them, as he did.

With the exception of the hiatus filled in by Jeremiah Fenton's story and my own interpolation, there is no break in the narrative I have transcribed by the aid of a magnifying glass from the bundle of bleached tiny leather sheets, charred at the edges and water-stained, that came into my possession in the spring of 1935. It is with a great deal of satisfaction therefore that I am enabled to head the closing scenes of the strange and stirring drama we have followed so long with the caption:

Hugh Lambert's narrative, continued:

I HAD no time to dodge, had no place to dodge to if I could have. This was the end.

Well, I'd done my— Something white, a flash of iridescent colors, swept between me and the soldiers! The Taphet received the full force of both lancing rays.

The *corets* whipped back to bear on me —Seela and the third Taphet swooped in, darted desperatedy at the Surahnit. Their flailing, frantic fingers clutched the soldier's arms, their wrists, before the weapons could be fired again. But they *were* fired.

The Taphetnit spurted into flame, reeled backward. Their great pinions incandescent, they reeled back over the brink, plunged downward out of sight.

They did not go alone. They took with them, in their blazing arms, the two L.S.G. guards who had so nearly done for me. A plume of black and greasy smoke was all I could see of them, all I could see of those three brave and gallant beings who had swooped downward out of perfect safety to come to my aid.

Perhaps they had sensed something wrong because the rope had been freed of my weight an instant too quickly. Perhaps, and knowing how great-souled they were I believe this to be the truth, it had been always part of their plan to follow me down and make certain I should win through to the lock unhampered.

At any rate, their sacrifice ensured the success of my enterprise. No other Surahnit came out of the tunnel mouth to interfere with me, and I knew that there would be no alarm spread below for a long time. That which would soon smash on the cavern floor would be a mass of black-charred carbon indistinguishable in shape or form, and the watchers there would think that a quartet of fleeing Taphetnit had been rayed by their comrades here.

I had only Talim to contend with now. The youth was choked half-unconscious; was terrified.

I let go with one hand, snatched up his *coret*. "Tell me how to work the lock," I

said, "if you don't want a dose of this."

He was, after all, a youngster and the desire for life was strong within him. "I—I'll tell you," he gasped, terror bulging his eyes. "Don't shoot."

He kept his word. The method of manipulating the lock mechanism was simple, almost ridiculously simple. It could be done single-handed with some small effort, and so I was enabled to tie up Talim with his own belt, gag him with a piece torn from his own uniform and leave him behind me, well hidden in a niche in the tunnel side.

Only brief minutes later, I was shooting up through Lake Wanooka's unfathomable depths, the hood of the *sibral* drawn once more over my head. I was following the long straight path of the violet ray that made a ladder to the world I had long ago given up hope of ever seeing again.

ii

I REACHED the surface into a gray dusk that brooded ominously over a shoreless sea. Panic gripped me for a poignant moment, terror that I was lost, that somehow I had come up out of some distant, unbounded ocean. Then I recalled how the familiar reaches of Lake Wanooka had appeared to me when I had dwindled to the mannikin I now was, and curving about in the water, saw the boulder-strewn slope where that transformation had occurred. I was home! *Home!*

In an instant I was clambering over the rocks upon that shore, making my painful way toward the lush jungle out of which I had run, terrified, from a two yard earthworm and an enormous spider.

Three-foot green spears that were blades of timothy threatened to impale me; I twisted an ankle in a deep depression that might have been the footprint of a field mouse. Outré and exotic my surroundings were, but they were on the surface of the earth. They were home! A great pulse of elation throbbed within me that almost drove from my mind recollection of what lay miles beneath me, of the desperate mission in which I was engaged.

Almost, but not quite. I remembered I must get to the camp somehow. I remembered that I must somehow find a human to whom to give my message.

A fist-sized stone—a pebble smaller than a marble, it would be, if I were my proper size—turned under my foot and threw me to my knees. The fall jarred me to the very core, and I did not have the strength to get up.

Tired! Suddenly fatigue had swept down upon me, the fatigue of a day and a night through which, without rest, without sleep, almost without food, I had been harrowed by such experiences as no man had ever encountered, had agonized and fought and agonized again and fought again. Tired! Man can stand so much and no more.

I shook my head, trying to clear it of weariness, trying to think. I dared not rest. I had no right to rest. I must get to the office. No, to the infirmary. Edith was there. Edith was a nurse and she would be quickest to understand my message. It wasn't far. It was only two hundred yards from this point on the shore.

Two hundred yards? To me as I was now those two hundred yards were twelve hundred, were almost a mile. I couldn't do it. I couldn't.

But I must. I must! I would rest a little, only a little, and then I would go on.

The mists closed in on me again. A Taphet swooped out of the sullen sky. Not a Taphet, but a small winged thing that swerved and alighted on a bending stalk above me. Its brown wings, nine inches across, fluttered a moment and folded.

This was a creature of my world, of my time. It was no *Eohippus,* no *Dicrorerus,* but a butterfly. A Gold-banded Skipper. The recognition did something to me, gave me strength to stand erect.

The ground shook beneath me, and I whirled in sudden terror. A looming giant moved toward me, his tremendous knees level with my head.

HIS Gargantuan body loomed high as he came on. A white, filmy cloud wavered over me, and behind it his face

was a great round moon, grotesquely masked by lenses like crystal dinner plates, through which bulging, gargoylesque eyeballs peered balefully.

That face was weirdly familiar. Of course! Once more I had forgotten my size. This was no giant! It was a human boy. It was Percy White. The cloud was a net and he was stalking the butterfly.

I choked, unable to speak for an instant. What luck! What glorious—

I was still unable to make a sound, but it was horror that clutched my throat now. Percy was looking down at me, straight down at me—*and he didn't see me!* He saw only the Skipper, directly over my head. I was invisible to him, invisible as the Little Men had been to me till the change in my blood.

Was my voice inaudible to him too? I shouted.

Just in that instant his net swept forward. It missed the butterfly. The insect leaped into the air, darted away—and Percy darted after it! Before I could shout again he was hidden by white, stupendous columns of a line of birch-saplings that edged the woods here.

I sobbed with disappointment. With rage. Fury exploded a red flare within my skull. It burned away the fatigue. It burned away everything but my purpose to get to the infirmary against all odds. The jungle could not stop me now. Nothing could stop me. I plunged onward, panting and furious, battling the grass and the leaves; battling lashing tendrils of that incredibly magnified vegetation.

Time blurred. The jungle blurred. I was aware only of a gray haze through which I struggled interminably, of a haze that at first was gray and then darkened as I fought onward through the night.

CHAPTER III

Account of Courtney Stone, M.D., continued:

I TIMED my return to Camp Saturday night so as to arrive there at suppertime. Not because I wanted to eat with those who were there, but quite to the contrary. I didn't want to face them at once. I didn't want to face Ann Doring or Edith Horne and answer the question I knew would be in their eyes till I had pull myself together.

I was a tired and despairing man, that night, as I coasted my car to the Camp gate so that its arrival would not be noticed, and stumbled through the darkness of the infirmary.

I was thankful that I had left instructions with Edith that she was to insist on Miss Doring's going down to the mess hall with her for all meals. There was no point in remaining with the three patients continually, there would be no change in them, no sudden emergency, and unless Dick's sister was diverted a little from her anxiety she would collapse.

These artists are high-strung, hyperthyroidic for the most part. They cannot bear strain as well as ordinary, unemotional temperaments.

The infirmary was quiet, as a result, quiet and peaceful. I went into Edith's little office and let myself down heavily into the chair at her desk. I did not bother to turn on the light.

The result of the tests I had ordered had been negative. Perhaps somewhere in Albany or in the Helderbergs there was someone with blood of the nature I sought, but he was not in the hospital, either as patient or interne or nurse.

The tests had failed, and my last hope had failed. Job Grant had died during the day. Charlie Dorsey would die, and Dick Doring. Hepzibah Foster, little Fanny Hall, tiny Jimmie Crane, would linger for a while, sinking, sinking, life slowly draining from them till they too would lie white and inanimate corpses on their beds.

And the disease would go on spreading. Tomorrow morning there would be more of its victims in the hospital, tomorrow morning and the day after and the day after. Eventually some way to stop its spread would be found, but meantime how many lives would it claim? How many?

My dreary thoughts were interrupted by

a sound from the threshold of the door that I had forgotten to close.

IT WAS a strange, small sound. A dead leaf blown from tree, I thought, but it came again, seemingly nearer. And again. *Pit—pit—pit*. Across the floor towards me. Like tiny footfalls stumbling, slow and weary, across the wooden floor. *Pit—pit—pit*. Like the footfalls of some little man, tired unto death.

I smiled at myself, realizing the notion had been suggested by Edith's quaint apprehensions of the evening before. If there was anything there, if I was not imagining that *pit—pit—pit*, it was some hurt bird that had hopped blindly into the place.

The idea intrigued me, of a wounded bird coming to the infirmary for treatment. Well, I thought, if it's as smart as that it shall be taken care of. But I couldn't see it in the darkness. I switched on Edith's desk lamp. The yellow light filled the room.

There was nothing on the floor. Nothing at all. *Pit—pit* . . . the sounds came from where there was nothing to be seen, and stopped.

A prickling chill rippled my vertebral column. *I was not alone!* The room was empty, except for me, but I knew that I was not alone.

"Court! Courtney Stone!"

The voice, tiny, shrill, came from where that last *pit* had sounded, from the absolute vacancy at which I stared.

"Court! Can you hear me? Tell me if you can hear me. Say something if you can hear me."

"I—I hear you." My own voice was a croak.

"Thank God!—Court! This is Hugh. Hugh Lambert."

"Hugh!" I whispered. "You're not—not dead?" I asked, whispering to the nothingness out of which that tenuous, high-pitched voice spoke to me. I, Courtney Stone, to whom the very word "ghost" always had been a cause for Homeric laughter.

"Not dead, Court. Changed. You can't see me but thank God you can hear me. I haven't time to explain. They're coming. They're coming from the lake, and—"

"Who's coming?"

"The—" I lost the word, or did not understand it. But I understood the next. "The *Little Men!* I've got to tell you something before the Life-Drinkers get here, before they see me. Listen. Are you listening, Court?"

The little men! What—? "I'm listening, Hugh."

"You've got to do as I say, exactly as I say. Tonight, right away, inject as much viosterol, as much Vitamin D, as they can stand, into the veins of all your coma patients. All of them, Court, at once, and into their veins, into their blood. Do you understand?"

"I understand, but—"

"They're coming, Court. They mustn't see me. They mustn't know." The *pit—pit—pit* was commencing again, faster now, retreating towards the door, and the voice was retreating with it, fading. "Hurry, Court, inject Vitamin D at once or nothing can save humanity. Goodbye, Court."

"Hugh," a pulsing cry throbbed in my ears. "Don't go, Hugh." I whirled to it, to Edith Horne in the doorway from the corridor. She must have come in the back way, been standing there and listening. "Don't go, Hugh," she sobbed, her hands outstretched and pleading, to the empty floor, the empty outer door from which no voice, no *pit—pit* of tiny feet, responded.

"You heard?" I croaked, staring at her. "I didn't imagine it? You heard it and I'm not insane?"

"I heard. It was Hugh. Hugh, doctor, come back from where he has been to tell us what to do. I knew he would come, when we needed him. We must do what Hugh said, doctor. He said to hurry, doctor. We must hurry."

"Vitamin D, he said," I gulped. "Viosterol. But that's utterly ridiculous. No warrant in physiology, in any branch of science, for thinking of that as a treatment for coma—"

"I'll call the hospital and you can give

them the orders," she interrupted me. "To inject viosterol into all the patients they've got there and send us a supply for our two by motorcycle." Coming into the room she stumbled. I saw the lax form slumped on the floor over which she had stumbled, Ann Doring on the floor in a dead faint. They had come to the door together, and Ann had fainted at the sound of that spectral voice.

The rattle of the telephone dial beside me brought me around to it. I caught Edith's hand.

"Wait!" I exclaimed. "Wait a second. Let me think. It's an outrageous proposition. It's contrary to all medical knowledge. It may kill the patients. My reputation—"

"Hang your reputation," she flared out. "Hugh said we were to do it, Hugh . . ."

Ann Doring moaned, on the floor.

"All right," I said weakly. "We'll do it."

ii

Continuation of Hugh Lambert's narrative:

I SAW the two girls come in as I stood in the center of an immense expanse of wooden floor and shouted my message at Courtney Stone, towering above me. I saw them come in and I saw Ann drop in at the sound of my voice, and I saw a fierce joy flare into Edith's face.

But I could not speak to her because I had to get my message over to Court and I had only seconds in which to do it.

Jumping the six-foot step from the infirmary threshold to the rocky desert of the path that led to it, I heard Edith's booming words, "We must do what Hugh said," and then I was running across that stretch of rocks and into the covert of the jungle that crowded it close. I gained that concealment just in time.

Past me, out there in the open, trotted one, two, a score of the *sibral*-garmented Surahnit I had heard following me up from the lake, just as I had collided with the great vertical cliff of the infirmary wall and came out of the daze through which I had somehow fought to my goal.

So close, after all I had endured, had I been to failure. For if they had come upon me talking to Court they would have sent back word of it to Vanark, and the Rata would have suspected at once that I had discovered a way to checkmate him, and devised a counter-move.

But by the scant margin of seconds I had avoided that catastrophe, and now, crouching there in the dark, I knew that the issue was no longer in my hands but in the lap of the gods, and in the very capable hands of Courtney Stone.

I watched four of the Surahnit climb the infirmary threshold and vanish within. I watched the rest skirt the infirmary corner and disappear into looming dark thicket I knew to be the thick hemlock edge bordering the road to Albany.

Almost at once they appeared again, heaving out between them a teardrop *lusan*. They tugged and heaved it to the road, climbed into it, and were off.

Then my weariness struck an almost physical blow, and oblivion claimed me.

CHAPTER IV

Continuation of Hugh Lambert's narrative:

I WAS awakened by a hand on my shoulder, shaking me. "Blazes," I muttered. "This is the first time I didn't hear the bugle blow. A nightmare I was having must have dogged me, Ed. Wait till I tell—"

My drowsy mutter choked off. My eyes had opened and I was peering at a sharp-featured vulturine countenance, just visible in the misty luminance of before-dawn.

"What ails you?" the Surahnit demanded. "Lying here asleep? Good thing I got off the clear road and came upon you, or—" He broke off, and then: "By the shaft of the eternal, you are not a Mernian! You are—"

My hands flashed up. My thumbs clamped on his windpipe, tightened. I felt flesh crawl greasily under their pressure. I felt gristle crumple. After awhile the *sibral*-clothed body was flaccid, lifeless.

I thrust it from me, rose to my feet, pulling the head of my garment over my

head to hide the face that had betrayed me. Through a leafy screen I saw a wraithlike procession of Surahnit gliding past. They were returning to the lake, to Mernia, satiated with the blood they had sucked from the Lord alone knew how many humans.

What sort of blood was it? They were carrying with them death in their veins, but was it their death and that of their kind, or death to the gallant Taphetnit and to my own people?

Had Courtney Stone done as I had bidden him? Even if he had, would the viosterol act in the manner I hoped? Well, I would know in a week, a month. If I had failed some time soon the lake would vomit forth a shambling troop of dead-alive, and after them a horde of Surahnit, and this pleasant countryside would become a harried hell as those who had been exiled from it five hundred centuries ago retook it.

MEANTIME, for a little space at least, I should see the sun again and feel it upon me. I should talk again with my own kind, and hold a girl of my own race in my arms.

"What's the matter, Edith?" a great voice said. "Can't you sleep, either?"

"Sleep? I'm too tired to sleep after last night. And besides, I have a feeling that Hugh is somewhere near, very near."

Near. I was not more than sixty feet from her! I started out of the jungle, got to the pathway. I halted, seeing them, Edith Horne and Courtney Stone, standing gigantic in the gigantic doorway of the infirmary.

"I've just been in to see Ann," Court said. "She's quietly asleep. She'll suffer no ill effects from her faint."

Edith was wan, pale, tired-looking. She must have been working hard, too hard for her strength. I started to call out to her. . . .

I caught myself just in time. There were more Surahnit coming in through the camp gateway, coming toward me along the path. If they'd heard me!

"Look, doctor, see that swirl of ground mist there," Edith was pointing straight at me. "Doesn't it look almost like a little mannikin, standing there—?"

"Why are you dallying here?" the foremost Surahnit said gruffly as he came up to me. "Get going." It was Hafna, the subaltern who had come so near *coretting* me at Vanark's command at the very moment of my reaching Mernia.

"There is more of the mist on the path now," Edith was saying. "When the sun comes up it will vanish, like Hugh vanished, into nothingness."

She was looking straight at me and all she saw was a little drifting vapor that the sun would dry in an instant. That was all any human would ever see.

I turned and went down to the lake with Hafna, down to the lake, and into it, and down, down, down through those stupendous depths to Mernia.

To Mernia, and the Taphetnit. To Fenton and Antil, and Leeahlee. . .

And Nalinah.

ii

INDISTINGUISHIBLE from the Surahnit because, clad in the *sibral* suit and hooded by it, there was nothing to set me apart from them, it was easy to reach the lock and go through it, and out to the ledge from which I first viewed Mernia.

There, however, my troubles began. The procession marched along that lofty shelf in the direction Vanark had led me, and I guessed that they were proceeding to the great cave that had been set aside as a laboratory. Here, undoubtedly they would be stripped of their clothing and subjected to the transfusions Nalinah had described. Here my masquerade would be discovered.

I must never reach that cave. How could I avoid it? The first of the openings in the cliff wall whose curtains of living light has so astonished me suggested a stratagem. I began limping, muttered something about having injured my foot. This enabled me to drift gradually to the end of the line of returning Mernians, and to duck unnoticed into a cave whose irregular opening marked it as a natural hollow.

It was a mere niche in the face of the cliff, so shallow that there was scarcely room for me, but it sufficed. Another group of Life-Drinkers shuffled by beyond the veil of darting sparks which concealed me, and then a long silence let me know that I need fear encountering no more of them.

So far, so good, but how was I to reach the cavern-floor, how make my way to distant Calinore?

Well, I had gotten as far as I had, not by planning, but by proceeding step by step, meeting each emergency as it arose, not thinking, not knowing, what the next one might be. I had only two choices, to go right along the ledge or left. Right was toward detection and death. I cautiously emerged from my hiding place and darted left.

I went past the exit from the lock, went past a great fold in the Cliff's parapet. The ledge started to slant upward, and the faint hope I had nursed that I might come to some less impossible way of descent died.

I kept on because there was nothing else to do, squeezed past another bulge in the face of the precipice where for a terrible moment I clung to safety only by toe and fingerholds, my heels projecting over those awful depths. The rocky shelf widened, just beyond there, and I went to my knees, trembling with belated fear, blind with a dizzy vertigo.

Arms went around me from behind, clamping my arms! I was helpless in a terrible grip! The whir of powerful pinions was in my ears and I felt myself lifted. A hand stripped the *sibral* hood from my head, and I heard a chorus of twitters all about me, a chorus of birdlike Taphetnit voices.

"It is he. It is Hula! He has returned to us."

I was in the arms of a Taphet. A covey of his fellows were about me and we were darting in a swift, steep slant for the obscurity of the cavern roof!

They were scouts sent out from Calinore to watch the movements of the Surahnit concentration here in the east. Seeing me making my perilous way along the ledge, they had suspected who I was. The wide place where vertigo had overcome me was a bulge in the cliff side that had somewhat screened them from observation below and they had taken advantage of that to pluck me from it.

iii

I AM once more at the platform high over Calinore, and Jeremiah Fenton is beside me. I am still warm with the greetings with which Antil and Leeahlee received me. I am still tingling with recollection of the look in Nalinah's eyes when she saw me return, and a few whispered words that passed between us. But I am cold too, with apprehension. I am quivering with the tenseness of hope and fear and dread.

In minutes now, in a few short minutes, I shall know whether that tremendous journey of mine has been in vain. The scouts have flown in with word that Vanark's legions are advancing, and now I can see them on the far eastern horizon. The dark line limiting the desolate, barren desert of rock that is Mernia's soil has come suddenly alive. They are coming now, a thousand Surahnit with human blood in their veins, a thousand Surahnit armed with the dreadful *corets* against which no human army will be able to stand if ever they are confronted with that dark green host, and they are dragging with them three blast-projectors whose blue flares can level Calinore to a chaos of jumbled rock in ten of the Mernian *neksa*.

"Come on, Mr. Lambert," Jeremiah Fenton says to me, quietly. "You better quit writing. Time for us to get busy."

CHAPTER V

IT IS over. That Surahnit host came steadily onward, a fearful green wave engulfing the brooding plain till it reached the landmarks I had picked out as bounding the farthest range of reflector-magnified beam of our captured *kitor*.

I snapped a command to Fenton and the white ray shot blazing out. It reached

to meet those advancing squadrons and fingered their serried front line tentatively, as if the light itself were doubtful of its own power.

Those green-clad forms melted to nothingness!

Strangely, I felt no elation, no such burst of jubilation as surged up from the breathless city, surged up in a great roar of sound from the Taphetnit watching upon the Wall. I played that destroying spray of artificial sunlight up and down the gallant ranks. I watched them dribble and melt down and film the rock with a glistening yellow pool, and knew the victory was mine, and the taste of it was as ashes in my mouth.

The world above was safe from the ancient race that had planned to reconquer it, but I knew I should never see it again.

I was thinking, in that moment, of an auburn-haired, pert-faced girl who had stood in the dim grayness of before-dawn and pointed to a winding gravel path. I was hearing her voice, tremendous in my ears.

"Look, doctor," she was saying, "see that swirl of ground mist there. Doesn't it look almost like a little mannikin . . . ?"

THERE remained, after the light-beam flashed, a few Surahnit that it had not destroyed—fortunate Mernians who had been completely immunized before Court Stone had injected the viosterol into the veins of the Life-Drinkers' victims. Luckily none of these had been near the blast-projectors and though they fought gallantly they were overwhelmed by the swarms of Taphetnit who darkened the sky as soon as I shut off the beam Jeremiah Fenton dubbed, "the flaming sword."

True to their gentle nature, the Winged Ones attempted to capture rather than kill their ancient enemies, and they brought in a number of prisoners. Among these was Vanark.

The dark-faced Rata, still snarling and defiant despite his defeat, threatened Antil and the Taphetnit with a dreadful vengeance, but in the midst of his tirade a messenger arrived from the Nal Surah proposing a truce and a conference between the two Mernian races to formulate a treaty to govern their future relations in the cavern.

The Winged Ones honored me by insisting upon my acting as one of their representatives, with Antil and Lura and a half-dozen others of their own people. I knew that the rest of my life would be spent among them, and I accepted.

The conference was held at once. I shall never forget Antil's speech in answer to the Nal's request for the Taphetnit's terms.

"We have no terms," he said. "We grieve that there has been this strife between us, and we desire nothing more than that our two races shall dwell henceforth in peace and friendship within this cavern. Different in certain respects as we are, we are yet brethren and as brethren we should work together for the common happiness of all Mernia.

"Tashna is yours and Calinore is ours and in each city we shall continue to dwell as we have been accustomed. For the rest, we propose that an equal number of Taphetnit be admitted to the Ratanit, and that this council govern Mernia for the peace and happiness of all Mernia. That is all."

So it was agreed. We returned to Calinore a very happy delegation, feeling that despite all its limitations the great cavern within the earth will henceforth be a very pleasant place in which to live.

WE GATHERED at last in the house that had been Seela's and now was Antil's, the group, small but oddly assorted, that had endured so much together. There was Antil and Leeahlee, Fenton and myself, and Nalinah. So much had happened that I found it hard to realize it was only the end of the second *ranhaltin* since Vanark had brought me to this strange, subterranean world that henceforth would be my home.

The girls had prepared a meal of *fortlik* and the wine they called *zingbar*. We sat down at the table, but before we began to eat, Antil rose. He stood there, a shin-

ing, handsome youth, still vibrant, still jaunty despite the weariness that must have crept sluggishly in his veins as it crept in mine.

"My friends," he commenced. "We have come to the end of an arduous journey and at last we have a little time to think of ourselves. You all know, I am sure, how very happy I am with the issue of our long struggle, with the peace that was ratified this *ran* and will reign henceforth in this beloved Mernia of mine. You all share that happiness with me, and I wish to share with you another, more personal happiness."

His glowing eyes strayed along the table and found Leeahlee's gray ones, and I knew what it was he meant. "I have dwelt all my life in Calinore," he continued, "and though I grew to know the Taphetnit as my people, as my very dear people, yet was I lonely always for my own kind. I am lonely no longer, my friends. I shall never be lonely again. I—I—" He stuttered suddenly. His face broke into a boyish smile. "Friends—I—Leeahlee has promised to be my wife. Leeahlee—I can't believe it yet, but she says it is so."

I jumped to my feet, raising a goblet of *zingbar* in my hand. "Drink! To Antil and Leeahlee and their happiness, Drink! And no heel taps."

When we had drunk that toast, I remained standing. "Friends," I said, and there was a quiver in my voice. "Friends. I too have something to say to you. Or rather, to say to one of you, before the others."

I half turned so that I was facing Nalinah, so that I was looking into the blue depths of eyes. "Nalinah," I said, slowly, distinctly. "In a certain book that has lived for many centuries among us of the Upper World, that lives still and will live forever, there is a tale of two people of stranger races who met, and loved. In that book it tells how one of these said to the other, 'I will go with thee and be thy spouse. Thy people will be my people, and thy race my race.'

"Nalinah, my dear, I say that to you now. 'Thy people will be my people, and thy race my race.' Will you have me? Will you go with me and be my bride?"

I saw a great joy, a great happiness, flare into the sweet face I had learned to love. And then I saw it fade beneath a film of gray. I saw the warm lips of old rose move in a wistful smile, and I heard words come from between them.

"Thank you, my Hula," I heard them say. "You offer me as great an honor as ever man can to maid. But have you thought, really thought of what it would mean were I to accept that which you tender? You have heard Antil, just now. 'The Taphetnit were my people, my very dear people, yet was I lonely always for my own kind.' If you wed me and remain here always, always you will be lonely for your own kind. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I murmured. "Yes. But"—I threw my arms wide in a hopeless gesture—"but whether or not you take me, I must still remain here. I cannot return to my own world. I can never return."

She smiled again, that tender, pathetic smile. "Hula. While you were gone in Tashna, I went to Vanark. What I said to him matters not, but he told me finally that which I wanted to know of him. Hula, you can return, and very simply too. The sun, that very sun which is death to us will make you again what you used to be. All you need do is lie bathed in its full, bright rays for a single *roh* and once again you will attain the stature of a human. Once again you will be as you were before the violet fire took you and changed you."

There was a whirring maelstrom within my brain, but somehow I managed to lean forward, palms pressed hard on the table, and whisper:

"Nalinah! Vanark hates me, and he hates you. What was it you told him, what was it you promised him in exchange for that secret?"

The tiny oval of her countenance was a pallid mask, and her eyes were glazed, expressionless. "Vanark does not hate me," she said in a dead monotone. "Or rather that virulent hate of his was born of a love

that once I spurned. I told him that now, seeing him weak and defeated, I had learned that I loved him. I—I wedded him, Hula, in that cell of his, just before you returned from Tashna."

EPILOGUE

Letter from Hugh Lambert, B.S., M.Sc., F.A.G.S., F.R.G.S., etc.:

Dear Zagat:

You have asked me to finish up the tale of that unbelievable adventure of mine in my own words.

I find it hard to do so. It seems like a dream now, like something that never happened and never could have. But I'll try to oblige you.

Let me skip to the moment when Fenton and I awoke on the shore of Lake Wanooka. We were stark naked, and our bodies were wet with the perspiration brought out on them by the sun, still pretty hot even though we were well into autumn.

I ached all over, every muscle, every sinew of me. I felt as though someone had been going over me with a padded bludgeon, pounding me to insensibility. But I didn't mind that. I didn't mind anything. For as I looked about me, I saw grass and bushes. I saw the old lake glimmering in the bright, early-morning sunlight, and I could see the opposite bank, the hill rising from it the old familiar hill I had looked at all summer. I was lying on a pebbly beach, and a grasshopper that leaped on my thigh and leaped off was half the size of my little finger.

From somewhere came the distant, deep tolling of a bell. It came again, welling slow and lazy through the morning hush.

"It's Sunday," Fenton said. "That's the bell of the Four Corners Methodist Church and it only rings on Sunday."

"Sunday," I repeated, staring at him. "But it can't be. It was Thursday night when this thing began, and I was down there only two—two *ranhaltinit*. Two—" Then the amazing truth struck me. "Good Lord!" I groaned. "I should have realized it from the way the day and night didn't match up when I made that visit here. Time runs differently up here and down below. Time in one place is entirely different from that in the other."

"Everything is different there and here," the farmer replied. "But me, I'm glad I'm back. I want to see some people, some humans. That's what I want now. But we can't go prospecting around, naked like this."

I replied, jumping up, "I don't care whether I'm seen nude or not. But if you're so blooming modest we'll duck through the woods to the guest house. There's always a couple of bathing suits lying around there that people leave from year to year."

We did exactly that. I left the sheets there with Fenton, on which I'd written what had happened, and stole up through the woods to the infirmary.

I heard a voice, just before I came out of the bushes on the path. Ann Doring's voice.

"Edith!" it said. "I've just been in Dickie's room and he spoke to me. Isn't it wonderful how quickly they are all recovering?"

"Isn't it!" That was Edith. "Doctor Stone just phoned me from the hospital. He went down there before dawn this morning. The people there are coming out of it nicely too. He says he can't understand how the viosterol could have done it. It's against all principles of medical science. Oh, it would all be just like a nightmare that's passed and done with if only Hugh was back."

Ann's voice was changed. "We'll never see him again, Edith. We'll never. . ."

"We will, Ann. I have always felt, and I still feel, that Hugh will come back to us."

I stepped out into the pathway.

The two girls, standing in their bathrobes just outside the infirmary door, didn't see me at once. I looked at them, at the two of them, eating them with my eyes.

I thought of them as I had seen them last, giants coming into the infirmary office. I remembered the look on Edith's face, and I remembered Ann dropping in a faint.

I thought of how Edith had leaped at once to carry out the behest of my message, so tremendously important. I thought of how always she had stuck on her job, never faltering, never seeking special consideration because she was a girl.

I looked at Ann again. I thought of how I had had to send her back to *her* job, and I realized that her very presence here

meant that she had abandoned it again.

But she was so glamorous, so beautiful. Her hair was molten honey in the sun, her body a modelled song.

I called to them. I called a name.

The name was, "Edith!"

She looked up, and saw me. She came to me, came into the arms I held out to receive her.

(Editor's note: Hugh Lambert here tells of the jubilation with which his return was received, and how after awhile it was decided that the real story of what had happened should be kept secret for a time at least. Mr. Lambert then goes back to fill the blank I have already noted, between the end of Jeremiah Fenton's story and his own fight with Talim on the ledge.

Jethro Parker never knew that he was not really a victim of the same disease from which the others suffered. His Martha was so grateful to Doctor Stone for the care the physician had lavished on her husband that she forbade Parker to even mention the matter of the vanished tramp again.

Edith Horne and Hugh Lambert were married in the Four Corners Church the following Sunday. Ann Doring acted as bridesmaid and Jeremiah Fenton as best man. The happy couple for some inexplicable reason, decided to spend their honeymoon at the Camp, now deserted. It is with an incident there that Hugh Lambert closes his letter to me.

A. L. Z.)

It was only two weeks since I had come back from that weird adventure of mine and already it seemed as though it had never happened, never could have happened. One night, however, the moon streaming in through the window of the little infirmary room that had been our nuptial chamber woke me.

I listened to Edith's quiet breathing. I stared at the tangled, snakelike shadows of stripped tree-limbs on the ceiling, and there was no sleep in me. Gradually, so imperceptibly that I did not notice when it began, a feeling that I had forgotten stole over me.

It was the lake. The lake was calling me again. Calling me down to its shore.

I slid stealthily out of bed, hardly knowing what I was doing. Barefoot as I was I tiptoed out of the room, out of the infirmary door, down through the woods to the bank of the waters.

The moonlight laid a shimmering, silver film over the quiet waters. Yards from shore that film deepened in color, became almost violet.

A black bubble broke the glimmering surface just there. A tiny form lifted out of the waves. Dripping arms rose to its head, stripped back a hood that covered it.

I saw an aureole of flaxen hair. I saw a tiny doll's face, oval and sharp-chinned and sad. I saw miniature arms extend to me, gemmed by flashing droplets.

The water was suddenly cold on my feet. I was wading out into the lake, wading out toward that tiny, pathetic form.

"Goodbye!" I don't know whether I heard that voice, tinkling like a silver bell, or whether I imagined it. "Goodbye, my Hula!"

She was gone. Nalinah was gone. There was nothing out there but the rippling shimmer of moonlight upon the lake. There was nothing there at all.

THE END

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

WE VERY seldom bother to keep track of dates. A day passes. If it has been a pleasant one—why, fine. If not, tomorrow may be more blessed. In any case, remembering its number doesn't seem to change it much. And it really is much more fun not to know it's the Fourth of July until a cannon-cracker explodes beneath your hammock than to lie awake nights dreading it for weeks ahead of time.

All this is to say that not until our offspring began to have no appetite for breakfast and started walking around the house with a dejected look on his face, murmuring, "Thirteen more days—gee!", and we said, "Thirteen more days, Bud?", and he said "Thirteen more days until school," with a look of grief-stricken accusation—not until then did we realize that the first days of September were upon us. And upon Bud with particularly crushing force. We recall hating school with a good deal of venom, but with nothing remotely resembling the forehanded bitterness that Bud brings to the subject. Probably that's something that only the extremely orderly Latest Generation is capable of.

Anyhow, it *is* the first of the month, and on that day, Argonotes is set apart for a good old-fashioned Gloat. And you get to see what's ahead.

First we want to be proud about next week's short novel: *Mr. Gadget,* by D. L. Ames. Only two serials in that issue (authors being what they notoriously are) —and we knew we had to have something substantial to make up for it. We think *Mr. Gadget* does. In the first place, it's a young book in size. In the second place—and chiefly—it's really a pip of a yarn, concerned with the madly diabolic activities of Europe's most winning jewel-thief. Stealing diamonds is his business—and a mighty good thing he makes of it, too—and gadgets are his hobby. Trapdoors; daggers that drop from the ceiling, with fiendish regularity and just about one inch south of where you're standing; and walls that slide capriciously about like the Forty-second Street shuttle gone mad—these are Mr. Gadget's delights. And when he gets a chance to combine his business with his pleasure, Mr. Gadget has—speaking roughly—Old Home Week.

Overnight, Mr. Gadget became one of our favorite characters—and there's a spot for him right in this office any time he cares to make the trip.

But that serial shortage still left us a little apprehensive. So we scurried about to find extra good ones to begin later on. Diving into the never-placid seas of fiction, we came up with two of ARGOSY'S triple-A specials clenched firmly in our teeth.

First—week after next—Borden Chase's serial, *Blue-White and Perfect.* Smooth Kyle may be in the movies now, but he's still true to ARGOSY, and this latest adventure is something he'll tell to his grandchildren o' the long winter evenings. About a flawless diamond—as you may have gathered—and a flawless scheme to smuggle it into America. Tops in entertainment.

And second—the new Eustace L. Adams —*Stunt Man.* We don't like to boast or anything, but even the printers are calling us up—can't wait until we send down the next instalment. No ladies get socked in this one, but that's about the only thing that doesn't happen. This, ladies and

gentlemen, is Mr. Adams "in the groove."

Along toward the end of the month—the twenty-fifth, to be exact—comes a novelet that we make no bones (or very few) about rating one of the most compelling and unusual tales ever to come into this office. It's Bary Boru's *Death Is a Far Country* and even with that somewhat pathological title before you, it still defies description. Bary Boru is a pen-name. We investigated thoroughly and were both baffled and disappointed when we found that it didn't furnish a literary mask for Edgar Allan Poe, Authur Machen, or Lord Dunsany. *Death Is a Far Country* is that kind of story. You'll have to read it to believe it—and this isn't the last you're going to hear about it in this corner.

One of the letters this week counsels us to give more space to letters, and, with characteristic amiability, we find we've taken up more room than usual with preamble. So let's to the mailbag with no more delay.

STANLEY DICKEY

I have a few things to say in regard to the overhauling of the good ship ARGOSY. Since January 1st things have been improving steadily both with the outer hull and the inner cargo as well. First the outer.

The cover is excellent without the red band; in addition, I notice you have put a caption *144 pages of fine fiction* on the frontpiece; both of these improve the book a great deal, also this little ARGOSY above the price makes the latest frontpieces the most attractive they have ever been in the seven years I have read ARGOSY.

Now for the winner—the short features at the end of the stories are always interesting as are Argonotes and Men of Daring. Now that the editor is relaxed, I will jolt him with my criticisms—if someone else has not beaten me to it. "The Smoking Land" by George Challis seems about on a par with all the other fantastic creations which used to be so prominent in ARGOSY. Naturally you can't please everyone so just keep fantastics at a minimum. Incidentally, why don't you put a small reproduction of the next week's frontpiece over your future "Looking Ahead," thus we would know beforehand how it would look, also making it more interesting as Argonotes is interesting to many of your readers and why not print more letters of the readers, too? (You will undoubtedly answer—"a mere question of room!")

The stories in ARGOSY have steadily increased in reader interest and warm, descriptive style since the first of the year too. The names of the best were:

Red-Headed Dancing Girl by Theodore Roscoe
Annapolis Ahoy! by George Bruce
McGlusky's Lucky Day by Richard Wormser
Revolution—with Pictures by E. L. Adams
Reader, I Killed Him by Dale Clark
War For Sale by Max Brand

In addition, the short stories and one feature were of unusual merit. *Bo Gestures* was very interesting as was Cornell Woolrich's unusual astrology novelette. Keep the good short stories, and the wolf will stay away from the Argonotes.

Last, but not least, why not have your loyal readers submit lists of their most popular authors and works so that the editor will recognize the needs of the majority of your readers—so far he is doing a good job or else having lots of luck. Theodore Roscoe, Eustace Adams, Max Brand, Dale Clark and Garnett Radcliffe are my favorite authors at present. Also let's have more of Hulbert Footner, and of the Jimmie Cordie stories. Trusting this lengthy letter (or excerpts of it) will be printed in Argonotes, I wish ARGOSY a pleasant bon voyage.

Greenville, Texas.

WE'LL let you in on a little secret, Mr. Dickey. It isn't the space-limitations but the lack of interesting letters that keeps us from printing more communications from readers. It's an unusual batch of mail that has in it two such pleasantly long and entertaining notes as yours and the one from:

RUTH EARLE-JONES

In last issue of Argonotes you said, "All you have to do to get your letter in featured position, is to guess in advance what weird frame of mind the editor is going to be in when he opens it." I wish to state that I will be more interested in the frame of mind he is going to be in when he finishes this one.

It's like this—you see, I'm crazy. However, there's a lot to be said in favor of being crazy—you have nothing to worry about and it's practically nothing in your young life if the budget does or doesn't balance. But to get along—I wasn't always crazy. No, indeed—once I

almost got the Pulitzer prize. I wrote long columns of stuff for newspapers. I knew Webster's *International* from cover to cover, and I spoke to all my neighbors. Then it happened!

I began reading the "Argo-Knockers" and began to sit up nights plotting long and painful deaths for them—I wept gallons of tears over you, poor editor, and ground my teeth into fragments, at the ingratitude of the world. My family took it calmly until I began buying dynamite and railway tickets for all the home towns of the Argo-Knockers.

Great alienists perspired and gnawed their nails over me. However, in one of my lucid moments I recall the great remark: "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country," and I make it even greater by saying I regret that I have but one brain to give for ARGOSY. Such loyalty!

I've read the ARGOSY since it was a small child. I stood by as she grew up and changed her mind and ways with pardonable regularity. I never faltered in my loyalty when she changed her name occasionally and I never grew caustic about the way she painted her face. What business of mine was it if she wore a red band or a blue one or none at all? It was the heart of her that counted and it has always been good and clean and brave. She has stood by me in all the changing scenes of my life—in sickness, in health, in joy and sorrow, at home and abroad. When I tossed her on the shelf she never whimpered, when I took her back to my heart again, she never reproached me.

When she offered me stories of prizefights, baseball or the Foreign Legion, I never said: "Listen, sister, I don't like prizefights, baseball and the Foreign Legion, so please turn over and give me the lowdown on the Strike or

LOOKING AHEAD!

BLACK DAMP

A story of the Pennsylvania coal mines, of the men who labor beneath the earth in a night darker than any night. The Little Boss had spent most of his life "below": he knew men and he knew anthracite, but he couldn't explain the disappearance of the diamond drills and the copper wire. Not until a likable lad, dubbed Sherlock, was killed, did the Little Boss find a clue to the grim underground riddle. A complete novelet by

W. RYERSON JOHNSON

THE WALL

In the living-death that was the French penal colony of Noumea, only the tough-fibered and the callous of spirit could survive. To escape was impossible—yet the men did escape. And during long, burning, maddened days in an open boat one man lived because he scorned dying as a luxury. A complete adventure novelet by

ROBERT CARSE

MR. GADGET

His name was Percival Jones. He was small and moist; and the Customs Inspector frightened him half to death. He was so abject when they found the four small bottles of liqueur in his valise that they never guessed that a queen's ransom in stolen diamonds was peacefully lying in a hidden compartment. For "Mr. Gadget" was Europe's smartest crook—and just about its orneriest. And when he has vengeance on his mind, he makes Fu Manchu look like a Pilgrim father. A complete short novel by

D. L. AMES

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—SEPTEMBER 11th

King Colt or Eddie Savoy," and never even objected when she began to like "Men of Daring."

Said I: "If you like them that way, it's all right by me, dearie. I'll even see what you have to say about them, tho' personally I think it takes more daring to be an editor than to fly the Atlantic. An editor never knows when he'll find an Argo-Knocker in his soup."

But to continue—I've gotten more pleasure, inspiration and relaxation from ARGOSY than from anything else in the literary world, and when I read slams and criticisms aimed at her and printed in Argonotes I—well, I go and bang my head against the wall of my padded cell.

So, my friend, in closing I suggest that instead of printing the Argo-Knockers, just slug 'em. Buy dynamite and railway tickets but don't let your family know it, or you may find yourself in the cell next to mine.

The Argo-Knockers made me what I am today, what d'you think I'd better do about it?

And now, poor editor, as I said in paragraph 1, what is your frame of mind now? Do you, or don't you agree with me about Argo-Knockers? Will you or won't you drown 'em in Printer's ink?

Salley, S. C.

ABOUT the only thing we resented in the foregoing letter was its author's calm assumption that ARGOSY is a she. Moddom, we'll have you know that ARGOSY smokes a pipe, bets on the races, and on its summer vacation goes up to Maine and fells giant pines for kindling. Even Ottokar would emit a dull, banshee scream if he could see your casual dismissal of the gender problem.

Concerning the Argo-Knockers, as you dub them, thanks for your gallant defense, but we're sorry that you've let them get you down that way. As long as the Argo-Knockers exist, the Argonauts won't have to go charging around at windmills—and even this department would find, probably, that a diet of unremitting praise would be trying on the nervous system. And heaven knows, what with the ripping-up of streets that's been going on outside these old windows and the incessant clatter of that office cat stomping across the rug, the department nervous system must be handled gently. Thanks again.

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"It saves me one gallon a day. I had to buy 5 gallons each day—now only 4 gallons."—*L. V. Sweet, Pa.*

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We told a smoker what Gary Cooper says about Luckies. He replied: "Then they ought to be easy on my throat, too!" We told him how other artists of the screen, stage, radio and opera also prefer Luckies. We explained that Luckies are a light smoke because the process "It's Toasted" removes certain throat irritants naturally present in all tobacco. The smoker said: "That sounds sensible. I'll try Luckies!"... Why don't you try them, too?
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