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ARGOSY

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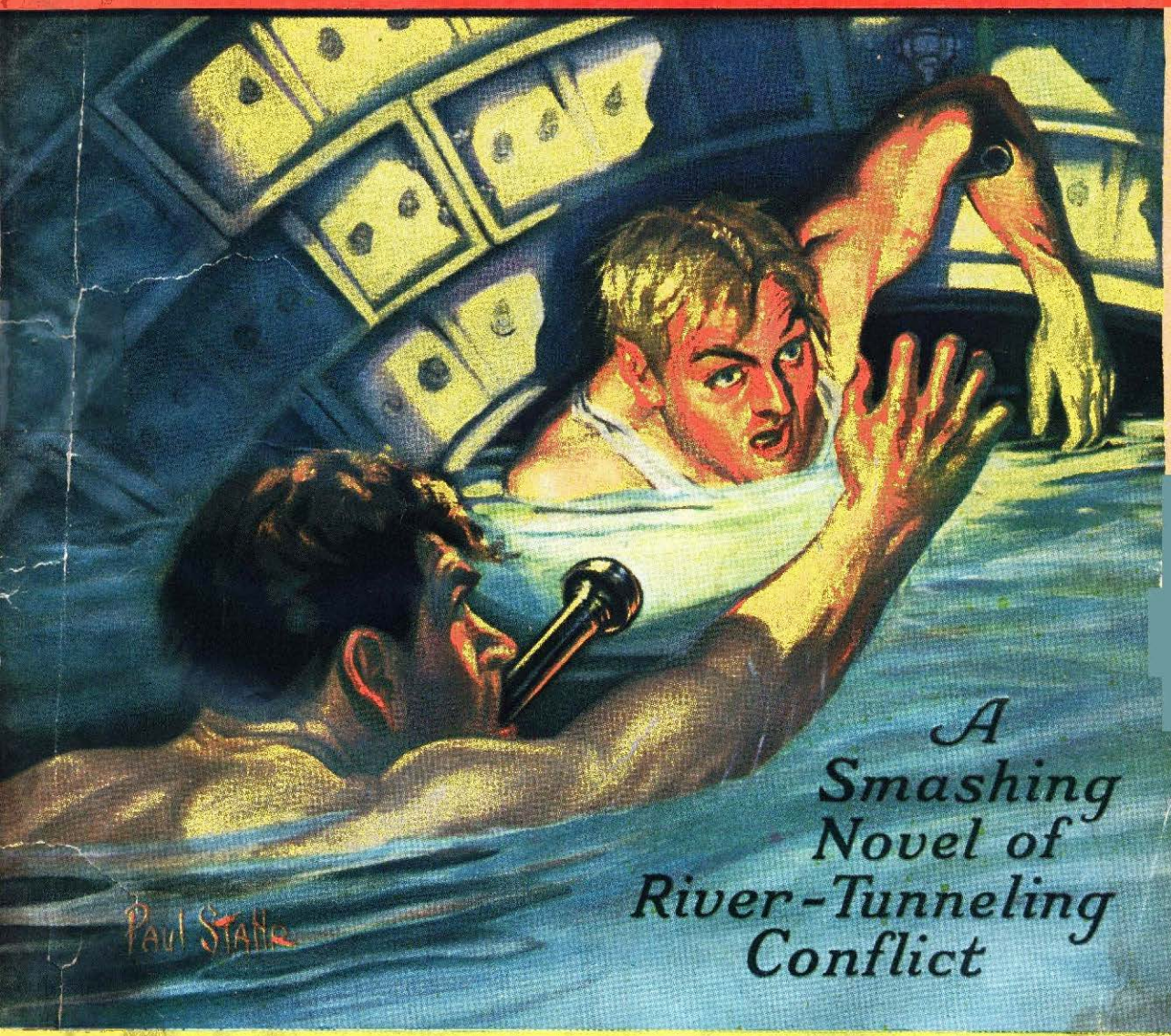
OCT. 6 WEEKLY



EAST RIVER

by CHASE and DOHERTY

The film version of this story will star Victor McLaglen and Edmund Lowe

The phrase that wrecks a MILLION MEN

"formerly with.."

He hands you a card half apologetically, half eagerly. You read across the bottom—"Formerly with." Then follows the name of a company that is a better company than the one he now represents. So with the company he represented before that one, and the one before that one. Down hill . . . pillar to post . . . same line of work . . . but down hill . . . and he doesn't know why.

A go-getting fellow, a stem-winding, whirlwind producer can get away with a great deal where the ordinary fellow cannot, say a number of employment managers.

One thing that few employers will tolerate in their employees who must meet the public, is halitosis (bad breath). It's a bad start for the man, a bad one for the company. The man who has it usually walks out the back door with a past, while the m who hasn't comes in the front door with a fut

Very few people escape halitosis. In all mout fermentation of tiny food particles, skipped by th tooth brush, goes on. Fermentation causes a numbe of distinct odors.

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LISTERINE *takes your breath awa*

ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 250 CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 6, 1934 Number 3

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

OTHER FEATURES

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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He raised his hand, his face a mask of horror

East River

By BORDEN CHASE and EDWARD DOHERTY

Laboring in compressed air at dangerous depths beneath the river, they jest at death—these stalwart men called " Sand Hogs "

CHAPTER I.

SAND HOGS.

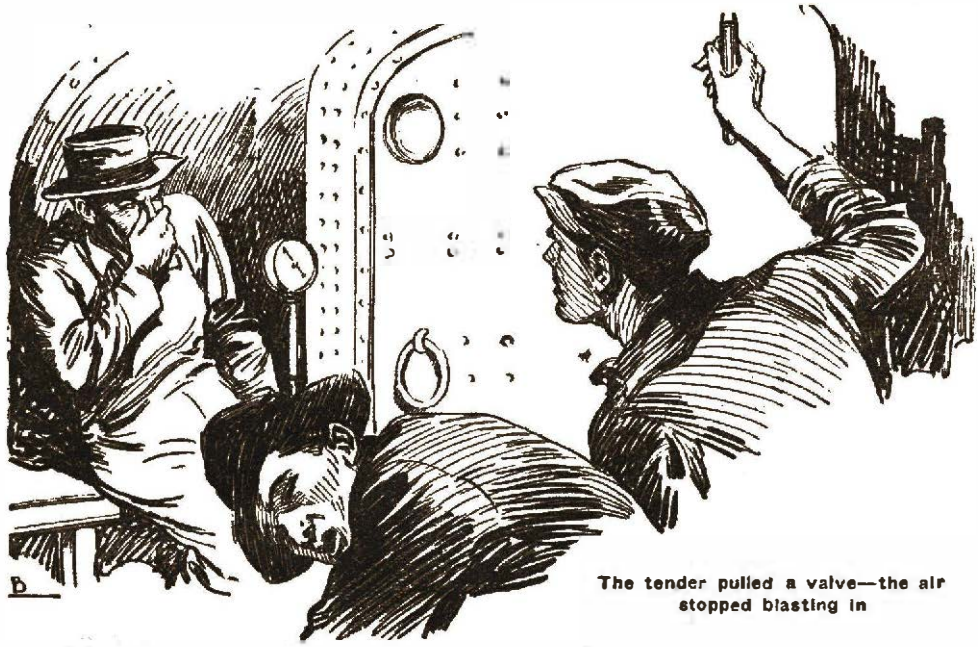
A BLOCK east of the river a crowd of men and women waited near the wooden structure they knew as the " gantry." Shawled women. Idle, ill-clad men. Gray as the fog. Grimy as the neighborhood. Gloomy as the day.

The gantry was built over a vertical shaft, and extended the width of the street. It smelled of wet new lumber, the only pleasant smell that could be detected.

Four cages went up and down through its middle all day long—and all night too—bringing up men, bringing up cars full of wet sand and muck; carrying men down, carrying down cars full of materials.

The gantry was topped with a stout wooden platform, and a maze of tracks ran over it. Muck cars, lifted from mysterious depths below the squalid street, ran along these tracks and dribbled odorous loads into waiting trucks. A stiff leg, a giant derrick, hoisted loads from other trucks, or from the street—iron plates, stacks of lumber, bags of gravel and cement, and placed them, with uncanny accuracy, into the bellies of the empty cars.

It was most interesting to the crowd, to watch this process of mechanical ingestion and digestion, to listen to the



The tender pulled a valve—the air stopped blasting in

wheezing and shrieking of the cages, the clatter of cars on the platform overhead, the chug—chug—chug of the motor that gave life to the derrick, the cries of the truck drivers, and the answering cries from the gantry top; but more interesting than anything else were the men who came and went in the cages, the men building the new tunnel under the river, the sand hogs.

One gang of them had gone down a short time ago, big brawny men, little scrawny men, seamed and calloused and wrinkled men, men half-drunk or half mad. They had run up the gantry steps swiftly, despite their heavy boots, nudging, jostling, and punching each other more or less playfully, cursing, shouting, laughing, singing. No other men in the world went to work so hilariously happy as the sand hogs.

The gang that would soon come up would be like them, full of horse play and Rabelaisian humor. Yet one would notice a difference. The compressed air in which they worked, the furious pace they maintained, the strain—and the let-down after it—made the difference. This was the gang the crowd had come to see, the gang "knocking off." When they had seen this gang, they would go home.

In every part of the world where tunnels are boring, crowds wait to see the sand hogs come out of the earth and breathe the air like ordinary men. The hogs would have been blasphemously disappointed were it not so. There are no more than fifteen hundred of them in the world, and most of them are Americans, by training if not by birth. They are proud of their work—for there is no task like it on land or sea, or above or beneath. They are proud of their might, their endurance, their recklessness, the high wages they receive for their unique labor. They brave a hundred dangers every day, and make a jest of death. Each job leaves its quota of killed or crippled sand hogs. But there's never any lack of volunteers for the next job.

So it is right, they feel, that crowds should gather to watch them come from their work, to admire them, to envy them a little. In this sense they are like actors strolling out of the stage door after a matinée. They are used to audiences of shawled women and ragged men and boys; and are not surprised to find such in New York.

IT was a dismal day, a morning of fog and cold winds, an afternoon of fitful drizzle. But the crowd was patient. Some of the women had been there since the forenoon. They had seen many gangs descend and rise. Now it was a little after four o'clock. It would soon be dark.

"Here they come," a woman cried, thrusting herself into the shelter of a doorway. Others gathered close to her, hoping not to be seen. Who knew how these "crazy American sand hogs" would act? Boys, loitering on the way from school, yelled excitedly to each other. They were not afraid.

Down the steps came thirty men, filthy with the muck they had wallowed in, hollow-eyed from the strain of the life-sucking air, men with the mien of conscious heroes and the appearance of dead men stalking out of hell. They came quickly, miners, muckers, the men of the iron gang, Jumbo, the heading boss, Mulroy, the shield-driver, and Shocker Duggan, the iron boss. They came leaping, jostling, shouting coarse oaths, singing snatches of ribald song, their heavy boots making mild thunder on the stairs.

Jumbo was in the lead, a man of forty-five, or thereabouts, six feet six inches tall, a monster one of those big-eyed boys might have dreamed last night before he woke up screaming. The men back of him, as rough-looking a group as ever imagined, slowed their steps and waited, grinning. A few of them puffed out their chests as though to say to these people—sons and daughters of Russia and Poland and Italy and Greece and other lands across the sea—

"Well, here we are, you poor know-nothing foreigners. We're the sand hogs. Look us over. You've never seen anything like us before. And you never will again."

Truck drivers, cage tenders, the men on the gantry top, the stiff-leg engineer, and the doctor in his office across the street, paused in their tasks for a moment, to look at the sand hogs, and smile. It was always worth while to look at that picturesque, colorful, ragged procession as it crossed from the gantry steps to the hog house, the hot coffee, the showers, and dry clothes.

On this day Jumbo was feeling more than usually playful. He drew himself up to his full height when he had come to the bottom of the steps, squared his shoulders—his muscles pulling his tight shirt wide at the neck. He thrust back his wide-brimmed shapeless old black hat—a foul, damp, stained, ill-smelling rag of a hat—and exposed a lock of hair, plastered and stiffened with mud. It stuck out over his right eye, giving him the look of a one-horned devil.

"What are you gaping at?" he roared.

His red rocks of fists swung at his sides. Moisture ran down his clothes. Perspiration cut through the grime on his face. His khaki clothes, his boots, his red neck, steamed. The thick black mass of hair, revealed by the opening of his shirt, glistened as with dew. His chest labored with Jovian indignation, giving that hair a sense of life and motion. His black eyes burned with a curious light, as though they would wither whatsoever they looked upon.

A light wind blew from him the damp stench of a grave.

A MOMENT he stood thus, compelling their attention, eyeing them with severe displeasure. A moment, and the spell was broken. The pretended rage dissolved in homeric laughter; and the big man squatted on his haunches and beckoned to a grinning boy.

"Hi, Sonny, come on over and shake hands. I never eat kids."

"Hi, Jumbo."

The boy started to come. But his mother would not let go his hand.

"No, Franky, no," she cried, her voice shrill. "I tell your papa."

Jumbo stood up, and roared again with laughter.

"They're afraid!" he shouted.

"Can you blame them?" asked Shocker, the young man standing at his left. "That face of yours would frighten tigers."

Shocker Duggan might have been called big in any other company. He was tall and straight and powerfully muscled. His roughly handsome face was topped by an up-thrust paint brush of shiny stiff blond hair. He was wide of shoulder, slim of hips, flat waisted, long-limbed, insolent. Beside Jumbo he seemed little, weak, almost fragile. But there was courage in his blue eyes that asked no odds. And there was scorn in his voice when he spoke.

"Go braid your chest, Jumbo, and stop playing the clown."

Jumbo turned quickly, furiously. He grabbed Shocker by the collar of his shirt, and lifted a fist over the grinning impudent face. Shocker whipped up his left arm to block the blow, and his right started toward Jumbo's stomach. But no blows were struck, for the quick stopping of a taxicab and the screaming of brakes distracted the attention of the fighters. They whirled around, dropping their arms, anger lost in curiosity. They could always fight. This might be something exciting.

A girl got out of the cab, saw the men on the stairs, and appealed to the biggest of them. "Help me, please. I can't lift him. It's a sick man—in the cab. He had this." She held up a metal badge such as compressed-air workers carry. "It says to bring him here."

Jumbo took the badge from her, thrust it into his pocket, and brushed her out of his way. He extricated the sick man from the taxi, and stood him on his feet.

"Shocker!" he called. "Shocker, it's Nipper Moran!"

The effect on the sand hogs was peculiar. They evinced no sympathy. They laughed, some immoderately. The sick man, swaying, and sagging, opened his eyes in a foolish grin. His arms hung limply, arms as long and powerful as Jumbo's. Jumbo let him fall into the embrace of two snickering Senegalese, who shared the load between them and started toward the doctor's office across the street.

The girl was astonished and indignant. "But he's sick, I tell you," she insisted, staring the laughing Jumbo into confusion. "He's a compressed air worker. His badge says so. It said to take him here—if this is the tunnel emergency lock."

"Sure," Shocker said quietly, thrusting himself in front of Jumbo. His voice was soothing, patient, sweet. "He's got the staggers, and he's got 'em bad. But we'll take care of him. I don't think he'll die. Only—he belongs on the Manhattan side."

"Is that why everybody laughed?" she demanded, her anger cooling.

Shocker shook his head and smiled, explaining that sand hogs always laughed at the staggers—" the staggers, the bends, and the itch."

Jumbo, staring at the Senegalese and their burden, scratched his ear. " What you suppose that louse was doing this side the river?" he asked. " Callin' on a dame?"

" You big baboon," Shocker replied, " don't you see the lady?"

JUMBO spun around. He had forgotten all about her. Now he took two steps forward, thrust Shocker out of his path, and clawed off his shapeless hat, knocking the stiff spike of hair into his eyes. He winced. He blinked. He smothered a curse. He flushed with embarrassment. His eye began to water. Both eyes began to water. He attempted apologies, stopped. His hands twisted his hat, the muddy fingers standing out like steel bars on a cell window.

" You sure used your head, ma'am," he managed to say. " Yes, ma'am. Most dames—most ladies—would have thought that guy was drunk."

The impish amusement in the girl's brown eyes was not shared by the rest of her thin pale face. " Everybody did think so," she answered. " So did I—until I saw his badge. He was lying on the sidewalk, and there was a crowd. I was just coming out of a—a store. And then I saw him—and picked up his badge. It was lying near him."

She looked uneasily at the waiting taxi driver.

" There was a policeman there, and he was going to arrest him. But I showed him the badge. So—so that was all right. I got the cab as soon as I could, and made the policeman help me get him into it. I told the driver where to go, but he said the emergency lock was on this side of the river. And so—"

" And so, you can't blame the girl for dumping Moran on us," the urbane Shocker interrupted, treading on the big man's booted toes.

He glanced up into Jumbo's eyes. " Did I step on your foot? I'm so sorry."

Jumbo scowled, but remembered his

JUMBO

manners, and changed the scowl to a grin. On any other face it might have passed for a simper.

" Don't pay no attention to this roughneck, Miss," he said. " He don't mean what he says. They learned him that at college."

Shocker laughed, and bowed.

" I'm Jack Duggan," he said, " and this is my pal, Jumbo, the heading boss in the tunnel. He's not really so awful as he seems. He couldn't be, could he?"

The girl looked from one face to the other, not at all understanding what she saw, then glanced with a touch of worry at the taxi driver.

" I—I owe the taxi bill," she said, " and—"

Shocker glanced at her thin worn purse, her shabby rain-wet clothes.

" You don't owe anything," he said

gently. "You delivered the big fish C.O.D. The company pays. Jumbo, go tell the driver where to get his money. The lady is cold and wet and can't stay here chinning with you all day. It's been raining, dumbbell."

"Sure, sure," Jumbo agreed. "What the hell! Sure it's been raining. That's why the street's all wet. Well—pleased to meet you, ma'am."

He slammed his hat on his head, jamming the stiffened lock into his eye again, turned abruptly and made for the cab, swinging his mighty fists. Shocker turned the girl around, as though he had known her all his life, favored her with his best smile, and escorted her down the street.

HE was a rough, even savage, looking man when he didn't smile, she thought; a filthy, ragged, odorous companion. His khaki shirt was ripped under both arms. His hair was matted with sand, and glazed, in patches, with red lead and river ooze. Bits of straw stuck up against his neck and the collar of his shirt, and wisps of wet hay festooned his shoulders. But there was charm in him, and gentleness, as well as strength; and he walked with her as one used to the company of girls.

"I'm Lee Murray," she said.

She had never seen such hair. It stuck up like a pompon. She wondered how it would look when combed. She had never seen eyes so blue.

He heard her; but only with his ears. The sound of his own name had put enchantment on him. He had forgotten he was Jack Duggan. He hadn't been Jack Duggan in years. Jack Duggan reminded him of a middle-western campus, the Phi Alpha Sig house, the belligerent Stanley Morehouse, professor of engineering, girls carrying books, prom girls, co-ed parties, letters from his father in stiff envelopes plastered with foreign stamps—"Dear son, Jack—"

"Lee," he said. "Lee Murray."

He was walking down a dirty street that pitched toward the dirty river, strolling with a thin pale girl in a wet coat.

And he was Shocker Duggan, iron boss in a tunnel, roughneck driver of roughneck men. "Do you live around here?"

"No."

"New York?"

"Yes."

A sudden thought halted him, and, perforce, her too. He looked at her with dour suspicion.

"You're not a friend of Nipper Moran's, are you?"

Lee swallowed quickly, shook her head from side to side. "No. I never saw him until today."

They went on walking, and Lee knew he was smiling. She didn't try to make sure. Some instinct told her not to. They sauntered slowly, past bleak and dingy warehouses and vacant factories and lofts and shops, paused a moment to look at a rusty freighter tied up at a nearby dock—"Frowzy old tub," Shocker dismissed it—and walked to the end of a concrete pier where tugs moored now and then, and barges came for loads.

Gray mist rose from the wide surface of the green-gray East River. Lee felt cold, looking at it. Barges and tugs came spectrally through the mist, leaving faint marks behind, forming into clean sharp pictures as they neared. A string of scows moved stealthily into the chill vapor, changed into smudged gray-yellow outlines, disintegrated one by one.

The Manhattan Bridge and the

Brooklyn Bridge in the rear of it, were faint but distinct in the weird light that seeped from a leaden sky, curious dull spider webs spun from steel. The Queensborough Bridge, to the right, though much nearer than the other bridges, was but a pencil mark on the sky.

Across the sluggish current, dimming, wavering, losing form, were the towers and temples of lower New York, their glassy eyes dull points of fire—spires, domes, columns, stepped-back pyramids of brick and stone, dock sheds, piers, low roofs plumed with smoke, a million fantastic shapes merging into a ghost-gray blur.

To the left, looking down stream, were the lesser buildings of Queens, the tall masts of ships to which clung ragged streamers of fog, squat hulks of freighters, derrick booms, patches of dirty green water hemmed in by docks —these reminded Lee of well-kept lawns at home—chimneys, round and tapering and tall, water tanks, electric signs blinking in the murky light, fluttering ribbons of smoke.

Smoke strings pushed themselves up through the river's breath, and gulls wheeled in and out of smoke and mist, noiselessly beating their wings, or gliding without effort. Above the roar of traffic Lee could hear far fog horns moan and sigh, engines throb, and whistles scream. The smells of burned oil and gasoline, hemp, wet hawsers and tarpaulins, the acrid fumes from smokestacks, damp, fishy, salty odors, stuck in her throat like nausea.

The water below them sloshed and gurgled, muted, half-heard. Someone on the "frowzy old tub" was blowing a mouth organ, playing a nostalgic foreign air.

Shocker drew in deep breaths, restlessness in his eyes, dreams of travel, visions of other rivers, other tunnels. He turned abruptly to Lee, noting her staring eyes, the pinched lines about her nose. He smiled at her, and pointed.

"Look there. Ever see anything like that?"

A short distance away, up-stream, a geyser was spouting from the surface of the river, tossing in mad convulsion, shedding spray, lifting, climbing, dancing, churning the waves to frothy milk.

"The boil," he said. He was absorbed by it, until her fingers touched his arm.

"Take me away, please," she said. "I'm—afraid."

He took her hand and led her back up the street. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know, of course. I meant to take you to the Hog Hole, and drink a cup of coffee with you. Instead I walked you down to the river to look at the boils. Excuse it, please?"

They stopped in front of a dilapidated building directly across from the gantry, a vacant, dreary, cob-webbed store front.

Who was this man, and where was he taking her? the girl wondered. He had led her down to the river—had fallen into step with her and guided her as though he had a right to. And—she had submitted without a thought of opposition. Her cheeks flushed.

"You needn't be afraid," Shocker said gently. "I'm taking you to the Hog Hole—for a cup of coffee."

She hesitated, the warmth dying out of her face.

"It's upstairs," Shocker went on. "Only one flight, but the stairway's dark. Amy's saving the light."

Lee looked into the blackness, and Shocker laughed, watching her expression.

"It does look bad, doesn't it? May-

be I'd better explain. The Hog Hole really isn't a hog hole. It's as much a part of the tunnel job as the air compressor. The sand hogs eat and drink there. That is, they drink there. No one but a tunnel man can get in. Amy runs it. She's a good scout. You'll like her."

She went meekly up the stairs, following him, since there was not room to walk at his side.

Shocker pounded on a door, two quick knocks, a single knock, then two again. Rap rap . . . rap . . . rap rap!

Sounded on the iron door of a manlock in the tunnel, this is the signal for "Open up!" A sand hog, through force of habit, will knock thus on any door, with knuckles or an iron bolt. Even at the pearly gates, they say in the tunnel, he will knock like that.

The door opened suddenly, and a woman stood in the light. She looked at Shocker, and to the right and the left of him, tried to peer over his shoulders.

"Where's Jumbo?" she demanded.

"Jumbo? Aren't we welcome without that lug? He's at the hog house, I suppose, changing his clothes. He'll be along."

"Who's that with you?"

"Her name's Lee Murray, Amy. She's been out in the rain, and she feels like a cup of coffee—cold coffee—but she wants hot coffee."

Amy glared at the girl, glared at Shocker. "Nothing's happened in the tunnel?"

"Don't be always scaring yourself to death, Amy. Jumbo's all right."

"You've been fighting with him again."

It was an accusation that made Shocker laugh.

"No. Not today. You'll see when he comes in that I'm telling you the truth. There isn't a mark on him. But, are you going to let us in, or do we have to stay out here all day? Miss Murray's teeth are chattering."

"You know I don't allow any women in here," Amy said.

Lee gasped, and started down the steps, tears of mortification in her eyes. It served her right for coming here. She was a fool. She heard Shocker follow her, felt him seize her arm, submitted to his will.

"This isn't any pickup, Amy," Shocker said hotly. "The girl's been walking her feet off all day, looking for a job. She hasn't a dime to her name, but she had guts enough to put Nipper Moran in a taxi when he was half-dead of the staggers, and bring him to the lock. She didn't know how she was going to pay the driver either. No. She took a chance on going to jail, to save a sand hog's life. And you start chinning about your rules."

Amy shoved him out of her path, looked at Lee's face, and put one arm around her shoulders.

"Sorry, kid," she said. "Don't mind my barking. Of course you'll come in. You're just suffering from Shocker Duggan's reputation."

"Thanks," Lee said. "I—just want to sit down some place where it's warm—and dry."

She bore the woman no resentment. She felt like a child in her presence, a child not necessarily unwelcome, but decidedly in the way.

The room was large, brilliantly lit, and hazy with tobacco smoke. It was garishly decorated. Drapes hung over the windows, and at other places around the walls. On the ceiling, and in the spaces between the wall-hangings, were crudely painted flower gardens. A long polished bar extended halfway across one side of the room,

and back of it, flanking the great mirror, were rows of gleaming glasses and fancy bottles. An upright piano, the top covered with sheets of music, stood against the wall at the far end, near one corner of the bar.

"Sit over there near the radiator, Honey," Amy said, leading the way, vigorously pushing aside the chairs that impeded her. Lee followed dutifully, almost overcome by the smoke, the close heated air, the smell of whisky and beer, and the sudden hush in the talk of men. She was glad Shocker was behind her. He gave her strength.

Amy drew out a chair, seated her professionally, and bade her take off her coat. She pulled a chair for Shocker, but that young man refused it.

"Don't mind me," he said. "I'll sit down when I'm clean."

Amy waved her hand to the bartender, a little man in a white jacket, and he came limping to the table.

"Two coffees, Limey," Amy said.

"Muck out a straight whisky for me, Limey," Shocker ordered.

"Righto, Shocker. Not with the big fellow todye?"

"He'll be coming along, worse luck. Hurry it, Limey, won't you?"

"With the grytest of pleasure, Mr. Shocker."

"An old sand hog," Shocker observed, when Limey was out of hearing. "Paralyzed. Lots of them like that." He gave the girl a friendly grin. "Strange new world," he went on, talking lightly until Limey returned with the tray. Amy, adding a few words, covertly studied the girl. Lee darted swift glances about the room, saying nothing.

"Please don't leave," Shocker said when he had swallowed his whisky. "I've got to change my clothes. But I'll be back. We'll have dinner together —if you'd like."

Lee saw him go with dismay. She didn't want to face Amy all alone. At least not yet. She was relieved when Amy rose and fell into step with Shocker.

She put the coffee cup near her face, loving the heat of it, and the smell of it. She drank it slowly.

At the door Amy felt it safe to whisper.

LEE MURRAY

"If she weren't so wet and cold and hungry and so—so damn helpless," she said, "I'd kick her out the minute you left. That would be the kindest thing I could do for her. But—she reminds me of a dog I had when I was a kid, a mutt I picked up in the street."

"Give her a break," Shocker said. "Like a damn fool, I took her down to the river. I wanted to see the boils. I wished you could have seen her face. She was scared pop-eyed!"

Amy regarded him with pretended scorn.

"What's the matter? Been going to Sunday School? I'll give her a break,

all right—something you never gave a woman. I'll keep her away from you."

Shocker smiled knowingly and hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOG HOUSE.

THERE were a dozen men in the hog house, changing their clothes, bathing, shaving, a few of them drinking black coffee. Jumbo was pulling on dry boots.

"Hey, Shocker," he roared, "did you hear the news? Savage says he hit a ledge of rock on his shift. The ass! He probably clipped a boulder."

Shocker tore off his shirt. He seemed but mildly interested. "How could there be rock there," Jumbo demanded, "when the engineers' borings don't show it?"

"Faker" Davis—who got his name by shirking—offered an innocent comment. "I tink Jumbo, he's right," he said. "It ain't no ledge, Shocker."

Shocker's right foot kicked his dirty shirt off the floor and into "Faker's" face.

"Butt out of this," Shocker said, "unless you want me to rub your ears off."

Davis, abashed, slunk away. Shocker went on undressing. "How do you know it's a boulder? Because it looks like your head?"

"What's the matter with you?" Jumbo shouted. "You gone nuts or something? Do you want to go through rock? You know what rock means?"

"It means high air," Shocker said. "Forty or fifty pounds of it. More money. Shorter hours. Less time for working. More time for drinking. Bring on the rock, and to the devil with your little boulder."

He hurried toward the showers.

"You crazy idiot," Jumbo's voice followed him, reverberating through the house, "don't you know that if it's rock we're in a formation? Blasting! Dynamite! The job slowed up! Everybody crazy from the general super down. The company loses dough. They take it out on the supers. The supers take it out on the heading bosses—on me! And I'll run you beggars ragged in a week. Rock! Rock-dust and powder smoke that'll cut your bloody lungs to pieces, tear your throat out, make your head feel as though you'd dipped it in hot lead—that's what rock means. Don't tell me about rock. I've shot more rock than you'll ever see."

"Speech! Speech!" Shocker called from the showers.

"And here's something else," Jumbo went on. "The gang on the other side of the river is making three shoves in eight hours—just like we are. But if we hit rock, we slow down. And they go ahead."

He turned his face on the few miners and muckers left in the room. "I'm going to run you dizzy if it's rock!"

"You talk like a company man," Shocker called. "I got a good mind to hang one on your chin."

Jumbo bellowed with rage. In suggesting he put the company's interests ahead of his fellows, Shocker had delivered the supreme insult of the tunnel.

"Come out of there," he shouted, rushing toward the showers, the floor trembling under his boots. "Come out and I'll break you in two."

"Why don't you come in?" Shocker taunted. "Not afraid of me, are you?"

Jumbo cursed and stormed, but stayed outside. Shocker laughed at him, called fresh insults, threw pieces of wet soap at his feet, hoping he'd slip

on them and fall. But he got tired of this after awhile, and wanted to come out.

"Everybody gone, Jumbo?" he asked, in the voice of one about to impart a secret.

Jumbo's answer was the essence of vulgarity. Shocker fended it off with amused protests of good will, wondering at the same time if there wasn't some way to squirt soapy water into Jumbo's eye.

"I wish I had a sponge," he said. "Listen, Jumbo. The girl's in the Hog Hole with Amy. But remember I saw her first. No monkey business."

Jumbo's curses became less vigorous, ceased. His heavy boots trailed thunder toward the door. Shocker grinned complacently. "The big lard-head still believes women hunger for him," he thought.

AMY would have been beautiful, Lee thought, were she not so hard. Her face was flawless, save for the lines about her eyes. She couldn't be much over thirty. Yet she looked like a middle-aged woman who is trying to be "young." Maybe it was the jangling bracelets, the earrings that swayed with every movement of her blond marcelled head; maybe it was the surplus of make-up on her lips, the mascara on her long lashes, or the too bright red on her polished nails that gave her this curious old-young appearance.

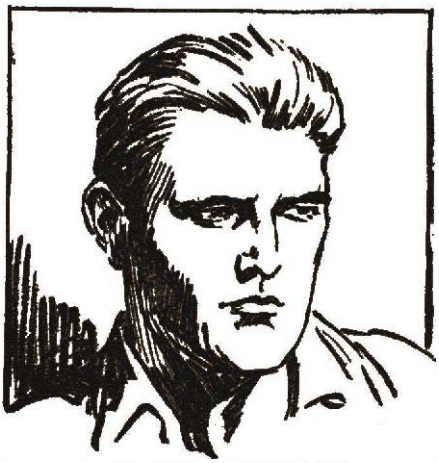
Yet at times there appeared an affecting wistful reality in Amy's face and manner, a deep and mellow charm that found an eager response in Lee.

"She hasn't made up her mind whether she likes me or not," she thought, finishing her coffee. "But she's being very kind."

Who was she? What was she doing here? Was she Jumbo's wife? "Where's Jumbo?" she had asked Shocker. That had been her first question.

And yet—the way she had looked at Shocker indicated something else. A man might not have noticed it, perhaps. But it was plain to Lee.

"She was rude to Shocker," Lee thought, "just because he was with me."



"SHOCKER" DUGGAN

The thought made her uncomfortable; made her try to remember every little detail she had noted, every word they had uttered in her presence, Amy's mien as she walked with Shocker to the door, the touch of her hand on his shoulder, the tone of her voice.

"She may be Jumbo's wife," she decided, "but she's in love with Shocker. Perhaps she doesn't know it. But she is."

The room began to fill with men from the hog house across the street. Most of them stood at the bar, talking in subdued tone. Others sat at the tables, drank, played cards, pretended they were entirely unaware of her existence, even when they looked at

her. Only one man seemed different from the others. He sat by himself, in front of a bottle and a glass, and read a book. Lee was surprised, glancing his way a number times, to discover the book was Byron's verses.

"Don't mind these fellows," Amy said. "They're human beings, like other men. They drink whisky like water; but they need it. It's sort of antidote for compressed air. Whisky and black coffee. They get hot coffee at the hog house—and they eat there sometimes. But many of them make breakfast, lunch, and dinner, out of two or three raw eggs in a glass of whisky. And they eat that here, if you call it eating. If they stare at you it's because they're not used to seeing any woman here but me."

Both felt less constrained after that.

"Was Shocker lying when he said you were looking for a job?"

"No. But I didn't tell him that. I don't know how he guessed it."

"Your shoes, maybe," Amy hazarded. "You can tell a lot about a girl by her shoes. Shocker's no fool. You don't play the piano?"

"Yes. I do. I came to New York to—well to study music."

"Well! And you had to go looking for a job! Do you sing?"

"Yes. But my voice isn't—that is, it hasn't any volume."

"Contralto, aren't you? Don't worry about volume. How about dancing?"

Lee admitted she had taken dancing lessons.

"Now I'll tell you the rest," Amy said. She waved to the bartender, and ordered more coffee and a plate of sandwiches. "I can talk while you eat. You came from a small town. You thought you'd go on the stage. You got the best teachers you could. You worked hard. You half-starved yourself. You came to New York, and it sort of frightened you. You went around to all the agents. After a time you got panicky and tried to get a job in a department store, or take care of kids, or—"

She broke off, seeing Lee's amazement, laid one of her hard hands on Lee's thin shoulder.

"I been through the mill myself," she said. "Why do you suppose I'm here? Because I like it? I took piano lessons myself once—in Muncie, Indiana."

SHOCKER DUGGAN was cleanly shaved when he returned to the Hog Hole, and a faint odor of toilet water emanated from his face and hair. His khaki trousers and shirt were clean and dry. His boots were spotless. His hair was combed—and there was a wave in it.

The Hog Hole was crowded. A black-jack game was in progress, with high stakes and lots of excitement. Amy stood near the piano, singing a torch song—

"What's my life to me,
Since you will never be,
My man?"

Some of the hogs were singing with her, off key. Half a dozen were lined up at the bar, talking tunnel. In a far corner, Jumbo sat with Lee, beaming at her, roaring at her.

"I'm for you, Baby. I'm for you."

Shocker waited until Amy had finished her song, then zigzagged through the tables to Jumbo and Lee.

"Telephone for you, Jumbo," he said. He bowed and smiled at Lee, and sat down.

"Who asked you to come here?" Jumbo growled.

"Want to get up and try your pipes,

kid?" Amy asked, coming up behind Lee's chair. With one hand she pushed the rising Jumbo back into his seat. With the other she motioned for Shocker to behave.

Lee got up quickly. She looked ill. But she smiled.

"Yes," she said. "I'd be glad to."

Amy escorted her to the piano; and Jumbo and Shocker bent across the table glaring at each other.

"That kid's decent," Shocker said. "Lay off her."

"Too damned decent for you," Jumbo growled. "Got all prettied up for her, didn't you? Well, let me tell you this. If I catch you even looking at her again—"

AMY

"Shut up," Amy said, again pushing Jumbo back into his chair. She grabbed the neck of a bottle menacingly. "She's going to sing." Amy seemed always to sense a crisis before it happened—and to arrive at the right moment.

The pianist, a little man with a dying cigarette pasted to his out-turned lower lip, ran over the music for a moment; then Lee, standing straight and unsmiling, bowed to her audience—as though she were about to speak a piece at school—and sang an old song about moonlight and roses.

Her voice was sweet, if not full.

"Think she'll do?" Amy asked, first Jumbo and then Shocker. The sand hogs were clapping, pounding the table tops and the bar. Even the black-jack players had paused for a moment in their game, to applaud.

Jumbo and Shocker were diplomatic. "Aw, it's all right, Amy," Jumbo said, without enthusiasm. "Well, she tried, anyway," Shocker said.

"Good God," Amy cried. "What on earth are you doing in this joint? A Tetrazzini, are you? What do you know about singing, anyway?"

She got up, taking her bottle with her, and rushed to Lee. Shocker and Jumbo winked at each other, laughed, and poured themselves a drink.

"The kid's got a job," Shocker said.

"Yeah. Me too. Keeping her away from you — and the rest of the hogs."

"Some job," Shocker said, "some job. Too big a job for you."

Amy returned to the table in time to prevent another fight. "Honest to heaven," she said, "I get more tired keeping you two from killing each other than Rockefeller does counting his dimes."

Both peered around her svelte form, looking for Lee. They didn't see her.

"What became of the kid?" Shocker asked.

"I'm putting her to sleep for an hour or so. She's worn out. Awhile ago she kept nodding over her gullet fodder like a highchair baby with his little tummy full of oats. And you too didn't help out any. You'd make any girl tired in six minutes."

"You mean you sent her home," Shocker said. "That was white of you, Amy. You must have loved that dog you were telling me about!"

Amy bridled. " She's in my room," she said. " And she's going to sleep. That's on the level. And, by the way, that's how it's going to be around here. On the level. Get me? The first one of you that makes a pass at her, or says something she don't like—I'll bust this bottle on his conk."

She eyed them each belligerently. " Sure, Amy," they said together. They began to talk about rock.

CHAPTER III.

RIVER BOIL.

THE gang went down for the last shift, thirty men in two cages supposed to hold but ten apiece. They stayed close together in the center, for the cages had neither fronts nor backs, only a few boards at the sides. It was easy to fall over the edges. Two men had been killed that way on this job. The cages went down rapidly, while the sand hogs laughed and sang and joked.

At the bottom of the shaft they piled out and walked toward the bulkhead, a concrete partition in the tunnel, a massive disk that held the man-lock, the muck-lock, and — above them — the emergency lock. A mucker rapped on the man-lock door with a spike. Rap rap—rap—rap rap.

A blast of air swirled out of the exhaust pipe and the door swung inward. They entered the low cylindrical compartment, stooping. Bill Ryan, the lock tender, a sand hog disabled by paralysis, called out a greeting, and the men answered in kind. They sat on benches facing each other. Jumbo, entering last as a heading boss should, looked over his gang and found that Davis was absent, and English had replaced him.

" Back, are you?" Jumbo greeted the little man.

" Aye, aye, Jumbo. I 'ad the chokes I 'ad. Couldn't heven catch me breath, so welp me."

Jumbo put his shoulder to the heavy door and clanged it shut. It sounded like a door closing on a tomb. The compressed air came in with a shrieking hiss that grew into a deafening howl. The revolving finger of the gauge moved steadily, showing the pressure, five pounds, ten, fifteen.

English winked at Shocker and attempted a jest.

" Pickin' up a bit o' speed, wot?"

It was an illusion suffered by every new man that the lock was travelling somewhere; and the hogs derived a lot of fun out of it. " Don't go so fast," they'd cry to the tender. " You'll throw us off the track." Their miming was intended to increase the victim's fright. The more fright, the more fun.

The lock door groans when the pressure inside equals that outside—giving the jokers the cue to scream, " We're dead men all." Once in awhile a man faints, hearing these cries. That is the best fun of all.

It began to grow warm. The increasing pressure generated heat. Hands and faces glistened. Dark wet patches appeared on shirts. Suddenly a man began to tug violently at his nose. Others aped him. Faces contorted. Mouths gaped convulsively. That was fun too—for some.

The sufferers were trying to relieve the crazy oppression in their ears, to equalize the pressure on their ear drums, to force the air into the upper passages of the head by vigorously blowing their noses.

Twenty pounds, twenty-one, twenty-two.

The strident noise lessened slowly as

the pressure increased. An iron-man, one of the Senegalese, was struggling madly, wrenching at his flat nose and twisting his head with convulsive jerks. He raised his hand, in signal to the lock tender, his face a mask of horror. The tender pulled a valve handle above his head. The air stopped blasting in.

"Too young and soft to be a sand hog, Frenchy!"

"Let him go home to mama."

"The poor man forgot his knitting."

The voices were strange, unnatural. High air causes a distortion of sounds, makes the voice nasal, thin, hollow, gives it a metallic twang.

Blood gushed suddenly through black fingers. Frenchy leaned over and let it pour.

"Man, man, dat's good," he said. "O.K., conducteh. All abo'd fo' Alabam'."

THE air came on again. The finger of the gauge reached twenty-six. The door groaned loudly as the strain on it was relieved by the equalization of pressure. The men swung it open and started down tunnel.

The bore, lighted by electricity, stretched before them vapory and vague. Pressure there is never constant, never can be. It rises a few pounds, falls a few pounds. The lowering of the pressure causes mist.

They walked on a plank flooring beside the narrow gauge tracks. A string of muck cars passed them with a dull clatter. They walked in leisurely fashion, for too vigorous a gait in this air may affect the heart.

Shocker stopped to snatch a forbidden smoke. The match flared explosively in the concentrated oxygen; and he got but three puffs before he had to throw the cigarette away. He stamped it carefully out.

Ahead, the mist brightened to a vivid glare, revealing men filling shovels with muck, filling and heaving, filling and heaving. Even after someone had spied Jumbo's gang, and given the call of relief—"Dry boots!"—the muckers worked for a last furious few minutes.

Ringer, the heading boss Jumbo was relieving, came forward out of the glare. "You guys will make the shove," he said. "We breasted the face down almost to the bottom of the cutting edge, but we didn't find no rock."

Jumbo laughed shrilly. "Tell that to Shocker."

"We'll find it," Shocker said. He walked ahead, into the light of a dazzling reflector. And immediately he felt himself again. This was something! This was better than women. This was a world apart, a world of men, a grotesque subaqueous world, a great long cylindrical world ringed with iron plates.

"Get to work, you baboons. What are you stalling for?"

The men of the iron gang ascended the wooden platform like so many agile apes, laughing, showing white teeth. In a few minutes they were swinging their iron wrenches, two men on a wrench; they were pulling until the sweat rolled out of them. They sang as they pulled. In five minutes they'd be splashed with drops of red lead falling from the bolt holes of the plates they were making fast.

The work platform, resting on its heavy iron turnbuckles, which were made fast to the horizontal bulge, the spring line, cut the heading into upper and lower halves. Beneath it worked the muckers, the wiry Irish, shovelling in rhythmic unison, stopping only now and then to wipe away the sweat with brawny forearm, to pull up their pants, or to tighten a belt.

They worked this side the shield, a circular and ponderous mass of pistons and copper tubes and pockets, with a cutting edge that would go through anything but rock. The shield was the same diameter as the tunnel, seventeen feet. It fit cunningly over the forward rings; and when it was shoved ahead, the pistons, or jacks, that rested tightly against the flanges of the last ring, kicked backward like so many legs. The pressure was directed to the jacks through glittering copper tubes. Out of the shield stuck a great steel beam, the erector. It took hold of the iron plates as the cars brought them up, and slammed them, each in its place, to form the ring.

The miners worked in front of the shield, most of them, scrawny and weazened fellows. They worked with the skill of watchmakers and the courage of hussars. They breasted down the muck from the face—the wall of sand at the forward end. The muck went through the pockets of the shield. The muckers banjoed it into the muck cars. The cars ran down the tracks, went through the muck-lock and up in the cages, and dumped their loads where trucks were waiting.

Yes, this was something!

" Come on, you apes. What do you think you're doing? Playing house?"

IT was nearly nine o'clock when Lee awoke. Amy was sitting on the side of her bed, shaking her gently. She raised herself on one elbow, rubbed her eyes, and looked about her.

" You're here," Amy said. " Listen, I'm going down to the river and watch the boils. You better come along."

Lee shuddered, sat up. " The river?"

" That's all right," Amy soothed her. " You don't have to be afraid of it any more. You got a job now, kid. Here, if you want it. I made up my mind to that. That's all you were afraid of, wasn't it, not finding a job? No man trouble?"

" No. Oh, no."

" Good. I've cleaned and ironed your dress. Your coat's still wet, and your stockings have holes in them. But I can lend you some things. You don't have to doll up. We'll not stay down there long."

The night was cold, unusually cold for April. A blustering wind tugged at Lee's hair, whipped her skirt about her legs, took her breath. She stumbled twice, and would have fallen had Amy not held her up.

They sat on a wide parapet overlooking the water—the cold and sluggish stream, black, oily, dotted and spangled and streaked with lights. The bridges were strings of lights arching over a wide expanse of blackness, trim outlines silhouetted against a moonless unstarred sky, running toward the lights of Manhattan, lights piled high, strung low, spilled over many acres, patternless, cold, numerous as the stars in the Milky Way.

Lee was cold, but no longer afraid. It was as Amy had said. Now that she had a job, the river no longer held any menace. She filled her lungs with the moist salt wind, as she had seen Shocker do, and inhaled the odors it brought.

" Why do they call him ' Shocker '?" she asked.

" Because he carries a shock in either hand," Amy said. " Kid, listen to me. I don't know whether I'm doing you any good by giving you a job in the Hog Hole. I've lived in a world of men for seven years, tunnel men. They're a hard breed, not easy to understand. I've cursed them, prayed for them, kept them in liquor, kept them from

killing each other, nursed them, entertained them, buried them. I know them. You'll have to be an animal trainer as well as an entertainer. You can't snub 'em, and you can't let 'em get fresh. But—listen, now, this is my warning—don't fall in love with any of them—especially Shocker Duggan." Lee said nothing.

"That white patch out there," Amy went on. "You see it? There's another one farther across the river—too far away to see now. That's what I came to see—what I want to show you. The boils. They're white tonight. I've seen them when they looked like fountains glowing with phosphorus, shooting high up and falling back in a million rainbows. That's when some tugboat turned a searchlight on them. No sailor wants to get too close to those boils. Know what they are?"

Lee stood up and stared.

"This one looks like a witches' cauldron—'Double, double, toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble.'"

"There isn't any Mother Goose about it," Amy said.

She stood beside Lee, pointing. "About eighty feet below that boil is the mouth of the tunnel, the face, they call it. The river's sixty feet deep. Jumbo's down there, and Shocker. The air's coming up out of the tunnel, leaking through the river bed and shooting up through the water. You can keep track of the tunnel by watching the boils. When the water shoots higher, the air pressure is being increased. When it goes about fifteen or twenty feet up, it means they've made a shove. The disturbing of the sand lets more air out. But if it goes higher and higher, thirty, forty, fifty feet and more, and keeps on until you want to scream, and then collapses—then you know the face of the tunnel has broken, all the air is rushing out, and the river is creeping in—to drown the men like rats. That's what they call a blow."

"You come here often?" Lee asked.

"Every time Jumbo goes into the tunnel," Amy answered. "I keep watching the boils—and watching him. Twice a day. Six days a week. I can't stay home and wait. I'd be too nervous, imagining all kinds of disasters. This way—I know. Whatever it is, I'd rather be here—and know."

HER voice took on a crooning note that was akin to wailing. "The river. It's so big, so mighty. I used to be afraid of it too—but not like you. I'm still afraid, at times. They're so puny, against it; and so brave, and so careless. Everything's a joke to them. They die every day in the tunnel. They die of the bends, of the staggers. They're burned to death, crushed, drowned. They drop dead for no apparent reason. The tunnel is always dangerous, always lying in wait, to maim and break and twist and kill the men who build it. And the river—always waiting to get into the tunnel. It's a joke. Nothing but a joke."

Lee looked away from the boil, regarded the river itself. The immensity of it! The might of it! Millions and millions of tons of water sweeping along toward the sea, resistless, overwhelming, never-ending. It looked sluggish, dead. But it was alive, terribly alive. Its calm was treachery, cold black treachery.

And down below it, Shocker. Fighting it. Fighting every minute. Why must she not fall in love with Shocker? Because Amy loved him? She must know. Amy must tell her.

"You — you like — Jumbo?" she managed to ask. Her heart beat wildly

as she waited Amy's answer. She shivered with the cold. Was Amy offended? Did she think the question impertinent? Why didn't she say something?

"Like him?" Amy said. "Oh yes. I like him. I ought to like him. He's done a lot for me. Seven years I've known him. I'm quite fond of Jumbo. He's big. He's rough. He's brutal and vulgar, and his manners ain't all they should be—maybe.

"I met him seven years ago. A night like this. And me like you. Out of a job, desperate, hungry. I stumbled against him in the dark—or he stumbled against me—and knocked off his funny hat. The same hat. He was as embarrassed as a child. He stood grinning at me, twisting his hat like a dish rag. Then he saw my teeth were chattering—and he bought me a dinner. He took me to a hotel—and left me there. For the night.

"And ever since then I've been keeping a Hog Hole in some part of the world. Wherever he went, I went."

"Seven years," Lee said aloud.

"She doesn't love him now," she thought. "Not since she met Shocker. Poor Amy. She's older than Shocker. Five years older at least. And Jumbo's much too old for her. She loves Shocker. But she can never have him. She must know that. But does she?

"Does she think that, because she's beautiful—in her own way she is beautiful—she can have him? Sometime? If the tunnel would get Jumbo? She can never have him while Jumbo lives."

In that moment she pitied Amy.

"Is that what makes her so hard?" she wondered, "knowing that Shocker is beyond her reach—and always will be? Does Jumbo know how she feels? Does Shocker? Does Amy know, herself?"

"Seven years," Amy answered, looking at her wrist watch. She held it close to her eyes. It was almost ten o'clock. She stood up and walked along the pier a few steps. Lee watched her, fascinated, studying her.

"We've been in some pretty rough spots, Jumbo and me. And Shocker. The three of us. Only—Shocker's young. It's only been a few years since he came into the tunnel. No two men are closer friends. And no two men fight each other so bitterly, and so continually."

"You love Shocker, don't you?" Lee thought to herself, without making a sound to disturb the night. "That's why I'm to stay away from him, isn't it? I won't do it. I won't, I tell you. I won't."

"Seven years," Amy went on, coming back to Lee and standing over her. "And all I know is the tunnel. Always the tunnel. I hate it. I hate the son of a tramp who invented it. A running grave under a running danger. Some day I'll run away and never look at it again!" Lee heard her sigh.

"Is it all right now—the boil?" she asked.

Amy drew the fur closer about her neck. "It's gone down a little," she said. "They must be mudding up. That means they're going to blast. Shocker was right. There is rock down there."

THE boil began to swell. It grew more violent. It leaped up, climbing. Lee felt a sudden chill, a premonition of disaster that made her teeth chatter. Amy calmed her.

"Air," she said. "More air. They've increased the pressure. They always do when they get ready to blast. The shield can't go through rock. They got

to dynamite it. If they're not careful the whole face of the tunnel will collapse, and the air will shoot through it like a cyclone through a canyon, sucking everything with it. Air's their only weapon against the river. When it goes—"

Lee stood up quickly, hearing Amy gasp—Amy clutched her, frantically, held her tight. She was trembling. The water was shooting higher.

"God!" Amy whispered. "Is it a shove? Is it a blow? It can't be a blow. Not now. Not on this job. It can't be. It can't."

Lee felt hard fingers digging into her. The nails bit into her flesh. She was almost glad of the pain. It was easier than Amy's agony.

Higher and higher; higher and higher! And now the geyser was no longer white. It was dark. Even in the blacker darkness Lee could see it change. And she could see black objects shoot out of it, dead things, sucked out of the tunnel eighty feet below and flung high into the air.

Thirty feet, forty feet, fifty feet the seething whirlpool soared, with a noise that might presage the ending of a world. Bags came floating into the calmer waters near them, broken boards, rags, bobbing bales of hay.

"I can't stand it," Amy said hoarsely. "I can't look any longer."

Suddenly she screamed and began to run, up the inclined street toward the gantry. Lee followed.

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN BELOW.

"SURE this is something," Shocker assured himself. "This is the stuff. Worth quitting college for. Worth all the letters from over the sea. 'Dear Son Jack.' Who wants to build bridges? Lay on that wrench, you simpering Senegal sissy! You want me to slap you to sleep?"

Jumbo left Ringer and strode toward the face. "Ready to go, Mulroy?" he cried, leaping onto the platform.

"Ready to go," Mulroy looked at a gage above his head. "I got six thousand pounds on the line. That ought to do it."

Six thousand pounds to each square inch of jack surface, a pressure of more than five thousand tons. Jumbo thought it would do. He turned to Shocker.

"Got that ring tight?"

"Tight and passed by the inspector."

"Ready in the face," Jumbo cried. "Knock out your braces, miners. Open her up, Mulroy. Here she goes."

Mulroy opened a valve. The shield moved, groaning and quivering, drove slowly through the sand. The tunnel shell trembled throughout its nine hundred feet. Mulroy looked proud, as though he were thinking. "I'm doing this; I, Jack Mulroy." He was not far wrong. The timbers supporting the face creaked and moaned in agony. The miners shouted, working furiously with their hammers to keep the pressure of sand from cracking the wood, especially the "walking stick," the giant beam that braced all the supporting timbers. If that broke they were doomed.

Inch by inch the shield moved on in an even progress. The sand poured into the upper pockets, where the miners were, and flowed on down to the muck heaps. The noise of hammer blows, as the miners knocked out various props, and the scrape of steel on sand as the banjos pecked at the muck piles, punctuated the hiss of escaping air.

The nasal sing-song of two iron-men equipped with measuring sticks, stationed on either side of the shield, told of the progress by inches.

"Fo'teen in de no'th," cried Frenchy.

"Fo'teen and a haaaf," cried his partner, a Harlem dude called "Bamboo" by his friends.

The inspector, a municipal engineer, checked the shield with rule and plumb line, to see that the proper gradient was kept. Jumbo leaped from place to place, watching, shouting many instructions through the haze that thickened as the air seeped out through the agitated face.

"What does she say in the north? Read that stick, damn it. What you got there, Frenchy?"

"Ah got twenty tight"—not quite twenty inches.

"Put on your top jacks, Mulroy. Let's get this over with."

"Top jacks coming out."

A minute later, crunching and grinding, the shield stopped dead.

"What the bloody hell!" roared Jumbo. His red-rock fists looked for a victim.

"Looks like we hit a ledge of rock," the inspector said.

"We hit your grandma's feather bed," Jumbo answered him. "Some mug's gumming up this job, and if I find him—"

"Rock," Shocker said, "Rock!"

Jumbo swept him away like a man annoyed by gnats. "Give it seven thousand, Mulroy," he ordered.

The inspector interposed a timid warning.

"Careful, Jumbo. You'll buckle the shield."

"Buckle your belt," Jumbo retorted. "Who's the headin' boss here? I said give her seven."

"Come on seven," Shocker jeered. "Natural, dice. Jumbo's goin' to pass. Right through the rock, he thinks."

Mulroy stepped across to the platform telephone and ordered an extra thousand pounds of pressure, leaped back to his post. Jumbo climbed the iron flanges to the platform and stared at the motionless jacks.

"There's your seven," Mulroy said.

THE tunnel shook, but nothing moved. Nothing was said. Muckers, miners, iron-men, everybody, stood silent. Jumbo climbed down from the platform, picked up a sledge hammer and a long pointed iron rod.

"Clear some muck out of there," he said, motioning a couple of muckers to the lower center pocket.

When they had cleared enough space for him, he crawled into the pocket, crouched, and drove the rod outward and down, probing. Suddenly he hurled himself out.

"What are you doing, you muckers? What are you standing around for? Don't you know what to do? Don't you know rock when you're up against it? Muck out there! Muck out! You miners, get busy on that face. Brace it up. Put in a few extra stretchers, and mud-up. Make it fast! Send your helpers down into the bottom and get 'em started on the drills. Where's that pipe fitter? Tell him to get six drills in here, and have 'em running in five minutes. Shocker—Hi, you Shocker—turn your gang to on the drilling machines. Mulroy, get the electrician and six or eight exploders, and a firing box. Tell him to round up the powder man too and get that dynamite in here. Come on, everybody, move. We got less than an hour to drill and shoot and finish the shove. Move!"

The heading hummed with activity. Hammers sounded again. Drills chattered against the rock. A length of wire was run from the face, through the shield, to a firing box located three hundred feet up-tunnel. In less than half an hour they were ready for the blast.

The powder man approached with the dynamite. The electrician pulled a plug that connected with the shield lights, plunging the heading into darkness. Water drips constantly in the tunnel, causing numerous short circuits in the wiring. Should one of the wires leading to the charge come into contact with a stray trickle of electricity, there would be a premature explosion. With the lights out the danger is considerably lessened.

The drills were silent. The hammers were silent. The only sound was the roar of the air coming in through the feed line. Presently a new note was heard—the high piping falsetto of air jetting out through the cracks in the face, a sinister sound.

Shocker leaned against one of the rings and watched Jumbo in the glow of a flash light. He was in the center pocket, placing the sticks of dynamite in the drill holes.

"'E thinks dynamite is gum drops, 'e does," English grumbled. "I 'inted to 'im, I did, as 'ow four sticks'd do the trick. But would 'e listen? 'E would not. Six 'e's usin'. Arf a dozen! Ow, I 'inted to him, I did. An' wot's me thanks? 'E slapped me in the mush, 'e did; and chucked me hout."

"On your hear," said Shocker. "I don't blame him. Shut up."

He knew six sticks might tear out the face; but he realized Jumbo knew that too—Jumbo's pride had been hurt ---discovering rock. And the work had been held up. The delay hurt Jumbo more than the knowledge he was wrong. He had a double grudge against that rock, and he was going to satisfy it with one blast, kick out enough of it to let the shield move its full thirty inches. There'd be no piecemeal work, no fooling.

"Six is the point," Shocker yelled. "Shoot the works!"

A dozen flash lights played on Jumbo as he stepped out of the pocket. "Up-tunnel, you hogs," he said. "Make it fast or your widows'll be picking rock out of your hides."

The hogs hurried, calling "Fire—fire—fire," the warning that a blast is about to ensue. The electrician waited a moment.

"Come on, Jumbo," he said. "What are you doing? You're going to fire the shot, ain't you?"

"You fire it," Jumbo said. "I'm staying here."

"You're crazy." The electrician backed away. "But you're the boss."

He saw Shocker, standing alone. "You screwy too?" he asked. "Want to die with your pal? Or just want to pick up his pieces?"

"Beat it," Shocker said. "You talk too much."

He stepped back into the partial protection of the flanges, and waited for Jumbo's "Let 'er go!"

THUNDER burst from behind the shield. Jagged pieces of rock belched from the lower pockets and clanged on iron. Jumbo's flash light moved about the shield, showing dense clouds of blue powder smoke. Shocker walked toward the flash, listening.

To his ears came the one sound he had been hoping not to hear. He heard it above the moan of the incoming air —the slithering hiss of pouring sand.

There had been rock below, and sand above—a dangerous combination.

Jumbo heard it too. He scrambled up onto the platform, rushed to the shield and flashed his light into the upper center pocket. An eery whining greeted him, the sound of a wind rushing through the leaves of many trees.

The white shaft of light, streaking through thickening fog, showed a broken beam hanging from the face, breast boards smashed and displaced, sand pouring down and forming in piles on the sliding platforms extending from the shield to the face.

He jammed the butt of the flash into the sand at his feet, with its beam directed at the break. He snatched up a bag of hay and hurled it into the growing hole. The rushing air caught it and whipped it up into the river bed, and through it. He tossed another bag after it, a shovel, a few short boards, a bale of hay, everything he could get his hands on. As fast as he grabbed anything it was snatched from his hands and sucked up into the opening.

The sand poured down from the face and crept up around his legs, pinioning him, creeping over the lens of his flash light, narrowing his field of vision. He reached for more bags, clawing frantically about on all sides in the darkness, trying to wrench his legs free of the sand, cursing madly. Suddenly a bag struck him in the back. He seized it before it had fallen, hurled it into the hole. Another bag hit him, and another.

"A plank, Shocker," he cried. "For God's sake get a plank."

He couldn't see the man who threw those bags. But he didn't have to see him. It could be nobody but Shocker. Shocker always stuck.

Into the face staggered Shocker, dragging a plank. Jumbo wrenched it from him and forced it crosswise into the mouth of the blow.

"Now, more bags."

Working like maniacs they crammed bag after bag into the breach, packing them around the plank.

"Watch out, Shocker," yelled Jumbo. "The plank's cracking!"

If it did crack they were licked.

Steadily the sand poured in, creeping across the face of the flash light. Shocker ripped his shirt from his shoulders and jammed it into the hole as the light went out. He laughed.

"Root hog, or die," he cried.

"Don't laugh, you fool," Jumbo answered. "Get more bags. Move!"

Alone, in the darkness, the two men stood in the gap, and fought the river with everything they had.

LEE stumbled and fell. But Amy didn't stop. As the woman passed beneath an arc light, Lee could see her hair streaming in the wind. Amy was running in the center of the street, splashing in the puddles, body bent against wind and the street's incline, hands swinging at her sides. Lee rose, and followed; not quite understanding. She knew only that something dreadful had happened in the tunnel, and Amy was running in terror.

She saw Amy enter the door of a corrugated iron shanty near the gantry. She stopped, and rested a moment, and went on more slowly. Amy was crying into a telephone when Lee arrived.

"Put the tunnel on here," she was crying. "Fast. Emergency. The tunnel! The tunnel! The tunnel!"

A gray-faced man, gray-haired, thin, stooped, was standing near, watching. His eyes were dull, without expression.

"Jumbo's down there," he said to Lee, as though explaining the situation to himself. "Her man's down there."

A charcoal fire was burning under a sort of ash can. The man was holding his hands over it, although heat came from his body as though it were a stove. He smelled of garlic and pipe-smoke and wet clothes drying.

"Operator!" Amy was crying. "Operator! Operator!"

Her fingers were white against the black of the phone, and the red tips of her nails made it seem as though she were squeezing blood out of her finger ends.

Lee could hear the ringing signal of the telephone. She thought she could even hear the beating of her heart, but realized it was the ticking of the clock. Ten minutes to ten.

Huge pipe lines ran through the shanty. Everywhere were valves, gages, curious looking metal things. Lee wondered idly, with one part of her mind, what they were, what their purposes were, how such a dazed-looking old man could tend to them.

"They don't answer," Amy said. "They don't answer."

"They're trapped," the man said. "They're trapped like rats. The river'll drown them like—like rats."

He rubbed his hands.

Shocker's hair was beautiful, combed or uncombed. A knight's plume.

It was still ten minutes to ten. The clock must have stopped. Why was it ticking then?

"The tunnel," Amy cried. "They don't answer, Operator! Ring 'em again. You sure? You're ringing the tunnel?"

The wind was loud, outside the shanty. And it was raining again. The rain lashed the grimy little window over the telephone, lashed it furiously. The flimsy door rattled, letting in shafts of wind. It was strange to think of Shocker dead. That fine, animated, virile face, cold, wavy, covered with green-gray water. Strange and hideous.

"That Jumbo," the man said. "He was a fine man."

The ringing signal stopped abruptly. Some one had answered! Lee sprang to Amy's side.

"Hello," Amy cried. "Hello. Tunnel? Is this the tunnel?"

Lee could hear a voice from far away, metallic, indistinct, like the sound of static on the radio.

"Mulroy," Amy said.

The far away voice continued for a moment. Amy hung up the phone. She leaned heavily against the wall, making the shanty tremble. She tried to smile.

"They're all right, kid," she said. "They stopped the blow. Quit biting your nails, and let's get out of here."

AFTER a few moments of panic the gang down the tunnel came, walking fast, toward the heading.

A flash light was turned on the gap where Jumbo and Shocker Duggan stood throwing bags of hay into the maw of the river bed.

"Bags," Jumbo roared. "Planks. Bales. Move!"

The dazzling light of the reflector came like a friendly hand to the rescue. Shocker stepped back, blinking.

"She'll hold," he said.

He was covered with muck and sand and river ooze that smelled of marshes centuries old. He looked at Jumbo and laughed, and flung another bag into the gap.

"You look like the devil modelled in clay," he said.

But Jumbo was in no mood for pleasantries. "Quit stalling," he bellowed to the men. "Take the lead out of your pants. Move, you beggars, move."

The phone on the platform was ringing. No one paid any attention to it. Muckers, miners, and iron-men worked feverishly to repair the damage of the blast, to stop up the hole.

Mulroy answered the phone after a time. He hung up, and called to Jumbo. "Amy sends her love," he said.

Shocker voiced intense unbelief. "Not to that pile of mud," he cried. "Come on, you apes, what are you laughing at?"

The Negroes began to sing—

"Down on the levee,
I said the levee—"

They were still singing—and filling up a hole in the levee—when Mulroy saw the relief gang coming, and cried "Dry boots!"

CHAPTER V.

LEE'S DÉBUT.

AMY was standing at the bar, an empty bottle at her elbow, talking to Limey, when Jumbo's gang, clean and dry, came into the Hog Hole.

"Muck out some drinks, Limey," Jumbo bellowed, pulling at his forelock. "I'm still spitting up muck."

Lee watched Amy closely, half expecting her to run to Jumbo or to Shocker, perhaps to throw her arms around him and kiss him, and break into tears. But Amy merely glanced around, as though annoyed by Jumbo's bellow, and resumed her interrupted conversation with the bartender. Lee was shocked, at first. Then, remembering Amy's panic at the river, and in the gage tender's shanty, she began to realize many things.

"She's masked. She's always masked. If she weren't she'd break. She'd betray herself. She'd go crazy. Every time those two come out of the tunnel, safe and unharmed, she feels they've come back from the dead! It's a miracle—but she mustn't let them know it's a miracle. She must act as though nothing had happened. I wonder how long she can stand it. No woman can stand too many miracles, believe me."

She was seated at a table with Nipper Moran, a great hulk of a man with red hair and face and hands, and the eyes and teeth of an ogre. He had come out of the medical lock, after several hours of compressed air, and had stepped into the Hog Hole for whisky. He drank it raw, out of a tumbler.

"God's bones!" he had cried, seeing Lee. "Ain't you the cutie that saved my life? Kid, lemme buy you a drink."

So she had sat with him, drinking coffee, and had listened for a time to his thanks, his boasts, his raucous talk of the tunnel driving toward Queens from Manhattan, the men who worked for him, and the way they worked.

Shocker had come in with Jumbo. Lee had seen him before she had seen any other man in the gang. She forgot, for a time, that Nipper Moran was talking. She followed Shocker's progress across the room—a curious impulse tempting her to rise and go to him; another impulse, just as curious, holding her firmly in her chair.

Suddenly she knew why Amy had bidden her not to fall in love with any sand hog.

"If I did—if I ever did—I'd be like her, afraid to let him go, afraid every time the river boils climbed high, afraid to let him see, when he came back, that he'd tortured me. I'd go mad."

She caught Shocker's eyes on her—intense blue eyes that seemed both an-

gry and astonished—and deliberately turned from their scrutiny to flash a smile at Nipper Moran.

EARLY in the morning Amy and Lee went to an apartment in Grand Street, packed up Lee's few belongings, paid the rent, and went looking for a good room near the tunnel. Later they went shopping.

"If you work for me, kid, you got to make a splurge," Amy said. "Never mind the dough. I'll get it back. I'm no sucker."

She overawed the clerks in the stores, making believe she was a society matron selecting the right things for her débutante daughter. She enjoyed the excitement in Lee's face, but never showed it.

"That rag? I couldn't see it with lenses that thick. It give me a headache. It's bad for my neuralgia. Put it back in the rag bag. And this is a little import, is it? Where from? Hackensack, New Jersey? Show us something a lady would wear. Classy stuff. That's silk? We want real silk, dearie, no come-on stuff. How much is this? Oh yes? I pay my own taxes, not yours. Now here's something ain't so bad. Why didn't you show us that first? Try it on, kid. If it fits, it's yours; and to hell with what it costs. It'll all come off your pay, in the end."

Shoes and stockings and underwear and hats were easier; but Lee must walk up and down several times in a dress she or Amy fancied. She must stand still, turn around, raise her arms, lower them, and give Amy ample time to make up her mind.

"That thing looks better off you than on," Amy might say. Or—"Kid, I never knew you were actually beautiful—not until you got into that rig. Why, you're a knockout! Now if we can get a hat to go with that, in this jerk-water store—"

Several afternoons they spent planning Lee's costumes, and picking out her songs. "Go into your song and dance, kid," Amy'd say. "I think I'm getting an idea."

When Jumbo first saw Lee in one of the new dresses he stood looking at her, twisting his hat and nodding his head.

"Aw!" he said. "Aw!" His neck thickened. His face flushed. He stood on one foot and then on the other. He looked at the floor.

"Say," he said, his voice louder than he realized, "say—if any of these hogs makes a pass at you, you tell me. I'll pull 'em apart."

He gave her a shy grin, twisted his hat more fiercely than before, and hurried away.

Amy laughed, but not until he had left the room. "The big goof," she said. "He'll be making love to you next."

Lee looked at her in some surprise.

"When you get my age, kid," Amy explained, "you won't worry about girls takin' your man away from you. Oh, I don't say Jumbo won't play around a bit. What man won't? But it isn't the girls that worry me. I can take care of them. There's only one thing I am jealous of."

"That's Shocker," Lee thought.

"That damned tunnel," Amy said. "Tunnel, tunnel, tunnel. Morning, noon and night they think of nothing else. These sand hogs! I can compete with any woman, I've done it before; and I'll do it again. But I ain't got a chance with a tunnel!"

WITHIN a week Lee felt at home in her new surroundings. She was at ease with the sand hogs, knew many of them by name, learned

the histories of half a dozen. She felt that Jumbo was her warm friend and champion. She liked Mulroy, the shield driver, and had once discussed poetry with him. He didn't care for Shakespeare, which she could quote readily. His favorites were Shelley and Keats and Byron. He wasn't sure which of the three he preferred but thought it was Keats.

"Take that phrase of his—'the deep sea-shouldering whale'"—he said. "That's as grand a thought as I've ever read, I think. What a picture that gives you—Leviathan shoving the ocean out of his way, pushing the seas aside with his great shoulders, going where he wants and nothing stopping him—nothing at all but a man with a harpoon!"

Mulroy's eyes had a trick of catching fire from his words, and lighting his whole face. "I've tried to write," he confessed, half an hour after he was introduced to Lee. "But it's hard work. I'm writing a play now."

"In blank verse?" Lee asked. She was thrilled. All her life she had dreamed of the stage. She had fancied herself an actress, a dancer, a concert pianist, or maybe a star of opera or musical comedy. To meet somebody who was actually writing a play was to come, somehow, a little closer to the realization of her dreams. And a play in blank verse suggested costumes to her, music, songs, dances. She did hope it was blank verse he was writing.

But Mulroy smiled and shook his head.

"No, I'm nuts about poetry," he said, "but I can't write it. It's just a play in three acts—an ordinary play. I call it—*Tunnel.*"

Lee laughed. She couldn't help it. Amy was right. The only thing these men loved was the tunnel.

"That's all right," Mulroy said. "Don't apologize. I'm used to being laughed at. These wolves think I'm a sissy because I read verse. I don't mind. Wait till that play's produced."

Lee also liked the bartender, Limey, whose ambition was to own a traveling circus and give command performances to royalty. She liked many others, men who spoke proudly of their wives and children—some of them even bringing pictures out of pockets for her to gaze upon—men who had been deep sea divers before they entered the tunnel, men who had stories from all over the world.

It was only Shocker Duggan who made her feel awkward, or shy, or ill at ease. She tried to avoid him, but she couldn't—always. She tried to be cold to him. She sometimes pretended not to know he was anywhere near her—though she knew the sound of his step, knew every inflection of his voice, could see him with her back turned and imagine every little gesture of his hands, every expression in his face.

"What's the matter with me?" he asked her once. "Has Jumbo been telling you about my lurid past?"

"Nothing's the matter," she lied. "Nothing, Shocker. Or maybe it's just that I'm—maybe I'm nervous, making my big début."

She knew moments of hatred for Amy—and other moments of love for her. Amy could not be blamed for loving Shocker. What woman could help loving him? It wasn't Amy's fault she was jealous of him. Shocker had a way with women. He made Lee feel weak, at times, weak and shaky.

"Amy knows she can't have him," she told herself, "but she won't let me have him either. Even if I wanted him. Which I don't. And if I did want him

—I wouldn't take him. Amy's been good to me. I can't hurt Amy. Amy's sweet. The only reason Shocker attracts me is that he's banned—forbidden fruit. Don't pick."

YET, after Lee's first professional appearance at the Hog Hole, it was to Shocker she went for appreciation. It seemed to her the natural thing to do. It was as though there never had been any Amy to say "Don't touch."

She was nervous before her début, believing her whole career depended on the pleasure of these tunnel men. If they liked her she might some day achieve her highest ambitions. If they didn't—she would never be anyone.

Amy introduced her with a characteristic speech; but it seemed to Lee, listening and peeking through the half-opened door, that Amy was nervous too.

She was attracting attention by pounding on the bar with her bottle. "Listen to me, you hogs," she said. "You're going to see something new tonight, something—well something new. And don't nobody—don't anybody—sit, on your hands. This little lady is—is new here. But you're goin' to like her."

Loud roars of approval greeted Amy, and restored her confidence. She banged the bottle furiously again.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. I ain't finished yet. The little lady is Lee Murray, and she's going to be here in the Hog Hole right along. But don't let that put any funny ideas in your heads."

The hogs laughed, banged each other vigorously to show they knew what Amy meant, and twisted their chairs around to watch Lee's entrance.

She appeared in a simple blue silk dress. She bowed, smiled, sat at the piano, and sang a popular torch song. The hogs pounded their approval on the table tops. They shouted. They stamped their booted feet. They whistled. Lee sang another, bowed, and hurried out. The window panes trembled with the noise that followed her exit.

"More!" the hogs shouted. "More!"

The orchestra entered and began Lee's dance music. The hogs gave them a loud and vulgar response. "We want Lee!" they shouted.

At the right moment Lee appeared in her dance clothes.

The hubbub quieted, and she spun across the floor in a furious whirling tap routine. Shocker was watching her. He was standing up, a whisky glass in his hand. Lee didn't know whether he liked her or not.

Jumbo was standing at Shocker's side, towering over him. His face was beaming. He was roaring approval. Suddenly every man in the place was roaring—every man but Shocker. Lee couldn't hear the music. She spun nearer and nearer to the piano, tapping a swift cadence.

The music stopped. She stood alone, bowing. She turned, and ran into the other room, into Amy's arms.

"Kid, I never seen anything like it," Amy said, hugging her violently. "You're a hit, a riot. Listen to them."

She released the girl and hurried out of the room, snatching up her bottle as she went.

Lee got into a fluffy white chiffon dinner dress, and went to Shocker's table, nodding right and left to the hogs who were clapping their hands at her appearance, and crying "Baby, that was swell!"

"Was I—all right?" she asked Shocker.

There was a queer catch in her throat. It seemed most important that he answer yes.

" It was swell," Jumbo said. " Swell! I can lick any man in the world that says it wasn't."

Lee hardly heard him. She was looking into Shocker's clear blue eyes—and waiting painfully for his verdict. She could see something in those eyes that made her heart beat fast—but she must have it in words. She must!

" If you were any better," Shocker said, " these hogs would have wrecked the place. You're the neatest dancer I've seen in years. And you can sing! You almost made Jumbo cry."

Lee had seldom experienced a happier moment.

" I'm so glad!" she said.

" Don't listen to that guy," Jumbo said. " I can tell you all about him in six words. Don't trust him. With women he's a louse. Them soft words don't mean what you think they do."

" Why, Jumbo!" Shocker said, in tones that expressed more mockery than hurt. " This from you?"

" That from me," Jumbo roared. Lee felt uncomfortable.

" Will you go to a dance with me tonight?" Shocker asked.

" She will not," Jumbo shouted.

" We'll go to the Everglades, the swellest place in town."

" Listen, Mug," Jumbo said, leaning across the table, that withering light in his black eyes, " if she goes any place tonight, she goes with me."

" I asked her first," Shocker responded. " And if you don't like it—"

" Please don't fight," Lee begged.

Shocker tried to reassure her.

" Don't mind Jumbo. It's just his way. I'll tell you what we'll do. As soon as we finish the next shift I'll climb into a dinner jacket. I'll meet you here a little before eleven o'clock. And we'll step out. Is it a bet?"

Jumbo growled, and reached for his shapeless hat.

" He may be in his monkey jacket," he said to Lee, " but he'll not be here."

Both men were looking at her as though awaiting her decision. She could not give it. That would surely start a fight. She must evade the issue, temporize.

" Monkey jacket?" She simulated surprise.

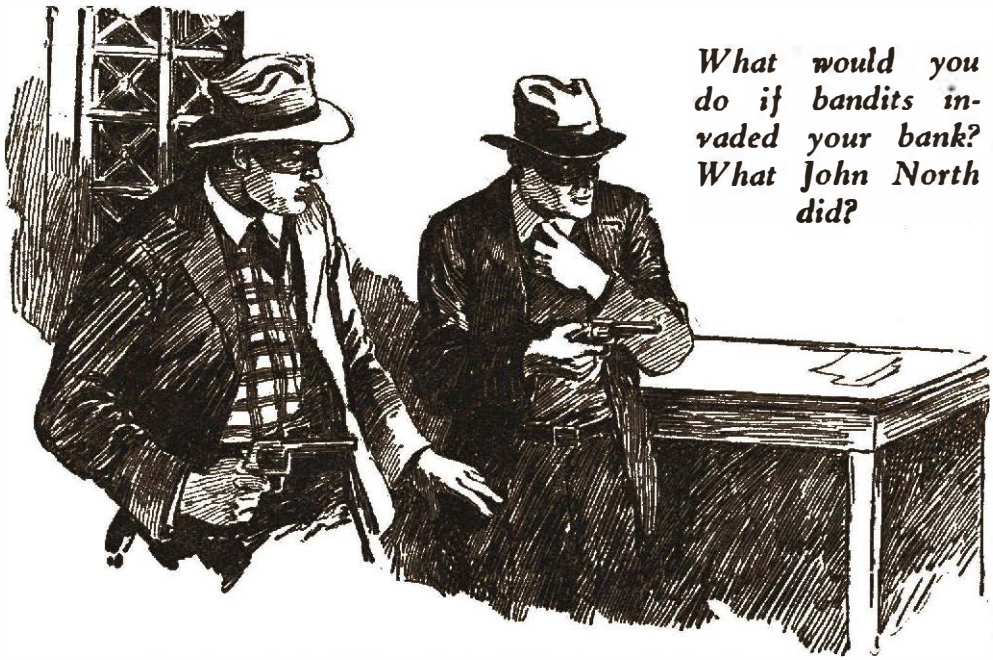
" Why not?" Shocker demanded. " What kind of animals do you think sand hogs are?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Brand New Money

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Whose Money?" "The Devil and the Deep," etc.



What would you do if bandits invaded your bank? What John North did?

"You're going to open the safe," said the man with the soft hands

CHAPTER I.

VINDICATED BUT FIRED.

THE secretary to the president of the Consolidated National Bank of San Francisco came out of the directors' room and beckoned to the young man who was waiting in the ante-room.

"You may come in now, Mr. North," she said.

John North, manager of the Westham branch of the Consolidated, who had been awaiting the summons for twenty minutes, nodded, rose and entered the inner room with a firm step. He was a lithe, wiry, dark young man with a high forehead, a pleasant mouth and a solid jaw. In his coat lapel was an American Legion button.

The twelve directors of the great bank were seated at a long, polished oak table. At the head of the table sat Stephen Fordyce Rathburn, president. Flanking him were the substantial men of the city, leaders in its various industries, worthy to be on the board of a national bank whose branches spread all over the city and surrounding counties.

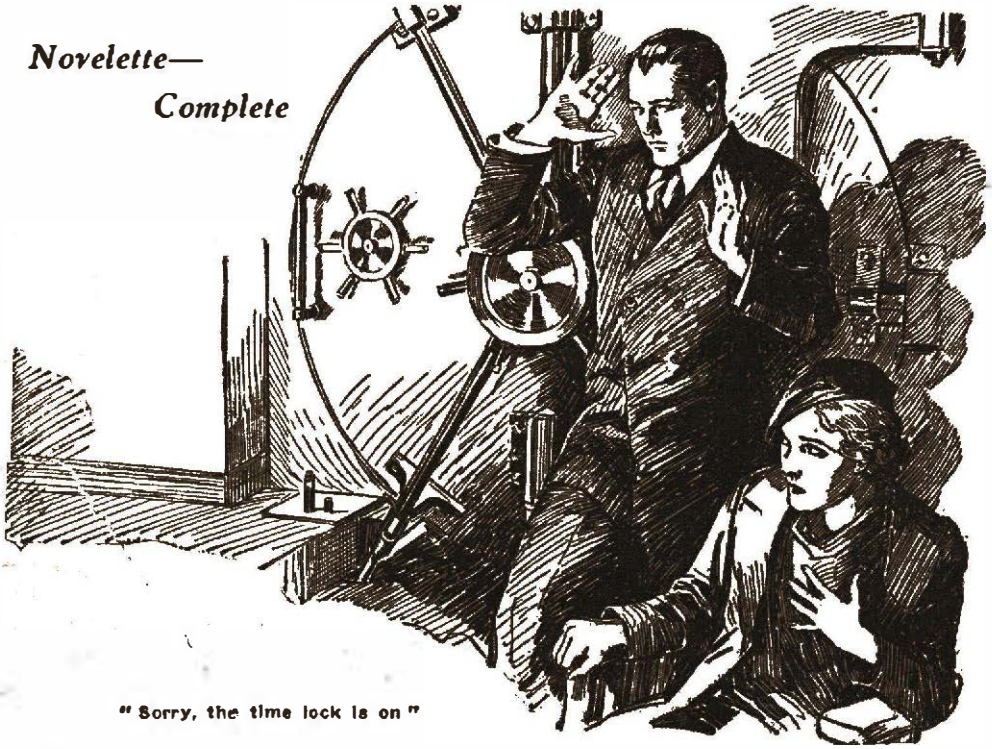
Mr. Rathburn removed his glasses, polished them and returned them to the bridge of his prominent nose.

"Mr. North," he said formally, "having considered the circumstances of the robbery from all angles, the board has come to the conclusion that no stigma attaches to you." He paused.

North, who had remained standing at the end of the table, bowed stiffly.

"Your statement has had ample confirmation. There seems to be no doubt that you behaved with—ahem—discretion. We cannot demand that a man placed in your circumstances should act with—er—more audacity. Am I right, gentlemen?"

Novelette—
Complete



"Sorry, the time lock is on"

The grave and reverend members of the board nodded one and all.

"Though a soldier, who was awarded the Croix de Guerre, might have found—er—some way to save the bank's funds."

"Such as what, sir?" asked North blandly.

"Well, let's not go into that. We feel, despite your complete exoneration, that there might be some question on the part of some people regarding the advisability of retaining you in your post. It would save us from embarrassment if you—er—"

"Would resign?" inquired North icily.

"We shall be glad to give you the highest recommendations."

"Despite which my chance of another bank job in this State will be nil," observed John North. "Gentlemen, the hell with you. Not one among you would have acted any differently. No one but a fool would lay down his life for a bank. I resign and I don't want any references. Good morning."

He walked swiftly from the room and was rude enough to slam the door. He strode out of the bank but, on the sidewalk, paused and wiped from his brow the sweat produced by his inward raging.

"Smug, overfed, greasy swine!" he exclaimed aloud.

He stepped into the little car which he had parked at the curb outside the

bank and started for the suburb of Westham to pick up his personal effects at the branch. Not one of the directors dared criticize his action individually, but as a body they had tied a can to him.

And what a fix he was in. In two weeks he was to have been married. He had cleaned out his savings account to make a down payment on a little house. Yesterday morning, when he entered the bank, his prospects had been rosy; now they were black as Hades.

FOR the hundredth time he reviewed the details of the bank robbery which had been of a character unique in the annals of the State. The haul had been one hundred and five thousand dollars. There was no clue to the perpetrators of the crime.

The Westham branch was located on the corner of Blake and Hope Streets in the heart of a residential district which, after ten o'clock at night, was as silent and, apparently, as deserted as a country village. Aside from the recently reopened concrete plant one mile outside Westham, the place had no industries, but, thanks to that plant and the wealthy residents, the branch had always been profitable.

It occupied a one-story building which had been erected as a store and had been remodeled. The walls had been strengthened; steel window frames in which had been imbedded steel bars three-quarters of an inch thick were substituted for the old wooden frames. Wooden floors had been replaced with concrete, and a big safe which was the last word in modernity had been constructed at the rear of the building. It was a great steel cylinder in the center of a solid concrete mass which was impervious to attack. Its huge steel door would defy any known method of safe-breaking.

The burglar alarm system was connected directly with police headquarters, only a quarter of a mile away. So confident were the directors of the Consolidated in the impregnability of the safe and the efficiency of the alarms that no night watchman was employed.

The building was about forty feet wide by sixty feet long and was separated by a light mahogany partition into two sections, the banking rooms which were about forty feet long and had the usual banking equipment, tellers' cages upon the right side and grilled counters upon the left for loan and discount officers. Just inside the front door at the left was a railed space where the bank manager, his secretary, his assistant and two stenographers worked.

The rear room was about fifteen feet deep, with the safe in the rear wall, its fortified bulk protruding ten feet beyond the building. In this room were desks for bookkeepers, lockers for the bank employees and filing cabinets. There was a stairway from this room to a small windowless basement where was the unit heating system.

The Westham branch had no safety deposit vault. During working hours two private policemen were on duty. At the close of business everything of value was deposited in the safe, the time lock set and the alarms turned on.

During the two years of John North's management nothing had occurred to interfere with the serene routine, and it was his misfortune that his branch had been chosen from among thirty for the personal attention of a genius.

When North had been mustered out

of the government service in 1919, at the age of twenty, he had entered the main offices of the Consolidated, and a decade of industry and intelligent effort had won him this position of confidence and importance.

ON the night before the robbery the sum of one hundred and five thousand dollars had been placed in the safe; the working funds of the bank having been augmented by sixty thousand in cash sent out from town for the convenience of the paymaster of the concrete plant. North, as was his custom, had set the time lock on the safe door and personally tested the burglar alarm system before leaving the bank at five o'clock.

At four o'clock the following morning four men appeared in the deserted village, parked a sedan on Hope Street, a few rods below the bank building, and stepped out. One of them went to the corner of Blake Street, upon which the bank fronted, to watch for the policeman on the beat, and the others attacked the concrete sidewalk six feet from the rear corner of the bank with picks and shovels. When they had dug down three feet they came upon an iron pipe which they cracked open and then, with pliers and a wire cutter, put out of business the burglar alarm system.

As the point at which the wires left the building was a secret known only to the manager, it was obvious that the robbers had special information.

When this job was finished, the hole was filled and the broken fragments of asphalt carefully fitted into place. At that moment the lookout came back and the quartet vaulted over a box hedge into the garden of a residence at the rear of the bank.

After the policeman had passed they resumed their labors. Two of them set to work with hack-saws upon the steel bars of the third of the three windows on Hope Street. For an hour and a half the saws ate into the steel; a sinister sound which would have attracted attention in a business district, but which awakened none of the people sleeping deeply in their homes in the neighborhood.

Twice they had to abandon their work at the approach of a patrolman, and twice the officer walked over the broken sidewalk and passed the barred window without observing that all was not well.

As dawn was fingering the sky with pink one of the bars, sawed through close to the sill and two feet above it, came out in the hands of the workmen, and a few minutes later a second bar was removed. A glass cutter quickly eliminated a pane of glass which enabled one of the men to reach in and unfasten the window, after which the window was pushed up and one of the men crawled through.

A suitcase and package were passed up to him, and then two others entered the bank.

The fourth man went to the motor car and returned with two wooden sticks painted silver like the steel bars and of the same length and thickness as the sections removed. With putty he fastened them to the ends of the bars which had been sawed, and he did it so neatly that a close inspection would have been necessary to discover the substitution.

After completing this artistic job the fellow went back to the car and drove off.

The trio had entered the bank behind the discount clerk's compartment. One of them set the package upon the counter. Explosives, perhaps, for a

hopeless effort to blow down the great door of the safe. No.

CHAPTER II.

ONE WAY TO ROB A BANK.

AFTER vaulting the counter, the three passed into the rear room. The hour was 6 A.M. They pulled up chairs around a desk and opened the package. It revealed sandwiches, pie and a vacuum bottle containing

JOHN NORTH

coffee. Scraps of food and blobs of coffee left by paper cups revealed this to the bank officers later.

The sun was up and plenty of light now came through the skylight, which illuminated the rear room and which was heavily grilled. Thus the nonchalant robbers could see what they were eating and drinking. After they had finished one of them produced a bit and stock and bored a peephole through the wooden partition which separated the rear room from the banking room.

After that, one of them brought out a pack of cards. A card fell from the pack when the owner was stuffing it into his pocket after the game and was found under the desk. A curious sort of procedure for bank burglars.

Time passed. At seven o'clock a key grated in the lock of the front door and one of the bandits glued his right eye to the peephole. Thomas Dolan, the janitor, entered with his wife.

As everything of value was deposited in the safe, the custom in such branches was to give the janitor the key to the front door. It was his duty to clean the place and admit employees as they rang the bell.

The janitor entered, whistling and pulling off his coat. He was a burly Irishman. His wife was red-faced and stout. She removed her coat and revealed a scrubbing costume. They came directly to the rear room, and the janitor entered first, ungallantly, perhaps.

He never knew what hit him. Mrs. Dolan, seeing her husband fall, opened her mouth for a healthy scream, but a rough hand covered it and a blackjack descended upon her graying hair.

When Dolan recovered consciousness he was bound hand and foot and there was a gag in his mouth, and two masked men were carrying him down the steep stairs to the basement. They laid him on the floor. A moment later his good wife was dropped, none too gently, by his side.

More time passed. The three bandits chatted together in desultory fashion, their masks remaining upon their faces.

As this was a bank in a residential section, its opening hour was nine and the employees began to report at 8 A.M. Each clerk or teller, as he arrived, rang the bell, saw the door opened as usual and the janitor, broom in hand, standing inside. Each noted as he entered that it was not the regular

janitor, because he had a black mask on his face and a gun in the hand which was not holding the broom.

IN the course of fifteen minutes eight men and two women had been admitted, conducted to the basement and thrust down the stairs. They were told to keep quiet or have their heads blown off, and they obeyed. One of the girls had enough courage to unbind the Dolans, who were too much subdued to make an outcry. If the prisoners had shouted the thick walls of the basement made it unlikely that their cries could be heard.

People were now passing the great front windows on Blake Street, but they were hurrying to work and did not look in. The policeman on the beat did so, but saw nothing and was too thick-headed to realize that the absence of clerks at this hour was suspicious.

At eight fifteen exactly, Frances Harding, secretary to the manager and the girl he was going to marry, parked her little car a few rods down Hope Street, walked round the corner and rang the bell. The door opened, a gun was shoved in her face and the terrified girl was led into the back room. While the man who had admitted her kept her covered the other two consulted. One of them pointed to a chair and told her to sit down while her captor went back into the banking room.

"You keep quiet," commanded one of the masked pair. "We won't hurt you unless you yell. It's up to you, kid."

Miss Harding was very pale and her blue eyes were gleaming. She was an extremely pretty young woman, with soft blond hair and soft pinkish white skin.

"You must be mad!" she exclaimed. "You can't rob this bank."

As she finished, the chairman of the reception committee ushered into the room John North, the manager.

"Here's the boss," he said. "We've nabbed every man jack in the joint."

North turned sharp eyes upon the trio. They were roughly dressed fellows. All were dark, with black hair. He noted that one of them had blue eyes and the black hair might be a wig. He glanced at this fellow's hands, and they were soft.

"What is the program?" North asked quietly.

"You're going to open the safe," said the man with soft hands.

North shook his head. "Sorry. It cannot be opened until eight thirty. The time lock is on."

"We'll wait." The man spoke hoarsely, disguising his voice.

"You can't get away with this, men," North declared. "Better scram. The police will be here any minute. I observed that nobody was at work and spoke to an officer."

"He's a liar," declared the man who had escorted the manager. "I was watching him come along and he didn't speak to any cop."

North shrugged his shoulders and smiled reassuringly at his fiancée.

"Suppose I refuse to open the safe?"

"We figger you're sensible and don't want your brains spattered over the floor," replied the spokesman.

"In which case the safe wouldn't be opened." He saw that Frances looked as if she were going to faint and he stepped to her and placed a protecting arm around her.

"It's like this, mister. We took an awful chance bustin' in. We get what we came for or we'll burn you, and don't you think I'm kiddin'."

"I get your point," North said.

"John!" exclaimed Frances. "You're not going to open the safe for them?"

HIS smile was strained. "I seem to have no choice," he answered.

"But they wouldn't dare to kill you. They'd be hanged."

"If they were caught. What happened to them wouldn't interest me."

"You're smart, all right," said the spokesman. "You keep your mouth shut, miss."

There were red spots in the girl's cheeks and her eyes flashed.

"I won't, and you can't make me," she declared. "John, do something."

"Unless the police interfere," the manager replied, "I shall open the safe at eight thirty. Where are the other employees?"

The man pointed to the basement door.

"How did you get in?"

"Through a window."

"But the burglar alarm system!"

"We know how to fix alarms."

"Humph. You are well informed. Ever work in a bank?"

The man's upper lip drew back, disclosing strong, regular white teeth.

"You get no info'," he growled. "In five minutes you'll open the safe or you get yer head blown off."

North smiled and nodded. "If you are here in five minutes."

Miss Harding threw off his protecting arm.

"You, an ex-soldier, are going to surrender to these robbers?" she exclaimed. "John, you can't!"

"It's precisely because I have been a soldier that I know better than to attack armed men when I am defenseless," he said quietly, though he grew very pale.

And then the girl he loved, the girl who had promised to marry him, rose from her chair. Her eyes were blue slits; her cheeks were flaming. Her voice was scornful.

"Coward!" she exclaimed.

"Do something about that hell-cat," demanded one of the robbers.

The chief laughed. "I will," he declared. "I've wanted to kiss her since I set eyes on her."

Frances retreated to the side wall. "Don't you dare," she cried loudly.

The fellow approached her purposefully. North grew tense and his sharp eyes studied the back of the man's head. He was wearing a wig, North saw.

"I like 'em wild," declared the gallant. He grasped the girl's arms.

"Quit that," shouted North. "I won't stand for it."

Two revolvers covered him.

"Stand still, you!" snarled robber number two. North hesitated and saw the leader bend the girl's head back. True to her promise, Frances was using claws and feet and screaming purposefully.

North took one step, drove forward his right fist and struck the amorous brigand just above the right ear as he was pressing his lips against those of Miss Harding.

The fellow went down as though hit by a sledge, and Frances sprang free and darted across the room.

THE man on the floor rose slowly.

"Why didn't you drill the punk?" he bellowed.

"Serves you right," asserted robber number two. "We need him to open the safe."

North faced the speaker.

"If I'm to be shot for hitting that brute, do it now," he said sharply. "I'm engaged to that girl. How about it?"

Robber number two turned his weapon on the chief. "Gimme yer gun," he commanded. "Quick!"

"Why, you—"

"Hand it over."

The leader passed over his weapon.

"Nobody gets plugged after the safe is open if they behave themselves. It's eight thirty, Mr. Manager."

North glanced at his watch. It was thirty seconds after eight thirty. With a shrug he stepped up to the combination plate and, as deliberately as possible, went about his work. In half a minute he stepped back.

"It's open," he said.

Eager hands pulled open the monstrous door. The disarmed leader plunged into the safe with the big suitcase.

"Stand over against the wall with the girl," commanded the second man. North crossed over and stood beside her.

"I'm sorry," said North in a low tone.

"Thank you for hitting him. I suppose you had to open the safe," she said coldly.

The leader emerged from the safe, suitcase bulging. "Let's go," he said curtly. "You hold 'em off, Bill."

The third robber, who had been addressed as Bill, covered the retreat. For fully a minute he blocked the exit into the banking room, then backed quickly across the bank and concealed his revolver as he plunged out into the street. A car had drawn up to the curb, the other pair were already aboard it, and it darted away as the door slammed. A second later North was on the sidewalk staring after the car, which was too far away to distinguish license plates though they would not have been helpful since a stolen car is apt to be used on such occasions.

North reëntered the bank.

"Release the others," he instructed Frances, who had followed him to the door. As she hastened away he picked up a telephone and called Westham police headquarters.

That was the whole affair. After notifying the police he phoned down town, reported the robbery and asked for cash for the day's business.

During the rest of the day he had interviewed various police and insurance and bank detectives. He told them everything he had observed, which was little. Frances sat near him, conveying by the set of her shoulders that her idol had fallen off his pedestal.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUM CHEWER.

THE attitude of his fiancée hurt him, but he was confident that her sound common sense would eventually persuade her that a man who attacked three armed desperadoes with his bare hands would not have been a hero, but an imbecile. He had done the intelligent thing; having established his courage years back at several places in the north of France. His resentment was not against Frances, but the directors.

When he entered the branch there was a stranger at his desk. Not a stranger. It was Kenneth Rathburn, nephew of the president of the Consolidated. Old Rathburn had been quick to plant a relative in the shoes of the discredited manager.

Rathburn had been manager of the branch before North; in fact, he had opened it. He was a disagreeable young man who had had trouble with the concrete plant executives and who had been transferred at their request. A

year ago he had resigned from the main office for reasons unknown to North. With a depression on, he probably was glad to get back under cover.

Miss Harding already had packed John's effects. A glance at her eyes informed him that his elimination as manager had brought her back to his camp, bag and baggage.

Rathburn rose and offered his hand. "Sorry, North," he said blandly. "You were on the spot and you did the sensible thing. It's too bad the directors couldn't see it that way."

"They gave me a clean bill of health. I resigned," said North curtly.

The new manager grinned derisively. "Oh, sure," he said. "Best of luck."

"Meet me for lunch at the Westham Hotel?" inquired North of Frances as he picked up the package of his personal effects.

In the lobby of the hotel Frances was waiting for him at one o'clock and his depression lifted at the warmth of her smile.

"I could have killed those directors!" she exclaimed vindictively. "How could you have prevented the robbery?"

"Yesterday you seemed to think I could," he reminded her.

She blushed vividly. "It was because —oh, I thought you were a superman. Anyway, if you wouldn't risk your life for their money, you were like a lion when that brute was kissing me."

"Needing me to open the safe, I didn't think they would shoot. But they would have tried torture if I refused to open up and finally killed me if I continued to refuse. I would take reasonable risks for my employers, but I wouldn't be a burnt offering."

She reached across the table and squeezed his hand. "Everything is all right, dear," she declared.

"Except that I'm broke and have lost my job."

"There is a ten thousand dollar reward and you're eligible now."

"And not a clue."

She hesitated. "John," she said finally, "I'm sure as I am that we are sitting here that Kenneth Rathburn was the man who kissed me."

"You're mad!" he exclaimed.

"No. A girl feels things. Besides, I have evidence."

FRANCES HARDING

"It's absurd, dear."

"The man who kissed me had been chewing Dobbs' Indigestion Gum. I've used it. It has a peculiar tang."

He laughed at that. "Millions of people chew it, no doubt."

"No. Dr. Dobbs makes it and prescribes it for his patients. He has never put it on the market."

"Well, what has it to do with Rathburn?"

Her eyes gleamed. "He had a stick of it and threw the wrapper in your wastebasket when he came in this morning. Anyway, I know he did it."

"He has sandy hair. I thought that fellow might be wearing a wig."

"And he has big white teeth like the robber," she cried excitedly.

"He always impressed me as a scoundrel," John said thoughtfully. "But he is the nephew of the president. And imagine the bank robber installed as manager of the bank."

"Go get him, John," she commanded. "I've got to hurry back now."

AFTER she had departed the ex-branch manager seated himself in a big chair in the lobby and looked out upon the quiet street.

The thing wasn't impossible, he thought. Why had young Rathburn left the bank a year ago? What had he been doing since?

By George! The Filmore Alarm system was always installed under conditions of secrecy. After the interior of a building had been wired the street outside was cut off, pedestrians turned aside and the underground conduit installed by men of proved loyalty, who worked at night and behind big canvas screens. The point at which it left the Westham branch was marked on a chart which was in the vault down town. Police and bank detectives were working on the theory that one of the workmen had betrayed the spot to the robbers. But Kenneth Rathburn had been the original branch manager. He knew.

When North had attacked the bandit chief in whose arms Frances was struggling, he had had an impulse to grasp at the thick black hair which looked so much like a wig and to tear the mask from his face, yet he had not yielded to it. John North was a young man who never lost his head even when furiously angry. He had not unmasked the bandit because Frances and himself would have been murdered on the spot. Pacific Coast criminals are killers by instinct; some of them slay from pure wantonness, but these bank robbers had been content to capture the bank employees, and if they secured what they came after there was a chance that they would avoid murder, but, for their own protection, they would have been forced to slay the pair who were able to identify them.

John's acquaintance with Rathburn was slight, but the man had impressed him as spineless, hardly the sort who would go in for crime in a big way. And it seemed incredible that he would have the effrontery to walk into the institution which he had robbed and take the manager's desk and give dictation to the girl he had kissed and who might identify him.

On the other hand, his confederates had not hesitated to disarm him when, in his rage, he would have shot down the young woman's fiancé. That indicated that his authority over them was limited.

Rathburn might have planned the crime, engaged the other ruffians and controlled them only when he was acting in their best interests. However, John could not figure the fellow in such a rôle.

NORTH went to the telephone booths and consulted a phone book. There were a lot of Dobbses—it was an Oakland phone book, Westham being a suburb of Oakland, and several of them were doctors—he had not thought of asking Frances for the full name of the physician.

However, half way down the column he came upon Dr. Chester Dobbs and immediately beneath "Dobbs' Indigestion Gum Company." Jotting down the address he hastened out of the hotel and took an interurban to town.

He found the physician located in a tall building full of doctors and dentists. Dr. Dobbs occupied two offices upon the door of one of which was his name and office hours, on the other, "Dobbs' Indigestion Gum Company."

Entering the physician's office, he was confronted by a fifteen year old girl attendant.

"I'll find out if the doctor can see you," she chirped. She came back immediately and beckoned him into the private office.

The doctor was a small man with a big head, partially bald, thick glasses and a straggling gray beard.

"How do you do, sir; sit down, sir," he said in a shrill voice. "And what ails you, my friend?"

"I'm troubled with indigestion, doctor. A chap I know, Mr. Rathburn, recommended you."

"Rathburn, Rathburn. Do I know any Rathburn?" inquired the doctor.

He pulled open a drawer and consulted a card index.

"No record that I ever treated a Rathburn," he declared.

"Well, he chews your gum, doctor," replied North, smiling broadly.

The doctor grinned like a cherub. "Which proves he is a bright fellow," he declared. "Before I bother to treat a person with indigestion I prescribe the gum. If, at the end of the week, his trouble isn't cleared up, I know it's a serious case and get busy."

"Lose a lot of patients that way, don't you?" inquired the visitor.

"Glad to lose 'em. Can't be bothered with people who aren't really sick."

"Well, he was using your gum. How could he get it if he wasn't a patient of yours?"

"My friend, my gum is beneficial to dyspeptics and pleasant and harmless to people who have nothing the matter with them. Within the last six months I have made a deal by which it is sold at chain drug stores all over the State of California. And, if business keeps up, I'm going to quit practicing medicine and take a trip 'round the world."

North rose. "Congratulations," he said. "I can buy your gum anywhere, then."

"Well, in all the Foster drug stores. Come back in a week and I'll go into your case though you don't look as if you had anything much the matter with you. Probably you over-ate yesterday or the day before."

"What's the charge?"

"No charge. Am I a robber?" demanded Dr. Dobbs testily.

"You're a gentleman, sir," replied North, who bowed himself out.

And that for Frances's evidence against Ken Rathburn. Thousands of people were chewing Dobbs' Indigestion Gum. Rathburn had never been a patient of the peculiar old physician. And he had never robbed a bank either.

As John hadn't admired the clue very much he was not greatly disappointed to find it worthless. On the other hand, without the girl's theory he never would have considered Rathburn in connection with the robbery. What was really important was that Ken Rathburn had known exactly where the alarm wires left the bank basement and went underground.

CHAPTER IV.

SEAGULLS LIKE CANDY.

JOHN wished he had paid attention to the bandit chief's voice at the time of the robbery, but he had been in a condition of great excitement despite his cool exterior. He was a

barytone and so was Ken Rathburn and so were about sixty per cent of all the men in the world.

He had spoken as though he were an educated man. John had observed his hands, which were white and soft like those of all people who work with their heads. Nothing distinctive about them, no moles or warts or scars to betray him.

Ten minutes later John was riding across the Bay on a Frisco-bound ferry. Let the police work on the possibility that the men who had put in the alarm system had betrayed its location to the robbers. He was going to poke around Frisco and try to get a line on the nephew of the president of the Consolidated. John was out of a job. When an important official of a bank is dropped immediately following a robbery, whether charges are preferred against him or not, whether he is officially vindicated or not, his prospects of landing another bank job are exceedingly slim. And no matter how forlorn a hope he may have, he had better follow it.

There was a very pretty young woman standing at the rail of the ferry boat who was feeding the seagulls, which on San Francisco Bay are as tame and spoiled as city pigeons. Unlike pigeons, seagulls will gobble anything which is offered to them. John, who was feeling pretty blue, found the spectacle interesting. The girl was about twenty—she was exceptionally well formed, with slim ankles and charming calves. She wore a white knitted suit and a red cap which rested jauntily on the left side of her head and contrasted vividly with her thick, jet black bob. Her face was piquant, dark, and audacious. She was handing the gulls, which would rather have had fish, chocolate creams from a box. John chuckled. They might have need of Dr. Dobbs' Indigestion Gum.

Obviously conscious that a number of people were gazing at her admiringly, the young lady climbed on the seat which ran around the boat's rail, and then placed her pretty left slipper upon the rail itself, a position which revealed so much of a very shapely right leg that she might just as well have been wearing tights.

And, at that particular moment, a tug coming along parallel to the ferry, on the other side, suddenly, for no reason, in the opinion of the angry ferryboat captain, veered, darted in swiftly and collided with the passenger craft. It wasn't a severe crash, but it was enough to knock the girl off her perch. With a shriek of terror she pitched forward. Her right leg pointed skyward for a hundredth of a second and John North was close enough to grasp the ankle firmly, after which he dragged the girl, who had been three-quarters overboard, back on board the boat.

EVERYBODY had rushed toward the other side of the ferry when the collision took place and the pair were quite alone.

She looked up at him brightly. "Didn't your mother ever tell you not to grab a lady's leg?" she inquired.

"I could have jumped in after you," he retorted, "but I didn't want to get my clothes wet."

She held out her hand. "Pleased to meet you," she began and then proceeded to fall forward in a dead faint. North picked her up, carried her into the cabin, laid her on a bench and clumsily began to unfasten her dress at the neck.

As quickly as she had fainted she recovered.

"Illegal use of hands. Five yards penalty," she said weakly. "Opponent refuses it. Much obliged again, big boy."

John smiled down at her. "You're rather remarkable," he observed.

She sat up and smoothed her skirt. "Stage faint," she said mendaciously. "I just wanted to feel a strong man's arms around me."

"Glad to oblige at any time," he replied, laughing. "You had no business climbing on the boat rail, Miss What's-your-name."

"Call me sweetheart," she said impudently. "What's yours?"

"John North."

"Jack. I hate John. There was a very fresh gull out there that was giving me the razz and I was just going to wring his neck when the earthquake happened. Or what was it?"

"A tug bumped us. Can't you hear the captains swearing at each other?"

"You're quick on the grab, Mr. North," she said. "Did I happen to thank you?"

"Very adequately. We're under way again."

"Well," she said with an impish grin, "I like you better than any seagull I saw. Call me up some time."

"With pleasure. Do you want me to escort you home?"

"There's a bozo waiting for me in San Fran," she replied. "The big heavy. How are your wives and children?"

"No doubt they would be enjoying life if I had any."

She stood up and gravely shook hands with him. "I can swim like a couple of fish," she stated, "but this happens to be my latest investment—" she spread out her skirt.

"And I bet it would shrink. Take care of yourself. And don't know me in the ferry house. My sweetie just ain't reasonable."

"I understand. I'm engaged myself."

"Well, well," she said with a flash of her fine teeth. "She can't divorce you till she marries you. Anyway, I'm too busy just now to give you the attention you deserve. You go that way and I'll go this way. We're almost in the ferry slip."

John laughed and sauntered toward the rear of the boat. It had been an entertaining interlude. The girl was a perfect comic and as pretty as a picture and, judging by her talk, rather tough. He would never see her again and he didn't care a hoot.

CHAPTER V.

OLD SLEUTH CASSIDY.

SITTING against the rail at the rear of the boat was a large man with a perfectly round face of a tint suggesting a pink moon. He had removed coat and collar and was perspiring profusely. As North approached him he bent hastily over to tie his shoe. John stopped short and bit his lower lip angrily.

"Hello, Cassidy," he said sharply. "Is it a coincidence that you and I are riding on the same boat or are you shadowing me?"

Tim Cassidy gave up the shoe tying pretense and straightened up.

"Hello, Mr. North," he replied with a grin. "What do you think?"

John sat down beside him.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Well, there's been a robbery in your branch."

"From which the directors exonerated me."

"Sure, they had nothing on you.

But they thought it was a good idea to keep an eye on you for a while."

John eyed him grimly. Tim Cassidy was chief of detectives at the main bank.

When North had been employed there he had been on friendly terms with the ex-San Francisco cop and, besides, Tim was a person who, once seen, was easily remembered.

"They picked a swell sleuth," he said scornfully.

"Mere matter of form, John," Tim assured him. "You never stole nothin'. I figgered this as a kind of vacation. I followed you down from town this morning and rode to Oakland on the back platform of the trolley. What did you call on that doctor for?"

"I'm troubled with indigestion," said John, laughing in spite of his resentment, not against Cassidy, but the sleek bankers who were rotten enough to suspect him of connection with the robbery.

Tim laid a pudgy hand on his arm. "My dogs are bothering me, John," he complained. "And I ain't fool enough to suppose you was in on that job in Westham. I was wondering when I was sitting here watching you and that doll that fainted up there how it would be if I stayed home and called you up every night and you told me what you'd been doing."

North laughed loudly and cheerfully.

"You've got a nerve," he replied. "Nothing doing. You're getting a salary from the bank and you earn it. And maybe I won't walk the legs off you!"

"Think yer smart, don't you," growled Tim. "Well, there ain't nothing the matter with my eyes and I'm a guy that has had a long police experience and I got what they call a photographic memory. How come you met up with Dell Gray on this boat? I suppose it was a coincidence just like you and me coming over on this ferry, eh?"

"Met up with Dell Gray? You mean that girl I was talking to just now?"

"Sure, the one that pulled a faint to give you an excuse to fetch her inside where you could talk private," said Tim.

"You old fool, I never saw her before in my life and I never expect to see her again. If her name is Dell Gray it's news to me."

"Yeah?"

"She was feeding the seagulls and nearly fell overboard. I grabbed her and she went over in a faint," said John, much embarrassed. "How do you get that way?"

"Well, I been sittin' here and all I know is that you carried her in and she set right up and you put your heads together. Want me to tell you who she is?"

"I don't give a damn," said the exasperated North.

"I'm telling you anyway. She's Barney Hogan's baby doll."

"I don't know who Barney Hogan is, you ass."

"Barney is the most competent safe cracker in the State of California and they let him out of San Quentin two months ago on account that they had him in on a frame-up and the best they could get was a short sentence."

"Well?"

"Well," said Tim with a grin, "the directors might think I was a pretty swell sleuth if I told 'em I caught you having a meeting on a ferry with Barney Hogan's moll."

John paled a trifle. "I can see that," he admitted. "But all I know is a

strange woman started to fall overboard and I saved her."

TIM laughed. When he laughed he shook like a jellyfish.

"That's to pay up for the crack you made about the kind of sleuth I am," he stated. "I come here and made myself comfortable because I knew you couldn't get off the boat, so I didn't see this accident, but I take your word for it. I'm not telling those what-you-may-call-'em's nothing, John."

"I don't give a damn if you do. We've got to get off this boat or go back to Oakland."

Tim made a grimace. "I'm comfy," he said. "Couldn't you go back to Oakland to oblige me?"

John's answer was to start forward so Tim, with a grunt, rose and waddled after him.

"What say if we split the same taxicab?" he inquired.

All rancor spent, John hooked his arm in that of Cassidy. "Fine," he declared. "I'm going to the Palace Hotel."

"And a very good place, too. What you doing in the big town, John? You live in Westham."

"Private business."

They had crossed through the ferry house and emerged on the sidewalk. North stepped into a cab and Cassidy caused its springs to protest as he jumped in after him.

"They've hung up a ten thousand reward for that Westham job," he observed.

John nodded. "Well," said Tim, "you lost your job and you could use it, eh?"

"What are you driving at?" North asked.

"I'm thinking," said Cassidy, "that you're after it. I'm betting you got an idea who done it, eh?"

"Look here," replied North. "Do you think this Barney Hogan had a hand in it?"

"Nix. I'll tell you why. He opens safes. He don't get the bank manager to open 'em for him. That stunt was thunk up by clucks that ain't got technique. And very good too. You could only work it in hick banks or small branches like yours, but there's plenty of jack to be got that way. If I should lose my job I might try it myself. I eliminate Barney, which is why it don't trouble me that you and Barney's girl have a confab on the ferry. I think it happened just like you say."

"Thanks. By the way, you know Rathburn's nephew, Kenneth, don't you?"

"Oh, sure. Damned young squirt."

"Did you hear that he has been appointed in my place at Westham?"

"Yes."

"Any idea where he lives in San Francisco?"

"No. I've seen him 'round." Cassidy chuckled. "You ought to be jealous. I seen him dancing with your friend Dell in Antonio's a few nights ago. If Barney had happened to blow in I reckon they would have had to appoint some other manager down in Westham. What's the trouble, kid?"

John had grasped his arm. His eyes were shining. He was excited.

"You can trail me all you like, Tim," he said. "Better stick close. If I get the reward I'll split it with you."

"Fine. How do we get it?"

"I've a hunch that Rathburn pulled that job. And, if he's chummy with Barney Hogan's girl, it means that Barney Hogan was in on it."

"Here's the Palace," replied Tim. "You pay him. I ain't got change."

John paid off the taxi and they went into the hotel.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT BECAME OF FRANCES?

"NOW," demanded Tim, who slumped in the first overstuffed chair which was unoccupied, "you're either off your nut or— What makes you think that Rathburn had a hand in it? He's the old man's nephew, you understand. What you got on him, eh?"

"Well," confessed John, "very little. It's one of those hunches, but this is how I connected him."

He told about the incident in the safe room, the kiss and Frances's recognition of the distinctive odor of Dobbs' Indigestion Gum on the man's breath.

"So that's why you called on this Dr. Dobbs, eh?"

"Yes. Unfortunately the gum is widely distributed. Frances thought its use was limited to a few people who were given prescriptions."

"I see. It looks like some dyspeptic that liked to kiss girls done the job," said Tim with a grin. "What's your next move?"

"I'm going to get a line on Rathburn, find out who his associates are, what criminals are among them. I thought, if we found he was in with bad characters the police might squeeze a confession out of one of them."

"You may be a good banker," said Cassidy scornfully, "but you're a punk Sherlock. You staying in town tonight?"

"I was going to make a call in Westham this evening, but—"

"Forget it. Meet me here at nine o'clock and don't go ringing Rathburn's doorbell asking the servant questions about where he hid the loot. Don't do nothing till you hear from me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Make a call—on Barney Hogan."

"But—"

"But nothing," grinned Cassidy. "And have a full report about your movements ready for me at nine. The bank wants it."

With that parting shot he moved away with an elephantine tread. John gazed after him dubiously.

Cassidy had the appearance of a very stupid man, but the Consolidated with its tremendous interests was not likely to employ a stupid man to protect it from swindlers and robbers. North knew nothing about his past record nor his achievements while in the bank's employ. He knew him as a good natured, ludicrously ugly "flattie" who had been fifteen years in the employ of Consolidated.

Despite Tim's prohibition, he looked up Rathburn's address in the telephone book and found it to be a swank apartment house on Nob Hill. He went so far as to taxi up there and ask the clerk the price of apartments. A "single" was a hundred and thirty-five dollars a month, a double was a hundred and seventy-five. The salary of the manager of the Westham branch was only two hundred and seventy-five a month.

However, Ken Rathburn might have private means—that was what John had to find out. Not being an experienced investigator, he didn't know how to go about it, but Cassidy would be able to help in that respect.

By this time it was after 6 P.M. and he ought to phone Frances that he would not be able to spend the evening with her. He went into the Mark Hop-

kins Hotel and called the house she occupied with her mother in Westham.

THE phone was answered by Mrs. Harding.

"May I speak to Frances, Mrs. Harding?" he requested.

"Why, John," she exclaimed, "what for?"

"Eh? I want to talk to her—"

"But she's meeting you, isn't she?"

"No. I was going to call after dinner."

There was a silence which lasted a couple of seconds. "Have you two quarreled?" Mrs. Harding asked in a curious tone.

"Certainly not."

"Well, she said she was going to San Francisco for dinner and I supposed she was meeting you, though she didn't say so. I was busy at the time and I didn't inquire. Maybe she's having dinner with May Marsden up there."

"That's right," he said quickly. "Perhaps May phoned her this afternoon and she knew it would be all right with me."

"Oh, probably that's it," Mrs. Harding replied, evidently much relieved. "I was afraid you might have had words or something."

"Not us," he said lightly. "Thanks, Mrs. Harding. Good-by."

He hung up, much perplexed. He didn't wish to alarm Mrs. Harding, but Frances had never done a thing like this before. At lunch she certainly had no intention of going to San Francisco for dinner or she would have mentioned it. Probably she had received an urgent message from May, who was the only close friend she had in the Bay city.

He found another nickel, looked up Miss Marsden, whom he knew quite well, found her number and dialed. The girl answered the phone in person.

"This is John North, May," he said. "I had to come to town and heard Frances was here. I wondered if she was with you."

"I haven't heard from her for a couple of weeks, John," she answered guilelessly. "Why don't you drop up here this evening if you're doing nothing?"

"I—I'd like to, but I'm here on business. I'll be busy all evening."

"Well," she said gayly, "I thought I might mooch a dinner. Give the kid my regards and tell her to write or call me up."

"Okay. Awfully sorry."

"Oh, that's all right, John."

The thing was darn queer, he was thinking as he left the hotel. Frances was a Westham girl and hadn't come up to San Francisco at night except in his company since their engagement, six months back. He didn't think she had any men friends up here, and May was her only girl friend. It was peculiar that she hadn't mentioned to her mother with whom she was dining. Mrs. Harding's plea of being busy was a motherly stall. She was very contented with her daughter's fiancé and didn't want an indiscreet remark to make trouble between them. Anyway, Frances wasn't the kind of girl who would pull a fast one.

Much disturbed, he went into a cheap restaurant and dined without appetite. At seven thirty he was through and wandered down Geary Street and finally along Market Street. At eight he was sitting in the Palace Hotel. At nine he was watching the corridor for a sign of Cassidy. At ten he was cursing the detective under his breath. At ten thirty a boy came through the lobby calling his name.

He accosted him.

"Gent on the phone wants to talk to you," said the bellboy. "Phone number six."

North rushed into the phone booth. He picked up the hanging receiver.

"John North," he said excitedly.

"John, grab a taxi and come down to Pedro's place at Number 444 West Pinero. Ask for Luke and tell him you're a friend of—ah!"

The last was a choked exclamation. He heard a heavy bump and a crash and then the click of a receiver being replaced on the hook.

Something serious had happened to Tim Cassidy.

CHAPTER VII.

"PEDRO'S CLUB."

NORTH rushed out of the phone booth and the hotel and leaped into a taxi at the curb.

"Go to Pedro's, 444 Pinero," he instructed, "as fast as you can."

He knew the neighborhood. It was the old Barbary Coast. Before prohibition that street and its neighbors had been lined with roaring dives, dance halls, canteens, gyp shows, saloons and whatnot. It had been the meeting place of deep sea sailors and town women. The Barbary Coast had been growing less barbarous, however, before prohibition gave it its quietus, for a reason which had once been explained to North by an old sea captain.

Up to 1915 San Francisco had been a port for windjammers, of which thousands still sailed the seas. Their crews, carrying from six months' to a year's pay, had been plump geese. As steam vessels, with their shorter cruises and more frequent ports, had replaced sail, the average goose which staggered along the Coast carried fewer golden feathers. And the steam sailors were a different type from the old salts from the square-riggers—less naïve, less open handed men who wouldn't toss a year's pay upon a woman of the evening.

Anyway, the prohibition law had closed the remaining joints and, for many years, the Coast had offered no attractions—just long rows of old buildings with padlocked doors and shuttered or broken windows. During the past few years, however, speakeasies had sprung up in the district during a liberal police régime. With Repeal many of them continued as illegitimate dives, and Pedro's must be one of these.

John had started to the rescue of Tim Cassidy on impulse. As the taxi bumped along he asked himself what he expected to do and why he should take chances for a man he didn't know very well. He was unarmed. He didn't know the ropes. Tim had been about to tell him to say he was a friend of Cassidy's. Judging by the crash which had put an end to the phone conversation, a friend of Cassidy's would not be warmly welcomed at Pedro's.

On the other hand, Tim had gone done there on John's business. Even if personal interests had something to do with it, that gave him a claim. And that he had learned something of interest to the ex-bank manager must have been his reason for phoning and commanding the young man's presence.

Curiously, John had not appreciated that he was under a cloud until he discovered Tim Cassidy on the ferryboat with him. At the point of a gun he had done the intelligent thing and opened the safe for the robbers, and it had not occurred to him for an instant that the bank officials might suspect a man with

his record of being in cahoots with the criminals.

He realized it now. The hold-up had been a new kind of bank robbery, a most astonishing achievement. It might enter the head of old man Rathburn and his associates that these audacious robbers had made advance arrangements with the bank manager to open the safe under duress. The fact that there had been no shooting might seem to them suspicious. They hadn't seen the steely eyes of the bandits gleaming through their masks. They hadn't charged German trenches and learned what bullets sounded like as they whizzed by. John knew that he would have been slain if he had not opened the safe. Frances understood it now, but not those sleek fat swine of bank directors.

The reward was of small consequence. He had to bring about the arrest and conviction of the robbers before he could convince Rathburn and other men of his type who ran other banks that John North could be trusted to manage a branch bank.

So, he had to take any risk to find out why Tim Cassidy had summoned him to Pedro's.

THE car was descending the hill and making rough weather of it. He leaned forward.

"Stop at the corner of the street," he ordered. "I'll walk down."

"You bet," replied the chauffeur.

A couple of minutes later he paid off the cab and walked down the street looking for Number 444. Just below a closed honky-tonk was an alley and a sign at the corner of the alley which pointed left and said "Pedro's."

Pedro's, then, was in the rear, up an alley. A taxicab was coming slowly down the narrow way and another cab was coming fast up the street. The cab in the crossway came to a stop at the corner to give the other time to pass. John stopped within a few feet of it, as the passage was not wide enough for him to get by the taxi. There was a single electric bulb burning above the "Pedro" sign.

The cab paused for only a couple of seconds and, as it started on, a young woman inside leaned forward. The light, coming in the opposite window, outlined her profile. John gazed incredulously, made to leap onto the running board, but the cab darted forward too swiftly for him. It turned right and went rapidly up the hill. John North, pale as death, watched it out of sight.

The silhouette had been that of Frances Harding, his sweetheart. Every feature was engraved on his heart. He could not be mistaken. He became furiously, unreasoningly angry. He swore fiercely. How dared she! She had an engagement with him for to-night; she had broken it, evaded her mother's inquiries; had come to San Francisco, met a man and dined in a low dive on the Barbary Coast. His Frances!

After a minute or two he snapped out of that. Modern up-to-date girls didn't mind dining in places where liquor was served. It had come to a pass that one found the best food there. But it was rotten for her to go out with another man. Suppose Pedro's was frequented by decent people—for all he knew it was. Who was the man?

Well, he didn't care what happened to him now. He'd bust into Pedro's, look for Tim, and if he wasn't visible he'd jolly well find out what had happened to him.

In a mood which boded ill for anybody who crossed him, John marched

down the alley. Behind the vacant block on the main street was a wide open space where grew a large oak tree. Beyond it was a building, one story high, which was shaped like a triangle, the entrance at its apex. There was a light burning over the door so that the lookout could identify whoever knocked. There was no sign above the door, and apparently no windows in the structure.

John stepped up and pressed a bell button. A face regarded him through the peephole.

"Yeah?" the man inquired in a thick accent.

"I want to come in."

"Never saw you before."

JOHN hesitated. Probably a mistake to mention Cassidy.

"Why all this mummery?" he demanded. "Nobody's bothering you fellows in this man's town."

"You bet there ain't," replied the lookout, and, without the slightest suspicion that he was being funny, he added, "This is a club, mister."

"Well, I'm supposed to meet Mr.—er—Ken Rathburn." He said that at a venture. It occurred to him that Rathburn must be a frequent patron of such places. And he rang a bull's-eye.

"That's different," said the lookout. "Why didn't you say so before?"

A big key grated as it turned, a bolt and chain was removed and the door was opened.

"Friend of his?" inquired the man.

John nodded.

"Want to see him or just lift a few?"

"Both. Why?"

"Because he just left."

"Just now. Within a minute?"

"Yeah. You must have met his taxi."

John turned away to conceal his flaming eyes.

"He had a lady with him, didn't he?" he asked as casually as was possible under the circumstances.

"Leave it to him," remarked the lookout.

"Well, I'll go in," John said tensely.

"Straight ahead."

The triangle widened until it was crossed by a bar against which several men and one woman were leaning. At the right was a passage into a corridor from which came loud talk. He glanced in and saw that there was a long row of private booths at the left of the corridor, evidently well tenanted.

Although North rarely drank he ordered a straight whisky and tossed it off. He needed a stimulant and maybe it would get his brain to clicking. At present he was stunned.

The drink helped. Frances, who, at lunch, had accused Rathburn of being the leader of the bank robbers, had come up to San Francisco with him for dinner and had dined in this dive. Well, it wasn't as bad as it seemed. Frances wasn't a girl who dined with her employer a few hours after he became her employer. It had been months before John had persuaded her to permit him to see her outside the bank. Frances was in love with John North and she believed Rathburn to be a crook. So, she had accepted his invitation in the hope of gaining his confidence, of getting some information from him which might help her fiancé. John believed that implicitly.

So all she was guilty of was extreme indiscretion. He didn't want her taking risks to help him. If he had known about this engagement he would have stopped it pronto.

Probably no harm would come of it. Rathburn dared not become objection-

able with an employee of the bank even if his uncle was the president. Probably he would behave with extreme circumspection in the hope of making a good impression.

"As I live!" declared a familiar voice. "The friend in need."

He knew who it was before he turned—the girl who fed seagulls, Barney Hogan's moll.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRATITUDE.

"HELLO," John said pleasantly because, safe-cracker's "sweetie" or no, this was an irresistible little personality. She wore a red satin dress with silver trimmings and there was a lot of bare bosom and bare arms, and the hair was newly curled and she had on enough rouge and lipstick to make her exceedingly vivid.

"You didn't look to me like a two-fisted drinker," she observed. "And judging by the way you clamped down on my leg, it ain't affected your co-ordination yet."

"My first one," he said truthfully. "Just came in."

"Buy me one," she suggested blandly.

"Certainly. Do you happen to have a name?"

"Say, I've the advantage of you," she said gayly. "Call me Dell Gray."

She tossed the whisky down the hatch like a veteran.

"Listen," she confided. "I told the boy friend what happened on the boat and he laughed fit to kill himself. He's a good guy when he's feeling right. Come along; I'll introduce you."

Expecting no refusal, she grasped his arm and led him down the long passage. He had a glimpse of people in booths, of both sexes, many of them in affectionate attitudes, and all with drinks in front of them. Half way down there was an opening at the right which revealed a dance hall where half a dozen couples were moving about to radio music. At the end of the corridor they made a right turn, found themselves at the rear of the dance hall with a row of booths at their left. They passed these and came to a closed door which she opened and they entered a completely private dining room. There were remnants of a feast, many bottles, and two men and one woman.

"I went out to see if it was snowing at the North Pole," she stated, "and see what I found."

"What did you find?" inquired a big man, rising and scowling.

"The seagulls' friend. He's a solitary drinker, Barney. People oughtn't to be allowed to drink alone."

"And this guy hadn't ought to pay for any drink to-night," said the big man heartily. "Shake, feller."

He pumped John's right hand, threw an arm over his shoulder and pulled him down on the bench beside him.

"This little bug over here told me all about it," he declared. "Say, I'm obliged to you. I kind of like her. No brains, of course, but she's got something."

"You telling him?" demanded the girl, who seated herself on the edge of the table. "I got these. He grabbed hold of one of them. I usually slug fresh guys, but I kind of like this one."

"She'd have drowned. She can't swim a stroke," stated the man.

"Maybe I can. I never tried," she retorted.

John laughed. "She told me she was an expert swimmer, but she didn't want to get her dress wet."

The big fellow laughed uproariously. "She ain't got her ears dry yet," he declared, "and she's thirty or forty years old."

Whang! The young woman swung at her friend and left the mark of five fingers on his cheek. With a roar he pounced upon her, squeezed her neck between his fingers, and, when John feared he was going to strangle her, lifted her bodily from the table to his lap and kissed her.

"You forgot to interduce us," said the man.

"His name's John North. This is a big yegg named Barney Hogan."

"North, eh?" queried Hogan. His small gray eyes half closed and his big head bent to the left in order to peer around the burden on his lap and inspect Miss Gray's friend.

JOHN returned his gaze in kind. The cracksman was about thirty-five years of age. His hair and eyebrows were sandy. He was much freckled, his mouth was large, his jaw was solid and his nose was flat. It would have been hard to believe that his profession was opening safes except for his hands which, though huge, had long, slender fingers. He was a crude subject and it was easy to believe that he was savage when angered. The eyes were sharp and shrewd. John decided that he might be without culture, but he was not without intelligence. And he was certain that Barney was not one of the trio that had broken into the Westham bank.

"Been here long?" Hogan asked casually.

"Lemme up, you big gorilla," demanded Dell. "I ain't accustomed to public demonstrations of affection. In fact, I don't like you anyway."

Hogan released her and poured himself a drink from a bottle. After that he placed a heavy slug of whisky in a glass which he offered to John.

"Nuts about me," he explained. "What's your business, Mr. North?"

"None at present," John replied. "I'm looking for work."

He was bitterly disappointed to decide that Hogan was not one of the Westham bandits. Finding him in this resort, knowing that Rathburn had been here, he had begun to put two and two together. Cassidy, however, had insisted that the job was out of Hogan's line. Which reminded him that he ought to be looking for Cassidy.

"Dell," demanded Hogan, "wasn't North the name of the guy that opened the safe for them yeggs down in Westham?"

"Sure. I read it in the paper."

"I'm the guy," said John hastily. He had seen suspicion in the eyes of the box-man.

"You mean they tied a can to you for that?" inquired Hogan.

John nodded. "That's why I came to town," he said. "It looks as if I were washed up in banking."

"Dell," complained the second girl, "you ain't introduced us to Mr. North."

Dell, who had squeezed in on the opposite bench and who had been staring intently at John, her pretty face cupped in her hands, her elbows on the table, made a vague gesture with her left elbow. "Jess Jensen," she said, "and Jack King. Friends of mine. So they gave you the gate because you didn't lie down and die for the Consolidated National?"

"That's about it."

Barney patted him on the shoulder. "You was on the spot," he stated sympathetically. "Them boys couldn't

have done nothing but plug you if you hadn't opened up. Course they might have tried matches on the soles of your feet. If they had you'd have opened up all right, and you wouldn't be able to walk now."

"The bank was insured, of course," said North, self-consciously. "And its prospects of recovering the money are excellent anyway. When I am unarmed and a gunman tells me to jump, I jump."

"You bet. A lot of saps would be alive to-day if they knew that when a man pulls a rod he has to go through. Have another drink."

"Sorry. I'm obliged to you, Mr. Hogan. I've a friend somewhere in the place that I promised to join."

"Maybe I've seen him. Who is he?"

JOHN hesitated. In his opinion Hogan was friendly and took only a professional interest in the Westham robbery. Cassidy had stated he was going to have a talk with him, which meant that he and the cracksman were on good terms. So John risked being indiscreet.

"Cassidy," he said. "Tim Cassidy."

"The bank dick?"

"He's a personal friend of mine."

"I told you that Cassidy was on the ferryboat," stated Dell.

"I'd like to see him," said Hogan. "You and me will go look for him, North."

"I'll go with you," stated Dell.

Hogan scowled at her. "You taking an interest in this guy, sister?" he demanded.

She made an impudent moue at him. "Sure; why not? He's a gentleman, if you know what that means."

"Am I a gentleman?" demanded Hogan derisively. He placed his palm against Dell's chin, pushed, and knocked her flat on the table to the detriment of various glasses of liquor.

While still recumbent, Dell grabbed a glass and hurled it. It crashed and broke against the door.

Hogan pushed John out of the room ahead of him and closed the door behind him. John heard Dell's friends expostulating with her.

"Hell-cat," stated Hogan grimly. "But I'm the boy that can tame 'em. Giuseppe!"

A swarthy waiter came to a halt.

"Sí?"

"Know a fat dick named Tim Cassidy? You've seen him here with me, haven't you?"

"Sí, sí."

"Has he been here to-night?"

"Sí, sí. Yes, sir."

"Gone yet?"

"No, I think not."

"Back room?"

"Maybe."

"Pedro gives all these flatties free drinks in a back room. He don't want the customers to see 'em. May make 'em nervous. Come on, North. I want to ask Tim somethin' myself."

John followed him back across the dance hall and into another long dark passage. "You and him come across the Bay together, eh?" Hogan asked over his shoulder.

"Yes. We happened to be on the same boat."

"You ought to have let Dell go over. Showing her shape, that's what she was doing. Probably she would have drowned, though. Here we are."

He opened the door of a room about sixteen feet square. In a corner was a telephone booth. John stiffened when he observed that the glass in the door was broken. And on the floor were curious dark blotches, close to the booth.

"Not here," said Hogan unnecessarily. "Well, I'll call the boss."

HE turned, facing North, standing a foot and a half away from him. Without warning, his fist came up from his knees in a terrific and incredibly vicious uppercut, while an expression of diabolical fury wrote itself upon his face.

John North's head went back an inch and the fist whizzed past his jaw—a clean miss. The broken glass, the spots on the floor looked like blood, the astonishing courtesy of a brute who had no manners, and the sixth sense of the skilled boxer saved him from the treacherous blow.

He drove his right into Hogan's well padded stomach. Hogan's breath came out with a hissing sigh and he was driven against a table, which toppled. A beer bottle came rolling and fell into John's left hand as Hogan ripped open his coat and grasped the handle of a knife in a sheath inside his trousers.

The beer bottle went into action first. With all his strength John brought it down upon the skull of the big man, smashed it, and floored his antagonist. With an expression of bewilderment that was ludicrous, Hogan settled and lay flat on the boards. But only for a second. He pulled forth the knife, which had a six-inch blade, reared himself, pulled up his legs to spring. North kicked him on the point of the jaw. This time Hogan went down and stayed down.

North looked around. There was a key on the inside of the door and a window on the opposite side of the room. He turned the key and rushed to the window. It was nailed down. As he was examining it, there came thumps on the door.

"Barney! What's going on in there? Let me in!" cried Dell Gray at the top of her lungs. Barney did not speak or move.

John stepped back and grabbed a chair, stood it under the window, and from this position kicked out both panes and the vertical sash. He cut his hands and tore his trousers getting through the big opening, and, after dropping six feet, landed prone. He was up in a second, cast a glance around and saw an alley directly ahead. In the distance was a dim street light. He had come out at the middle of the base of the triangular building, and had made use of what appeared to be the only window in the structure.

Expecting immediate pursuit, he ran at top speed through the alley, but, after traveling a couple of hundred feet, he struck a bulky object, and he went forward head first and slid along soft ground for five or six feet. With an oath he rose, hesitated, and went back. The softness of the obstacle had been suspicious. It was a body, a human body. A large body. He knelt beside it. It was dark, but not too dark He was leaning over the dead or unconscious body of Tim Cassidy.

"Tim! Tim! Are you alive?" he asked fearfully. No answer. He arose and looked back. No pursuit. He tried to lift Tim, but it was impossible. Cassidy must have weighed two hundred and sixty pounds. He placed his hand on the man's heart. It was beating faintly, very faintly.

JOHN ran swiftly to the through street and, as fate would have it, he ran into the arms of a policeman.

"Well, well, and what's this?" demanded the officer.

"A dying man in that alley, officer. Get an ambulance—quick!"

The policeman looked at him suspiciously. "Want to get me down the alley, eh?" he demanded.

"It's Tim Cassidy, detective for the Consolidated National Bank."

"You've blood on your face; your hand is covered with it," said the patrolman. He drew his gun. "You go ahead of me down that alley," he commanded.

Startled, John looked at his hand. Several cuts from jagged window glass had caused his palm to turn red. Meekly he led the way to where Tim Cassidy was lying.

The officer threw a flashlight on the face of the victim and emitted an indignant explanation. "It's Tim," he declared. "Sure, I used to know him well."

The light on his eyelids caused Tim's lashes to flicker and then he opened his eyes.

"What happened to you, Tim?" asked North, anxiously.

"Eh, you came, John. I been knifed."

"It's Pat Fagan, Tim," said the policeman. "This fella O. K.?"

"Friend of mine. I got knifed—in the back."

"Where? Who done it?" demanded the officer.

John grabbed the cop's arm. "Damn it, man, we need an ambulance and doctors. He may be dying."

"I'm tough," mumbled Tim. "Get busy, John."

"How?" asked John, on his knees beside the detective.

"Rathburn—grab him quick, search him—you'll find—aah!"

"Get his legs," commanded the officer, as the wounded bank detective lost consciousness again. "We got to get him out of here. They may come back and finish him."

The policeman was a powerful fellow and North was strong, but Cassidy was a terrific weight and they made hard going of it to the street. Half a block down was a patrol box. They laid Cassidy in a doorway and, commanding North to watch him, the policeman ran to the box to summon an ambulance.

A minute passed and Tim muttered something. John bent over.

"They'll hold you. You got to get Rathburn. Scram," ordered the detective. "God, my back." He fainted once more. John hesitated a second, saw the policeman slam shut the box door and, yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, he darted across the street, turned a corner and ran like a streak. He heard a shout and a shot, but didn't heed them.

As he reached the next block he came upon a cruising taxi, and boarded it.

"Palace Hotel," he gasped. "Quick!"

THE officer had not pursued, not wishing to leave the wounded man in the doorway. And when Tim recovered consciousness again he would exonerate John North. In the meantime, John had to find Rathburn.

From the moment when Hogan had tried to hang a fast punch on him, things had happened so swiftly that John had not had a chance to wonder what it all meant. And much of it still bewildered him.

What was the motive of Hogan's unexpected attack? Who had knifed Cassidy and left him dead, to all appearance, in the alley back of Pedro's? Tim had been stabbed in that room, while he was telephoning to North at the Palace. In the struggle, the glass in the door had been broken. Hogan had tried to knife John North—there-

fore he was the one who had wounded Cassidy. But Cassidy was on friendly terms with him. It didn't make sense.

Hogan had been affable, even grateful for John's assistance to his sweetheart until he learned that North was the Westham manager. Which meant that Hogan was in the hold-up plot. Putting two and two together, the presence of the bank manager and the bank detective in Pedro's struck Hogan as suspicious. Perhaps he had heard what Tim had said over the telephone. Anyway, he had intended to eliminate North as he supposed he had eliminated Cassidy.

Cassidy wasn't dead. He might be badly wounded, but he had his senses. He had something on Rathburn. "Catch him quick! Search him!"

Why quickly? Why search him? Tim might have explained, only he had gone off into a coma.

John glanced at his watch. Only an hour had elapsed since he had seen the silhouette of Frances Harding in the taxicab leaving Pedro's. An hour.

It was most unlikely that Frances would permit Rathburn to escort her home. In all probability she would have allowed him to cross on the ferry with her and put her on the interurban. Rathburn would be getting home pretty soon unless he decided that the eveing was young and it was too early to go home.

John descended at the Palace and slipped through a side door into the men's washroom, where a porter stared at him indignantly, but changed his attitude when John slipped him a dollar.

"Auto accident," he explained. "Help me to clean up." A glance in the mirror caused him to marvel that he had succeeded in reaching the washroom unchecked. His face was dirty and blood was mixed with the dirt. His hands were black and his clothes were filthy.

Ten minutes' labor repaired everything except a rent in his trousers, and the porter was at work on that with a needle and thread. His cuts had been superficial, and bleeding had ceased almost immediately.

Leaving the washroom, he phoned the apartment hotel where Rathburn resided. Deliberately, he asked the operator to connect him with the clerk from whom he inquired if Mr. Rathburn was at home. He heard the clerk say to the operator, "Call Mr. Rathburn in 712," and immediately hung up. He didn't want the connection; he wanted the number of the apartment.

"Find Rathburn quick. Search him —you'll find—" Poor old Tim had been unable to finish and John didn't know what he would find, but he proposed to call on Rathburn and search him. If Tim was wrong, John would probably land in jail.

North went into the street, secured a taxi and gave the address of the apartment building on Nob Hill.

CHAPTER IX.

FRANCES TAKES A HAND.

DURING the afternoon Frances Harding had been conscious that her new boss liked her looks. And she remembered that the head bandit also had liked her looks. Being a girl, she didn't have to have a real reason to think a thing was thus and so. She just knew.

About two thirty Rathburn went over to the concrete company in response to a request from the vice-president, and at two thirty-five Frances answered a call for him. It

was from the cashier at the main branch.

"Mr. Rathburn is out for the moment. This is Miss Harding, Mr. Gleason."

"Oh, hello," said the cashier, who had talked with her on the phone a thousand times. "Listen. Tell Rathburn that we've a break regarding that robbery. In the cash we sent down for the concrete company's payroll were two packs of hundred dollar notes. These packs came in from the Federal Reserve a few days ago, were newly engraved, and the Federal Reserve has just supplied us with their numbers—there's a piece of luck. Tell Rathburn that we have supplied the police with the numbers and they ought to get action."

"Do you want to dictate the numbers, Mr. Gleason?"

"Not necessary—sending them by registered letter."

When she repeated this message to Rathburn half an hour later she studied his rather plain countenance sharply and she was certain that she read concern in it. However, he said nothing.

Ten minutes later he left the bank without his hat, but returned shortly and then, under the pretense of dictating, he engaged her in inconsequential chatter for a while. He asked personal questions which she answered as she pleased. He told her she was going to find him most considerate, that it made him cheerful to have a pretty secretary. She laughed all this off and got out the two or three brief letters which he gave her.

About four o'clock, when they were alone in the bank save for a couple of tellers who labored at the far end of the room, he came over and seated himself on her desk.

"I feel like celebrating," he said. "I'm all set up about getting back in harness. How did you get along with North?"

"Very well," she said demurely. Obviously he didn't know of their engagement. John and Frances hadn't spoken of it at the bank.

"I bet you're a swell dancer," he insinuated.

"I've been told so," she said modestly.

"What say you and I step out tonight in Frisco."

"Really, Mr. Rathburn, I hardly know you," she protested.

He grinned. She was sure those were the bank robber's teeth.

"I'm the manager of this bank," he replied. "That ought to stamp me as a clean-living, high-minded young man. Come on, kid, we're going to be pals. Let's start right in."

She made up her mind. "Well, there's no harm, I suppose," she said, affecting to hesitate.

AS he lived in San Francisco, it was arranged that he would meet her at the six thirty ferry. She vetoed a suggestion that she should call at his apartment. And, at six thirty, wearing her prettiest gown, the amateur female detective left the ferryboat and found him in attendance.

"Going to take you to a picturesque place, where the food is swell and the drinks guaranteed," he explained. "But the men don't dress formally there. Girls do as they please."

Half an hour later they were in a booth at Pedro's. Rathburn had suggested a room where they could have complete privacy, but she had countered with the desire to be out where she could see people.

She drank two cocktails which were excellent, and heard him order a dinner

which sounded delicious, and a bottle of champagne. Frances, nervously on guard, was relieved to notice that Rathburn seemed content to behave like a gentleman despite the semi-privacy of the booth.

Half an hour passed and Miss Harding was slightly crestfallen to find that her escort didn't appear to take as much interest in her as she had a right to expect. He was nervous, absent-minded and inattentive. Some of her bright sallies had to be repeated, and then his laugh had no mirth in it.

Frances, who had accepted this invitation in the hope that Rathburn might become expansive after a few drinks and let drop something which might be useful, seemed to be wasting an evening in the company of a man she didn't like. She dared not ask leading questions, though she did tell him her experience during the bank robbery and how the scoundrel had forcibly kissed her.

"Pretty nervy of North to take a crack at him," he commented. "I'd have grabbed his gun and shot the whole caboodle of them."

She bridled, but she didn't want him to think she was interested in John.

"You bawled him out plenty for opening the safe, I hear," he added. "A hell of a soldier that guy must have been."

She almost made a hot retort and then she sucked in her breath sharply.

There had been nobody in the safe room when she had upbraided John but North, herself and the robbers. The other bank employees were in the basement behind a closed door. She hadn't mentioned the matter, and it wasn't likely that John would. How did he know? Because he *was* the man who had kissed her.

Rathburn, quite unconscious of his slip, began talking of something else. Time passed. It was nine by her wrist watch when a waiter whispered something in her escort's ear.

"I'm wanted on the phone, Miss Harding," he said. "Will you excuse me for a few moments?"

He had been gone only two or three minutes when a very fat, moon-faced man who lifted his feet and laid them down as though each step was an effort came along the corridor, stopped at her booth and peered in her face. She stiffened and then recognized him.

"Fancy seeing you, Mr. Cassidy," she said.

"Hello," he answered in a low tone. "You're North's girl. Out with the new boss, eh?"

"I—I—"

"'Sall right. I know about the bum. I ain't seen you." He winked, grimaced and passed on. Cassidy made occasional calls at Westham and had been at the bank that morning when North was on the carpet in San Francisco. She felt heartened by this encounter. It meant that John must have taken her tip seriously since he had confided it to the bank detective.

HALF an hour went by before Rathburn returned. He slipped into the seat opposite her. "That phone message forced me to call up two or three other people," he said.

"I've been amused," she said. "Several people passed." She laughed lightly and gazed at him through half-closed eyes. "Isn't this a funny place for a bank detective?" she asked casually.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I'm afraid our celebration will be broadcast through all the Consolidated branches. Mr. Cassidy just passed and recognized me."

She saw Rathburn's hands clench and his knuckles grow white.

"Cassidy," he said slowly. "Well, I suppose these cops enjoy good grub and liquor like the rest of us."

"Rather embarrassing for me," she remarked with a nervous laugh, "to be caught dining out with my new boss on his first day at Westham."

"But he didn't see me."

"No, that's true."

"Well, we'll have a cordial and leave. Which way did he go?"

"That way."

"The exit is the other way. We'll drop in somewhere else for our cordial. Say my apartment. I've prime cognac at home."

"No, thanks."

His eyes fell upon her commodious leather hand bag lying on the table. "Lots of room in that," he commented. "Is it full?"

"Practically empty."

He thrust his hand in his breast pocket and drew forth a package wrapped in brown paper. It was about six inches long by two inches wide and perhaps an inch and a half thick.

"Bulges out my pocket," he said. "Will you put it in your bag until we get to the apartment?"

She reached for it, opened her bag and made room inside for it.

"But we're not going to your apartment," she said.

He laughed. "To the ferry, then."

The girl dropped her eyes so he shouldn't see the light in them. The package in her bag was about the length, breadth and thickness of two packages of bank notes. Suppose it should contain the packs of new bills from the Federal Reserve whose numbers were registered.

She was certain it was exactly that. The bank had notified the head robber that the numbers of those packs were known. The loot had been concealed in this den. Rathburn had brought her here as a blind. The phone call was an excuse to see his confederates and tell the bad news. No doubt they had decided to take the marked bills out of circulation, or else Rathburn was going to use his opportunities as a banker to substitute them for unmarked bills at Westham. Finding them in the safe, the tellers would pass them out without scrutiny, and if the police turned up some of them it would be assumed that these particular packs had not been in the concrete company payroll fund, but had come down later in the ordinary course of events.

Being a banker herself, Frances reasoned from her experience. And now she had the identified bills in her hand bag. The package had felt soft to the touch, as though it contained paper.

"Come on, let's go," Rathburn said abruptly. He rang for the waiter.

Why had he put them in her hand bag? Because she said she had seen Cassidy. He was afraid he might be searched.

RATHBURN was paying the waiter and eager to be gone. She rose leisurely and preceded him along the corridor, passing numerous booths occupied by more affectionate couples than she and Rathburn had been.

She had to escape with the package. How?

There was a taxi parked in the alley. Rathburn opened the door and entered after her. A few seconds later it passed John North without the girl being aware of the proximity of her sweetheart. Halfway up the block she uttered an exclamation.

"My handkerchief! I left it on the

bench beside me. We must go back."

"A handkerchief. I'll buy you a box."

"This—this is priceless, rare lace, an heirloom. I must have it."

"Turn round," he said grumpily to the driver. A moment later the cab approached the alley.

"Wait here," commanded Rathburn. "I'll go in."

He sprang out and Frances immediately prodded the driver.

"Drive on, quickly," she commanded. Alas, she didn't know the kind of gallant who drove that taxi.

"Hey, feller," he bellowed. "The dame wants to scram."

Rathburn, who had only moved a dozen feet from the cab, dashed back and leaped in.

"What's the idea?" he growled menacingly.

"I—I—thought I had better go home," she faltered.

"The old gag," he said with a sneer. "How about my package? Give it here."

"I forgot that. I'm sorry."

"It's all right," he said, less roughly. "Afraid of me, eh?"

"Well, it's late."

"Only ten thirty. You're coming up to my apartment and we'll get cozy." He tucked the package in his breast pocket. Frances decided to surrender—for the time being.

"Anyway," she said meekly, "I tried to go home." Maybe at the apartment she might get a chance to grab the package and escape. Maybe he would get drunk enough to make that possible.

"You're a swell kid," he declared. "You and I are going to have lots of evenings. And I thought it was going to be stupid in the Westham branch."

He gave the driver his address. Frances was tingling with excitement and apprehension. John would never forgive her for going to Rathburn's apartment, not even if she secured absolute proof of the man's guilt. Well, he would have to forgive her. This opportunity was known only to her and she must take chances.

CHAPTER X.

CROOKS' CONFERENCE.

FRANCES opened her eyes wide at the splendor of the apartment hotel. She demurred against entering as a matter of form and allowed herself to be persuaded.

When they arrived at his door she was terrified. She had never done a thing like this in her life. But the key had turned in the lock, he pushed open the door and, taking her arm, he almost dragged her in.

"Here we are," he declared briskly. "Now we can really get acquainted."

Rathburn had a large living room and a commodious chamber connected by folding doors, which were open.

"Make yourself comfortable," proposed the host, "while I fix us a drink."

Frances sat down uneasily on the edge of a stiff-backed chair. She would have given anything to escape. She had been mad to come here. Maybe she could have reached John at his home in Westham, told him what she had learned and let him arrange to raid the place. There was a gleam in Rathburn's eyes which she didn't like. Had he suspected that she intended to make off with the package—that she hadn't been merely a frightened girl?

She eyed the door longingly, but Rathburn, who had thrown off his coat in the bedroom, was standing where he

could see her. He pulled open a closet and drew forth a crimson satin lounging robe which he donned and then went into the bathroom. Now was her chance. No, he popped out, in each hand a glass of amber liquor, and came towards her.

"Very old cognac," he said proudly. "Here's to us."

Frances took the glass and sipped it. Rathburn sat down close to her, smiling encouragingly. She sipped some more. It seemed to her that there was something the matter with her eyes; Rathburn's face was blurring. Now she could see only one half of it---one eye, the left side of his mouth. It was curious; she couldn't be drunk. Was she drugged?

A moment later Rathburn caught her slight form as she pitched forward, carried her into the bedroom and laid her, none too gently, upon the bed.

He then picked up his telephone and called a number.

"Get up here right away," he said. "There's the devil to pay. Yes, my apartment. That's right."

Time passed. Frances Harding lay motionless, unconscious on the bed. Rathburn smoked a cigarette furiously, walking from the bedroom to the living room and back again. He poured himself a stiff drink of brandy and tossed it off. He had had three brandies when there came two short raps and two heavier ones on his door. He pulled it open and a young woman entered, hatless, with a cape over a red evening dress, and a brawny man who held his hand to his jaw.

"What's up, Ken?" demanded Dell Gray. Her sharp eyes espied the girl on the bed. "Oh, oh!" she exclaimed. "Untrue to Delly, eh?"

"What's the matter with you, Barney?" demanded Rathburn. The boxman made a growling noise and pointed to Dell.

"Wants you to talk to me," said Dell. "The he-man has a broken jaw, kicked by a mule by the name of John North."

"What's that?" cried Rathburn. "North? How? Where?"

"You spiel first, brother," she commanded. "Flop, Barney."

She curled up in a chair "And make it interesting."

"I TOLD you I brought my secretary at the bank to Pedro's," said Rathburn. "With the police poking around I didn't want to go there alone. Well, while I was with Barney, Tim Cassidy came along, recognized her and probably she told him she was with me, though she says no."

"That the doll you fondled on the job the other morning?"

"Yes, but she couldn't identify me, of course. Well, Cassidy being around frightened me. She had a good-sized hand bag and I put the package in it, thinking that if there was a frisk on the way out they wouldn't touch her."

"You fool," said Dell frankly.

"Maybe," he answered sullenly. "Anyway, we are starting away in a taxi when she says she left her handkerchief. I started back to get it—"

"Forgetting she had the package?"

He nodded. "She told the taxi driver to step on the gas, but he sung out to me and I leaped back into the cab. She said she had been afraid I'd take her to my apartment and had forgotten she had my property. She handed it over and came up here without much fuss after that. But I was suspicious, and I doped her brandy and then decided to risk having Barney come up. I didn't want you. A woman coming in is sure to be noticed."

"Well," said Dell sharply, "I told Barney it was a mistake to tie up with a sap, even if he did have a good proposition. You shouldn't have brought her up here and you shouldn't have doped her. You could have made a pass at her and let her get away."

"But Cassidy—"

"That egg is fried," she said testily. "Can you imagine? He gets into the phone booth in the back room, squeezes down and hears you and Barney deciding what to do about the two packs of new bank notes. After you left Barney went back into the room and sees Tim jiggling the telephone. So he slips up, pulls open the door and punctures Tim in the back three or four times. After that he gets a couple of boys and rolls Tim out into the alley to check out."

"He murdered Tim?" gasped Rathburn, who was pale as death.

"And a little while later who blows in but this John North, who turns out to be quite a boy—hey, Barney?"

Barney muttered something not understandable, but probably profane. "It seems that this boy met me on the ferryboat—we won't go into that—and not knowing he's the main squeeze at Westham, I take him back and give him a knockdown to his nibs here. In the course of the conversation Barney finds out who he really is and takes him for a walk. He's the bimbo that Tim Cassidy was telephoning to, see?"

"Good Lord!" murmured Rathburn.

"Well, he's smarter than he looks. When Barney gets him in the back room and looses a haymaker, this baby counters with a kick on the jaw and escapes through the window."

"He got away?"

"Yea, bo. And he tumbles over Cassidy, too, who ain't quite dead. North gets a cop and they carry Tim to the street and get an ambulance and Tim is unconscious yet. Meanwhile North blows, the cop takes a shot at him, but, unfortunately, misses. Which is the present situation."

"What'll we do?" mourned Rathburn.

"Blow," declared Dell. "Hand over the twenty grand in them two packs. We can slip it around in a few months and nobody will be wise."

"But to run away is a confession of guilt. I can't do that."

"Suit yourself, brother. We're sailing on a freighter for China at 6 A.M."

RATHBURN stopped in the middle of the floor and scowled at her.

"I turned over to you twenty thousand in money to-night," he declared. "I'll bury this. Or else return me the cash I gave you."

"You better come with us. We don't know what Cassidy told North on the phone. Plenty, or he wouldn't have been wise to Barney and have kicked his face in. What's that?"

The apartment bell had rung.

Rathburn stepped to the door. "What is it?" he inquired in a voice which shook.

"Telegram for Mr. Rathburn."

Rathburn unlocked the door, opened it a few inches and extended his hand.

"Give it to me," he instructed.

There was a crash; the door flew open; Rathburn went over backwards and John North catapulted into the room.

"Stick 'em up, sweetheart," snapped Dell Gray. In her right hand was an automatic. Growling ominously, Barney was on his feet, a heavy revolver in his right, his left still holding his broken jaw.

"Close that door and lock it," cried Dell Gray. Rathburn picked himself up and obeyed orders.

"Imagine meeting you so often," cooed Dell. "Barney, maybe we don't have to blow after all. Johnnie, I think I'm insulted because you grabbed my leg on the boat. I think maybe I'm going to blow off the top of your head."

John didn't answer because he was staring into the bedroom where Frances lay as though she were dead.

"Speak up, baby," jeered Dell, wagging the automatic. "Tell mamma all."

She didn't know that she was addressing a person who at the moment was insane with fury. He grasped her wrist, dragged her toward him and tore the pistol from her hand. Barney fired one wild shot and then hesitated because North had lifted the girl whom the cracksman loved and was holding her as a shield while she kicked and clawed.

"Get him, Rathburn," roared Barney.

The automatic spat three jets of fire, and two of the three bullets entered the chest of Barney Hogan. As he fell, John North threw the girl from him as if she were a snake and rushed at Rathburn, who had drawn a revolver from his hip pocket and was fumbling with the safety catch.

North was on him like a catamount. Rathburn went down with the maddened sweetheart of Frances Harding on top of him. His right arm was pinned to the floor by North's left knee. North had dropped his pistol and was clubbing his victim on the head with his big right fist.

"Gimme that, you fool," snarled Dell Gray. She was pulling the revolver from Rathburn's nerveless fingers. She lashed out and the two went down together. John at that instant became aware that Rathburn was unconscious and also that there was heavy pounding on the door. Dell was crawling like a serpent toward the automatic pistol. John put his foot on it.

"Open the door, you," he growled.

Whimpering with impotent rage, Dell Gray opened the door and there poured into the room four men with weapons in hand. Police.

"HOGAN'S down! Who done this?" demanded the head cop.

"I did," said John. "I surrender, officers."

"Who in hell are you?"

"My name is John North."

"It's North, all right," reported the head cop and the others nodded their heads and dropped their levelled weapons.

"Have you got the marked money?" demanded the first detective, who turned out to be Police Lieutenant Wright.

"I don't know about any marked money," said North.

"But Cassidy said he told you—"

"Is Tim alive? Has he talked?" asked John eagerly.

"What do you suppose we're doing here?" replied the lieutenant. "What's the verdict, Bill?"

He addressed an officer who was stooping over Barney Hogan.

"Dead as a halibut."

There was an unearthly shriek and Dell Gray made a rush for John North. A two hundred pound officer intercepted her and folded his big arms around her.

"John, John, darling," came feebly from the bedroom. Frances was sitting up, and holding out her arms. North rushed into the bedroom and embraced her.

"I—I think I was drugged," she whimpered. "John, I was trying—"

"Hold up yer hands, feller," commanded the lieutenant. Rathburn, battered but conscious, obeyed silently. Handcuffs were locked around the wrists of the nephew of the president of the Consolidated Bank.

After two men had carried the unfortunate Dell Gray down to the police ambulance, Lieutenant Wright explained a few things to North.

Detective Tim Cassidy had been stabbed three times in the back and lost a lot of blood, but no vital organ had been injured. In the hospital he had recovered consciousness, told what he knew and sent the police to raid Rathburn's apartment.

The two packs of brand new Federal Reserve currency whose numbers were known were found in the pocket of Rathburn's coat, which he had thrown on the bed and upon which Frances Harding had been lying.

Rathburn made a full confession. He had met and carried on with Dell Gray while her man was in jail. After Barney's release Dell had brought the two men together. Rathburn, who was hard pressed for funds, had confided to Hogan his idea of how a bank like the Westham branch could be robbed if one knew the location of the alarm system, and Hogan had immediately proposed to pull the job. He figured that he would not be suspected of a break so completely out of his line, but he made the arrangements and forced Rathburn to superintend the job as being most familiar with the particular bank to be robbed. Barney had been the outside man on this occasion.

The appointment of Rathburn as branch manager to succeed John North had seemed to both a piece of luck as Rathburn would be on the inside of the investigation and would be the last person to be suspected. No doubt everything would have gone perfectly for the criminals if Frances Harding had not discovered that both the chief robber and the new bank manager used Dobbs' Indigestion Gum.

John North was the recipient of a full apology from the directors, and was reappointed to the Westham branch. President Rathburn, under fire for appointing a man of bad character, who happened to be his nephew, to a responsible position, was forced to resign. And Frances and John were married upon the date they had planned and found their half of the ten thousand dollar reward most useful in furnishing their home.

THE END

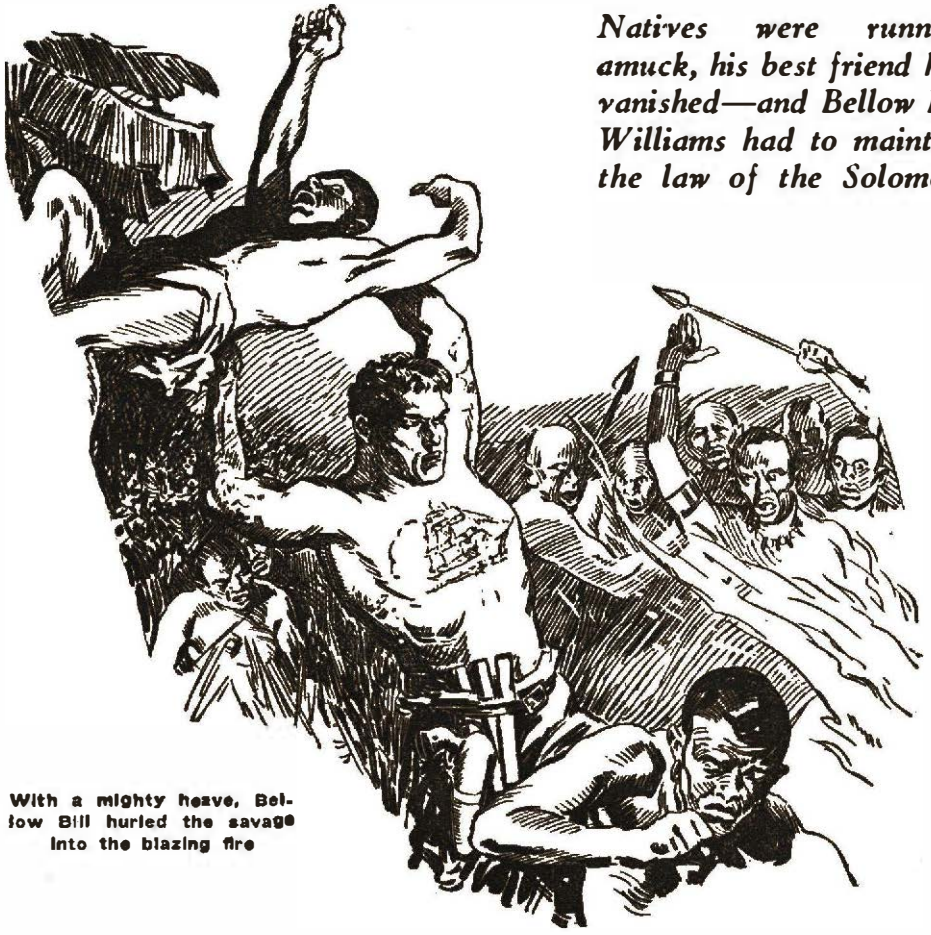
Blood Payment

By RALPH R. PERRY

Author of "The Scar," "The Jungle Master," etc.

Novelette—Complete

Natives were running amuck, his best friend had vanished—and Bellow Bill Williams had to maintain the law of the Solomons



With a mighty heave, Bellow Bill hurled the savage into the blazing fire

CHAPTER I.

RUMAKOTU.

BELLOW BILL WILLIAMS, the tattooed pearling skipper, liked to handle his schooner alone; which is all right if a man is big enough to hoist the mainsail in a gale. Bill was big enough. Six feet three, weighing two hundred and forty pounds of hard muscle, he could easily do the work of three average sailors.

He also liked to sail to the remoter and wilder sections of the South Seas; which was all right, too, since he had plenty of self-confidence and rather enjoyed a tight corner. An immensely powerful and utterly fearless man

doesn't get much chance to use his full strength in the ordinary course of the pearling trade.

Nevertheless, to play a lone hand exacts its penalties. Running southward from Christmas Island after a successful pearling season, with the hold of the schooner full of shell and the steady trade wind on the port quarter, Bill snagged his right thumb on a fish hook while trolling.

The injury was trifling. He forgot about it until two days later. Then the hand and forearm commenced to be sore. Under the tanned, tattooed skin thin red lines were visible, running from the little gash, which had refused to heal, up his right arm to and beyond the elbow. Those thin red lines were the symptoms of blood poisoning; and all around Bill was a warm, blue, empty sea.

Bone setting was the limit of Bill's knowledge of surgery. He couldn't operate on his own right arm, anyway; and the nearest hospital was at Tahiti, distant by eight days' sailing. At the rate the infection was spreading, in eight days his arm would be in such shape that the French sawbones in Tahiti would want to cut it off at the elbow, or the shoulder, in order to save his life.

Bellow Bill sat at the steering wheel in the warm sun, and filled his cheek with fine cut chewing tobacco, which he carried loose in his hip pocket. He'd be damned if he was going to lose an arm; nor was he such a fool as to fail to realize that an attempt to save his arm, in Tahiti, might kill him. He needed to see a doctor within forty-eight hours at most, not after a hundred and ninety-two.

And that meant that he must change his course and sail to the atoll of Rumakotu, only a hundred and fifty miles away across the warm, empty sea. Fat, easy-going Phil McGuire had been a doctor once—a ship's physician who had fallen in love with the South Seas, thrown up his job, and established a copra plantation with Dennis Shea, putting up the money in return for the planting experience of the older, more taciturn Irishman. Bellow Bill knew that the partners had done well. Twenty-five thousand coco palms were just beginning to bear, and though McGuire hadn't practiced medicine during the seven years that the trees were reaching maturity, except to cure the recruited laborers, he hadn't fogged his mind by laziness or booze, either.

Phil McGuire was a good egg, plenty capable of fixing Bill up. A day lost in reaching Rumakotu was a good gamble; and Bellow Bill, as he put the wheel over and trimmed sheets on the new course, was grimly thankful that his mind was a chart of the South Seas. Most sailors, lacking his far-flung and detailed acquaintance with the islands, would have held course for Tahiti. To rot in a hospital for weeks or months at best. Possibly to rot under the coral sand in the end. Whereas Bill, sailing into Rumakotu after twenty hours on the new course, anticipated a speedy cure with the two partners.

A native drum was booming wildly as he anchored in the shallow lagoon. The recruited laborers who did the work on the plantation were dancing, and by the hoarseness of the voices and the steadiness of the shouting Bellow Bill guessed that the dance had progressed beyond the stage of individual displays to the orgiastic mass hysteria which is always reached when natives amuse themselves, but which was rarely arrived at so early in the afternoon as this.

No one, white or native, came down to the beach to see what schooner had arrived; and though the coco palms which were planted on every foot of the island except the actual beach sands concealed the buildings ashore from Bill, and also kept his schooner from being seen, the roar of the anchor chain must have been audible at McGuire's bungalow.

"Ahoy!" Bill bellowed in the great voice that had the booming crack of a mainsail in a gale. "McGuire! Shea!"

Boom! Boom! Boom! went the drum, like a fevered pulse. No other answer to that stentorian hail for an instant, and then, from behind the waving screen of palm leaves, the crack of a repeating rifle, half a dozen shots fired as fast as the cartridges could be levered into the barrel.

"Keep a-way-y!" shrilled a woman's voice. "Don't—land—alone! The natives—are running amuck!"

Bellow Bill smiled grimly. Something else was running amuck in his right arm. Don't land alone, eh? That was a laugh, under the circumstances. He wondered, briefly, what a white woman was doing on this island of bachelor partners, and why she should answer his hail. Possibly because the people in the bungalow knew that a woman's voice would cut through the hoarse yelling of the recruits better than the deeper tones of a man.

"This is Bellow Bill!" the pearler thundered. "Callin' McGuire and Shea! Do you want me to land and give you a hand, or would you rather come aboard till the recruits quiet down?"

"I'm alone!" came the shrill answer. "Shea's been lost at sea! Phil went out to quiet the recruits. Half an hour ago! Don't—land—alone!"

Boom! Boom! Boom! went the drum, fierce and angry like the pulse that beat in Bill's arm. And McGuire had gone to stop that dance? Half an hour ago? A fat, jolly little man, who knew little of the South Seas except what he'd seen from the deck of a liner, or learned on Rumakotu. A half hour is a long, long time for a white man who tries to stop a native orgy to be away.

Bill's huge tattooed hands tightened on the rail.

"I'm landing!" he roared. "Will you be all right there in the bungalow for the next twenty minutes?"

"Yes!" came the answer. "I've got —the rifles. I'm keeping—the law of the Solomons."

The law of the Solomons is that any native who enters the clearing of a white man unclothed, or carrying a weapon, may be shot. This girl, whoever she was, was no new-chum to know that law.

Bellow Bill decided to go after McGuire first.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIFLE.

HE rowed ashore with a revolver and half a dozen sticks of dynamite, capped and fused to explode in five seconds, stuck in his belt. A cigar was clamped in his jaw, and he was stripped to the waist. Bill's forty-eight-inch chest was tattooed with a full-rigged ship. His back, ribbed with muscles like the trunk of an oak tree, was decorated by a Chinese dragon and a snake that coiled around the hips. Every inch of skin from the neck down not occupied by these designs had its own picture pricked in colored inks, and since in

the South Seas the rank of a native chief can be judged by the amount of tattooing on his body, Bellow Bill's painted skin marked him as no common man—a fact as useful as his height and weight when he had savages to overawe.

He pulled the dinghy above the high-tide mark with a single sweep of his left arm, and marched into the shade of the coco palms toward the drumming and the hoarse shouts as though he were a regiment.

The first natives he encountered were wandering through the palms one by one while they rested from their exertions in the dance. They were black and kinky-haired New Hebrides Islanders, wearing G-strings of pandamus which emphasized rather than concealed their sex. At home they were cannibals to a man. They were the most surly, the most ignorant, and the most treacherous savages from whom plantation labor is recruited; and though they were resting, their ugly black jaws were still streaked with foam from the mad excitement of the dance. Natives in their condition were as dangerous and as unstable mentally as a drunkard on the verge of delirium tremens.

Bellow Bill eyed each savage with a level, unspoken threat and strode straight at him. Each circled away a few yards to permit the pearler to pass, but once Bill was by each savage circled still farther and followed him. He entered the clearing where the fire blazed, trailed by more than a dozen men.

Fully a score of dancers circled the fire, foaming at the mouth, howling in a frenzy that made them oblivious to everything save the beat of the drum. These would dance till they dropped from exhaustion, or were knocked down, and if one were knocked down the others would rush insanely at any number of white men, armed in any way whatsoever.

Yet as long as they were not interfered with, the very frenzy of the dancers was in Bill's favor. They did not see him, nor care at all because he was an alien and an enemy. Not so the mob of forty or fifty islanders who milled around the dancers in a loose, slow-moving ring.

There were men who were neither exhausted by frenzy, nor completely dance-mad. Many carried the short, heavy knives used for splitting coconuts. They scowled at the cigar in Bill's teeth and the yellow sticks of dynamite thrust between the waistband of his trousers and his tattooed skin. Momentarily the ring of islanders stiffened, attempting to bar him from the dancers and the fire.

Bill pulled out a revolver and a stick of dynamite, and strode ahead. The ring broke—widened out, and reformed with Bill inside. A knife buzzed past his head. He whirled, revolver raised. Any one of a dozen men might have thrown the knife. At his back the dancers leaped and howled. The outer ring faced him, eyes rolling in black faces, some mouths foam-streaked. Bill pushed the revolver back into his waistband. Bullets against such numbers were useless. The outer ring commenced to move toward him, and in a flash he guessed what had happened to McGuire.

The mob had surrounded him, tightened upon him, and at last gripped him, much as a python tightens on its prey. Whether the doctor had emptied his gun into the mob had no bearing on the outcome. If he had, these savages had torn him limb from limb, which would explain their frenzy.

While if he had not—they might merely have seized and bound him, saving him for the climax of the orgy. Such a dance ends, if possible, in cannibalism. Swiftly, Bellow Bill glanced around. There were no bodies near the fire, or close to the drummers. Nor were there stains of blood on the trampled sands. McGuire, who was by nature a gentleman, must have yielded to the inevitable without a shot. There was still a chance that he was alive, which altered Bill's decision to blow his way through the outer ring with dynamite.

Suddenly, while the mob was gathering courage to close in upon him, he leaped like a tiger on the drummers. One was knocked senseless by a swing of Bill's fist. The other, leaping up, was seized by the neck and G-string. With a mighty heave the pearler hurled the drummer over the heads of the dancers into the blazing fire.

The scream of the savage was less startling than the cessation of the drum beat. The dancers paused in mid stride as the drummer rolled from the embers, frenzied eyes staring around for the cause of the interruption. In that split second Bill tossed a stick of dynamite into the fire, and flattened the two dancers nearest him with swings of his left fist.

THE explosion showered him with embers and sand. The concussion was staggering, though he had whirled and hunched his huge shoulders to protect his face. Recovering himself, he sprang toward the gaping hole where the fire had been and tossed the dynamite that was left in all directions as fast as he could push the cigar against the fuses. Even so, one of the dancers rushed him and had to be knocked kicking. The others ran past or away from him and joined the flying mob.

While the dust was still flying, Bill charged after the savages. He needed a prisoner. At the edge of the clearing he overtook a young native whose leg had been injured. He flung the man to the sand and crouched over him, with the revolver against the black throat.

"Where one fella McGuire? Where boss doctor fella?" he boomed.

"Ghost take one doctor fella!" gulped the savage.

"Take him where? You come along me seven bells, savvy?" Bill rumbled. The savages hadn't run as far as he would have liked. Through the long, straight aisles through the coco palms he could see them beginning to collect into groups. He lifted the prisoner in his arms.

"You fellas kai-kai McGuire," he accused.

"No kai-kai. No kill," the prisoner gulped. "McGuire throw down gun belong him. Vaeho say ghost belong him say no kill. Vaeho take McGuire. Give McGuire ghost belong him."

This wasn't particularly clear. From his experience, rather than from the halting pidgin English, Bill guessed that Vaeho, who was a medicine man, had claimed McGuire as a prisoner to give to the familiar spirit, which is the ace of any medicine man's bag of tricks.

"Where?" he rumbled.

The native pointed across the clearing, to a thicket of pandamus which grew on a light hummock in the coral sand of the atoll. Bill went to the spot as fast as he could walk. Through the stems of the pandamus the earth was visible everywhere. There was neither body nor bloodstains nor enough cover to hide a dog.

"If you're giving me a song and

dance I'll wring your neck!" Bill boomed. He felt the native tremble in his arms in terror.

"Vaeho hit head belong him with spirit club!" the savage howled. "No kill. Spirit club too much little! Put McGuire on ground. We fella turn around. Ghost take one fella McGuire. We fellas look. He gone!"

The savage was telling what he thought to be the truth. He—and Bellow Bill with him—were tricked because of the medicine man's hocus-pocus. It is not hard to remove an unconscious body when an audience fears to look until the magician tells them to do so.

"Show me Vaeho!" Bill rumbled grimly. "He'll know more about the ghost than you, I guess."

Carrying his prisoner, the pearler started back toward the islanders, who had collected into a compact crowd. A skinny man as tall or taller than Bill capered and jumped in front of the blacks, shrieking imprecations. Charms as large as a soup bowl, carved from mother of pearl, clashed around his chest.

"Vaeho!" gulped the prisoner.

"Aye!" Bill rumbled.

The skinny individual was evidently a medicine man, and as plainly, to judge from the speed with which he had rallied his tribe, a leader with unusual personality.

Bill set his prisoner down. To cut Vaeho out of that mob he might have to shoot quick and straight, and he had never been much of a marksman.

"What name ghost belong him?" he growled.

"Shea name ghost belong him," gulped the released prisoner. "Ghost belong him boss Shea ghost!"

Bellow Bill started. For the medicine man of a crowd of recruits to take the ghost of a dead plantation owner as a familiar spirit was new to his experience. But he was within seventy yards of his adversary. Vaeho could explain his choice of a ghost later, if Bill could get him.

"You fella Vaeho!" he roared. "Walk along me quick too much, or I shoot you one fella plenty dead, savvee?"

Bill raised the revolver, steadying the barrel with his left hand.

The savages around Vaeho swirled and drew apart—to reveal a huge black who knelt on that sand, taking careful aim at Bill with a rifle. *A rifle*—and recruits are never allowed to have firearms.

Sheer amazement cost Bill his chance to fire first. Lead hissed around him. Five—ten—fifteen—more shots than he could count, or a repeating rifle hold!

He was not hit. Savages do not understand the use of sights, but the drum-fire astounded him. This was an automatic rifle, such as only soldiers and gunboats possess!

The huge black slipped another clip of cartrides into the breech with a skill that made Bill think, for an instant, that he was faced by a white man disguised as a native. But no! The matted, kinky hair, the jutting jaw, and the savage bestiality of the black face were genuine.

Bill sprang behind a palm, using the trunk as a rest, since it was far too slender to shield his body. He shot the best he could—but he missed all six shots. Bullets sang around him. The savage, also missing, slipped a third clip into the breech. His ammunition seemed to be unlimited.

In obedience to Vaeho's howls, the savages were spreading out to get behind the pearler. Bill turned and ran.

With a concerted yell, the whole crowd gave chase.

CHAPTER III.

THE WORTHLESS OLD MAN.

FOR a big man Bill was fast on his feet. He maintained his lead over the savages all the way back to the bungalow, and with a thundering shout that he was white—for the tattooing on his body might deceive the woman, despite his coppery red hair—he hurdled the fence of the compound and sprang up the bungalow steps.

A rifle barked inside, and the foremost savage, who had reached the fence, uttered the choking cry of a man mortally hit. Bill pulled open the door, which was unlocked. Crouched at the window with a rifle projecting across the sill was a girl wearing shorts and a white silk shirt. Plump arms and legs were tanned a rich cream. She glanced at Bill with a quick flash of blue eyes and dazzling teeth, and pushed a rifle lying on the floor toward him with a sneakered foot.

"Where's the dynamite?" Bill boomed. "That's all I'm fit to use. I'm sore at myself."

"They're taking their fight out in yelling," retorted the girl. "We'll be all right until sunset." She relaxed, squatting cross-legged on the floor, and brushed a wisp of dark hair out of her eyes. Firm red lips were trembling.

"You didn't find Phil?" she asked. "I'm Nell Fiske. I was going to marry him."

"Neither McGuire nor his body," Bill rumbled gravely. "A native thought that Vaeho made him disappear, which wants lookin' into. You don't happen to be a missionary?"

"An anthropologist," Nell answered. "I came to this atoll to study the language before I did field work in the New Hebrides. It's the best method, now that labor is recruited from the wildest tribes. But why do you ask?"

"Most missionaries know medicine these days," Bill rumbled. "You couldn't do an operation to clear up a case of blood poisoning?"

"I'm afraid not, but why—"

The vast, tattooed shoulders shrugged. "Why, in a week at most I'm liable to be delirious," Bill explained. "Wouldn't think I was sick, to look at me, would you? I don't feel sick yet. But I've either got to find out what happened to McGuire quick or blast a way to my schooner and get you off this island. You couldn't hold out against these savages long alone, and I'll be more of a hindrance than a help pretty soon. That's something that wants thinking over."

"I shan't leave without Phil," Nell decided.

"Nor I," Bill rumbled. "Come nightfall, I'll go out and see if I can get my hands on Vaeho. I ought to. The natives ought to sleep like logs after the dance, and I ain't unhandy—except with firearms."

The blue eyes of the pearler twinkled.

"Why did the recruits run amuck?" he asked.

"Because their two years were up and they wanted their pay."

"And why didn't they get it?"

"Because the trade goods we sent for never got here. Mr. Shea went out with our season's take of copra to buy the goods. Instead of shipping the stuff by steamer, he wrote us that he had picked up a schooner at a bargain in Tahiti, and was sailing back." Nell

shrugged. "A boat marked with the name of that schooner was washed up on the beach here after a storm. We inferred that Mr. Shea was drowned at sea."

"Schooners bought at a bargain often have rotten planking," Bill rumbled dryly. He reached for fine-cut. "You say Phil—and Mr. Shea," he suggested.

The girl flushed. "Mr. Shea wanted to marry me, too."

"Oh!" Bill boomed. "And how long has Mr. Shea been overdue?"

"Two months. And you see we had no schooner, and the steamers that usually stopped passed us because they must have thought we had one. And the recruits refused to wait any longer—"

"Sure!" Bill growled, deep in his chest. "Though savages aren't usually so particular about dates, and they don't usually riot. Every tribe has been shot over by gunboats at some time. You were glad to see Mr. Shea go? Both you and McGuire were glad?"

"Yes. It was difficult—"

"Difficult for Shea, too, I guess. He's spent seven years watching the palms grow, and having a swell time with McGuire."

"Just what do you mean?" demanded the girl coldly.

"Nothing. I'm just thinking out loud," Bill rumbled. "Why did you tell me you had all the rifles?"

"But I had!" snapped Nell angrily. "I heard the firing, but I can't understand it at all. The first thing Phil and I did when we saw signs of trouble was to check over the firearms. None were missing."

"An automatic rifle was missing."

"There never was an automatic rifle on the atoll. You're mistaken!"

"The target," Bill rumbled, "is never mistaken. My God, girl, the flashes from that gun were like the sparks from a pinwheel!" He shifted his quid thoughtfully. "Two partners disappear, and an automatic rifle—deadly even with a savage who doesn't understand the use of sights firing it—appears. What's your comment on all that?"

"As an anthropologist, I never heard of a medicine man who caused a prisoner to disappear," the girl began slowly.

"Nor I," Bill rumbled, "and I've fought as many savages as you've read books. It could be done, of course. Gifts to the spirits disappear. But the natural thing for Vaeho to have done with McGuire was to tie him up by the fire until the time came to turn him into long pig."

Nell shuddered.

"But if a man and a girl wanted to get rid of a third man—for the sake of his share in a valuable plantation—and a wandering pearling skipper happened to drop anchor just at the wrong time," Bill purred, "then the body would have to disappear. Murder can't be prosecuted without a *corpus delicti*."

FOR a second or two Nell did not understand the diabolical plot of which Bellow Bill was accusing her. Then her face paled with horror, only to blaze in an instant with anger.

"Shea and I—plot to murder Phil?" she gasped. "Why—why, you damned hound! Why, if that had been the scheme I'd have shot you down when you crossed the compound!"

"Steady, girl!" Bill rumbled. "Remember I'm betting my right arm—or my life—that I can get to the bottom of a complicated mess quickly. I had

to find out whether I could trust what you said or not. I'm satisfied now. You wouldn't have shot me as I crossed the compound, because you wouldn't have known whether or not I was alone on my schooner. But the idea that it might be Shea you were in love with hit you harder than an accusation of murder. Are you still mad?"

"Yes!" Nell blazed.

"Then suppose," said Bill evenly, "that Shea plotted to get rid of Phil and you. For the sake of the plantation, and because he was jealous. Suppose he set a boat adrift to fool you into the belief that he was wrecked. Suppose he hid the schooner in the lagoon of some lonely atoll, or—which would be smarter—actually ran it aground in such a way that it would take him months to work it back into deep water.

"In the meantime, you and McGuire are killed by the natives. Shea is shipwrecked miles away at the time, as he can prove by the ship's log, which is evidence in any court. What's your comment on that?"

"Shea couldn't be positive that the recruits would make trouble," said Nell slowly.

"Some one came to the atoll to make certain. With an automatic rifle," Bill rumbled.

"No one could have come. There's no place a stranger could hide!"

"McGuire was hidden somewhere," Bill insisted. "Remember that before McGuire left this bungalow to stop the dance the topsails of my schooner were in sight. It is easier for me to believe that some white man realized it was too dangerous to kill McGuire at that moment, as had been planned, and instead ordered the leaders of the natives to kidnap him and hide him until the errand of the schooner was known, than it is to assume that a crowd of natives, dance mad, would do anything to anyone who interfered except knock him on the head and keep him for long pig.

"When I blew up the dance I had to be driven off, even though that involved revealing the automatic rifle. One white man driving a crowd of natives to kill another needs a weapon that's better than ordinary to protect himself. And finally, my prisoner told me that McGuire had been carried off by Shea's ghost."

"Recruits running amuck would be easier to deal with," commented Nell grimly.

"Much easier," Bill agreed. "Provided they hadn't killed McGuire before I arrived. I've got to decide how and why that automatic rifle got on Rumakotu before I can plan what to do next."

"Shea was a taciturn, embittered man," Nell replied thoughtfully. "It's true that he considered the increase in the value of the plantation was due wholly to his work. That without Phil's money he wouldn't have had the chance to work never seemed to occur to him. And it's true that when I refused him and accepted Phil he was so angry that he wouldn't speak to either of us for days. He walked around with a twist to his mouth. He was silent, but he frightened me. I half expected that at any second he'd scream and go for us with the first weapon he could snatch. We were both very glad when he left the atoll."

NELL FISKE shrugged plump shoulders. "You're not very encouraging," she remarked. "However— Look! There's a na-

tive coming into the compound! But he's an old man—and dressed—and unarmed!"

"Then let him come!" the pearler boomed.

For a savage, the man was very old, emaciated, and feeble. His knees shook as he climbed the steps of the veranda, though more from fright than from weakness.

"No shoot! Me good fella!" he quavered. "Got book belong you!"

From his loin cloth he pulled two scraps of white duck, such as might have been torn from a white man's jacket.

Bellow Bill flung the door open and jerked the old native inside. Both scraps were covered with writing in a dark fluid which was probably blood. The uppermost piece read:

Nell, dear,

I'm unhurt, except for a few bruises. Vaeho and Gorai are holding me as a hostage for the payment of the wages, and I'm sure they won't harm me unless Bellow Bill Williams attacks them again. If he does, they'll kill me in sheer funk.

For God's sake persuade Bellow Bill to sail at once. Go with him, and bring back a schooner load of trade goods. I'm sending a power of attorney so that you can raise money on the plantation for this purpose. Two years' labor for a hundred men at fifteen pounds a year comes to nearly fifteen thousand dollars, so a loan will be necessary.

Don't worry about me. Vaeho's civilized enough to realize I'm only useful to him alive. Love. Phil.

The second scrap of duck was the power of attorney, in regular form, but limited to the purpose of raising a loan to satisfy the wage claims of the recruits. The document was signed, Philip McGuire.

"That's Phil's writing," Nell breathed over Bill's shoulder. "He's alive! Unhurt! Oh, thank God! I never realized Vaeho was quite as civilized as this, but it's a logical explanation of what's happened, don't you think? Don't you agree that we should obey Phil's instructions?"

"You are asking me because you are doubtful yourself," the pearler rumbled. Beneath the sea tan his face was bloodless. "Vaeho must be mighty intelligent. Gorai, I take it, is the ugly black who had the rifle." Bill paused. "Neither of the savages can read?"

"Of course not!"

"Phil must have been pretty eloquent to persuade them to let him write and to make him a pen. He was bound, and just recovering from a knock on the head. He knows who I am, but he might have recognized my topsails, or heard my voice. He doesn't say where he's being held, as he could have done—and yet it's just such a letter as he might write of his own free will. He gets you off the atoll. Saves you."

"Yes, he'd want to do that," Nell breathed. "But the only reason I'd go is to save him. I'm not considering myself."

"I'm not considering my arm, either," Bill rumbled in his deepest chest tones. "I've fought these recruits, and they've licked me. The letter's logical. If McGuire wrote it of his own free will we ought to go. But I can't help wondering whether he was forced to write it at the dictation of a third person."

"It only names Vaeho and Gorai."

"That's it. We have to show the letter to a banker to raise a loan. You swear the signature is genuine—and that lays the guilt of anything that happens to McGuire absolutely upon a pair of savages. McGuire is murdered while we're gone. Vaeho and Gorai vanish. And with that letter authenti-

cated, Shea would be safe in appearing with his yarn of shipwreck and claiming the island.

"If Shea is hidden on Rumakotu, that letter is the most devilishly clever note that was ever dictated to a prisoner. It even puts the onus of McGuire's death upon you and me unless we set sail instantly."

"But we can't possibly tell whether the letter was dictated or not! This worthless old man won't know!" Nell cried. "We can only guess, and if we guess wrong—"

"Yes, it's a tough choice," said Bill gently.

CHAPTER IV.

MURDERER'S WAGES.

"WHERE did Vaeho give you one fella book?" he boomed at the old native.

"At clearing belong fire. Belong dance!"

"All right! Tell Vaeho I go. White Mary goes. We go right away too much on schooner—but—" Bellow Bill's huge tattooed hand closed on the skinny shoulder. With his right hand he took a chamois bag from his pocket and shook a pearl as big as a pea into his palm.

"Tell Vaeho I pay wages. Pay wages with pearls. White fella money for black fella! Many, many fella pearls like that fella pearl! You give that fella pearl along Vaeho!"

He opened the door, pushed the old native out, and whirled, beads of sweat on his forehead.

"What are you doing?" Nell gasped. "You haven't as many pearls as that on your schooner!"

"Every pearl I have is in that little bag," Bill snapped. "There's nothing on my schooner except some stinking pearl shell that no bush savage will accept for money. But I intend to find out whether there's a third white man on this atoll before I sail. You know and any white man knows that no pearling schooner carries fifteen thousand dollars' worth of pearls. But bush natives from the interior of the New Hebrides don't! Savages are human! Why won't they take what pay they can get? Vaeho ought to be civilized enough to realize that pearl I sent him is worth triple his wages." He leaned grimly over the girl.

"You'll run some risk rather than abandon Phil? You don't want to sail away wondering whether you were tricked?"

Nell's eyes flashed.

Bill nodded, and sprang through the door onto the veranda. The yelling of the natives had died down somewhat, but his appearance elicited a concerted roar.

"Don't shoot—even if I'm shot at!" Bill said over his shoulder to the girl. "Gorai!" he thundered in a bellow which silenced the clamor of the savages.

There was no answer, and no shot. The old native scrambled over the fence of the compound, the pearl held aloft in skinny fingers.

"Gorai, do you want a gun that will always kill?" Bill roared. "A good gun, not like the one you have, which only makes noise? How many you fellas want guns? How many you fellas want pearls? I pay with white man's guns and white men's money!"

The huge tattooed body leaned forward. Bill swept the fringe of green with his eyes. "What man of your tribe," he called persuasively, "ever brought a white man's gun which would shoot many times back to the

village? Which of you wants to be that man? A gun that shoots many times will make the weakest of you a chief!"

A naked savage leaped from his place of concealment into the compound.

"Not yet!" Bill boomed, flinging up his hand. "Gorai gets his gun—which always kills—first!"

The pearler turned slowly, and reentered the bungalow. In the coconut grove the drum commenced to beat softly. *Boom—boom—boom.* The rhythm was broken, and staccato. A code, or a summons.

"Arm the recruits! Are you mad?" Nell snapped. "They'll fire at us, if only to make sure the guns we give them will shoot!"

"I shouldn't wonder if they'd fire at something—as soon as they get cartridges," Bill rumbled. A reckless little smile twisted his lips. He stepped to the gun case and selected a ten-gauge repeating rifle. "Though not at us. Not instantly, unless they are egged on. Savages are mighty human, except when they're dancing. If some one said to you, 'Here's that million dollars you've always wanted, and I'll sail away and bring you another million in a couple of weeks, would you kill him? Savages want guns more than anything in the world, but if Shea is on the atoll I don't doubt he'll prefer the recruits unarmed."

BILL took three shotguns shells from a box, and started to dig out the wadding with a jackknife. "Unload the rest of these guns and lock the cartridges away somewhere," he ordered. "Work fast. We've got to move before they do. Where does McGuire keep his dynamite and his surgical instruments?"

Nell pointed to the bottom of the gun cabinet. Bill dropped half a dozen sticks of explosive into the little black doctor's bag, snapped the bag shut, and with his jackknife started to shave dynamite from a seven stick. Nell caught her breath—and then continued to unload the rifles. Bill grunted with approval. Into the shotgun shell which he had opened he crammed as much dynamite as the case would hold, crimped it tight with powerful fingers, and worked it into the magazine. Behind it he loaded two ordinary shells, loaded with buckshot.

"That was risky," he rumbled. "If the knife blade happens to strike a spot where the nitroglycerine in the dynamite is concentrated, you blow yourself up. Got the rifles unloaded? Can you carry them all? Good! Let's go!"

He strode through the door, the shotgun over his arm and the little black bag in his left hand. Nell walked behind toward the beach, laden with weapons. Below the dragon on Bill's back a snake was tattooed, coiled around his hips like a belt. She could not take her eyes from the snake.

The drum had ceased to beat. She could hear the savages around the compound talking excitedly. Bellow Bill helped her over the compound fence. He grunted, and she looked up. The quick twilight of the tropics was at hand, and the coco grove was dark. Through the tapering trunks she caught a glimpse of the lagoon, and in that direction no natives were visible. On each side, however, were scores of men, moving slowly.

"No sign of Gorai. Nor the auto rifle," Bill reassured her in a bass rumble. "Walk in front. These fellas don't love me, but they've seen me fight. They won't rush me, and we're moving faster than their leaders."

He was right. Nell and he reached the boat which Bill had left drawn up on the beach. He lifted the girl in, and turned to face the recruits.

"I go to get rifles belong you. Pearls belong you," he said slowly. "Rifles like this!" He took a gun from Nell and tossed it into the midst of the crowd.

As they scrambled for the weapon, he gave the boat a mighty shove and leaped in, seizing the oars. He rowed with strokes that lifted the little dinghy.

"That was well done!" Nell exulted. "But I thought you weren't going to sail until—"

"I'm not," Bill grunted over his shoulder. "Can you swim?"

"Yes.'"

"Few bush natives can. That's why I'm going to the schooner, and I'm in a hurry because I've half been expecting a clip from that damned auto rifle to be fired at me ever since I left the bungalow. Walking across the compound was a worse risk than the dynamite. You're safe now, by comparison."

"Then you have an idea? Loading that shell with dynamite—"

Bellow Bill turned and grinned. "I got a hunch. Have you ever noticed that a really avaricious man doesn't expect others to be as eager for wealth? If Shea did start a native revolt for the sake of a plantation and revenge, he wouldn't be likely to think that his natives might want something else just as badly. I can't fight, but he can't bribe, except with the stuff I own."

"Even so, I don't see why you shaved that dynamite—"

"For an anthropologist, you've got lots to learn about primitive men!" Bill grinned. The dinghy bumped the schooner. He swung Nell and the rifles to the deck—and then sent the dinghy adrift with a thrust of his foot. The hatches of the schooner were already locked. He unlocked the cabin companionway, put the padlock on the inside, and stared for an instant, frowning, at the pile of rifles, which were by the port rail, fifteen feet or so from the companionway.

With a shrug he passed the end of the main sheet into the cabin through a porthole on the starboard side.

"Take this kit of doctor's tools below," he instructed Nell. "Then close all the other portholes and pick out a rifle of mine that you like. You may have to do some sniping."

THE sails of the schooner were already hoisted. Bill slipped the cable, and running to the wheel, steered toward the beach where the recruits were gathered.

"I'm going to beach the schooner so they can come aboard," he explained. The twilight was too dense for Nell to see him, but she could feel that a mocking, reckless smile was on his face. "This is risky, too," he purred. "But if they'll just come aboard we'll soon find out if a white man is at large on Rumakotu!"

The schooner barely moved through the water. It touched the beach gently, and at once Bill let the sheets go with a run, lashed the wheel, and leaped onto the slide of the companionway. His heels dangled in the doorway in front of Nell's face. She could just make out the shotgun poised across his arm.

"Does Gorai want the gun that always kills, and Vaeho the pearls?" Bill called mockingly into the dusk. "First I pay the chiefs! Then I give the guns that make you all chiefs at home!"

From the savages on the beach arose a murmur, but for five long seconds there was no movement. They were suspicious. Nell could sense it. Bellow Bill stooped until he was almost flat on the companionway.

"Why does the gun always kill?" growled a surly voice.

"Because it shoots many bullets at once, Gorai!" Bill boomed softly. "Watch the sail and see what this gun does."

Bill fired twice. The echoes rolled around the lagoon, and the crowd whispered sibilantly. Suddenly, all at once, a score of men ran into the water. Savage after savage climbed the bowsprit and leaped down onto the deck.

In the lead was a tall, amazingly thin figure with a charm clashing at the chest, and a heavier, thick-set man almost as tall.

"Here is the gun, Gorai!" Bill boomed. He held the weapon out by the muzzle. Nell saw it snatched from his hands. "And the pearls!" Bill added. But Vaeho hung back. Behind him were a dozen savages, shoulder to shoulder. More were climbing over the bow.

"Here!" Bill boomed, lifting the chamois bag.

As he spoke, Gorai pushed the shotgun forward until the muzzle almost touched Bill's side, and pulled the trigger.

THE shotgun burst at the breech. Gorai screamed. One hand was ripped to shreds. Bill bellowed with pain, for his side was seared by the jet of flame which had streaked from the muzzle, but he leaped—for Vaeho! His left fist crashed into the face of the skinny man. Catching him by the throat, Bill swung him to the companionway, hurled him down, and leaped after him, closing and locking the door as the savages flung themselves pell-mell down the narrow stairs.

"All right, Nell!" boomed the pearler. "Hammer this fella with the butt of your gun if he comes to!" Bill crossed the cabin and hauled on the sheet stuck through the porthole. The schooner trembled as he hauled the sail aback, shivered, and slid off into deep water. Knives were hacking at the companionway door, but on deck a savage yelled as he saw the beach receding. "I'll take care of him as soon as the schooner's in deep water!"

"But the knives! The men on the deck!" Nell cried.

"Why, we got all the rifles that have ammunition below!" A reckless lilt sang in the rumbling voice. "This is my *schooner,* and I can sweep the decks with buckshot from the fo'c's'le hatchway, or clear them with a capstan bar!" Bill laughed aloud. "I'll choke the truth out of Vaeho!" he exulted. "And Phil won't be hurt while the two he named in the letter are in my hands!"

From the beach came a burst of rifle shots—the brief drumfire of an automatic rifle.

"Gorai!" screamed the voice of a white man. "Cut every rope you see! Cut—"

The rattling thunder of the falling mainsail drowned the rest of the order. Gorai might be incapacitated, but the other natives were quick to accept any guidance.

"Shea thinks like a sailorman in a pinch," Bill boomed in a reckless, lilting singsong. The cabin was pitch dark. He heard Nell groping toward him. Her hand closed on his arm.

"Next he'll set the schooner afire,"

she whispered. "It's too bad. And yet —I don't see how you could have done any better."

"Why, he may try to burn us," said Bill calmly. "First he's got to get these boys of his off, without a boat. You might get a shot at him. From the fo'c's'le hatch, or through a port-hole."

"Oh!"

"Oh is the word. You're steady as a rock when you know what you're up against," Bill rumbled approvingly. "The fact is, I figured after I got that letter, that Shea probably couldn't keep me from getting some of the natives on board who knew enough of the truth to hang him, and that I probably couldn't get the schooner out of the lagoon afterward. We swapped the bungalow for the cabin. Do you think you can defend it as well?"

"I?" Nell whispered, and despite her courage her voice shook.

"I'd like to open the lumber port forward and swim ashore," Bill admitted. "Get behind Shea, and find Phil, if I can. I'll need Vaeho, and one person is as many as I can handle in the water.

"You can come with me if you swim like a fish. Hell! You can come with me anyhow!" the pearler broke off. "To have you stay here is asking too much!"

"Not if my staying would help Phil," Nell answered. "Still—I'm glad you don't ask it!"

CHAPTER V.

IN THE LAGOON.

BELLOW BILL had changed his mind because the schooner, though still afloat, was liable to drift back to the beach and go aground again in time. Shea might and probably would prefer to wait for that to happen, for then he could set the hull afire and force his enemies into the open—force them to charge across a beach lighted by the fire, while he lurked under cover and was supported by his savage allies.

That would be suicide for Bill. A retreat, even burdened by Nell and his prisoner, was possible, though risky. The savages had no firearms. The hull of the schooner, and the darkness, would afford some protection from Shea's rifle.

With the speed and thoroughness of a sailor, Bill bound Vaeho hand and foot and gagged him with a strip of cloth torn from Nell's skirt. The little black bag with its load of instruments and dynamite he slung over his back by a string. For weapons he took a heavy diver's knife, and told Nell to lay rifle and pistol aside. If he failed she would be captured, then or later.

Whispering to Nell to dive deep, and swim underwater as far as she could, he opened the lumber port. The noise that he made was heard. As Nell's white body flashed in the air the savages massed at the rail and yelled. From the beach Shea shouted to them to throw their knives, and as Bill rose from his dive with Vaeho in his arms a knife or two did splash into the water.

"Make a light! Set fire to the sail! Quick, damn you!" Shea was screaming. At random he fired a clip across the dark water.

"Lucky for us savages don't carry matches," Bill growled. "He'll have to board the schooner himself to set her afire. Swim like hell, girl, for the opposite side of the lagoon!"

"The—opposite side?" Nell panted. She was a fair swimmer. Good

enough to use a scissors kick, and not a laborious and noisy breast stroke.

"Too far?" The distance was about a quarter of a mile.

"No—but—can't Shea—overtake us in a boat?"

"I hope he tries it! I'll capsize it and knife him!" Bill growled. "But—blue hell! Speaking of matches, the ones I have in the bag are soaked! How'm I going to set off my dynamite, if I need to?"

He swam in silence, with Vaeho's head tucked in the crook of his left elbow, face above water, as though the savage were a helpless man whom Bill was saving from drowning.

From the schooner came the sound of ax-blows, and the splintering of a door. Across the water Shea was exhorting the recruits to run around the beach and kill Bill as he landed. He was promising a big long pig that night and when that feast was over—more long pig.

"I'll drown myself first!" Nell panted. "He'll give me to them—after he's—"

"Yep!" Bill rumbled. "Swim like hell. He's smarter to break into the cabin than set fire to the schooner. He's damn smart. It's a race to shore!"

Race with what? Nell wanted to ask. She learned as she stumbled up the beach. Behind them suddenly leaped up the vivid blue flare of a Coston light. It was stuck on the rail of the schooner, and it illuminated the whole lagoon, even the knot of savages who were trotting, rather slowly, around the beach.

BILL pushed the girl into the shadow of the coco palms as bullets came skipping across the water. Though Shea missed, he could have corrected his aim, had they still been swimming in that vivid blue glare. In grim silence the pearler dropped Vaeho on the sand and loosened the gag.

"Where did Shea hide when he was ghost fella?" he demanded. "Where did you hide McGuire?"

The savage clenched his teeth. Bill set the knife on the big tendon just above Vaeho's heel.

"Once more I ask along you," he rumbled. "Your tribe coming seven bells. Find you with tendons cut. No can heal along you. You no good to tribe. They bury you alive, like any old man that's no good."

Not so much threat, as fact, rang in the deep voice. And it was a fact. A slash of the knife, and Vaeho, medicine man and chief, would be buried alive by his own tribe because of the customs he had helped to establish. Nell knew it; he knew it.

"One fella Shea, one fella McGuire, crawl in hole in pandamus thicket by dance fire," he gulped. "Live under sand."

"I've seen that thicket. There's no such hole," Bill rumbled coldly.

"Lift one fella pandamus! Ground come up! Then see hole belong Shea!" Vaeho howled.

"Which pandamus? It's a thicket?"

"One fella pandamus!" Vaeho howled. He could be little more specific.

"A masked entrance to a cave in the coral? Hollowed out by water seepage?" said Bill to Nell. "There are such things. If Shea found such a thing and decided to conceal the entrance by transplanting a palm, it may have been the start of his whole scheme. Where boat belong Shea?" Bill growled suddenly.

"Bury boat belong him in beach sand all same eggs belong turtle!" Vaeho gasped.

"Aren't those recruits getting close?" Nell demanded nervously.

"Let 'em. They don"t want to meet me," rumbled the pearler. "I think this fella's telling the truth. His story fits pretty well."

The blue flare, beating across the water, gave just enough light for Nell to see the hard set of the pearler's jaw.

He loosened the cords on Vaeho's ankles enough to permit the savage to walk, and drew a jackknife which he passed to her.

"Make Vaeho show you that boat," he said. "It'll be buried somewhere along the outer beach. Make him launch it for you, and put to sea. Stay close to the island until dawn, and after that—get as far to sea as you can.

"You've a chance to be picked up, and if you're not, thirst and sun will be kinder than what will be waiting for you here. Think of that, if Vaeho balks and you've any hesitation in using the knife on him."

"I do what I must," Nell snapped. "Yet if the savages coming along the beach find me—"

"They won't look," Bill promised. "Use your ears. You can tell how I'm getting along with Shea by the sounds. Don't jump to conclusions, though, before dawn."

The pearler rose, slung the little black bag over his shoulder, and strode purposely away under the coco palms, angling to arrive at the inner beach slightly in advance of the scouting party of savages. With a shock Nell remembered that he had not matches to ignite the dynamite. Nothing but a knife. She forced Vaeho to rise and withdrew, slowly and hopelessly, toward the outer beach.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE SAND.

BELLOW BILL, on the contrary, was not seeking to conceal, but to reveal himself. The inner and outer beaches were separated at that point by three hundred yards or more. The distance around the doughnut-shaped atoll was more than a mile. Deliberately he walked into the glare of the flare upon the inner beach.

At the sight of his huge figure the savages halted. Bill was crimping a dynamite cap into a piece of fuse with his teeth. The diving knife glimmered close to his face, and though the savages numbered more than a dozen, they had encountered Bill once before when he held dynamite in his fists. One man ready to die if he can take a sufficient number of enemies with him, and who reveals that determination by the grim swing of his shoulders as he moves to the attack, can scatter a mob every member of which is most anxious of all to keep a whole skin.

The savages broke. Across the lagoon Shea fired, but Bill merely withdrew, a little, into the shadow of the palms. The savages could see him. He was crimping another cap—into the other end of the same fuse, had they known it. While they watched, his vast, shadowy figure moved farther under the palms until it became invisible.

On the beach the savages turned and ran! Toward the protection of Shea's rifle, toward their fellows. They had no stomach to go poking into the gloom where Bellow Bill lurked.

The pearler grunted with satisfaction. Until he was incapacitated there

would be no hunt for Nell. He set out swiftly toward the clearing where the dance had been held, keeping to the middle of the atoll, where the darkness was densest.

To approach the clearing took Bill twenty minutes. The Coston light burned out, and a new one was not kindled.

While that aided the pearler somewhat, the almost complete absence of underbrush beneath the palms precluded any possibility of getting into contact with his enemies without alarming some of them.

Bill was moving stealthily from palm to palm, pausing behind each. Though he got close to the pandamus thicket unchallenged, he was not surprised when a native leaped up in the darkness and ran toward the clearing, yelling that Bill was coming. He merely paused, listening intent for the sound of a mob in movement. In the midst of that mob he meant to locate, and to kill, Shea. Even if he were overwhelmed by superior numbers afterward, the savages might release McGuire if they lost their white leader.

Nothing moved in the gloom after the shouts of the sentry ceased. Yet Bill could feel the presence of men near by. Men who waited for him to crawl farther into the trap? He could not retreat.

From his bag he took all the dynamite—six sticks—and bound them tightly around the stick he had capped with bandage. Still his enemies waited. He groped among the instruments, seeking a pair of forceps, or a knife with a metal handle. He found the latter, and bound the loose end of the fuse, with its cap in place, to the steel. The instruments had clicked—like castanets, it seemed to Bill—and still Shea and the savages were content to wait!

The sandy soil under the palms was light in color. In the gloom Bill figured that he could see anything that moved two palms beyond the one behind which he crouched. Palms are set from twenty-five to thirty feet apart. If he advanced thirty feet—

He did so, rapidly. As he leaped up he glimpsed a dark mass of underbrush ahead! The pandamus thicket, which was his goal! He was running on when a rifle blazed in the heart of the thicket and a bullet sang inches above his head.

He dove for the base of a palm tree with a leap that carried him fifteen feet, the capped fuse hugged against his chest. He landed heavily. A spasm of pain ran through the swollen, feverish right arm. The bullets were thumping into the trunk of the palm, and around it, showering Bill with sand.

"Lights! Back there! Light the flares!" Shea screamed.

Bill swung the surgical knife against the trunk of the palm by the fuse. The cap exploded sharply, the fuse hissed. That Shea had laid the ambush in the thicket corroborated Vaeho. But what six sticks of dynamite, exploded above a cave gouged in soft coral, were going to do to a man within Bill dared not think. No chance to hesitate.

AT two points behind him Coston lights flared. Bill hurled the spluttering package of dynamite, glimpsing Shea in the heart of the thicket, sighting carefully. The planter must have tried to escape as the bomb rolled over the sand. At least, he never fired. Bill, crouching behind the base of a palm harely wide enough to hide his shoulders, never saw.

With the bombing thud of the explosion he leaped up and charged into a cloud of sand that was blue in the glare. The ground crumpled beneath his feet. He fell, blinded by dust, half buried in sliding sand, a gush of foul, smoke-laden air rising around him. A body holding a rifle tumbled against him.

Bill clutched the throat, which was limp as a rag, and drew the knife back for a thrust.

The sand stopped sliding. The whole fall, as he looked upward through the dust, was hardly more than eight feet. The cave was a mere fox hole, hardly ten feet square. A corner of the roof had broken in and the sand loosened by the blast half filled the space. Far away a pan of charcoal smoldered. Beside it, bound hand and foot, lay McGuire.

Shea was unconscious, his clothes partly ripped from his body by the explosion.

"This fella belong me!" Bill roared. Catching Shea by the neck and knees, he heaved him up to the edge of the pit. The recruits could see. Bill picked up the rifle, which seemed to be all right, and crawled toward the far corner of the cave. The air was like a hand on his throat. His head swam as he dragged McGuire into the open. The fat little man was barely conscious.

"But I'll sign—bill of sale—if you'll let her go. But I'll sign—bill of sale!" he was muttering drunkenly, over and over.

Bill pushed him up to the rim of the pit and scrambled after him, slipping in the sand.

"Ahoy!" he thundered. "This is McGuire fella! Your boss fella!"

The echoes rolled across the atoll. There was not a native in sight, no answer to that booming shout. The flares cast a hard blue light, and the dust settled slowly under the rustling coco palms.

Then from far away came the faint, shrill cry of a girl, and from the darkness beyond the flares the faint, quavering voice of an old man.

"Me good fella! You no cross along me?"

"Me no cross along anybody any more. Go tell 'em all to be good fella. Keep quiet to-night; get pay quick pretty soon!" Bill rumbled.

"Bill?" gasped McGuire. "Is that Bill?" Though his eyes were open, he seemed half asleep.

"You all right?" rumbled the pearler with a stab of anxiety.

"Coming around," McGuire muttered. "It's that charcoal. It burned up the air. Dennis lighted it. He said he didn't want to kill me quickly, but he wanted to be damn sure I'd die. Why'd he hate me so?"

"We'll ask him," said Bill grimly. "We'll ask him where that schooner of his is, too. That'll quiet the natives. Nell's all right, I'm sure, and I'd let the deputy commissioner worry about Shea. At the trial."

The pearler had loosened McGuire's bonds. By an effort the little man sat up, smiling weakly. He was the sort who will always try to smile.

"I've been thinking I was going to die so long it's almost queer to expect to live," he muttered. "You're sure Nell's all right?"

"Positive. That was a healthy screech of hers. When that gal's got a definite job to do, she does it!"

"She can do anything," said McGuire simply. "Of course I can't thank you, Bill—"

"No?" boomed the pearler. He thrust his right arm forward in the blue glare of the flares, and traced the

little red lines running under the skin.

The eyes of the little doctor widened.

"Why, that's in bad shape," he said. "A couple more days, and that would have had to come off at the shoulder."

"You can save it?"

"Why, when I'm able to stand," McGuire smiled. "I know my profession, I think."

"I think I know mine!" Bill grinned. "The thanks are fifty-fifty, Phil. You didn't need a roughneck any worse than I needed a doctor. No chance is too long to take when you're fighting to keep your right arm!"

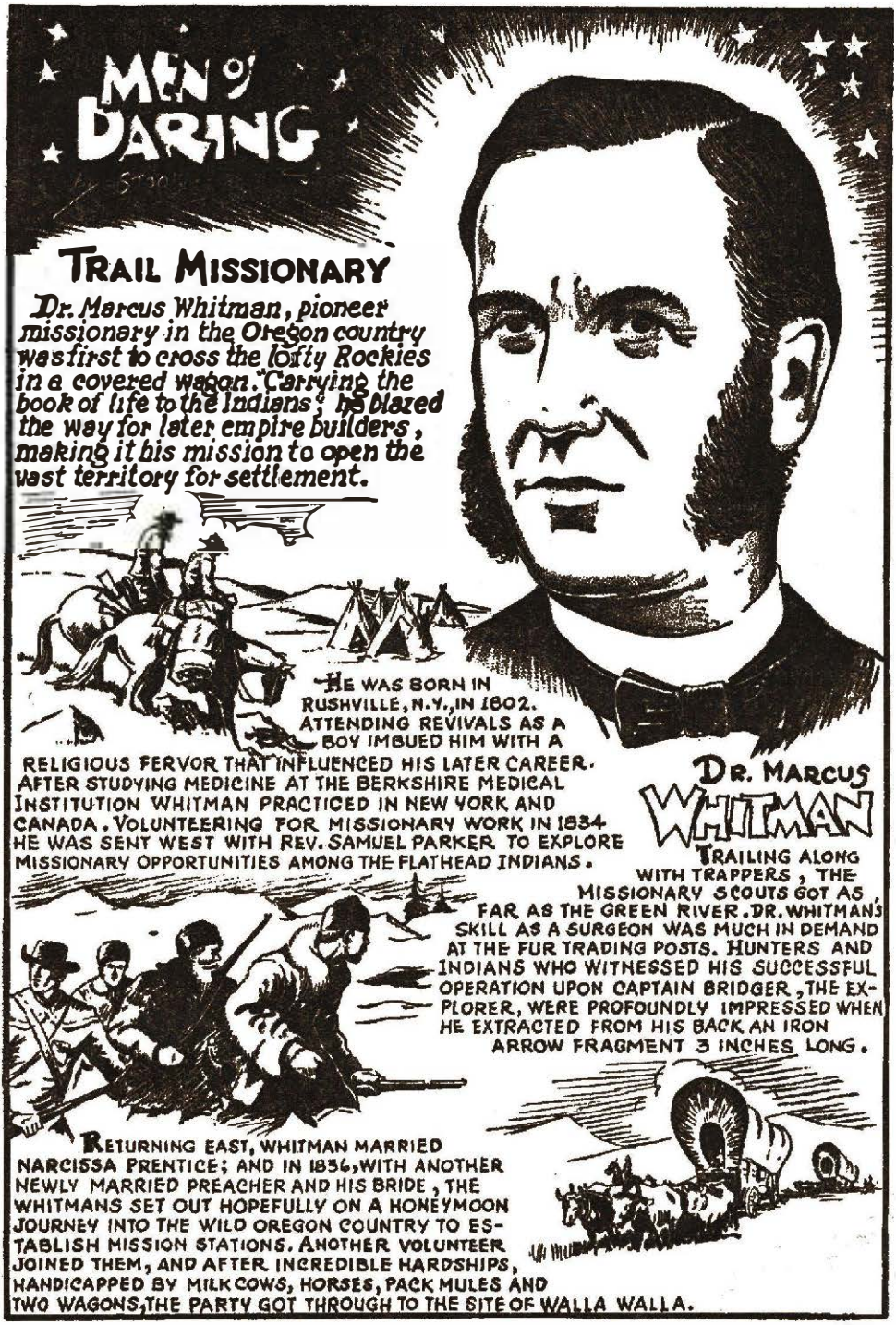
THE END

State Names

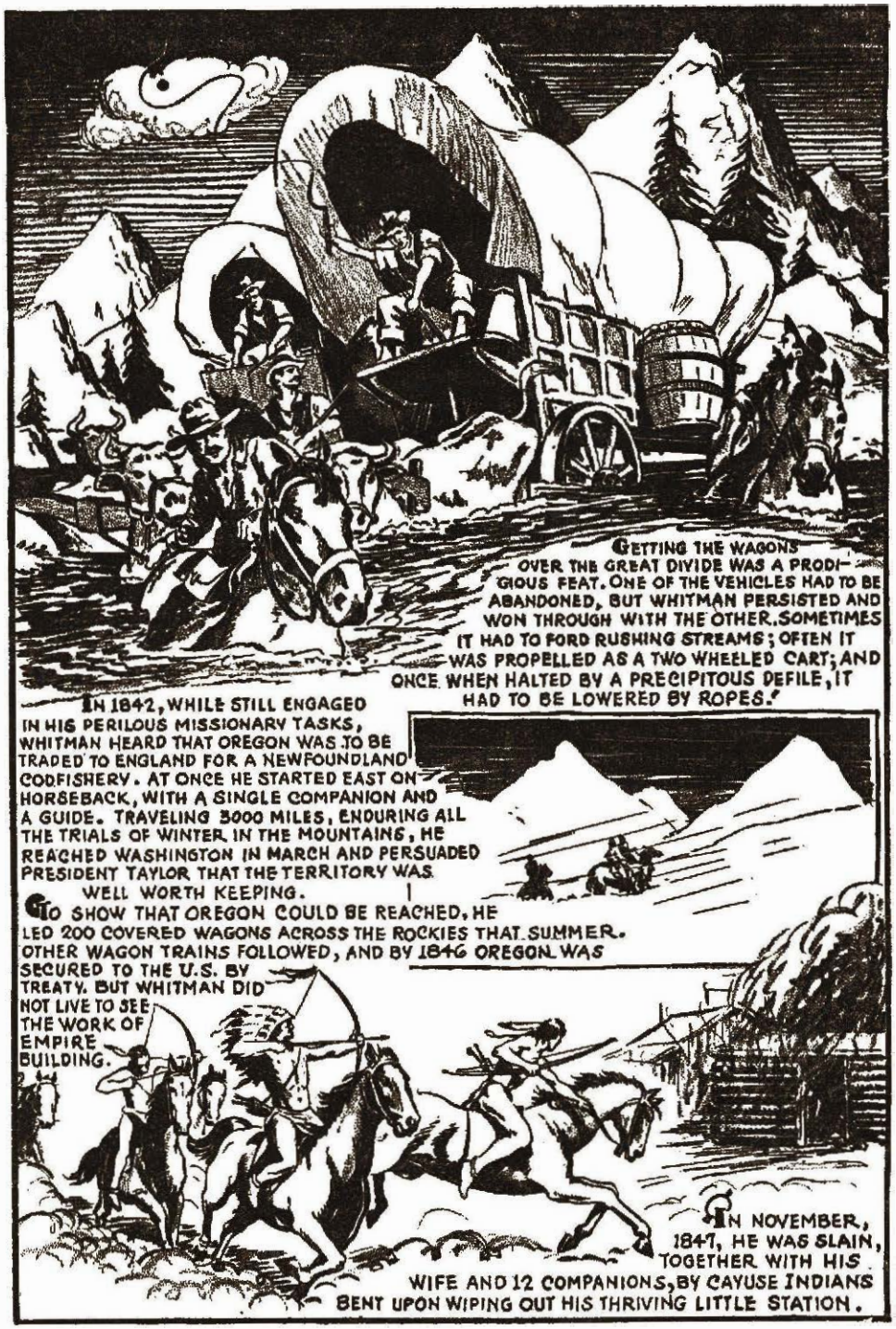
MOST of our States have Indian names. Translated, they sound rather silly. Massachusetts is from words meaning "Big-little-hill town." The Indians had something in mind, but we don't know what. Another State name is from "alba aya mule," which means "I open the thicket." We call it Alabama, for some reason. Iowa was named for the Aiouez, or "Sleepy Ones," but don't mention it in Des Moines. Kentucky is from "Ken-tah-teh" and means "Land of Tomorrow." Idaho, "Light on the Mountains." Minnesota doesn't mean soda water, but only sky-blue water. Texas means "Friends," while Mississippi is "Maesi-Sipu"—"Fish River."

Names not Indian are mostly Spanish or English. Florida just means "Easter Sunday." California was named by Spaniards from a popular novel called "Las Serges de Esplandian"—in the book it was a balmy isle. Nevada is "snow-clad" if you believe in names. Maryland was so named in honor of Queen Henrietta Marie of England, who owned some land in France called "Maine." One of the oddest names is "Washington"—it's American.

J. W. Holden.



A True Story in Pictures Every Week

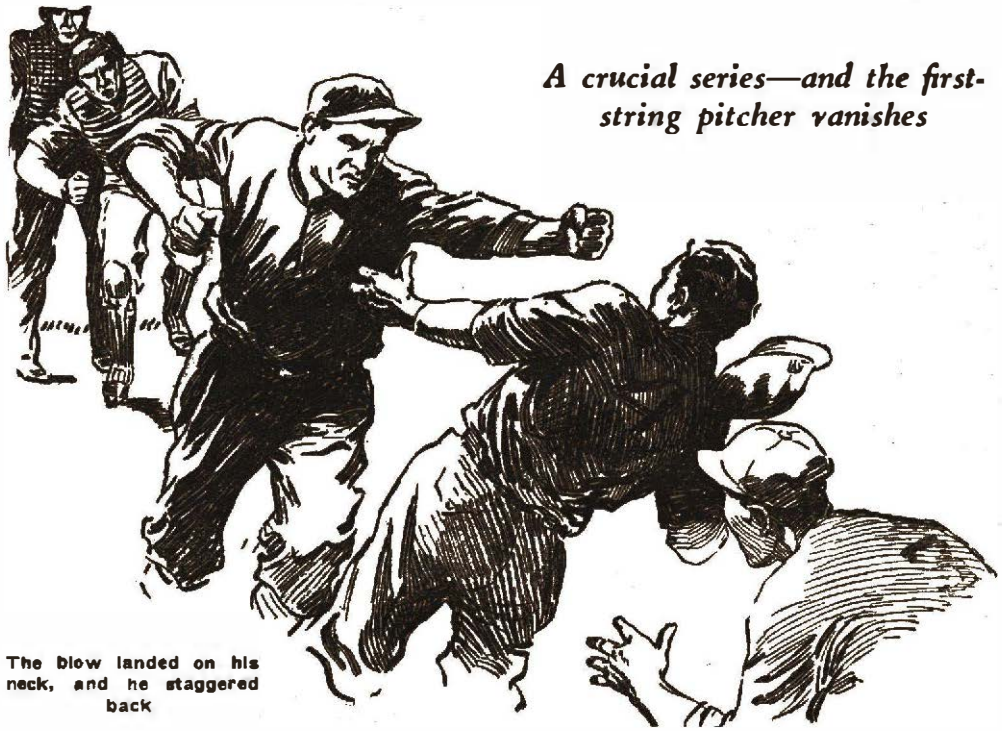


Next Week: Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, Explorer, Adventurer

The Duplex Chucker

By JAMES W. EGAN

A crucial series—and the first-string pitcher vanishes



The blow landed on his neck, and he staggered back

NINETEEN to nothin'! No, it wasn't a November football score; them Ripley believe it or not figures represent the shellackin' my Quartz Hill ball club suffered the fair May afternoon we opened on the home lot.

Nineteen runs to a horse collar! Never in the many years I been guidin' minor league layouts have I took such a steam rollin'. And, to add arsenic to the flowin' bowl, this wholesale butchery was the work o' Bull Hubbard and his Wolves.

There's six clubs in the Ore Belt loop, but between the burgs o' Quartz Hill and Woolville feelin' is always high as the New York Yankees annual pay roll. To me personally, big Bull Hubbard was public enemy number one, and the gloatin' look on his pan as his hired hands paraded around the paths had me latherin' at the lips. Yeah, it was a red-letter day for the skipper o' the Wolves, and I furnished the sign paintin' crimson with my heart's blood!

I was still a coupla hundred degrees Fahrenheit under the collar when I bumped into Andy Hunt the followin' forenoon. Andy is the chief o' police and a burnin' baseball bug. He hadn't missed a game in Quartz Hill since the peanuts sold customers was fresh.

"Howdy, Peewee," he greets. "Been lookin' for you."

"Gonna chase me outa town after yesterday's massacre?" I belches, bitter. "Four chuckers pounded to a pulp in one brawl. And why, Andy? I'll tell you why! Bull has six left-hand hitters in the line-up. How they can smear right-hand pitchin'! And that's all I got to throw at 'em. I need a good port-sider like an umpire needs a whisk broom, and I ain't been able to buy, beg or burgle a crooked wing anywheres!"

The Ore Belt's a Class C chain, playin' five scuffles a week. Each club's limited to fourteen athletes, and it's seldom more than five flingers is carried. My Quartz Hill Hustlers had a quintet o' starboard mound artists. Not a single southpaw tried out in the spring had delivered the goods. Capable forkfisters seemed a lot scarcer than colonels in Kentucky.

Andy Hunt nods, his huge Panama flappin'.

"Well, Peewee, that's why I been lookin' for you. Got a guest down at Headquarters who might int'rest you. A young tramp was pulled off a freight in the railroads this mornin' and vagged. Claims to be a ball player—a pitcher. Says he's busted and had to bum his way."

"A tramp?" I snorts. "Listen, Andy, I got five tramps now who call themselves chuckers!"

"He's a husky kid," Hunt persists. "Kinda impressed me as bein' on the up and up. Better come down and talk to him."

"Okay, Andy," I shrugs. "If he's a southpaw, maybe I'll bail him out."

A few minutes later I was parked in the chief's office, orbin' his prisoner. The youngster was tall and well built, prob'ly in the early twenties. He could have done with a shave — and a bath wouldn't have hurt him.

"This is Peewee Morgan, manager o' the Hustlers, son," Andy says.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Morgan." The kid mitts me in a strong grip. "You must excuse my appearance; I been on the road several days, and the accommodations was a bit lousy."

"I hope you ain't!" I grunts. "You want a job playin' ball, huh? You told the chief you're a pitcher. Right or left handed?"

"Both." He grins sorta funny.

"Huh?" I scowl at him. "Whatta you mean, both?"

"Just that. I can pitch with either arm. I suppose I'm more or less a natural southpaw, but I've learned to use the right wing, too."

"A duplex chucker?" I turns on Andy. "You sure bagged a prize, chief. Not that I ever glimmed a double-barreled deliveryman worth a hoot from a practical standpoint."

"All I ask is a fair trial, Mr. Morgan." The grin sticks. "You know it ain't often you can sign two arms for the price o' one!"

"What's your name and where you from?" I snaps. "Ever play any professional ball?"

"The name's Jack Crosby," he answers. "I'm afraid you won't find it in the record books. I beat my way here from K. C. and points east. I'm twenty-one years old, without a dime, but plenty ambitious. And I never been in jail before."

"You say you're a natural southpaw?" Somethin' about this young Crosby has me stumped.

"I've more speed with the left, but better control right-handed." His grin is rather likable.

"You can hardly be worse than the guys who chucked yesterday," I decides. "I'll take him off your hands,

Andy. Remember, Crosby, I gotta have a port-sider. Never mind your other arm."

THAT evenin' Jack Crosby was outa the gow and in a Hustler suit. Our openin' tilt had been played in daylight, but we'd go owl the rest o' the week, Sunday excepted.

Cleaned up and shaved, the kid proved a pretty good-lookin' sprout. Crosby worked out Thursday and Friday, and handled himself nice in practice. "Barker" Cadman, our veteran first-string catcher, warmed him briefly each night. He poured 'em in from the port side with sizzle galore, but none too much control. He made no attempt to exercise the right flipper, I noticed.

Saturday I sent Butch Bittner, my right-handed ace, to the slab. We had copped two combats since that openin' horror, and I had a vision o' cinchin' the series. However, the Wolves treated Butch very rough. Hubbard's pack was in front 8 to 3 when I lifted him for a pinch-hitter in the eighth.

"Loosen up that left souper, Jack," I commands Crosby. "You're gonna gun 'em in the final heat."

Five o' Bull Hubbard's warriors batted in the ninth. None o' them laid wood on the leather. Crosby passed two and struck out the other three. When his fast ball was over, the Wolves couldn't touch it. And he was just erratic enough to give Bull's fork-hand sluggers the jitters up there under artificial light.

The fans cheered the kid at the end o' the frame. Chief Hunt beamed from his field box back o' first. Even if we did lose the brawl, I felt encouraged. If only the kid could go the route . . .

"Listen, Jack," I yodels en route to the clubhouse, "I believe you can take these birds and the series to-morrow. I'm figurin' on startin' you. What would you say?"

"I'd say thanks, skipper," he grins back.

So Crosby hoofed out to the hill for Sunday's wind-up. I knew I was gamblin', with the series two-all, on a green rookie; yet I had a hunch his fork fireballs would bother Bull's swatsmiths plenty.

Two Wolves walked in the initial stanza. Crosby also fanned a pair and forced a third sticker to pop feebly. Andy Hunt waved his wide Panama at the youthful twirler as he trotted in.

Burly Max Ragan was toilin' for Woolville, and Ragan was tough opposition, as a rule. However, the Hustlers tallied a twain in the last half o' the bracket when "Lemon Pie" Leary, our giant right gardener, lofted the apple outa the lot with two out and a man aboard.

Quartz Hill still led, 2 to 0, at the beginnin' o' the fifth. In five heats Jack Crosby had passed five Wolves and whiffed six. He was unsteady, but stingy with base knocks.

It was in the sixth his control vanished like pretzels in a beer parlor. Three men strolled in a row, crammin' the cushions. Cussin', I thumbed Swede Hoagland to the sidelines to warm up.

With bases crocked and Libby, a dangerous left-hand hitter, at bat, Crosby located the plate. He wheeled two straight strikes across. Then, havin' put the hitter on the spot, the youngster grew wild again. He missed the dish three times with wide flings. Bull Hubbard, coachin' at third, commences to croak:

"Take me out! Take me out!"

In no good humor I bounced from the bench, ready to ticket Crosby to the

showers. Very cool and deliberate the kid stepped outa the box. He yanked the glove from his right paw, tossed it beyond the foul line.

BUT he wasn't quittin' o' his own accord. Barehanded, he returned to the turret. A brief wind-up and the right arm—not the left—uncoiled. The onion sailed across the plate, a few inches below Libby's waist. The surprised batsman never moved his wand. The umpire called him out on strikes.

Bull Hubbard barged in, bluffin' a beef. The umpire soon had him powderin' back where he belonged.

Prevost, a right-hand hitter, now crouched at the rubber. Crosby squeezed the pill in his dukes, prepared to pitch. A port heave was pronounced a ball. The kid switched to starboard for a strike.

He buzzed another with the right flipper. Prevost cut, drove a hard hopper to Third Baseman Marty O'Connell. Marty scooped it up, shot home. Barker Cadman tagged the saucer, rifled a peg to Holtz at first. A double suicide! How the bugs whooped her up!

I left the kid on the firin' line. He used his two arms in smart fashion the three remainin' semesters. He would southpaw till he lost the platter. A change over to the right always seemed to restore his control. Though he passed an even dozen Wolves durin' the tilt, the Hustlers won by a shutout. My gamble on a raw rook had give us the series and Bull Hubbard no pifflin' peeve.

"Bum voyage, you big bum!" I chirps in a partin' crack.

"You lucky little squirt!" Bull bellows, sorer than a kicked shin. "Wait till I get you sewer roses in Woolville!"

"Yeah," I says in Barker Cadman's ear, "and we'll bring our new duplex deceiver along to tame the big, bad Wolves. I'm hangin' onto that lad a while, Bark."

Three weeks after we invaded the bailiwick of our dearly beloved rivals. Jack Crosby hurled and copped the first fracas, mixin' up southpaw smokers with teasin' starboard slants. We divided the ensuin' pair of battles, and I chose the kid again for the chuckin' chore on Saturday evenin'. Should he achieve a second victory, Quartz Hill would chalk up another series on the Wolves, and would that be sour spinach in Herr Hubbard's cupboard!

But Bull didn't aim to be humiliated in front o' the home folks if he could help it. Left Fielder Libby wasn't in the Woolville line-up Saturday night; a husky newcomer with a hard, scarred pan and a bulgin' tin ear replaced him. The moment I glimmed this tough-lookin' bozo, listed under the monicker o' Gallivan, I experienced a strange, uneasy feelin'. Somethin' was cookin'.

Both teams was blanked in the openin' canto. We counted in the second, when Leary and Holtz smacked out doubles. Trailin' 1 to 0, the Wolves went to bat in the last half o' the chapter.

The first batter to face Jack Crosby was Libby's sub, the gorilla-like Gallivan. He swung from the right side; maybe this was the reason he was in the game. But I had my doubts.

Gallivan crowded the dish, flailin' his hickory. Cadman flashed the kid a sign. Crosby whipped a speedy portside shot close inside, to dust the hitter back. Gallivan spilled in the dirt. In a jiffy he was on his feet. Droppin' the stick, he tore out on the diamond, fists knotted.

"Try to bean me, will ya?" he snarls.

I wised up real sudden. Hubbard had stuck this mug into the tilt for the sole purpose o' buildin' trouble. Gallivan would get himself thrown outa the game, but he prob'ly would get Crosby tossed, as well. And that would suit Bull just dandy.

The youngster stood his ground. The owner o' the tin ear reached him, let go a punch. Crosby half-ducked. The blow landed on his neck. He staggered back several feet.

I swore. Naturally I expected the kid to cuff back in sheer self-defense. A few brisk socks would be traded, and then both players would get the gate from the umpires. League regulations in regard to fightin' was mighty strict. The removal o' Gallivan couldn't harm the Wolves much, if any; puttin' Crosby out was the main object. Bull Hubbard's slimy strategy was plain as a hog's schnozzle.

TO my amazement, however, Jack Crosby didn't do the expected. Gallivan rushed; he leaped nimbly to one side. Makin' no attempt to use his fists, he dodged around the center o' the diamond till a coupla our infielders and the base umps grabbed Bull's tough guy.

The excitement subsided. The growlin' Gallivan was dragged off the field, finished playin' for the night. Crosby stayed in the game. Woolville bugs razzed him in no gentle accents.

"Ye're yelluh!" screeches a voice in the bleacher section.

"Yellow is right, Peewee!" Butch Bittner clips beside me. "Them Wolves will ride him outa the loop after this exhibition!"

"Maybe," I mutters, shakin' my head.

Libby finished battin' for the exiled Gallivan. Pitchin' mostly left-handed, Crosby set the Wolves down in order. He come to the bench in grim silence, a purple blotch on his neck where he'd been pasted. A majority o' the Hustlers was oddly silent, too. I knew what was in their minds, and it didn't exactly flatter our twin-armed hurler.

Quartz Hill took that tilt, 4-3, despite five bobbles behind Jack Crosby. Heedless o' cheesy support or the unpleasant jeerin' o' Hubbard and the crowd, the youngster hurled swell ball all the way. He showed no yellow on the mound, at least, or in the batter's box. He clicked three singles, drivin' in a brace o' markers and registerin' the winnin' run himself.

At the end of the contest, his expression stony, he headed for Bull Hubbard on the coachin' line. He spoke some words to the big skipper in a low tone, spun on his heel. I seen Bull stare after him, then bust forth in a harsh chuckle.

Several minutes later Hubbard and a passel o' his Wolves jammed into the Hustlers' dressin' room. In their midst was the hard-panned Gallivan, still wearin' baseball togs.

"Here he is, punk!" Bull cracks.

"What's the big idea?" I shoves forward. "Scram, you—"

"Pardon me, Peewee," Crosby breaks in, very cool. "This is my party. I asked Hubbard to bring his bruiser here if he cared to finish what he started in the second innin'. He has accepted the challenge, and I'm ready to settel the issue, man to man. Peel down, Gallivan!"

"Yeah, hop to it, Slug!" jeers Bull. "We'll pick up the pieces!"

His husky ape and the youngster stripped to the waist. Slippers replaced their spiked shoes. Benches was moved

back, space cleared for a combat arena. Seein' Crosby was quite in earnest, I didn't interfere further.

Max Ragan o' the Wolves was agreed on as referee, while Barker Cadman held the watch. The veteran catcher shouted, "Time!"

The bare-knuckled battlers made no attempt to shake hands. Slug Gallivan plunged straight at the kid, a wicked leer twistin' his tough features.

A trifle the lighter o' the two, Crosby moved with catlike grace. A jabbin' left speared Slug's nose, drawin' Burgundy. A solid right smash under the heart followed.

Gallivan's leer faded.

For three rousin' minutes Bull's ruffian was a target for flickin' lefts and joltin' rights to the body. Jack Crosby proved a really dazzlin' boxer, light on his feet as a cork. Gallivan, a rough mauler with some ring experience—afterward we learned he was a local semi-pro ball player, who'd been fightin' prelim bouts around Woolville for several months—landed a number o' hefty socks, but the kid seemed able to take 'em. And he delivered a lot more than he took. Slug wasn't sorry to hear Cadman holler the end o' the round.

A brief rest, and the mêlée resumed. Gallivan didn't leap to the attack this time. He was breathin' kinda hard. Crosby appeared fresh as a loaf o' new bread. He stepped about, snipin' his opponent with lightnin' lefts. Finally Slug got mad. He begun swingin' like a revolvin' door in a rush hour.

Crosby ducked under a wild looper. He hooked a terrific left to the darby. Gallivan folded in the middle. The kid's right flashed to the jaw—a short, deadly uppercut. Slug crashed to the floor. Max Ragan commenced a count, stopped halfway. There wasn't any need; Slug was cold as an official scorer's heart.

"All right, Bull," I warbles. "You agreed to pick up the pieces. That pleasure's entirely yours."

Neither Hubbard nor his gawpin' athletes had anythin' to utter. When they'd towed the dazed gorilla away, Butch Bittner marched up to Crosby with a shamed grin.

"I apologize, Jack. Guess me and some o' the other boys had you all wrong. You ain't yellow. O' course, the way it looked out there on the field—"

"You're a bright bunch o' clucks!" The youngster rubs skinned knuckles. "Don't you suppose I was wise to Hubbard's little frame-up? I refused to tumble into the trap. Winnin' the brawl come first. I figured I could deal with Mr. Gallivan later."

"Well," I proclaims, "you sure polished off that big palooka! Where did you learn to handle your dukes, anyway? You're no slouch o' a boxer, kid."

"I used to hang around a gym run by a smart old ringman." Crosby grins, faint.

"He taught me plenty. You see, I always had a yen to be either a fighter or a ball player. Baseball won out."

Slug Gallivan was missin' from the Wolves' line-up Sunday afternoon. They beat Swede Hoagland in a close tiff; just the same, I left Bull's burg pretty much satisfied. We'd whipped our bitter rivals in another series, thanks mainly to Jack Crosby.

AS the summer advanced and the thermometer aviated, our duplex chucker continued to mystify hostile macers. With Bittner and

Hoagland, he gave the Hustlers a trio o' effective gunners. By August we was leadin' the gonfalon gallop. Bull Hubbard had his wolves right on our tail, though. They gained at the expense o' other clubs, if not us.

Crosby's unusual trick o' castin" the apple both starboard and port naturally made him a gate attraction. The newspaper boys around the circuit saw him as swell copy, but the kid was funny that way. It was harder to get him to talk than to hit his fast ball on a foggy evenin'.

He refused to pose for pictures; in fact, he wouldn't let a shutter snapper come near him. This odd attitude peeved some o' the publicity brethren. One scribe tagged him the " baseball Garbo."

I tried to hint that maybe he was pullin' a boner. He smiled, a polite yet stubborn smile. " I simply don't care to be ballyhooed as a diamond freak, Peewee."

Old Barker Cadman wagged his grizzled knob in wise fashion. " It's the left-hander in him. Ever see a guy who chucked from the wrong side who wasn't a bit screwy?"

" Uh-huh," I grunts. Still, I kinda wonder what Jack Crosby had been or done before ridin' the rods into Quartz Hill. I never heard him say. Not, I admitted, that his past mattered to me so long as he could pitch winnin' ball in the present and future.

September first found the Hustlers toppin' the heap, the Wolves a notch below. The end o' the season was two weeks off. We washed up at home with the Rockridge Ravens, then moved to Woolville for our five final clashes.

Crosby worked the second scuffle o' the Rockridge series and thereafter ornamented the bench. I was savin' the kid and his pair o' flossy flippers for Bull Hubbard's pack. If needful, I wanted to be able to throw him every other tilt.

Quartz Hill mopped up on the lowly Ravens while Woolville was tanglin' with the tougher Silver Summit Miners. We faced the last week o' the campaign a game and a half to the good. Even with this comfortin' margin, I realized the flag was far from in the bag. The Wolves would be on their home orchard, desperate, all primed to claw and rend. Bull Hubbard would give anythin', up to and includin" his right optic and gold bridgework, to drag us down.

But I was countin' heavy on young Jack Crosby to check the foe.

Early Wednesday mornin' me and my athletes boarded the bus which was to roll us to Woolville, ninety miles distant.

Rain sprinkled from a dark and cloudy sky. Long before we reached the Wolves' lair, it was fallin' in sheets. There would be no contest this afternoon---owl play stopped the last o' August in the Ore Belt, owin' to the chill o' the nights.

Not until dusk did the heavens stop drippin'. My players spent dull hours cooped up in the lobby o' the Palace Hotel at Woolville, orbin' giant drops splash on the windows. I knew how Bull Hubbard must be cussin'. The rain was a worse break for him than us.

Thursday mornin' broke gray and threatenin'. Barker Cadman and me was ruinin' stacks o' wheats in the hotel coffee shop when Lemon Pie Leary busted in on us.

" Peewee," he squawks, excited, " Jack is gone! He went out last night and never come back!"

" What?" I almost stabs myself with the fork.

"About nine o'clock he said he was goin' out for a breath o' air. I was tired and hit the hay. A few minutes ago I wake up and there's no sign o' Crosby. His bed ain't been slept in. What the hell do you figure could've happened to him?"

"If somethin's happened, I bet Bull Hubbard had a finger in it!" rasps Barker. "The kid's been poison to the Wolves all year, and Bull wouldn't stop at nothin' to get him outa the way. We oughta put a guard over him, Peewee!"

"Too late now." I shoves my plate back. "The only thing we can do is start lookin' for Jack. Come on!"

FOR several hours we looked in vain. Crosby was nowhere to be found—he seemed to have vanished completely. We couldn't pick up a solitary clue to the missin' hurler.

Finally, accompanied by Cadman and Leary, I ankled to police headquarters. Otto Metzler, Woolville's chief, heard us in person.

"Prob'ly got drunk and is snorin' it off some place." He shrugs.

"Nuts!" I snap. "The kid ain't no boozer. Never touches anythin' except a glass o' beer. Besides, we've prowled most o' the liquor joints."

"Well, maybe he skipped for some reason o' his own." Metzler spins on Leary. "You was his roommate. Do you know if he was in some trouble? How much do you know o' his private affairs?"

"Not much," Lemon Pie answers. "Jack's a mum mouth. If he was worried about anythin' he never spilled it to me."

"In my opinion," sputters Cadman, "Bull Hubbard's messed up in this plenty. You might ask him a few questions!"

"That's a serious accusation." The chief frowns. "I'll talk to Hubbard, though I hardly believe—"

"Listen!" An idea strikes me sudden. "Barker, remember that gorilla Jack licked in our second series here—Slug Gallivan? He wouldn't cherish no love for the kid. Maybe they bumped into each other last night and Gallivan got even."

I tell about the brawl in the clubhouse and what led to it. Metzler shakes his head. "Slug Gallivan ain't been seen around town for some time. It's rumored he took a job as bouncer in a tough cabaret over in Silver Summit. However, I'll investigate that angle, Mr. Morgan. Slug can be a rather bad hombre at times. Rest assured my men will do their best to locate your pitcher."

"Yeah," Barker growls on leavin' the police station, "he'll break a leg to help us. I still think Bull's at the bottom of it. Him and this copper are lodge brothers, I understand. We sure had a whizzer pulled on us, Peewee!"

No trace of Jack Crosby had been discovered by game time Thursday. Bull Hubbard, seemin' very indignant, denied he was even aware o' our chucker's disappearance. Slug Gallivan, the police reported, wasn't in Woolville.

I started Butch Bittner in the delayed opener, against Max Ragan. The diamond was muddy, the day cold and dreary. Especially for my club. Them southpaw sockers o' the Wolves whaled Butch hard, winnin' the combat and choppin' our lead to half a game.

Friday morn found Crosby yet unfound. The Woolville *Argus* had quite a story about it, and I had quite a headache. I couldn't figure what had become o' the youngster. Was he the

victim o' some sly plot engineered either by Bull Hubbard or local supporters, or was there a different explanation?

I recollected the queer way Crosby shunned reporters and bulb squeezers ever since joinin' the Hustlers. Maybe he had a reason; maybe this reason had caused him to take it on the lam.

O' course, I tried to get in touch with Andy Hunt. I wanted the advice o' Quartz Hill's chief and Crosby's Columbus. But a long distance phone call revealed he was outa the city for a day or two.

Bull Hubbard slated a twin bill for the afternoon. The weather was mean and bleak as Thursday's. The Wolves devoured us in the first fray and hurdled into the top berth. I scorched the ears o' my warriors, and they managed to nose out a 5 to 4 victory in the nightcap between Swede Hoagland. We grabbed back our half-game margin.

It was rainin' again Saturday. I hoped it would keep on pourin', which it did. Minus Jack Crosby's left arm —and right—I realized our chances o' stoppin' Woolville's portside pounders was slimmer than the fondest dream o' a dietin' fat girl.

I WAS parked in the lobby o' the Palace Hotel a few minutes before noon, when two wet figures sloshed in. One o' the pair was Andy Hunt; the other a bulky, thick-jawed stranger. To spot him for a dick was easier than reachin' base on an intentional pass.

Quartz Hill's chief and the big biscuit march toward me.

"Howdy, Peewee," Andy chirps. "I hear my young friend Crosby is lost, strayed or stolen. What's the inside dope?"

"You're askin' me?" I says, sour. "All I know is the kid faded out Wednesday night and is still missin'. The coppers in this burg been about as much help as a harelip to a radio announcer!"

"Otto Metzler's usual efficiency," Hunt snorts. "I told you, Gilligan, the old coot couldn't catch a snail on a motorcycle! Peewee, meet Mike Gilligan, representin' the Gilligan Detective Bureau o' New York. He's lookin' for a certain young man he believes might be Crosby. If so, he aims to direct the search for him personally."

"From the description, I'm convinced Crosby is the party I'm seekin'." The big dick fishes a photo from a pocket. "Is this the man known as Jack Crosby?"

I stare at the picture o' a tall lad rigged out in a set o' soup and fish. It's our duplex chucker, all right.

"Yeah, that's him." I grow plenty curious.

"Just as I thought—he is Richard Lounsbury!" The thick jaws click. "He led me a merry chase, but I've tracked him down at last."

"Tracked him down?" I gasps. "You mean the kid's guilty o' some crime? That he's a crook?"

"Hell, no! He ain't a crook!" Gilligan barks. "Richard Lounsbury is the nephew and sole heir o' Miss Abigail Lounsbury, one o' the richest women in America! Both his mother and father are dead and he lived with his aunt since he was twelve years old. Last year he insisted on becomin' a professional ball player. She didn't approve of the idea, but finally give in. He pitched for the Bearcats in the Atlantic League all season, and I guess he wasn't so hot. Anyway, he told his aunt this spring he wouldn't play ball. Said he was goin' on a trip to South America. Several months went by

without a word from him. His aunt got worried and engaged my agency to locate him.

"I soon found he hadn't gone to South America. For weeks I run down false trails. I bet I visited a million ball parks before hittin' this territory. Had a hunch he'd be pitchin' somewhere under another name."

"Wow!" I glances at Andy, sorta dizzy. "It don't seem possible Crosby can be this rich old lady's nephew. Why, you picked him up as a vag, chief! He was flat-broke. Do you suppose the kid's sufferin' from anemia, or whatever they call it?"

"Amnesia," Gilligan corrects. He frowns. "I doubt that bein' the answer. I think the young man's mind is okay and he's up to somethin' he didn't want his aunt to know about. Maybe he'll explain his actions when we corner him."

"Funny how he disappeared the other night," muttered Andy Hunt. "He couldn't have been tipped off about you, could he, Gilligan?"

"And skipped out?" The New York dick shakes his head in a grim manner. "That's very unlikely. No, chief, I have another theory. Racketeers have a habit o' keepin' posted on the doin's o' rich men and women. Suppose some smart criminal got wise that Crosby was really Miss Lounsbury's nephew? Those rats have excellent information bureaus. I wouldn't be surprised if kidnapers had put the snatch on him and are holdin' him for ransom!"

"In that case," I objects, feelin' more and more dizzy, "why ain't they let a peep outa them?"

"Prob'ly ain't perfected their plans yet." Gilligan whirls on Andy Hunt. "We gotta work fast, chief. I'll wire Miss Lounsbury and suggest she offer a reward o' five grand—or even ten. We must organize posses o' men and scour the country hereabouts. Let's go!"

EVEN though there wasn't a ball game Saturday afternoon, Woolville had excitement enough. Mike Gilligan wired his wire; an hour later he received authority to post five thousand dollars for the safe return o' Richard Lounsbury, alias Crosby. Half a dozen search parties was formed by citizens eager to get that chunk o' dough. The New York detective headed the largest posse which slopped forth to comb the wild hills and cañons surrounding the town. Andy Hunt went with them.

"I'm actin' in a unofficial capacity, Peewee," confides Quartz Hill's chief. "Truth is, I played hookey to root for the Hustlers here in their last coupla games, if any. But with things as is, I better go with Gilligan. I know the country."

Nobody was more excited and buzzin' than my idle athletes.

"That big gumshoe is cock-eyed!" Barker Cadman bites into a plug o' tobacco. "No racketeers or gangsters snatched the kid. Bull Hubbard got him outa the way for the series—you'll see!"

"Well, I'd hate to be in Bull's boots then!" cracks Marty O'Connell. "He's started somethin'. What a jam he'll be in if they ever pin it on him!"

"Yeah, he's liable to lose more'n a pennant," Butch Bittner adds. "And if this rain don't stop he loses the rag by default."

But Jupe Pluvius shut off the sprinklers Saturday night. Old Sol beamed warm and bright Sunday forenoon. A double-header was carded, and it looked like it would be played. We had to annex one o' these scuffles

to cinch the title, and without a fork-hand hurler.

Several search parties had straggled back, empty-handed. Mike Gilligan and his main posse was still to be heard from. Our missin' twirler prob'ly would be found too late to do the Hustlers any good, even if in shape to pitch, which was doubtful.

So, when my room phone rang late Sunday mornin', I answered it without the faintest notion o' what was to come.

"Morgan," croaks an unfamiliar voice, "if you want to find Crosby, go to 1710 East Saxon Street and look in the basement. Don't take no coppers. You'll find him there tied up, but okay otherwise."

A receiver banged in my ear. For a moment you could've floored me with a celluloid wrapper. Recoverin', I dashed outa my room. I didn't bother to have the call traced. I believed it on the level.

Maybe half a hour afterward four o' us piled outa a cab in front o' a shabby house on East Saxon Street—number 1710. Lemon Pie Leary, Cadman and Bittner was with me. Butch carried a rusty gat he owned. There wasn't any John Laws along; I'd followed instructions.

The front door to the dump was locked. We busted it off the hinges. The cheap furnished place was deserted upstairs. We invaded the basement kinda cautious. Bittner located a light switch, thumbed it. He had his gun ready to shoot.

There was no need. Over in a corner, lyin' on a cot, was Crosby. Ropes trussed his arms and legs, a cloth gag was in his mouth. His eyes smiled up at us as we swarmed around, commenced untyin' knots.

"Been expectin' you," he husks, when free. "I'm glad you fetched no police. That was in the bargain I made with Eddie."

"What bargain?" I belches. "And who is Eddie?"

"His last name's hard to pronounce," says the youngster. "Eddie rented this charmin' shack. He's a pal o' Slug Gallivan. You remember Slug, Peewee? Him and Eddie was hired to abduct me. They had a stroke o' luck Wednesday night. I walked outa the hotel almost into their arms. Got rapped over the dome and woke up here. Aside from the initial rough stuff, they treated me okay. It was business with them."

"Bull Hubbard's dirty business, huh?" Cadman clips. "I knew it!"

"Naturally he must've been the master mind, Bark—but I can't prove it. I was to be held prisoner until the series ended. However, somethin' broke yesterday.

"Eddie and Slug were panicky at supper. Finally Eddie told me they were in a hot spot and had to scram. He didn't explain further. I propositioned him. If I was turned loose so I could play ball to-day I'd file no charges with the police. They wouldn't release me right off, but promised to phone Peewee from some safe point this mornin' and tell him where I was. They've kept their bargain; I'll keep mine. Whatever scared them out—"

"FIVE grand reward scared 'em!" I squawks. "Five grand offered for the recovery o' the nephew o' one o' America's richest women. Listen, kid. A New York dick named Gilligan blew into Woolville yesterday, identified you as Richard Lounsbury, nephew o' Miss Abigail Lounsbury. Claimed to been buntin' you for weeks. Gilligan brightly Sherlocked you'd

been snatched by big-time racketeers, got your aunt to wire a heavy reward. Most o' Woolville began searchin' for you. No wonder Slug and his pal craved to get away. You don't deny you're Richard Lounsbury, do you? Or is Mr. Gilligan wrong on that score, too?"

"No, I ain't denyin' it, Peewee." The youngster sighs. "Dear old Aunt Abby! She will insist on livin' my life for me! Put detectives on my trail, huh? Oh, well! Some time I may spill you the whole story, skipper—in case you're interested."

"You bet I'm interested!" is my retort. "But I'm even more interested in knowin' whether you can chuck to-day. How do you feel?"

"Swell!" He flexes both his valuable arms. "Merely a little bit stiff. Sure, I can pitch, Peewee. Maybe I can pay off my grudge against Brother Hubbard in the box!"

In a mighty short time all Woolville knew our missin' hurler had been found, Bull included. Attempts were made to relay the tidin's to Mike Gilligan's still absent posse. The kid was quizzed by Otto Metzler and local reporters. He stated he had been abducted by a coupla known miscreants and held captive until the hue and holler over Richard Lounsbury had frightened them into scttin' him at liberty and beatin' it. Yes, he was really Lounsbury, he admitted, but why he played ball under an assumed name was entirely his affair.

O' course, the "miscreants" weren't unknown. He covered up Eddie and Slug, and none o' us in on the rescue spilled anythin'. He had forced us to give our word to that effect.

Fans jammed the turnstiles for the final double bill. Many bugs from Quartz Hill was on hand. Jack Crosby we couldn't get used to callin' him different—was the center o' attraction. He was cheered loudly as he warmed up.

Bull Hubbard chose Max Ragan for mound duty. The Wolves' boss had a pale and haggard look. He should have. The big weevil was lucky not to be inside a cell.

The buntin' was at stake in this first tilt. Both ball clubs was keyed to a high pitch. For seven heats Crosby and the Woolville ace staged a beautiful duel. The youngster was somewhat unsteady from the port side, walkin' six men. But his trick o' switchin' to starboard in the pinches and great support by the Hustlers kept the plate unspiked. My athletes never fielded better, pullin' four fast double plays. They couldn't hit Ragan, though. Burly Max had plenty o' stuff this sunny afternoon.

In the eighth inning, with two in the grave, Cadman scratched a single. Crosby brought the fans outa their seats by smashin' the first ball on a line to deep right center for a clean triple, scorin' Barker. The kid died on third, but that single run loomed larger than an elephant in a kitchenette.

THE Hustlers still led, 1 to 0, as the last half o' the ninth rolled around. Hubbard paced the third base coachin' box, his pan bleak. Just three outs stood between Quartz Hill and the pennant.

The top o' the Wolves' order was at bat. Chuckin' left-handed, Crosby whiffed two southpaw swingers. How that onion smoked down the slot!

Maybe he bore down too hard on the next hitter. At any rate, with the count three and two, a speedy forkhand heave went wide. Ball four, and a man on first base.

Pete Harvey, a pretty dangerous

slugger, stalked to the saucer. A pair o' sizzlin' portside deliveries missed the corners. The kid shifted to the right arm, hooked the marble over the dish.

Harvey cut a sharp single to right field. Hurryin' on the blow, Lemon Pie Leary let the pill ooze through his legs. It was the first error for Quartz Hill, and a very costly bobble.

The runner ahead o' Harvey scooted all the way home. Pete raced to third, slidin' in safe. The score was knotted!

Tough break as it was for Crosby, he remained cool. Goin' back southpaw, he blazed two strikes across on the left-handed Libby.

Libby got a piece o' the followin' pitch. A weak grounder wiggled down the third base line. Harvey dashed for the plate Marty O'Connell flung in to field the ball, saw it swervin' outside the chalk line. He didn't try to pick it up. Let it roll foul!

Marty's idea was okay, except for one thing. In slidin' third a moment back, Pete Harvey had pushed the bag several inches outa position. Libby's roller just nicked the far extreme o' the protrudin' pillow.

The umpire called the hit foul, then reversed himself. My beefs and those o' the entire Quartz Hill club were useless. Lady Luck had played us a lousy trick—Libby's foul blow had to be ruled fair. Pete Harvey scored; Woolville won the game, 2 to 1.

A mighty sore bunch o' athletes gathered in the Hustler's dressin' room durin' the intermission.

"Never mind!" Jack Crosby faces us, grim. "We can still take the second game, gang. I want another crack at those babies, Peewee. Don't forget I have a pair o' pitchin' arms. I'm willin' to wear 'em both out if necessary!"

"All right, kid!" I slaps his shoulder. "They ain't earned a run off you yet to-day. The second brawl is only seven heats, accordin' to agreement. That'll be in your favor."

So the duplex chucker was back on the slab when the final scuffle got under way. He got a swell hand from the packed stands.

The Wolves, however, had tasted meat. After Ryder, a lean right-hander, had stopped us cold in the first frame, they hopped on Crosby. A pass, mixed in with solid drives by Harvey and Libby, netted Woolville a brace o' talies. Bull's club returned to the field full o' pep and chatter. I told Bittner and Hoagland to warm up.

At the commencement o' the fourth innin' the Wolves led, 2 to 0. Crosby had settled down, but Ryder hadn't allowed the Hustlers a hit. Tommy McKee broke through in the fourth with a single to center. Rabbit Grass sacrificed. O'Connell walked, Lemon Pie Leary picked on a high inside ball and rode it into the adjoinin' county, countin' two ahead o' him.

The giant right-fielder smiled for the first time since his misplay in the previous scuffle. Even though Ryder fanned Holz, we was a juicy marker to the good.

Quartz Hill clung to its margin durin' the last o' the fourth and fifty. Crosby seemed to improve. He was usin' his right flipper oftener, contrastin' slow starboard curves with fork-hand speed.

The Wolves went to bat in the sixth, desperate. Two men skied out. Then the troublesome Libby lined a terrific shot straight at Crosby. The kid flung up his ungloved paws. The apple caromed away. I saw him wring his right hand. McKee fielded the pill too late to erase Libby.

Pedalin' out on the diamond, I examined the injured duke. The middle finger appeared busted. I beckoned to Butch Bittner.

"Guess you gotta quit, Jack," I scowls.

"Guess again, Peewee!" The youngster grits his teeth. "Bandage her up and I'll finish the game pitchin' southpaw. I ain't quittin' until we've beat Bull Hubbard!"

No argument could shake his determination. The crippled finger was bound up. A glove pulled on the right fin, he returned to the turret. His first portside offerin' was popped to Rabbit Grass.

Ryder blanked us in the seventh. The Hustlers took places for the final half. Crosby's features were white and set as he toed the slab. I kept Bittner and Hoagland limberin' up.

Woolville's first batter walked. The second man, Catcher Dolan, let a close pitch tick his shirt. Two on. Hubbard jerked Ryder for a pinch-hitter. Rooters for the home team stamped and yelled. I stood in front o' the dugout, jittery as a drunk on an escalator.

Crosby hung two strikes on Ryder's sub, then lost the range. The umps called a fourth ball on a toss barely missin' the dish. The satchels was filled and none away! Forced to depend altogether on his left arm, the kid's control seemed to have gone blah. I trotted onto the field.

"Sorry, Jack," I blurts. "Better give me that onion."

"Wait, Peewee!" His eyes spark, stubborn. "Three left-handed batters are comin' up. Let me work on them. I ain't gonna pass anybody else!"

I debated a long moment. Could either Bittner or Hoagland baffle those southpaw sockers? Maybe I should gamble a little further on the kid. He had plenty of guts. If he got the ball over...

NOT knowin' whether I was wise or witless, I trudged back to the bench. And I left Crosby on the mound. The youngster resumed his place. He whipped a fast strike to Olson, head o' the Wolves' order. Olson slapped it to short. Tommy McKee scooped the agate, fired to Cadman at the plate for a force-out. That was one in the coffin.

Roscoe, the second forkpaw puncher, missed a fireball. Crosby suddenly changed pace. A high foul near the third base stand. Marty O'Connell gobbled the loft. Two down!

Mahaffey, a husky swatter, was up. Woolville bugs entreated him to smear one. He run the count to two and two. Crosby tried a slow teaser. Mahaffey screamed it along the first base line, foul by inches! Whew! It was close.

Again the kid wound up. The marble—it looked that big—wheeled in like a streak. Mahaffey swung savagely. He missed! A strike-out! The Wolves had retired, scoreless, after packin' the pillows with nobody out. That old buntin' belonged to Quartz Hill!

The Happy Hustlers carried our crippled pitcher into the clubhouse. I stayed outside a minute to insult Bull Hubbard, but the big crumb had left. As I started for the dressin' quarters a messenger boy shoved a yellow envelope and his book at me.

The message was in my hip pocket when I rejoined my new champions. Several civilians was in the room. I spotted the grinnin' pan o' Chief Andy Hunt and Mike Gilligan's thick jaws. The posse finally had got back, huh?

I hear the New York dick soundin' off to our young chucker. "Louns-

bury, I might've muffed off one in figurin' racketeers put the snatch on you for dough, but I still claim you're nutty. Runnin' away from ten million bucks to play ball in this jerk league under a phony monicker. From ten million bucks!"

"As it happens, that's just the trouble. My Aunt Abigail is a dear, well-meanin' soul---only far too rich." The kid faces all o' us. "I'm tellin' you now that ten million dollars can be a frightful handicap to any one who wants to stand squarely on his own feet. I'm gonna let you judge for yourselves.

"A coupla years ago I was rated one o' the best amateur boxers in college circles. My trainer urged me to turn professional. Aunt Abigail would not hear o' me enterin' the prize ring. I also thought I was a pretty fair southpaw pitcher. The Bearcats o' the Atlantic League offered me a contract on leavin' college. She again objected, but finally give in and wished me luck.

"Prob'ly I was the worst hurler on the club. They called me the wild man o' the loop—I was free with passes as the club secretary. Seldom did I win a brawl. Yet the Bearcats kept me all last season, even though several more capable hurlers got the gate. Not until the close o' the season did I learn the truth.

"My aunt had secretly bought controllin' interest in the club and they didn't dare fire me! No matter how rotten I was in the box, my job was safe!

"Maybe you can imagine what that done to my pride. Instead o' reproachin' Aunt Abby, however, I resolved upon a certain course o' action. I was always able to throw a bit with the right arm.

"This spring I informed my aunt I wouldn't play ball, led her to believe I was goin' to South America. I beat it out West, lookin' for a job in some smaller league. The Ore Belt appeared ideal for the purpose. In Kansas City holdup men robbed me o' what money I had.

"That's the reason I arrived in Quartz Hill a penniless vag. You know the rest. I sold myself to the Hustlers as a double-barreled chucker. I changed my name and avoided publicity to prevent Aunt Abigal from learnin' what I was about. I knew she'd have me trailed eventually, but I hoped to make good by that time—if it was in me."

THE END

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

YUGOSLAVIAN SAMSON

WHEN bigger and better beards are grown, Milhailo Nestorovsky will do his best. In the meantime, he wants $500 because his beard is gone. He is suing two men for that amount, claiming that they caused him to become intoxicated, and that while they were on the way home, in a Belgrade taxicab, his long, silky, black beard and heavy mustaches were cut off by his practical-joking friends. Nestorovsky claims that his earning power has suffered, because he now looks less distinguished without his beard!

DOUBLE SCHNOZZLE

THERE'S one calf in the United States which can't follow its nose to the feed box — it might lose its way. The calf was born with two complete heads, with two sets of vocal cords so that when it moos, it sings (?) a duet. It weighed eighty pounds when it was six weeks old, and is in perfect health.

NUMBERS FIREMEN NEVER HEAR

THERE is one signal on record that the New York Fire Department has never used, and hopes never to use. It is " 5-5-5," which calls out the Sappers and Miners' Company, and warns all boroughs that a fire has gotten beyond control and that buildings have to be dynamited in the path of the fire. This number went over the bells only once—in 1905—when Chief Croker himself tried it out as a test.

USEFUL PALM LEAF

MEMBERS of the Vedda tribe, in Ceylon, equip themselves in rainy weather with nature's own umbrellas. Huge leaves of the talipot palm are used. The talipot palm leaf can be folded up and carried under the arm, or four men can put their palm leaves together and set up a tent immediately. This useful palm flowers but once in its lifetime, throwing up a creamy froth of millions of minute blossoms. When the blossoms turn to small nuts the tree sickens and dies. From the talipot also come the olas, or palm leaf books used by the monks.

THE ORIGINAL TRAFFIC LIGHT

WHAT is believed to be the first traffic signal was erected in Westminster, England, in 1868. It was a gas lamp with red and green signals, and used only at night.

WILD HOTEL

THE quietest hotel in the world is known as Treetops; yet wild animals prowl beneath its windows. Treetops is a two-roomed bungalow, built high up in the branches of a great tree in the heart of the forest twelve miles from Nyeri, Kenya Colony, South Africa. It overlooks a water hole which is visited by elephants, leopards, hyenas, rhinoceroses and monkeys at night. Guests of Treetops Hotel are required to spend the whole night there; they must check in at four P.M., must not talk or smoke or shoot. Letters are sent by carrier pigeon to Nyeri.

The sheriff wanted to live, so his hands went up

The Kid from Hell

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Framed as a cattle rustler, Dick Savage was determined to find out who wanted him out of the way—and why

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

YOUNG Dick Savage and Myra Blake had both had a taste of Hell, and they both realized that they preferred Paradise—and were ready to fight for it. Myra Blake's father had been known as the black sheep of an old Kentucky family. When he died he left her nothing—but a clear mind and a familiarity with horses.

Since none of her relatives wanted her, she took a chance and used most of her few dollars to buy a railroad ticket to Pink Hill, Texas, where she knew of an uncle, Tony Blake, who had a ranch near there. On the train, not far from Pink Hill, she met Dick Savage, who was handcuffed to his seat and in charge of Sheriff Bill Deaver.

Dick managed to tell her that he was being taken back to Pink Hill, accused of stealing cattle. He said he was innocent. He also told her that her uncle was dead, and that Joe Venner was the present owner of the ranch that had belonged to Tony Blake, the Flying V.

Myra helped Dick to escape from the sheriff just as they reached Pink Hill. Taking his own horse and buying another for Myra, Dick set out across the plains with her. Deaver organized a posse and started after them. Dick crippled several of the posse's horses, and delayed it until he had

taken Myra to the ranch of Poke Wood and his wife Deesy. He asked Poke to take care of Myra. He saw that Deaver was approaching.

CHAPTER IV.

"IF YOU WANT TO LIVE."

THE Wood home was in a grove of timber. Dick had just glimpsed the sheriff, far down the trail. He rose and stepped behind a big tree.

"Let him come on up and pass the time of day, Poke," said Dick.

"See here, Dick," said Poke, "I know you don't aim to bush ary man on earth, but—"

"I won't hurt him," said Dick. "Just speak him fair and act natural. I'll do the rest."

Poke Wood stepped out from the tree and stood watching the approaching rider, who was now in plain sight. Poke couldn't help the hair rising on the back of his neck, for two men were going to meet in about a minute who were about as game as men ever got.

"Hi'ya, Sheriff," greeted Poke.

"Hi'ya, Poke," growled the sheriff. "Have you saw anything of Dick Savage?"

"Shore," said Poke. "What's that on yo' arm?"

"It's a handcuff," snapped Bill Deaver. "I'm carryin' it that way to have it handy. I aim to put it on Dick Savage. Where is he?"

"Here I am," said Dick, stepping from behind the tree, with his gun on Deaver. "Get yo' hands in the air, Bill—if you want to live." Bill wanted to live, at least a little while, so his hands went up. "Take his guns, Poke. I don't want to have to hurt him. That's it. Now, Bill, get down and let your saddle rest."

Deaver dismounted stiffly. The devils of rage were seething in him, but he was helpless.

"JUST sit down on the ground, Bill," said Dick Savage. "I got some things to tell you. First thing is, take them handcuffs off. They are humiliating to an honest man. I know, because I had 'em on, and I'm honest." Dick tossed Deaver's own key ring to him. The sheriff removed the handcuffs and dropped them into his pocket. "Now, listen close, Bill, for I don't aim to repeat any of this, and you'd better understand it. You are a pretty good fellow, and you would make a good sheriff if you didn't let Joe Venner say gee and haw to you. I asked you two-three times who made that charge of rustlin' ag'in' me, and you wouldn't tell. Now you are going to tell. Out with it."

"Why, Dick, I—you know I can't tell that to nobody but the grand jury, and—"

"You are going to tell me," said Dick coolly, "and if I find out afterward that you lied to me I'm going to kill you."

"But, Dick, I can't tell—"

"All right," said Dick. "Have you got any message that you want to send to yo' folks?"

"Whu-what do you mean?" stammered Deaver.

"You never heard of me breaking my word in your life," said Dick calmly. "I'm goin' to count ten. If you haven't told me who made that charge by the time I say 'ten,' I'm goin' to kill you. Any message?"

Deaver was silent.

"One—two—three—"

"Hold on, Dick," begged the sheriff. "Let's talk this out."

"Three-four-five—"

"I'll tell," yelled Deaver, in a panic of fear. "It was Joe Venner."

"I thought so," said Dick. "Now, you know as well as anybody that I never stole anything in my life, don't you?"

"Yes," said Deaver, "I knowed you weren't on the steal. I just thought Joe knowed something pretty bad on you, and made the charge rustlin', aiming to bring the other out before the grand jury."

"Oh, that's what you thought," said Dick. "Well, listen just a little bit more. I'm going from here to the Box D. You can go to the Flying V, if you want to, and tell Joe Venner this. He hasn't got anything at all on me now, but if a few killings are bad he'll have that on me before this mess is over.

"I've got just this to tell you. I missed you and your men on purpose, when I shot at you. I am not going to do that any more. I'm for the law, but not for using a public office to help thieves and murderers, and that's what Joe Venner is. You can tell him that, too. If you don't, I'll tell him the first time I see him, and I'm going to see him. Joe wants me out of the way, without killing me. He knows killing me is a grown man's job, and so do you. Joe Venner thinks I know something. I don't, but I mean to find out a few things. That's all."

"See here, Dick," said the sheriff, "you can't get away with anything like that. You better come on and go with me, and let the grand jury settle this matter; then it will all be over."

"Nope," said Dick. "Joe Venner owns the sheriff, and every other officer in the county. He can get witnesses that will tell any lie on earth, and a jury that will be afraid to find a verdict that didn't suit him. There's just one more little thing, Bill. Poke is going to give you your gun now. Put it on, and if you think you can get me, you're welcome to try."

THE sheriff rose and put on his gun. He was not going to try to get Dick just then. Deaver's horse was put in the pen and fed. The three men went on to the house, Dick walking half a step behind Poke and the sheriff, and watching as a cat watches a mouse. The sheriff went in to breakfast, and Poke went with him. Dick stopped in the living room, where Myra was. He knew that Bill Deaver wouldn't try to trick him, with Poke Wood watching him.

"Well, Myra," said Dick, "I'm going to ride from here."

"You—you won't stumble, will you, Dick?" said Myra in a low tone. She had looked into Dick's blue eyes, and what she saw there was not pretty. They looked like a couple of wide open gates to a graveyard. Dick Savage was all set to kill.

"I'll—I'll keep my head up if I can," said Dick, "but—"

"Look at the stars when you are about to stumble."

"They ain't no stars in the daytime," said Dick, "but—I'll do my best, and I'll be back. So long."

He clasped her hand and was gone. Myra kept back the tears. She didn't know what it was, but there was a man she would die for, no matter how wild he was. She wanted to go with him, and keep him from stumbling on the road from Hell to Paradise, but knew that she could not.

Dick mounted his horse and rode away. The sheriff stood in the door with Poke Wood and watched.

"There goes the coldest bundle of nerve that I ever saw," said Bill Deaver, "and I've seen 'em all. When

Dick Savage is good, he's as square a man as the West ever saw. He has gone bad, and now he is as dangerous a man as the *world* ever saw, and I've got to take him because it's my duty."

"Well," drawled Poke Wood, "there he is, and he invited you to take him."

"See here, Poke," said Deaver, "you don't want to get mixed up in no job harboring criminals."

"I ain't harboring nobody," said Poke. "Dick Savage is a Box D puncher, and I gives him his breakfast, just like I gives you yo'n, and like I would a Flyin' V puncher, or anybody else that comes to my house."

"What about that girl you got here?" asked Deaver.

"That young lady is a member of my family," said Poke Wood, with a funny little tinkle in his voice that the sheriff didn't miss. "I aim to take care of her. Dick Savage brought her here, and anybody that mistreats her is apt to be tolerable sorry he does it."

A few minutes later the sheriff mounted his weary horse and took the same trail that Dick had taken.

"Mr. Wood," said Myra, "do—do you think that sheriff is going to try to take Dick?"

Poke didn't answer at once, and Myra started to ask her question again, when he said:

"Oh, you was speakin' to me. Better just call me Poke. I can understand it better. Folks don't mister me, much. I don't know whether Bill is goin' to try to take Dick or not, but—I know he ain't goin' to take him. I hope he don't try, for killin' a sheriff is plumb ag'in' the law in this country."

Poke escaped into the kitchen before Myra could ask him any more questions. Deesy was washing dishes.

"Leave them dishes for a while, Deesy, and come out here with me. I want to talk some."

DEESY dried her hands on her apron and followed Poke out the back door. When they were well away from the house Poke stopped and said:

"Now, Deesy, it looks like you and me are apt to get mixed up in about the worst mess that this old cow country ever knew. Dick Savage may be bad; I reck'n he is, but—if it hadn't been for him and old Tony Blake, I wouldn't be here now. I told 'em then that if I ever had a chance to pay it back, to somebody else that was in a jam, I'd do it.

"Dick says this girl is in a worse jam than I was then, and he wants us to pay it back to her. I told Dick I'd do it, and I will. I don't know who she is, nor what for. I do know that Dick Savage wouldn't have anything to do with her if she wasn't on the level, and that he wouldn't bring a woman to yo' house that weren't fitten for you to associate with."

"Why, Poke," said Deesy, "I talked to her some, while you was out with Dick. She seems a right nice, quiet, well-mannered and well-spoken girl. I don't see nothin' wrong with her."

"Shore she is," said Poke, "but Bill Deaver hinted that she might be wanted. I just wanted to tell you that we are treatin' her fair and protectin' her. If anybody but Dick Savage takes her out of my house, it will be over my dead body.

"I got an idea it won't be long until Dick comes back. When a man thinks enough of a woman to do what he seems to have did for her, he don't stay away from her long at a time—

unless he's dead, and Dick ain't. I'm afraid he's going to do some killin', though, but we can't help that. All we can do is take care of the girl for him, because we owe it to him, and—because it's right."

WHEN Deesy got back to the house, Myra was in the kitchen with her sleeves rolled up, washing dishes. "Why, child," said Deesy, "you don't have to do that."

"But I want to do something," said Myra, and went right on washing dishes while Deesy dried them.

Possibly there is something about a thorough job of dish-washing that inspires confidence between the two women doing it. Myra was silent until the job was finished, and then she said:

"Mrs. Wood, is Dick Savage very wild?"

"Why—why, honey," smiled Deesy, "that's a funny question for a woman to ask about her man."

"He—he isn't my man," said Myra. The thought had been suggested to her for the first time, and it caused her to pause and wonder. "I never saw him until yesterday. I was—was in trouble, and he got me out of it and brought me here to stay until I can decide what to do."

"Oh, thataway," said Deesy. "Well, that's like Dick, accordin' to everybody's tell that knows him. He's for the under dog, if the upper one is a tiger. You want to know if he's wild. All I know about that is some things that Poke says. I don't use cuss words—unless I'm mad; but Poke he says Dick Savage is the wildest devil from Hell to Halifax; but he says he's the squarest man he ever seen and ain't afraid of the very old Devil, claws, horns and any. Still and all, them kind settles, and makes good men—sometimes."

Myra asked a good many more questions, but she learned very little more about Dick Savage. One reason was that Deesy knew very little about him. Another was that Poke had told her to know as litle as she could. So, Myra settled in her strange, new home. She put on one of Deesy's dresses, which was not a bad fit, and helped as she could about the house.

That night she sat outside the door in the balmy April air, and looked up at the stars. She was thinking of Dick Savage, and wondering where he was. Deesy had called Dick her man. It had put a new train of thought in Myra's mind. She had never been in love. Her life had been a strange one. She had worked off her surplus mental and psychic energy in other fields. She knew women did love men. She wondered why she had taken the chance that she had taken with Dick Savage. So, Poke Wood said Dick was the "wildest devil from Hell to Halifax." Well, he couldn't be much wilder than she had been, when she snatched the sheriff's gun and gave it to Dick. True to the Blake stock, she had placed her bet on Dick, and would let it ride.

She looked up at the stars again and wondered if Dick was looking at them and thinking of her. That should have told her that she was perilously near to being in love with Dick Savage, no matter how wild he was. Then she wondered if Dick had stumbled, before the stars came out to remind him of the compact that they had made the night before. If he did stumble, she would not be there to give him a hand over the rough place. Then she thought of the queer jam that she was in. Oh, well, she sighed to herself. Tom Blake on his death bed had said that she had

an even break with the world, and that was all that a Blake should ask. Her name was Bradley now, but she was still a Blake. She had put everything on Dick Savage to win.

Yes, she admitted to herself now that she had even put her heart on this strange wild man. All she could do was let the bet stand, and watch the wire, to see whether Dick or the sheriff nosed under ahead. With that, she went in and went to bed, and to sleep, as a healthy young girl should.

POKE WOOD held his little ranch there in a fold of the foothills because he was in nobody's way. There was not enough grazing land there for a big outfit to want it. Twenty miles to the north, in a broad stretch of fine grazing country, lay the old Blake ranch, now called the Flying V. West of the Flying V, in another valley beyond a range of low hills, lay Val Doane's Box D ranch, where Dick Savage had worked for several years. Val Doane was a typical square Western ranchman, who attended strictly to his own business and let that of other people alone. Particularly he kept clear of politics. For several years he had simply voted with Joe Venner, because Joe was his neighbor, they worked cattle together, and to him politics was too small a thing for neighbors to quibble over.

Doane was a giant of a man. Well over six feet, and still active at fifty. He was still a handsome man, though his black hair was mixed with silver, and there was a slight droop to his square shoulders. Val Doane was a very quiet man, and no one in that country knew that in his youth he had been an unquenchable firebrand. Val had been to the Flying V to arrange with Venner for the beginning of the spring round-up. About mid-afternoon he had got back to within a few miles of his own ranch when he saw Dick Savage coming in on another trail, and pulled up to wait for Dick.

"Hi'ya, Dick," he greeted.

"Howdy, Mr. Doane."

"Where the devil have you been?" asked Doane. "I been looking for you for a week. We are about ready to go to working cattle."

"I couldn't get back no sooner," said Dick. "I—I had a little trouble."

"Oh, you did? Well, I've been telling you that you would keep on hellin' around until you got into a mess. Come on. You can tell me about it as we go along."

"No," said Dick. "I'd rather tell you here. You might not want me to go on to the ranch."

"What!" said Doane. "Ain't you sober yet?"

"Yes," said Dick. "I'm too sober. Do you believe I'm a cow thief, and maybe worse than that?"

"Hell, no! What makes you ask a fool question like that? You know I'd trust you anywhere on earth."

"Well, Joe Venner says I'm a cow thief," said Joe. "I aim to call him on it, and if he don't square it I'm going to kill him."

"Why, Dick," said Val Doane, "they's bound to be some mistake about this."

"No," said Joe. "They's been a bad mistake made, but not about Joe sayin' I was a cow thief. After I left here I goes to Pink Hill. It was sorty slow there, and I leaves my bronc at the stable and goes on a little trip to a bigger town. When I gets to the big town, I leaves my gun in my room. I'm in the wash room when Bill Deaver comes in, throws a gun on me, and handcuffs me."

"Why, Joe, is that straight?"

"It shore is, Mr. Doane, and that ain't all."

Dick went on and told the whole story, except that he made no mention of Myra. He just said he got hold of Bill's gun and stood him up. Then he told about Bill chasing him, and about the sheriff coming to Poke Wood's house that morning, and him standing the sheriff up again. Then he told about Bill saying that he knew Dick was not a thief, but he figured that Joe Venner knew something a whole lot worse on him and just wanted to get him before a grand jury.

"WORSE?" said Val Doane. "How the hell could a man do anything worse than steal a cow—unless he cut his own mother's throat, and I know you ain't done that."

"I haven't done anything," said Dick, "and Joe Venner knows it. I'll tell you what I think, and I ain't talking behind Joe Venner's back, because I aim to tell him the same thing just as soon as I get to him. Joe Venner is a liar, a thief, and a murderer, and he thinks I know it. He wants me out of the way, and ain't got the guts to kill me."

"Why, Dick," said Val Doane soberly, "them's pretty hard things you are sayin' about Joe. You'll have to back 'em up with something."

"I aim to back 'em up with my gun," said Dick, "and if Joe don't take back-water on that charge he made I aim to kill him."

"How come you never did say nothin' about Joe before?"

"You never heard me say anything about anybody that lets me alone, did you?" asked Dick.

"No, I didn't, but—what do you think Joe is afraid of you about? What is it you know?"

"I don't *know* anything," said Dick, "but since this mess has come up and Joe has tried to get me out of the way, I been thinking a lot. You know that in spite of the difference in our ages, old Tony Blake and me used to hell around a lot together. He was a dead game sport, and I liked him."

"Yes, I know that. What of it?"

"Well, for one thing, I never did believe the tale they told about the way Tony Blake got killed. For another thing, I wondered, and I reck'n you and everybody else did, how Tony comes to be broke when he's killed and how Joe Venner got all the money that he said Blake owed him. More than the ranch was worth."

"Why, Dick, you never said anything about that before."

"No, I didn't," said Dick. "I don't mess with the other fellow's business. But now he has made it my business, and I'm going to bring him to a cold showdown and make him like it. That is why I wanted to stop here and talk to you. It's going to be war, with the big Flying V on one side and just me on the other.

"I'm comin' clean with you, because you have always treated me right. I'm on the kill. Can't nary man on earth put that sort of stuff over on me, and get away with it. I don't want to kill anybody. I'd like to settle down and be a human, if I could get a little help, but—the only thing that is going to save Joe Venner is for him to get down on his knees like the pup he is and beg out of it."

"Dick," said Val Doane, "I know you have told the truth, and I know that somebody has given you a dirty deal. I don't blame you for the way

you feel about it. I'm not going to turn you down, but this is apt to bring on the nastiest mess this old cow country ever knew. You've been through hell the last few days, and you ain't in no shape to meet Joe Venner, nor nobody else, right now. Come on to the ranch and get a night's sleep. Let me have time to think this thing out, then to-morrow—well, to-morrow will be another day."

So, in the setting sun they rode on to the Box D. Val Doane was no quitter, but he dreaded what was going to happen, for he knew that nothing on earth could stop Dick from taking Joe Venner apart, just as soon as he could get to him, and that meant war between the two ranches.

CHAPTER V.

DICK PLAYS A LONE HAND.

DRY LAKE was a little old town that lay about on the range line between the Flying V and the Box D. It was west from both places, and about fifteen miles from the Box D and ten miles from the Flying V. There was not much there. Postoffice, one big general store, blacksmith shop and a couple of saloons. Dick had not mentioned it, but he had stopped there that day, to look for Joe Venner, and had not found Joe because he was at home with Val Doane, making arrangements for the round-up. Next morning Val Doane went out to where the men were saddling up. He didn't see anything of Dick, so he asked about him.

"Dick?" said Leck Munson, the foreman. "Why, he comes in last night. He didn't even say 'Pass me some more of them beans,' but just took what he could reach. He went to bed as soon as he et. Then, this morning, just before daylight, he mounts and rides."

"Hell!" said Val Doane. "That won't do."

"What won't do?" asked Leck.

"Why, Dick riding alone thataway. He's going to jump the whole damn Flying V outfit."

"Jump 'em?" said Leck. "What for?"

"Why, he says Joe Venner swears out a warrant charging him with rustlin' Flyin' V cows, and—"

"The hell he did!" said Leck.

"That's what Dick says. He said Bill Deaver traps him and puts handcuffs on him. Then Dick, he stands Bill up and gets away. Bill trails him, and Dick stands him up again and makes Bill tell who made the charge, and Bill says it's Joe."

"Mount, fellers," yelled Leck Munson, who was red-haired and loved a square shooter better than any man living. "Anybody that says Dick Savage is a thief is a damn liar. I've knowed him for five year, and he is one of the squarest men that I ever seen in my life."

"Hold on a minute," said Val. "I know Dick is on the level, as well as you do, but where are you going to ride to?"

"Why, to Dick. He rides off to'ds the Flying V. He can't take on the whole United States Army, alone."

"He can come about as near it as any one man that I ever saw," smiled Val Doane. "It's more than apt to come to a mess between us and the Flying V, but we don't want to go busting over there with our bristles up. Let the Flying V start it, and we'll finish it."

"Start it," roared Leck Munson. "If accusin' a Box D puncher of steal-

ing their lousy Flying V cows ain't starting it, what do you call a start?"

"I know," said Val, "but I don't think Dick went to the Flying V. He's too much of a fox for that. I think he rides to Dry Lake, to lay for Joe Venner."

"What's the difference?" snapped Leck. "Joe never rides no place without his two killers, Dave Roach and Ben Watts. If Dick jumps Joe, he jumps him in a cloud of smoke, wherever he is."

"Well," said Val, "we don't want to make a play with the whole outfit. It would look like takin' a sledge hammer to smash a bug. You and me and half a dozen of the boys will ride to Dry Lake. If Dick ain't there, we'll just make like we come in to take a few drinks and play some poker, before the round-up. Then we can watch and see what happens.

"If it looks like a plumb general war, we'll get all the boys and take the Flying V to a cleaning. I don't like for Joe to accuse my men of stealing his cows, because they couldn't do it without me knowing it. If they stole Flying V's, they would be stealing 'em for me."

"You are right, like you always are," said Leck, "but let's get goin'. I know Dick is handy with his gun, but so are Dave and Ben."

Five minutes later Val Doane and his men were on the trail for Dry Lake, but Dick had more than two hours start of them, and a lot can happen in two hours.

DICK had slipped away from the Box D because he didn't want to drag Val and his men into the quarrel. At the moment, he didn't care what happened to him. He was brave with the bravery that madmen know. The more he thought of what Joe Venner had done, wholly without cause, the greater his rage grew. He wanted to come to a showdown with Venner, as quickly as possible. He knew the sheriff might be in Dry Lake. He didn't care if he was. He had told Bill Deaver he meant to kill him if he interfered again, and if Bill wanted to take a chance that was his privilege. Waiting for that showdown was not to be thought of.

It was still early in the morning when Dick rode into Dry Lake. He dismounted, dropped his reins on the ground, and entered the dinky little restaurant, after looking up and down the street and seeing no horses. He ate breakfast, and as he stepped to the street he saw four horses, in front of the Silver Spur saloon. He rolled a smoke and walked calmly toward the door of that saloon. His face was set, and his eyes narrowed to slits. At the door he loosened his gun and entered.

Joe Venner, Bill Deaver, Dave and Ben were at the bar taking a drink.

"Morning, gents," said Dick as he stopped within twenty feet of them. They returned the greeting, with a look of unease, but made no move for their guns.

"Take something with us?" asked Bill Deaver.

"No, thank you," said Dick. "Go ahead and take yo' drink. I want to talk to Joe some, when you get through."

"You can talk to me right now," snapped Venner. "What is it you want to say to me?"

"I want to tell you," said Dick, in slow, even tones, "that you are a damned, dirty liar, thief and murderer, and if you don't swallow the charge you made ag'in' me, of stealin' cattle,

I'm goin' to kill you. Take your choice. Swallow the lie, or go for your gun. It is all one to me."

There followed a silent tableau of fear and hate. There was death in the hard blue eyes of Dick Savage, as he stood poised as if for a spring at Joe Venner's throat. From the quiet, rather retiring cowboy that they had all known for several years, Dick had changed to a menacing, two-gun terror. His guns hung well forward, and his hands were just over them, in position for the lightning draw that they knew he could make.

Joe Venner was white to the lips with fear—cold, clammy fear. He was a handsome man, in his late thirties. Dark, with black hair and brown eyes, his face only spoiled by the lines of greed about his mouth, and a fixed sneer of contempt on his lips. That sneer had wilted now. One minute before Dick entered the saloon Joe had his chest puffed out as the virtual owner of the world. Bill Deaver had spent the night at the Flying V, arriving there the evening before, after Val Doane had left. Bill had told his story of the arrest and escape of Dick Savage. Joe had only laughed, and said:

"Well, you got him on the run now. He'll take to the roughs. You can get him. Just watch Poke Wood's house. He'll go back to the girl. Once a man goes crazy over a woman, he's as good as got. It's your job. You are sheriff. Take him and throw him in jail. I'll do the rest—if there is anything to do. If he opens on you, kill him. That would suit me all right, and you'd be in the clear."

It had been easy enough for Joe to make that talk in his own home, with a few drinks in him, but now, with those cold blue eyes on him, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and not a sound would come. Joe Venner was waiting for the sheriff to do his duty, but Bill Deaver still wanted to live a while longer.

"WELL," snapped Dick, "say something, or go for your hardware, you dirty liar and thief. If you are any sort of a man, you'll make a move. Either swallow the lie, or get ready."

Joe was swallowing, all right, and swallowing hard, but it was his heart that he was trying to swallow back to its usual position, and not the lie that was in his throat. He wondered if Bill Deaver would never make a move to take this killer.

There was a swift move. Dave Roach and Ben Watts, both cold killers, and pilot fish for the ranchman, swung in front of Joe and went for their guns.

"Hold on, boys," warned Dick. "I don't want to kill you. Joe Venner is the gent I'm after. No use you mixing into this."

Bill Deaver thought it was time to do his stuff, while the two killers went for their guns. Bill was leaning against the bar, a little nearer to Dick than the other three men. He went for his gun and got it, but Dick saw him out of the corner of his eye. One of his guns spat. The sheriff's gun clattered to the floor, and it would be some time before that arm was of any use to him.

Dave and Ben were on the ready. Joe Venner saw his chance and darted for the side door, which was around the end of the bar. Both of Dick's guns spouted fire, and the two killers went down. Not dead, but out of that fight, and any other that might come up in the near future.

Dick sprang around them and made for the back door, but Joe Venner was

gone. He had vaulted to his saddle, and was galloping madly away when Dick reached the street. Refusing to fire on Joe's back, Dick holstered his guns and went back into the saloon. The barkeep and the porter had got up from behind the bar, and were trying to stop the blood of some pretty bad wounds in Bill Deaver and the two killers. Dick helped them, until the blood was stopped, and then he said:

"Dave, you and Ben brought this on yourselves. I could have killed you just as well, but I didn't want to. Take care of yourselves, and you'll get all right. And you, Bill. This is your last warning. I told you yesterday that I was not going to try to miss you again. I didn't miss you, but I just stopped you. Next time—there had better not be any next time."

Dick turned and left the saloon. He meant to get Joe Venner, but he was not fool enough to follow Joe to the Flying V and jump the whole outfit. He was pretty sure that he would never be able to catch Joe, then, for Venner was riding a real horse. Dick mounted, and was debating in his mind whether to follow Joe, when he heard a rumble of hoofs as about twenty riders came storming into the east end of the street. Joe Venner had known very well where he was going when he escaped from the Silver Spur. He knew the rest of his outfit were coming to town, and he meant to hurry them on.

Dick was wild, with the bravery of rage, but he was not a fool. He turned and raced west out of town.

VENNER and his men did not see Dick. They stormed on to the Silver Spur and stopped.

"Where's Dick Savage?" bawled Venner as they entered the place.

"Why, he just went out of here," replied the barkeep. "Didn't y'all see him?"

"No, but we will see him. Come on, fellers. He'll go to the Box D. Val Doane will give him up. Val ain't a fool. He knows who runs this country. Let's ride."

"Wait a minute, Joe," said Bill Deaver, who was now leaning against the bar with his arm in a sling. "You better let Dick Savage alone. He gives you a chance to talk, a while ago, and you got clean away. Next time, he's going to kill you first and let you talk afterward."

"That's what you say," sneered Joe. "Dick is on the run, now, and we've got him where we want him. He's a killer, and Val Doane won't harbor him. All we got to do is watch Poke Wood's shack, and pick Dick up like a dog does a rabbit. Nary one man on earth can whip the whole Flying V outfit. You may of been a pretty good sheriff once, but you ain't worth a damn now. Appoint Hub Connor deputy, and give him that warrant, so's we'll have the law back of us, and we'll get Dick Savage."

If the way that Bill Deaver felt when he had turned the job of taking Dick Savage over to Hub Connor meant anything, Elijah must have felt pretty good after he dropped his mantle on Elisha. Bill Deaver felt pretty good to be out of the mess with only a broken arm, and he set out at once to find a doctor who could do something for it.

WITH their new leader, the Flying V riders started to follow Dick Savage to the Box D. Hub Connor was foreman of the Flying V. Hub was pretty sure that he would make a good sheriff, and Joe

Venner had him in mind for Deaver's successor. Hub was a bristly giant, who ruled the tough punchers of the Flying V with an iron hand. He was an accurate and fairly swift gunner, with an inborn desire to kill somebody. The band of riders took a drink, then mounted and swept out of town to the west. They were about a mile from town when they met Val Doane and his little band of men.

"Hi'ya, Joe," greeted Doane.

"Hi'ya, Val," returned Joe Venner. "Have you saw anything of Dick Savage on the trail?"

"No, I haven't," said Val.

"Well, he rides out this way. He was in town a while ago. He shoots up Dave and Ben, and puts a bullet through Bill Deaver's arm, and then—"

"What did Dick do that for?" asked Val innocently.

"Why, Bill has a warrant for him, and goes to arrest him. After the mess, Dick rides out of town, goin' to'd the Box D. Bill, he appoints Hub Connor deputy, and we are goin' to take Dick."

"Oh, y'are?" said Val Doane. "Well, you listen to me. Dick didn't go back to the Box D. If he goes there, you and your men can't take him away from there."

"Huh—what!" said Joe Venner. "Mean to say that you aim to defy the law, and—"

"I mean," said Val slowly, "that Dick Savage has not committed any crime. I don't care what he is charged with, nor who charges it. If you want to go on to the Box D and look for him, the road's open. He ain't there, but if he was, you couldn't take him."

"See here, Val," said Joe, white with rage. "Do you mean that you want war with the Flying V?"

"No," said Val. "I don't want to start a war with anybody, and I'm not going to, but if anybody starts one with me I'll do my damnedest to finish it. Dick was at the Box D last night, and I talked to him. He told me all about this mess. I told him I'd talk it over with him this morning, but I didn't. He was white enough not to want to drag the Box D into his troubles, and he left by himself before daylight.

"The Box D is not in the quarrel—yet. As long as Dick wants to fight his own battles, and stays away from the Box D, and you stay away from there, we won't be in it; but—now is a good time for you to get this. If you think, because I have always tried to keep out of trouble, that I'm afraid of anything that God Almighty ever put whiskers on, you made a mistake. I've let you run this country because you wanted to, and I didn't, but I damn shore aim to run the Box D.

"I and these boys are going into town to take some drinks and play a little poker. If you want to go to the Box D and look for Dick, go ahead. The whole spread is there, and if Dick went there he's with 'em. If you think a mess like that will taste good, bite into it, but when you do that you have started war, with *me*."

Val Doane shook his bridle and rode on toward Dry Lake, with Leck Munson by his side and the other men following, while Joe Venner, his new sheriff, and the rest of his gang stood in the trail looking silly.

"That was a pretty cold talk you gives Joe," said Leck.

"I aimed for it to be cold," replied Val Doane. "I been watching Joe Venner, and I noticed that his britches was getting pretty tight lately. As long as he wanted to run the rest of the coun-

ty, and let me alone, it was all right with me; but when he talks about jumping the Box D, that's something else. They won't go on. If they do—they won't come back. My boys are on the prod."

"Where do you reck'n Dick is at?" asked Leck.

"I wish I knew," said Val. "Damn his crazy hide, he's as independent as a hog on ice. He won't hardly ask one of his friends for a light. He never talks about himself, but he told me one day that he didn't have ary friend on earth, and knowed it. I didn't tell him so, but I knowed that wild as he is, they ain't a man on the Box D spread that wouldn't slip a shoulder for him. If he's gone on the loose, that's his business. If he don't come back to the Box D, we'll have to get along without him, and if Joe Venner don't mess with us, we are not going to mess with him. I know plumb well that Dick slipped out on us this morning to keep us out of the mess, and he'll do it if he can."

A QUARTER of a mile from where they had met Venner they looked back. The Flying V riders were standing in a group where they had left them. They were having an argument. Some of the hotheads, Hub Connor among them, wanted to go on and take the Box D apart. They insisted that Val Doane had lied about Dick not going back that way; but Joe Venner had another thought. He knew that Val Doane didn't lie to anybody, and he knew pretty well what that cold note in Val's voice meant. He had heard Val talk cold turkey before, and he knew that he always made it stick.

"Now, listen to me, boys," said Venner. "I reck'n I'm still boss of this outfit. I don't want a mess with Val Doane, and if we go on to the Box D we get one. All I want is Dick Savage. I want him, dead or alive, and prefer him dead. He's wolf-wild, and on the kill. I don't believe he's at the Box D. It would be like him to try to keep Val Doane out of this. Dick thinks he can play a lone hand, and whip the world, but he can't."

"Well," growled Hub Connor, "how are we goin' to get him if we don't look for him?"

"Just like this," said Venner. "I'll let you pick five men from this outfit, and you take his trail. He'll go to Poke Wood's cabin to see that girl before very long. Maybe to-night. Right now, we'll all go back to town. We'll act friendly with Val and his hands, drink and play poker with them, like nothin' has happened. Then you can pick your men and slip out on Dick's trail."

When Val Doane glanced back from a little rise half a mile farther on, and almost in the edge of town, he saw Venner and his men following.

"Looks like Joe decided what was at the Box D wouldn't taste good to him and his hands." That was all Val said.

The Flying V riders came on into town. They scattered about the two saloons, bought drinks, and went out of their way to be friendly to Val Doane's men, and Val's punchers were just as friendly; but they were watching every move.

Hub Connor may have thought he was slipping out of town with five picked killers, but the Box D men knew when he went, and had a pretty good idea what he was going to try to do. About mid-afternoon Val Doane and his men mounted and rode for the Box D.

"Val," said Leck Munson, as they

rode along, " what do you make of this mess?"

" About the nastiest thing this country ever knew," said Val, " if Dick goes back to the Box D and Joe Venner tries to take him away from our spread. I don't believe Dick will do that. He feels like it's his quarrel with Joe, and don't want us hurt. I think he has just gone bronc and took to the roughs, but I wouldn't give a nickel with a hole in it for Joe Venner's hide. Dick is goin' to kill him."

DICK SAVAGE had seen the meeting of Venner and Doane, from a distance of about four hundred yards. The trail ran right along the south edge of the open country. To the south of it was broken points of the foothills. Dick had hidden his horse in a gulch, and was lying on the ground behind a clump of bushes. He saw the whole thing, and while he could hear nothing, he had a pretty good idea of what was passing between the two outfits.

When Val and his boys went on to town, and pretty soon Venner and his gang followed, Dick knew that a clash between the two outfits had been avoided, for the time at least, and he hoped for all time. He didn't want to see a lot of men killed over his troubles. His business was with Joe Venner, and sooner or later he would settle it. Until he did, he would never go back to the Box D.

Two hours later he was watching Dry Lake when six men rode away from there. He couldn't make out who they were, but he guessed what they were going to try to do. He walked back to his horse, mounted, and rode on into the hills.

That night, in a little hidden pocket of the foothills, Dick Savage made coffee, and ate some of the food he had prepared for such an emergency. All that day he had not thought once of anything, except his desire and determination to kill Joe Venner. After eating, he smoked a while, still mulling over the best means of getting to Joe Venner, without facing an army of killers. At last Dick mashed out the stub of his cigarette and lay down on his saddle blanket. Then it happened.

He looked up at those silent, friendly old stars, and his agreement with Myra Blake came back to his mind. There had been no stars in the daytime, as he had said, to remind him of it, but now it all came back to him with a rush.

He had agreed with Myra that they would try to fight their way back from Hell to Paradise, and he had stumbled. All that day he had been doing his best to get farther into Hell. True, he had not killed, but he had sorely wounded three men and had meant to kill. All that had saved Joe Venner was that he slipped out behind the smoke screen that Dave and Ben and the sheriff had made.

" I'll kill him yet," mused Dick. " He's right in the middle of the trail from Hell to Paradise, and I got to kill him, to get by, and—get Myra by." Dick felt a tingly sensation at the thought, and then:

" No, ain't a chance of that. She's clean-strain thoroughbred, all right, and she'll go, but I ain't low enough to ask her to tie up with a wolf like me. No. I'll give her a hand on the trail from Hell to Paradise, when I can. Then when she gets a good start, I'll get out of the way.

" Some day I'll go back to Poke's cabin. She'll be safe until I come. She'll be willing to go back to civilized

folks by that time. I got some money. I don't need it. Poke can make her think he's letting her have it, to be paid back when she can. I—I'd rather not see her again. I reck'n I went sorty crazy out there under them stars that night. A woman like her might make a human of me, but—no, it wouldn't be fair to let her try it. She might fail, and then we'd both slip plumb back to Hell."

Dick turned on his side, pillowed his head on his arm, and went to sleep, unaware that he was going to sleep soundly while Myra Blake was passing a rough place on that trail from Hell to Paradise, and needed his hand to sustain her.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

* * *

A Quarter's Worth of Oysters

WHAT was perhaps the strangest case of its kind was just heard recently in a magistrate's court in Canada, and settled to the satisfaction of both parties.

A tramp had an insatiable appetite for raw oysters. He begged a quarter from a passerby and entered a sea food restaurant near the docks that catered to his kind of trade. He ordered raw oysters and, shelling them himself, he began eating them, although he hadn't yet paid for them. With the third oyster in his mouth, he felt something that he thought was a piece of shell. He dropped it from his mouth to his hand and to his surprise he saw that it was a beautifully shaped black pearl. He dropped it into his one good pocket quickly. But he wasn't quick enough. The owner of the restaurant had seen it. The proprietor demanded the pearl from the tramp, but the tramp claimed it as his own as he had bought the oysters and everything that went with them. But as the oysters were not yet paid for, the proprietor maintained that the pearl was his. When the tramp heard this he offered to pay for the oysters, but when he reached into his pocket for the money it was gone.

He searched himself frantically but could not find the coin. The proprietor then claimed that the tramp was trying to defraud him of a meal and so called a policeman. The cop couldn't decide to whom the pearl belonged so he took them both to court.

The pearl was handed to the magistrate; he heard both sides of the story and pondered the thing. Finally he sent for an appraiser who valued the stone at two hundred dollars. The judge asked him if he would pay that much for it and he said that he would. He wrote out a check and purchased the pearl. The judge sent one of the officers to cash the check and when he came back with the cash the judge gave each man a hundred dollars and shooed them out of court. They both left, completely satisfied with the manner in which the case had been settled.

Albert M. Vitale.

"Quick! You're going to help me! Take this automatic!"

The Black Schooner

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

They appeared to be six harmless hoboes lounging in a Florida "ghost" town. Which one was wanted by the Secret Service?

HE was of average build, not older than twenty-five, unshaven, in clothing that once had been very good, but now was sadly in need of laundry and the presser's iron. His jaw had the cast of a fighter, and he had a pair of keen gray eyes in his head.

They were eyes that missed little or nothing as he walked along the grass-grown, jungle-bordered main street of a Florida beach "ghost" town, a part of the residue of the late wild "boom." All the houses were of cheap stucco, he noted, and peeling off fast now.

A mischievous jay hooted at him from the head of a ragged cabbage-palm. Another jay sat hidden among the branches of a flaming poinciana gone wild, and laughed at him. He heard the nasty buzz of a rattlesnake somewhere in the street grass to his left. Giving no especial attention to any of this, he proceeded to the heart of the silent, sun-blasted town. There, at last, he heard the sound of a human voice.

"Hi, 'bo."

"Hi," he called back.

He had stopped short and stood facing the verandah of a stucco building that had been meant for a hotel. There

in the shade, in makeshift chairs, lounged six men. They, also, were unshaven and in clothing that could have been much improved by laundry, needle, and presser's iron. Four of them were big fellows, aged somewhere between thirty and forty. One was young and slender. The sixth was a Bahama negro who had an ear missing. It had been the biggest of the big fellows, a man who was almost dark enough to be a Mexican, who had hailed the newcomer.

Without waiting for an invitation, the newcomer ambled up to the verandah. He took off his slouch hat, and with a curved forefinger raked perspiration from his brow. "Hot," he said, simply.

The biggest man spoke again. He had the blatant air of a sideshow spieler. "Welcome to our city, which same is miscalled Paradise! Funny what pipe dreams them knickered real estate tiger sharks had, ain't it? You see before you our whole and entire population, all strangers here, and strangers to each other. Gimme your moniker, 'bo, and I'll interduce us!"

"Sometimes it's not considered polite to ask a man his name," quietly said the seventh of these strangers in Paradise. "Suppose we say I'm Jack Jackson, and let it go at that?"

The spokesman for the whole and entire population of Paradise nodded understandingly. "That'll be okay, 'bo. Where you from?"

The man who had given Jack Jackson as a name narrowed keen gray eyes and said nothing at all. His questioner shrugged. "Well, I guess that's okay too. Now to the interductions. Me, I'm Bill Western. These other hombres is Pennsy Red, Still Henry, Arkansaw Traveler, Tennessee Slim, and Thomas Brailey."

Not one of the five opened his mouth. Tennessee Slim was the young one. Thomas Brailey was the black Bahaman.

"Looks like a nice place to rest up for awhile," observed Jack Jackson. "What does it cost?"

"Oh, not much," Bill Western said. "Dollar or so a week. Brailey here, he rustles the grub and does the cookin', and we pays him. There's free oysters and clams and fish. Over across the bayou is a town—you must 'a' seen it—where Brailey can buy groceries. That bayou wasn't there when Paradise was built. A September hurricane washed it in, and cut Paradise off except when the tide's low. You happened along at low tide. Yes, it's a nice place to rest up for awhile, Jack."

He finished with a meaning wink. Tennessee Slim drawled in friendly fashion—it was, unmistakably, the drawl of a mountaineer:

"None o' the houses is funnished, Jack, and here in the hotel they's only what funnicher we could scrape up and build ourselves. You ort to have a blanket to sleep on. I got two, and I'll loan you one. Muskeeters gives us hell at night, 'lessen we sleeps in rooms that's screened. Mine is, and you can sleep there. I'm a'goin' down to the beach fer a swim in the surf now. I got some salt-water soap. Want to go along?"

"Many thanks," said Jack Jackson. "You bet I want to go along. I need it, sure."

"Yeah," Bill Western said, none too pleasantly, "you need it, Jack, all right. Freight trains is dirty, ain't they?"

TENNESSEE SLIM rose and went inside, and came back with soap and two cheap towels. At once he and the newcomer set out for

the nearby beach, where the light surf of the Gulf rolled lazily.

They had their dip, didn't stay in for long because of the threat of painful sunburn, and dressed in the shade of a sea-grape tree that was all snarled up in bayhop vine. The mountaineer had warmed fast toward Jackson. He answered questions readily now.

" Bill Western? He's the boss here —calls hisself the mayor o' Paradise, sometimes—and ef he ain't a bad aig, I never seen one. Pennsy Red and Arkansaw Traveler is both scrappers; they're bad aigs too, I'd bet. I cain't be shore about the feller which is called Still Henry. He don't talk, y'see. All of 'em is tramps, I figger, here in Floridy endurin' the winter months. As consarns me, Jack, I—"

The young mountain man paused, grinned and went on:

" I'm a-goin' to trust you, Jack. Anyhow, I'm so homesick I don't much give a damn. Back on Ripshin Bald Mountain in Tennessee I whupped hell out o' a polecat which walked on two laigs, and was arrested and tried and sentenced to thutty days in jail fer 'sault and battery, and I 'scaped on the fo'teenth day. I been a thinkin' lately that I'd go back home and sarve t'other sixteen days, Jack. Because I might hafta kill Bill Western ef I stays on here long. A Western man, him? Ef he's from the West, I'm from the Nawth Pole!"

Jackson laughed. " It would seem," he muttered, " that you don't particularly like Bill."

" Say!" exploded Tennessee Slim. " Now jest what do you think he done, only this mawnin'? I'll tell you. He 'lowed 'at ef I didn't do his washin' fer him, he'd call the sheriff over here —they's a sheriff in that town over beyant the piney woods—and git him to 'vestigate me! Can you tie that, Jack?"

" Going back home of your own free will is probably the best move you can make, kid," very soberly said Jack Jackson. " I—er, I'm sorry I can't tell you my own story. You might talk in your sleep. But I'll tell you one thing, Tennessee, provided you'll swear you won't mention it to any of the rest of the gang. How about it?"

" Sol'mnly swear," breathed Tennessee Slim.

Jackson's gaze roamed the shimmering far reaches of the Gulf for a moment. Then he said: " It will sound crazy to you, kid, maybe, though it's anything but crazy. I'm looking for a ship, a black schooner with red sails. Haven't seen one, have you?"

The other shook his head, and Jackson was keenly disappointed. Suddenly the mountaineer laughed. " Haw, haw, haw! I ain't seen no ship like that, ner neither have I seen any feathered pink elephants with purple toenails, green ankles, and yeller snoots. Haw, haw, haw! Pokin' fun at me, Jack, huh?"

" I was afraid it would sound too wild for you," said Jackson. " I'm thirsty, Tennessee. Let's find a drink of water. Also, I'm hungry. What time does the one-eared black boy serve supper?"

The Bahaman called the seven strangers into the dining room at sundown. He was careful to collect a dollar in advance from the new man. " I afraid you might blooming well run off, sar," he explained.

When the meal was finished, the big, dark Bill Western beckoned Jack Jackson into the hot, dusty, and furnitureless lobby.

" I happen to know," began Western, in a whisper, " what you're wanted for. Maybe I saw your picture in the

papers. Now keep your shirt on, Jack. I won't do you harm, not a bit. Not if you does what I says, I won't. All I'm askin' is, I got some clothes which needs washin', and they's a tank o' good, soft rainwater behind the hotel here. Well, Jack?"

The keen eyes of the seventh stranger narrowed. "The sheriff, eh? I think you're bluffing, but— All right. First thing tomorrow."

Bill Western grinned. It was a triumphant grin, and it said, quite plainly, "I thought that would bring you. You may think I'm bluffing, but you're not going to take a chance."

ARKANSAW TRAVELER, Tennessee Slim, Still Henry and the sandy-haired Pennsy Red passed through the lobby on their way to the verandah. Western joined them. Laughter came from the verandah shortly afterward. Jack Jackson frowned. He walked over to a window and gazed absent-mindedly at a tangled clump of *sangre de Cristo* in the encroaching jungle outside.

Then a hand fell lightly on his shoulder. He turned to see the lean countenance of the youthful mountaineer, which was a picture of mixed resentment, pity and contempt.

"Know what they're a-laughin' at out there, Jack, don't you?" soberly breathed Tennessee Slim.

"Well—what?"

"Ahout you a'bein' Bill Western's washerwoman, that's what!" The Tennesseean almost spat this, though it came in low tones. "He's tried the same trick on every one o' the rest of us, but it didn't work. Yeah, Jack, you're crazy. No doubt ahout it. Fust you're a-lookin' fer a black ship with red sails—even me, I got sense enough to know that no kind o' ship could git 'in a mile o' land here, 'count o' the shaller water, so you couldn't never 'scape that way—and now you 'grees to wash—"

Jack Jackson cut in, whispering fast: "Listen, kid, I'm getting a great break, I think, and you mustn't spoil anything! You promised you wouldn't mention that ship. Remember it, don't you? Not that I'm much afraid that you will, for I believe I know a man when I see one. I simply want to make sure."

"Feller, git this," the mountain man said gravely. "Keepin' my word is mighty near all the religion I got or ever did have. You a-hein' a flunky fer Bill Western shorely ain't no funeral o' mine. Only—my gosh, Jack, you ain't even made out o' the same kind o' dirt that big skunk is, and it seems sich a hell of a shame."

Tennessee Slim faced about abruptly and went toward the dining room. A moment later, Jack Jackson overheard him wheedling the one-eared Bahaman out of another helping of tinned peaches.

There was much at stake for Jackson. So much, in fact, that he slept little that night. His roommate snored, but he was scarcely aware of it. His thoughts were all upon that which he had at stake.

Early on the next morning, he went to the room that the boss of these strangers in Paradise had chosen for his own, and entered without rapping. Bill Western lay sprawled on a blanket fast asleep.

"Where are the clothes you wanted washed?" quietly asked Jackson.

The big man sat up blinking and swearing. Then—"Oh, the clothes," sleepily. "Just a minute, Jack. See that you hangs 'em in the sun where they'll dry quick, because they're all I

got, and britches and sweaters scratches to beat the devil without underwear."

Soon he had tossed over his shirt, underwear and socks, and was picking up a pair of trousers and a button sweater. Jackson, the bundle in one hand, left the room and closed the door behind him.

But instead of going down to the rainwater tank behind the hotel building, he returned to the room that he had shared with Tennessee Slim. The mountaineer was wide awake now, and staring out of homesick eyes at one of the blank walls. Jackson dropped the bundle as though it were contaminated, and sprang lightly to the slender figure on the blanket.

"Up quick, Tennessee," he ordered with a snap. "You're going to help me with this; get me? Take this automatic!"

"*Yeah,* I am!" It was a hoot of irony. "I wouldn't—"

Jackson's interruption was sharp. He bent and for two minutes talked rapidly in undertones.

Tennessee Slim helped him.

THE elderly sheriff in the town nearest the "ghost" town on the beach had just settled himself at his scarred desk, that morning, when three men, strangers, walked in from the liveoak-shaded street. One of the three was Bill Western. Another was the man who had called himself Jack Jackson. The third was the mountaineer.

"Now what?" growled the sheriff, after he had noted that the big newcomer's companions each held the muzzle of an automatic pistol snug against the big newcomer's ribs.

"I'm E. J. Hollingsworth of the Secret Service," began "Jackson," displaying a badge with his free hand. "My prisoner is Fred Booher, alias 'Sailor' Hensley, alias George Barlow, alias Bill Western. He's wanted for robbery, murder, and counterfeiting. I'm asking you to keep him in a jail cell until I can rid myself of this disguise of dirt and otherwise get ready for the next northbound train. I mustn't risk losing him. You see, I'm young in the Service.

"Sure you've got the right man, are you?"

"Dead sure," was the prompt answer. "I'd trailed him to this section. Found him with three other big men, and didn't know which was which, as the saying is, since I'd never seen even his photo. The other three didn't put up much fight when the kid and I started off with Western—"

"We shore thought they would!" the Tennesseean exclaimed.

"—so they're probably just hoboes," continued Hollingsworth. "There was only one way of positively identifying the man, and I had to keep that pretty well to myself for fear of scaring the real criminal off. Didn't want to make a false arrest, of course. Then I had a fine break. He wanted me to wash his clothes, and when he took them off I had his identity cinched."

Hollingsworth smiled at the mountaineer. "Maybe I won't seem so crazy to you now, kid. Get an eyeful of this, will you? You too, Sheriff."

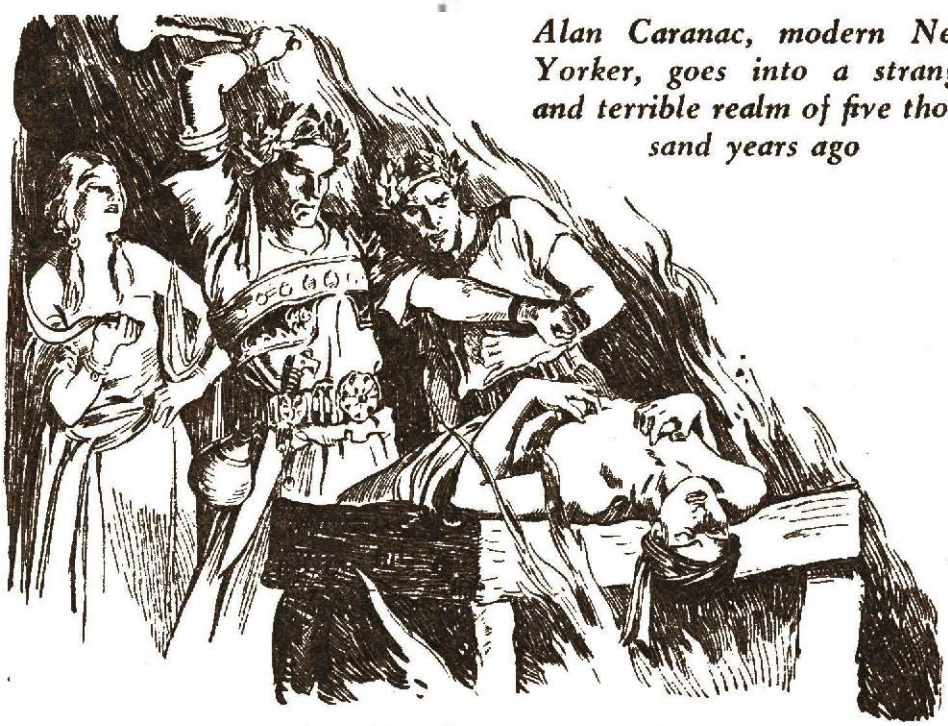
Swiftly he unbuttoned the big crook's sweater, revealing a wide expanse of chest.

"Ef that—don't—beat anything!" gasped Tennessee Slim.

The big crook had once been a sailor. Tattooed across his chest there was a black schooner with red sails.

THE END

Alan Caranac, modern New Yorker, goes into a strange and terrible realm of five thousand years ago



The sacrifice began as Alan watched

Creep, Shadow!

By A. MERRITT

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ONE of the weirdest scientific battles of history began in New York when Dr. Alan Caranac returned from a world trip and learned that his friend, Dick Ralston, had committed suicide. Ralston had killed himself, right enough, but he had been prompted to do it by the beautiful and unscrupulous Demoiselle Dahut d'Ys de Keradel, an expert hypnotist and daughter of Dr. Rene de Keradel.

The De Keradels claimed to have mastered the secret of reincarnation of souls. Dahut, in fact, told Alan that he and she were reincarnations of two lovers who had lived thousands of years ago in ancient Brittany. Alan found this hard to believe, but how else could he explain the knowledge he seemed to have of days long ago—unless by hypnotism exerted by the Demoiselle?

Arrayed against the De Keradels and their "shadows" were Alan; Dr. Austin Lowell; Dr. William Bennett, Alan's close friend; Helen Bennett, with whom Alan was in love; and by no means least, McCann, an underworld friend of Dr. Lowell's.

When the De Keradels went to Rhode Island and purchased a home on the shore, McCann followed to investigate. He learned that a huge stone cairn had been built inside the grounds; that the estate had been walled off; and that many people had been disappearing from the countryside.

At Dahut's command, Alan went to visit her. He hoped to secure evidence with

This story began in the Argosy for September 8

which to convict her of murder. He is telling the story.

CHAPTER XIV *(Continued).*

BEHIND DE KERADEL'S WALL.

THE Demoiselle was regarding me with frank amusement. I said, indifferently: "You have perfect discipline, Dahut."

Again she laughed. "Perfect, Alain. Let us go to lunch."

We went to lunch. That, too, was perfect. Somewhat too perfect. The two stewards who served us were like the others I had seen; and they served us on bent knees. The Demoiselle was a perfect hostess. We talked of this and that...and steadily I forgot what she probably was, and thought of her as what she seemed to be. Only toward the last did that which was buried deep in both our minds crop out. The blank-eyed stewards had knelt, and gone. I said, half to myself:

"Here feudal and the modern meet."

She answered, quietly: "As they do in me. But you are too conservative in naming feudal times, Alain. My servants go further back than that. As do I."

I said nothing. She held her wine glass against the light, turned it to catch the colors, and added, casually: "As do you!"

I lifted my own glass, and touched hers with its rim. "To ancient Ys? If so, I drink to it."

She answered gravely: "To ancient Ys . . . and we drink to it."

We touched glasses again, and drank. She set down her glass and looked at me, faint mockery in her eyes and, when she spoke, within her voice.

"Is it not like a honeymoon, Alain?"

I said, coldly: "If so—it would be somewhat lacking in novelty, would it not?"

She flushed a little at that. She said: "You are rather—brutal, Alain."

I said: "I might feel more a bridegroom if I felt less like a prisoner."

Her straight brows drew together, and for a moment the hell sparks danced in her eyes. She dropped her eyes and said, demurely, although the angry flush still stained her cheeks:

"But you are so—elusive, my beloved. You have such a gift for disappearance. There was nothing for you to fear—that night. You had seen what I had willed you to see, done as I had willed...why did you run away?"

That stung; the sleeping wrath and hate against her that I had known since I met her flared up; I caught her wrists.

"Not because I *feared* you, white witch. I could have strangled you while you slept."

She asked, tranquilly, and tiny dimples showed beside her lips:

"Why didn't you?"

I dropped her hands. "I may still. That was a wonderful picture you painted in my sleeping mind."

She stared at me, incredulously. "You mean . . . you do not think it was real? That Ys was not—real?"

"No more real, Dahut, than the world in which the minds of the men on this boat live. At your command—or your father's."

She said, somberly: "Then I must convince you of its reality."

I said, rage still hot within me: "Nor more real than your shadows, Dahut."

She said, yet more somberly: "Then of those, too, you must be convinced."

THE moment I had said that about the shadows I was sorry for it. Her reply did nothing to reassure me. I cursed myself. This was no way to play the game. There was no advantage to be gained by quarreling with the Demoiselle. It might, indeed, bring down upon those I was trying to protect precisely what I was trying to save them from. Was that the meaning behind her promise to convince me? She was pledged so far as Bill was concerned and here I was in payment—but she had made no pledges as to Helen.

If I was to play my game, it must be to the limit; convincingly; with no reservations. I looked at Dahut and thought, with a sharp pang of compunction for Helen, that if the Demoiselle were a willing part-

ner it would have its peculiar compensations. And then I thrust Helen out of my mind, as though she might read that thought.

And there was only one way to convince a woman.

I stood up. I took the glass from which I had drunk and I took Dahut's glass and threw them to the cabin floor, splintering. I walked to the door and turned the key. I went to Dahut and lifted her from the chair and carried her to the divan beneath the port. Her arms clung 'round my neck, and she raised her lips to mine . . . her eyes closed . . .

I said: "To hell with Ys and to hell with its mysteries. I live in to-day."

She whispered: "You love me?"

I answered: "I do love you."

"No!" She pushed me away. "In the long ago you loved me. Loved me even though you killed me. And in this life it was not you but the Lord of Carnac who for a night was my lover. Yet this I know—again in this life you must love me. But must you again kill me? I wonder, Alain . . . I wonder . . ."

I took her hands, and they were cold; in her eyes there was neither mockery nor amusement; there was vague puzzlement and vague dread. Nor was there anything of the witch about her. I felt a stirring of pity—what if she, like the others upon this boat, were victim of another's will? De Keradel's, who called himself her father . . . Dabut, who lay there looking at me with the eyes of a frightened maiden . . . and she was very beautiful . . .

She whispered: "Alain, beloved—better for you and better for me if you had not obeyed my summons. Was it because of that shadow I was forced to send your friend . . . or had you other reasons?"

That steadied me. I thought: *Witch, you are not so clever.*

I said, as though reluctantly: "There was another reason, Dahut."

She asked: "And that?"

"You," I said.

She bent toward me, took my chin in one soft hand and held my face close to hers.

"You mean that — Alain de Carnac?"

I said: "I may not love you as the—Lord of Carnac did. But I am tempted to try."

SHE leaned back at that, laughing—little rippling waves of laughter, careless and cruel.

"You woo me strangely, Alain. Yet I like it—for I know that what you say is truth. What do you truly think of me, Alain?"

I said: "I think of you as a garden that was planned under the red Heart of the Dragon ten thousand years before the Great Pyramid was built and its rays fell upon the altar of its most sacred shrine . . . a strange garden, Dahut, half of the sea . . . with trees whose leaves chant instead of whisper . . . with flowers that may be evil and may not be, but certainly are not wholly of earth . . . whose birds sing strange songs . . . difficult garden to enter . . . more difficult to find its heart . . . most difficult, once entered, to find escape."

She bent to me, eyes wide and glowing; kissed me. "You think that of me! And it is true . . . and the Lord of Carnac never saw me so truly . . . you remember more than he . . ."

She fastened my wrists, her breast against mine: "The red-haired girl—I forget her name—is she not a garden, too?"

Helen!

I said, indifferently: "A garden of earth. Fragrant and sweet. But no difficulty there about finding your way out."

She dropped my wrists, and sat for a time silent; then said, abruptly:

"Let us go up to deck."

I followed her, uneasily. Something had gone amiss, something I had said or had not said about Helen. But what the devil it could have been, I did not know. I looked at my watch. It was after four. There was a fog, but the yacht seemed not to mind it; instead of diminishing, it seemed to me that the speed had increased. As we sat on the deck chairs, I mentioned this to the Demoiselle. She said, absently: "It is nothing. There can be no danger."

I said: "The speed seems rather dangerous."

She answered: "We must be at Ys by seven."

I echoed, stupidly: "Ys?"

She said: "Ys. It is so we have named our home."

She sank back into silence. I watched the fog. It was an odd fog. It did not swirl past us as fog normally does. It seemed to go with us, to accommodate its pace to ours.

To move with us.

The wide-eyed. vacant-faced sailors padded past. I began to have a nightmarish sort of feeling that I was on a ship of ghosts, a modern Flying Dutchman, cut off from the rest of the world and sped on by unseen, unheard, unfelt winds. Or being pushed along by some gigantic swimmer whose hand was clasped about the stern of this boat..and whose breath was the fog that shrouded us. I glanced at the Demoiselle. Her eyes were shut, and she seemed to be fast asleep. I closed my own eyes.

WHEN I opened them, the yacht had stopped. There was no sign of fog. We lay in a little harbor between two rocky headlands. Dahut was shaking me by the shoulders. I was outlandishly sleepy. The sea air, I drowsily thought. We dropped into a tender, and landed at a dock. We climbed up steps, interminably, it seemed to me. A few yards from the top of the steps was a long, rambling old stone house. It was dark, and I could see nothing beyond it but the banks of trees, half-stripped by the autumn of their leaves.

We went into the house, were met by servants, wide-pupiled, impassive, as those who manned the Brittis. I was taken to my room, and a valet began to unpack my bags.

In the same torpor, I dressed for dinner. The only moment of real consciousness I had was when I put my hand up and felt McCann's holster under my armpit.

I have the vaguest recollection of the dinner. I know that de Keradel greeted me with the utmost politeness and hospitality. During the dinner, he talked on and on, but what he was talking about I'm damned if I know. Now and then I was aware acutely of the Demoiselle, her face and big eyes swimming out of the haze that gripped me. And now and then I thought that I must have been drugged—but whether I had or hadn't been didn't seem to matter. There was one thing that I was acutely conscious did matter, however — and that was how I answered de Keradel's questions. But another sense, or another self, unaffected by what had so paralyzed my normal ones, seemed to have taken charge of that, and I had the comfortable feeling that it was doing it most satisfactorily.

And after a while I heard Dahut say: "But, Alain, you are so sleepy. Why, you can hardly keep your eyes open. It must be the sea air."

I replied, solemnly, that it must indeed be the sea air and apologized for my dullness. I had a dim perception of the solicitous readiness with which de Keradel accepted the feeble excuses. He, himself, took me to my room. At least, I was hazily aware that he accompanied me to some place where there was a bed.

I rid myself of my clothes by sheer habit, dropped into the bed and in an instant was sound asleep.

I SAT up in my bed, wide-awake. The strange drowsiness was gone; the irresistible torpor lifted. What had awakened me? I looked at my watch, and it was a few minutes after one. The sound that had awakened me came again—a distant muffled chanting, as though from far under earth. As though from far beneath the old house.

It passed slowly from beneath the house, rising, approaching; becoming ever plainer. A weird chanting, archaic; vaguely familiar. I got up from the bed, and went to the windows. They looked out upon the ocean. There was no moon but I could see the gray surges breaking sullenly against the rocky shore. The chanting grew louder. I

did not know where was the switch to turn on the electrics. There had been a flash light in one of my bags, but these had been unpacked, their contents distributed.

I felt around in my coat and found a box of matches. The chanting was dying away, as though those singing were passing far beyond the house. I lighted a match, and saw a switch beside the wall. I pressed it, and without result. I saw my flash light on a table beside the bed. I clicked the catch, but no ray streamed forth. Suspicion began to take hold of me that these things were linked—the strange sleepiness, the useless flash, the unresponsive switch . . .

McCann's gun! I felt for it. There it was, nestling under my left armpit. I looked at it. The magazine was full and the extra clips safe. I went to the door and cautiously turned the key. It opened into a wide, old-fashioned hall at the end of which dimly glimmered a great window. The hall was curiously—uneasy. That is the only word for it. It was filled with whisperings and rustlings—and shadows.

I hesitated; then stole to the window and looked out. There was a bank of trees through whose half-bare branches I could see across a level field. Beyond that level field was another bank of trees. From beyond them came the chanting.

There was a glow through and over these trees—a gray glow. I stared at it . . . thinking of what McCann had said . . . like light decaying . . . rotten . . .

It was exactly that. I stood there, gripping the window, looking at the putrescent glow wax and wane . . . wax and wane. And now the chanting was like that dead luminescence transformed to sound . . .

And then a sharp scream of human agony shot through it.

The whisperings in the hall were peremptory. The rustlings were close. The shadows were pressing around me. They pressed me from the window, back to my room. I thrust the door shut against them, and leaned against it, wet with sweat.

Leaning against it, I heard again that scream of anguish, sharper, more agonized. And suddenly muffled.

Again the torpor swept over me. I crumpled down at the edge of the door, and slept.

CHAPTER XV.

RALSTON'S SHADOW.

SOMETHING was dancing, flittering, before me. It had no shape, but it had a voice. The voice was saying, over and over: "Dahut . . . beware of Dahut . . . Alan, beware of Dahut . . . give me release, Alan . . . but beware of Dahut . . . Alan, give me release. . . from the Gatherer . . . from the Blackness . . ."

I tried to focus upon this flittering thing, but there was a brilliancy about it into which it melted and was lost; a broad aureole of brilliancy and only when I turned my eyes from it could I see the thing dancing and flittering like a fly caught in a globule of light.

But the voice—I knew the voice.

The thing danced and flittered; grew larger but never assumed definite shape; became small, and still was shapeless . . . a flittering shadow caught in a brilliancy.

A shadow!

The thing whispered: "The Gatherer, Alan . . . the Gatherer in the Cairn . . . do not let It eat me . . . but beware, beware of Dahut . . . free me, Alan . . . free . . . free . . ."

Ralston's voice!

I lifted myself to my knees, crouching, hands on the floor; my eyes fixed upon the brilliancy—straining to focus this whispering, flittering thing that spoke with the voice of Ralston.

The brilliancy contracted—like the eyes of the captain of the Brittis. It became the knob of a door. A knob of brass glimmering in the light of dawn.

There was a fly upon the knob. A blue-bottle; a carrion fly. It was crawling over the knob, buzzing. The voice I had thought that of Dick was drained down into the buzzing; became one with it. There was only a blue-bottle fly flittering and buzzing upon a shining brass door-knob. The fly left the knob, circled me and was gone.

I staggered to my feet. I thought: *Whatever you did to me there on the boat, Dahut, it was a first-class job.* I looked at my wrist watch. It was a few minutes after six. I opened the door, cautiously. The hall was shadowless; tranquil. There was not a sound in the house. It seemed to sleep, but I didn't trust it. I closed the door quietly. There were great bolts at top and bottom which I dropped into place.

There was a queer emptiness in my head, and I could not see clearly. I made my way to the window and drew deep breaths of the sharp morning air, the tang of the sea strong within it. It made me feel better. I turned and looked at the room. It was immense; panelled in old wood; tapestries, colors softened by centuries, fell here and there. The bed was ancient, carved and postered and canopied. It was the chamber of some castle in Brittany, rather than that of a New England manse. At my left was an armoire, ancient as the bed. Idly, I opened a drawer. There upon my handkerchiefs lay my pistol. I pulled it open. Not a cartridge was in the chamber.

I LOOKED at it, unbelievingly. I knew that I had loaded it when I had placed it in one of my bags. Abruptly, its emptiness linked itself with the useless flash, the unresponsive switch, the strange sleepiness. It jarred me wide-awake. I put the gun back in the drawer and went and lay down on the bed. I hadn't the slightest doubt that something other than natural causes had induced the stupor. Whether it had been suggestion by Dahut while I lay asleep on the deck, or whether she had given me some soporific drug with my lunch, made no difference. It had not been natural. A drug? I remembered the subtle drug the Tibetan lamas administer — the drug they name "Master of the Will" which weakens all resistance to hypnotic control and renders the minds of those to whom it is given impotent against command, wide-open to hallucination.

All at once the behavior, the appearance, of the men on the boat, the servants in this house, fell into an understandable pattern. Suppose that all were being fed with such a drug; and moved and thought only as the Demoiselle and her father willed them to move and think? That I was surrounded by human robots, creatures who were reflections, multiplications, of the de Keradels?

And that I, myself, was in imminent peril of the same slavery?

Belief that something like this was the truth became stronger the more I thought over it. I strove to recall the conversation with de Keradel the night before. I could not—but I still retained the conviction I had passed the ordeal successfully; that the other sense or self which had taken charge had not allowed me to be betrayed. Deep within, I felt that assurance.

Suddenly, as I lay there, I felt other eyes upon me; knew that I was being watched. I was facing the windows. I drew a deep breath, sighed as one does in deep sleep, and turned with arm over face. Under its cover, with scarcely opened lids, I watched. In a few moments a white hand stole from behind a tapestry, drew it aside, and Dahut stepped into the room. Her braids fell below her waist, she wore the sheerest of silken negligees and she was incomparably lovely. She slipped to the bottom of the bed, soundlessly as one of her shadows, and stood studying me.

I forced myself to breathe regularly, as though in soundest slumber. She was so lovely that I found it rather difficult. She came to the side of the bed and leaned over me. I felt her lips touch my cheek as lightly as the kiss of a moth.

THEN, as suddenly, I knew she was gone.

I opened my eyes. There was another scent, unfamiliar, mingling with the breath of the sea. It was oddly stimulating. Breathing it, I felt the last traces of lethargy vanish. I sat up, wide-awake and alert. There was a shallow metal dish on the table beside the bed. Piled on it was a little heap of fern-like leaves. They were smoldering, and from their smoke came the

invigorating scent. I pressed out the sparks and instantly smoke and scent disappeared.

Evidently this was an antidote to whatever had induced the other condition; and quite as evidently there was no suspicion that I had not slept uninterruptedly throughout the night.

And possibly, it occurred to me, the shadow-crowded, rustling hall and the bluebottle fly that had buzzed with the voice of Ralston might have been by-products of this hypothetical drug; the sub-consciousness fantastically picturing under its influence, as it does in dream, chance sounds in terms of what has been engrossing the consciousness.

Maybe I really had slept through the night. Maybe I had only dreamed I had gone out into the shadow-crowded hall . . . and had fled from it and dropped down beside the door . . . had only dreamed the chanting.

But if there had been nothing they had wanted me to be deaf and blind to—then why had they bundled me up in that blanket of sleep?

Well, there was one thing I knew I had not dreamed.

That was Dahut slipping into the room with the leaves.

And that meant I hadn't acted precisely as they had expected, else I wouldn't have been awake to see her. There was one lucky break, whatever the cause. I would be able to use those leaves later, if they repeated the bundling.

I went over to the tapestry and raised it. There was no sign of opening, the panelling seemingly solid. Some secret spring existed, of course, but I postponed hunting for it. I unbarred the door; the bars were about as much a guarantee of privacy as one wall in a room with the other three sides open. I took what was left of the leaves, put them in an envelope and tucked them in McCann's holster. Then I smoked half a dozen cigarettes and added their ashes to those on the dish. They appeared about the same, and they were about what would have remained if all the leaves had burned. Maybe nobody would bother to check—but maybe they would.

By then it was seven o'clock. I wondered whether I ought to get up and dress. How long was it supposed to be before the antidote took effect? I had no means of knowing and no desire to make the least mistake. To sleep too long would be far safer than to wake too soon. I crawled back into bed. And I did go to sleep, honestly and dreamlessly.

WHEN I awakened there was a man laying out my clothes; the valet. The dish that had held the smoking leaves was gone. It was half after eight. I sat up and yawned, and the valet announced with antique humility that the Lord of Carnac's bath was ready. Despite all that the Lord of Carnac had on his mind, this combination of archaic servility and modern convenience made me laugh. But no smile answered me. The man stood, head bent, wound up to do and say certain things. Smiling had not been in his instructions.

I looked at his impassive face, the blank eyes which were not seeing me at all as I was, nor the world in which I lived, but were seeing me as another man in another world. What that world might be, I suspected.

I threw a robe over my pajamas and locked the bedroom door against him; unstrapped McCann's holster and hid it before bathing. When I came out I dismissed him. He told me that breakfast would be ready a little after nine, and bowing low, departed.

I went to the armoire, took out my gun and snapped it open. The cartridges were in place. Furthermore, the extra clips lay orderly beside where it had been. Had I also dreamed that it had been emptied? A sudden suspicion came to me. If I were wrong, I could explain it as an accident. I carried the gun to the window, aimed it at the sea and touched the trigger. There was only a sharp crack as the cap exploded. In the night the cartridges had been made useless and, without doubt, restored to the pistol during my later sleep.

Well, here was warning enough, I thought grimly, without any buzzing blue-bottle, and put the gun back. Then I went down to breakfast, cold with anger and disposed to be brutal if I had the chance. The Demoiselle was waiting for me, prosaically reading a newspaper. The table was laid for two, so I judged her father had business otherwhere. I looked at Dahut, and as always admiration and a certain tenderness reluctantly joined my wrath and my rooted hatred of her. I think I have mentioned her beauty before. She was never more lovely than now—a dewy freshness about her, like the dawn; her skin a miracle; clear-eyed, just the right touch of demureness . . . not at all the murderess and witch I knew her in my heart to be. Clean.

SHE dropped the paper and held out her hand.

I kissed it, ironically.

She said: "I do hope you slept soundly, Alan."

And that had just the right touch of domesticity. It irritated me still more. I dropped into my chair, spread my napkin over my knees. "Soundly, Dahut, except for a big blue-bottle fly that came and whispered to me."

Her eyes narrowed at that, and distinctly I saw her tremble. Then she dropped her eyes, and laughed: "You're joking, Alan."

I said: "I am not. It was a big blue-bottle that buzzed and whispered and buzzed and whispered."

She asked, quietly: "What did it whisper, Alan?"

"To beware of you, Dahut."

She asked, again quietly: "Were you awake?"

Now, regaining caution, I laughed: "Do blue-bottle flies whisper to people who are awake? I was sound asleep and dreaming—without doubt."

"Did you know the voice?" Her eyes lifted suddenly and held mine. I answered:

"When I heard it I seemed to know it. But now, awake, I have forgotten."

She was silent while the blank-eyed servant placed this and that before us. Then she said, half-wearily: "Put away your sword, Alan. For to-day, at least, you do not need it. And to-day, at least, I carry no weapons. I pledge you this, and you can trust me—for to-day. Treat me to-day only as—one who loves you greatly. Will you do this, Alan?"

It was said so simply, so sincerely, that my anger fled and my distrust of her weakened.

For the first time I felt a stirring of pity. She said:

"I will not even ask you to pretend to love me."

I said, slowly: "It would not be hard to love you, Dahut."

The violet of her eyes was misted with tears. She said: "I—wonder—"

I said: "A bargain. We meet for the first time this morning. I know nothing of you, Dahut, and to-day you will be to me only—what you seem to be. Perhaps by to-night I will be your—slave."

She said, sharply: "I asked you to put down your sword."

I had meant nothing more than what I had said. No innuendo . . . But now I heard again the voice that bad changed to the buzzing of a fly—"Beware . . . beware of Dahut . . . Alan, beware of Dahut . . ." And I thought of the blank-eyed, impassive men . . . slaves to her will or to her father's . . .

I would not put away the sword—but I would hide it.

I said, earnestly: "I haven't the slightest idea what you mean, Dahut. Really I haven't. I meant precisely what I said."

She seemed to believe me. And on that basis, piquant enough considering what had gone before in New York and ancient Ys, our breakfast continued. It had its peculiar charm. Before it was done I found myself dangerously close several times to thinking of the Demoiselle exactly as she wanted me to think of her. We dawdled, and it was eleven when we ended. She suggested a ride around the place, and with relief I went up to change my clothes. I had to snap my gun a few times and look at the leaves in McCann's holster to clear my

mind of disarming doubts. Dahut had a way with her.

WHEN I came down she was in riding breeches, her hair braided around her head like a helmet. We went to the stables. There were a dozen first class horses. I looked around for the black stallion. I didn't see it, but there was a box stall where it might have been. I picked out a sweet roan and Dahut a leggy bay. What I wanted most to see was de Keradel's " rockery." I didn't see it.

We trotted along a well-made bridle path which gave occasional vistas of the water, but most of the time the rocks and trees shut off the ocean. It was a peculiar layout and one better adapted for solitude I have never seen. We came at last to the wall, turned and rode along it. Wicked, inverted chevaux-de-frise guarded the top, and there were a couple of wires that I suspected of carrying heavy voltage. They could not have been there when 'Lias had scaled the wall. I thought that probably he had taught a lesson as well as received one. And here and there stood several of the swarthy little men. They had clubs, but how otherwise armed I could not tell. They knelt as we passed them.

We came to a massive gate, and there was a garrison of half a dozen. We rode past the gate and came to a wide, long meadow land dotted with stunted bushes, crouching like cowering men. It came to me that this must be where the unfortunate 'Lias had encountered the dogs that weren't dogs. Under the sun, the brisk air and the exhilaration of riding, that story had lost many of its elements of reality. Yet the place had a frightened, forbidding aspect. I mentioned this casually to Dahut. She looked at me with a secret amusement; answered as casually: " Yes - but there is good hunting here."

She rode on without saying what kind of hunting. Nor did I ask; for there had been that about her answer which had abruptly restored my faith in 'Lias's veracity.

We came to the end of the wall, and it was built in the rock as McCann had said. There was a big breast of the rock which shut off view of what lay beyond. I said:

" I'd like to take a look from here." And before she could answer, had dismounted and climbed the rock. From the top, it was open ocean. A couple of hundred yards from shore were two men in a small fishing boat. They raised their heads as they saw me, and one drew out a hand net and began dipping with it.

Well, McCann was on the job.

I scrambled down and joined Dahut. I asked: " How about riding back and going out the gate for a canter. I'd like to see more of the countryside."

She hesitated, then nodded; we rode back and through the garrison and out upon a country road. In a little while we sighted a fine old house, set well back among big trees. A stone wall protected it from the road, and lounging beside one of its gates was McCann.

He watched us come, imperturbably. Dahut passed without a glance. I had hung back a few paces, and as I went by McCann I dropped a card. I had hoped for just this encounter, and I had managed to scribble on it:

> Something very wrong but no definite evidence yet. About thirty men, think all well-armed. Barbed and charged wires behind wall.

I drew up beside the Demoiselle and we rode on a mile or so. She halted, and asked: " Have you seen enough?"

I said, " Yes "; and we turned back. When we went by McCann he was still lounging beside the gate as though he had not moved. But there was no paper on the road. The garrison had seen us coming, and the postern was swinging open. We returned to the house the same way we had gone.

Dahut was flushed with the ride, full of gayety. She said: " I'll bathe. Then we'll have a lunch on the boat."

" Fine," I said. " And I hope it doesn't make me as sleepy as it did yesterday."

Her eyes narrowed, but my face was

entirely innocent. She smiled: "It won't, I'm sure. You're getting acclimated."

I said, morosely: "I hope so. I must have been pretty dull company at dinner last night."

She smiled again. "But you weren't. You pleased my father immensely."

She went into the house laughing.

I was very glad I had pleased her father.

IT had been a thoroughly delightful sail with a thoroughly charming girl. Only when one of the tranced crew knelt as he passed did I feel the sinister hidden undertow. And now I sat at dinner with de Keradel and the Demoiselle. De Keradel's conversation was so fascinating that he had made me forget that I was a prisoner.

I had discussed with him much that I had wished to on the night Bill had persuaded me to be so objectionable. If at times his manner was irritatingly too much like that of a hierophant instructing a neophyte in elementary mysteries, or if he calmly advanced as fact matter which modern science holds to be the darkest of superstitions, investing them with all the authenticity of proven experience—it made no difference to me. The man's learning was as extraordinary as his mind, and I wondered how in one short life he could have acquired it.

He spoke of the riots of Osiris, the black worship of Typhon whom the Egyptians also named Set of the Red Hair, the Eleusinian and the Delphic mysteries as though he had witnessed them. Described them in minutest detail—and others more ancient and darker, long buried in age-rotten shrouds of Time. The evil secrets of the Sabbat were open to him, and once he spoke of the worship of Kore, the Daughter, who was known also as Persephone, and in another form as Hecate, and by other names back, back through the endless vistas of the ages—the wife of Hades, the Queen of the Shades whose daughters were the Furies.

It was then I told him of what I had beheld in the Delphian cave when the Greek priest with the pagan soul had evoked Kore . . . and I had watched that majestic —that dreadful—form taking shape in the swirls of smoke from what was being consumed upon her thrice ancient altar . . .

He listened intently, without interrupting, as one to whom the story held no surprise. He asked: "And had She come to him before?"

I answered: "I do not know."

He said, directly to Demoiselle: "But even if so, the fact that she appeared to—to Dr. Caranac—is most significant. It is proof that he—"

Dahut interrupted him, and I thought there was some warning in the glance she gave him: "That he is—acceptable. Yes, my father."

De Keradel considered me. "An illuminating experience, indeed. I am wondering, in the light of it, and of other things you have told me—I am wondering why you were so—so hostile—to such ideas the night we met."

I answered, bluntly: "I was more than half drunk—and ready to fight anybody."

He bared his teeth at that, then laughed outright. "You do not fear to speak the truth."

"Neither when drunk nor sober," I said.

HE scrutinized me silently for moments. He spoke, more as though to himself than to me: "I do not know . . . she may be right . . . if I could wholly trust him it would mean much to us . . . he has curiosity . . . he does not shrink from the dark wisdom . . . but has he courage . . . ?"

I laughed at that, and said, baldly: "If I did not have—would I be here?"

"Quite true, my father." Dahut was smiling maliciously.

De Keradel struck down his hand like one who has come at last to a decision. "Carnac, I spoke to you of an experiment in which I am deeply interested. Instead of being a spectator, willing or unwilling . . . or no—spectator, whichever I might decide . . ." He paused as though to let the covert menace of this sink in . . . "I invite you to participate with me in this experiment. I have good reason to believe that

its rewards, if successful, will be incalculably great.

"My invitation is not disinterested. I will admit to you that my experiment has not as yet met with full success. I have had results—but they have not been what I hoped. But what you have told me of Kore proves that you are no barrier to the materialization of these Beings—Powers or Presences, or if you prefer, discarnate, unknown energies which can take shape, become substance, in accordance with laws discoverable to man—and discovered. Also, you have within you the ancient blood of Carnac, and the ancient memories of your race. It may be that I have missed some slight detail that your—stimulated—memory will recall. It may be that with you beside us this Being I desire to evoke will appear in all its power—and with all that implies of power for us."

I asked: "What is that Being?"

He said: "You, yourself, named it. That which in one of its manifold shapes came to the Alkar-Az of ancient Carnac as it came to the temples of my own people ages before Ys was built or the stones of Carnac raised—the Gatherer in the Cairn—"

If I felt cold creep along my skin he did not know it. It was the answer I had been expecting and I was prepared.

I looked long at Dahut, and he, at least, misinterpreted that look, as I had hoped he would. I struck my own hand down upon the table. "De Keradel, I am with you."

After all, wasn't that why I had come there?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAEL BENNIQUE.

DE KERADEL said: "We drink to that!"

He dismissed the servants, unlocked a closet and took from it a decanter half-filled with a green liqueur. The stopper was clamped and difficult to withdraw. He poured three small glasses and quickly clamped the stopper down. I raised my glass.

He checked me: "Wait!"

There were little bubbles rising through the green drink; like atoms of diamonds; like splintered sun rays shot back by crystals bottoming still shallows. They arose more and more quickly, and suddenly the green drink fumed; then became quiescent; pellucid.

De Keradel lifted his glass: "Carnac, you join us of your own will?"

The Demoiselle said, her glass close to mine: "It is of your own will you join us, Alain de Carnac?"

I answered: "Of my own will."

We touched glasses and drank.

That was a strange drink. It tingled through brain and nerve, and immediately there was born of it an extraordinary sense of freedom; swift sloughing of inhibitions; a blowing away of old ideas though they had crumbled to dust and, like dust, had been puffed from the surface of consciousness. As though I were a serpent which had abruptly shed an outworn skin. Memories grew dim, faded away, readjusted themselves. I had an indescribable sense of liberation . . . I could do anything, since, like God, there existed for me neither good nor evil. Whatever I willed to do that I could do, since there was neither evil nor good but only my will . . .

De Keradel said: "You are one with us."

The Demoiselle whispered: "You are one with us, Alain."

Her eyes were closed, or seemed to be; the long lashes low upon her cheeks. Yet I thought that beneath them I saw a glint of purple flame. And de Keradel's hands covered his eyes, as though to shield them, but between his fingers I thought I saw them gleaming. He said:

"Carnac—you have not asked me what is this Gatherer—this Being I would evoke in Its completeness. Is it because you know?"

"No," I answered; and would have followed by saying that I did not care—except that suddenly I knew I did care; that of all things that was what I thirsted to know. He said:

"A brilliant Englishman once formulated

perfectly the materialistic credo. He said that the existence of man is an accident; his story a brief and transitory episode in the life of the meanest of planets. He pointed out that of the combination of causes which first converted a dead organic compound into the living progenitors of humanity, science as yet knows nothing. Nor would it matter if science did know. The wet-nurses of famine, disease and mutual slaughter had gradually evolved creatures with consciousness and intelligence enough to know that they were insignificant.

"The history of the past was that of blood and tears, stupid acquiescence, helpless blunderings, wild revolt and empty aspirations. And at last, the energies of our system will decay, the sun be dimmed, the inert and tideless earth be barren. Man will go down into the pit, and all his thoughts will perish.

"Matter will know itself no longer. Everything will be as though it never had been. And nothing will be either better or worse for all the labor, devotion, pity, love and suffering of man."

I SAID, the God-like sense of power stronger within me: "It is not true."

"It is partly true," he answered. "What is not true is that life is an accident. What we call accident is only a happening of whose causes we are ignorant. Life must have come from life. Not necessarily such life as we know—but from some Thing, acting deliberately, whose essence was—and is—life. It is true that pain, agony, sorrow, hate and discord are the foundations of humanity. It is true that famine, disease and slaughter have been our nurses. Yet it is equally true that there are such things as peace, happiness, pity, perception of beauty, wisdom . . . although these may be only of the thickness of the film on the surface of a woodland pool which mirrors its flowered rim—yet, these things do exist . . . peace and beauty, happiness and wisdom. They *are*.

"And therefore" — de Keradel's hands were still over his eyes, but through the masking fingers I felt his gaze sharpen upon me, penetrate me—"therefore I hold that these desirable things must be inherent in That which breathed life into the primeval slime. It must be so, since that which is created cannot possess attributes other than those possessed by what creates it."

Of course, I knew all that. Why should he waste effort to convince me of the obvious. I said, tolerantly: "It is self-evident."

He said: "And therefore it must also be self-evident that since it was the dark, the malevolent, the cruel side of this—Being—which created us, our only approach to It, our only path to Its other self, must be through agony and suffering, cruelty and malevolence."

He paused, then said, violently:

"Is it not what every religion has taught? That man can approach his Creator only through suffering and sorrow? Sacrifice . . . Crucifixion!"

I answered: "It is true. The baptism of blood. The purification through tears. Rebirth through sorrow."

The Demoiselle murmured: "Chords that must be struck before we may attain the supreme harmonies."

There was a mocking note to that; I turned to her quickly. She had not opened her eyes, but I caught the derisive curving of her lips.

De Keradel said: "The sacrifices are ready."

I said: "Then let us sacrifice!"

De Keradel dropped his hands. The pupils of his eyes were phosphorescent; his face seemed to retreat until nothing could be seen but those two orbs of pale blue fire. The Demoiselle raised her eyes, and they were two deep pools of violet flame; her face a blur beyond them. I did not think that strange—then.

There was a mirror at the back of the sideboard. I looked into it and my own eyes were shining with the same feral fires; golden; my face a blurred setting from which yellow gleaming eyes stared back at me . . .

Nor did that seem as strange, either. Not then.

De Keradel repeated: " The sacrifices are ready."

I said, rising: " Let us use them!"

WE went out of the dining room and up the stairs. The inhuman exaltation did not wane; it grew stronger; more ruthless. Life was to be taken, but what was the life of one or the lives of many if they were rungs of a ladder up which I could climb out of the pit into the sun? Force recognition from That which had lived before life . . . command It . . . the Creator?

With de Keradel's hand upon my arm I passed into my room. He bade me strip and bathe, and left me. I stripped, and my hand touched something hanging to my left arm-pit. It was a holster in which was an automatic. I had forgotten who had given it to me, but whoever it was had told me it was important . . . most important; not to be lost nor given up . . . essential. I laughed. I tossed it into a corner of the room.

De Keradel was beside me and I wondered vaguely why I had not seen him come into the room. I had bathed, and was stark naked. He was wrapping a breech-clout of white cotton around my loins. He laced sandals on my feet, and he drew my arms through the sleeves of a robe of thick fine cotton. He stood back, and I saw that he was clothed in the same white robes. There was a broad belt either of black metal or ancient wood around his middle. There was a similar cincture around his breast. They were inlaid with symbolings in silver . . . but who ever saw silver shift and change outline . . . melt from this rune into another . . . as these did? Around his forehead was a black chaplet of oak leaves, and from his belt swung a long black knife, a black maul, black and oval bowl and a black ewer . . .

Dahut was watching me, and I wondered why I had not seen her enter. She wore the robe of thick white cotton, but the girdle around her waist was of gold and on it the shifting symbols were red; and of red gold was the fillet that bound her hair and the bracelets upon her arms. In her hand was a golden sickle, razor-edged.

They fastened around my waist another black and silver symbolled belt, and set upon my head a chaplet of the black oak leaves. De Keradel drew from his belt the maul and put it in my hand. I shrank from its touch and dropped it. He picked it up and closed my fingers around it. I tried to unclose them and could not, although the touch of the maul was loathsome. I raised the maul and looked at it. It was heavy and black with age . . . like the belt . . . like the chaplet. It was shaped all of one piece as though carved from the heart of oak; shaft in center, ends of its massive head blunt—

The *mael bennique!* The beater in of breasts! Heart crusher! And I knew that its blackness was less from age than from red baptisms.

MY exaltation ebbed. Something deep within me was stirring, tearing at its fetters, whispering to me . . . whispering that it had been to stop the beating of this maul that I had gone from Carnac long and long ago to slay Dahut . . . that whatever else I did I must not use the maul . . . but also that I must go on, go on as I had in lost Ys . . . meet and even steep myself in this ancient evil, so that . . . so that . . .

De Keradel's face was thrust into mine, mouth snarling, hell-fire flaming in his eyes: " You are one with us, Bearer of the Maul!"

Dahut's hand closed around mine; her cheek touched me. The exaltation swept back; the deep revolt forgotten. But some echo of it remained. I said:

" I am one with you—but I will not wield the maul." Dahut's hand pressed and my fingers were loosed and I threw the thing from me.

De Keradel said, deadly: " You do as I command. Pick up the maul."

Dahut said, sweetly, but with voice as deadly as his own: " Patience, my father. He shall bear the bowl and the ewer and do with them as is prescribed. He shall

feed the fires. Unless he wields the *mael* of his own will, it is useless. Be patient."

He answered her, furiously: "Once before you betrayed a father for your lover."

She said, steadily: "And may again . . . and if so what can you do, my father?"

His face writhed; he half raised his arm as though to strike her. And then crept into his eyes that same fear as had shown there on the night we had met when he had spoken of Powers summoned to aid and obey, and she had added—"or to command us."

His arm dropped. He picked up the maul, and gave to me the bowl and ewer. He said, sullenly: "Let us go."

We went out of that room, he on one side of me and Dahut at the other. Down the stairs we went. A score of the servants were in the great hall. All wore the white robes and they held unlighted flambeaux. They sank upon their knees as we approached them. De Keradel pressed upon the wall and a section slid open, revealing wide stone steps winding down and down. Arm in arm, Dahut and de Keradel and I trod them, the servants behind us until we faced what seemed to be a wall of solid stone. Here again de Keradel pressed, and a part of the wall raised slowly and silently like a curtain.

It had masked a portal to a vast chamber hewn out of the solid rock. Through the portal stole a penetrating pungent odor, and from beyond it came the murmur of many voices. The light that filled it was dim but crystal clear—like a forest twilight. There were a hundred or more men and women facing us, and their eyes wide pupilled and blank—rapt—looking into another world. But they saw us. There were cubicles all around the cavern, and others came out of them; women who carried babies in their arms; women at whose skirts children clung. Babies and children were wide-eyed, too.

DE KERADEL raised the maul and shouted to them. They answered the shout and rushed towards us, throwing themselves upon their faces as we drew near; crawling to and kissing my feet, the feet of de Keradel, the slim and sandaled feet of Dahut.

De Keradel began a chant, low voiced, vibrant—archaic. Dahut joined him, and my own throat answered . . . in that tongue I knew and did not know. The men and women lifted themselves to their knees. They joined, full throated, in the chant. They lifted themselves to their feet and stood swaying to its cadence. I studied them. They were gaunt faced and old, the most of them.

Their garb was what I had known in ancient Carnac, but their faces were not those of Carnac's sacrifices.

There was a glow in their breasts, over their hearts. But in too many it was dim and yellowed; flickering toward extinction. Only in the babies and the children was it clear and steady.

I said to de Keradel: "Too many are old. The fire of life is dim within them. The essence of life which feeds the wicks runs too low. We need younger sacrifices—those in whom the fire of life is strong."

He answered: "Does it matter—so long as there is life to be eaten?"

I said, angrily: "It does matter! We must have youth. Nor are these of the old blood."

He looked at me for the first time since I had refused to pick up the maul. There was calculation in the glowing eyes, and satisfaction and approval. He looked at Dahut, and I saw her nod to him, and she murmured: "I am right, my father . . . he is one with us, but . . . patience."

De Keradel said: "We shall have youth—later. All we need of it. But now we must do with what we have."

Dahut touched my hand, and pointed. At the far end of the cavern a ramp led up to another door. She said: "Time goes—and we must do with what we have—now."

De Keradel took up the chant. We walked, the three of us, between the ranks of swaying, chanting men and women. The servants with the flambeaux fell in behind us and behind them trooped the singing

sacrifices. We ascended the ramp. A door opened smoothly. We passed through it into the open air.

De Keradel stepped ahead; his chanting fuller voiced; challenging. The night was cloudy and thin wisps of fog eddied around us. We crossed a broad open stretch and entered a grove of great oaks. The oaks sighed and whispered; then their branches began to toss and their leaves soughed the chant. De Keradel raised his maul and saluted them. We passed out of the oaks—

FOR an instant ancient time and this time and all times reeled around me. I stopped my chanting. I said, strangled: "Carnac — but it cannot be! Carnac was—*then*...and this is *now!*"

Dahut's arm was around my shoulders; Dahut's lips were upon mine; she whispered: "There is no *then*...there is no *now* ...for us, beloved."

Yet still I stood and looked; while behind me the chanting became ever fainter, faltering and uncertain. For there was a level space before me over which great monoliths marched; not leaning nor fallen as at Carnac now; but lifting straight up, defiant, as in Carnac of old. Scores of them in avenues like the spokes of a tremendous wheel. They marched and circled to the gigantic dolmen, the Cairn, that was their heart. A crypt that was truly an Alkar-Az ...greater than that which I had known in most ancient Carnac...and among and between the standing stones danced the wraiths of the fog...the fog was a huge inverted bowl covering the Cairn and the monoliths. And against the standing stones leaned shadows...the shadows of men...

Dahut's hands touched my eyes, covered them. And abruptly all strangeness, all comparisons of memory, were gone. De Keradel had turned, facing the sacrifices, roaring out the chant, black maul raised high, the symbols on black belt and cincture dancing like quicksilver. I raised the bowl and ewer and roared the chant. The faltering voices gathered strength, roared out to meet us. Dahut's lips were again on mine..."Beloved, you are one with us."

The oaks bent and waved their boughs and shouted the chant.

The servants had lighted their flambeaux and stood like watching dogs on the fringes of the sacrifices. We entered the field of the monoliths. In front of me strode de Keradel, maul held high, raised to the Cairn as the priest raises the host to the Altar. Dahut was beside me, singing...singing... her golden sickle uplifted. Thicker grew the walls of the great inverted bowl of the fog above and around us; and thicker grew the fog wraiths dancing among and circling the monoliths. Darker became the shadows guarding the standing stones.

And the sacrifices were circling the monoliths, dancing around them in the ancient measures as though hand in hand with the fog wraiths. The servants had quenched their torches, for now the corposants had begun to glimmer over the standing stones. The witch lights. The lamps of the dead. Faintly at first, but growing ever stronger. Glimmering, shifting orbs of gray phosphorescence of the grayness of the dead.

And now I stood before the great Cairn. I looked into its vault; empty; untenanted —as yet. Louder was the chanting as the sacrifices danced between and around the monoliths. Coming ever closer. And more lividly gleamed the corposants, lighting the path of the Gatherer.

The chanting muted; became a prayer; an invocation. The sacrifices pressed upon me; swaying; murmuring; rapt eyes intent upon the Cairn...and seeing—what?

THERE were three stones close to the entrance to the chamber of the Cairn. The middle one was a slab of granite, longer than a tall man, and at about where the shoulders of a man lying upon it would be, there was a rounded ridge of stone like a pillow. It was stained—like the maul; and the stains ran down its sides. At its left was another stone; lower; squat; hollowed shallowly and channeled at its lower end as though to let some liquid escape from it. And at the right of the long slab was a more deeply hollowed stone black with fire.

There was a curious numbness creeping through me; a queer sense of detachment as though a part of me, and the most vital part, were stepping aside to watch some play in which another and less important self was to be an actor. At the same time, that lesser part knew perfectly well what it had to do. Two of the white robed servants handed me small bunches of twigs, small bundles of leaves, and two black bowls in which were yellow crystals and lumps of resinous gum. With the twigs I built the fire on the blackened altar as the ancient rites prescribed... well did I remember how the priests of Ys had made that fire before the Alkar-Az at Carnac...

I struck the flint, and as the twigs blazed I cast on them leaves and crystals and gums. The strangely scented smoke arose and wound around us and then went streaming into the Cairn as though sucked by a strong draught.

Dahut glided past me. There was a woman close by with a child in her arms. Dahut drew the child from her, unresisting, and glided back to the squat altar. Through the smoke I caught the flash of the golden sickle, and then de Keradel took the black bowl and ewer from me. He set them beneath the gutter of the squat altar. He gave them to me, and they were filled...

I dipped my fingers into the bowl and sprinkled what filled it over the threshold of the Cairn. I took the ewer and poured what it held from side to side of that threshold. I went back to the altar of the fire and fed it from red hands.

Now de Keradel was standing at the squat altar. He raised a small body in his arms, and cast it into the Cairn. Dahut was beside him, rigid, golden sickle upraised — but the sickle was no longer golden. It was red... like my hands...

The smoke from the sacred fire swirled between and around us.

De Keradel cried a word—and the chant of the prayer ended. A man shambled from the sacrifices, eyes wide and unwinking, face rapt. De Keradel caught him by the shoulders, and instantly two of the servants threw themselves upon this man, tore off his clothing and pressed him naked down upon the stone. His head fell behind the stone pillow — his chest strained over it. Swiftly de Keradel pressed upon a spot on the neck, and over the heart, and under the thighs. The sacrifices lay limp upon the slab...and de Keradel began to beat upon the naked lifted breast with the black maul. Slowly at first...then faster and faster . . . harder . . . to the ancient prescribed rhythm.

There was a shrilling of agony from the man on the stone. As though fed by it, the corposants flared wanly. They pulsed and waned. The sacrifice was silent, and I knew that de Keradel had pressed fingers against his throat...the agony of the sacrifice must not be articulate since agony that is voiceless is hardest to bear, and therefore most acceptable to the Gatherer...

The maul crashed down in the last stroke, splintering ribs and crushing heart. The smoke from the fire was swirling into the Cairn. De Keradel had raised the body of the sacrifice from the slab...held it high over his head...

He hurled it into the Cairn, while fast upon its fall came the thud of a smaller body, hurled after it...

From the hands of Dahut! And they were stained red and dripping — like my own.

THERE was a buzzing within the Cairn, like hundreds of carrion flies. Over the Cairn the fog blackened. A formless shadow dropped through the fog and gathered over the Cairn. It had no shape, and it had no place in space. It darkened the fog and it squatted upon the Cairn—yet I knew that it was but a part of something that extended to the rim of the galaxy of which our world is a mote, our sun a spark...and beyond the rim of the galaxy . . . beyond the universe . . . beyond, where there is no such thing as space.

It squatted upon the Cairn, but it did not enter.

Again the golden sickle flashed in the hand of Dahut; and again de Keradel filled

the ewer and the bowl and gave them to me. And again, numbly, I walked through the smoke of the altar fire and sprinkled the red drops from the bowl into the Cairn, and poured the red contents of the ewer from side to side of its threshold.

De Keradel held up the black maul, and cried out once more. A woman came out of the sacrifices, an old woman, wrinkled and trembling. The acolytes of de Keradel stripped her, and he threw her upon the stone...and swung the black maul down upon her withered breasts...and again and again...

And he swung her body up and out and through the portal of the Cairn . . . and others came running to him...and them he slew with the black maul...no longer black but dripping crimson...and hurled them into the Cairn...

The squatting darkness on the Cairn was no longer there. It had seeped through the great stones that roofed it, but still its shadow stained the fog reaching up and up like a black pillar. The chamber of the Cairn was thick with the blackness. And the smoke from the altar fire no longer clothed Dahut and de Keradel and me, but streamed straight through into the Cairn.

The buzzing ceased; all sound died everywhere; a silence that was like the silence of space before ever a sun was born took its place. All movement ceased.

But I knew that the formless darkness within the Cairn was aware of me. Was aware of me and weighing me with a thousand eyes. I felt its awareness; malignant—crueler beyond measurement than even human cruelty. Its awareness streamed out and flicked over me like tiny tentacles... like black butterflies testing me with their antennæ.

I was not afraid.

Now the buzzing began again within the Cairn, rising higher and higher until it became a faint, sustained whispering.

De Keradel was kneeling at the threshold, listening. Beside him stood Dahut, listening...sickle in hand...sickle no longer golden but red...

There was a child upon the squat altar, crying—not yet dead...

Abruptly the Cairn was empty...the fog above it empty of the shadow...the Gatherer gone.

I WAS marching back between the standing stones, Dahut and de Keradel beside me. There were no corposants over the monoliths. The flambeaux flared in the hands of the servants. Behind us, chanting and swaying, danced those who were left of the sacrifices. We passed through the oaks, and they were silent. The curious numbness still held me, and I felt no horror of what I had seen—or of what I had done.

The house was before me. It was strange how its outlines wavered...how misty and unsubstantial they seemed...

And now I was in my own room. The numbness that had deadened all emotional reactions during the evocation of the Gatherer was slowly giving way to something else—not yet defined, not yet strong enough to be known. The exaltation which had followed the green drink ebbed and flowed in steadily decreasing waves. I had an overpowering sense of unreality—I moved, unreal, among unreal things. What had become of my robe of white? I remembered that de Keradel had stripped it from me, but where and when I could not think. And my hands were clean—no longer red with blood.

Dahut was with me, feet bare, white skin gleaming through silk. The violet fires still flickered faintly in her eyes. She put her arms around my neck, drew my face down to hers, set her mouth on mine. She whispered: "Alan...I have forgotten Alain de Carnac...he has paid for what he did, and he is dying...it is you, Alan, that I love."

I held her in my arms, and within them I felt the Lord of Carnac die. But I, Alan Caranac, was not yet awake.

My arms closed tighter around her... there was the fragrance of some secret flower of the sea about her...and there was the sweetness of new-learned or long forgotten evil in her kisses...

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

WRITER AND SANDHOG

BY this time you know a great deal, of course, about the new novel, "East River," which begins in this issue of ARGOSY; and you know almost as much about the two men who wrote it, Borden Chase and Edward Doherty, and about the forthcoming film version of the story in which Victor McLaglen and Edmund Lowe will be starred. Every mother's son of you will want to read this great story, and we'll miss our guess by a mile if you don't all agree that it is one of the most gripping, rousing stories that you have read in many a month. It's different, and it's exciting. It ought to provide a tremendous story for the two motion picture stars to whom Fox Films has given the leading parts—you will remember that pair of hardboiled roughnecks as the heroes of the film called "The Cock-Eyed World," and as the *Flagg* and *Quirt* of the film classic, "What Price Glory?"

But we haven't yet told you everything about the authors of the story, Chase and Doherty. Edward Doherty is one of the highest priced newspaper men of the country, as well as being a dramatist, a scenario writer, a novelist and a short story writer. He has been called the star reporter of America, and for many years he was a staff writer for *Liberty Magazine*. His published books include "The Broadway Murders," "The Life of Jeanne Eagles," "The Diamond Eye," "Dark o' the Moon," and many others.

As for Borden Chase, for ten years or more he has been a sandhog, though he tried his hand at a number of other things before he finally found himself at work in one of those human mole-holes called a subway tunnel. He has been a gunner's mate in the Navy —and a boxer—during the World War; he has been by turns an insurance man, a prize fighter, a member of the "off-shore fleet" during Prohibition years. In addition to everything else, he is a writer, and has published a great many stories. Until "East River" was sold to the movies, so that his expert advice upon the picture's technical set-up was demanded, he fully expected to be at work on the new Midtown Hudson Tunnel that will form another link between New York City and the New Jersey shore. Just now he is a technical adviser to Hollywood, but he feels that by nature he is a sandhog and always will be one. And no doubt when "East River" has been finished for the screen Borden Chase will be found in the "air" down beneath the Hudson, doing the thing that gives him the greatest kick in life.

DOESN'T want longer stories in smaller type:

Oklahoma City, Okla.

During the many years I have been reading ARGOSY I have found only one thing to criticize,

and that is that occasionally during the past few months a story has been printed in smaller type. Reduce the number of stories if you like, but please do not reduce the size of the print.

I have to depend on news-stands for my ARGOSY and in one town recently I called at the news-stand on the day ARGOSY was put on sale to find the supply exhausted, but the newsdealer supplied me with the name of one regular ARGOSY reader and I borrowed his copy. I have not missed an issue in several years.

CATHRENE JAY.

ARGOSY all-star league:

Bronx, N. Y.

Seeing all the fuss made about the American League-National League all-star game gave me a plumb good idea. I'll be a horned toad if I didn't form the ARGOSY League all-stars out of my pet characters! Here they are:

First base—Peter the Brazen. Second base—The Roadrunner. Third base—Bob Zane. Catcher—Tarzan of the Apes. Pitcher—Mme. Storey. S.S.—Major Brane. Left field—Carson Napier. Right field — Bellow Bill. Center field — Singapore Sammy. Water boys—Bill and Jim. Bat boys—Jimmie Cordie and his gang.

And I'll stake my last cent that they could trim the ears off any other dime magazine's team on the market.

A. CARRAS.

THAT *Robin Hood* of California:

Peoria, Ill.

My favorite authors are Fred MacIsaac, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Theodore Roscoe, Ralph Perry, and W. C. Tuttle. Fred MacIsaac's "The Devil and the Deep" was a pip of a serial.

Why did you stop the *Zorro* stories? I thought they were swell—wonderful, perfect, etc.

Where are those two old wanderers, *Jim* and *Bill*? If you don't find that pair of loafers I'll stop the ARGOSY for sure.

LYNN BRANSON.

APPRECIATED "The Barbarian":

Cleveland, Ohio.

I wish to express my appreciation of F. V. W. Mason's story, "The Barbarian." Seldom have I read a story which so gripped my interest from beginning to end. I was much disappointed when it ended and I hope Mr. Mason will give us a sequel to *Alvenus's* adventures.

To please me, give me more of Seltzer, MacIsaac, Merritt, Bedford-Jones, and Challis. Also another serial by Raine. I am a comparative newcomer to ARGOSY, but you can bet that I'll stick.

ALVIN MCNELLY.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

Classified Advertising

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