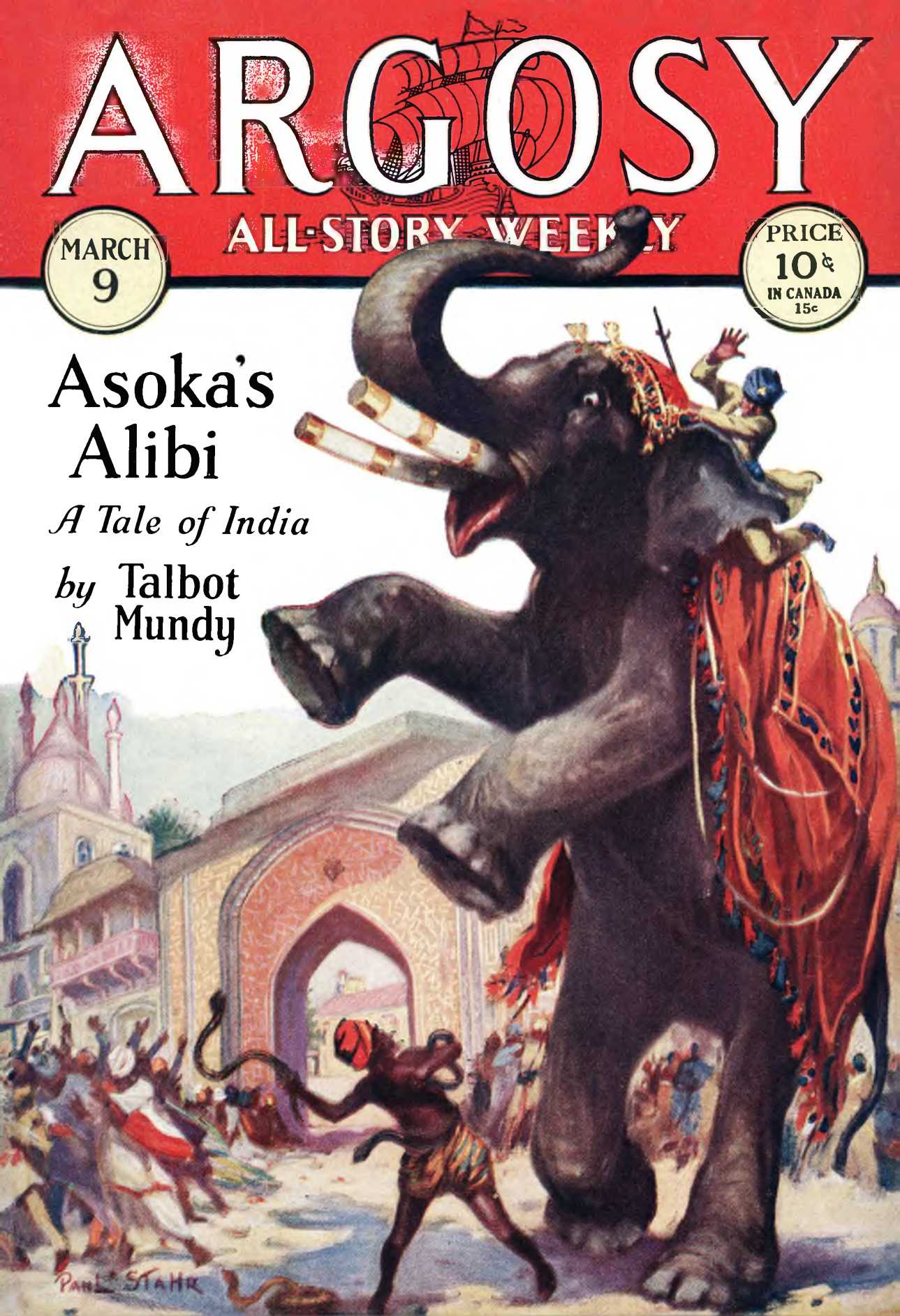
ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY
MARCH 9
PRICE 10¢ IN CANADA 15c

# Asoka's Alibi

*A Tale of India*

*by* Talbot Mundy



# All Wool Reg. $35.00 Value

Guaranteed

## Blue Serge

only $29.95

only $1.00 deposit Brings It!


### Stylish! Dressy!

Think of it! For only $1.00 down you can have a suit made to measure from this splendid fine weave all wool blue serge suiting. Soft and silky in texture, thoroughly pre-shrunk, the finished suit will stand lots of wear and also hold its shape. Tailored in first class style, full lined with lustrous wool alpaca. Coat is cut in the new 3-button "Executive Model" making an ideal business man's suit. Five-button no collar vest. Stylish fitting trousers with medium fullness, with or without cuffs as ordered. You take no risk as we stand back of this suit as to fit, style and quality. Just give us your measurements also height and weight. Have a tailored suit that you'll be proud to wear. Sizes 34 to 44.

**Order by No. A-7150S. Terms: $1 with coupon, then only**

**$4.85 a month**

**Total Bargain Price only $29.95**

## 6 Months to Pay!

Not only can you save money but you get the benefit of easy terms besides. You won't miss only $4.85 a month. Try it and see. Blue Serge is always stylish—ideal for dress or business—the most practical suit one can have. Send only $1.00 deposit now. No risk [see coupon]. No C. O. D. to pay. Get this suit *on approval.* Try it on—see the *perfect fit*—compare the value—the style—everything—then if absolutely satisfied take 6 months to pay the special price. Send coupon and $1.00 Now.

**Sent On Approval**

**No Risk**

***No C.O.D. to Pay***

**Send for Free Catalog**

***Send Coupon and ONLY $1.00 NOW!***

**ELMER RICHARDS CO.**
Established over 20 years

**Dept. 2832 W. 35th Street, Chicago**

I enclose **$1** deposit. Send All Wool Navy Blue Serge Suit No. **A-7150S.** If I am not perfectly satisfied I can return it and get my money back. If I keep it I will pay **$4.85** a month until I have paid **$29.95** in all.

*Height*..... *Weight*..... *Chest*.....
*Trousers With Cuffs* ☐
*Waist*..... *Inseam*..... *Without Cuffs* ☐

*Name*.....

*Address*.....

*P. O.*..... *State*.....

**(Be sure to fill out simple measurements above thus insuring perfect fit.)**

# ARGOSY

## ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 202 | CONTENTS FOR MARCH 9, 1929 | NUMBER 1


## SERIALS



## COMPLETE STORIES



## OTHER FEATURES



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


THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Réaumur
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

*Entered as second-class matter November 22, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879*

# CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

**April 13th Classified Forms Close March 16th.**

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY — $100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL, union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at $23.50 and $31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. C-409, Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, FLAVORINGS AND SPECIALTIES. WONDERFULLY PROFITABLE. LA DERMA CO., DEPT. D, ST. LOUIS, MO.

Wonderful "Whisper-It" Mouthpiece For Telephones; gives secrecy in conversation. Every telephone user a prospect. Retails $1.00. Liberal profits. Write for full selling proposition. Colytt Laboratories, Dept. M, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

I PAY MY AGENTS $90 A WEEK JUST TO WEAR AND SHOW MY BEAUTIFUL NEW FREE RAINCOAT AND GIVE AWAY FREE HATS. WRITE TODAY FOR YOURS. ROBERT KING, 230 SO. WELLS, DEPT. AA-4, CHICAGO.

## HELP AND INSTRUCTION

YOU ARE WANTED. Men—women, 18 up. Government Jobs. $105.00—$280.00 month. Steady. Many February Examinations. Applicants coached. Book with particulars—FREE. Write today sure. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. N-1, Rochester, N. Y.

## MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, Lakes, Streams. Write today. SWIGART & CO., M-1278, First National Bank Building, Chicago.

## TOBACCO

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 845, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

## PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND ADVICE. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for our free Guide Book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of Invention for Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Prompt Service. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—WRITE FOR OUR GUIDE BOOK, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

## OLD CARS LOOK NEW in 30 MINUTES

New Miraculous Fluid—not a paint—not a polish—not a varnish—not a wax. Flows on; dries quickly. Instantly restores original color and luster. Agents and operators for Service Stations wanted. Write The ReNUZit System, 154 E. Erie St., Dept. 740 E.R., Chicago. Ill., for Free Test Offer.

## I'll Start You at $15 a Day

taking orders for Ced-O-Bags and Butterfly Moth Bags. Hundreds making big daily profits. You can too. No experience needed. No investment. No risk. Keep present job and sell in spare time. Lewis, spare time worker, cleared $15.30 first day. Act quick. This means money. Write today for big free outfit.

**COMER MFG. CO., Dept. 461-L, Dayton, Ohio**


# "He saves $100 a month"

"See that man at the receiving teller's window? That's 'Billy' King, Sales Manager for The Browning Company. Every month he adds $100 to his savings account.

"Three years ago he started at Browning's at $25 a week. Married, had one child, couldn't save a cent. One day he came in here desperate—wanted to borrow a hundred dollars—wife was sick.

"I said, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something worth more than a loan—some good advice—and if you'll follow it I'll let you have the hundred too. Take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and put in some of your evenings getting special training. The schools will do wonders for you, I know. We've got several I. C. S. men here in the bank.'

"That very night Billy wrote to Scranton, and a few days later he had started studying at home. Why, in a few months he had doubled his salary! Next thing I knew he was put in charge of his department and two months ago they made him Sales Manager. It just shows what a man can do in a little spare time."

Employers are begging for men with ambition—men who really want to get ahead in the world and are willing to prove it by training themselves in spare time to do some one thing well.

Prove that you are that kind of man! The International Correspondence Schools are ready and anxious to help you prepare for something better if you will only make the start. Do it now! At least find out what the I. C. S. can do for you.

***Mail the coupon for Free Booklet***

**INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS**
*"The Universal University"*
**Box 2244-D, Scranton, Penna.**

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

**BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES**

| | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Business Management | ☐ Salesmanship |
| ☐ Industrial Management | ☐ Advertising |
| ☐ Personnel Management | ☐ Business Correspondence |
| ☐ Traffic Management | ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering |
| ☐ Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching | ☐ Stenography and Typing |
| ☐ Cost Accounting | ☐ English ☐ Civil Service |
| ☐ Bookkeeping | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ Secretarial Work | ☐ Common School Subjects |
| ☐ Spanish ☐ French | ☐ High School Subjects |
| | ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning |

**TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES**

| | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Electrical Engineering | ☐ Architect |
| ☐ Electric Lighting | ☐ Architects' Blueprints |
| ☐ Mechanical Engineer | ☐ Contractor and Builder |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ Architectural Draftsman |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ Concrete Builder |
| ☐ Railroad Positions | ☐ Structural Engineer |
| ☐ Gas Engine Operating | ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy |
| ☐ Civil Engineer ☐ Mining | ☐ Automobile Work |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Airplane Engines |
| ☐ Plumbing and Heating | ☐ Agriculture ☐ Navigation |
| ☐ Steam Engineering | ☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio |

Name.....

Street Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation.....

*Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada*

ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 202 | SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 1929 | NUMBER 1

*Maraj glared at him—a monster to whom death was life and cruelty was beauty*

# Asoka's Alibi

***Asoka was a mighty elephant, and none could manage him save Quorn—sometimes; nor was carnival season, in that mad, seething India border state, the best of those times***

***By TALBOT MUNDY***

***Author of "Ho for London Town!" "When Trails Were New," etc.***

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MASTER OF ELEPHANTS.

"RECKON maybe I'm nutty," said Quorn to himself. "Hell, supposing I am! So is Narada. Elephants is the only sane folk hereabouts."

To comfort himself he looked up at Asoka, the tallest elephant in captivity, whom only he could manage at the best of times. At other times Quorn had to ride him as a fury rides a typhoon.

"You, you big stiff, if it weren't for you I'd pull my freight for Philadelphia and drive a taxicab again. If I might take you along I'd join a circus. This here circus gives me the willies."

He was referring to all Narada, not merely the elephant lines. Narada is close enough to Rajputana to be soaked with a sense of worn-out history. Treaties and its mountains have kept railroads at a distance, and the news comes dim, diluted, and distressing, by mail and word of mouth, so that people are only aware that the world is changing, without knowing why, or how, or what the changes mean.

They feel backward, and resent it, but they keep up the ancient customs for lack of intelligible new ones. Accordingly, for eleven months of every year Narada is piously miserable; during the twelfth month it is impiously mad and happy—more or less—always with a feeling that happiness has to be paid for, and, though the gods are kindly, there are as many vengeful and resentful devils as there are gods.

The carnival falls at the craziest season—April, when the heat is almost intolerable and nobody has too much money, having paid the taxes and the money-lenders' interest, so there is a fine feeling of equality, with common enemies to execrate.

There is also a yearning in common to cut loose and thumb rebellious noses at authority, so the underpaid and not too numerous police receive a lesson in self-restraint; a policeman's head, struck by a long stick, cracks as easily as any one's; the police station is of wood and would make a lovely bonfire. So the police stand by, while Narada eats, drinks, dances, sees the sights, marries and gives in marriage, is irreverent, sings naughty songs, quarrels and makes it up again, wears out its finery before some of it is paid for, and does all those things that good books say should not be done—because next month it must begin all over again working for the landlord and the money-lender.

The sun beats down on that exuberant emotion and ferments it, under the eyes of Brahmin priests, who understand a little of the law of give and take. The more impertinences now, the more abject the reaction presently; the little money fines and penitential gifts will mount up to a huge sum in the aggregate. Meanwhile even the lousy sacred monkeys feel the will to be amused and steal with twice their normal impudence, acquiring wondrous and enduring bellyache from plundered sweetmeats.

Passion of all sorts blossoms, and there are more sorts of it than most men guess. Scores of species of holy mendicants arrive from all the ends of India; so do the astrologers, clairvoyants, ordinary fortune tellers, conjurers, snake charmers, acrobats, sellers of love philters, preachers, teachers of how to get rich quick and gamblers to show how swiftly to get poor again, owners of fighting quails and fighting bantams, story tellers and proprietors of peep shows. Each sort makes its own noise, and the din adds madness to emotion.

Murder stalks abroad. Why shouldn't it? Life and death are one, admits Narada. Death must have its innings. We might even see a murder, and get excited about it, and help to confuse the police, if we are lucky. Hot? Yes, horribly. Dusty? Whew! We sweat, and dry dust sticks to us. But let's go and see the sights, the free ones first.

SINCE the legendary Gunga *sahib* reincarnated and became Ben Quorn, and the Ranee made him superintendent of her elephants, the royal elephant lines have been the finest circus in the world. So Quorn had thousands of visitors all day long; and because he was homesick for the gray fogs of Philadelphia he was more than usually kindly. His strange, agate-colored eyes had frightened people in Philadelphia; but here, under a light blue turban, they suggested rebirth from the storied past, so that it was no wonder that people who believe

implicitly in reincarnation should insist he was a national hero come to life again.

Was he not exactly like the image of the Gunga *sahib* on the old wall of the market place? Had he not miraculously tamed the terrible Asoka when Asoka ran mad through the city? And was Asoka not the name of the sacred elephant the Gunga *sahib* rode in the ancient legend? And wasn't it fun to know how mad the temple Brahmins were, since they had had to bow to public clamor and admit that the Gunga *sahib* truly had come to life in the body of Quorn from Philadelphia?

Some one—nobody knew who, but some one—had explained that Philadelphia means the City of Brotherly Love.

Could the Gunga *sahib* come from any better place than that?

So Quorn answered questions and wiped sweat from his face until his throat was dry and he was so weary that he had to sit down on the upturned packing case beside Asoka. There he could watch all of his four and thirty elephants, each under its own enormous tree, within a compound wall that was carved from end to end with legends of gods and men.

Since Quorn came, every one of the elephants had learned new tricks; and he was generous, he staged a fresh performance every hour or so. The Ranee was generous, too, or else Quorn had persuaded her; there was free lemonade in such amazing quantities that the mystery was where all the lemons came from; and the lemonade was pink, which was a miracle, but it made Quorn feel less homesick.

He had always loved a circus—always had loved elephants, although he never knew why and had never had dealings with them until he came to Narada as caretaker of some abandoned mission buildings. Accident, according to his view of it, or destiny, according to local conviction, had caused him to climb on Asoka's neck one day when he was idly curious.

Asoka had chosen that moment to go into one of his panics, had burst his picket-ring and had run amuck through the city. Quorn had stuck to him because there was nothing else to do; and when the elephant had stunned himself at last against a wall, it was Quorn who gave him water and a cool bath in a garden pond—Quorn who coaxed him back to sanity.

It was in response to popular clamor, and only incidentally as a political move against the temple Brahmins that Quorn had been promptly put in charge of all the elephants. Nobody expected him to make good; not even Quorn had expected it. Miracle of miracles, his love of elephants had proved to be a film that overlay his natural genius for training them.

And Quorn loved his job. But he was lonely.

There was only Bamjee with whom to be intimate—Bamjee, the ex-telegraphist *babu*, who had sat at his instrument and learned so many secrets, of so many important people, that he had finally been appointed to the lucrative post of royal purchasing agent as an inducement to hold his tongue.

The only other man to talk with now and then was Blake the British resident, a gentleman so far above Quorn's social standing that, in spite of mutual respect, anything like intimacy was out of the question. Actually, at times, Blake and Quorn were suspicious of each other.

Secretly, Blake was determined, at all costs, even at the risk of his official career, to keep the Ranee on her throne and to support her modernizing efforts. Openly, Quorn was her stanch and loyal servant, cheerfully willing to run all risks and to defy temple Brahmins or any one else in her behalf. But Blake's official position as resident agent of the British-Indian government obliged him to seem critical and sometimes even threatening, so that the

two men did not always understand each other.

AS for the Ranee, there was no understanding her at all. Like Alexander the Great, Cleopatra, Queen Elizabeth and Napoleon, she had blossomed at the age of nineteen and burst suddenly into full maturity of intellect and statecraft. The last of her royal race, she resembled a marvelous flower on a dying vine, whose whole strength had gone into this last effort.

Raised within the customary *purdah* that prevented contact with the outer world, she had contrived, with the aid of Bamjee, who would do anything for money, to import books and to learn three languages. She knew everything that has been printed about Napoleon, Frederick the Great, George Washington, Lincoln and Grant. She had read modern novels, and was more familiar with modern views than many people are who see newspapers every morning. And she had unbelievable courage. She had broken *purdah* and defied the temple Brahmins.

If she had been ugly it might not have mattered so much, but a beautiful young girl arouses comment, and when she rode through the streets in breeches with no women in attendance, even those who benefited by her modern views were scandalized.

She opened hospitals. She superintended sanitary improvements. She pulled down rat-infested tenements and built new houses for the poor. And—deadliest offense—she defied the Brahmins' wrath by refusing to do penance for having broken the rigid laws of caste.

In consequence, her throne was rather less secure than if it had been raised on powder barrels. The temple Brahmins were doing their utmost to produce anarchy, so that the British-Indian government would have to intervene and either reduce her to the status of a puppet queen or, possibly, depose her altogether. Everybody knew that. Quorn, in particular, knew it. That was why he staged the daily circus. They were her elephants; they should help to make her popular.

"Not that them Brahmins won't get her," he reflected. "If not one way, then another. Poison." He shuddered. He, too, had to guard against poison. "Snakes. Knives in the dark. Accident. Them Brahmins only has to drop a hint or two and some crazed ijjit sticks a knife in some one else. And if she goes, I go—same way probably."

He looked up at the elephant again. "I'd start for Philadelphia to-morrow, but for her and you, you lump! Do you know what they'd do to you if I should up and leave you? They'd order out the troops and the machine gun."

That was absolutely true. Nobody but Quorn could manage the tremendous beast. And Quorn knew that the Brahmins were trying to stir public opinion to demand the summary execution of Asoka as too dangerous to live. They hoped by that means to be rid of Quorn; he might go home to Philadelphia if his beloved elephant were dead.

Quorn's perfect understanding of that phase of the situation was another reason for his taking so much pains with the daily circus; he hoped to make Asoka as well as the Ranee more popular. But he kept constantly close to Asoka, because Bamjee had warned him that an effort might be made to poison the great elephant with something deadly inserted in a tempting piece of fruit or sugar cane.

Fortunately, Bamjee also was anathema to the temple Brahmins. As the Ranee's purchasing agent it was he who had suggested buying tons of liquid disinfectant and a spray, with which even the sacred temple precincts had been drenched for the protection of the crowds who came in carnival month.

To say that the Brahmins were annoyed with Bamjee is to understate it altogether. They were in a state of fanatical mental constipation on account of him. Nothing could restore their equanimity as long as Bamjee was alive and at liberty to pocket ten per cent commissions for inflicting what they considered outrageous sacrilege. And as long as Bamjee could pocket ten per cent commission, he would commit anything under the sun.

So it was obviously Bamjee's cue to keep Quorn posted as to developments. They quarreled very frequently about the quality and price of the corn and sugar cane supplied to the elephant lines, and Quorn had repeatedly earned Bamjee's contempt by refusing to accept a percentage of Bamjee's commission. But hardly a day passed without Bamjee visiting the elephant compound and pausing for a chat with Quorn. He came now. And, as usual, although he would have hated to have to admit it, Quorn was glad to see him.

"MARAJ is in town," said Bamjee.

"The hell you say! Tell the police."

Bamjee was a pleasant-looking little man, in a gray silk suit and a turban of the same color, blinking through platinum-rimmed spectacles. But he could look as contemptuous as the devil himself. The first part of his answer was drowned by the noise of a snake-charmer's bagpipe and the drums of itinerant troupes of acrobats, but presently he came closer to Asoka and sat on a box beside Quorn.

"The police would resign in a body," he said, "if they were told to capture Maraj. Self also. Am get-rich-quick exponent of materialistic fallacy of me first—fallacy because of risks incurred in course of same. Like any other speculator, might go broke. Like any other egotist, might tread on toes of wrong rival and be disemboweled with a dagger—funeral tomorrow afternoon, and nobody, not even you, to pity me, because I took too many chances. But there is one chance that I do not take. I do not monkey with Maraj."

"Hell," Quorn answered. "One mean murderer, without caste or backing—who's afraid o' that man?" He knew better, but he wanted to draw Bamjee. "I've heard say Maraj is one o' them Chandala people—folk that are reckoned worse than hyenas—ain't allowed in cities—lower than sweepers — insect-eaters — bums — filthy, no account savages too skeered to look at you excep' sideways."

"They are," said Bamjee. "They are worse than that. It may be true that Maraj is one of them. But have you heard of Thuggee?"

"Thugs?" said Quorn. "Who hasn't? They were stamped out. They were the guys who used to wander about the country killing total strangers with a handkerchief—just for the love o' killing. Am I right?"

"Yes, but they were not stamped out. They invented another way of killing, that is all. Death by suicide. There is humor in that. It is better than murder. He who is murdered is not guilty of his own death, but whoever commits suicide is doomed to wander endlessly in total darkness, earth-bound on the lowest layer of the astral plane. All religions seem to be agreed on that. Even I, who have no religion, nevertheless believe it. This new form of Thuggee, therefore, dooms its victim to almost endless misery in an astral madhouse. Maraj invented it, or so they say. His allies are the Chandala, who are allowed to rob the bodies and who cover up his tracks and run his errands. You can guess who his employers are, can't you?"

"Do you mean them temple Brahmins pay him?"

"I am not so crazy. And they are so far from being crazy that they pay for nothing. A hint—that is enough.

Not even such a cunning devil as Maraj could last long unless he had protection. Nothing for nothing. How does he pay for protection? He acts on hints. He overhears two Brahmins saying so-and-so is an undesirable. There is another suicide. Nobody guilty—nobody caught—only a whisper, and the name Maraj is more dreaded than ever."

"Do you mean he kills 'em and makes it look like suicide?"

"Not so. If he is forced to kill he makes it look like accidental death. Almost always he succeeds in making them kill themselves, and there is no possible doubt about its being suicide. All sorts of ways—clever ways. Bullets. Hanging. Poison."

"Ye-e-e-s. Maybe. But that ain't suicide if they don't know what they're doing."

"But they do know. Mr. Quorn, they do know. That is his ingenuity—his creed—his purpose—his religion. It is not enough for him to kill their bodies; he must doom their spirits also."

"That guy seems to be fixing up a lonely future for himself. Even in hell there won't be many o' his kind. Well, it's pretty near time for my act. But what's the point of all this? You aren't skeered, are you, that he'll suicide me?"

"There is no knowing," Bamjee answered. "Don't say I didn't warn you. The temple Brahmins are your enemies. Maraj is in town; and Maraj is more cunning than chemicals that make no noise but work in the dark and change something into something else."

"Mind yourself," said Quorn. "I'm going to unhitch this critter."

THE crowd divided down the midst, making a lane along which Asoka moved with ponderous dignity until he reached the circular roped arena in the center of the compound.

Asoka's mood seemed perfect. He knew that the crowd wondered at him, and he enjoyed it. He quickened his pace as he neared the arena, as if he liked doing his tricks, and he commenced the first one before Quorn ordered it, limping around the arena on three legs.

According to Quorn, he was the only elephant in the world who could turn a somersault; he did it three times. Then he walked on his hind legs; he walked on his fore legs; he played the drum; he lay on Quorn without crushing him; he picked him up and swung him, as if his trunk were a trapeze; he sat and begged for biscuits as a dog does.

He caused roars of laughter by opening an umbrella and sauntering around the ring, holding it at the proper angle to the sun, with a two-foot dummy cigar dangling from the corner of his mouth. He was so well behaved that he ignored the oranges the children threw to him until Quorn told him he might pick them up.

And last of all—his most hair-raising trick—he pretended to get angry with Quorn and chased him until he caught him, swung him in the air as if about to hurl him to the ground, but placed him on his neck instead and started leisurely back toward his picket under the neem-tree.

"Not so bad, you sucker. If you make yourself all that popular," said Quorn, wiping the sweat from his face, "they're liable to forget some o' your peccadillos, such as smashing up the market place and what not else. Hey—steady now! Don't spoil it!"

But a naked fanatic whose type of holiness was dancing with a dozen snakes twined on his arms and neck had forced himself into the lane between the thronging crowd and blocked the way, giving a technically perfect exhibition of the dance of death. The crowd watched spellbound, making no room on either side of him.

Asoka began to gurgle. There is no truth in the tale that elephants fear mice, but some of them fear snakes,

like a man in *delirium tremens*. Asoka hated them; they made him hysterical. Quorn shouted to the fanatic to get out of the way, but the ash-smeared, naked seeker of salvation only danced the harder, making his snakes weave themselves in writhing patterns. He even began to dance toward Asoka.

Quorn shouted to the crowd to make the fool go somewhere else, although he knew they would rate it sacrilege to interfere with any one so holy. He even yelled for Bamjee, knowing that Bamjee had no fear of sacrilege; Bamjee might have courage enough to whip the fakir off the lot. But Bamjee had vanished.

Quorn tried to turn Asoka back to the arena, but the crowd had closed in behind and on either flank; there was no room to turn quickly. And suddenly the fanatic flung his snakes straight at Asoka's face. He might better have pulled the lanyard that fires a cannon. He stood still, waiting for results, perhaps for half a second.

IT appeared to Quorn—and Bamjee afterward confirmed it—that during that half second some one shouted in a strange tongue to the fanatic, who glanced, as if toward the voice, exactly at the moment when Asoka launched his charge.

Asoka may have meant to kill him, or he may have been merely hysterical and in a five-ton hurry to get home to his snakeless, comfortable picket by the neem-tree. It made no difference. The fanatic was in the way. He became a crimson mess that writhed as his snakes had done, crushed flat where Asoka trampled him in passing.

Quorn heard mocking laughter and knew he was meant to hear it, since it was pitched above the din the crowd made, but he did not dare to look to right or left; he had one purpose now —to keep his elephant from trampling the crowd that was milling in mob hysteria.

There were only fifty yards to go, and he discovered that he could guide Asoka easily. The elephant responded to the least touch. He was not in one of his tantrums.

"All right," said Quorn, between his teeth, "that guy committed suicide and you, you're not guilty o' murder. But who's to prove it? They'll get the Maxim out and shoot you full o' holes, you sucker! Hell, no—home's no use to you—keep going! Keep on going! You for the tall timber!"

There is nothing on four legs faster than an elephant for half a mile. Bamjee was by the back gate; it was he who opened it. Asoka charged through like a gun going into action and Quorn heard Bamjee shout to him something about Maraj. But his ear only caught the one word, because behind him the compound was full of the din of the crowd and Asoka, too, was not moving his tonnage in silence.

Beyond, lay the open road, dusty and winding between ancient trees that were the fringe of a forest, and Asoka seemed to know he must run for his life; but to make sure Quorn emphasized the information with the goad, the iron *ankus*.

"Give her the gun now! Step on it! You great big bone-head, think up your own alibi while you run! And then tell me where to hide you! Jumping gee whiz, who can hide an elephant?"

---

## CHAPTER II.

### INTRIGUE IN THE RANEE'S PALACE.

NIGHTS are noisier than days when Narada is keeping carnival; and they are lovelier, because the colored lanterns sway amid a mystery of trees and the roofs of nearly all the ancient buildings are limned in dim fire. Shutters are closed; thieves are abroad. But doors are open; shafts of yellow light cross narrow streets; the passers-by are gaudily dressed humans at one moment, phantoms the next.

Friends and their families sit in the doors, adding din to the din. Men, women, children sleep in any corner they can find, or on the tiled floor of the market place, or in mid-street, reckless of the traffic; shadows are avoided for fear of treading on an unseen sleeper, or a drunken one who might have lost his feeling of inferiority and found his knife. There is even a certain amount of highway robbery; people wander in groups, and those who have no friends follow any group that has the kindness to endure them.

There was therefore something suspicious and worthy of comment in the way that Bamjee hurried through the city. He was alone, he avoided groups as much as possible and he kept in the shadows wherever he could. He knew Narada intimately, inside out, and yet he wandered like a lost man and selected streets that almost everybody knew were dangerous.

He passed by gambling houses, near which the strong-arm gentry lurked to rob the winners on their way home. Somebody snatched his watch-chain.

He was so out of breath and excited that he made the mistake of trying to elbow his way through a marriage procession. Sixteen sweating dancers paused from their contortions in the colored lantern light to hold him while their overseer beat him with a long stick; then they flung him into the crowd and the crowd bullied him, not knowing who he was, until he left his gray silk jacket in their hands and escaped down an alley, where he fell over a sleeping woman, who yelled to her husband—a lusty peasant, who gave chase, crying thieves and murder.

Bamjee had to stop and bribe the peasant to let him alone, nor was the peasant satisfied until reasonably sure that he had all the money in Bamjee's possession. If he had known Bamjee, and had not been a simple peasant, he might have suspected that Bamjee did not keep all his money in one pocket.

The strangest part was that Bamjee did not head toward his own three-story house in the bazaar, with its office on the ground floor and living quarters above, where his family were keeping supper for him. He appeared to dread pursuit and yet seemed equally afraid of running into some one who might recognize him.

When he saw a policeman he ducked down an alley as swiftly as when he saw a group of temple Brahmins and their attendants armed with staves to keep the crowd from defiling them with its touch. He avoided all the temples, yet seemed deadly curious to learn what the crowds around the temples were discussing; several times he took advantage of deep shadows to approach and listen. What he learned excited him and sent him dodging again through shadows.

It was toward the palace that he headed finally, constantly glancing over his shoulder, and now and then pausing in doorways to make sure he was not being followed. He did not go through the main gate, where the men on sentry duty knew him and the officer was so involved with Bamjee in intricate schemes for grafting off the public treasury that one might suppose he would have to be friendly. Friends may be as dangerous as enemies—especially that sort of friend.

When Bamjee passed the main gate he took advantage of a four-wheeled, tented wagon going the same way to screen himself from observation. Out of breath though he was, tired though he was, he displayed the agility of a youngster when he came to a part of the wall where stones were missing and the branches of a huge tree offered means of descent on the other side.

However, his wits were tired, too. He forgot that that tree stood in an inclosure in which a sacred white bull cultivated boredom and a loathing of all bipeds. The bull was hardly larger than a big dog, but at least as active and not at all in love with being awakened in the night.

Bamjee fell almost on top of him. There was sudden and tremendous noise. Bamjee went out over the six-foot wall of the inclosure faster than a monkey, thanking a whole pantheon of gods that he did not believe in, because his pants and not his thigh muscles had caught on the bull's horn.

One pants-leg was still intact; by holding onto the other as he ran, he could make himself believe he looked presentable. It is what we believe that matters—until there is collision with a stronger disbelief.

HE fled like a ghost through the trees in the palace garden, skirting the portico and the terraces until he reached the servants' quarters and the back door used by underlings. There was nothing normal about that; Bamjee, as official purchasing agent with a position to keep up before the world, had never felt he could afford to be admitted to the palace by any except the front door. Suspicion reared itself against him, blackmail springing from it, as naturally as Minerva from the brow of Jove.

He was greeted by a *hamal,* which is a kind of go-between servant who normally does all the butler's work, and gets and deserves all the blame for whatever goes wrong. The *hamal* refused to recognize him at first, although he did concede the advisability of standing in the dark to talk. Blackmail abhors witnesses as absolutely as nature abhors a vacuum.

"I am Bamjee!"

"By Siva's necklace, that is an easy thing to say and any one might say it in the dark. But Bamjee *sahib* has the name of being a liberal gentleman."

Bamjee had to feel under his shirt for money, and it was so dark in that corner behind the butler's pantry wall that he could not see the denomination of the bills he drew forth. He had to guess.

He guessed wrong. It was too much money for a *hamal.*

"Son of an immoral mother, hide that in your belly-band and take my message."

But the *hamal* turned toward the light. He saw a fifty-rupee note. He hid it with the swiftness of a roadside conjurer.

"But, Bamjee, *sahib,* my day's work is over. I am not even allowed to enter the kitchen again until to-morrow morning. Will to-morrow not do?"

"Do you know what *now* means? Ingrate! If the nowness of the now does not make you act swifter than dynamite I will see to it that you have no job to-morrow morning. You are out—a screech-owl screaming in a wilderness of debt with a wife on her way to another man's arms and your children following the chickens through the streets to pick up food, unless you take my message now! Now, do you understand me? Go before I beat the teeth out of your head!"

"But, *sahib*—"

"Very well, I will make a great noise and summon the butler. I will tell him you offered to sell me some of the palace silverware for one-fifth of its weight in rupees."

"*Sahib,* the butler would demand at least two hundred rupees to take such a message at this hour. Whereas I, if he should catch me before I whisper to one of the maids, could bribe him with only fifty. So give me fifty more and I will do it. Thus I shall have only forty for myself, because I must give the maid ten—at least ten."

Bamjee paid him in the dark and was so impatient and excited that he never knew that he had given the man an extra hundred by mistake. He sat down in the dark and waited—endlessly it seemed to him, while the *hamal* sent the message up in relays to the roof, each relay offering excuses and objections until the last possible cent had been squeezed from the man below and the *hamal's* hundred and fifty dwindled to a hundred.

It appeared there was a party on the

roof; it was no time to interrupt a royal lady, even though she was breaking every canon of tradition by entertaining men in her palace, and of the two men one an Englishman. Even Bamjee, the contemptuous skeptic, shuddered at the idea of an Englishman drinking champagne with the Ranee on the palace roof. It made him repeat to himself the dark names certain temple priests were calling her.

THE message reached its goal at last and there was no more lost time. It might be difficult to reach the Ranee from below, but when she commanded from above it was as if she pressed an electric button and things happened. Men leaped to obey.

A very important palace personage was sent to guide Bamjee up a labyrinth of stairs and passages; and because his pants were torn he was supplied with an Indian costume of crimson silk before he was ushered into the presence, amid a fairyland of colored lights, in a garden that bloomed in tiled flower beds, where baskets that seemed to have been fastened to the stars swayed gently in the night air, drenching it with the scent of musk, and a splashing fountain filled the air with music.

There was other music also; women behind a marble lattice-work were playing flutes; a man was singing the love-song of the bride of Krishna. Bamjee, stepping out of darkness with the colored lamp-light on his crimson costume looked no longer like a *babu;* he resembled an ambassador from Araby, bringing news of caravans loaded with spices and slaves and jewels.

He even forgot his nervousness to some extent, because Marmaduke Brazenose Blake was seated smoking in a lounge chair, dressed in a black dinner jacket, with his monocle fixed in his eye and an air of bachelor enjoyment like an aura all around him. It was such a scandal that Blake should be there that Bamjee grew for the moment almost superior to his surroundings—almost, but not quite.

Facing Blake sat Rana Raj Singh, prince of a line of Rajput blood so purple that its sources—so men say—are traceable to when the gods made merry on the earth with men and were a trifle more than merry with the women. Tall, black-bearded, handsome—graceful with the litheness of a swordsman who can hunt the gray boar with a sword on horseback, who has lived clean and neither drinks nor guzzles.

His presence was, if possible, the more scandalous. Blake, it might be presumed, might hardly understand the horror of the Indian aristocracy if it should learn that he was sitting *vis-à-vis* the Ranee on her sacred roof —and she unveiled. But they would know that Rana Raj Singh understood the significance, even as Bamjee did. It meant that the pillars of Indian aristocracy were falling—or else changing; and to some people change is as bad as decay. Rana Raj Singh was a cataclysm, not a scandal; compared to his presence there, Sodom and Gomorrah were a minor incident.

But the Ranee, even at nineteen, which is a revolutionary age, had not thrown all tradition to the winds. She had kept its substance, while throwing away the shell. She had ten of her ladies with her, five on either hand—surely sufficient witnesses to prove to any jury that she had not sinned as deeply as Mother Eve, who set the first unveiled example.

Nor had she forgotten strategy. Her ladies were as marvelously dressed as flowers in the early morning dew, but none of them was younger than herself and some were older; none was as good-looking. Her dress was the plainest and made in Paris by a magician who knew how youth should look beneath a hot night sky amid the smell of musk and the rustle of palm leaves.

Although Bamjee knew her well, and had seen her often, in that setting

she made his sharp little eyes almost snap from his head, and took away all his remaining breath.

"What can it be, Bamjee, so important that you must intrude at this hour?" she asked pleasantly. But underneath the velvet voice there was a hint of iron. It might not fare well with Bamjee if his errand lacked justification. "Speak," she said. "The company will excuse you."

"Sister of the Starlight, this is terrible and secret news I bring," said Bamjee. "Is it wise to spread the scroll of evil before strangers' eyes?" he quoted.

"Who, then, is the stranger?" she asked him. "Speak, fool!"

"But, Daughter of the Dew, there are the servants—"

"Oh, very well." She clapped her hands until the chief attendant stood before her. "You and all the servants have my leave to go until I send for you again. See that none waits in hiding behind the flower pots—and now," she said, staring at Bamjee. "What is it?"

"THE elephant Asoka slew a man."

"I know that. It is a great pity, even though the man who was killed seems to have been almost as disgusting a reptile as the snakes that crawled like vermin on him. I am sorry to say that Asoka will have to be shot, unless—perhaps you have come to tell me some way out of it?"

"Playmate of the gods, they are saying that the man who was slain was Maraj! He was crushed out of recognition. Who shall say it was not he?"

"Who should want to say it was not Maraj? If such good news is true your intrusion is justified. We may forgive Asoka."

"Lioness of Heaven, it was not Maraj! Maraj himself has spread that rumor and the temple Brahmins are confirming it. Why? Why not? Whoever thinks Maraj is dead is less on guard against him. Nevertheless, although the temple Brahmins are helping to spread that rumor, to you they will make no such pretense. They will send to you to-morrow. They will say the slain man was a holy one and they will try to force you to order the troops to shoot Asoka. Why? Because that would cause Quorn to leave Narada and return to the United States, thus depriving you of your Gunga *sahib*, who has been so helpful in breaking the Brahmins' tyranny. This they will do to-morrow, nevertheless knowing that it was Maraj who slew that fakir with the snakes!"

"Maraj who slew him? What then had Asoka to do with it?"

"The man was suicided!"

"Hell's bells!" muttered Blake, and Rana Raj Singh scratched the chin beneath his beard.

"How do you know this, Bamjee?"

"Beloved by the Rishis, if I should dare to tell you—"

"If you should dare not to, Bamjee—do you wish to resign from your post as purchasing agent? Do you wish to leave Narada? Do you wish the auditor to publish the report that he has shown me privately?"

"Oh, my God!" said Bamjee. "This *babu* is on the horns of a dilemma! How do I know it was Maraj who suicided that abominably holy person? I know it as well as I know I also shall be suicided if it ever leaks out who told! That very holy person was the man whose poisonous serpents were employed to slay Ali Gul the Moslem money-lender, whom all hated. Was he slain? No. He was suicided. Why not? Had he not a mortgage on a property that the Brahmins said was their property? Was the mortgage found after his death? No. He also had a mortgage on a property of mine. Was that found? No. Were any of his papers found? No. How was he suicided? He was given his choice between taking a living cobra into his bed that night or being accidentally

caused to break a vial of carbolic acid with his face. And how do I know that? His widow told me. How did she know? She was in the secret cabinet where Ali Gul used to hide witnesses to what were supposed to be secret conversations."

"This story sounds fishy to me," remarked Blake and Rana Raj Singh nodded, but his nod was neutral. He was possibly confirming his own estimate of Blake's neutrality. Blake turned to the Ranee. "Of course, your highness, as your guest I cannot take official cognizance of any of this. But may I ask to be excused from hearing more. It might be awkward."

The Ranee smiled as sweetly as if she were Machiavelli himself in woman's raiment. Blake, as the official representative of the British-Indian government, with authority to advise and keep watch and report, was no bugbear to her—not though on the strength of his reports the British-Indian government might send commissioners to rule in her name and reduce her to the status of a puppet-queen. He was a sportsman and a gentleman—insuperable handicaps in dealing with a woman who understood both qualities and had the wit to play the game according to his rules, but with her own rules added.

"I might need you," she said, gazing at him. "For the present let us call this a private conversation. Confidential—under the seal of hospitality. Then, if it gets too serious, I could consent to your breaking the seal of confidence, without having to tell you it all from the beginning."

BLAKE should have taken his leave. But he loved her too well, in a fatherly, middle-aged bachelor fashion. She was too amusing to be left, and also too likely to do something recklessly behind his back that might cost him months of letter-writing to his government to explain away. He was lazy and hated writing letters. His purpose was to keep her on the throne in spite of her own recklessness, and in spite of all her enemies, if he could manage it by any gentlemanly means. He repeatedly risked his own good standing with his government to cover the strategic errors due to her inexperience.

"Highly irregular," he said, frowning. "However, I will stay if you wish."

And then came Quorn—at first a message from him, saying he was downstairs in the front hall threatening mayhem to the palace servants who kept him waiting there.

"Daughter of the Dawn, he uses strange oaths, yet he is not drunk."

Then Quorn himself, treading the heels of the servant sent to bring him—Quorn in his turban, with a ready-made blue serge jacket on over his Indian costume, and in his right hand the *ankus* of office, the iron hook with which he normally controlled Asoka's ponderous movements. Servants standing near him shuddered at it. The Ranee dismissed the servants.

"Miss," he began, then hesitated, being vague on the subject of etiquette. Besides, Blake's presence bothered him. He liked Blake, but he was too much a restraining influence on the Ranee to be suffered without some resentment. Also he knew that Blake disliked that form of address to a reigning Ranee.

The Ranee nodded. She liked Quorn to call her miss—it sounded so enormously more honest than titles such as Bamjee and her servants used. She valued Quorn more highly than a dozen Blakes, and at that without robbing Blake of credit. It is only fools and knaves who undervalue one man because they recognize the different merits of another. She was neither a fool nor more of a knave than any statesman has to be.

"Yes, Mr. Quorn?"

"You heard what Asoka done, miss? 'Tweren't his fault. He was behaving gentle as a lamb. That there

holy feller went and beaned him with a raft o' snakes that would have made a temple statue throw a fit. And mind you, it was done a-purpose. Some one laughed. Maybe you don't know the kind o' laugh I mean! There's Brahmins at the bottom of it, them there temple Brahmins. I've been home to clean up, miss, and my Eurasian servant Moses had an earful for me. They've been bragging to him—told him now you'll have to order out the Maxim squad to shoot Asoka first thing to-morrow morning."

"Have you any suggestions to offer, Mr. Quorn?"

"No, miss—excepting, if you will pardon me, miss, and no insolence intended—I'd as soon they'd shoot me first. I couldn't tell you, miss, how much that critter means to me. And he weren't guilty. No, miss, he didn't even throw a tantrum. He was same as me or you if we'd had poison snakes thrown at us.

"And the devil who did it had time to get out o' the road, too. He was one o' these here fanatics. He chose that way o' dying. Miss, it wouldn't be fair to shoot Asoka—not for that."

"Where is Asoka now?" she asked him.

"Miss, I've got him hid."

Because she was young and not yet spoiled by life, the Ranee did not sigh relief, she smiled it. It was Blake who sighed. Rana Raj Singh grunted.

"I have heard of hiding needles in a haystack," said the Ranee. "Are you sure that no one knows where you have hidden him?"

"No, miss, I ain't sure of nothing. But I'm reasonably sure."

"How will you feed him? Can't they follow you when you come and go?"

"That's just exactly it, miss. I want leave of absence, please, and some money."

"My steward shall give you money. Yes, you may have leave of absence."

"There was something else, miss."

Quorn glanced sidewise at Bamjee, whom he trusted at any time about half as far as he could see him.

But the Ranee had a trick of trusting untrustworthy people in the same way that some people skate on thin ice, going where others don't dare to go. It pays if you can do it; and if you can't you only drown, so it doesn't matter.

"Listen to this, Bamjee," she said. "Listen well. It would do your credit with me no harm if you should happen this once—this first time—to be loyal and secretive."

BAMJEE smirked a protest of his loyalty. He bowed acknowledgment of trust. He opened his eyes and snapped his mouth shut, symbolizing secrecy. He threw a chest. Manfully he held his hands behind him. He deceived the Ranee as thoroughly as a child deceives its nurse at hide-and-seek.

"I will order the treasurer to hold up for the present all the money due you for commissions," continued the Ranee. "And now, Mr. Quorn, what is it?"

"This, miss. Them there Brahmins. I figure you're number three on the Brahmins' list. They mean to get Asoka first, me next, and then you. If they can force you to order Asoka shot, that gets rid o' me automatic. I'd go home. You could get along, o' course, without me, easy.

"But you can't afford to have them Brahmins bragging they put one over on you. So I'm here to say I'll stand by you and take all chances o' black magic, and snakes, and this here murderer Maraj, if you'll okay me."

"What do you mean—okay you?"

"War, miss! War to a finish! Back me until I get this guy Maraj and prove him on the Brahmins! Flynn ain't my name. I'm no Pinkerton or Burns. I'm plain yours truly with his goat got and his dander good and riz. There won't be no widow or orphans

if they get my number. I wrote my will the other day. I named Asoka; he's to have my bit of insurance money. If Asoka dies first, then it goes in a lump to the feller that gets the crook who k i l l e d him. Only, if Asoka should be executed, then the money goes where it can do the most harm; I've named a gang of reformers in the States who'll make more trouble for the Brahmins with my bit o' money than Asoka himself could if he tore loose at one o' their celebrations. So that's that, miss. Are you in on it?"

She nodded. Blake looked nervous; he knew the danger of what Quorn proposed.

Rana Raj Singh, thrusting his jaw forward, stroked it, running his fingers through his beard.

"My God!" said Bamjee. "You bequeath your money to an elephant?"

"Mr. Quorn," said the Ranee, "I appoint you my special agent to investigate Maraj and his association with the Brahmins. You may kill him wherever you find him. You may give whatever orders you please. You may employ the troops, the police, my palace servants, Bamjee—any one. I will put that in writing and sign and seal it. If any one refuses to obey you you may have him put in prison. If you catch Maraj or kill him, and if you prove he was in any way associated with the Brahmins, I will raise you to the rank of *Sirdar* and I will use what influence I have with Mr. Blake to get the British government to confirm the title. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes, miss."

"What else? You seem to have something else on your mind?"

Quorn looked straight at Rana Raj Singh—very straight indeed, but he could see Blake's face at the same time, and he knew better than vaguely what was going on in Blake's mind.

As an independent prince without a fortune, but with a tremendous reputation, who was modern enough to woo the Ranee in the modern way, Rana Raj Singh would be a deadly dangerous spark to plunge into the magazine of local politics. His interference might provide excuse for riots. On the other hand, he had a handful of Rajput followers, than whom there could not possibly be better and braver or more willing experts at hunting a murderer down.

Rana Raj Singh slowly rose out of his chair. He nodded at Quorn. He smiled at the Ranee, showing wonderful white teeth. He smiled at Blake. Then he nodded at Quorn again.

"You will need help," he said. "I will provide it. You may order me, too."

"Oh, my God!" said Bamjee.

That was reasonable comment. When a prince, whose pedigree is older than the proudest European king's, submits himself to the disposal of a man of an alien race, whose business is training elephants and whose pedigree dates from just before the time when births in Philadelphia were legally recorded, it is thinkable, even by Bamjee, that the two of them are first-class men.

Blake actually dropped his monocle, and had to screw it in again. The Ranee's ladies fluttered with astonishment.

The Ranee looked with wondering eyes from Quorn to Rana Raj Singh and then back again. Quorn stiffened himself, caught Rana Raj Singh's eye and answered him with four words:

"Sir to you, sir."

---

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ART OF THUGGEE.

SAY this for England: a Residency is a place where any one is safe, no matter who he is nor why he has taken refuge. Since '57, when they held the Lucknow Residency against as long odds as were ever laid against a garrison, it has become a part of

India's superstition that a Residency is inviolable.

The upper classes recognize it as an embassy or legation, with all that implies; the lower classes don't reason about it, but even the criminals respect it as a sanctuary, where life at any rate is safe until the law determines otherwise. No violence in Residency grounds.

"Quorn," said Blake as they left the palace, "I'm going to take you up behind me on my horse and ride you to the Residency. I've a notion you may have been followed here, and they may be on the lookout for you. I will talk with you—unofficially—after we reach my quarters."

Blake's whaler mare behaved abominably, not being used to the weight of two men, and Quorn was no horseman. They clattered on the stones beneath the guardhouse gate; they plunged and lunged along the street outside, shying at every shadow; and they made so much noise that all Narada might have heard and seen and recognized them.

However, nothing happened, and Blake's servant, running alongside, reported that, as far as he knew, they were not being followed—until they left the zone of partially lighted streets and plunged into the pitch-dark lane between high walls that led toward the Residency compound. There the servant fell and smashed his lantern.

Blake reined in, and Quorn jumped down to help the man. He could hear him sobbing. He groped for him in total darkness, finding him—feeling him just as the sobbing ceased. He could feel two men. They were both dead.

"Got a match, sir?"

Blake passed him a box of matches. Blake's Moslem servant, Abdul, lay dead of a knife wound. He was lying prone on another man, who lay face upward and who seemed to have been dead for quite a little while before Abdul tripped and fell belly downward on the long, razor-edged knife whose hilt was in the dead man's hand.

"But there's another, smaller blade below the hilt, sir," Quorn reported, striking match after match. "It's one o' them there weapons that can be used as sword and dagger. The shorter blade is stuck into the dead guy's stomach; that's what held the knife upright.

"Yes, sir, Abdul is stone dead. The long blade passed clean through him—there's three inches of it sticking out of his back. If you should ask me, he couldn't fall that hard. I'd say not. There's something tricky about the way the lamp was smashed—as if it was knocked out of his hand on purpose. Would you care to look, sir, if I hold the horse? It looks to me as if some one jumped on Abdul's back and forced him down on the knife."

"Are you positive he's dead?" asked Blake.

"As dead as mutton."

"Well, the thing to do is to get his body to the Residency. Which shall it be? Will you run on and bring back any of my servants you can find? Or will you wait here while I gallop and get them?"

"Go ahead, sir. That's the quickest. Do you pack a gat, sir?"

"Do I do what?"

"Carry an automatic?"

"No, confound it. Here, are you sure both men are dead? Get up behind me then and we'll both go. That's safer."

"No, sir, I'll be all right. I'll stay here. You hurry."

It was Blake's off night. No human being ever lived who did not make a murderous mistake at one time or another. Blake rammed in his spurs and thundered down the dark lane like a whole troop of cavalry. He made enough noise to drown the shouts of ten men, and his own shouts, to his servants, as he neared the Residency, were enough to deafen them to any

noises Quorn made—not that Quorn made any.

HE hardly knew what struck him. He felt a stinging blow from behind and smelled the musty stench of a burlap gag that was thrust into his mouth and wrapped around his head.

He struck out blindly with his fists, but hardly felt his wrists seized and pinioned, hardly felt his ankles being tied before he became unconscious from the blow—or perhaps from some drug with which the gag was soaked; it tasted beastly. He had seen nobody; he had heard no sound; he could not even swear that a cry had escaped his own lips.

He recovered consciousness within a dark room and lay listening to voices that, for a long time, seemed to be inside his own head. It seemed to him he was home in Philadelphia. His taxicab had been in some sort of smash-up—his first. He felt ashamed, and afraid for his license. After awhile he shook off that feeling, but the voices seemed to come from another world—inhuman, without emotion, hollow.

At last, though, he was able to recognize a few words in the local native tongue, but it was a long time before he could make any sense of what was being said. There was an argument—hot on one side, ice cold on the other. One man was urging action, to which the other appeared insolently indifferent.

"If you don't kill him now—"

"I know my business."

"He is probably listening!"

"Let him."

"Can't you understand that the Englishman, Blake, will raise such a hue and cry that—"

"I have understanding. I am not in need of advice from you."

"By Jinendra's nose, I am not giving you advice! I order you!"

"Order somebody who will obey you—some priest, for instance. I am no temple rat."

"Too much success has made you insolent."

"No. I was always insolent."

"Suppose we should turn against you?"

"That is not hard to imagine. You are sure to do it sooner or later. I am not afraid of you. You know why. Cease talking. You annoy me. It is not safe to annoy me."

Some one took a cover off a lamp. The light hurt Quorn's eyes; he shut them for a moment. When he opened them again a man was squatting beside him, gazing at him. He was a man with a big head, crowned with a shock of shaggy hair that seemed to have been bleached to the color of new manila rope.

He had dark eyebrows and a shaggy, dark beard and mustache that half hid and yet exaggerated the coarseness of a big mouth, around whose corners a sort of humor lurked. His nose was coarse and honeycombed with pockmarks. His big, full, deep-set eyes had humor of a sort too, but it was cruel humor; they would have been splendid eyes if they had had more color, but they were so light—gray, blue, green perhaps—as to look hardly human.

"Why do you not go to the United States?"

It was the bored voice that had pleaded insolence. Quorn lay still, trying whether he could move his wrists and ankles, wondering whether he could break the man's neck if he had his arms free. He felt an impulse to kill.

Quorn was a man who had almost never raised his hand in violence; certainly he had never contemplated doing murder; he would have been willing to bet all his money, at any time, that he never would commit murder, and would never wish to do it. Yet he felt now he would almost rather kill that man who gazed at him than

go on living. There was nothing to argue about, he just wanted to kill him.

"Do you wish ever to see the United States again?" the man asked him, in the same cold, incurious voice.

Quorn did not trust himself even to try to speak. He was working hard to regain possession of his senses, which recognized, in the man who was talking to him, something vaguely suggestive of his own peculiar influence over animals.

Nevertheless, he had never pretended to understand that influence; and this man's was not quite the same, it seemed reversed, although to save his life Quorn could not have explained the difference. Black magic was the thought that came into his mind. His head felt woozy, and he knew that was only partly due to the blow, only partly due to the drug he still tasted; there was still something else that he felt he could fight and overcome.

"Understand me," said the man, and he spoke English with only a trace of accent, "you are physically at my mercy—absolutely. I can kill you slowly or quickly, however I please, in my own time, in my own way, for my own pleasure. Sit up. I will show you something else."

HE seized Quorn's shoulders and raised him until he sat with his back propped in the corner of a wall. His strength appeared to be prodigious; it produced in its victim a sense of helplessness that had nothing to do with the cords around wrists and ankles. It was like the strength of machinery.

"There is a fool here," he said, "who has wearied me."

Quorn discovered it was painful to turn his head; however, he managed it, and decided he had not been badly hurt. He was in a small square room with whitewashed walls. The only furniture was heaps of gunnysacks, that looked rat eaten, and a small glass lamp on an upturned packing case. Another man sat on a heap of sacks, whom Quorn recognized at the first glance as the individual used by the temple Brahmins as go-between, whenever they had business with persons with whom their caste forbade them to associate—a man in a long yellow robe with a variation from the Brahmin caste mark on his forehead—a sort of bastard Brahmin, a metaphysical eunuch, authorized to touch defilement in the name of holiness without infecting his masters.

"You shall watch him die."

As if he had been shot out of a catapult the other man made headlong for the door. But the door was locked.

"You would escape from Maraj? In what way are you more clever than all those others? Come here."

His panic-stricken effort having failed, the man seemed paralyzed by fear. He turned ashen gray, trembled, unable to speak. The man who had called himself Maraj reached out with his right hand, seized him by the ankle, twisted it, drew him forward, changed his hold to the shoulder and hurled him back on the heap of sacking—all with one hand and without much noticeable effort.

"I will not kill him. He shall kill himself."

At those words the man found speech at last. He jabbered, stuttered, threatened, pleaded—until his voice died to a meaningless mumble and his jaw fell.

Then Quorn spoke for the first time:

"Out with the light, you idiot!"

The advice came too late. The Brahmin did make a move toward the lamp, but the other man seized his ankle and twisted it again until he screamed and struggled like a landed fish. Maraj then put the lamp up on a beam; he had to stand on the box to do it.

"It is time to die now," said Maraj. "Which way do you prefer? Painless, of course. They all seek painless ways, as if that made any difference!

Die! Do you hear me? Kill yourself!"

He turned to Quorn: "The poor fool threatened me. He had the impudence to order me. He said he would betray me unless I slew you out of hand. He could do it, too; he could have betrayed me easily if I had let him. But he hasn't much intelligence. Let us see which way he chooses."

He sat down close to Quorn and waited, watching his victim, who seemed several times as if going to speak—and as if then the uselessness of speech occurred to him. He even seemed to try to summon dignity, but found none.

"What will you do?" Maraj asked. "You have no knife—no rope. How will you kill yourself?"

Quorn spoke again, surprised by the impersonal aloofness of his own voice, that sounded as if it belonged to some one else.

"Why not have a crack at killing *him*, you idiot!" he heard himself say to the terrified prisoner. "I'll help you if you'll loose me some way."

Maraj chuckled. "Why not?" he suggested. "Would that not be suicide? Try killing me!"

The man found speech again. Quorn's voice seemed to have stirred lees of manhood in him. He spoke in the native tongue cold-calmly, every word a concentrated curse.

"You offspring of all the dogs that ever lay in filth! You soul of stinks! You carcass of—"

HE rushed him suddenly—and died that instant. He who had called himself Maraj stepped sidewise with the skill of a toreador in the arena. No eye could have followed the speed of the silken handkerchief that licked across the man's neck and killed him infinitely more neatly than a hangman's rope.

It left no mark on him. It severed him from life, and was out of sight again before the knees could yield under his weight and let him begin falling to the floor; and yet he fell as if there never had been life in him nor any bones to keep him straight.

"That is the art of Thuggee, so-called," said Maraj. "Isn't it brilliant? In a world where so many forms of death are messy, what do you candidly think of a so-called government that tries to stamp out and abolish such a mystery as that? Mind you, it is a mystery. It is more than an art.

"You couldn't learn it—not in fifty years—not even though I should be fool enough to try to teach you."

He rolled the body over with his foot, then sat by Quorn again. For a moment or two he paused as if turning over matters of importance in his mind. Then:

"Don't you think they ought to make me public executioner? It would make me so happy. It would save them so much trouble. Often I make a victim really kill himself, but that fool's fear was of the sort that is not easy to control. He was not sentimental. You are. Where have you hidden your elephant?"

"He ain't mine," Quorn answered.

"Liar—or else imbecile! You have no bill of sale for him; therefore he is not yours, eh? Show me a bill of sale then for the death you will presently die! Will it not be your death? Ownership! Where is the elephant?"

"He belongs to the Ranee. Ask her."

"You mistake me, I think, for a worse fool than she is. Your Ranee's hours are numbered. I said hours, I should almost have said minutes. These pretty ones—young ones—they taste sweeter on the teeth of death than carrion like that thing." He kicked at the corpse on the floor. "Does she love life? Will she cling to it? Ah, then what a sacrifice to death! Mn-n-n—what an offering! You love her, don't you? And that elephant loves you? Ah! You shall kill her.

Then you shall see me kill the elephant. Then I will kill you. Perfect! Look at me."

He peered into Quorn's eyes, leaning over him. If he was human he hardly seemed so. Mania, as if it were a monstrous spirit from another plane of consciousness, had entire possession of him—a monster to whom death was life and cruelty was beauty.

Not for nothing had Quorn handled elephants in all their moods; he recognized the likeness of the thing that seized Asoka now and then. Only this was more developed—had more intelligence. He had thought of it, when Asoka threw his tantrums, as the spirit of one of nature's cataclysms, weary of blind energy and seeking a sensual outlet. But this man seemed to have the spirit of all evil in him.

"Death is a devourer—hungry. One must feed death daily, if he wants to live. Keep death fed full—and live forever! Hah! Feed life—and die forever! But you are too silly to understand that. I understand it, that is the point. You shall obey me!"

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**

## *Queer Bridges*

AFTER crossing the wonderful bridges of to-day it is almost impossible to realize that such marvels of engineering skill are the direct descendants of many strange structures which man has erected to facilitate his going from bank to bank of a river.

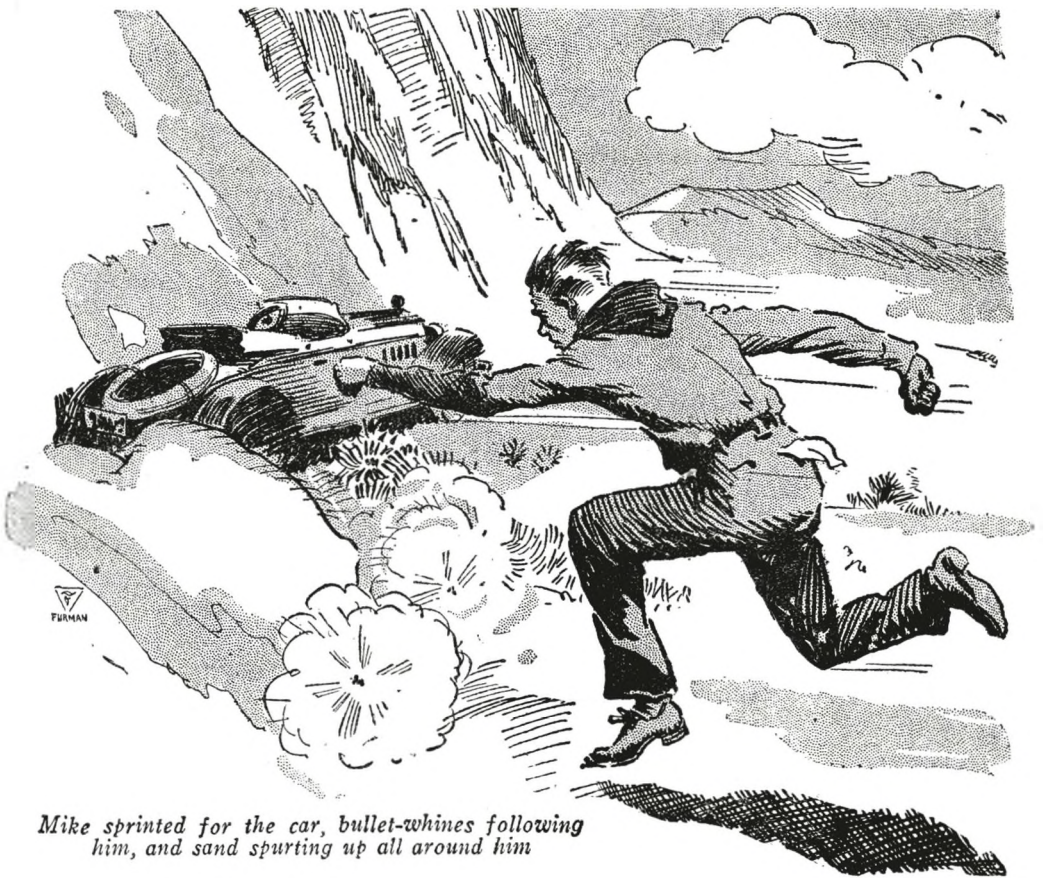
The early inhabitants of America learned their bridgecraft from the beaver. They hewed down trees on opposite banks of a stream, and when they fell the topmost branches interlaced over the water and so formed a rude bridge. Later in their civilization, poles were erected on either bank, leather thongs stretched across from side to side, bundles of grass laid upon the frail structure—and the first suspension bridge came into being.

Some five hundred years ago the Peruvians, at war with a neighboring tribe, built a bridge across the Rio Desaguadero, which was a hundred yards in width and had below its surface water a treacherous undercurrent. Four large cables of twisted rushes were laid across the stream and covered with plaited grass. Two more rush ropes were added and the whole woven together by twisting in and out the pliable twigs of young trees. Over this, just three feet above the water's surface, Capac, fifth Inca, transported his whole army into the enemy's country.

South America has frequently solved the river crossing difficulty by a device called the *tarabita*. Across the stream is slung a rope of buffalo hide, secured at one end to an immovable stake. On the opposite bank a winch slackens or tightens the cable as required. From the rope hangs a leathern hammock, large enough to hold a man. The traveler seats himself in the strange car, is pushed off, and speeds along the taut *tarabita* to the other side. Even mules are taken over in like manner, fastened to the rope by a band.

But of all human devices for stream crossing, perhaps the most convenient is that of the Mesopotamian Arab, who totes his "bridge" with him. Recently a band of desert marauders fleeing before the enemy, arrived at the bank of the river Tigris. Having neither raft nor boat, they inflated their goatskin water bags and, perched upon, them sailed to the opposite shore, and safety.

*C. A. F. Macbeth.*




*Mike sprinted for the car, bullet-whines following him, and sand spurting up all around him*

# Stopping 'Em With Lead

***Jimmie Grant, of the Secret Service, and Jimmie Earpe, Arizona Ranger, form an alliance that starts plenty of trouble for the smugglers of dope and Chinese tong men***

***By W. WIRT***

***Author of "More Than a Double Cross," "War Lord of Many Swordsmen," etc.***

## *Novelette—Complete*

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE BORDER TRAIL.

THE pilot car on the Benson trail stopped as a Mexican stepped in the glare of the headlights and waved it down. The evil-faced little driver leaned out over the wheel.

"Come on," he snarled, "get a move on you. Whatinell do you think, that we got all day? Hurry up, spig!"

The Mexican understood the tone and finished the last ten feet to the car in a shuffling trot.

"*Señor!*" he chattered. "Back! *Vuelva Vd. pronto—muchos hombres delante! Rangeros!*"

"Get out of the way," answered the driver. "Tell Pedro O K," and the big car turned around, almost running over the Mexican, who for once in his life, jumped with the swiftness of a

jack-rabbit. As he stood for a moment in the shadow of the mesquite, he muttered: "*Adios—diablos Americanos.*"

The car swayed desperately from side to side.

"What the hell, now?" asked the young, reckless-eyed man sitting beside him. "Do you reckon they are out for us, Mike?"

"Don't know and don't give a damn," snapped the driver, his eyes on the road. "It's up to us to pass the word, and up to Monckton to do the figuring. Keep still and let me drive, the boys are close behind us and coming fast."

A few minutes went by and then, as they rounded a curve, the headlights of two cars picked them up.

"There they are," said the man beside Mike. "We're in plenty of—what the hell are you doin', you crazy Irish—"

Mike had swung the car off the trail and was on the alkali of the desert. "Get to your rod, quick," he shouted. "Border Patrol! They're ambushin' us!"

The young man laughed and stood up, facing back in the swaying car, drawing a .45 Colt automatic. "Keep goin', Mike, old bull-buster," he grinned, his gun beginning to spit out a steel-jacketed answer to the streaks of red coming from the two cars now on the right rear.

"Stick and slug, Kid," shouted the man at the wheel. "It's catchin' before hangin'."

Whatever he was, this man Mike at the wheel had plenty of cold nerve. He drove that car blind, headlights out, through the desert at seventy-five and eighty miles an hour. The *thud-thud-thud* of bullets hitting the car didn't even make him wince. The Kid

emptied his gun, snapped the magazine out, brought another out of his side pocket, slipped it in, raised his gun. They went up a little rise, swooped down again, and suddenly were in the clear.

Mike swung sharply to the left and the Kid sat down heavily. "Hope I can hit that damn trail again in time to turn the boys," Mike snarled. "It's a tip-off sure as shootin'."

"How'd you know they weren't our bunch?" asked the Kid.

"Because they didn't dim their lights when we flashed 'em. Sa-a-ay, how come you don't know that, Kid?"

"I never been out riding on this side before. Monckton brought me up from Tepoca. I been on the receivin' end down there and before that I was on the old Shark, transportin'. Hey, you're on the trail now, boy."

"I know it," grunted Mike, as he turned down the trail. "They ought to be along here right now. Maybe-so the shootin' turned 'em."

"THERE they are! Something anyway," said the Kid, a minute later. "Look—over to the right of the road. What the hell? All lights out!" The big car came to a brake-burning stop alongside of two others, just off the trail. Its headlights disclosed a scene of recent death, quick and merciless.

On the sand near the cars lay the bodies of four Chinese, sprawled out in different directions and attitudes, as if shot down while running. In the car nearest the trail was the body of a white man, slumped in the front seat. Over the wheel, his head resting on that man's body, lay another. In the other car, the muzzle of a Browning submachine gun showing between them, their bodies hanging out over the side, were two more white men, both dead.

As the Kid said, "Oh, my God," Mike drew a long whistling breath and reached for the gear shift. His hand froze on it as he felt a cold round ring of steel press into his neck and the drawl of a soft, deceptively mild old voice came to his ear. "Don't move, feller." Out of the corner of his eye, Mike could see the Kid stiffen as he had done, and he knew they were caught, like rats in a trap.

"You gents sit right still now," the old voice went on, "until my boys get them popguns you-all call pistols."

They felt hands pawing over them, searching for and finding their guns, then the voice again, "All right, son, turn on the lights and we'll see who's come to call on us."

The lights of the other two cars went on and Mike and the Kid saw around them the grim, tanned faces of the best shots in the world, the Arizona Rangers.

Old Ranger Captain Johnston, whose equally old ivory-handled single-action Colt .41 had been against Mike's neck, stepped close to the car.

"You gents are both under arrest," he said.

Mike laughed. "On what charge, rube?" He knew that he was in no danger of being killed or even manhandled, now that he was disarmed and under arrest. In a city, a question like that, with a word of derision or scorn tacked on to the end of it, would have brought an instant physical answer; but here in Arizona, he knew that while a ranger would cheerfully kill him if he resisted, or disobeyed an order, he could say what he wanted to. His warped brain did not or never could sense the utter scorn and loathing that he and his kind inspired in the hearts of the clean-living, hard-riding, straight-shooting outdoor men, whose code of honor was as fine and clear as a Knight Templar's.

"Well, suh," drawled Johnston. "You-all are carryin' weapons, that's one charge; unless you-all have a permit," and he paused skeptically.

"We haven't," grinned Mike; "go on, tell us some more. We're packin' those rods to protect us against a lot

of bad men that are hijackin' around here. Fellers that you drug store cowboys and coppers can't seem to get. That's easy; our mouthpiece will get us out an hour after you throw us in the coop. You got nothin' on us but that, big boy. Let's go."

"No hurry, feller," drawled Johnston. "Just step out of the car for a minute while we look it over."

"Think we got some yellow-bellies in the flaps?" sneered Mike, but doing as ordered, the Kid following him. "Look at all the hardware hanging around these birds, Kid."

The Kid smiled. "May I reach in my pocket for a cigarette?" he asked the ranger beside him. The Kid was a college man who had deliberately chosen the path of adventure and "easy money."

"Yeah, boy," answered young Jimmie Earpe, who measured up to the rest of the Earpes as a gunfighter, and went quite a little beyond, in the estimation of many in Arizona. "Go on, reach for it; and listen, feller, maybe-so you've got another gun planted. Bring that out, too. I'll give you first shot, honest Injun—both you and this mangy little coyote here that's been yappin'. Go on," he coaxed, "the rest of 'em ain't lookin'. Get something in your hand."

The Kid laughed. "I'd be delighted to oblige you," he drawled, "but at the moment I really only have some cigarettes in my pocket. Some other time—any other time, in fact, that you and I may meet."

Mike's evil, wizened-up little face grew even more so, as the lean, hard-bodied young ranger called him "a mangy little coyote."

"God made big men and God made little men," he snarled, "and Mr. Colt .45 he made all men equal. Gimme a gun, you big false alarm, and let's you and me step out in the light. I'll give you a chance to strut your stuff, cops or no cops."

Earpe chuckled. "I reckon Capt'n Johnston would get right fussy at me, if I did. You might try snatchin' at a gun."

"That's right, Jimmie," drawled Johnston, behind him. "These here jaspers are prisoners. No gun playin' now, son. This here is business."

LATER, Earpe, Chick Absolom, and Red River Thomas drove into Rosemont with the prisoners, Captain Johnston and the rest of the rangers and United States deputy marshals remaining at the scene of the killing. The Kid leaned forward to where Earpe was sitting in the front seat, half turned so that he could see them. "Your name is Earpe, isn't it?" he asked, politely.

"Yes, suh," answered Earpe, "Jimmie Earpe—so's you won't be gettin' me mixed up with Sam Earpe or William or Bud. Just ask for Jimmie Earpe and you'll get me, feller."

"Thanks," murmured the Kid, "that's just what I intend to do, Mr. Earpe."

"Dog-gone it," said Jimmie Earpe, plaintively, "and me on ranger business."

There was no question but what Mike had told the truth saying that he and the Kid only being in jail for an hour. It was hardly that long before a big car roared into Rosemont and unloaded a quiet, well-dressed attorney from Nogales, who produced the bonds necessary and the car slipped swiftly out of Rosemont, this time with Mike and the Kid in it.

"Well," said Captain Johnston, later, when he had come in and learned that the two men were freed, "I didn't reckon we could hold 'em long. I was sure hopin' that we could, though, until that Federal man that's workin' with the district attorney got up here to look 'em over."

"How'd it come off, Wes?" asked ex-Ranger White, who had ridden line with Johnston in the old days, before they both became rangers.

"Well, suh, there was a tip come from somewhere that Gomez was on the road; and the Border Patrol boys and us reckoned we might box 'em in. These gents we let go by us, not thinkin' they'd meet up with the Patrol so soon. When the jaspers in the other two cars heard the shootin', they stopped, and it looked like the Chinamen made a break of some kind. When we got there, the shootin' was all over—the smugglers was kinda destroyin' the evidence, Wes, looks like to me. Anyway, those four hombres was just startin' away when we climbed 'em."

"Any of the boys get hurt?"

"Well, suh, that's a right, funny thing. They had 'em one of those little machine guns and when that hombre usin' it cut loose, he sure gave Billy Yancey a right good hair cut; took hat and hair right off him. Shotgun Collins got him one in the arm, and Sam Morgan drew him a right bad wound in the chest from one of them little automatics."

"Dog-gone," said Wes, enviously, "I shore wish I was there. Then what, Bud?"

"Why, that's all, Wes. Them four jaspers called it a day, right, after."

## CHAPTER II.

### DESERT DUEL.

THE car with Mike and the Kid pulled into Nogales about dawn and the suave, high-priced attorney unloaded them near a little house on the outskirts. There was a light burning in the kitchen and as they walked around from the front the Kid said, with a grin, "Kentuck will be willin' to give a rattler the first two bites after he hears this sad tale of woe."

The neatly dressed, solidly built, middle-aged man, who looked like men seen around city clubs, looked up from the solitaire game, but did not stop playing.

"I know about it," Kentuck said, quietly. "Are the boys all dead?"

"We didn't get a chance to go over and hold a post-mortem," answered the Kid, with a yawn, "being in conference with three or four rangers. From where we stood they looked plenty dead."

"Who turned you?"

"A spig—one of Pedro's men."

"Any other cars on the road?"

"We didn't meet any. Langdon took off with a couple of yellow gentlemen just before we pulled out," the Kid replied.

"How much snow and chandoo were you packing?"

"About sixty grand, all told."

"That's not so good," said Kentuck. "The chief will be very much fussed up, I'm afraid."

"Yeah?" The Kid was apparently not much impressed. "Well, I'll hit the hay. If you want me I'll be over to Francisco y Herrara de Gonzales's *pluperia,* where I have what is known as chambers. *Adios, amigo hasta mañana.*"

"How long has the Kid been up on this end?" Kentuck demanded of Mike, after the Kid had gone.

"Three weeks now. Clark told me that he's a game kid, but reckless as hell." Mike's mean little eyes tightened as his crafty brain, trained in race-track double and triple crossing, began to work. "Follow this through, Kentuck. Dolores Gonzales, the spig that the Kid thinks is his sweetie, is tricking him—her real sweetie is Juan Martinez."

"Well, what then?"

"This Juan was a rurale; and not long ago he was tellin' me that a United States deputy marshal named Beardsley saved his bacon for him. The Kid is a great bird for wah, wah stuff with the dames.

"Get it, Kentuck?"

"Sounds like from Evers to Tinker to Chance," said Kentuck, with a cold smile, then he played in silence for a

little while. Suddenly he looked up and said, "Take the Kid for a ride."

"When, right now?" asked Mike.

"The sooner the better. Better get some sleep, Mike."

"And a rod," answered Mike, rising. "I got mine taken off me by them damn rangers. Say, Kentuck, I want to get a ranger named Earpe, Jimmie Earpe—will you give me a hand to frame on him?"

"Why, sure, only you must want to die. They're a good outfit to let alone, those Earpes. You kill one, and you've only got started. There's four or five more coming up from behind all the time. They're too heavy for you, Mike. Better lay off."

"He called me a mangy little coyote," answered Mike, his little eyes venomous as a cobra's, "and I'm goin' to get him."

"Fair enough," said Kentuck, going back to his game. "I'll help you, of course."

"WHERE the hell was you all the mornin'?" demanded Mike, when he finally located the Kid in one of the *pulperias*.

"Why, *pobrecito loco*, where else would I be but with Dolores Gonzales?"

"What's that you called me?" demanded Mike, suspiciously, "the first part." His Spanish consisted of two or three oaths.

"Why, it's a sort of a pet phrase which means 'poor little crazed one.' You must be, not knowing where I generally am. What's doing?"

"Kentuck wants us to drive out to the ranch and make sure that Langdon landed O K."

"Yeah? He said last night that Langdon reported in. Well, it's nothing in my young life. I'd just as soon drive out in the country as not. Whose car are we going to take?"

Mike, who was a fastidious little man about his clothes, had stooped to brush some dust off his trousers leg when he made his statement about Langdon, and had missed the slight tightening of the Kid's eyes. When he straightened up it wasn't there for him to see.

"I got to get me a gat," the Kid said, lighting a cigarette.

"Kentuck gave me one last night," answered Mike. "We don't need any gats along. Them damn cops might be around and look us over. If they found gats on us, maybe-so our mouthpiece couldn't spring us this time. They got us pegged as something else besides tourists, boy. I'm going to plant the one Kentuck gave me in the seat stuffin'. Let's go. We can take that car of Kentuck's."

"You get her, Mike. I'll go and get me another bonnet. This one's too heavy."

"Hurry up, then. I'll pick you up in front of Ortiz's place."

They drove out toward the Atoscos Mountains, through Tubac and across the little curving branch of the Santa Cruze River, and kept going up the eastern slope of the foothills. Mike was driving the powerful roadster absent-mindedly, smoking one cigarette after another.

It was burning hot, with absolutely no breeze, and the Kid sat with the collar of his soft white silk shirt open, his left arm along the seat, his hand just behind Mike's head. He was singing little snatches of songs and watching the ever varying desert with eager young eyes that noted every movement of the "desert people." Suddenly he stopped singing and said:

"How do you like this game, Mike?"

"What game?" demanded Mike, coming back from where he mentally had Jimmie Earpe on his knees begging for mercy.

"Why, this gay buccaneer business, being land pirates and bad men and everything, like Sir Henry Morgan. Do you get a kick out of it?"

"Aw, fer c r i p e ' s sake," Mike

snarled out of the corner of his mouth. "You're goofy, feller. I'm in it for the jack, nothin' else."

"Yeah? The way you talk out of the corner of your mouth, Mike, leads me to believe you been in stir. Have you been in stir, Mike?"

"Who wants to know?" grinned Mike.

"Why, I do. I'm your buddy, am I not, Mike?"

"Sure," answered Mike, turning to the left of the trail up a little cañon. "Regular buddies."

The Kid laughed, and after a moment or so asked softly:

"What are you stopping here for, Mike?"

"Hear that canary? I've been hearin' it ever since we started. I told Kentuck yesterday he had one in this damn car.

"Get out and see if you can find it, will you, Kid? I'll run the engine, maybe-so you can locate it. I hate like hell to drive with a squeak."

"I don't mind it," said the Kid lazily, "and you needn't bother about it, Mike. You're not going to hear it any longer."

MIKE'S left hand, which had been down at his side, stopped abruptly in the pocket where it had slipped with the ease and quickness of a snake in its hole. Once again in twenty-four hours he felt a cold, round little circle pressing against the top of his spine.

"You poor fool," the Kid was saying softly, his body in the same position as before, his head turned a little toward Mike, his left arm now a little bent—"you poor ignorant little fool! As wise a guy as you think you are, to let a man ride along with his left arm back of you! If you move, Mike, you're dead. This .25-caliber steel-jacketed automatic bullet isn't so very big, but I've got her where she can go through what little brains you pack. Sit still, Mike, and listen, so's you can tell all the pretty angels—or, rather, all the little imps—just how come you got yours."

"Aw, hell," sneered Mike, "cut her loose, feller, an' quit that damn kiddin. I ain't afraid to go. Cut her loose if you feel that way."

"Scarfaced Tony Mareno taught me how to pack a little automatic up my sleeve on a spring, Mike. You know, the lad that Federal agent knocked off last year. It's like one of those telephone things that stretches out. I'm telling you this, Mike, so your crooked soul won't go to hell worrying how come."

"Doin' a little torturin' first, ain't you?" sneered Mike. "Go ahead and talk your head off. You ain't got me goin' yet."

"That 'll be all, Mike. Get ready to say good morning, God— Oh, damn it all, I can't pull trigger with you sitting still that way. Draw your gun, Mike; this is too much like killing a baby."

"I won't," said Mike calmly. "You would pull then, and I'd have no chance."

The Kid's reckless laugh echoed among the hills. "It's a stalemate," he said. "I can't kill you like this. Mike, did you ever hear of a duel—a regular duel?"

"Yeah," answered the game little gangster, "I seen two fellows fight one once down in the Argentine."

"Well, only one of us can drive out of here, Mike. I could kill you, take this car and pull for the north—if I weren't born and bred otherwise. Here is what we'll do. Listen carefully now. You take your left hand out of your pocket and your right from the wheel and raise them up over your head. I'll take your gat as soon as you raise your hands, then you get out and walk the forty paces.

"I'll come after you until I've stepped off twenty; then I'll put your rod down on the ground and walk back. When I holler 'Halt,' you turn

and walk back to your gat. I'll have mine on the ground also. When I say 'Go,' we'll help ourselves from then on. Got it, Mike?"

Mike's answer was to raise his hands.

The Kid naturally couldn't see the cruel, exultant gleam in his little pig-like eyes.

"THAT'S the boy," said the Kid, reaching in Mike's left pocket and taking out the automatic. "You haven't another on you, by any chance?" He slapped Mike's shirt under the armpits and felt his trousers legs.

"I ain't got no gun," growled Mike. "You're givin' me a break, Kid; I'll play square."

"I doubt if you know the meaning of the word," answered the Kid. "I'm the one that's playing square—with myself. I ought to kill you like a rat, and I know it. Go on, get started."

Mike walked the forty paces, stopped when the Kid called, turned and walked slowly back to where his gun lay on the hot alkali.

The Kid stood, a smile on his young face, the little .25 caliber automatic at his feet. This was a bigger thrill than he had ever experienced. This watching a man walk slowly toward a gun and knowing that in another half moment he would have it in his hand, spitting out death. This was the spirit in which the knights of old used to fight.

Mike reached the gun and halted, his right hand spread out like a claw.

"Ready?" called the Kid cheerfully.

"Wait a minute. I'm as game a guy as you are, Kid; you ain't got an even break with that little .25 from there. You pick your gat up, and I'll walk back a little. You come and get my rod and drop it again ten paces closer. Then we'll go."

The Kid laughed. "Mike, you've some good blood in you somewhere. I never thought of that. All right, start back."

When the operation of getting the duelists to within thirty feet of each other had been completed and once more they faced each other, the Kid again called:

"Ready?"

"Yeah," called back Mike, an evil sneer on his twisted lips. "I'm—" His right hand flashed back of his neck, then out, and his arm straightened. A flicker of steel like a lightning flash passed between him and the Kid, shoulder high, and lost itself in the Kid's chest, in spite of the instantaneous swerve of his body as his eye caught the motion.

Mike stood and watched the body as it pitched forward.

"There's another thing I learned in the Argentine, Mr. Wise Guy Kid," he said. "That's as good as that sleeve stuff."

He went to where the Kid lay, his face to the hot sand, and turned him over with his foot. The deadly throwing knife of the tropics was buried to the hilt in the Kid's gallant young heart, and he had met the great adventure like the officer and gentleman he had once been.

"Not so bad," he said as he stooped to draw out the knife. "I'm still good."

The whine of a high-powered rifle bullet came to his ears as his hat jumped from his head. A second later and he felt a searing pain in his left shoulder. He straightened up without the dagger and ran for the car, the bullet whines following him, little spurts of sand jumping up around him. He made it, threw himself in, started the motor and turned. As he did he heard the *thud, thud* of bullets against the car body. As he stepped on the gas a bullet grazed his ear, making a neat hole in the windshield, then no more, as the car leaped down the cañon.

"Magazine empty," Mike grunted

aloud. "This is sure my lucky day. Wonder who the hell that was and how much he seen?"

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FEDERAL AGENT.

FEDERAL AGENT JAMES H. GRANT sat in conference with United States District Attorney Sawyer and United States Marshal Sam Putney in the Attorney's office in the Federal building in Phoenix. Ranger Captain Johnston was there also.

"It was sure a right funny break," Johnston was saying. "It wasn't the outfit we were after at all, son. We heard that Gomez was comin' across, and so we was kinda ridin' herd on him, when these jaspers came runnin' plumb into the net. What-all happened to Gomez's outfit I don't know. Maybe-so they heard the ruckus and went home."

"You were fishing for minnows and caught a whale, captain," said Jimmie Grant, his lean, browned face lighting up as he smiled at the old Ranger captain, who had more notches on his old Colt than he cared to count, not including Mexicans. "I know it ties in somewhere with the gang we're after, but where, I'm frank to say, I can't see at the moment. One thing I do know, and that is that those Chinamen that were killed were Chang Kwang Tong men. No one touched the bodies, I suppose, until we got there?"

"I don't reckon they did, son," answered Johnston. "At least I left orders with the boys, and my orders ain't always disobeyed."

"I'll bet they're not," Grant smiled cordially. "Well, they didn't have anything on 'em; but one of them had the high Tong mark on his wrist; and if he was a Chang Kwang it's a cinch the others were also. This bird we're after does business with them; we now know that much."

"Is that going to help you any, Jimmie?" asked the District Attorney.

Jimmie Grant was working openly, not under cover; and he smiled as he answered: "It ought to, in some way; but how? I wish I knew. It may be that when I get the reports of the under-cover men that are on it with me, it may fit in. I've got a bearcat planted—"

The door opened, and the District Attorney's secretary stuck her pretty little head in a few inches. "Mr. Sawyer, Ranger James Earpe wants to know if you're right busy?"

"Tell him to come in, Betty," answered Sawyer, then as the door closed behind her: "Bud, you're always bragging about this Jimmie Earpe of yours, maybe he can give Mr. Grant here a line."

"Who—me?" demanded Johnston, as the door opened and Earpe came in. "Brag 'bout that no-'count scoundrel? That Earpe boy is just naturally worthless, yes, suh! I'm talkin' about you, Jimmie—you-all come on over and shake hands with another Jimmie. This here one's name is Grant, and he's a Federal agent from Washington."

Earpe smiled cheerfully; he knew that old Ranger Captain Johnston was telling them, and him, how much he loved him. "I'm right glad to meet up with you, Mr. Grant," he said as he shook hands. With the first quick glance of his keen young blue eyes he knew that Grant "belonged."

Jimmie Grant's hand tightened in Earpe's. "Being as how we're two Jimmies," he said, "let's you and me sink the mister stuff. You be Jimmie No. 1, and I'll be Jimmie No. 2. How is that?"

"Suits me down to the ground," young Earpe answered promptly. "I got me something that might interest you a whole lot, Jimmie. That's the reason I came up, to show it to Mr. Sawyer here."

"Light and sit," said Marshal Putney, who had ridden the range in the

old days with both Johnston and Sawyer, and had looked through the fog of gun smoke with Jimmie Earpe's father many times.

"WELL, suh," said Jimmie Earpe, slouching into a chair. "Yesterday Jinny—that's my sister," he explained to Grant, "and old Ma Collins that's visitin' us down on the Lazy W, went up to see how Grizzly Callen was gettin' along. He's an old prospector that got him a dig up back of Snake Cañon. On the way back they sights a car coming, so they holes up behind a bunch of mesquite to watch 'em, it not being natural for a car to wander up thataway. Jinny, she's packing her thirty-thirty. The car stops and two men get out and begin to do what Jinny thought was some kind of surveyin' or locatin'

"Old Ma Collins can't see right good, and she allus totes Slim's field glasses around with her—bein' loco about birds and such. All at once one of the men pitches forward, and Jinny says she could just make out that the other threw something. Old Ma Collins had the glasses on 'em, and she lets out a hoot and grabs Jinny's thirty-thirty and begins tryin' to get her the feller that was standing. She did lift his hat off, Jinny says, and—"

"Dog-gone," said old Ranger Captain Johnston. "Ma still's got some of her shootin' eye left anyway. Darn good thing for that jasper that she was gettin' a little near-sighted. Time was when Sarah Collins could outshoot old Shotgun himself with a pistol for a rifle.

"You hombres remember the time she stood off the Waco Kid and his gang and got her three of them to boot? Man—"

"Gettin' old, gettin' old," moaned United States Marshal Putney, turning to Sawyer. "Talkin' all the time, pore ole man. Too bad, ain't it, Bill?"

"He is, old and feeble," answered Sawyer. "He was a right good man once, too, wasn't you, Bud?"

"Go on, son," Johnston told Earpe. "Never mind these two old polecats always buttin' in. Ma cracked down on him; then what?"

"Why, Jinny says that she grabbed the glasses, and could see the sand fly up all around this gent that was foggin' it right smart toward his car. He got away and they slid down to see what for. The jasper lying on the ground was dead, with a knife in his heart. They didn't stay around no more, but burned the wind gettin' back to the ranch. Jinny, she telephones me, and I come out with Bob Beardsley.

"The man that was dead is the one that we took in night before last—the young, smilin' one they called Kid. The other jasper, from the description Ma and Jinny gives, is the little feller that got right fussed up when I called him a coyote. We got the knife out and wrapped it right careful so's not to disturb the finger-prints; and on the Kid's body, tucked under the lining of his waistband, we found this."

Earpe tossed on the table a half sheet of notepaper. The three men bent toward it as one. On it was written in a very good hand:

KENTUCK:
The Kid is the Chang Kwang Tong man for Mexico. Do whatever he says.

It was signed by a square in the middle of which the numbers 2-0-0-0 were written. That was all.

"My gosh," gasped Jimmie Grant; "it's gettin' like Alice in Wonderland. You say the Kid and the bird that knocked him off were together last night in one of the cars; they must have been acting as pilot car for the others, and the border patrol turned them—that's easy. But why does Jimmie's little 'coyote' knock this buddy off the next day, especially if he knows he's a representative of the hardest boiled Tong in the world?

"Unless he's a damn fool he would know that they'd boil him in oil sooner or later. Wait—maybe he didn't know. I'm just thinking out loud. Any one got a line on who this Kentuck is? There's forty Kentucks in every neck of the woods."

"I RECKON," Johnston put in, "this here Kentuck is George Mears, the gambler over at the Ace of Spades across the line. This here Kid and the little jasper have been seen with him once or twice, my boys tell me."

"Yeah? Well, let's go on the basis that he is. Then he has been top cutter for this bird who makes a square with 2-0-0-0 in the middle of it for his John Hancock. This Kentuck has been falling down and— No, that's wet. They'd simply put him on the spot and send another man in. Maybe-so the Chang Kwang can't understand why so many of its members get knocked off. Have you been turning many back lately, Mr. Sawyer?"

"Don't get a chance," answered Sawyer grimly. "We've been finding quite a few dead, like this time. I heard that when the Barracuda left Martinique she had forty on board; but when the coast guard picked her up she was empty."

"That's just what makes me want to kill these birds first and arrest 'em after," said Jimmie Grant grimly. "They'll throw the Chinese overboard or shoot them the moment they think they are in danger of getting knocked off. That darn thing," and he pointed to the square and numbers in it, "reminds me of something— Holy Mackinaw! Monckton! See—2000—2000 pounds to a ton!

"He's the bird higher up that we're after—that's cold turkey! He's shipping in yellow brothers for the Chang Kwang; Kentuck is one of his lieutenants; the Kid was working in the gang as the Tong man. There may not have been any trouble; he came on to look at this end—didn't show this to Kentuck—so, after the other day's knock-off, Kentuck, not knowing who the Kid is, any more than that he's one of the mob, orders him taken for a ride as a squealer—and the little man does it.

"I don't get that walking up and down stuff, but it doesn't matter. Kentuck has pulled a frightful boner, having the Kid killed. I was in China long enough to know how the Tongs feel about a thing like that!"

"How come this jasper Monckton to be so careless as to give this here Kid writin', Jimmie?" asked Earpe.

"I don't know. Maybe the Kid asked for something to show Kentuck, if he had to. Maybe Kentuck would not take word of mouth. There's nothing criminal in representing a Tong, Jimmie; the Five Companies have lots of white men doing business for them. It's a darn good job, on the legitimate end.

"There was no danger to Monckton. He could have addressed it to Mr. George Mears and signed it Charles L. Monckton, and asked the D. A. here to deliver it.

"If the Kid had 've been killed with the Chinese in the car and the note found, Monckton would have said: 'Certainly; I do business with the Chang Kwang, as I do with a good many Chinese societies. On their request I gave their representative a note to one of my friends.'

"What does the 'Do as he says' mean? Why, it seems that a Chinaman absconded with a temple idol—or any old thing, see, Jimmie? The Kid was sent to round him up, and Monckton, out of the goodness of his heart, ordered one of his men-Fridays to help him. Just try to prove anything different! Suppose we ask him: 'How about the Kid being found with some Chinamen running the line, Mr. Monckton?' He smiles and says: 'You will have to ask him; I know nothing of his—er—personal activities.' You

can't prove anything. His attorney will jump up and say: 'Just what is the charge against my client?' Isn't that right, Mr. Sawyer?"

"Boy," answered the District Attorney with deep feeling, "who knows that better than I? That paper doesn't mean a thing as far as evidence goes."

"THAT'S right," agreed Jimmie Grant. "But I wonder just how strong Monckton is now with the Chang Kwang? Here's four of their highbinders cold-meated, and the next day one of their white brothers. If it was only the highbinders, they might pass it off as the fortunes of war; but the Kid's death is going to take some fast explaining. Monckton will unquestionably throw Kentuck to the wolves, but will that satisfy them?

"If I could only frame something that would lead them to blame it all on Monckton— I know it's there, if I can dope it out. Their headquarters are in San Francisco. Well, I'll get on it; maybe it 'll be the weak link in the chain. He's suspected of more than slipping yellow brothers over the line. There was a big gem robbery abroad not long ago that included some foreign government stuff, that he's tabbed with engineering."

"We might have the sheriff bring in this man that killed the Kid," suggested the District Attorney, "on a murder charge, if Jinny and Ma Collins will swear to the information. That will put him away in a safe place, and he might break enough to give us some stuff to go on. Would it make this Monckton suspicious, Jimmie?"

"Natural thing for the sheriff to do," answered Grant promptly. "Go get him, hold him *incomunicado*— maybe-so we can open him up."

"Please, suh," said Jimmie Earpe, his eyes shining, as he turned to Ranger Captain Johnston, "can you-all get me that warrant to serve?"

"That's a sheriff's warrant, and it's up to his deputies," began the old Ranger captain sternly. Then, as he saw the disappointment in Earpe's eyes, he finished with: "But if you-all got a feud with this here little feller, I reckon it might be arranged."

"And listen to me," the District Attorney added, "I want this hombre alive."

"Yes, suh," answered Jimmie Earpe, standing up. "I'll shore bring him in for you, Mr. Sawyer. No shootin'—"

"Unless to protect your life," Johnston finished for him.

"Unless to protect my life," Jimmie repeated gravely. "I'll go and get Jinny and Ma Collins right away."

## CHAPTER IV.

### MIKE, THE KILLER.

MIKE went over to the Ace of Spades and played draw poker until he saw Kentuck push back from his stud game. They sauntered to meet at the bar, had a couple of rounds, then drifted slowly outside to where some chairs were lined up against the 'dobe wall in the shade. They moved two chairs away from the rest and sat down, tilting back against the building.

"I did 'er," said Mike, lighting a cigarette. "He's havin' sand for breakfast."

"Yeah? Any trouble?"

"Not much. He had a rod up his sleeve and hung it on me at first. Something made him suspicious, I guess. Anyway, I bulled him out of it, and finally I slipped a sparkler into him. It was a pretty throw, all of thirty feet. He couldn't dodge it, and—"

"Forget it, Mike," said Kentuck, "long as it's done. Did you go through him?"

"Naw—I didn't have time."

"What's that?" demanded Kentuck, his chair coming down heavily on the

ground. "What do you mean by that?"

"Aw, it wasn't anything. I was just stoopin' over to get my knife, when somebody way up in the hills began crackin' down on me with a high-powered rifle. I high-balled it outta there."

Kentuck's face was impassive as he asked:

"How far away were they, Mike?"

"Way up on the side of the hill. Hell, they couldn't see me or what it was all about."

"Then why did they shoot at you?" asked Kentuck. "You say you left your knife, also?"

"Sure I did. So would you or any one else," answered Mike, with a grin. "You're thinkin' about finger-printin'. They send 'em in, and they correspond with a guy named Goofy alias Gafoozalum, who went to Copper John. My name is Mike Maloney—but what's that got to do with them suspectin' me?"

Kentuck looked at him as if he were a new kind of bug. "You were picked up the other night with the Kid," he said. "You have been seen around here with him; you drove out of town with him, and you got back alone. Instead of choosing a place where you'd be safe and could leave him for the coyotes to play with, it seems as if you picked out a spot like a theater stage. You must have softening of the brain. I understood that you knew your business."

"I do," snarled Mike. "All that is applesauce. We was way up a cañon."

"This man that shot at you—what would he do, just as soon as he made sure you'd pulled out?"

"He'd come down and take a look," said Mike, with a grin, "and find the Kid with a knife in him. What of it?"

"Then what would he do?" went on Kentuck, ignoring Mike's flippancy.

"Go and holler for some of them damn rangers or border patrol cops," answered Mike. "What the hell can they do?"

"And I picked you out!" said Kentuck softly. "Mike, you see the border? Well, you stay on this side of it, understand? They'd have to frame with the rurales to get you, or else go through all the red tape of extradition. I'm in good enough to stop any frame, I guess. It may be that they won't think the Kid important enough to make any fuss over, at that. They'll put it down to a gang killing, and let it go."

"I got to go over and get my car and clothes," said Mike. "I ain't afraid of any of those damn rube cops. I'll come over, if you say so."

"I do; very much so. And at that, I think you had better pull out for Tepoca instead of hanging around here."

"Whichever you say," answered Mike, with a yawn. "It makes no never-mind to me, as long as I get mine."

HE had a couple more drinks, some lunch, played a little more poker, then leisurely sauntered across the line into United States territory, without any thought of fear. Going to the garage where he kept his car, he paid his bill, drove around settling several small accounts, and finally about four o'clock drove up to the curb in the quiet little side street where he had a room in one of the ornate little bungalows.

He stepped out of the car and reached in for his coat, which had been on the seat beside him. Tossing it over his left arm, he crossed the sidewalk. As he put his foot up to take the one stone step leading from the sidewalk to the bungalow walk, he stopped.

From between his bungalow and the next came Arizona Ranger Earpe, his gun on his right hip, hanging low and a little to the front. It was a Colt .45 with mother-of-pearl handle, once the gun of the famous Wyatt Earpe.

Earpe stopped twelve feet away from Mike:

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Maloney. Put your hands up!"

The little gangster looked steadily at Earpe. Here was the man who had called him a little mangy coyote. His car was at the curb; there were plenty of safe places beyond the line; and, best of all, his gat was in the side pocket of the coat hanging over his left arm. It was within two inches of his right hand, which had been raised to put a cigarette in his mouth when he froze at the sight of Earpe.

He could see that Earpe's right hand hung loosely at his side, four or five inches away from his gun butt. Two inches for him, and five for Earpe; the safety was off his automatic, as always; the butt was up, and he could cut loose through the pocket. All of this went through his brain in the flash of time that Earpe said "Put your hands up!"

All his mean and crooked life he had been fast—fast as a jockey, fast as a fighter; he was quick with a gun and quicker with a knife. Now, as he made his decision, his right hand went in to the loosely hanging pocket of the linen coat, already opened and sagging with the weight of the .38 caliber automatic.

He put every ounce of speed he had into the effort. It was as light and quick as the dip of a swallow in the twilight.

As the cloth raised his eyes lighted with unholy joy—to be closed forever in darkness as a .45 Colt lead bullet crashed between them.

The city gangster, killer, and bad man had tried out his swiftness against the hard-riding, clean living, clear-eyed ranger, down in the southwest, where gun swiftness was common and the Earpe family noted.

He lost.

Jimmie Earpe stood looking down at the man he had killed in self-defense, smoke still curling from his .45.

"You may have been little, and you may have lived like a mangy coyote, but you shore died game, feller," he said softly.

---

## CHAPTER V.

### YACHTING PARTY.

THE trim white yacht, every inch of its brasswork polished and shining in the hot sun, its paintwork immaculate, lay at anchor in a little bay between Cape Tepoca and Cape Lobos in the Gulf of California. It flew the flag of an exclusive Eastern yacht club.

The bay was one hundred and fifty miles below Port Isabel, fifty-odd miles from Yuma. The owner, sitting with two other men beneath the gayly striped awning over the quarter-deck aft, listened intently to what one of the men was relating.

His face showed unmistakable signs of birth and breeding, but was hard and cold, as was his eyes. The two men with him were of the same type, one about forty, the other ten years younger.

The awning kept the hot sun out, and several electric fans gave a cooling breeze. The wicker table around which they were sitting was loaded with bottles bearing foreign labels, soda bottles, cracked ice, and glasses. Several curiously carved Chinese dishes or bowls held candied fruits and preserves.

"I am very much afraid," the owner said, leaning over and carefully selecting a piece of candied ginger, "that Mr. George Mears has, we shall say, outlived his usefulness to us. You say, Langdon, that he told you frankly that he had—how do you term it?—oh, yes—'put the Kid on the spot.' I say, Carewe, that's a bit of Yankee slang for you to remember."

"I asked him where the Kid was, Monckton," replied Langdon, the young man of the party, "and he told me that; he added that his man Mike

seemed to have done it in plain sight of some one who began to shoot his disapproval of such methods."

All three men smiled. They were university men; Carewe an Englishman, who, if he wished, could use one of the proudest titles in England; Monckton and Langdon, Americans. All of them suave gentlemen, and ruthless killers and pirates by choice. They had been born some centuries too late. In Sir Francis Drake's day they would have been captains in his fleet—or have a fleet of their own. Monckton had plenty of money, as did Carewe. Instead of living on it, or being useful members of society, they deliberately used their wealth and their clever brains to prey on the very society that had given it to them.

Langdon was as they were, sans the money. He made up in absolute recklessness and daring what he lacked in that respect. The relationship was practically that of Monckton, captain; Carewe, first lieutenant; Langdon, second lieutenant.

"I wonder," Monckton went on, "if the Kid had told or shown Kentuck who he was?"

"Evidently not," answered Langdon, "or he wouldn't have dared do what he did."

"You say that a Ranger named Earpe killed Mike?"

"Yes. They must have had a tip; probably from the chap that shot at him before. Anyway, Earpe had a warrant for his arrest. It doesn't point to us, as far as I can see."

"Not as far as the killing goes, no. But it does put me in a frightful position with the Chang Kwang. Wang Li has been getting rather uppish lately about losing so many men; now I must go to him with the story of four more of his best hatchet men, and, to crown it, one of his best-liked lieutenants."

"Why go?" drawled Carewe. "Put in to San Francisco and send for him to come on board."

"Send for Wang Li! Old chap, that Five Star must have gone to your head. He's more apt to send for me. Here, you!" to a sailor who had appeared around from the port side of the steam launch, swung in-board. "What are you doing there?"

The sailor, a young man whose flaxen hair, blue eyes and fair skin showed Teutonic blood, came to attention and saluted.

"De—de boson he tell me to the little boat clean," he stammered. "I jus' got de dime to up on deck come."

"Get forward," ordered Monckton curtly, "and pass the word for Captain Davis or Mr. Clark to come aft." To his companions he added: "I wonder how much he heard?"

"Nothing, probably," answered Langdon indifferently; "and if he did, he wouldn't get half of it. Those squareheads are two-thirds moron anyway, except when it comes to the sea. Supposing he did hear something, what could he do with it?"

"That's the first time my rule has been disobeyed," said Monckton sternly. "You are no doubt right, Langdon, but we were talking rather freely."

MR. CLARK, the first officer, came hurrying up. He was a tall, well-built, rangy man about twenty-eight years of age. Hard-faced, with cold blue eyes and tight lips.

"Captain Davis is indisposed, sir," he began to Monckton.

"For that, read drunk," sneered Carewe, helping himself to a big drink of brandy.

"Which same he has a perfect right to be, as long as the anchor's over the side," said Monckton suavely. "A very good man, at all times. Allow me to suggest, Carewe, that you tighten up a bit; you know what that brandy does to you. Well, Mr. Clark, you are familiar with the rules and regulations of this yacht?"

"Yes, sir," answered Clark, a flush coming in his cheeks.

"Quite so. And what is the one regarding enlisted men, or any other man for that matter, coming aft on the quarter-deck while the owner is present? Unless sent for, of course."

"Same as on the bridge, sir. Not allowed."

"Right; and yet, not five minutes ago, I looked up from a private conversation with these gentlemen and saw an enlisted man within hearing."

"Some mistake, sir," answered Mr. Clark.

"A bad one, Mr. Clark. I pride myself on the efficiency of my officers. This man stated that the boson had sent him up to clean the launch. Look into it, please, and report to me. The man is the one who passed the word to you to come aft. And by the way, Mr. Clark, cancel any shore leave he may have; and I would suggest that he be given duties that would require his time—below. You understand me, Mr. Clark?"

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Clark grimly. "He will be sent below, some time to-night."

He gave a brisk navy salute and left.

Langdon whistled.

"My hat, Monckton. You're not going to have that poor devil sent west, are you? What could he do, even if he did hear anything?"

"Better safe than sorry," said Monckton, reaching for some more ginger. "What's his life against mine, or any of ours? A good many organizations have been broken up by letting some little thing go by. We were careless in the first place, but there is no need of being careless twice. You left the plane at the ranch, Langdon?"

Carewe had risen and sauntered around the quarter-deck behind the launch, looked carelessly in it, then returned to his seat. The launch was the only boat swung inward on the quarter-deck, because of its size, requiring extra large davits.

"Go ahead," he said as he came back and sat down. "All clear now. If that sailor just came up, why didn't we see him coming?"

"Chances are he was corked up in there," smiled Langdon. "I know I used to, when I was in France, every chance I got, rules or no rules. Yes, Monckton, I unloaded my two passengers on schedule and took the car. I was heading for Kentuck when I heard the news. You owe Pedro something; he turned the pilot car as soon as he heard the boys were out.

"Say, you chaps, that brings me up to my knitting. I'm done, Monckton. That was my last flight for the outfit. I'm quitting—matter of fact, I'm done done, as the old colored man used to say."

"I DON'T quite get that, Langdon," said Monckton calmly. "You mean that you are going to pull out, entirely?"

"Yes. I'm fed up. All I get out of this is the privilege of flying, and I had enough of that in France. I'm going on my own for awhile."

"You have always received your share, haven't you?"

"I have," answered Langdon. "No argument there at all. I'm just fed up with this neck of the woods and being dry nurse for a lot of yellow brothers. I'll take my share of the stones, if you don't mind, and go away from here."

"Sorry, old chap," said Monckton. "At the moment they are not available for division; and besides that, it won't be quite convenient to have you pull out."

Langdon laughed.

"Just like that? Well, I never cared much regarding the conveniences—and you had much better get the—shall I say loot?—for division. Pronto."

Carewe, who had been drinking steadily, leaned forward, his eyes contracted to pin points. "I say, old thing, that could be very readily construed as a threat, you know."

"Why, so it could," grinned Langdon. "The brandy has sharpened up your brain, old bean?"

"Steady," warned Monckton evenly. "Let's give each other the credit for knowing that none of us is a man to play with very much. Just what is the basic idea of your wanting to quit the game, Langdon?"

"Well," answered Langdon, smiling at Monckton, whom he really liked, "frankly, I'm going in on my own, without any partners."

"Here?" asked Monckton, reaching for some of the candied fruit.

"Not exactly here, on this spot; farther up the coast."

"Sorry, old dear," said Monckton. "I am afraid that it can't be done—at the moment anyway. It would interfere with several things at the moment."

"No?" questioned Langdon quietly. "Just how do you think you can stop me?"

Carewe leaned forward a little.

"The same way as we have stopped many a man, my lad."

"Yeah?" said Langdon silkily. "Well, laugh this off, both of you. I will fly no more yellow brothers, or snow, or chandoo, over the line for you. I want my cut from the stones in, say, ten days."

"If you are very, very lucky," interrupted Carewe, "you may drink your morning coffee twice more. With extraordinary luck, perhaps three times."

"I have a rendezvous with death," quoted Langdon with a laugh. "I did as the Japs do before going into battle, Carewe, a long time ago. I held my own funeral. So really the matter doesn't interest me."

"I will take the deck, Carewe, if you don't mind," said Monckton. "Listen, Langdon; you have always received your share; you have never been asked to do anything more than you agreed to do. I knew you on the western front and know that you are all right in every way—but it will take a better reason than you have advanced to explain your sudden desire to quit the game; at least as far as we are concerned. I know that you would not give out any information, of course, but you might readily fog up our lines if you went in as an independent."

Langdon laughed. "I ran out of reasons last night and forgot to bring any more with me. All the talk is bushwah as far as I am concerned. I am washed up, Monckton. You can put me ashore again, right here."

"Sorry." Monckton shook his head. "If you persist, Langdon, I'm afraid I'll have to concur in what Carewe said. There are many ways to die—some short and pleasant, some long and—very unpleasant. I am afraid that Wang Li might not care to have competition."

LANGDON gave vent to an amused, reckless laugh. "In other words, if I do not continue to play in your yard, I meet Wang Li. Well, I never learned to count costs, and I'm much too old to begin now. So the bet goes as she lays. You can deliver my cut in the stones to Smithie, in San Francisco."

Carewe snarled a laugh. "You can't get by with it, Langdon. You're in with us too far. Who's backing you?"

"Who wants to know?" questioned Langdon silkily.

There was a sudden tension in the air, although none of the three men changed his position in the slightest. When Langdon issued the underworld challenge, it was as if all the softness, culture and breeding had suddenly sloughed off, leaving only the naked, merciless, cruel killers exposed.

"I think it only fair to tell you," Monckton said very softly indeed, "that if Mrs. Monckton has anything to do with your sudden desire to pull out, that I have been fully aware of your plans for some time, and at the

moment she is not in a position to join you as arranged. I knew some time ago that you and she had planned to go— Sit tight, Carewe! This is my show!"

The words were intermingled with the whiplike crack of Carewe's automatic. He loved the woman who posed as Monckton's wife, and the sudden knowledge that Langdon was the favored one snapped him into action. He had half risen and fired through the pocket of his immaculate white linen coat.

Langdon's body had swerved out and to the right as he saw Carewe start to rise, and his hand had flashed under his left armpit and out with a .38 Savage automatic.

As he fired straight into Carewe's drink-inflamed face, his left shoulder jerked back from the impact of the steel-jacketed bullet from Carewe's gun.

Monckton slid from his seat like the gray shadow of a jungle cat flitting across a moonlit space among the trees, and before the body of Carewe fell against the table he had tilted it and with all his strength shoved it against Langdon's legs, throwing him off balance for a moment. Kneeling, he fired twice at Langdon, hitting both times. Langdon returned the fire, standing erect, his heels together as if at attention, a smile on his lips in spite of his wounds.

There is one thing about an automatic which many a gangster has found in times of stress. The slender steel-jacketed bullet goes through so fast that it cauterizes the wound and prevents much bleeding. Unless a man is hit in a vital spot, it does not stop him, at least for a little while.

Monckton's face all at once seemed to have a curtain of blood lowered over it, and he slumped to the no longer spotless deck, his automatic sliding from his nerveless hand.

Langdon stood for a moment watching him, looked at the body of Carewe, laughed, holstered his gun, turned and, staggering to the rail, slowly climbed up on it. He poised a moment and took the water in a clean, perfect dive. The shore lay three hundred yards away, and the water between was calm as a mill pond.

From the quiet, peaceful scene of three gentlemen in spotless whites, sitting under the striped awning of a private yacht with their cooling drinks, it had in less time than the count of five in the ring changed to what looked like a shambles.

Men came from both the starboard and port gangways. Monckton stirred and tried to raise his head, then fell back again.

A man dressed as a ship's officer stepped from the wheelhouse, a thirty-thirty Winchester in his hands. As Langdon's head appeared for a moment fifty feet away, he calmly raised the rifle and fired once. The head disappeared and a little splotch of blood floated on the surface for a moment.

The man who had shot put the Winchester down, and, going to the bridge ladder, came on deck. As he turned to go aft he ran into the sailor who had caused him to get a "wigging" from Monckton.

"What the hell are you doing forward?" he snarled. "Get below, you damn piece of Dutch cheese! What were you doing to port?"

"I does shots heard," stammered the sailor, "und on deck ran mit de rest. Boson he holler de doctor to get und he forward point."

"Get below," Clark ordered, "and stay below."

Clark then ran aft to find that Monckton had been taken below, as had the body of Carewe. Stewards already were busy with buckets and mops.

The sailor, instead of obeying Clark, went to the side, eased himself gently under the bottom rail, hung by his hands for a moment, then dropped silently into the water. He swam close

to the ship's side until he came to the bow, then dived and swam under water as long as he could toward the shore.

THE doctor was coming out of Monckton's suite when Clark arrived.

"Did Langdon get him?" Clark asked indifferently.

"No," answered the doctor curtly. He didn't like this paid killer of Monckton's. "The first bullet went high and just missed the lungs, and the second glanced along his skull. It laid his scalp open for seven inches. He'll have a bad scar, that's all."

"Yeah? Is there any chance of seeing him?"

"No," the doctor answered brusquely. "He is under an opiate." He had been a famous surgeon once, respected and honored, before he found that a little, just a little, of the drugs he knew so well would relieve the strain after an operation. Even now, when he had fallen, there remained a trace of his former code, and he looked at Clark through narrowed eyes.

Clark knew how the doctor felt, and it amused him. "Tell him when he wakes up that I got Langdon for him," he said. "Doc"—he knew that the doctor hated to be called that—"you ought to have seen the shot I made; I got him smack center when his head came up, and—"

"You killed Langdon?" asked a cold voice behind him.

He turned to see the woman whom Monckton had mentioned standing at his elbow. The doctor bowed to her and went to his cabin forward, leaving her with Clark.

She was beautiful, this woman who had done the same as the men—given up her position in society, her home, and all that the average woman clings to, solely because of her hatred of restraint of any kind. Beautiful, graceful, with slender ankles and little arched feet, her slim, exquisite body moved with the sinuous grace of a black pantheress.

With a face almost perfect in its clear-cut patrician contour, she was more than beautiful; but her eyes spoiled it. They were blue; not a warm, soft blue, but a blue as cold and deadly as the sheen of northern ice.

"Yes," answered Clark coldly, "I killed him."

"He was in the water, wounded, swimming for what little life he had—and you killed him?" Her eyes were full on Clark's, which were almost as cold as hers. He knew then that he had made an enemy that was more dangerous than a king cobra, and that his life was worth just the trouble to snuff it out if she could compass it; and he also knew that she as well as Monckton had been able several times before to reach that particular consummation.

He was not afraid of her, any more than he was afraid of any man. He believed that when the Three Sisters sitting up there cut the thread, he'd go on the one-way trail—and not before. Which most men and women who belong to the "Lost Legion" believe.

"I couldn't see whether he was wounded or not," he answered. "Not that it would have made any difference. I obey orders, Mrs. Monckton; no one leaves this boat unless Mr. Monckton states that he may."

"I see," she answered, her eyes still holding his. "Mr. Monckton asked me to pass the word for Captain Davis to put the anchor on the bow. He will give him sailing orders as soon as possible."

"Very good, Mrs. Monckton," said Clark, saluting. "Put the anchor on the bow. I will pass the word to Captain Davis."

"Thank you," she answered, stepping by him. "I will tell Mr. Monckton as soon as he awakens that you—'got Langdon,' I think you said—for him."

Clark stood still for a moment after

she had gone, then he smiled grimly. "I think," he said softly, "that I will seriously consider Kentuck's offer—and in the meantime be very careful where I step."

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### DUTCH VON HOLZEMAN, SPECIAL AGENT.

JIMMIE GRANT, sitting on the cool veranda of Captain Johnston's ranch house, grinned at the young man sitting opposite, from whom he had received a telephone message the night before asking for a meeting place.

"What happened to you, Dutch?" Jimmie asked with a grin. "I thought you were planted on board until the finish?"

"It came," said the young man who had, up to the day before, been an ordinary seaman on the yacht Carmen, "as far as I was concerned, Jimmie, old kid. Boy, howdy, I heard Monckton tell Clark to drown me that night, just as he would tell him to drown a sick kitten or something. Hot damn—I'd just as soon be in a den of rattlers. I could sleep sounder. They think as much of a human life as I do of a cigarette."

"Which is a hell of a lot sometimes, when you've only got one, and I want it," said Jimmie. "You big piece of Limburger cheese!"

"Yeah?" grinned Dutch von Holzeman, one hundred per cent American in spite of his name, and a crack special agent for Uncle. "If you'd buy you some cigarettes once in awhile I wouldn't feel like that, you grifter."

"So's your grandma," said Jimmie. "Tell me about it."

Dutch told him about the fight on board the Carmen and the killing of Langdon, also about Wang Li and the Chang Kwang Tong.

"Hot damn," said Jimmie; "that's the stuff I want. Boy, as a special agent you're a fine shoemaker. How'd you come to get out of the boat, though?"

"I'd heard plenty, and I knew the boson was due any minute huntin' for me. He'd stop way back and ask permission to come aft. He'd be looking for me with blood in his eye and bawl out the fact that I'd been missing for a couple of hours. So I thought I better take a chance and show. I figured I could alibi myself in some way."

"Except to explain how come they didn't see you coming to the boat, dumb-bell," grinned Jimmie.

"Easy. I'd stick it that I walked along the rail, and that they were taking a drink and didn't notice me. Well, what to do now, Jimmie?"

"Well, now we know that what Uncle suspected before is plenty true. Monckton is top cutter of the outfit; Carewe, the one that engineered the jewel robbery, is eliminated; Monckton has the stuff planted somewhere. Langdon, who helped Carewe grab off the stones, is out also. That leaves Monckton.

"We can't touch him on what we got—unless we could pull him on a charge of killing Langdon: rotten—he didn't, Clark did the killing; you say you saw him crack down. Besides, he would alibi with every man on the boat that he was below. Let's dope it out, Dutch; we darn near got him."

"He's wounded pretty badly; maybe-so he's dead by now. I didn't wait to inquire, but when they brought him down deck he looked all in."

"No chance," said Jimmie positively. "You can't kill those birds like Monckton; you got to hang 'em or put 'em on the hot chair. I wish to heck I knew where the junk was that they copped in England. That Scotland Yard man is foaming at the mouth."

"Yeah? Where is he, Jimmie?"

"In San Francisco, holed up at the Palace. I told him I'd break this case for him right away and then he'd have a better chance to get a line. He gen-

tly insinuated the last time I saw him that he was muchly disappointed at the Americano much-touted speed."

"I KNOW where the junk is—it's on board the yacht," said Dutch, lighting a cigarette.

"What?" yelled Jimmie Grant, so loud that Captain Johnston stuck his head out of one of the feed barn doors. "You know that! Well, you poor nit-wit! By gosh, Dutch, if you had forty-nine per cent more brains you'd be half human. Why the heck didn't you say so, fish?"

"Aw, I haven't seen 'em. One—"

"There you go! What good does all that 'I heard,' 'he said,' 'they acted like' stuff do? We got to catch 'em red-handed, boy."

"You're teachin' your grandma how to fry eggs," answered Dutch. "Well, anyway, one night I was where I oughtn't to be, as usual, and I heard Monckton raising hell and high water with that sweetie of his about putting on a lot of stuff, and she comes back with the fact that she wanted to see how she'd look wearing some of the crown jewels or what-not, and that she had as much of an interest in them as he did.

"He said she had an interest that would put her away for the rest of her life if she didn't show any more sense than to be parading 'em. Just then some nosey bird came along and I had to play dead."

"Boy, you done noble," said Jimmie admiringly. "You're better than nine regiments of marines. We might try to get a United States Commissioner to give us a search warrant."

"First, find one that would, on that dope," answered Dutch pityingly. "This bird Monckton stands too darn high at the moment for them to take any chances. If we got one, we might search the darn hooker from stem to stern and not find a thing. Then what, Jeems?"

"You and I would get ze one grand bawling out," admitted Jimmie. "Well—here we are: Monckton is the lad, all right; Carewe is dead; Langdon, who killed Carewe, also is very much dead, unless Clark missed him?"

"He didn't," said Dutch positively. "I saw it."

"We know where Clark is. We can take him on a murder charge any time on your say-so. But we don't want him now, unless he could be made to talk on a promise of an easy one—Langdon being a crook anyway."

"He wouldn't," asserted Dutch. "That bird is probably wanted for a few killings himself. Boy, he's got a cold eye like a fish."

"Never mind studying natural history; Uncle sent us down here to get Monckton, not to talk about eyes. Remember you're drawing pay, feller."

"Man, you get on that old bum-boat for awhile, and you'd be earning yours, for a change. Let me be top cutter for awhile, and you get in and do some work. And say, Jimmie, that lady of Monckton's has got the same kind of an eye, only worse."

"What did I just tell you?" chided Jimmie severely. "Well, we now have Monckton, the fish-eyed lady, Kentuck, and the jewels, with Clark as a side issue. Does he know about things in general, Dutch?"

"Who—Clark?" asked Dutch, who had been watching a young colt in one of the corrals.

"No, President Nicholas Murray Butler! Pay attention! Here I am working my massive brain overtime and you moon around looking at colts. I asked if Clark is in the know, all around?"

"He seems to be; but he's more of a top sergeant, Jimmie."

"Well, we got to rib up something to get Monckton and his boat in a place where we can give it the once-over, that's all. How about your going back and—"

"What?" yelled Dutch almost as loud as Jimmie had. "Me? Go back

on that? Dilly, dilly, come and be killed. You're crazy, boy. I couldn't get back any more than—"

"I mean to San Francisco, fool," interrupted Jimmie. "You go back there and see if you can't horn in. Say, have they got licker on board?"

"Yeah, plenty of it, and fine stuff, boy."

"How do you know?" demanded Jimmie enviously.

"Me and one of the stewards were just like that," smiled Dutch, holding up two fingers close together.

"FINE! The next time she comes into port we'll get the Prohibition outfit to jump her. You can swear out the information; that lot isn't fussy about evidence. She flies the American flag, I suppose?"

"Sure," Dutch chuckled, "and also she keeps out of American waters, old slute. Any old time Monckton or any of them go ashore they land in Mexico; so there goes your old ball game, Chames."

"All wet," admitted Jimmie. "How's this, Dutch: you go to San Francisco, get to this bird Wang Li, tell him you've got the dope that Monckton himself had the Kid put on the spot because the Kid had found out that Monckton was double crossing the Chang Kwang, and—"

"How was he double crossing?"

"How the heck do I know? Make up some of it yourself. He was sending in a poor brand of chandoo—no, that won't do; they'd know it as soon as he did it. Here—how's this? Monckton has been hired by the Mock Duck Tong to kill off as many of the Chang Kwang crowd as he can, claiming that they got knocked off by the John Laws. That ought to get their goat."

"Boy, that's some dope," said Dutch admiringly. "No wonder they pay you a couple of dollars a day. I got me a friend in the Mock Ducks that 'll fix me up papers to prove it, and I got dates and everything about landings. Take two chairs, feller."

"When Wang Li hears that, being naturally suspicious of all foreign devils," Jimmie smiled angelically, "he'll sharpen his best little hatchet and go out and scrag Mr. Monckton on general principles, and investigate later. Man, that 'll start a Tong war from who-laid-the-chunk."

"Over which I will no doubt shed a lot of tears," said Dutch, "coming from California as I do, and loving Chinks with all my heart. Well, when I get Wang Li all het up I'll restrain him from using the said hatchet and propose a more subtle way of revenge. We will frame on Mr. Monckton to get him and his boat in 'Melican waters with some yellow gents on board. I'll have Wang Li insist that Monckton himself be present in person, himself and no other, with his boat and all, to show good faith. Savvy?"

"Now you *are* teaching your grandma," admitted Jimmie. "It may work. We'll try it anyway. Then when we take the hooker the gal is mine."

"You can have 'er!" answered Dutch, with deep feeling. "I prefer something a little farther south than Greenland's well-known icy mountains."

"Maybe your peculiar style of beauty didn't register, Dutch," grinned Jimmie. "Well, go and frame up with your Chink friend. We got the yacht covered outside. Frank McGee and old Doc Cook are on the job in San Diego and Yuma. I'll attend to Kentuck at this end. There won't be much doing for a week or so, until Monckton gets better. We put an awful crimp into them, or rather Langdon and Kentuck did, for us. We might pick up Kentuck and tell him that Mike and the Kid both said he was the big noise before they kicked off, and then see what happens. Get going, boy."

"Hey, listen! I swam ashore from that floating hearse expecting any second to hear that same Winchester go

*pow!* and get it in the back of my head—"

"You'd get it first and hear it afterward. Be more careful in your language," Jimmie smiled sweetly.

"Yeah? Well, anyway, I swam ashore, walked twenty miles, rode a blamed old mule for forty more without a saddle before I could get to a telephone, with nothing to eat but some cold beans I collected *en route*. Then the minute I get here you give me the b u m's rush. *Du hast mein Herz gebrochen,* James."

"I'll break more than your heart if you don't snap into it," answered Jimmie with a stern air. "We got to get this thing ribbed up before Monckton comes to. On your way, feller. Want any jack?"

"All you got," answered Dutch. "When I left the Carmen flat, all I had on me was my working whites. Bet four dollars that the Bureau of Accounts won't allow me a nickel for my clothes or anything."

"You win," said Jimmie, grinning. "All you'll get is: 'Disallowed; agent should have taken clothes and belongings with him.'"

"I'll try 'em out, anyway. Come through with all the jack you got, Jimmie. I'll need a bundle in Frisco."

"I'll go in with you as far as Phoenix and draw some."

## CHAPTER VII.

### LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE.

THE play at the Ace of Spades was not heavy, and Kentuck went out to get a little fresh air and to escape from the old familiar scene of chips and cards and strained white faces.

Mike's death grieved him more than he would admit. There had been something in the little Irishman that had appealed to him strongly, probably his utter disregard for all law and conventions of society. The little man had lived in a world of his own, peopled with "wise guys" like himself and with "come-ons" and "John Laws," to be taken and fought respectively.

As he passed Vasquez's *pulperia* shop, Señora Vasquez leaned from the window and beckoned. "Señor Clark *está en casa, amigo.*"

"Is he? Thank you, *señora,*" answered Kentuck, who went through the cool drinking room and upstairs to where he knew Clark would be waiting.

"Hello, Clark," he said, as he shook hands. "What brought you this far inland?"

"Several things. Sit down and have a drink of this *aguardiente* the *señora* dug up for me."

"No, thanks—not before night; I may have to sit in a game. What do you know, Clark?"

"Quite a little. Monckton sent me over here to put you on the spot, Kentuck."

"Yes?" answered Kentuck calmly. "What for, Clark?"

"Did you by any chance know who the Kid was?"

"No, any more than he was one of Monckton's men from the south. Why, who was he?"

"One of Wang Li's special agents. Monckton himself didn't know it until just before the Kid came up to look this end over."

"He should have told me," stated Kentuck, with impassive face. "All I took him for was a young fool that might have talked a little in the wrong place; so I took no chances, according to instructions."

"Monckton thinks that feeding you to the lions might have a soothing effect on the Chang Kwang Tong," said Clark, with a grim smile.

"No d o u b t it would," Kentuck suavely agreed. "Just what happened, Clark? Did Langdon get back?"

"Yes, he got back—then he and Carewe went away, indefinitely, almost taking Monckton with them."

"What?" said Kentuck, surprised for a moment out of his pose of utter indifference to everything.

Clark told him of what had happened on the yacht, down to the last detail, ending with: "And I know that she will get me for killing Langdon, the first moment she can. It all rather clears the deck for us, Kentuck—if you have decided to go through."

"I had, a long time ago, whenever you were ready. This Tong thing complicates the play, though. If Wang Li does not think I am dead, the word will go out for all Chang Kwang men to see that I am assisted on the one-way trail, and they are very strong down here."

"That's easy," answered Clark. "I will take you for a ride, then come back and announce it, and pass the word that that's what happens to men that pull bonehead plays in the game. You drop out of sight. How do you stand with the *rurales?*"

"O. K. I can get any help I wish. Go on; what then?"

"YOU arrange to lay doggo somewhere near Port Isabel; say between there and Adair Bay," Clark explained. "Monckton makes headquarters between Tepoca and Lobos.

"When he wants to get to San Diego or San Francisco he lands there and goes up by car or plane, and now that Langdon's been knocked off, it 'll be by car. You get your outfit together and patrol the coast. Keep close enough to the yacht so that you can see a messenger land. He'll be my Jap.

"Here"—Clark tore an envelope in half—"take this piece; I'll give him the other to show you. Here it is, cold turkey, Kentuck. I'll wait until I get the right play, then I'll pile the boat up on the beach; chances are, at night. It 'll be right after the Jap gets to you with the message. All he'll say is, 'Let's go,' or 'To-night.' The ship's an oil burner, and I can turn her over and cut the anchor loose and have her on the beach before they know it.

"You be ready with some of your friends and boil over the side to the rescue. Get it? I've a damn good idea where the jewels are. In the excitement I'm very much afraid that Mr. Monckton is going to get hurt, also that she-devil that's out for me. Wait a minute—better save her. In case we don't find the stuff she'll come in handy to tell us, with a little persuasion. You tell your outfit that they can have the looting of the boat. There's all kinds of gold and silver junk on board. You and I will get the sparklers and be on our way to Paris. There's over a million dollars' worth, Kentuck. You fully understand? When you come on board, either you or I will kill Monckton and—"

"I will have one or two men with me that can attend to it," interrupted Kentuck. "How about the rest of the crew?"

"Davis is harmless. The second and third don't know what it's all about; they're squareheads, and do as they're told. Maybe a couple of Monckton's old men will put up a fight. If they do we can take care of them easily enough. Any chance of your bunch trying a double cross?"

"A very good chance; but they can't get away with it. I'll take Fernando Rodriguez in with me, up to the jewel level. He's *jefe* down there, and he'll keep 'em fairly straight, to get his. You and I can handle it, Clark."

"Certainly. I've one or two friends on board myself that will give me a hand for a little cut. No one in the crew knows about the stones. Are you ready to go?"

"I always stay that way," answered Kentuck. "I'm ready whenever you are. When do you figure on making the play?"

"Can't tell—maybe a week or so. You keep the yacht covered from shore. If he pulls out for other waters I'll get word to you."

"And when we board her, Monckton is to be killed and the woman also, if you have located the jewels; then you and I ease off as soon as possible. That's it, isn't it?"

"Exactly," answered Clark, with a cold smile. "If you're ready, let me take you for a ride. Hope you don't mind getting bumped off like this?"

They smiled bleakly at each other.

WHEN Clark arrived on board the Carmen he was met by the second officer.

"Mr. Monckton's compliments, Mr. Clark, and will you see him as soon as possible?"

"My compliments to Mr. Monckton, and I will report to him just as soon as I have freshened up a bit. How is he, Mr. Larson?"

"Very much better, sir. The doctor says that he will be able to go on shore almost any time now. He's got a mean-looking scar on his forehead, though."

"That's too bad. Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir," answered young Larson. "Mr. Monckton requested Captain Davis to cancel all shore leave. One of the men went over the side some time ago and hasn't shown up since."

Monckton was sitting in an easy-chair when Clark entered his suite. "Hello, Clark," he said. "Sit down. There's some drinks on the stand."

His face was as usual, but pale and drawn-looking. Langdon's bullet had just missed his lungs, and that, coupled with the blood he had lost from the scalp wound, had drained him of a lot of vitality, but his nerve was intact and his eyes active.

They chatted for a moment or so about little things, as long as Monckton's man, who was cleaning up, was in the room. When he went out Monckton motioned to Clark to lock the door even more securely than the snap lock made it, by shooting the bolt.

"I've been a bit jumpy, I think," he said with a smile, "ever since that sailor disappeared. You left before we missed him, didn't you?"

"Yes," answered Clark, pouring out a drink. "I intended to give orders that night, but the shooting drove it out of my mind temporarily. You remember, just as soon as you came to again, you told me to go and attend to Kentuck? Larson told me when I came on board that a man had gone over the side. Probably nothing in it but a plain case of jumping ship. I'll have him looked up, though. He's no doubt hanging around some dump near Yuma, as they generally do."

"No doubt you're right," said Monckton. "The boson says that he did order him to clean up the launch earlier in the day. Well, did you see that Kentuck was—safely settled?"

"Yes, sir. He had no idea, of course. I took him to a place where it was very quiet, and settled him down. Then I caused the rumor to leak out that he had become a little careless and had been—transferred."

"Quite right, Clark. By George, that reminds me of Carewe. Too bad he went crazy that way. I could have handled Langdon, I think."

"Carewe was in love with Mrs. Monckton," answered Clark calmly, "and when he found out that Langdon—"

Monckton laughed, holding his wounded chest as he did. "Why, it was like a French comedy, wasn't it? Do you know, I had never suspected that! How do you know, Clark?"

"I had the deck one night, and it got stuffy up on the bridge, and I walked aft. I overheard him tell Mrs. Monckton so."

Monckton smiled. "No wonder you know, then. Er—by any chance are you in love with her also?"

Clark, his lips twisted into a grim smile, shook his head. "No, sir. I am in love with no woman, nor ever have been."

"Well, let's get down to business. I'm going to promote you, Clark. Carewe and Langdon are both gone; Kentuck is gone, and Davis is good for only running a boat. I don't want to pull any of the rest in closer. There are plenty of flyers to be had, so Langdon's place can be filled. Carewe has left quite a hole, though. He attended to most of the financial matters with the Tongs. If you care to take it on, your cut will be the same as his was. After overhead had been paid, he drew one-third."

"That is very satisfactory, Mr. Monckton," answered Clark, "and I see no reason why we cannot—"

They heard the deck watch forward hail:

"Lay off! Officer of the deck—small boat on port side amidship wants to board us!"

Monckton started to rise, then sank back. "See who it is, Clark, there's a good chap."

CLARK went on deck and to the rail. In the small boat, rowed by two Mexicans, sat a well-dressed Chinaman fanning himself with his neat straw hat, which bore the colors of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a hatband. He waved his hand in a quick signal when he saw Clark.

As Clark ordered the port gangplank lowered, the Chinaman gave an order to his two oarsmen, who strained at the oars in a way that showed fear of their passenger as well as a desire to please him by fast work—something which a Mexican avoids whenever possible.

Clark met the Chinaman at the top step of the gangplank and shook hands with him. He was Chieh-yu, Wang Li's first lieutenant, and second only to him in the Chang Kwangs. Boston Tech graduate, mining engineer, student of literature, chess player, rich and cultured—and with it all he was, first, last, and all the time, a Chang Kwang, as his fathers had been before him for generations.

When Clark brought him to Monckton, explaining on the way that the yacht owner was unable to come on deck, Monckton tried to rise. "Pardon my not getting up, old chap," he said. "I am still under the doctor's orders. Mr. Clark, will you ring for a steward, please? Sit down, Chieh-yu. Is there anything special you would like to have to drink?"

"The ride was a hot, long, dusty one," answered the young Chinaman, with a smile, "and the last part in the little boat was hottest of all. I would really like a mint julep. I have always remembered the ones I had when I had the pleasure of coming on board the Carmen at Havana last year."

"Sanetomo," said Monckton to the Jap steward who had materialized like magic out of the companionway to the owner's suite, "start making mint juleps and keep on until I tell you to stop."

The Jap drew his breath in with a hissing sound, bowed, said "Sir, can do," and disappeared.

"One or two will be plenty," said Chieh-yu, with a small smile. "Wang Li asked me to see you, Mr. Monckton, to ask if it would be convenient for you to come up to San Francisco for a conference."

"Certainly," answered Monckton. "The doctor tells me that he will release me almost any time. I will be there Friday or Saturday."

"That will be quite all right," said Chieh-yu.

Monckton knew that Chieh-yu was high in the Chang Kwang councils, and that he knew just how Wang Li had taken the killing of the Kid; and he also knew enough not to ask Chieh-yu anything about it.

The mint juleps arrived and the rest of the hour was spent discussing China of the Ming dynasty and the Chinese method of candying fruits. Clark excused himself and went on deck.

As Chieh-yu went over the side he smiled at Clark, whom he liked. "We hope to see more of you, Mr. Clark," he said. "Mr. Monckton has been telling me of the sad accident to Mr. Carewe and Mr. Langdon."

"Thanks," replied Clark. "I hope you will."

He stood and watched the Mexicans pulling Chieh-yu toward the shore.

"I wonder," he said softly, "if that was a tip that I had been chosen in Monckton's place."

A sailor came up to him with a message from Captain Davis, and Clark promptly dismissed any further thoughts of that nature, becoming at once the efficient ship's officer he really was.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PLANNING A PRIVATE WAR.

JIMMIE GRANT and Jimmie Earpe were talking in the post-office lobby, having met by chance after breakfast. In his soft, drawling voice Earpe was telling Grant of a round-up the Rangers had made the night before, and Jimmie number two was grinning as Earpe described the gun-fight that followed. A Mexican eased up alongside Earpe, said something, and kept on drifting.

"He wants me to go to the Last Chance," Earpe said. "He's got something to tell me. Come on, Jimmie; it's right cool over there, and maybe it's something you might want to know. That was Jesus Carrera. I know him right well. He used to be a *rurale* until he killed a man that was way up, and he had to drift, pronto. I got him a job out at the Lazy W."

The former *rurale*, after he had one or two drinks and Earpe had assured him that Jimmie Grant was *muchisimo caballero* and his own *buen amigo*, began to tell them a long story. He left the main line several times to go up branches telling Earpe how much he loved him, and how it happened that he got the word, and why Pedro this and Manuel that had told him so-and-so.

It all boiled down to the statement that Kentuck was far from dead—he was holed up at a sheep camp near Libertad, and was organizing some kind of a standing army. He, Carrera, knowing that his *amigo* Earpe had killed the so-worthless Malonee, thought it best to learn about this, as without doubt Kentuck was planning to come over and wipe him out. Also that watch from the shore was kept on the big boat from which the Señor Clark came so often.

Jimmie Earpe thanked him for the information, prevailed on him to accept a "loan" of twenty dollars, and bought him several drinks. Señor Carrera, his sombrero well on the back of his head, swaggered down the street, warm in the knowledge that he had protected a friend—also that he had enough to get into a game of monte.

"Let's you and I go somewhere and make medicine," said Earpe, as Carrera faded from sight.

"Come on up to my room. It's quiet and no one around this time in the morning," answered Grant. "Boy, something's surely due to break. That's a funny stunt, Jimmie. Why would— Better wait until we get holed up."

Once in Jimmie's room Earpe said: "Jimmie, I reckon that this here Clark must be throwin' in with Kentuck on some play."

"Yeah, sure's shootin'. We know that Clark and Kentuck went for a ride and Clark came back alone and passed the word that Kentuck had gone away to attend to some business. In other words, Kentuck had been put on the spot for the bonehead play he pulled with the Kid. That's easy to dope out. All right: Clark and Kentuck frame something, he plants Kentuck in a place where Monckton couldn't find him or get word that he's there; then

he goes back and tells Monckton that the matter has been attended to. But that business of patrolling the beach, and the standing army recruiting stuff—"

"Maybe-so they aim on gettin' them a boat," drawled Earpe.

"Gosh, boy, you sure nicked it, I bet you. I'm going to get you a Distinguished Service Medal and everything. Let's set the stage: Clark comes to Kentuck, tells him cold turkey Monckton has ordered him to act as the Lord High Executioner; and instead of that, they frame to turn regular pirates."

"Why would they do that?" puzzled Earpe. "That's what I can't see. They couldn't go anywhere in that boat, and the Chang Kwang would get them."

"Yeah, that's right," and Jimmie Grant's keen eyes bored into Jimmie Earpe's smiling, equally keen blue ones as if searching for the answer. Suddenly he smiled. "I got it. Clark knows of the jewels—"

"What jewels, Jimmie?" interrupted Earpe.

"What jewels? Oh, remember I said in the D. A.'s office that Monckton was suspected of being the big cow in an international gem robbery? Well, I've found out that he was, and that the jewels are on board the Carmen."

"Yeah? Then why don't you—"

"I'm going to take that Distinguished Service Medal right away from you," said Jimmie severely. "First reason is he hangs out in Mexican waters, and if we went to Mexico City and asked for a search warrant they'd want to handle it, naturally—and where would the jewels be afterward, answer me that?"

"*Quién sabe?*" said Jimmie Earpe, sadly.

"YOU can have your medal back," grinned Jimmie Grant. "Well, how's this: Clark knows where they are, and he frames something with Kentuck. That bird is down close to the yacht, waiting for Clark to flash the word that the stunt is ready. They've got some play where they figure on stealing the jewels in the excitement and fading out of the picture."

"Yeah," agreed Jimmie Earpe, "that's it."

"If they pull that, it's going to knock all my plans higher than hell and high water. They'll get Monckton, probably, and get the jewels—and all I'll get will be a bawling out that 'll go down in history. I got to stop that some way, Jimmie, old kid."

"My pa was a right good figurer," drawled Earpe, "and he always said the best way to stop anything was to stop it with lead."

"Your pa sure had the right idea," agreed Jimmie, grinning. "How far is this Libertad from here, Jimmie?"

"About a hundred and ten miles, I reckon. It's on the west slope of the Sierra del Nazaren mountains. Maybe-so it's a little farther. You go to Altar, then to Cruces, and through the pass to the Gulf of California."

"How long would it take?" asked Grant.

"Two days, I reckon. You can use a car as far as the eastern slope beyond Cruces. It's the pass that's the hardest."

"Let's get a map for a minute. Come on over to the Federal building."

A little later they were poring over a map in the postmaster's office. "See? Go by boat from Port Isabel, Earpe. Slip down the coast and go in on 'em. Less chance of a tip-off. Mexico or no Mexico, I'm going down there and get me this Kentuck feller for interfering in my plans this way."

"You and me both," said Ranger Earpe. "I'll get me a week's leave and go with you."

"Come on," grinned Grant. "We'll follow your pa's advice."

The two young men, going deliberately into another country, where they

only amounted to what they weighed, smiled delightedly at each other.

"If we get Kentuck," said Jimmie Grant, "that 'll sure hesitate Clark. He can't pull anything by himself, unless he steals the jewels and jumps ship—and I'll bank on Monckton being too fast for him to do that. I wonder how many men Kentuck has with him?"

"*No sabe*," shrugged Earpe. "Tell you what, Jimmie, let's take Sam and Bill Earpe along with us. The four of us can handle all the men he's got. Besides, Sam he's got him a fishin' boat at Port Isabel, him being one of these here *loco* fishermen. It would look plumb natural, seein' him come down there with a party."

"Boy," said Jimmie Grant, "I'm going to get you the Congressional Medal also. Let's go and find them."

## CHAPTER IX.

### GUNS OUT!

KENTUCK was making headquarters in a little 'dobe house, quite a bit back from the beach and set in a clump of prickly pears. It was a pretty place, with flowers and shade, plenty to eat and drink. Music and the quiet had relaxed his taut nerves. He had arranged all details as far as his end went.

Two of the *rurales* in whose beat he was had agreed to play in according to his instructions; the *jefe político* of the district was to share with Kentuck fifty-fifty—at least he thought so. With the *jefe's* help Kentuck had picked out ten men who didn't care whether it was a yacht or a battleship, if the looting was good and they could get away with it.

As far as killing went, neither Kentuck nor any of the others once thought about that. They killed without a moment's hesitation, as simply as they would raise a drink to their mouths. Now there was nothing to do but await Clark's messenger.

Kentuck, through his glasses, saw the fishing boat coming up the coast. It stopped and dropped anchor every once in awhile, and he saw the lines go out. He had been a fisherman himself in his younger days, and watched them for awhile with a smile on his thin lips. Some one called him after a short time, and he went in the house.

The fishing boat lazed along, coming nearer inshore, and finally beached a mile up from the house. The four men pulled it up on the beach, threw an anchor on the beach, secured it with an old spar, stretched and appeared to see the house for the first time.

They started to walk up the gentle slope toward it. A Mexican slid off the roof and went inside. Kentuck was talking to two of the men who had joined him.

"*Señor*," the man said, "a small boat has just come, and from it there comes four men to the house. Is it your desire that they come?"

"It's a fishing party," answered Kentuck. "I saw them. No reason why they shouldn't come up, Juan; they probably want to get a drink. If we stopped them it would look suspicious. Let them come, *amigo*. If they question, I am a mining man, and you are my helpers."

His Spanish was almost as good as Juan's, who nodded and went out to greet the fishing party.

"I do not think it advisable," Kentuck went on to the two men, "to allow more men than absolutely necessary to board the ship when she comes ashore. The crew will not show fight, we believe, and it will lessen confusion. The whole thing must be carried through as a rescue; is that plain to you both?"

"*Si, señor*," they both said eagerly, "*muy claro!*"

A man came in. "*Señor*," he said, "the *señores* of the small boat ask that you come out and drink with them."

"I didn't want them to know that

a white man was here," said Kentuck with a frown. "Who told them?"

The man raised his shoulders and held out his hands.

"*Quién sabe?*" he answered in a resigned tone. "They ask, as I said. What more, Señor Kentuck?"

Kentuck went out and around to the side of the house where the shade was best. Two of the four men were over away from the house watching with interest a card game that several Mexicans were playing, a blanket spread on the ground acting as table. The Mexicans were squatting around it or kneeling. One or two stretched out on the ground were watching the others, having evidently gone broke. The two Mexicans had come out with Kentuck and were with him when he came up.

Jimmie Earpe turned to face the white man as he heard him coming. Kentuck recognized him. The slight tightening of his eyes was the only sign that he sensed danger.

"Hello, Earpe," he said calmly. "I didn't know you went in for fishing."

"Well, suh," drawled Earpe, "I don't reckon I do, very much. That no-'count Sam over yonder is the fisherman of the Earpe family."

"Yes? Is he—oh, yes, I see him—and your other cousin, Bill, too. Is this gentleman a Ranger also?"

"No," answered Earpe. "This here jasper is a Federal agent named Grant. Jimmie, this is Kentuck Mears."

JIMMIE GRANT grinned at Kentuck, who smiled politely in return.

"I've heard of Mr. Grant," Kentuck said. "I knew there was a Federal man working with Sawyer. I won't insult you gentlemen by pretending you came here for a drink. What do you want, Earpe?"

Kentuck's tone became wintry. As soon as he saw Sam and Bill Earpe he knew that something somewhere had slipped, and that they had come for him.

"You know, of course, you are in Mexico," Kentuck went on. "Your authority is the same as mine or any one's here—absolutely nothing."

"Yes, suh," agreed Earpe. "We know that, Kentuck."

"Here it is," said Jimmie Grant shortly. "Cutting out all the wah-wah, when you had the Kid put on the spot, Kentuck—which incidentally we can't prove, of course—you spoiled some plans of ours for getting the Chang Kwang.

"What you are doing here we don't know and we don't give a damn. We got word you were here, and came down to do one of two things. First, take you back with us and hold you *incomunicado* until we round up, then try you on any old charge and make it stick if we can; or we will just remove you from the picture. You can take your choice."

Kentuck's eyes widened. "Short, sweet, and to the point! I always like to have matters put plainly to me, Mr. Grant. I will speak just as plainly. First, I will not go back with you, for several reasons, ignoring the reason why I am here. I am wanted for a few things that would be rather embarrassing to face. Second, let me call your attention to the fact that there are ten or more men here with me, picked for their ability along certain lines; and while I give you gentlemen full credit for your nerve and your undoubted skill with guns, I can only say that I don't think you can make the play good."

Jimmie Grant laughed gayly.

"I didn't think you would accept the first, Kentuck. Well, get something in your hand—"

A Mexican coming around from the rear of the house had reached the card game on the blanket. As he started to sit down he saw Sam Earpe and jumped back, his hand going to his holster.

"*El Rangero* Earpe!" he yelled. "*Muerte!*"

Young Bill Earpe, being closest to him, killed him before his hand had started to draw his gun from the holster.

All the card players who could rolled away from the blanket, the others faced the two Rangers from where they sat.

The two men who had been with Kentuck, not understanding much of what was said, ran toward the blanket, now covered with bodies. Sam and Bill Earpe were standing as they had been when the Mexican shouted, but now their heavy Colt .45s were roaring out death at every pull of the trigger.

Jimmie Earpe stepped out a step from Grant, and his Colt rose and fell twice. He "threw down" on the two men as coldly and calmly as he would on a rattlesnake; they were rattlesnakes, human ones. After he fired the second shot he ran out about ten feet, whirled, and stood facing the house, his eyes alert for a shot or man from within.

KENTUCK stood facing Jimmie Grant. There was no fear in his eyes. He knew that it was hopeless now and that he had lost. If there had been time to signal Juan and one or two others to get posted while he talked, there might have been a chance. He had decided, at the moment the Mexican yelled, to pretend to yield. Now there was nothing left but to shoot it out. He could not go back to the United States—it would be going to the chair.

In the split second it had taken him to reach for his gun he had thought it out.

Jimmie Grant read in Kentuck's eyes that he was going to take a chance. The two shots came together, and both men staggered back from the impact of the bullets. Kentuck's teeth closed over his underlip as he tried to maintain his upright position. Jimmie Grant was already swaying back. Kentuck fired twice more and Jimmie fired once as he straightened up almost to attention, facing Kentuck some five feet from him.

Jimmie Grant whirled around as Kentuck's second bullet tore through his shoulder, the third getting him in the left arm as he turned. The force of the bullet was enough to turn Jimmie halfway around, and, falling as he was, his nerve forced his body the rest of the way.

As he fell he fired once more at Kentuck, whose knees were giving. Kentuck was already in the shadow of the valley of death, with everything going black, yet with the instinct of a born killer he returned the fire, then his body fell across Jimmie Grant.

The firing by the blanket had ceased. Four Mexicans had their hands up, the rest were dead. Sam Earpe had a bullet in his leg, Bill Earpe was untouched.

The Rangers had been too fast for the Mexicans, and those that were alive had promptly thrown up their hands after seeing five men killed before they could get really into action. The bullet Sam had collected came from the third man, who had time to fire once.

Jimmie Earpe pulled the body of Kentuck off Jimmie Grant and knelt beside him. Bill Earpe stayed with the Mexicans, and Sam came limping over.

"Through the shoulder and the arm," Jimmie announced, "and a bad one in the chest. Reckon we better get this no-'count scoundrel of a Jimmie Grant to a doctor, *muy pronto,* Sam. You hurt bad?"

"Not any," answered Sam. "I got me a little one in the leg. I'll get Bill to plug it up for me. You tend to this here Jimmie. Man howdy, he can sure take it, can't he, Jimmie? I seen him workin', out of the corner of my eye."

Jimmie and Bill Earpe searched the house, after locking the survivors in one of the rooms, and after they had given Jimmie Grant all the first aid they knew, they carried him to the

boat, leaving the body of Kentuck to await Clark's messenger.

## CHAPTER X.

### CLARK PICKS UP A PRICKLY PEAR.

MONCKTON sat with Clark aft on the quarter-deck, almost in the same place as he had sat when Carewe ran amuck. "Wang Li took the death of the Kid easier than I expected," Monckton said. "I explained to him that the Kid did not show Kentuck any credentials and that I had attended to Kentuck. He questioned the number of men that we were losing, though.

"What he wants is this. There are two men coming in for some special work, and he wants me personally to see that they arrive safely. We are to take them off a boat that will bring them up to Mazatlan and then slip up the coast to the Umpqua River, one hundred and fifty miles north of Cape Blanco. He says that he will be there in person to receive them."

Clark whistled. "Way up in Oregon! Must be something hot, to require all that care and bring the big chief out. These birds must be important. Thought you didn't like to have the yacht mix in."

"I don't, especially now with that stuff on board which I told you of. There has been a delay in passing it along. Carewe was to attend to it, and I don't like to pick up the strings he had out.

"I'm not sure of the people anyway. He seemed to be, and I knew that he could take care of himself. They really are a damn nuisance, Clark. Hard to get and harder to get rid of unless one wants to take less than they're worth.

"Well, I told Wang Li I would attend to it. I don't want to lose out with them; the connection is valuable in more ways than one."

"If they meet us offshore up there it will be easy," said Clark. "We can outrun anything Uncle Sam has got. When are we to pick them up?"

"To-morrow night. We'll pull anchor in the morning and laze down. I think I'll land Captain Davis and let him go to a hospital in Mazatlan. He has absolutely unbelted, hasn't he?"

"Pretty bad, I'm afraid," answered Clark. "He comes off one drunk to slide into another, and that means he's done."

"He was a good man, too. Many times he has helped out very much. Well, Clark, we'll make this delivery for Wang Li and then go into executive session about the stones."

"Right." Clark rose. "I'm going to send my Jap on shore for some of those pears, if we are pulling out in the morning."

Monckton laughed. "You seem to have fallen for them awfully hard. Why not send a steward?"

"They wouldn't give him the kind I want," said Clark. "My boy knows just where to go by now."

Monckton laughed again and waved his hand, as if to say "Help yourself," and Clark went below. Not many minutes later Mrs. Monckton came aft and sat down beside Monckton.

"Hello, old dear," he said with a smile. "You are just in time to join me. What will you have?"

"Nothing, at the moment," she replied curtly.

Monckton looked at her. "Ridin' hard?" he drawled.

He did not love her, and she knew it. He lived with her as he had with other beautiful women in all parts of the world. He acted like a gentleman always, but he did not love her, nor did she love him. She was with him for the material things that his wealth could afford, and in turn she knew he counted her as one of them.

"No, not especially." Her cold blue eyes were intent on his handsome face. "Are you taking this man Clark in with you?"

"Yes. Case of necessity, old thing,

since Carewe found out that Langdon was cutting him out with you. I am rather short-handed at the moment. You caused me to lose two good men, my dear."

SHE ignored the taunt.

"He reported he had killed Kentuck?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Monckton, showing a little surprise. "Why?"

"Did he do it?" she said shortly. "It was the first time I ever saw you take a man's word for a thing like that and not do any checking up."

"Perhaps I should have," admitted Monckton. "You don't think that crack I got on the head has made me feeble-minded, do you?"

She colored a little at his tone.

"No; but I think you are not showing your usual carefulness. What's his Jap going on shore for, at this place?"

"See what suspicion does," chided Monckton. "For some prickly pears that Clark likes. Simple, isn't it, when you know."

"Very," she said, "especially since he came on board yesterday afternoon with almost half a cutter full."

The smile left Monckton's face as if wiped off by a hand. He looked over at the shore and began to whistle softly an old Irish love song. Suddenly he broke it off.

"Thanks, old lady; I'll attend to it. Will you go below and get to McGuire without Clark seeing you? Tell him to report to me and to bring Mareno with him. Then go and get Clark, and tell him I told you to show him the jewels. That's what he's after. Take him to the stateroom and show them to him."

"What?" she interrupted.

"Follow through, dear, like a good girl now, and do just what I say. Show them to him, put them back, then later go back and get them and carry them on you until I take them. Do you follow me? I will arrange to have the Jap covered. He hasn't left yet?"

"No. I heard Clark tell him to go about six o'clock."

"That's all right, then. Keep Clark occupied for an hour or as long as you can. I'll have the starboard side cleared so that McGuire and Mareno can ease over. We'll see what kind of prickly pears he gets. It may be a mare's nest, but best be sure."

That night about nine o'clock Monckton sent for Clark.

"The boson just reported to me that two more men are missing, Clark," he said curtly. "A seaman named McGuire and a steward named Mareno. This jumping ship has got to be stopped. Better send a cutter on shore and have those two drinking places combed out. Has your Jap got back, by the way?"

"No," said Clark. "He's overdue. That's the trouble with these waters—too easy to get amusement any place they hit the shore. I'll skin my boy when he does show. I'll take the cutter in myself."

"No need," yawned Monckton. "Send Larson or Sivertson. I want some one to sit and drink with me. Beastly thing, to sit and drink alone. Sit down, Clark, and tell me some of your adventures on the seven seas."

Perhaps two hours later the cutter came back, bringing the highly befuddled McGuire and Mareno, who were singing Irish and Italian songs at the top of their voices. They brought along the body of Clark's Jap. The face was bruised and discolored and the doctor reported that the man's body, on examination, showed that he had been brutally beaten.

McGuire and Mareno, under quiet, deadly cross-examination by Clark, maintained as best they could in their drunken condition that they had stumbled over the corpse not far from the path leading to one of the *pulperias*. They had hoisted it on their shoulders and carried it to the beach, where they had met the cutter crew.

Clark had ordered the body into the

sick bay and had stood by as the doctor stripped it. The Jap's pockets contained little, and there was no half envelope among the contents of his clothing.

Clark went on deck, his cold, crafty brain searching and twisting through the labyrinth of doubt and suspicion the bringing of his boy's dead body had opened up. Was Kentuck double crossing him? Or had his man delivered the message and stumbled into a fight on the way back? Could Monckton have learned— No; he dismissed the thought; it was impossible. Yet, how had McGuire and Mareno got on shore? Clark knew they were Monckton's gunmen. Their story was airtight. Should he go through as planned?

He laughed recklessly and went below to his own room. When he came out he had a .45 Colt under his left armpit, as well as his automatic in his hip pocket. He had decided to go through and beach the yacht. If Kentuck didn't show as planned, Clark would shoot his way to the jewels, get them, and take his chances of getting away ashore. He figured on the confusion that would follow the grounding, and although he knew that Monckton and several more would be prompt to combat any such action, he would rely on their being sufficiently scattered out for him to shoot his way clear. If a double cross showed, then it was on the knees of the nine Red Gods—let the best man have the stuff.

McGUIRE was reporting to Monckton, in a little room off the library that was absolutely sound-proof and could be entered only through Monckton's suite. Mrs. Monckton sat in their living room reading a novel.

"We gits to shore," reported McGuire, who had miraculously sobered, "and we follys him. He goes up to a place on a hill back a ways. We tags along, me and the wop. There's a lot of dead Spigs lying in the yard, and wan dead white man, nawthin' else. The Jap he goes up and looks at the white man, lets out a screech that would wake the dead and away he goes, me and the wop after him. We catch up wid him soon, and we gits him to tell us all about it—after a little persuadin'."

"A little persuading," echoed Monckton, with a smile. "The doctor told me that the body showed more than a little—er—persuasion."

"That come after, most of it," replied the gunman. "Well, he told us that Mr. Clark had sent him with half an envelope—the wan ye have ferninst ye there on the table—to a man named Kentuck. That was the white man lyin' dead in the yard. His message was: 'To-night.' Whin he saw this Kentuck was dead he squawked and ran—that's all he knew. The beatin' he got was when he tried wan of them jewy-jitsoo tricks of his to get away from us. Me havin' him by the scruff of the neck at the time."

"All right, McGuire. There is one grand to your credit and to Mareno's also. Keep as close to Clark as you can, either of you, without attracting his attention. That's all. And pass the word that I want to see him, in about twenty minutes."

Mrs. Monckton came in as McGuire went out. "Well?"

"You were right," Monckton said. "He did not attend to Kentuck, but brought him down here. He and Kentuck had something ribbed up—to take place to-night. Kentuck got into a fight and was killed. His bringing Kentuck down looks to me as if they had planned an attack from shore."

"Either that or he figured on getting the jewels, and Kentuck was waiting to pick him up and help him get away."

Monckton laughed. "Well, forewarned is forearmed, old girl. I need him until after I make this delivery to Wang Li. But I have the deck, old

dear; I think I can run rings around Mr. Clark. A little while after he comes in you drop in and ask that we put to open waters for the night. Complain a little of heat. If I ordered it done without a little preliminary play, he might think our wind was up. I don't rely much on Davis, and Clark knows these northern waters."

Clark was with Monckton when Mrs. Monckton came languidly in and suggested that they put to sea for the night on account of the heat. Monckton readily agreed, and laughingly stopped Clark from going on deck; he said that Larson wanted a chance to "strut his stuff," and he wanted Clark to stay with him, boasting that he would drink Clark under the table.

Clark sat there, a smile on his tight lips, and heard the anchor come on the bow, the screw begin to turn. He knew that his present chance had slipped by him. He had sensed that he was being watched and that in some way the coils were tightening around him. But to his reckless, chilled-steel, fearless heart it was all a huge joke. If the gods so willed, he would win clear with the jewels; if not, he wouldn't. Monckton and his paid killers and his cold-eyed woman, who was out to get him, Clark—none of them could do a thing but play the parts the gods decided they should. Clark was a paid killer, he thought grimly, but this time he was working for himself.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SEA FIGHT.

DUTCH VON HOLZEMAN sat beside Jimmie Grant's bed in the hospital at Yuma. "You got a swell chance," he said firmly. "Be thankful you're not sittin on a damp cloud right now playing a harp. The doctor tells me that if that bullet went a gnat's heel lower you'd have caught it in the lung instead of just above. Be your age, you poor old wreck. You're going to stay right here, and Field Marshal von Holzeman will attend to the knock-off. Me and the Scotland Yard johnnie."

"You forget that I'm your superior officer," Jimmie said, sitting up in bed. "If Jimmie Earpe and I don't come to the party, there ain't goin' to be no party, my Dutch friend."

"German, not Dutch," corrected Von Holzeman, as he always did when any one deliberately mentioned his ancestry. "German is 'von,' Dutch is 'van,' ignorant."

"Excuse me," grinned Jimmie. "Anyway, I'll be there."

"Oh, no, you won't," said a calm voice from the doorway.

The old doctor, who had treated gun wounds in the Southwest long before Jimmie was born, came in the room. "The human body, young feller, can only stand so much; then it goes out of commission. Yours is a strong one and is coming back all right—to get some more, no doubt. But for the next two weeks you will stay right in that bed unless you think you can lick me and all the rest of us."

"I don't," Jimmie mourned. "If I did, I'd have tried her a long time ago."

"Laugh that off, Chames," said Dutch. "Anyway, don't worry, old kid. You had your fun with Kentuck, and we got this Monckton walking right in our parlor."

"Yeah? How are you doin' 'er, Dutch?"

"Two revenue boats, the Bear and the Haddon, will follow 'em up the coast, while a navy flyer spots the Carmen and radios her progress. Wang Li has given Monckton a place to get contact in the mouth of the river. When the Carmen gets in far enough, the navy will close the neck of the bottle; the army, consisting of me and the Scotland Yard man and nine million customhouse hombres, will put out from shore in launches and what not; we'll board her, and once aboard the lugger, the jewels are mine."

"How about the Chinks that Wang Li is sending up as decoy ducks? What happens to them?"

"It 'll take some knockin'," replied Dutch, with a grin. "Those two are the hardest-boiled gunmen the Chang Kwang owns. Soon as the yacht gets in the mouth of the river they are going to retire quietly but firmly to some place where they can repel any attack until we get on board."

"Well," Jimmie sighed, as he leaned back against the pillows, "I guess Jimmie number one and Jimmie number two fade from the picture, darn it all. That's what we get for going around playing instead of tending to business. Hop to it, old kid Field Marshal von Holzeman."

THE beautiful white yacht nosed her way daintily into the mouth of the river from the open sea, Clark, Monckton, and Mrs. Monckton on the bridge. Captain Davis had been dropped at Mazatlan. The Umpqua River mouth was fairly wide, perhaps half a mile, clear of obstructions, and heavily timbered on both sides.

"We ought to sight Wang Li's launch any minute," said Monckton, and he turned and looked aft along the deck. "The gentlemen high-binders have gone below. Packing up, probably. Better slow down a little, Clark."

Mrs. Monckton, who had turned as Monckton spoke, suddenly laughed, an amused, clear laugh. "Look behind you."

From around the bend in the shore line, not a mile behind them, came the two revenue cutters, crews at the guns.

"My word!" laughed Monckton. "Neatly trapped."

"Take the wheel," said Clark. "I'll go below and get those two yellow crooks. We may have time to—"

"You're going to stay right here, Mr. Clark," said Mrs. Monckton icily. "You need not hunt for the jewels; I have them on me."

Clark laughed and let go the wheel, which Monckton seized, throwing it over to hard-a-port as the Carmen gathered speed.

Clark looked at the fast converging revenue boats, at the launches speeding out from shore, at Monckton at the wheel, and at the lovely, ice-cold woman who stood with a sneer on her exquisite lips, her eyes intent on his, all else forgotten. This was the man who had killed Langdon, swimming wounded in the water, and she forgot all else.

"Give them to me!" Clark commanded, his own eyes as cold as hers, his hand flashing under his arm.

Mrs. Monckton laughed, and in the face of the revenue boats and the crowded launches and the crew of the Carmen, who were now on deck, she straightened her right hand out from the frilly lace cuff and shot Clark between the eyes with a little .25 caliber automatic.

Monckton laughed recklessly.

"Nice work, old girl! Get down! I'm going between them!"

He headed the Carmen straight at the Bear instead, the guns of his killers on deck spitting lead.

THE grizzled old captain of the Bear grunted: "Going to ram us? Let him have it!"

The first shell struck the Carmen on the bow, the second hit square amidships as she fell away. The rapid-fire guns swept her deck as mercilessly as her crew had swept men out of life.

A bugle blew "cease firing," and the *rat-tat-tat-tat* was stilled. The Carmen lay on her side, filling rapidly, her immaculate woodwork splintered and torn.

Men were jumping overboard, to be picked up by the launches. The bridge was practically intact; the gunners of the Bear had seen a woman there and had avoided it. Monckton lay clinging to the wheel, on the bridge, whose slant now was pronounced. Mrs. Monckton, holding to a rail, was beside him.

"Get them off you," he commanded calmly. "Claim that you knew nothing of my—"

"Do you think that I would live to go to prison?" she demanded. "Fight it out, Frank."

McGuire crawled up beside them, his Colt in his hand.

"What now, captain?" he asked, with a grin.

"Whatever you like," answered Monckton, letting go the wheel and getting into a sitting position as he drew his gun.

Climbing over the rail of the bridge from starboard came the Scotland Yard man and Dutch von Holzeman, followed by two of the customhouse men.

Monckton and McGuire fired at them.

A splotch of red came on Dutch's linen coat—the Scotland Yard man fell back, a bullet in his shoulder from McGuire's gun. The customs men fired at the same time as Dutch. Monckton and McGuire slumped to the slanting deck, dead.

Mrs. Monckton fired once at the nearest man, missed, put the little automatic to her mouth—and the yacht went under the calm water.

The small boats backed away to avoid the suction, only the Bear steaming closer. Dutch von Holzeman came up, then the Scotland Yard man, then the customs men, who had jumped as far clear as they could. Monckton's body floated to the surface, and the Scotland Yard man ordered it taken in one of the boats.

A young lieutenant on the Bear suddenly kicked off his shoes, tossed his coat on the deck and took a long dive over the side.

He came up with Mrs. Monckton's body, which he had seen drifting along under water. In spite of the shattering wound in the back of her head, where the bullet had spread coming out, she had the same cold, calm beauty of face. Her blue eyes were open and as wintry as ever.

DUTCH VON HOLZEMAN, who had insisted on being taken to the same hospital, was telling Jimmie Grant and Jimmie Earpe about it. Jimmie Grant was so far advanced now that he was sitting in an invalid chair.

He and Jimmie Earpe listened with envy in their eyes as Dutch rubbed it in by describing every detail of what he termed the sea fight of the century. He wound up by saying:

"The jewels were on her, and after the Scotland Yard man gets out of the hospital he's going home and get made an inspector, I bet you. Boy, howdy, you poor prunes missed a show."

"Yeah?" said Jimmie Grant. "How about the two yellow brothers—did they get away?"

"Well, when me and the Scotland Yard bird was climbing up onto the yacht, we passed them climbing out of a porthole. Old Wang Li had a launch up there on watch for them. Chances are they made it."

"If they didn't, you better go far, far away, boy, and every time you see a Chink for the next million years you get something in your hand, right quick, as Jimmie number one would put it."

"It's catching before hanging," answered Dutch cheerfully. "The D. A. at San Francisco is seeing Wang Li right away. Old Wang is a good sport, and he doesn't want to lose face, not any. If it came out that he had been gypped by a Federal agent, it wouldn't be so good for him. They'd laugh him out of the Chang Kwang."

"Tell you who *will* scare you," answered Jimmie grimly, "and that is the Bureau of Accounts, when they get your expense account for the last month."

"Now," said Dutch, with a grin, "you said something."

THE END.

*Nereid went in a graceful arc into the sea*

# The Sea Girl

*Down into the unknown ocean depths go three intrepid souls—to face the infernal menace of the world's enemies*


## *By RAY CUMMINGS*

***Author of "A Brand New World," "Beyond the Stars," etc.***


### LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SUNKEN food ships and volcanic eruptions of steam, in the spring of 1990, presage a world calamity of an unknown and amazing sort; and by July the oceans have receded many fathoms. Scientists are at a loss to account for the disappearance of this water; but they finally are forced to agree with the conclusions of Dr. Plantet, former surgeon and now a leading oceanographer. Pointing out that the earth's surface, land and sea, is only twelve miles from the top of Everest to the bottom of the Nero Deep, and that the earth's interior is unknown, he claims that the errors in estimating the earth's density are due to great subterranean hollows or honeycombs—into which this water is flowing.

Furthermore, he believes that a race exists there, akin to the human race, the race that furnished the basis for humanity's legends about mermaids and Titans. This race, he thinks, may have broken through the ocean floor, in its first offensive move against mankind. For his son, the romantic and poetical Arturo Plantet, and the young navigator, Geoffry Grant—who is telling the story—were in a submersible in the Pacific and saw a strange globular craft speeding along, with a weird, beautiful green-eyed girl's face staring at them through a sort of window. This was in a region where many ships had disappeared, in the western Pacific; and near there the crew of a surface ship saw a "mermaid" on an island.

The sinking ocean level has already


**This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 2.**

halted all ocean transportation and forced it into the air. At last Dr. Plantet completes his Dolphin, a narrow eighty-four foot long craft with a double hull of ralite, between whose hulls rapidly circulating water transforms the tremendous crushing pressure of the ocean depth into "kinetic pressure," or the motion of the water —and the craft has an estimated range of two thousand fathoms depth—twelve thousand feet. The vessel is driven by an atomic engine.

But the day before the Australian Flyer is to pick up the craft and its passengers—Dr. Plantet, Jeff Grant, Arturo and his sister Polly—Arturo disappears from home. He has been acting strangely ever since he had seen the undersea girl and had learned about the menace. Now he leaves a note, saying that he has taken his radio sending set, and if he needs his father, will call him at midnight in their secret code; that he thinks what he is doing is for the best.

## CHAPTER V.

### NEREID OF THE SEA.

THE westward-bound Australian mail left its Hendon Airport at 5 P. M., Greenwich time, August 10. At 9 P. M., Washington time, in the luminous darkness of the late summer twilight, we saw its lights over Norfolk—the immense, quadruple banks of its lighted hull windows. It came down over the landing field where our little Dolphin, with three of us on board, was lying cradled and ready. It hovered; its electro-magnetic grapples caught us up; in ten minutes, with the great flyer on its westward way again, we were stored on its lower deck.

Three of us on board: Dr. Plantet, Polly, and myself. We had had no heart to try and find a last minute substitute for Arturo. We could handle the Dolphin, we two men. It was, indeed, a craft with every modern device operated by the levers in its forward instrument room, of one-man control.

We had found no trace of Arturo. Dr. Plantet had uttered one anxious, heartfelt cry: "Why did he not tell me? I would have understood and advised him."

Ah, but there lay the trouble! He would have advised his son; but he could not, probably, have understood! Whatever Arturo contemplated, quite evidently he feared that his father would have disapproved of it. And, disapproving, would have forbidden him to do it, with a gruff command enforced against all possibility of argument. Arturo knew it; Polly and I, as we read his timorous, pleading little note, realized it was true. But Dr. Plantet did not think of that, and there was no one to tell him, and no use in telling him.

He had done what he could to trace Arturo. The lad's own small Wasp was gone from its hangar. Arturo had gone alone, by air. For an hour that afternoon when we returned from Norfolk to find him gone, Dr. Plantet shut himself up with his instruments; notified the authorities; had every detective bureau at every transfer point and in all the traffic towers of the country on the watch. But Arturo had evidently planned carefully. No report of him came to us.

We were very busy those last hours. With all his worry over his son—shot through with anger also, I am sure—Dr. Plantet would not let it interfere with our voyage. That was not his way; though he was right in that, of course. We were not going on a mere experimental voyage to try and chart the great unknown deeps. That was a mere incidental. The oceans were still receding; the deeps might soon be dry, so that any one could see and explore them. By this August 10, another eight fathoms were gone from the oceans. Some eighteen fathoms in

all—over a hundred feet. We heard a newscaster give the figures on the evening of August 9. The oceans down nearly a hundred feet below low tide levels, everywhere, and the world was seething with the confusion of it.

Our voyage might locate the cause. But, most important of all, we hoped to locate this unknown enemy race, somewhere down there, to whose existence so much evidence had pointed. An enemy, perhaps making ready to attack our world; we must determine that, one way or the other; locate the point of attack, if attack there were to be; estimate its nature, and the best methods of repulsing it. These were the main reasons for our voyage. The fate of our world might depend upon our success—and no disappearance of a wayward son could swerve Dr. Plantet from the least detail of his starting preparations. Within an hour the affair seemed to be wiped from his mind.

Flying southwest, the mailship carried us over Mexico during that evening. We passed to the Pacific at latitude twenty-two degrees N. At fifteen degrees N. and one hundred and twenty degrees W., some one thousand two hundred miles off the Mexican coast, Dr. Plantet told them that they could put us down. By local time for that longitude, it was then nearly midnight.

The cranes lowered us into a placid sea; we lay awash, the three of us standing on the tiny deck of the Dolphin, watching the lights of the great liner vanish among the southwest stars. The lights winked, red and green and purple, and presently were gone.

We were alone on the falling Pacific. Our enterprise was begun!

I MUST recount now the strange adventure to which Arturo had set himself alone. From what he afterward told Polly, and, to a lesser degree, his father and myself, I can construct a picture of it. A picture no doubt lacking much in detail, for none could fathom the emotions that beset him. Yet withal it may be fairly accurate, for I doubt if he himself could have analyzed his motives.

Guiding him, no doubt, was the clear vision that upon his own slender shoulders might rest the salvation of his world. That, perhaps, was his compelling urge. I have no doubt but that he thought so. But beneath it, mingled with it, was what may have been an even stronger urge—a strange lure.

He had planned it for a long time. He had fought against it, for there was a fear lurking in it, a strange instinctive dread, mingled with the urge that seemed rushing him on. He would have gone before, but he could not find opportunity. Our departure for Norfolk that morning gave him his chance.

There was a night—I think it was the evening of August 1—when he made up his mind definitely that he must act alone. It was that evening we heard the newscaster say that a fast air cruiser had been dispatched by the American Government from Guam to the uninhabited island upon which the mermaid had been reported. A formidable company of marines had landed with a flourish upon the outer shoals to which the ocean now had receded. They had scrambled up to the beach and searched the island to capture this mermaid. But nothing human or otherwise had been found to capture.

It came to Arturo evidently as at once a disappointment and a relief. And it spurred him to his decision. If his adventure had any rationality, any possibility of success, it must be undertaken alone. I think, too, that secretly in his heart he welcomed this.

He took his radio sender and a copy of his improvised radio code; in his Wasp, which he had provisioned and fueled, he started from "Sea End" within an hour after we had left. The Wasp, tiny as it was, could do a good

three hundred. He flew north, and high, taking his chances with the traffic towers, who would have ordered him down below the five thousand foot lane upon any normal occasion. But this was not a normal occasion. The country was in confusion; the air directors were all more or less lax. Arturo was visible that morning to a score of their finders. But none, evidently, bothered to record his number; and when the air police, dutifully pursuing Dr. Plantet's inquiry, sought to check the travel, there was no one to report his passage.

Arturo was no fool. He had guessed all this, and played upon it. He clung to the ten and twenty thousand foot through lanes. With his three hundred mile speed he swept north far into Quebec; turned west, passing over the Dominion, where he guessed they would be even more lax. He went west, crossed the middle of Vancouver Island. At Alberni he took a necessary chance and refueled. He had played skillfully for his favorable wind-drift, and made good time. By ten o'clock that evening he was over the Pacific.

He headed now southwest. It was a calm, clear night. The ten thousand foot lane was deserted. He lashed his controls, set his warning bells, and went to sleep.

THE sun was rising when he awakened. The deserted sea beneath him was calm. No islands were in sight. The air was clear of craft.

He seemed poised, motionless and alone between the two matched domes of sea and sky. He was young enough to be thoroughly refreshed and hungry. He had slept very nearly nine hours; he ate a lavish breakfast.

Then he took his position. He found himself in thirty-two degrees twenty minutes N. and one hundred and fifty-five degrees six minutes W. Four hours of elapsed time afterward he swept over Gardner Island of the Hawaiians. The sun was still well in the east—he was gaining an hour of comparative local time for every fifteen degrees of longitude he traversed on his westward flight.

He had feared that the Gardner tower might challenge him, but they did not.

It was a long day of flight, but his eager thoughts possessed him. She might perhaps be there on her island. He wondered if it were the same girl he and I had seen in the globe beneath the surface. We had seen that face in the ocean not very far from this same island where the mermaid was reported.

Had she been on her way up from the abyss then? Coming up, perhaps alone? For what reason?

If she had still been upon the island, those marines, landing there with such a vainglorious, belligerent gesture, undoubtedly would have frightened her. She would have hidden, plunging into the lagoon perhaps, to await their departure. She might still be there. And Arturo, alone—he told himself that he would not frighten her. He found himself trembling. Ah, it would not be she who would be frightened; yet with every fiber of him he longed to encounter her.

The setting sun before him found Arturo and his little Wasp in the neighborhood of nine degrees thirty minutes N., one hundred and fifty-seven degrees twenty-five minutes E. He had met a fresh, strong head-wind for most of the day. And his engine, over this long, continuous flight, had been giving him some trouble. He had cut down his speed. But he was here, at sunset; it was that same evening of August 10 during which our little Dolphin was being carried westward by the Australian mail.

In the late afternoon Arturo had passed over the Northern Marshalls—the tip of the Ratack Chain. He had seen several of the through Flyers dur-

ing the day, passing to the sides far above him; but none had spoken him.

"Nereid's Island." He was already calling it that in his mind. He would call her Nereid.

He had not wanted to reach here before the sunset anyway. In the golden path of the setting sun he raised the island. At low speed his motor was quite silent. He might have been a softly humming wasp, circling over the lonely little island, coming gently down, circling.

It lay, a strangely augmented patch of land in the fallen ocean. All around it was a low, outside circular area of green-black and coral rocks, sloping steeply upward, strewn with shriveled, drying marine vegetation—at the bottom of which the sea was lapping. A sodden, upward rocky slope led to where, high up in the air, a fringe of white beach lay queerly dry. Above that, a crescent area of palms and vegetation. The inner lagoon was dry—an empty, sandy bowl, perched up there in the air on a spreading rocky base.

It seemed no earthly island; a small mountain top, with a shallow crater in its center and a strange fringe of trees and meaningless beach.

There was no sign of moving object. With his heart pounding, Arturo gazed down. There were many caverns and pools in the lower slopes from which the ocean had fallen—she could hide there very easily.

And then he saw, or thought he saw, something unusual—the bulge of a metallic surface. It lay nearly submerged in a rift of rock far down the outer slope at the water's edge. The globe we had seen in the ocean that night?

He fancied so. Lying in that position it would have been well covered by water when the marines were here.

In the glowing, glorious twilight of that tropic night, Arturo landed in the basin of the empty lagoon, then rolled his Wasp up the gentle slope of the inner beach.

HE sat there that evening, silently waiting. Over him spread the blazing southern stars strewn on purple velvet. The arching palm fronds whispered about him as the night breeze stirred them. Ahead, down the slope of beach and lower slope of rocks, the sea lay quietly breathing. A quarter moon was following the vanished sun. It dropped a bright silver path on the water; it glorified the beach; it laid upon the brooding little island an amorous spell.

Arturo sat, edged with silver. Would she see him? Would she be too frightened? Was she, perhaps, not here at all?

The moon fell lower. He went, with sudden thought, back to his plane. He sat again under the palm, and the low voice of his violin throbbed into the somnolent night. He wondered if she would be as frightened, as emotion-swept as himself.

I think, as he sat there softly playing, that the world of 1990 was far away from Arturo. I think his mind must have been flung back, past all the counted centuries to those fabulous, magic times when the sea had no history, but only legend. One of the sailors of Ulysses, with his ears stuffed with wax against temptation, but being more courageous, or perhaps weaker than his fellows, might have slipped ashore—and waited thus, with the wax cast away, singing perhaps a soft song of his own to tell that he had yielded.

Arturo must have trembled, as the song of his violin was trembling. Was this a daughter of Amphitrite, mockingly cast in the fashion of a woman? Or was it a human girl?

And then he saw her. Partly behind him, among the long, slanting shadows of the palms. A dark figure edged in a silver patch. It stood motionless; then it moved toward him a trifle, and stood again.

Arturo laid his violin and bow beside him on the sand and very quietly got to his feet. He could see her better now, only a few yards away. A small, slim figure of a girl, white limbed, but flushed like moonlit coral. A brief, dangling robe, which might have been green; smooth, lustrous green, as though a fabric of softly woven metal, painted green by the sea.

He stood tense, unmoving. The moonlight was on him—his slight, boyish figure of long, slim black trousers, and white ruffled shirt; his black tousled hair thick in waves over his pale forehead.

He stood trembling. She moved again toward him. The moonlight struck her face. Ah, this must be a human girl! He saw her features—a face of strange, soft beauty; wide eyes, parted coral lips; a face, timorous, gentle, eagerly wondering. And framing her face, lying in waves upon her coral shoulders, a tangled mass of tawny hair.

No fabulous siren, this! A strange, but very human girl—and yet, for all that, a siren.

Arturo spoke, tremblingly, very gently.

"Nereid! Can you hear me? Can you understand?"

She stood frozen. But her lips parted with a smile. He said: "Nereid!" He moved slowly toward her.

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### THEIR LONELY, LOVELY LITTLE ISLAND.

THE Dolphin lay, that midnight of August 10-11, awash on the surface of the Pacific some twelve hundred miles southwest of the Mexican coast. I had thought that for the time Arturo was far from Dr. Plantet's mind. But not so. He made no move to start our voyage until for half an hour at least he had listened to the air. It was seething with world-activity—the silent echoes of our busy, modern life. But the sub-split wavelength which Arturo's code specified, was dead.

Dr. Plantet turned at last away. "Nothing there." He spoke in matter-of-fact tone, but I could guess at the emotion it was hiding. "Nothing there—well, we must remember to try again to-morrow night."

There was in his manner what seemed to forbid discussion of Arturo. Indeed, we had much of our own concerns to busy us. We were to head, Dr. Plantet had planned, directly for the Micronesian islands. Most of the tangible evidence bearing upon the existence of a human menace, had seemed to come from that locality. The Malaysia had been lost in there, and several others of the surface freighters. And the submersible of my own line. Again, it was there that Arturo and I had seen the face in the sea; and the mermaid had been seen there.

"I think," said Dr. Plantet, "that if we are to locate this hidden enemy at all, it will be upon some of the rises in sub-sea Micronesia."

There was another factor that made him think so. For weeks he had been assembling world-data showing a disturbance of the ocean currents. With oceans receding, the water was seeping away somewhere. That the normal ocean currents were changing was unquestioned. The evidence was inconclusive, but there seemed to be an unmistakable drift toward the mid-Pacific. And Dr. Plantet thought that upon the ocean floor in Micronesia we might find evidence of the outlet.

We had had, he and I, a considerable discussion on these points.

"We can only try, Jeff," he said at last. "But two thousand fathoms, even with our five hundred fathoms of additional vision, will show us no more than the mid-depth rises."

The mountain ridges. Or the great submerged plateaus; domes; volcanic sub-sea cones. But if, in the lower

basins, the great caldrons or the deeps, this enemy was lurking, we would have to wait until the water materially was lowered. And that might be months, or years.

We were starting from this point so comparatively near the continent because obviously it might not be in Micronesia at all that the menace lay. I had wanted to cruise the American continental shelf. Dr. Plantet would not take the time. He was convinced the danger lay farther west. But he had agreed that we should start here, and cruise across, searching as we went.

We closed up the Dolphin. The turret slid down after us. For all my hundred sub-sea trips in the Pacific, my heart was beating fast. Polly touched my hand, as we moved forward along the passage. Her fingers were cold; but in the dim light I caught her sturdy glance, and saw that her lips were smiling.

"Starting, Jeff—at last."

"Yes." I pressed her hand.

We gathered, all three of us, in the bow instrument room. Dr. Plantet fingered the control levers. The Franklin lights sputtered and glowed with their steady white beams; through the circular windows, the light sprayed ahead of us in the green ocean just below the surface. The jacket-pumps were throbbing. The windows dimmed a trifle with the passing sheet of water; but when it flashed faster, they brightened. The Parodyne atomic engine was operating; the water tanks were filling under pressure; the lateral planes, like fins, were extended from the hull outside.

We had settled, barely to tip the surface. I flung the water-ballast to the bow; in the silence with only the burring of the Parodyne and the humming of the pumps, the water came forward with a swish. The bow dipped. I held the rudder-levers; and released the atomic streams.

We slid smoothly forward and downward. Little Dolphin, sliding, forcing its way into the depths, with green phosphorescent sprays of fire from its sides.

IT is not my present purpose to describe in detail this voyage. Under other, less vital circumstances, it would have had a scientific interest beyond any enterprise of the sea which for centuries had been undertaken. But we were too engrossed in what we sought—too absorbed in the possibility that at any moment we, like those others, might be attacked. In what strange, unnatural fashion we could not guess. It kept us tense—an aspect of the voyage which we had hardly discussed, but of which we were very keenly aware, every moment.

We had only one weapon—the torpedo tube. Six small torpedoes, each loaded with some three hundred pounds of trinitrotoluene as its explosive charge. There were also a dozen of the more modern cylinder bombs of miscellaneous variety, to be dispatched through the same tube. A mere gesture of warfare! I could not feel that against this enemy it would be more than a gesture.

We slid down from the surface. Ah, that first plunge! At the beginning it was no more than running level, save that I could feel the Parodyne laboring a trifle and our forward thrust slackening. There was nothing to see but the dim green water rushing at our lights. Then I saw a fish of an unfamiliar type; it hung stupidly in the light and then moved away. We very nearly struck it.

Five hundred fathoms. A thousand. The red column in the pressure indicator was rising steadily. The ship was laboring, struggling. The Parodyne at its higher intensities, developed unexpected strength; the pressure pumps were humming with a shrill electrical whine.

Fifteen hundred.

Dr. Plantet said awkwardly: "I wouldn't—I'd rather not take her be-

low eighteen hundred, Jeff. Not at first."

Seventeen hundred. The water seemed darker, more turgid, as though down here the sediment of dead organisms were settled in it like a fog.

Eighteen hundred!

"Enough, Jeff; hold us. Watch for elevations of the floor."

I could imagine from the aspect of the water that we might be near the ocean floor. We slid ahead. Our chart showed in this region of the Pacific an estimated depth of two thousand five hundred to three thousand five hundred fathoms. But it was not so at this particular point. Even with all the patient thousands of soundings, how could they chart with any detailed accuracy the wide-spread ocean basins! We turned one of the Franklin lights downward.

A rising slope lay close beneath us, dark and cold, and seemingly black or dark-red ooze. The ocean floor! Smooth in its contours, almost level along here, with a gentle rise before us. Protected by the water from the rapid, sub-aërial erosion which sharpens the features of the land, piled by the regular accumulation of deposits, it stretched heavy-featured, morose, mysterious. I could imagine the cold waters from the frozen poles flowing in sluggish, heavy currents along this bottom.

But it was not all so uniform. We had of lighted region ahead of us barely half a mile. A rounded cliff came sweeping at us. I turned us aside; the cliff went up and backward to merge with a dome.

Then presently we found ourselves in a furrow, with elevations on both sides. We passed, when the furrow widened, over a great black caldron. The lip of it rose to a thousand fathoms. It was forty miles across—a pit of blackness, possibly four thousand fathoms or more in its depth, as though here were some giant crater, filled and immersed. We went to two thousand fathoms in it, and then rose and surmounted its opposite rim.

BUT there is no one now to whom the physical conformations of our ocean basins need be a mystery. And such details here are out of place.

We ran directly west on the fifteenth North Parallel. We made, each twenty-four hours, some twelve hundred to fourteen hundred miles. I give, not the nautical, but the statute measurements. The nautical now, is turning to be a thing of history. It was midnight of August 14-15 when our westward searching voyage was ended. Four days, during which we saw enough details to fill a weighty volume confirming or denying the groping research and speculations of science.

But to what purpose? The deep sea animals, the vegetation of the deeps—it will all find its place in the history of the sea. It has no place here, for I am concerned only with the little parts my friends and I played in this great world crisis. Of what use dogmatically to explain that the great Pacific Basin is not altogether what the charts picture it? Why describe the steeply narrow ridge winding like a thin mountain chain up to eight hundred fathoms at its highest elevations, crossing and recrossing the fifteen parallel? Or mention, as its discoverer, what now they call the "Country of the Moon"? Jagged pits and tumbled crags over that plateau a hundred miles in westward extent? We found that it stretched barely fourteen hundred fathoms deep.

Such things in detail would obtrude a pedantry into my tale.

We were south of Hawaii, the midnight of August 12-13. We listened, as we had listened the previous midnight, for Arturo. But his wavelength still was dead. We crossed into the Eastern Hemisphere about midnight of August 13-14. Again no signal from Arturo. Why should there be? I asked it to myself; I could not dare

to voice it to the anxious Polly and her father. Arturo had said he might signal. But when, or from where? Perhaps he might not wish to. Or he might be desperately anxious to do so, and could not. Futile, meaningless speculation.

We had found that the Dolphin labored under the downward thrust; was difficult to hold level at the depths; and we slid up the incline when ascending with a speed too great for safety. I set down these random notes from my log.

No sign, either of an enemy attack upon us, or of an enemy's very existence. No indication of a rift in the ocean floor. We sometimes wondered if either one existed. Yet that too, was a futile question! We had followed a narrow line, like a thread across this small section of the ocean. More than four-fifths of the time, with the depth too great for us to see anything, we had shot up to the surface and run at a few fathoms of depth for the greater safety. We had seen only an infinitesimal part even of this tiny portion of the area in which our enemy might be lurking. The futility of it struck us at last. It occurred to Dr. Plantet, that the sub-marine slopes of the great rise crowned by the Societies and Tahiti might be worth investigating. Or the upper reaches of the Japan trench. Or, in fact, any of the continental shelves. I did not remind him that this latter had been my original idea.

We were running north of the Marshalls at noon of August 14. At midnight, that night, again we listened for Arturo. And this time his signal came!

His call, given in the code, repeated at intervals. We answered it, on our own wave length which Dr. Plantet was sure the lad knew, if only he would remember. He did remember, and flashed:

"Your position?"

We told him. He sent us:

"Come at once—nine degrees thirty minutes N., one hundred and fifty-seven degrees twenty-five minutes E. Hurry!"

His wave-length went dead. To all our frantic questions it held only silence.

I CAN picture Arturo, there with Nereid for those four days upon their lonely, lovely little island. But of necessity it must be a fragmentary picture with much that I can only guess; and built, too, somewhat from my own impressions of the girl as afterward I saw her for myself; and as Polly saw her, and tried to talk with her. The whole translated by my own poor fancy, into a picture of what Arturo's emotions for her must have been.

She could, even at first, understand his words a trifle; a British sailor had been drawn under alive, and had lived long enough to teach her and others some of his language. She learned it with an unnatural facility. A few broken words that first night; she said them and no more. But she understood and she was learning; so eager to learn!

I try now to imagine them that first night of their meeting. There was a shy, wild fear about her, mingled with a very evident desire not to be afraid of him. He could not touch her, but he sat near her; so quietly, so gently. And as I think of his gentle, boyish, romantic figure, there in the moonlight, I can realize that none but himself could have approached her.

Perhaps, that first night, they conversed only in the universal language of youth. Their crossing glances, eager yet shy, their own thoughts of what the other must be, as they gazed. Perhaps they drew together with the universal language of music. Perhaps he again played his violin for her. Perhaps she sang for him. There is no one to say.

He found her human as himself. A young girl, barely yet matured, fashioned with almost a normal earthly

beauty, and yet with a strange something about her, making her different. It was not her slim rounded limbs, white and flushed with the tint of coral. Nor the thick tawny tresses, framing her timorous, girlish face. Nor yet her fashion of dress—her shimmering robe, with moonbeams dancing on it like green sea water ripples in moonlight. None of these, though in truth they were all strange enough.

It was something greater. A wild shyness in her manner; she sat, half reclining by the palm-trunk; but it seemed that every nerve and muscle in the young body was tense, as though she would spring away if too suddenly he moved. A gentle animal, bred in the wilds, might be like that, mistrustful of the first human hand to approach it.

And other strange things about her. Her gestures, graceful, yet often meaningless. And her eyes, as she sat regarding Arturo. The sea was in her eyes, the changing sea, whipped with wind, dim with mist, wan with starlight. He gazed, over long silences, into her eyes. They held level, as she gazed with equal wonderment into his.

The mystery of the sea was in her eyes. Unfathomable green depths. Eyes that had seen things he had never seen; things queer, unnatural to him. But her youth was there; her human womanhood. It glowed eager, yet afraid; it met him, and it understood him, strange though he must have been to her.

I think also, that first night, she tried to talk with him. He understood at least, her desire to learn his words. And presently he began teaching her.

There are other fragmentary pictures I can give. The dawn flushed the east, and it seemed to frighten her. She moved away from Arturo. But he followed. She came to a sort of cave entrance; it lay part way down the rocky slope from which the ocean had so recently receded, and was still partly filled with water. She slipped into it. Ah, then he must have been struck with her strangeness anew! She lay in the water relaxed; a familiarity with it, as though she scarce had remarked that it was water and not the land. It was not very deep, a few feet, lying in a passage which seemed to run back into what perhaps was a dark cave here in the rocks.

Arturo waded in after her; and as she stood up, for the first time, she touched him. Her fingers were warm and human. Her touch pushed him away. She slid again into the water and with a silent swimming stroke, was gone back into the darkness.

THE sunrise came full. Arturo was very tired. He ate, and slept. He went that midday, to the cave entrance. No sign of her. He wondered if he should go in, and at last he started. But there was a place where the passage ended. The water stood waist-deep and touched the lowering ceiling. She had evidently gone under it. Or had she left the island?

He returned outside. Down the slope he saw the rounded top of her globe. The high tide had brought the ocean pounding over it; the sea was rougher this day. But her globe was still there. She had not gone.

She came out again when night had fully fallen. He found then that it was the daylight which frightened her; blinded her.

She let him follow her into the cave that second night. She swam so humanly graceful and yet with a natural grace surpassing what we call human. It was only a few feet underwater, where the passage roof chanced to bend down. Arturo was by all our earthly standards, a good swimmer. He followed her.

She had in the small cave her own supply of food and fresh water, brought from her globe. She seemed able to see, in that degree of darkness. But Arturo had to go back to his plane and bring a small vacuum bulb; he kept it shaded from her. They ate to-

gether—food unknown to Arturo. They laughed together, tried to talk. He went out and brought his own food from the plane, and let her taste it.

They swam together in the deep little pool that covered half the cave-floor. He sat and watched her, later, while she disported herself alone, as a girl of our world might dance for her audience of one; a slim, green-and-coral-tinted nymph at play. He saw that she swam under the surface for several times the length he could manage; but she always came up breathless and very human. He saw her limbs flashing in the water with a silent, gliding grace; her tangled, tawny hair floating like seaweed. Her eyes were often laughing; dancing like the sea in the moonlight under a soft, fair night-breeze.

She lay in the shallow water at its edge, her hair tumbling over her back; her shoulders and head raised, elbows down with chin propped by her hands. Her eyes dancing at him—

"Flinging back a million moon-beams, the tropic sea reminds me of thine eyes." He murmured it. "That's the way you look, Nereid. Oh, if you could only understand me."

She seemed to like it. "Say—that—" Her voice was soft, with liquid tones. "Say—that—" She thought for a space. "Say that—one time more—"

He said it again. She came up from the water, and sat beside him, abruptly serious. The water dripped from her green robe; her tawny hair dripped with it. She was abruptly serious. She understood far more than he realized; she could talk, with long spaces of thought between the words.

He stared into her eyes now when they were neither laughing, nor timorous, and saw there an intelligence as great as his own. Different, with all its knowledge different, and yet very much the same. He caught through those sea-green windows, a glimpse of the girl herself. Purposeful, anxious, apprehensive, not for herself, or himself, or anything of their own concerns, but something greater.

And that evening, or the next, or both, she began giving him fragments of strange and startling things.

He had been in his mind following the probable course of our Dolphin. He knew our plans; he could estimate that at midnight of August 14, we would very likely be at our closest point to him. And it was that night that he got out his sending instrument. With Nereid sitting beside him, he connected it. He saw anew, the real girl which was Nereid. Her glance, quickly intelligent, following all his strange movements; the solemn intentness with which she watched him carrying out their agreed-upon plans.

For there was between her and Arturo now a mutual, secret, absorbing purpose. And for all their youth they executed it unswervingly.

One picture more I can give. Polly had it from Arturo, when just for one brief moment on the Dolphin she reached him with her sisterly affection. There was a night, there on the island, when suddenly swept by longing, he held out his arms to Nereid. She came quite close to him, and gazed, with the tip of her hand holding him off. He saw, far in the tender moonlit sea of her eyes, the answer he sought. But her lips and her restraining hand denied him. He said, like a very manly, human boy:

"Why, yes—you're right, Nereid."

And her tender eyes, dimmed suddenly by mist, were thanking him as he turned away.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

### THIS ENEMY INFERNAL!

IN the pink and gold tropic dawn of the morning of August 15, we took them aboard the Dolphin. Arturo did not mention, then, the globe of metal lying there in the rocks at the

ocean's edge. We did not chance to notice it. We left Arturo's plane—he said, with a quiet force which had come to him, that even if we could have taken it, we had no use for it.

They came out from the rocky slope, swimming to us as we lay near by. I saw the girl, like a nymph, swimming. She was nearly always under water. Each time as she came up, and waited for Arturo to overtake her, he seemed directing her.

We drew them aboard. I saw her then as a girl much smaller, more slim of figure than Arturo, standing drooping, with her face hidden in the tangle of her hair and her crooked arm. She was blinded by the light of the dawn. Frightened, perhaps, by our voices, by our clutching hands as we drew her up the Dolphin's side.

Arturo carried her to one of the Dolphin's tiny rooms. There in the dark, barring us, he left her.

A quiet force had come to Arturo. He met his father's questions and turned them aside. It was this time not sullenness, not brooding, nor anything neurotic. A quiet force, rather, a purpose. There were things that he would tell us, and things that he would not. No fire from his father could shake him. No irony touched him. No pleading from Polly could soften him. Yet, with it all, he was tender, affectionate; and underneath, I think, sometimes a little wistful.

This was a new Arturo. It struck Dr. Plantet sharply. There was one brief passage in which Dr. Plantet was so obviously the loser, for he said much, and Arturo said almost nothing. And when it was ended, Arturo kissed his father.

"I want you to believe in me. You will have to trust me, father, there isn't any other way; you'll have to go it blind. I'm sorry—and I love you, all of you, very much—"

It was in these latter words that I caught the wistful note, a gentle sorrow, mingled with his purpose.

It was Arturo now who gave us orders. That Dr. Plantet obeyed them, with the knowledge that Arturo knew more than he, I think is a tribute to the man's inherent bigness. Nor, after those first hours, were there any clashes or recriminations. We did what Arturo so gently but firmly suggested we should do. But he would give us very little explanation. Even without any compact he may have had with Nereid to enforce his reticence, he was right; had he told us his full purpose, we would have restrained him.

We ran northeast, close under the surface. The course would take us south and east of Wake Island, and then we were to head for the northwestern end of the Hawaiian archipelago. Beyond that—the mere laying down of our course and our depth—we knew very little.

In thirty-six hours we were near Ocean and Midway Islands. It was late afternoon of August 16.

For myself that day and a half, I scarcely saw Nereid. But to the picture of her through Arturo's eyes which I have given, I can add the woman-impressions as Polly saw her; and glimpse her with Dr. Plantet's prosaic, classifying viewpoint of the scientist.

She would not talk to Polly. But she seemed to understand Polly's words quite well. A very gentle little girl, shy, but seeming readily to respond to human affection. She evidently took a great liking to Polly, and the feeling was mutual.

They sat once, in the gloom of the tiny room with their arms around each other; Nereid's body was soft and warm and yielding; but there was a firmness to it, and apparently a considerable strength for all its frail aspect. Nereid seemed quickly affectionate toward this other girl; but it was the mistrustful affection of a creature of the wilds. She drew away sharply at one of Polly's questions.

She was a creature of swift-springing moods. Polly admits she tried to

win the girl, to gain her trust, to make her answer questions. Once, in that dim light of the tiny cabin, Polly caught the expression on Nereid's face. A whimsical smile; an amusement that this girl of the great, bright, atmospheric world should think her so simple. It struck Polly with chagrin and humiliation. This Nereid was no fool.

DR. PLANTET, with Arturo standing watchfully in the doorway, had several opportunities of studying Nereid. Oh, the passionate obsession of science for classification! As though one could capture the moods of the sea and set them down in logical, descriptive sequence!

Dr. Plantet found that Nereid was really not her name. He made her say her name, but he could think of no sounds in our earthly languages to represent it fairly. He found her, in height four feet eleven inches. In weight, ninety-one pounds. Coarse, thick, unruly hair, apparently of human structure; in length nearly to her knees; in color, tawny.

Her skin was soft, smooth, and white, with coral pink and red flush to it. He found her eyes light green; but apparently changing in their shade. A trifle tinted very pale green over the white eyeball. The tiny capillaries on the eyeball were pale coral pink rather than red. The pupils, with a deep green light in them, were overlarge, but shrank suddenly at the slightest light, and suffused readily with moisture. Her eyelids were thin as a delicate coral veil, with curving lashes, long and thick and tawny.

He found her apparently intelligent, shy and gentle. Of human stock; but different from ourselves in a score of details which he set down. A slightly rounder skull-shape; broader hips and higher breasts. Fingers and toes slimmer and longer. The skin connecting the fingers and toes crossed nearly at the middle joint, suggesting a closer heritage to a time when a membrane might have been there, making the members webbed.

He found her chest high and deep, with a proportionately greater lung-capacity than ours. Her breath, he surmised, could without undue discomfort, be held for at least five minutes while under water.

A human specimen of wholly different stock from any of our known earthly races. A civilization advanced as far perhaps, as our own; but obviously in a different direction. It was, he wrote down, as though on the great family tree of mankind, this were a blossom on a different branch and a wholly different limb.

He felt, when the case were closely studied, that evidence would be found to show that this was the parent stock of earth-humanity. Itself risen directly from the creatures of the sea. That from this stock, it was we who branched off, to leave the depths, ascend to the air and the land and sunlight and rise through the primates into what now we were pleased to call Man.

Dr. Plantet was very enthusiastic over Nereid. With scientific zeal he looked eagerly forward to the moment when he would present her to the study of our world-scientists. I remarked Arturo's strange expression as his father said that.

On the late afternoon of August 16, we were just south of Ocean and Midway Islands, those extreme northwestern outposts of the Hawaiians. It was then Arturo told us what little we were to know of those things he had learned from Nereid.

We gathered in the stern chart-room; the Dolphin lay awash on the surface of a placid sea. With sudden decision Arturo brought Nereid in to join us. He shaded the light carefully for her and in the gloom of a corner of the floor, she sat watching us.

It was one of the few times I had seen her. I noticed with what a quiet

dignity she came in, following Arturo's guiding hand; and with what intent, alert intelligence she sat watching and listening. She did not speak; but once or twice I saw her nod with confirmation of Arturo's words.

"THERE is not much I can tell you, father. But enough. Please do not question me—for if you do, I will tell nothing." He threatened it, quietly, but with a very firm, very convincing finality.

"Many of your theories, father, are correct. There is a race of people under the ocean beds—I think largely here under the Pacific. Nereid, as you see her here before you, is, I am sure, a representative of the higher portion of this other civilization. It menaces us—you were right about that, father! The conquest of our world is contemplated—and has already begun. Soon I—we, Nereid and I, will show you."

Dr. Plantet sat very still. I knew that a score of questions were storming within him. He sat, regarding Arturo with keen, scientifically appraising glance. He saw Arturo striving now to talk with a precise, scientific exactness, but failing, for the lad was evidently laboring under a tense excitement. Dr. Plantet was enough of the physician to understand his son's condition; he knew that very easily Arturo could fall into a stubborn silence which nothing could break through. And Dr. Plantet did not dare question.

But I was not so self-controlled. I burst out, "Arturo, look here—the water is leaving our oceans. Why? And why can't you tell us everything you know? Why pick and choose? With the fate of our world at stake—"

He turned on me. "You're childish, Jeff. I'm telling you as clearly as I can. I don't know very much myself—do you think that Nereid has been able to give me a complete scientific report on all these questions which you would like answered? Our world is doubtless at stake, as you say. This enemy is ruthless—inhuman by all our standards of humanity. Oh, do not judge the enemy you will have to confront by what you see of gentle Nereid! Yes, the oceans will probably empty of water. The 'Gians' have contrived it. How long it will take, I do not know. Where the main rift is—or how many rifts there are—I do not know. I think there is one in sub-marine Micronesia—I don't know just where—"

Polly stammered, "The people—'Gians'?"

"Yes, Polly, you can call them that—this enemy. The word Nereid gives me sounds about like that. I don't know what weapons they have. Nereid doesn't know; she is neither a warrior nor a scientist—just a girl. If I knew the weapons with which they will attack, I'd describe them quickly enough!"

He spoke with a rising vehemence. "Our world will have to defend itself, father! You were right in your fears! The main attacks may not come until after the ocean beds are dry. It will be a land-fight then—in these new strange lands that we have never seen! Or there may be an attack very shortly. The Gians, an army of them, are coming up. Moving up an equipment of weapons. It may be merely an experiment preparatory to the main warfare. Nereid has heard it may be; I certainly hope so." He paused, then suddenly added: "They are moving upon the Hawaiian group, not far from here—down near Maui. We're going to show you!"

THE Hawaiian group of mountain-tops were built long ages ago along a crack on the ocean floor by a string of volcanos; some are peaks, seven miles straight up from the surrounding depths. An island-bearing rise some seventeen hundred miles long, quite narrow, extends from Hawaii in the southeast, to Ocean Island at the northwest tip.

We circled Ocean Island, and running a hundred miles from the crest, near the bottom of the slope, we followed it southeast. Past the peak of Midway; past Gambia Shoal; Pearl and Hermes Reef; Lisiansky; Brooks and Bird; and came at last near Kauai.

We ran often near the surface, but sometimes deep. Everywhere, we saw the same sharp upward rise to this hogback, razor ridge. A jagged, tumbled sub-marine region. Here, in some remote geological era of the past, nature had obviously been convulsed. Domes and peaks and crags; steep, sharp ridges; caldrons like black pits; tumbled, broken land, submerged now, but lying like some wild, naked mountain fastness. There were slopes of truly precipitous character; cliffs, eroded with great side holes; black ravines and gullies; bowlders of giant size, pitted and scarred, strewn where some volcano had flung them. A wild, naked region; rising in great serrated tiers from the ocean floor up this hundred-mile slope to the island peaks at its summit.

We came to the surface off the island of Kauai. More than a hundred feet of naked slope, had been exposed by the fallen ocean. But the green island stood serene up there on its peak. The comparatively shallow two-thousand-fathom depth extended out here in a great circular plateau to the north. Our charts showed it almost level for several hundred miles. We dived and followed over its shoreward, necklike width, and came again into deeper water.

North of Maui, the tumbled rise went up a regular, ascending slope, terminating at the peak which was the island. We lay, at twenty-one degrees, thirty-three minutes, ten seconds N., one hundred and fifty-six degrees, eight minutes W., in two thousand fathoms. The slope was another thousand beneath us; but we could see its higher crags down there, and as we moved slowly south, toward Maui, holding the two thousand depth, the crags came up to meet us. We went cautiously, with only one light preceding us. Winding now, down in the ravines and furrows of the steady upward grade.

Silent, mysterious passages! Sometimes they seemed about to close over us; or opened into valleys, with cliff-walls and jagged rims. Darkly, sinister depths! Our half-dimmed light showed us very little. Like a silent, cautious monster, surprising this other marine life which sometimes we saw fleeing before us, we slowly felt our way along.

We came to a sharp, winding gully, barely a hundred feet wide, with sides twice as high. Its jagged, uneven floor wound upward. Once, perhaps, lava had come down here. But now its side-walls were eroded with many cavelike openings larger than the Dolphin. Still more slowly, with our little light struggling ahead of us, we followed the gully.

We were all in the forward instrument room. I was at the controls, with the others around me. Nereid and Arturo stood together at my elbow with the port forward bull's-eye before us. Occasionally he would whisper to her. With the tenseness of it, we all spoke instinctively in undertones.

We were in no more than three hundred and thirty fathoms now; the Dolphin handled steadily. Some two thousand feet over us was the surface of the sea. The gully was narrowing; rising steeply ahead to what seemed a crest.

Nereid whispered something. Arturo said suddenly: "Turn off the light, Jeff."

I cut off the Franklin. Through the bull's-eye a grim, sullen darkness leaped to enfold us. But in a moment, what Nereid had seen, we began to see. A dim, pale-green effulgence far ahead, a glow, a radiance. It seemed very distant, as though the source of it might be down behind this gully-crest —a radiance in the upper water which was our sky.

I heard Dr. Plantet's sharp intake of breath; and Arturo's murmur:

"Keep our light off, Jeff. Can you see to get us up there? Stop at the crest."

We crept on up, holding close to the gully floor. The green radiance faintly painted the gully walls. At the crest we paused.

THERE lay before us a sharp declivity—a drop of perhaps five hundred feet to a broad oval caldron. It must have been ten miles or more in width. Beyond it, in a great steep rise the main slope ascended toward Maui.

The whole scene was painted dimly green with a diffused effulgence of light. We stared, all of us for a moment unbreathing. Mysterious, awesome, uncanny! A crest to the left with a dangling forest of marine vegetation, gently swaying. Occasional dark blobs of prowling marine life. All dark and dimly turgid. A scene with a quality almost infernal.

I could not grasp much of it at first. But it grew upon me—I think we may have been there an hour, staring. It grew upon me, like formless shadows slowly taking form in a pregnant darkness.

The green light suffused everything. But down in the caldron it was concentrated into many small points. Moving dots; blobs of light—and near the center a large luminous area which presently seemed almost bright.

Moving dots of light. Things moving, carrying with them the lights. Things that presently seemed cubes and oblongs of metal. I fancied they may have been, some of them, a hundred or two hundred feet in length; moving metal containers. With human occupants? My reason told me so.

They showed no details, only as distant blobs. But my fancy supplied details; I could imagine them being dragged very slowly up the slope toward Maui with giant chains. Or perhaps they went as our old-fashioned tractors used to move, with caterpillar tread. One moved, and stopped; and I did not see it move again. Then another; another—a little distance gained for each.

And the movement was always upward, toward Maui's green mountain-top—toward that bright ethereal other world of land and sky!

It grew upon me, this scene so darkly, silently infernal. The slow patience of it!

But there was other, swifter movement. Smaller, individual, metallic vehicles moved more swiftly about as though commanding. Some darted like tiny sub-sea vessels, carrying lights. Others moved on the bottom. There were unlighted shapes that seemed not much larger than a human figure, moving among the rocks on the caldron floor.

The broad, circular, nearly-bright area seemed to have a great transparent dome over it, like an amphitheater suffused with illumination. I think the water was excluded from under it.

The encampment of this attacking army! It was distant from us, with image tiny to our sight. Human figures in there, moving about. Tiny dots of green light strung above them. Shapes of things that might have been houses; tiers of them, terraced like sections of a pyramid. An encampment, crowded with apparatus perhaps. I even fancied I could see some of it, which the figures were assembling.

Dr. Plantet was fumbling with our telescope. He turned on its tiny penetrating ray of light, but Arturo leaped at him. "Don't, father!"

I reached and snapped off the light. But it had betrayed us. We did not know it then; for another interval we gazed down from this height where it seemed that in darkness the Dolphin lay secure on the crest of the gully-mouth.

But our light had betrayed us. I was first aware that though, with the

Parodyne cut off, we had been poised motionless, we were *not* motionless! The gully had passed behind us! Slowly, silently, as though drifting, we were moving out over the caldron! The declivity with its sudden drop was now behind us; we were in open water, five hundred feet above the caldron floor.

I CLUTCHED at the Parodyne control, to start it. I think I must have stammered some startled, horrified words. There was no time to say or do anything. A light—it may have been a form of light, or something more tangible perhaps—shot suddenly upward at us. A narrow green beam with red fire woven through it, a darting thing like a dim narrow beam of light. It caught us. More tangible than light, for I could feel it strike us, grip us! As though caught in the magnetic grapples of a crane, I could feel the solid grip of it; holding the Dolphin, partly turning us over. And drawing us, sucking us—there are no words to describe it—pulling us downward!

There was an instant of horrified confusion. The shock had thrown all of us against the instrument room wall. I heard Dr. Plantet shout something. I must have been able to start the Parodyne; it was burring; the pressure pumps fortunately continued to work; I could hear their whine. The Dolphin was shuddering; shaken; stricken. And being pulled down—a great fish held struggling but helpless in the luminous tentacle of a monster.

Polly was clutching me. I caught a vision of Arturo, holding Nereid, his encircling arms trying to protect her. I did not see Dr. Plantet.

I flung the Parodyne to all its power. I could feel it futilely surge against this thing holding us.

I was thrown again. Through the bull's-eye a slanted scene of movement was coming up at us as we went down.

And then there was a flash down there—a flash of blinding white, brief and silent. I know now that Dr. Plantet had been able to get to the torpedo tube—had taken swiftly what came to hand and launched it. A mere light-bomb, of the sort recently developed for sub-sea photography.

It may have been harmless or not, to this strange enemy. Perhaps it blinded whatever eyes were guiding this grappling thing. And for an instant, the clutching hold upon us loosened. The Dolphin righted, and as I turned on the ejecting pumps, we started upward, gathering speed. The Parodyne took hold and added its power. I turned our bow straight up.

The grappling light sprang upward, past us. It missed us, came back and missed again. Its source was very mobile—it seemed rising after us; it swept off to one side and the beam leaped again, and again did not strike.

We shot up the two thousand feet to the surface with the speed almost of a diving plane. I leveled us off and we raced at a fathom's depth. The attacking light had vanished. The depths beneath us were dark. We sped away, shoreward. Presently we lay awash on a starlit glassy sea, with Maui's green-brown heights staring down at us. And the blessed stars in a canopy above.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MYSTERY OF THE SEA.

DR. PLANTET would have landed at once upon Maui, and warned them, but Arturo dissuaded him.

"It is not necessary, father. That has been going on down there for weeks. There is no hurry that way. Besides—" He checked himself suddenly.

"What?" his father demanded. "Arturo, if there is anything more—"

But Arturo remained silent. He had conveyed the impression of having other vital knowledge; I think now, looking back upon it, that he did it

knowingly, cleverly bending his father to his further purpose.

"What?" demanded Dr. Plantet again.

"Father, won't you trust me? I brought you here and showed you what I could—"

I said: "Arturo, look here, you're not telling us that you want us to keep this thing secret? That would be dastardly!"

He turned those solemn dark eyes upon me. He was only eighteen, this lad; but at that moment he seemed older than I.

"No, Jeff, of course not. When you—when we get back, father can discuss it fully with the authorities. If you like, father, you might try now to call Washington. Tell them, briefly, that with your own eyes you have confirmed your theories—your worst fears. Tell them that there may be warfare such as this world has never imagined. But I hardly think I would specificially name this threat against Maui. It might cause—if news of it leaked out—a panic in the Hawaiians. And from its remoteness to Europe it might make those people over there less earnest in preparing. No good in that, and besides—"

He paused, and then as though having decided to finish, he added:

"Besides, I am not—we are not, Nereid and I—altogether sure that the main threat is against Maui. There may be other localities."

"Well, what do you want us to do?" asked Dr. Plantet.

He told us then, with a simple directness. Run the Dolphin to ten degrees one minute five seconds N., one hundred and fifty-eight degrees four minutes eighteen seconds E. I looked it up on the chart. Open sea. A point in Micronesia, not far from the island where Arturo had found Nereid—some fifty miles to the northeast of it. We had to go there, lie on the surface for a night, and wait.

Arturo, for all his quiet force, turned to sudden pleading. "Oh, father dear, won't you trust me? Please believe Nereid and I are thinking only to do what is best!"

I am very glad—since fate seemed determined to give Arturo his way—that Dr. Plantet yielded in the fashion he did. He put his hands on Arturo's slim shoulders; he gazed into the lad's earnest, flushed face. There was a somber wistfulness there. I think Dr. Plantet must have seen it. He suddenly enfolded his son in his strong arms.

"Your world already owes you a great deal for what you have done, Arturo. I do believe in you."

We ran the Dolphin to the position Arturo gave us. A depth was here evidently far beyond our reaching. But we did not try to investigate it. We lay awash, at sundown, idly waiting as Arturo directed.

A tenseness had fallen over all of us on the Dolphin. It showed clearly stamped on Arturo and Nereid. It communicated to us. Polly and Arturo were much together. Polly says that never had she felt him so gentle, so affectionate. Or so quietly obdurate in his secretiveness.

Dr. Plantet and I discussed the situation. There would be much to do when we got ashore.

But we both realized that our discussion was premature. Arturo still had something to show us. It might change everything—add new factors to make all our present plans useless.

WE lay awash that night on the surface of the empty sea. There was a brilliant moon coming up near midnight in the east. It painted the sea with a running stream of silver.

Toward midnight it clouded over with a leaden sky, and the wind fell. A hush was on everything; an oppressive, ominous hush. The surface turned glassy, grimly brooding.

Arturo gave his orders. This was a rendezvous—something he said, some

vague suggestion he dropped, made us realize it was that. He had for a day been puttering with something in his cabin. He brought it up at midnight—a small but brilliant hand-light which was part of the Dolphin's equipment. He showed it to me.

"Look, Jeff—what I did!" He had pasted a yellow strip of mica with a queer design on it, across the flash light face. He smiled like a boy triumphant over a great boy-secret. "Don't ask me, Jeff—you'll see presently. To-night—or it may be we'll have to wait, so don't be disappointed."

He sent us below, and sat on the dark deck alone with Nereid. Waiting. He said he would like to let us stay up there with him—but our presence there would interfere. There could be two on the deck, no more.

We three were in the instrument room. Dr. Plantet, unknown to Arturo, had the under-sea telescope ready; if anything appeared, he would snap it on. We had loaded the torpedo tube also. It was possible that Arturo might be tricked. This might be some enemy for whom we were thus trustfully waiting.

We were tense, ready as we could be, for what might come. Occasionally Dr. Plantet would send me on tiptoe in the darkness to the turret-top to observe in secret Arturo and Nereid upon the deck.

IT was dark out there on the deck. The two figures sat some distance from me as I crouched in the turret doorway. But I could see their outlines fairly clearly—Arturo sitting close to her, sometimes whispering.

She stood up. She evidently saw something. My heart began pounding. Whatever it was, it was hidden from my position. Arturo was on his feet beside her. She gestured—I could see her slim white arm gesturing. I saw him raise the flash light, and send its narrow, penetrating yellow beam steadily out over the water. That device he had cut in the yellow face of it—something, some one out there must be seeing that—and recognizing it, as Nereid? I thought so.

There was a space, while Arturo held the light steadily level. Then Nereid said something to him. He snapped off the light. They stood waiting. A minute? Ten minutes? I do not know. I heard nothing; saw nothing save those two motionless, tense figures standing there by the Dolphin's low rail. Boy and girl, so slim, so frail, so youthful, both of them. They stood, so close together that her long wild tresses seemed almost enfolding him.

I recall that I was about to go below and tell Dr. Plantet and Polly of this signal I had seen. A movement of Nereid stiffened me. She drew apart from Arturo. The Dolphin's rail was lower than her waist. She seemed poised; her arms went up; she went in a graceful arc, over and head downward into the sea.

I was stiffened for just an instant. Why, what was this? Arturo moved. He put his foot upon the rail. For a breath, he seemed to hesitate. Was he executing his compact with Nereid? I think so. But perhaps, there at the last as he hesitated, he was fighting with the lure. His foot was on the rail. He plunged. There was a little splash as he struck the water!

I waited. One has not long to wait for a swimmer to come up. I called: "Arturo! Arturo!" I crossed the narrow deck, rushed to the bow—to the stern. I called frantically: "Arturo!"

My running footsteps, my frantic voice brought Dr. Plantet and Polly. She called wildly: "Arturo! Arturo dear—"

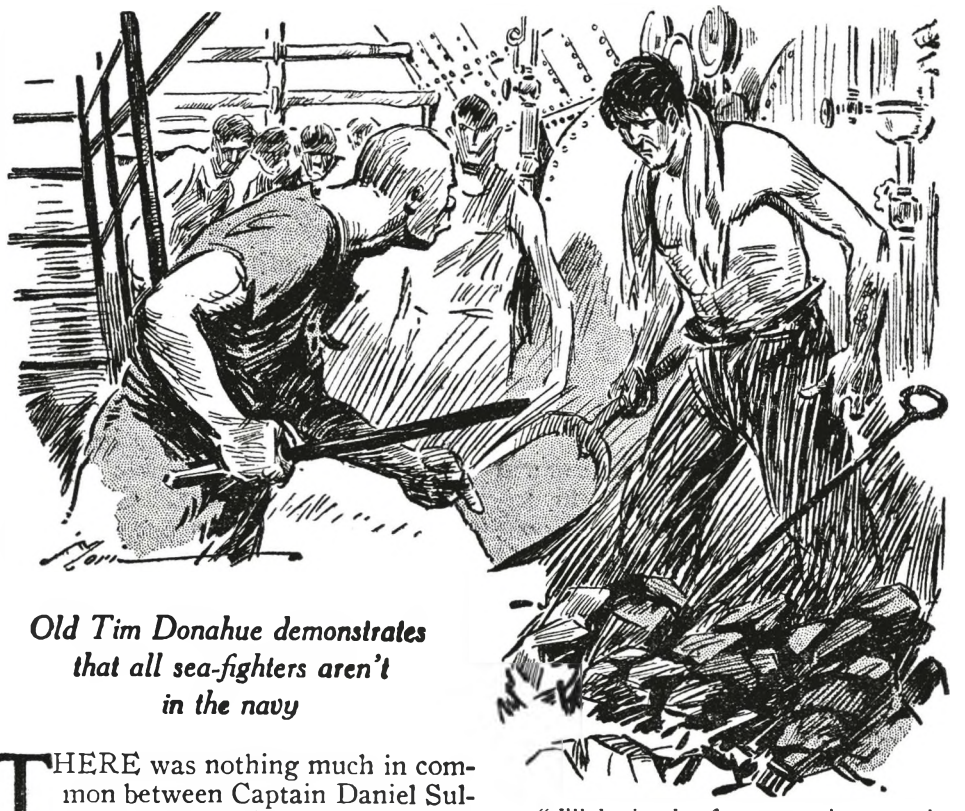
We hurried below, and too late now, we plunged the Dolphin.

But there was nothing. Down to our limit of two thousand fathoms there was nothing but the dark, turgid mystery of the sea.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.**

# Strange Waters

**By KINGSBURY SCOTT**



*Old Tim Donahue demonstrates that all sea-fighters aren't in the navy*

THERE was nothing much in common between Captain Daniel Sullivan and little Tim Donahue. In the fifty or more years they had been on earth together their life currents had never touched, as far as they knew, until that day on board the Aurora, and then only for the brief flash of a moment.

While there is no record that the extremely short contact had any direct bearing on Captain Sullivan's career, it surely did bring a decided change into Tim's existence—a change which swept him out of the ranks of everyday men into the pages of history itself.

In fact, it is doubtful if Captain Sullivan in that instant was even subconsciously aware of Tim Donahue's existence.

When Captain Sullivan hurried down the iron ladder into the stoke-hold of the lake freighter Aurora, lying at her dock in Buffalo, he saw nothing to attract his attention especially to the stubby man in overalls and a grimy undershirt scooping coal from the plates into the open furnace. Neither did he particularly notice that the glare was throwing a red glow over the sweaty shoulders and iron-gray head of the smallest man in the stoke-hold.

*"I'll brain the first man o' youse that tries to get out o' this fire-hole!"*

But Tim, confined within the limits of a much smaller world, noticed Captain Sullivan with a touch of curiosity as to his business there.

Of course there was no real reason why Tim Donahue should know that

Captain Daniel Sullivan was representing the United States Government, nor that Captain Sullivan had made a rather important decision a few hours before when he had watched the Aurora come foaming into Buffalo harbor with a cargo of grain from Duluth under her hatches.

The Superior Navigation Company had been notified that their steamer Aurora had been commandeered by the government, and the ship was on her way to the yards at Lorain before Tim Donahue discovered the turn which life had token. Tommy Jackson, his partner, whispered the news to him as they came on watch and the information hit little Tim with something of a thud.

He worked out his trick below with an all-gone feeling in the pit of his stomach, and every scoop of fuel he shoveled into the Aurora's furnaces seemed to mock him.

When his watch ended he climbed the iron ladder out of the stoke hold with lagging steps. The steady thrum of the Aurora's big compound engines seemed to be singing a farewell song to him. He lingeringly sniffed the odors of steam and grease as though he were anxious to preserve the memories of them forever.

Tim did not climb clear to the upper deck. Half way he swung to the narrow steel-sheathed passage over the boilers leading to the small door which opened through the heavy bulkhead to the engine room.

As he stepped through upon the gratings around the big cylinders he could see the oilers below him in the electric-lighted regions. The hum of the dynamos, the whir of the fans, and the drum of the big crank shafts plunging almost under his feet mingled in an orderly symphony.

The Aurora carried three engineers and Kelly, the second assistant, was on duty. Across the shining engine room Tim saw Andy McLaren, the chief, sitting in his hot little office. Tim pointed a grimy forefinger toward the chief's sanctum and Kelly nodded permission.

THE chief engineer looked up suddenly from his log book as little Tim Donahue stepped timidly through the doorway. It was not the custom for firemen on board the Aurora to walk into the chief's office unless they were invited or summoned, and a summons usually meant something unpleasant. Tim had never been further than the doorway.

"What's the rip?" the chief asked.

"Is it true, chief, that the old Aurora's goin' to salt water?" the little fireman asked, standing with his greasy cap in his hands and his gray head bowed as though he were expecting a blow. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, streaked with coal dust.

"It looks that way, Tim," the chief informed him. "We're sailing under orders now from the Shipping Board to deliver the ship at Lorain.

"They'll hack her in two with torches there and send her through the Welland canal in sections."

"An' that's the end of her," sighed the little man.

"Far's the lakes are concerned, I suppose it is," answered the chief engineer. "It's not likely they'll ever send her back."

"Well, thin, I suppose we'll all be gettin' off her now?" ventured the fireman.

"Nearly everybody but me, I guess, Tim, and maybe the cook," the chief told him. "With my salt water papers, I've been commandeered, too, for ocean service and they've offered me the Aurora.

"I'm used to her, and I may as well be here as anywhere else. I know what she'll do, and I'll be more at home in her than in some of the tubs they are puttin into service on the seaboard."

"Sure, you brought her out just ten years ago, chief," little Tim mused.

"Yes, and she's in better shape to-

day than when she was launched," the chief agreed.

"An' I was in her the first trip wit' you, chief," the little man said, looking down at the floor.

"That you were, Tim."

"An' I've been wit' you every season since, sir."

"So you have, Tim, me lad."

"Sure, she's like a home to me, sir," declared the stubby man. "It's been me pride that you were never widout steam when you needed it, sir—an' plenty of it, too, chief, wit' me on watch. I've been hopin' that I could spend all me sailin' days in her.

"I've me failin' I know," he continued. "There's been times when pay days near ruined me. I'm not denyin' that. There's been times when you've had to be huntin' me up on both ends o' the run, an' I'm sorry for the trouble I caused, chief. But it's me weakness, that's all, an' I've thought sometimes 'twas a curse put on me. Anyway, it never took long to get the whisky out o' me once I was aboard, did it, now?"

"Right again, Tim," the chief laughed. "I always knew, once I had you aboard, you'd be ready for duty when your watch was called."

"Maybe I'm slowin' up a bit wit' age, sir," the little fireman rambled on. "I'm gettin' along well past sixty, I'll admit, but— Be the saints, sir, I can make a lot o' younger min break their back over the scoops yet!"

"I'd say you've improved with age," the chief remarked. "You're the best fireman on the lakes, Tim. I'll say that for you. I wish I could always be sure of a man like you below."

Tim moved closer to the chief's desk, fumbling his cap nervously.

"Av you please, Mr. McLaren," he mumbled. "I'm hatin' to leave the old ship. I can't think o' her out there in the Atlantic an' me not aboard. I'd like to be shippin' wit' you, Chief."

There was an appeal in old Tim's eyes, which was far more eloquent than any words he could have spoken and McLaren saw it.

"I may not have the say, Tim," he explained. "I'm working for a new boss myself. But if there's a chance I'll take you with me. You'll have to run the risk of torpedoes, when we're sent across."

"Darn the torpedoes!" Tim fairly shouted, unconscious of his quotation. "Av I can stay in the old Aurora wit' you I'll ride thim torpedoes av I have to, sir."

"You may have to do that then, Tim. There's not many ships gettin' through, they tell me, and the subs seem to be getting thicker."

"The dirty pirates," mumbled the stubby man. "Av I could get a good paste at one o' thim, I'd give 'em a taste of a real Irish fight."

"They don't give you a chance to fight 'em that way, me lad," the chief laughed. "We won't get such an even break. I'll let you know in a day or two what your chances for living to be an old man will be."

IT was an odd fate which awaited the Aurora at Lorain. Within thirty-six hours of her arrival there the torch-bearers were at work on the steel sides with their "fire knives." They cut her through just forward of her 'midship deck-house. New bulkheads were fitted at the forward end of the after section and at the after end of the forward section and the caulkers made them as tight as the hull itself.

A temporary wheel house was built on the deck house and the rudder chains were connected up to her helm at that point, permitting the after section of the craft to proceed under its own steam. Then the odd-looking contrivance started down Lake Erie, with the forward section coming along under the convoy of two tugs.

Up to the entry of the United States into the great war, neither the American shipping interests nor the Canadian government had been very farseeing.

As a result the submarine assault on allied merchant ships created a situation which was anything but promising.

Many fine cargo boats, badly needed in the emergency, were locked in fresh water by the small locks of the Welland canal. Nothing over 260 feet in length could then get through.

Only one thing could be done. There was not time to enlarge the locks, but the steel hulls of the lake freighters could be reduced to sections in a hurry with the torches. Great craft were cut into sections and floated through the canal. In Lake Ontario ports many of them were put together again. Others went through in sections to Montreal before they were again restored to their original form.

Down in the stokehold of the Aurora, Tim helped keep steam on what was left of his ship. While he was on watch below there was little to remind him of the change which had taken place. When he climbed to the upper deck to view the chubby chunks of what had been one of the trimmest freighters on the lakes, his heart gave many a sad thump.

" An' to think I'd live to see thim do this to you," he said. " Wit' the rest of us trailing like the second piece of an angleworm. Who'd think this was the old Aurora, an' the finest ship on the whole chain o' lakes? Will they ever be able to do the right thing by you, I wonder?"

At Montreal the Aurora was held for her surface condensers and her salt-water fittings. Ingenuity born of necessity had found the way to button steel craft together, and the Aurora, once more her old self, surprised the stubby old man who had spent ten years of his life in her stokehold.

When she was ready for sea, Andy McLaren called little Tim into his office.

" We're paying off the crew to-morrow, Tim," he said. " The boys'll get their wages and transportation back home."

" Yes, sir," Tim replied, with a lump in his throat. " Most o' thim have places they can call home, no doubt."

" The salt water crew'll be aboard to sign up in the morning," the chief went on. " They do that on the seaboard, you know. Everybody'll have to sign articles."

Tim nodded, with his cap crunched in his hands, but made no reply.

" There's a big risk going to sea in these ships now, Tim," the chief warned him. " And it's not all torpedoes. The lake boats haven't been the biggest sort of success in the transatlantic trade. They're just as good sea boats, no doubt, but they're hardly built right for the ocean seas. Then there's the subs, too.

" I hear we're going right across to Liverpool. They need wheat over there and we're fitted to get it to 'em in chunks that count, if we can get through. But the chances are all against us. If you want to take the chance, Tim, me lad, I'll fix it for you. You'll have to sign on for the voyage, though, and it's about like enlisting in the navy without the chance of fighting back."

" I'll risk me ol' bones in the Aurora in anythin' that blows," Tim declared.

" Av she'll stand up in Lake Superior wit' the wind blowin' a gale clear through from Hudson Bay, she'll take care o' herself just runnin' across the little Atlantic.

" I'll stack her agin thim rusty ol' tramps that are in service now, sir. I'm that grateful to you for the chance, and' you'll not regret it. I'll break the backs o' thim salt water huskies, Chief."

" Oh, I believe that, all right," the chief agreed. " I sailed salt water before I came to the lakes and from what samples I've seen, I'll hand it to the lake firemen every time. But the old Atlantic's pretty cold, Tim, if you have to get over the side, and that's liable to happen, you know."

" I'll not be gettin' over the side until I have to," Tim asserted. " I've been

in the fire hole so long that I'm spoilt, entirely. I'm afraid o' the cold, Chief."

"I'm just telling you, Tim, you can back out if you want to and there's nobody to say a word to you about it. We'll be pulling out in the morning, though, and I'm advising you to remember your failing if you go ashore! This Canadian whisky's a quick actor."

"Sure it's not me that'll be backin' out, sir, nor takin' any chances ashore, either," Tim assured him. "I've been worryin' too much for fear the old Aurora'd be sailin' widout me!

"I may not have much back o' me, an' little I know about the Donahues or the Cullens, either, that came before me. I've never been anythin' but a fireman, an' I never will be, Chief. But I ain't yellow. Nobody can say that o' Tim Donahue. He may be an ol' booze hound on occasions, but that's the worst o' him, sir."

THE stubby little man stared straight ahead of him at the chief's license on the wall and rambled on musingly as though he were talking to himself.

"I was a bit of a lad on Torry Hill in Milwaukee but I can remimber thim takin' me mother away in a black cart up to St. Andrews an' me an' the ol' man follerin' along in a hack. After the mass, the ol' man left me in care o' the Doherties, that kept a saloon on the corner, an' he lit out. Glad to git away, I guess.

"Whin I was old enough to work I ran away from Doherty an' his wife, but I guess it didn't make much difference to thim because I've never heard from thim to this day. As far as I know, sir, I've neither kith ner kin to be carin' whether 'r no, if I'm blown up. In that case, Chief, I'll have the pleasure o' finishin' up wit' the ship that's been me home for ten years. Sure, I'm feelin' like I was ol' John Paul Jones, himself, like he must 'a' felt whin he set sail in the ol' Bonum Richard."

To Tim Donahue, odd as it may seem, John Paul Jones stood out in clear relief. Although old Tim had been only a fireman all of his life, and although he seemed illiterate, he was a reader of history. The life and the deeds of America's first naval hero were the little man's special hobby. Somewhere back in Tim's Celtic past there must have been a student ancestor, who had left this bit of a bequest to an odd offspring.

With the somewhat primitive ability to read which a few years in St. Andrew's parochial school had given him, Tim Donahue had been stumbling through the pages of history.

His fanciful Celtic mind was able to visualize what he read. It served to people his brain with living beings who had long since played their parts upon the earth and passed on. With the magic power of his retentive memory, he could call back out of the dim ages the great and the near great, from the Roman Cæsars to Mad Anthony Wayne.

The comfort of his life was John Paul Jones and his rotting old frigate, the Bon Homme Richard. The story of her battle with the Serapis was his great page in history. It is doubtful if any learned lecturer could have given a more graphic story of that encounter than little Tim Donahue.

In his secret mind, Tim had always hoped for a chance to repeat the deeds of the long-dead sea master. Half in childish fancy, he had often served the guns for his naval hero. When he was certain, at last, that he was about to sail out upon the same old sea which had lapped the sides of the Bon Homme Richard—a sea again infested by enemies to the same old flag, Tim's thoughts very naturally turned quickly to his hero of heroes, his shipmate of years of fancy.

"Av he could lick 'em in a rottin' hulk like the Bonum Richard, smokin' an' burnin' and witherin' up under his feet, Tim Donahue needn't be losin' his

nerve wit' a craft like the Aurora under him," he mumbled, when he was alone with his thoughts.

TEN days out with a cargo of grain under her hatches, the Aurora was plunging along at ten knots. Ten days and nights of the perfect weather which the Atlantic can exhibit when she is inclined to be agreeable had greeted the lake steamer on her maiden run through the salt seas.

Captain James McGraw, survivor of two previous submarine encounters, had kept well out of the beaten track of ships, and consequently away from lurking periscopes. During all of this time he had grudgingly given the Aurora her due as an able ship, which sparing praise would have aroused the everlasting hate of Tim Donahue had he been in position to hear the remarks on the bridge. But Captain McGraw had never before sailed anything but a long-legged salt water craft and it was rather to be expected that he might be slightly prejudiced.

Captain McGraw, cautious from experience and uncertain as to his ship, could not expect to go on dodging submarines indefinitely unless he expected to fetch up somewhere in the Arctic ocean. It was necessary for him to pull at last and bear for the coast of England if he hoped to make Liverpool with the cargo so badly needed there. He could only head the Aurora into the danger zone, trusting to luck to meet a destroyer convoy before the submarines discovered him.

At the same time the German submarine U-X-8, a supercraft for that period of the war, was cruising far from its base, waiting for a chance to pick up a fat victim before returning to its nest. Its supplies were running low and its crew was beginning to feel the pinch and nervous strain of the long cruise. With the increasing fleets of destroyers the sea was becoming less free for the pirate craft.

For several days there had not been a sign of a victim and Captain Froebel was beginning to believe his country had cleared the sea of merchant ships. Then suddenly far away to the starboard one morning, he spied a faint smudge on the horizon.

All day the ship hunter stalked his prey, still far out of range. As the strange ship came nearer Froebel studied her carefully through his powerful glasses. At first he feared she might be some new type of destroyer, which was being sprung on him, or a disguised war vessel—she lay so low in the water. Her funnel was far aft and her deck houses were farther apart than those of any other ship he had encountered. He could not quite make her out.

When he felt safe in drawing nearer, however, he saw the American flag flying at her peak.

"Yankee in a crazy craft," he muttered. "He'll be easy. He won't fight and that ship should be worth picking."

The commander left the conning tower and closed the steel hatch after him with a bang. Slowly the U-X-8 began to submerge until only her periscope cut the surface. During the remainder of the afternoon the submarine cruised within easy range of the odd ship until the light began to fade and the twilight settled down in a dusky murk over the sea.

IT must be admitted that the crew of the Aurora was a bit jumpy, from Captain McGraw down. It is not a comfortable thing to slip out of comparative safety into a zone which is known to bristle with periscopes.

The darkening of the ship, the frequent lifeboat drills, the ever present cork jackets and the noticeably increased tension on the bridge did not tend to steady the nerves of the men who were taking a chance on the Aurora. Sailing his first voyage through the torpedo zone, Tim Donahue was less affected than those who had passed through the experience before.

For two days and two nights the thing had been going on. The smallest unusual event, even the clang of the engine room telegraph sent the stokers jumping for the safety ladders in a mad scramble. Whenever such a stampede happened on Tim's watch he could not disguise his disgust. His watch partner, August Schultz, a big husky German, under suspicion by the whole crew, was the worst offender.

"What the divil's got into youse?" Tim asked angrily as the crew grew worse instead of better. "You, Schultz, you big Dutchman, runnin' every time somebody stubs his toe on a slice bar! Why don't you bend your back like a man an' help keep some steam in thim kittles?"

"Ja!" Schultz cried in broken English. "You want me to drown like a rat in a trap or get captured aboard a German boat, yes? I know what they do mit me on these submarines. I been in the German navy three years. I know these officers, damn 'em! They don't care for a man's life. I run away from it. I can't stand it. I know what they are, these officers. They are devils without any feelings. Gott!"

"It ain't goin' to help none to run up on deck and jump overboard before ye're hit, is it?" Tim challenged. "You'll never make a good Yankee, Schultzie. Y' ain't got the in'ards in you. You're just like the rest o' thim Heinies. You'd ought to be aboard o' one o' thim tin fish. Ain't you got any fight in you, man?"

"Ain't I?" cried Schultz, in anger. "Ain't I? If I get a chance I'll show you. I say I know what we get from them. I was in a submarine three years ago, already, with a captain that was a brute. One morning I stood on deck, when he wasn't feeling good and he hit me in the face and knocked me overboard, because I was in his way. Gott! If I could see him once with equal chances!

"We was in the Nord Sea and a Danish fish smack picked me up. Then I go to America and I make up my mind never to go back again to Germany alive."

"What the divil are you doin' aboard a Yankee ship out here, thin?" inquired Tim suspiciously.

"I'm a sailor. That's all I can do. I got to live," Schultz explained. "Maybe I get my chance at that officer, too. Ach, if I do!"

"Well, stick around an' don't get looney," cautioned Tim. "Though for the life o' me I don't see how you got aboard this ship. I thought they were pretty careful about lettin' Germans aboard nowdays."

"Nobody asked me anything. I just signed up and nobody tells me I can't," the German insisted.

"'Tis no wonder the country's full o' thim spies," Tim commented, "lettin' furriners in that way.

"But whither or no, you'll walk the mark whilst you're wit' me. An' some time, Schultzie, I'll tell you about an honest-to-God American that wasn't afraid of anythin' that floated. It 'll do you good, me boy. Did you never hear o' John Paul Jones?"

"Clang! Clang! Clang!" suddenly crashed the engine room signal from the bridge. Tim held his breath and waited until, "Clang!" sounded the signal for the fourth time. He knew the bridge was calling for "Full speed ahead."

Grabbing a short iron bar he ran for the narrow steel ladder and reached it ahead of the rest of the crew. Then he turned and, perched on his vantage point four rungs up, faced the panicky group.

"I'll brain the first man o' youse that tries to get out o' this fire-hole!" he screamed, swinging his weapon above their heads. "Get back there an' shove some steam into thim boilers, y' quitters! Av the old man didn't want more steam he wouldn't be ringin' for it."

"Out o' the way there, you crazy fresh water runt!" warned a burly

coal passer, making for the ladder. "They can't keep us down here to drown like rats."

With a sickening thud the bar crashed down on the skull of the coal passer and the huge bulk crumpled at the foot of the ladder. "Thud!" came the bar on another head, and two men lay still at the bottom of the ladder.

"I'll use you all alike!" cried little Tim, the thrill of battle lighting up his smeared face. "Act like Yankee sailors an' youse won't have nothin' to fear from me. Get back to thim furnaces now an' be min! Schultzie, fire me furnace for me whilst I stay here to crack the next yellow-leg that tries to run away from a fight."

Tim's rough methods earned command of the stoke-hold for him. Perched on his ladder with his weapon ready, he stood guard as the crew returned to work.

"I had to put the fear o' God into thim," he mumbled as he surveyed the work of his bar. "I'm hopin' a little cold water'll bring thim boys up standin'."

The men in the stoke-hold of the Aurora could feel the increased speed of the ship as she surged ahead, and they could feel that she was swinging off sharply to starboard. But the grimy crew had more to fear from the stubby man on the ladder than from the torpedo which they expected momentarily.

Suddenly there was a terrific shock which knocked down most of the stokers. The Aurora rolled down wickedly, but righted herself within a few minutes. It seemed hours before the signal to stop rang out in the engine room. Then came a bedlam of hideous noises from above, a series of explosions following one another in a deafening roar.

"They're shellin' us!" cried one of the men.

"Thin we're safer here," Tim announced.

"Schultz!" he sang out." "Go on deck an' find out what it's all about! Thin come back an' tell us. Mind you don't lose your nerve an' run away. If y' do, God help you—we'll all take a crack at you.

"The rest o youse stay here. Maybe th ol' man'll be wantin' some more steam in a minute. Keep her blowin' off!"

FOR very good reason, Captain Froebel had decided not to sink the Aurora with an expensive torpedo. He had been away from his base a long time and with so many British and American destroyers now operating, he wanted to save his deadliest weapon for them. Also, the Aurora promised to have things on board which he needed, and his German thrift forbade destroying a prize which promised little difficulty, until he had picked her clean. A bomb properly placed would finish this craft when he was through with her. So he determined to pick her clean without considering that several things might happen.

In the first place, never having had experience with Great Lakes craft, he had no idea that the Aurora was capable of picking up speed rapidly. Neither did he know that this odd ship, built to cut some sharp corners in the ship canals without a tug, was quick as lightning on her helm. It came as a surprise to him, therefore, when the steel hull of his victim slammed into him and carried away the periscope of his almost totally submerged craft.

With its periscope gone there was nothing left for the U-X-8 but to come to the surface and fight it out. Even in this situation the underwater boat had all the advantage over the Aurora, which was sailing without a gun crew. Repairs to the damaged periscope could be made quickly, once the prize was disposed of. Captain Froebel hurriedly mounted his light deck gun and fairly deluged the decks of the Aurora with shell fire as a matter of chastisement.

"Take your crew off in the boats!"

he shouted to Captain McGraw of the Aurora, in very good English, after the first shower of shells. "I'm going to shell your ship immediately again. Heave to and get your boats off if you want to save your men! I'll give you ten minutes."

Captain McGraw, who had seen four of his men go down under the fire of the pirate, was well aware that further resistance was useless. The Aurora was not built for battle and a well-placed shell might end her career at any time. He sounded the order for the boats and the crew lost little time getting overside.

Deep down in the stokehold, Tim Donahue and his surly crew failed to get the order to abandon ship. When Schultz clambered down the ladder with his report, he whispered to the little man on guard so that the men might not know the truth. No doubt he feared they might blame him for not shouting down the order from the deck. Without doubt the sight of the German craft had frightened him and driven all desire to leave the ship from him, because of his fear that he might be taken aboard the submarine.

"Gott!" he whispered excitedly. "It's a big submarine and we knocked her periscope off. She is laying to and our crew's gone over the side, already. We're all alone on the ship."

"The divil we are!" little Tim cried.

"Ja!" Schultz whispered. "They are coming aboard from the submarine. I saw them launching a collapsible."

"Let thim come," challenged Tim, grasping his steel bar tighter. "Av these yellow legs'll stick we have a chance yet. If not thin we'll all go together. Are you game, Schultzie?"

"Ja!" declared Schultz. "Maybe I get a chance at an officer, anyway."

Tim Donahue looked down into the smeary faces of the men in the stokehold. There were eight of them and they were looking up at him curiously.

"Youse guys have one chanst in a thousand o' gettin' out o' this alive," he told them. "There's a submarine 'longside an' there's a Heinie crew comin' aboard. They've got our gang up there buffaloed. Will youse stick?"

"Sure we'll stick!" they answered him.

"All o' youse?"

"Sure—what's the game?"

"Thin hunt yourselves some good handy pieces o' pipe an' be sure it's heavy enough," Tim directed. "Mind ye do as I say or it'll be all off wit' youse. There's a chice for you bein' kilt be the Germans 'r me. Get out o' sight in the bunkers an' stay there quiet till ye hear me signal, which will be Schultzie, here, talkin' Dutch. The Heinies think they've got the hull crew corraled. Schultzie, me lad, you're a godsend this day. Come up the ladder wit' me now, and keep out o' sight when you get on deck."

The long steel ladder led up to a hatchway in the forward end of the deck house, which was connected with the after cabin, galley and mess room. A door directly in front of the companionway to the stokehold led directly out on deck. As the two stokers reached the top of the ladder, they heard the men from the submarine coming over the rail to the deck just outside. Hurriedly Tim and Schultz sought a hiding place on either side of the door, each grasping a short bar, their only weapons.

SCHULTZ listened intently to the conversation of the boarding crew.

"Cleared out like rats from a sinking ship," he heard the officer in charge sneer in German. "Yankees! Bah! They won't fight like men. We will clean her out and then blow her up. First I will go through these deck houses to see what the swine have left for us."

Schultz stiffened in eagerness. He started to move forward, but Tim grasped him by the arm.

"Keep your shirt on, Schultzie," cautioned the temporary commander of

the Aurora. "Wait for him to get well inside."

"Gott!" Schultz hissed. "How can I wait! So bad I want just one good crack at his head."

The two men crouched breathlessly in the shadow as they heard footsteps coming nearer and nearer along the steel deck. The interior of the deck house had become quite dark in the dûsky, grayish light which hung over the sea. The officer's flashlight blazed ahead of him as he stepped through the doorway.

There was a sudden muffled thud, a stifled groan, a faint scraping sound. Then silence.

"You got him good, Schultzie, me by," Tim whispered. "I'll drag him out o' sight whilst you're callin' in a couple more o' thim. Git thim two at a time, if you can. There's time enough and' we've got to give the lads below a chanst at thim, y'know."

"Two men follow me!" Schultz commanded in German, his hand before his mouth to muffle his voice. More footsteps sounded on the deck and the stokers waited for the figures to darken the doorway. There were two more slight thuds and then perfect silence.

"Goin' fine, Schultzie by," whispered Tim. "Just like the ol' Third Ward picnic at home. Get their guns and heave thim guys out o' the way where they won't be disturbin' us. How many more in the boat?"

"There were six in the boat with the officer," Schultz answered.

"Four left thin," commented Tim. "We'll feed thim to the byes. Fetch thim all in, Schultzie."

"All of you follow me below decks, this way!" Schultz directed in the same guttural, muffled voice. "The companionway is here."

A moment later four more figures passed through the doorway and groped ahead into the darkness unmolested. They found the companionway and following the red glow from a partly opened furnace door, they began to descend the long ladder, directed by Schultz from above.

When they had neared the bottom the flash played upon them from above, but thinking their commander had remained behind their suspicions were not aroused. Under the light, however, the waiting stokers, crouching to spring, watched them come.

When the last man had stepped to the steel plates, Tim bade them strike. There was a rush and good American curses came up, mingled with cries of surprise and groans. Then silence settled down.

"Got thim all, lads?" Tim called from above.

"Sure t'ing," came the answer. "Send some more."

"Get their guns!" Tim ordered. "We may need thim. This thing's only half over."

Schultz was bending over the prostrate officer, who had been dragged out of the way.

"Gott!" he cried. "He is der captain. He lives, but not for long, I think. It was my chance and I fixed him good."

"It ain't hardly human to shuffle thim off that way, Schultzie," Tim said regretfully. "You must o' hit him too hard. But if you done it, it's too late to kick now. It ain't our way, though. Get on his cap and jacket. We need a Dutch captain at this stage o' the show."

"But he was—" began Schultz, trembling with emotion.

"Oh, the divil take care o' him! Never mind who he was. I hope he was the Kaiser. Anyway, he'll never tell on you."

STANDING at the rail of the Aurora, coached by Tim Donahue, Schultz with his adornments of an officer of the German navy, called out in his best High German to the man on the conning tower of the submersible, just visible in the dusk.

"Bring eight men aboard at once!" he ordered in a disguised voice. "This craft's full of plunder that we need. There's not a Yankee sailor left on board."

The two men at the rail of the Aurora watched the small boat leave the submarine before they hurried back to their station just inside of the deck house.

"Below there!" Donahue called down into the stokehold. "Here's eight more comin' aboard! Don't open up anythin' until you get me signal! Kin you handle thim or shall I come below meself?"

"We're waitin' for 'em," came the answer. "Send 'em along."

"There's the byes," said Tim, with a note of pride.

Within fifteen minutes the second boatload from the U-X-8 were lured into the stokehold. Then came some more thuds and groans and a few curses, and another battle was over.

"All clear below for the next lot!" came a voice from below.

"There'll be no more murther done on this ship this night, you bloodthirsty divils," answered Donahue with a chuckle.

"Get on their caps an' blouses and we'll all go over an' have a look at the submarine. There can't be more'n half a dozen left on her. Get all the guns you can find on thim fellers down there, and you'd best make thim all fast so they won't wake up an' start somethin' whilst we're away."

The firehold crew was not long in getting up the ladder to the deck, rigged out in a motley array of German sea clothing, and grinning with the thought of the easy victory over the enemy, who had descended innocently to meet them.

"We'll take the two boats," Tim directed, as the group gathered about the rail. "Schultzie an' me and two min 'll git off in the first boat an' the rest o' youse follow in the second. Stand off until you get three flashes from me light. Thin come along wit' ever'thin' y' got!"

"Mind y' keep your mouths shut, an' let Schultzie do the talkin'," he admonished. "He's got the lingo, and don't any o' youse be tryin' out your Milwaukee German."

Silently the smeary, grimy expedition put off from the ship, and the leading boat boldly approached the submarine. It was now quite dark, and the men in the boats were reasonably safe for the time being. A look-out was posted on the deck of the submarine and Schultz hailed him in German.

"The rest of the men are following shortly," the bogus captain assured the guard.

There was no challenge, and the four men silently climbed aboard, keeping their weapons handy. Schultz and Tim walked toward the look-out.

"Pigs," grumbled Schultz. "They have all run off like cowards."

At the same minute the look-out's knees doubled under him suddenly and he sank limply to the deck without a groan. Immediately Tim's light flashed across the water, and the second boat came alongside.

"Follow us below an' keep thim guns handy!" he whispered as they scrambled across the slippery deck. "We'll have a fight on our hands now, I'm thinkin'."

There were six men below, but only two of them were in sight when the unexpected guests arrived among them. When the other four rushed into the compartment they were looking into the muzzles of ten guns. Their two mates were but silent heaps.

"You're lucky y' were in the other compartment," commented Tim, grinning at one of the captured officers. "Behave yourselves now and you'll be likely to see home some time av there's anythin' left o' your damned country whin the Yanks get through wit' it."

"Swine! Yankee swine!" raved the officer.

"So you thought 'twas easy we'd be, me laddie buck," Tim tantalized. "An' did you never hear o' the ol' Bonum Richard an' a feller named John Paul Jones? An' better min than you'll ever be, he had to fight an' lick, me son."

"You will pay! You will pay, yet," cried the angry captive in fair English. "When the day comes the German navy will come out and then good-by to your puny fleet, your transports, and your whole verdammt' country."

"Fools!" rumbled Schultz. "You know nothing of the wonderful America. She is the best country in the world. You will never whip us!"

THE survivors were shackled and tumbled into convenient berths while the boarding crew went gunning in search of any who might have escaped the first assault. Tim found a line which was made fast to the bow of the submarine. Leaving two men aboard, he ordered the rest of the crew back to the Aurora.

"Schultzie," he said, "wit' your experience in the German navy you'd ought to be able t' navigate a ship. Can you steer? She's steam gear and can be handled from the bridge."

"I have served both ends of the ship in the navy," Schultz assured him. "But I'm not a good navigator."

"Well, do your best, me lad. So long as you don't fetch us up in the German navy yard, it'll be all right," Tim comforted him. "Wit' me life spent in the fire hole I'd ought to be able t' run the engine room. Maybe I can find an oiler in the crowd to be me first assistant. We'll run her along easylike until daylight, an' maybe we'll pick up the boats wit' the skipper an' the rest o' the crew."

The sun rose to reveal a strange spectacle on the high seas. Lumbering along, with an odd fishlike creature dragging at the stern, the Aurora came into the reddish-yellow light of the dawn like a figure being developed on a photograph plate. At her stern fluttered the Stars and Stripes and on a tiny jury staff above her strange tow a similar emblem floated.

Far off on the horizon a smoke cloud appeared suddenly, growing larger and larger as Schultz watched it from the bridge through the ship's glasses. Then he telephoned to the engine-room, and Tim Donahue, acting chief engineer, shut off steam and climbed to the bridge. The news spread below decks, and the stokers deserted their furnaces without orders and clambered up to the main deck, many of them still wearing the uniform of their enemy's navy.

Strung along the rail they watched the strange ship racing toward them from the colorful horizon. A cheer went up from the deck of the Aurora when a long, lean destroyer came roaring up 'longside. The cheer grew louder when the smoke from the destroyer's funnels blew aside, revealing the Stars and Stripes flying straight out in the wind.

When an officer and his crew of gobs came aboard of the Aurora, they gazed suspiciously at the motley group of men in German uniforms, keeping their weapons handy for instant use.

"Sure, sir, they've just borrowed thim rigs," Tim Donahue explained with a grin. "The guys that owned them costumes won't need 'em for awhile, so there's no hard feelin's at all."

"Who is in command of this ship?" the officer asked, with a tone of authority.

"You may have your chice, sir," Tim replied. "I'm actin' chief engineer, and Schultzie there, wit' a Dutch name an' a Yankee heart, he's been skipper all night. The rest o' the crew flew the ship, wint over the side whin the tin fish we've taken in tow started poppin' shells at us.

"Sure, I don't blame thim for skiddooin'. I'd 'a' done the same had I the chanst. I'm hopin' they're all safe, 'specially Mr. McLaren an' the rest o'

the engineers. They were good fellers."

"The boats were picked up during the night by a British destroyer, and the men taken to Liverpool," the officer informed him. "We were instructed by wireless of the presence of this submarine, but we didn't expect to find this ship afloat. She's a lake ship, eh?"

"She is that, an' the best afloat, sir," Tim declared.

"I thought I knew her. I was born at Cleveland," said the officer.

"God bless you, son," cried Tim.

"Give me your report, please," the officer directed.

With his Irish love for the dramatic playing at its full sweep, Tim Donahue told his story in detail, encouraged now and then by the grins of the sailors from the destroyer.

"We're ready to turn over the ship to you, sir," he concluded. "An' it's thankful I am, sir, that I'm puttin' her into the hands of a Great Lakes man."

"Your job was well done, I'll say," the officer smiled, with more enthusiasm, perhaps, than is proper for an officer to display. "You will all be rewarded for this by the government. Now you will proceed to Liverpool, with your ship under convoy."

"Sure, sir," Tim bowed. "We'll go anywhere wit' the Aurora, av you'll give us a navigatin' officer an' an engineer. It's in the fire hole I'm needed, sir, where good min count."

"They will come aboard presently," the officer informed him. "Now, where is the crew of the submarine?"

"Here and there, sir," Tim responded. "Some in the coal bunkers, some in the deck house an' a few mad ones aboard the submarine. We've had little time to arrange thim for inspection, sir."

"Say!" blurted the officer, with sailor-to-sailor frankness. "Will you tell me, please, how you got away with this thing? You've told me how the boys stood by you, but what about yourself in this mess?"

"It was like this, sir," said Tim, solemnly. "Y' see 'twas the first trip for me an' the ol' Aurora on salt water an' I had to stick by her. We've been together ever since the day she come out o' Ecorse yards, sir.

"Whin I thought o' thim divils riflin' her an' thin stickin' a bomb into her and sinkin' her out here alone in strange waters so far from home, it made me blood boil, it did. I said to myself, we'd not give up without a scrap, an' av the worst came, sir, we'd go under together—me an' this ol' girl that's made a home for me for ten years."

Tim paused to look proudly over the steel decks of the ship. His eyes glistened a little as he turned back to the officer, a grin wrinkling his smeared face.

"Did y' never hear o' the Bonum Richard an' ol' Paul Jones, sir?"

"All that happened a long time ago. What's it got to do with this?" the officer asked.

"I'm thinkin' he must 'a' felt about the same about the ol' Bonum as I did whin thim pirates began abusin' the Aurora, sir."

"Well, he had nothin' on you, old timer," the officer declared with more enthusiasm than a naval officer is expected to betray.

THE END.

*The outlaw advanced slowly toward her*

# The Way of the West

***Deadly drama shakes the Wyoming rangeland as Blackie Dunham and his men return in search of gold and revenge***

***By A. T. LOCKE***

***Author of "Will Power in Packsaddle," "Case One Hundred and One," etc.***

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SALLY LEE CORBIN is riding home to the Bar-X ranch with her old grandfather, Dan Corbin, after an unsuccessful attempt to get Banker Pinkham of Wallow to renew their mortgage. Her grandfather is killed from ambush. Foreman Buck Randall and the Bar-X punchers can find no trace of the murderer, and Sally offers a reward of ten thousand dollars in gold—practically every cent she has in the world.

She is in Wallow, urging old Sheriff Dumbarton to greater efforts, when an armed man, Blackie Dunham, brings in a prisoner and claims the reward. The other man, Wanderin' Willie Watson, does not deny his guilt—until Dunham rides off with the money; then he tells how Dunham had a gun on him, forcing his confession. He had been in jail in Dorado when Corbin was shot.

Nobody in Wallow believes his story, except Sally. That night a mob storms the jail, setting it on fire. Sally and the sheriff give him a chance to escape, and he rides ahead of the mob to Dorado, where Sheriff "Easy" Pickins

**This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 16.**

verifies his alibi. But Willie has recognized Dunham as a prisoner in the jail. The mob is about to lynch Dunham, but he stubbornly refuses to disclose where he hid the gold, though he confesses he killed Corbin with this scheme in mind.

Willie and Buck prevent the lynching, hoping to trick Dunham into betraying the hiding place. Willie helps Dunham escape from the Wallow jail; and watchers scattered throughout the countryside follow him. Just as Dunham is about to climb Lonesome Butte, where he has hidden the gold, he hears a horse neigh. Fleeing, he kills Buck Randall from ambush, and escapes.

Wanderin' Willie searches the butte, but cannot find the gold. Knowing that Blackie Dunham will return—probably with some unscrupulous men—he keeps watch, stationing men at the butte and elsewhere. Sally Lee Corbin has made him acting foreman of Bar-X ranch.

The interest on the mortgage is due, and Sally has scarcely enough cash to pay her punchers. Banker Pinkham rides out to the ranch one day, when Sally is alone in the ranch house, and tells her that he will swallow up her ranch along with the others on which he has foreclosed—unless she will marry him! He has been drinking, and when she refuses his insolent offer, he advances upon her menacingly.

---

## CHAPTER XV (*Continued*).

### PINKHAM SHOWS HIS HAND.

"SO you despise me, do you?" he sneered. "And you hate me? And my money can't buy you in marriage and my power can't force you to become my wife?"

He moved forward suddenly and his arms closed around her and drew her close to him. She tried to scream, but found that she could not utter a sound; she struggled, but was powerless in his grip.

"First," he said, gathering her closer into his arms, "I'll have a few kisses from those rosebud lips—"

She felt herself jerked suddenly forward with brutal violence. Then as suddenly she was released, and reeled sidewise. She saw, as through a mist, the face of Wanderin' Willie and she felt exuberantly safe. He had come, somehow, to her rescue.

Her vision cleared and she saw the face of Pinkham; it was bleeding, contorted, ugly. They were fighting and she could hear the heavy thud of blows and the grunts of the two combatants. She winced and shrank back as a powerful blow caught Wanderin' Willie under the chin and sent him staggering sidewise. It seemed to hurt her as much as it could have hurt him. Then she saw Willie straighten up and lash out a fearful left which caught the advancing Pinkham on the jaw.

The banker reeled unsteadily, as Wanderin' Willie stepped back and watched him, and then fell forward like a crashing tree.

"Oh, he hurt you—he hurt you!" she cried, tears in her eyes, as she put her arms on Wanderin' Willie's shoulders.

"I didn't feel a thing," the latter asserted. "I saw him mistreating yo' and I reckon I got too mad to feel anything."

And then, for the second time, they kissed each other.

Wanderin' Willie went to the door and whistled. Billy Hawkins and Mike Gilson, who had been lingering in the vicinity of the ranch house, came up on the veranda.

"It's all over, boys," grinned Wanderin' Willie, "but yo' might stick around fer a little while and see how Pinkham behaves when he wakes up from his little nap."

In the course of a few minutes Pinkham recovered consciousness and, with the not-too-gentle assistance of Wanderin' Willie, he finally was balanced on his feet.

"Now git!" barked Wanderin' Willie, "and don't show up here again!"

"I'll go all right," snarled Pinkham, "but I'll stay away just long enough to foreclose the mortgage on this property and obtain possession of it. Then everybody connected with the place will go, and believe me, they will go pronto, too!"

"Listen, mister," commenced Wanderin' Willie ominously. "Yo' ain't goin' to foreclose no mortgage on the Bar-X. Leastwise, yo' ain't goin' to foreclose it anywhere as soon as yo' think!"

"Maybe you'll tell me why I'm not," Pinkham sneered.

"I won't tell yo' why," grinned Wanderin' Willie, "but I'll do somethin' better. I'll show yo' why."

He whistled softly and Billy and Mike, who had been just outside the door, stepped into the room.

"Yo', Billy, and yo', Mike," said Wanderin' Willie, "take this hyar short-whiskered galliwumpus out in the woods somewhar and see thet he don't find his way back to Wallow until I give the word. He's hankerin' to become one of these hyar hermits fer a few days. I'd keep him tied up if I was yo', and don't kill him as long as he's obedientlike and gentle."

Wanderin' Willie meditated in silence for a moment and then he gave his henchmen their final instructions.

"Yo' kin bring him back to Wallow," he said, "when we've found the ten thousand in gold thet was buried by Blackie Dunham, because then Miss Corbin kin pay the int'rest on his mortgage without no trouble a-tall."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### KIDNAPERS.

BLACKIE DUNHAM had been fortunate in picking up four friends of his who were hiding out along the north fork of the Platte River. They had made even the rather lawless Kansas too hot for them. Blackie had been exceedingly gratified; it would enable him to make his way back to the Wallow district all the sooner to recover the small fortune that he had been obliged to abandon there.

The more distance he had placed between him and Wallow, and the longer he had remained away, the more concern he had felt for his treasure. He had found his old pals rather well supplied with money, but not at all averse to splitting half of ten thousand dollars among themselves. That was the split that Blackie had offered and, under the circumstances, it had appeared fair enough.

They had agreed to Blackie's scheme and had commenced to drift northward a couple of weeks after his unceremonious departure from Wallow. For the most part, they kept to the open country and traveled singly or in pairs until they had made their way up into the Big Horns where Blackie had first hatched his scheme to make some money by killing an innocent man and then using another innocent man for a cat's-paw.

Babe Medford, a blond-haired, innocent-looking youth whose past greatly belied his mild appearance, had even ridden boldly into Wallow on the chance that he might hear some valuable gossip regarding Blackie and any plans that might have been made to apprehend him. He had posed as a cow-poke in search of work, but he had found that the people of Wallow, just at that time, were exceedingly suspicious of strangers and not at all inclined to be communicative in the presence of a person they did not know. As brazen and deadly with a gun as the Babe was, he was rather glad when he had ridden out of that town with an unpunctured skin. He had seen a lot of very grim faces in the town and he had sensed the fact that it was no place for a hombre to start any monkey-shines.

He had rejoined his companions, af-

ter riding forty or fifty miles out of his way in order to avoid those who, he was certain, were trailing him.

"Thet thar Wallow ain't no town fer none of us to go callin' in right now," he had warned Blackie. "They're watchin' strangers like a Mex watches his gal," he continued. "I reckon thet they think ye're comin' back, Blackie, and are right on the watch for yo'," he added.

"As long as they're not watchin' around thet Lonesome Butte, whar I planted the gold, I don't care," said Blackie. "We'll ride over thar in a coupla days, Babe, to see what we kin see. We don't have to go nowhere near Wallow to git to the butte, so yo' don't need to worry thet any one from the town 'll see yo'."

"Whar's the Kid and Jeff?" asked Babe, "and whar's Jake?"

"Jeff's right around hyar somewhar," replied Blackie. "The Kid and Jake are over in the direction of Wallow. They started over early this mawnin' to look things over."

And what Jake Savage and the Llano Kid were seeing, and hearing, at that very moment, would have been very interesting to Blackie.

They had left the cave, in which they all had hidden out, to reconnoiter in the direction of Wallow and to take a look at Lonesome Butte if they had the opportunity. Blackie wanted to learn if the trail that led up the mountain was being watched and if so, how many men were on guard. The butte was visible for miles, of course, and, following Blackie's directions, his two men had ridden eastward from the Big Horns until the landmark was just barely visible. They had made their way through a stretch of timber that was growing along the course of a stream and they were just about to emerge from the woods when they saw three riders in the distance.

They had trailed the horsemen, without being observed themselves, and had followed them along until they had entered a little ravine where, it became apparent, they intended to remain for some time. Jake and the Llano Kid, slipping from their horses and leaving them at a distance, had managed to creep close enough to the other three men to see them and overhear their conversation. One of the three, it was very apparent, was the prisoner of the other two, for he was securely bound. His captors were busy pitching a small tent and, while they worked, they seemed to be amusing themselves at the expense of their prisoner.

"WHAT sorta animule is thet sittin' ag'in' the tree thar, Mike?" asked the younger of the two men, with a twinkle in his eyes, as he indicated the man who was bound.

"Thet," said the other man, "is what yo' call a short-whiskered galliwumpus. Leastwise, I've heerd it called thet."

"Gosh," replied the other man, "I thought it was one of these hyar animules called a banker. It looks fer all the world like one of 'em. I've seen some of 'em sittin' behind plate glass winders, but I ain't never been close to one of 'em before."

"Thet's another name fer 'em, Billy," said the older of the two men. "And promise me, son," he continued, affecting an expression of anxiety, "thet yo' won't never go near none of 'em. They're dang'rous, son; they're worse'n grizzly b'ars."

Jake Savage and the Llano Kid were not missing a word of the conversation and they heard the portly individual, who was so helpless in the hands of his captors, break in on the discussion.

"I'm giving you fellows one more warning," he said in a menacing voice. "Release me now and I will not hold this against you. But if you keep me any longer, you will suffer for it and suffer plenty."

"Thet's how a short-whiskered galliwumpus growls, Billy," said the man

called Mike. "Ain't it horrible how it carries on when it finds itself in a trap?"

"What do these hyar galliwumpusses eat, Jake?" asked Billy. "I ain't never paid no partic'lar attention to 'em before."

"Thet's a question," replied Jake. "What do short-whiskered galliwumpusses live on? Mostly, my son, they live on bankrupt ranchers, and they like 'em good and lean. They like ranchers' widders and ranchers' daughters, too. Unprotected women-folks are sorta delicacies fer galliwumpusses like thet thar one."

"Listen, you two!" exclaimed the irritated Pinkham. "I'm damned tired of all this. I'll give you a hundred dollars, and overlook what you have done, if you will release me right now and let me go on my way."

"Yo' know, Billy," said Mike, paying no attention to Pinkham, "a galliwumpus is somethin' like a wolf. If a wolf is caught by the laig in a trap it 'll sometimes chew its laig off so thet it kin git free. A galliwumpus, my son, has the very same tendencies."

"I reckon yo're right," said Billy. "I reckon a galliwumpus thinks as much of a hundred dollars as a wolf does of a laig. Now, me, I don't think nothin' of a hundred dollars."

"Me neither," said Mike. "The clinkin' of small change sorta annoys a guy like me."

The two enjoyed themselves immensely as, with grave faces, they continued their discussion about Pinkham. The latter, infuriated at his summary rejection by Sally Corbin and by the manner in which he had been disposed of by Wanderin' Willie, smoldered with rage. And the angrier he became, the more Billy Hawkins and Mike Gilson liked it. They played him along for awhile, leading him to believe that it might be possible to bribe them if a sufficient amount were offered. He finally offered them a flat thousand dollars if they would let him go.

"Have yo' got the money with yo'?" asked Mike, simulating an air of cupidity. "Kin yo' pay us cash down right now?" He knew very well that the banker would not have that amount of money on his person.

"Of course I can't!" snapped Pinkham. "Do you think that I want to make myself a target for every crook in the district?"

"Then how are we goin' to git our money?" asked Mike.

"Just ride into town with me," said Pinkham in a more affable tone than he had used before, "and stop with me at the bank and I will pay you off. It will be worth a thousand dollars to me to get back to town by to-morrow," he added. "I don't want my daughter to be worrying about me, and, besides, I have some important business to attend to."

Billy and Mike whispered together for a couple of minutes and then they both looked at Pinkham and smiled.

"It's all set, then, Mike, isn't it?" said Billy. "We know just what we're goin' to do."

"Shore," agreed Mike. "If thet pore, deluded, white-livered pole-cat offers us a million dollars to set him free, we're jest goin' to keep him sittin' right thar until we git word to release him. I wonder, Billy, whar he ever got the idee thet he could buy fellers like us?"

THEY were grinning at each other and looking with contemptuous eyes down at the disappointed and enraged banker when they heard a voice behind them.

"Put yore hands up, yo' two, and be quick about it!"

Two pairs of hands went up in unison and Billy and Mike felt themselves being relieved of their guns.

"All right now!" the voice of Jake Savage snapped. "Yo' kin take three or four steps forward and then turn around and give us a look at yo'."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Pinkham fervently. "You two fellows

came just in time," he said to Savage and the Llano Kid. "These kidnapers would have murdered me if you hadn't happened to come along. I own the bank in Wallow, my friends, and I will see that you make something out of this."

"Thanks, mister," said Savage rather grimly. "We're mighty glad, me and my pard, thet we came along in time to git yo' outa the hands of them villains. They look like real tough guys, they do."

"They are," agreed Pinkham quickly. "They are. But they were hired by a bigger villain to bring me out here and keep me here until he could get away with some dirty work. But don't worry—I'll fix all of them later."

"Keep yore eyes on them two, Kid," ordered Savage, "because we can't take no chances with such desp'rate hombres. Fellers thet would kidnap a banker would be li'ble to do most anything."

The Kid came up close to Billy and Mike and the latter spoke to him.

"When yo' git that galliwumpus over thar by the tree untied," he said, "yo' wanta look out thet he don't bite yo'. He's plumb pizen, stranger; he's plumb pizen."

"We heerd consid'rable of the conversation between yo' fellers," the Llano Kid replied softly. "Me and my pardner have got things figured out pretty well. It ain't every day thet a coupla gents kin lay hands on a real live banker, fellers. They say a banker's hide is worth quite a bit of money sometimes."

Billy and Mike understood the reference of the Kid and they smiled at each other, for it was very evident that Pinkham had, figuratively, fallen out of the frying pan and into the fire. But the banker, who was not aware of what was happening, was in a most genial mood.

"If you boys will untie me now," he said, "we'll ride along into Wallow where I will see that you are properly rewarded."

"Listen, mister," growled Savage, "me and my pard hyar 'll take care of our reward all right. Don't yo' worry none about thet. And yo're not goin' to be untied—not right away, leastwise. As soon as it gets dark yo're goin' to take a journey with us, and if yo' don't act nice and accommodatin', yo' may never return from the trip."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### HELD FOR RANSOM.

MR. SILAS PINKHAM, the eminent banker of Wallow, had been missing for two days and not a word had been heard from him.

His daughter, Penelope, knew that he had started one day shortly before noon for the Bar-X ranch. She had, indeed, desired to accompany him on the journey, but he had indicated that he preferred to make the trip alone. He had been in excellent humor at the time, but she had wisely attributed this to his indulgence in a flask of whisky which he had more than half emptied and which he had taken with him. He had been rather mysterious, in a good-natured way, concerning the reason for his visit to the Bar-X, and he had intimated that he might have something important to impart to her upon his return in the evening.

When he had not come back that night she had not been very deeply concerned. He very probably had decided, she had concluded, to remain at the Bar-X for the night. At noon the next day, however, she had commenced to wonder what had befallen her august parent, and had expressed her dawning curiosity to the proprietor of the hotel.

Old Wally Westcott did not have the least idea where Pinkham might have gone. He had started for the Bar-X on some matter of business and, very probably, was still there. Wally Westcott had more than a suspicion that Pinkham was about to foreclose on the Bar-X, a proceeding with which he

could not sympathize, and his attitude toward Penelope had not only been indifferent, but somewhat brusque.

Then he relented a little, for it had occurred to him that, after all, the girl was not responsible for the meanness of her father.

"Wanderin' Willie, the foreman of the Bar-X, rode into town awhile ago with two of his waddies," he told the girl, "and I saw 'em go into the sheriff's office. Maybe they're in the office yet, and it might be they kin tell yo' somethin' about yore father."

The foreman was at that very moment in conference with Dumbarton. With him were Billy Hawkins and Mike Gilson. Dumbarton was shaking his gray head dubiously.

"It ain't reg'lar, Watson," he was saying. "It ain't reg'lar and I don't know what to do about it."

"Of co'se it ain't reg'lar," Wanderin' Willie admitted, "but it's the best thing to do under the circ'mstances. Thar's no question but thet we're up ag'in' Blackie Dunham and some of the gang he brought back hyar. Both Billy and Mike heerd Blackie's name mentioned by them two hombres thet got away with Pinkham. Blackie and his friends are stalkin' thet ten thousand dollars and in the meantime they've stumbled over a way to make a lot more money by holdin' Pinkham fer a ransom. They're hidin' out over in the Big Horns somewhar and the only thing we kin do is to string along with 'em, and play thar game fer awhile. Then we'll round 'em all up at once."

"It seems to me, Watson, thet this trouble is all yore fault," said the sheriff severely. "Yo' hed no right to hold Pinkham a pris'ner in the fust place. If yo' hadn't ordered Billy and Mike hyar to take him out and hold him, he never would 'a' fell into the hands of them fellers."

"In which case," said Wanderin' Willie, "we wouldn't have been shore thet Blackie hed come back with his gang, and we wouldn't have had any line on 'em a-tall. One more thing, sheriff, too. By this time Pinkham would 'a' foreclosed on the Bar-X and Sally Corbin wouldn't have a roof over her head."

"Oh, yes she would." The sheriff swore gruffly. "Her granddad and her dad were my friends, and she'll always have a roof over her head."

"I did the best I knowed how, sheriff," pleaded Wanderin' Willie. "Things 'll work out all right if yo'll listen to me."

Sheriff Dumbarton sighed a little wearily as he leaned back in his chair.

"I'm in favor," he said, "of gettin' up a posse and chasin' these hyar guys straight down to Mexico."

"Thet 'u'd be a simple thing if no one cared about Sally Corbin's money," agreed Wanderin' Willie. "But she's gotta have it and we've gotta git it fer her. Thet's all thar is to thet."

"I s'pose so," agreed the sheriff. "It beats me how yo're goin' to do it, though."

"Jest listen to me," said Wanderin' Willie, "and we'll do it all right."

"I reckon I'll have to listen," said the sheriff. "This hyar business is gittin' too complicated fer me."

"The fust thing, then," said Wanderin' Willie blithely, "is to git Pinkham's daughter down hyar and give her the message from the crooks."

"Go up to the hotel and git her then, Watson," said the sheriff. "She must be a leetle worried about her father by this time and I reckon yo'll find her thar."

"I'll be back in a jiffy, sheriff," said Wanderin' Willie and throwing his sombrero on his head, he went out of the door.

HE was rather surprised to find that the black-haired girl he was in search of was walking toward him down the street, and he was even more surprised to have her speak to him when they met.

"You are Mr. Wanderin' Willie, aren't you?" she asked. "I know that is not your real name," she said with a smile, "but I forgot to get that. Anyway, you are the foreman of the Bar-X?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, sweeping off his hat and making a courteous bow. "I was jest comin' to look fer yo', ma'am."

"To look for me?" she questioned in surprise. "And I was looking for you," she told him. "Have you seen my father? I wanted to ask you about him—do you know where he is?"

Her directness rather nonplused Wanderin' Willie.

"If yo'll come down to the sheriff's office, ma'am," he answered her, "we kin talk things over."

Her eyes widened with fear.

"The sheriff's office?" she gasped. "He hasn't been arrested, has he?"

"No, nothin' like thet," replied Wanderin' Willie with a smile. "But he's in a little difficulty, ma'am."

"Is he hurt?" she pleaded. And then an idea that, under the circumstances was obvious, occurred to her. "He's not dead, is he?" she breathed. She clutched Wanderin' Willie fiercely by the coat and there were tears in her terror-stricken eyes. "Tell me," she exclaimed, "is he dead?"

Wanderin' Willie felt that, in view of her serious apprehensions, the truth would be a relief.

"I tell yo', ma'am, on my word of honor," he said earnestly, "thet yore father is not dead or even hurt. But he has been picked up by a gang of desperadoes and is bein' held fer ransom. He's sent word thet he needs a little help from yo'."

"Desperadoes!" she gasped. "Oh, I just know they'll kill him!"

"Now, ma'am," said Wanderin' Willie soothingly, "they won't do no such thing. Not, anyway, if yo'll come to the sheriff's office with me and hear all about it," he concluded lamely.

She went without further conversation. Once they were in the office, Dumbarton suggested that Wanderin' Willie present the facts in the case to her.

"Waal, yo' see, ma'am," he commenced a little nervously, "yore father got picked up by a pack of bad hombres thet are hangin' out over in the foothills of the Big Horns. They took these two cow-pokes hyar, too. But they found out thet yore father was a banker and thet Billy Hawkins and Mike Gilson are jest a coupla good-fernothin' waddies thet never have a cent 'cept on payday. So nacherally, they kept yore father and sent these two cow-pokes away on the jump."

He paused a moment and then his attitude became more serious. "The trouble is," he continued, "thet they're demandin' twenty-five thousand dollars for the release of yore father and they won't let him go to git the money onless you'll go out and be a sorta hostage for him. They want yo' to stay with 'em while yore father comes to town to git the money. They know thet he'll be shore to come back if they hold yo' while he's gone."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" the girl cried. "I just couldn't, that's all! I'd be afraid to stay with those desperate men alone!"

"WELL, ma'am, that's up to yo'," said Wanderin' Willie. He could not help but contrast the dark-eyed beauty before him with Sally Lee Corbin. He knew that the latter, under the same circumstances, would never have hesitated a moment. "I'd think it over if I was yo', ma'am," he urged. "Those hombres out thar want money and I don't reckon thet they'd do yo' any harm. They're mighty li'ble, though, to harm yore father if yo' don't do as they want yo' to. Billy Hawkins hyar will take yo' to whar they'll be expectin' yo' tomorrow afternoon, if yo' decide to go."

"I can't do it," asserted the girl. "It would frighten me to death!"

"I reckon thet by to-morrow mawnin' yo'll be ready to go," said Wanderin' Willie tolerantly. "I figger thet yo' cares as much for yore father as yo' do for yoreself, ma'am, and thet after yo' think things over, yo'll be glad to take a little risk and maybe save his life."

There were tears in the eyes of the girl and she shook her head stubbornly.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "I can't go! I won't go!"

"Jest go up to yore room and think it over fer a little while," urged Wanderin' Willie quietly. "Billy 'll be waitin' for yo' hyar at seven o'clock to-morrow mawnin'."

The girl rose to her feet and Wanderin' Willie opened the door for her when she left and closed it after her.

"She's a whoppin' pretty gal," said Billy, "but she jest ain't got no nerve a-tall."

"Yo' can't blame the poor kid much," suggested Wanderin' Willie. "She ain't had the proper kinda bringin' up back in them Eastern schools. I reckon, though, thet she'll go when the time comes."

"But it's a rotten shame to turn a gal like thet over to thet gang of tough hombres," objected Billy. "Thar's no tellin' what 'll happen to her."

"I don't reckon them fellers 'll look at the gal twice while they're waitin' for the twenty-five thousand," asserted Wanderin' Willie. "If they git the money they kin buy all the women they want and all women look alike to hounds like them."

He paused a moment, lit a cigarette, and looked thoughtfully at the sheriff.

"Red Knowles, with Tom Johnson and French Louis, are watchin' down at Lonesome Butte, ain't they, Dumbarton?" he asked. The sheriff nodded. "Let's see, then," mused Wanderin' Willie. "The gal will go to-morrow to take the place of her father. Pinkham 'll ride back to-morrow night and git into Wallow in the mawnin'. He'll git the money and start right back agin, because he ain't goin' to leave thet gal of his in the hands of them crooks any longer than necessary. He'll git back to their hide-out late in the afternoon. Yep," he added, with an air of self-satisfaction, "I reckon Blackie 'll go to Lonesome Butte to git his swag about the evenin' of day after to-morrow."

He inhaled deeply and then sent a cloud of smoke swirling into the atmosphere.

"And I reckon," he concluded, "thet he'll git a lot more lead than he does gold."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HOSTAGES.

WANDERIN' WILLIE, leaving Billy Hawkins in Wallow, started back with Mike Gilson for the Bar-X that afternoon. He was reasonably certain that Penelope Pinkham at the last moment would be willing to go to the rescue of her father. If she did it would be necessary for her to pass the Bar-X with Billy, and he fully expected to see them both some time before noon the following day. Wanderin' Willie, as he rode along in the spring sunshine, was in such a cheerful mood that he commenced to whistle. Things seemed to be working out even better than he had anticipated.

When the Bar-X was reached, Mike rode straight for the corral while Wanderin' Willie paused at the ranch house to have a few words with Sally. She had been informed, of course, of the seizure of Pinkham. She knew also that the gang, before releasing the banker in order to permit him to get the amount of his ransom, had stipulated that his daughter deliver herself up to be held as a hostage for him. She had been curious as to whether or not Penelope Pinkham would have the courage to venture unprotected into the midst of the ruffians who had seized her father.

"Well, how did the Pinkham girl take the news?" she asked eagerly, after she had admitted Wanderin' Willie into the living room, where she had been awaiting his return.

"Not so chipper," he replied. "She said that she couldn't go—that she would be too much afraid. But I reckon that she'll come through all right."

An expression of impatience clouded the countenance of Sally.

"The little coward!" she exclaimed. "Can you imagine a daughter refusing to go to the aid of her father?"

"I reckon it's the fault of her upbringin'," said Wanderin' Willie easily. "She lived a sorta pertected life, and yo' cain't scarcely blame her for not wantin' to turn herself over to a gang of cutthroats."

"So you, too, have been fascinated by her beauty," accused Sally scornfully. "You feel, like lots of other people around here, that whatever Penelope Pinkham does is all right. You-all make me tired!" she concluded vehemently.

"What?" gasped Wanderin' Willie, startled by her sudden anger. "I ain't fascinated by her at all," he asserted stoutly. "I didn't say thet whatever she did was right. But a gal needs nerve to hand herself over to a gang of desperate men and she jest ain't the sort of a gal who's got nerve, thet's all. I'm sorta sorry fer her, I am."

"Well, I'm tired," said Sally shortly to the surprised Wanderin' Willie, "and I guess we had better say good night." She rose to her feet and went to the door and held it open. There was nothing for him to do but pick up his hat and go.

"Hollerin' Hannah!" he exclaimed to himself as he went down the veranda steps. "What come over her all of a sudden?" He shook his head dolefully. "A feller jest cain't figger out a woman nohow."

He wandered over to the bunk house, where he found Mike and several of the other boys sitting around and smoking and talking.

"Whar do you reckon, boss, thet Blackie's gang is hidin' out?" Mike asked him.

"I ain't got no idee," admitted Wanderin' Willie. "I reckon thar's lots of places over in the Big Horns whar a gang could hole up and be safe. I don't know thet country well enough to be any authority on it."

"We was figgerin'," continued Mike, "thet we might be able to spy 'em out and give 'em a little surprise."

"We'll land 'em without goin' to thet much trouble," asserted Wanderin' Willie confidently. "Things is goin' all right. Thar ain't nothin' to worry about."

IF Wanderin' Willie was not worrying, neither were Blackie and his four companions, safely ensconced in a commodious cave over in the eastern foothills of the Big Horns. A fire of dry chips both warmed and illuminated the place, and the faces of the five desperadoes appeared actually cheerful in the yellow glow of the flames. They were seated in a circle around the fire and Silas Pinkham, looking decidedly dejected, sat alone some distance away from them. The banker was not tied or bound in any way; this, apparently, was not considered necessary since he was unarmed while the others each wore two heavy guns.

"Wal, it won't be long now," said Blackie cheerfully, "before we kin mek trecks fer th' south, boys. I'll hate," he added, "to leave sich a rich and fertile section as this hyar one."

"The gal oughta be hyar by to-morrow night," said Jake Savage. "Thet is, if she's comin' at all. Then the banker gent hyar kin start ridin' fer home, and I reckon he'll be back by the next evenin'. I'll be mighty sorry fer his darter," added Jake in a louder voice, "if he don't git back pronto. While me and Jeff wait hyar, Blackie,

yo' and Babe and the Kid kin do thet other little job yo' have on hand. When thet's finished yo' kin come fannin' back hyar and we'll all light out together."

"Thet's about the program," agreed Blackie jubilantly. "It 'll go through without a hitch, too. I feel right proud of myself," he added, "at havin' handled things so proper. I reckon thet yo' boys ain't sorry now thet yo' decided to come back hyar with me."

For two days Blackie and Babe had been hiding out in the vicinity of Lonesome Butte, in a position where they could get a close view of the foot of the trail without being seen themselves. They had found that the place was being watched by only three men, one of whom Blackie had recognized as the red-headed deputy sheriff. The Wallow men made no particular effort to conceal themselves and did not appear to be particularly vigilant in the watch they were keeping.

"There couldn't be nothin' easier," said Blackie in a low voice to his companions, "than to sneak up on those guys and git the drop on 'em and tie 'em up. After thet, thar's nothin' to do but git the money, ride back hyar, and make our get-away."

They sat around the fire and talked for awhile and then, after securely binding Pinkham, they drifted off to sleep one by one. They were so certain of their security that none of them even remained on guard. The night passed by, and they awakened early in the morning. The Llano Kid replenished the fire and Blackie fixed up some breakfast. Pinkham, weary and stiff, was relieved of the thongs that had held him fast during the night and, when the others had finished eating, he was given some breakfast.

"Nothin' to do now but wait," said Blackie to his companions, as they settled down after breakfast. "By tonight we'll know jest whar we're at. Yo' think yore darter 'll come all right?" he asked Pinkham.

"I hope to God she doesn't!" swore the banker fervently. "But I guess she will, though," he added with a touch of pride.

"We don't aim to hurt the gal," asserted Jake Savage. "Leastwise, not if yo' come back pronto with the money."

"I'll come back with the money," promised Pinkham. "I don't care so much about that. But if my girl is harmed I'll spend every penny I have got, or ever can get, in running you crooks down and seeing that you are hung. Remember that, because I mean it!"

PENELOPE PINKHAM, at that very moment, was riding out of Wallow with Billy Hawkins. Her love for her father had overcome her fears and she had determined to go to his rescue. Her eyes were red from crying and she still was terrified at the unknown dangers that were confronting her. But, despite her inexperience, she was no craven; she had realized, during the sleepless night, that if she abandoned her father to his fate, life to her would never again be worth living. She tried now to cast her apprehensions out of her mind, she tried in vain to think of other things. But her terror persisted and her face was pallid with fear.

"You don't think that they will hurt me, do you?" she asked piteously of Billy Hawkins.

"Of co'se not, miss," Billy replied reassuringly. He realized the state of mind the girl was in and his heart went out to her. "If they do," he added grimly, "the day 'll come when they'll wish they hadn't."

"But they won't, will they?" she persisted.

"Shore not, miss," he told her. "All they want is the money from yore father and when they git thet they'll let yo' go. Jest don't yo' worry none at all, miss."

"I guess I'm not very brave," she

said, trying to smile through her misty eyes.

"Yo're as brave as any gal I know, miss," asserted Billy Hawkins positively. "Yo're goin' through with this even if yo' are afraid. Thet's what I call real bravery."

They came, finally, to the Bar-X and there they found Sally Corbin waiting on the veranda. Sally was somewhat surprised to see Penelope Pinkham. She had been inclined to believe that the banker's daughter would lack the courage to go through with the venture. When Sally saw Penelope's drawn face and the look of frightened appeal in her eyes, her attitude underwent a sudden change. Sally at once became sorry for Penelope Pinkham; she found her dislike and contempt vanishing. There was something real, after all, in the fiber of this girl who had spent most of her life in the East.

Wanderin' Willie, who from a distance had seen Billy Hawkins and the girl ride up, appeared on the scene and joined the other three.

Sally, for some moments, had been absorbed in a reverie and, becoming suddenly alert, she turned to Wanderin' Willie.

"I wish," she said, "that you would have some one saddle my horse."

He looked at her in surprise, for he was not aware that she had planned to go anywhere that day.

"Do yo' want it right away, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "right away. I am not going to let Penelope Pinkham go alone into the hands of these men. I am going with her and I am going to stay with her until she comes back."

An exclamation of gratitude escaped from the lips of Penelope and a look of vast relief came into her eyes.

"Oh, if you only would!" she breathed. "If I had some one with me I wouldn't be so frightened!"

"But yo' cain't go!" protested Wanderin' Willie sharply. "Thar's no sense of yore goin'!"

Billy Hawkins looked rather worried, but, sensing the relief of Penelope Pinkham, he maintained his silence and made no objection to the proposal that had been made by Sally.

"I can go, and I am going!" asserted Sally. "I am not in the least afraid of those men."

Wanderin' Willie realized that her mind was made up and that it would be almost impossible to persuade her to change it. He tried one more argument, however.

"But the fellers who are goin' to meet yo' will be suspicious if they see two gals comin' instead of one," he insisted. "They'll think thet yo're aimin' to trap 'em somehow, and they may not show themselves."

"I guess they won't be any more afraid of two girls than they would of one," said Sally, overriding the objection. "Anyway, I'm going. That is all there is to it. I will go down to the corral and get my horse myself," she said.

She dashed off, and Wanderin' Willie went after her.

"It's jest the sort of a thing a gal like yo' would do," he told her as he saddled her horse. "Yo're a wonderful gal, Miss Sally, and—"

The look of his eyes finished the sentence for him, and it brought a blush to her cheeks.

"If any of them fellers as much as lays a finger on yo'," he told her before she rode away with her companions, "they'll have to git hawses with wings to git away from me."

SALLY CORBIN was silent for awhile as they galloped westward from the Bar-X; she was thinking of Wanderin' Willie. She would show him that she, too, was unafraid; that she would go smiling into a situation from which Penelope Pinkham was inclined to shrink with terror. At the same time she would be helping Penelope for whom she really was sorry. The ordeal ahead was one from which

any woman might well draw back. Sally Corbin was fully aware of the dangers that she so carelessly was defying. The three riders, late in the afternoon, came to a wide and open plain. On the farther side of it they saw the fringe of a forest.

"We'll leave the road hyar," said Billy Hawkins, "and skirt south along the edge of the woods fer a couple miles. Then we'll be at the place whar we gotta wait fer the fellers who are goin' to be thar to meet yo'."

The two girls followed the lead of the young cow-puncher, who finally came to a halt under a large tree that stood at some distance from the beginning of the thick woods. They had been there for perhaps a half hour when two men, rifles under their arms, emerged from the forest.

"Thar they are," said Billy Hawkins. "They're the same two fellers thet got th' drop on yore daddy," he added to Penelope.

She was white and trembling and practically incapable of speech.

"Buck up, Penelope," said Sally cheerfully, "and don't be afraid. We will get out of this all right."

Jake Savage and the Llano Kid were close at hand by this time and when they were a few yards away they halted.

"I thought yo' was only goin' to bring one gal," barked Savage suspiciously. "What fer did yo' bring two of 'em?"

"It's thisaway," explained Billy Hawkins. "One of 'em come to keep the other company."

"Which is the gal of the hombre thet we're holdin' fer ransom?" queried Savage.

"This hyar one is Miss Pinkham," said Billy, indicating the frightened Penelope. "And this hyar one," he added, "is Miss Corbin."

Savage and the Llano Kid whispered for a moment and then, their guns carefully balanced, they advanced closer.

"I reckon it 'll be all right," said Savage with a grim smile. "Yo' kin vamose, feller; come on, gals," he added, "while me and the Kid hyar take yo' fer a leetle ride."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### AT LONESOME BUTTE.

ANOTHER night and another day had gone drifting into the limbo of vanished time.

Not far from the foot of the trail that led up the precipitous side of Lonesome Butte there was a fire burning and, around the fire, three men were gathered. One of them was Knowles, Sheriff Dumbarton's deputy, and the others were Tom Johnson and French Louis, from the Bar-X.

The fire was burning brightly and the flames seemed to give an extraordinary livid hue to the red pate of the bulky officer of the law. Knowles was eating his evening meal while the other two, apparently through with that pleasant diversion, were squatting by the fire and smoking. The deputy had been in Wallow during the day and had arrived back at the butte late at night; now, between mouthfuls, he was telling his companions of the events that had been transpiring in town.

"Pinkham came ridin' into Wallow early this mawnin'," he said, "and he hardly stopped long enough to speak to any one. I wasn't thar then, of co'se, but they told me all about it. He stops at the bank and goes in and counts himself out twenty-five thousand as though it was a fistful of nickels. He don't even wanta stop to eat no breakfast because he's so afraid of what 'll happen to thet gal of hisn. Dumbarton gits him to sit down and eat a little grub, though. Believe me, boys, the town's excited. When Penelope Pinkham went out to give herself up to the outlaws, Sally Corbin went with her. What d'ye think of thet?"

"Mees Corbin?" French Louis asked excitedly. "Why for she go?"

"Jest because she didn't wanta see the other gal go alone," explained Knowles. "They were sayin', too, that Pinkham was gettin' ready to foreclose on the Bar-X when he got roped in by these crooks."

"Sally Corbin is some gal!" exclaimed Tom Johnson enthusiastically.

"Yo're right she is," agreed Knowles heartily.

The three watchers from Wallow were grouped on one side of the fire, away from the smoke. Apparently sure that no one was likely to climb the bluff, they made no effort to conceal their presence. Lounging there and talking about the absorbing events of the past few days, they were unaware of the stealthy sounds behind them, or if they heard, they failed to recognize the noise.

From a few yards away, Blackie Dunham barked an order: "Stick 'em up, quick—we got yo' covered!" Two confirming growls from Babe Medford and the Llano Kid proved to the startled deputy and his men that they were indeed trapped.

In a few moments Knowles and the Bar-X punchers were disarmed and tightly trussed near the fire. Blackie Dunham grinned gloatingly at them, enjoying their resentful expressions. But he quickly recalled himself to the business in hand, and turned to his two henchmen.

"Babe," he said, "yo' stay hyar and guard these three hombres. The Kid and I'll go on up and get the gold. We'll leave the hawses back thar in the thicket till we've got the stuff and are ready to travel."

Babe started to protest, but Blackie and the Llano Kid had already started on the trail up the bluff, and he recognized the wisdom of keeping watch over the three "guards," though there was small chance of their escaping from the tight and expert lashings.

As the sound of his companions' footsteps died away, Babe began to grow a bit uneasy. The loud-spoken courage that he possessed was, to a large degree, spurious; it was, as a matter of fact, mostly braggadocio and so was manifest only when he was in the company of other men. Placed upon his own initiative, the Babe was without much stamina.

It soon occurred to him that he was standing in the light and so made an excellent target for any one who might be loitering in the vicinity. He looked nervously around him, but his eyes, blinded by the light of the fire, could penetrate only a short distance into the surrounding blackness. He knew that there was no one out there, of course, but nevertheless he felt thoroughly uncomfortable.

HE decided to leave the immediate vicinity of the fire and stretch out on the turf back in the darkness. He would be able to see the three captives all the more distinctly, as a matter of fact. They all were tightly bound; there was no possibility that any one of them might get free; and, in the event that one of them did liberate himself, a bullet from a rifle would lay him low at once.

Babe, figuring out all these things, drifted a few yards back into the darkness and then sat down, keeping his eyes fastened on the three prostrate figures by the fire. He had been seated there for perhaps five minutes when he felt the end of a cold, hollow tube pressed against the back of his neck.

"Don't yo' move or make a sound," a strange voice whispered in his ear, "or I'll blow yore head off. Leastwise, don't move until yo're told to."

Babe Medford turned cold with fear and he was almost afraid to indulge in the slight movement that the process of respiration demanded. He felt a hand remove his gun from his holster. Then he heard the whispering of several voices behind him. Inasmuch as the muzzle of the gun was still pressed

against the back of his neck, he did not consider it expedient to turn his head. Cold perspiration was now rolling down his face. It tickled the end of his nose, but he bore the irritation in silence. He felt his gun being slipped back into his holster again. Whoever had taken it out had undoubtedly removed the shells.

"Now," continued the whispering voice behind him, "git up and stroll out into the light of the fire again jest as if nothin' had happened. Stay right thar until yore two friends come down off the butte. When they come down, jest act as if everything was all right. And remember, hombre," the unseen whisperer added, "thet thar ain't no way fer yo' to escape. No matter which way yo' might run, yo'll run plumb into the muzzle of a rifle. Now, then, feller, jest wander out thar in the light and jest act natcheral. Onless, thet is, yo' wanta die suddenlike."

Babe Medford lacked the slightest inclination to "die suddenlike." Obediently he rose to his feet and proceeded to exhibit his talents as an actor. He walked nonchalantly out of the darkness and into the area that was illuminated by the dancing flames of the fire. He tried frantically to figure out just how he would act naturally.

At last he decided that he very probably would go over and poke Red Knowles with one of his feet, and so he hesitatingly stepped over and did that very thing. Knowles growled so ferociously at him, however, that the overwrought Babe quickly retreated.

He felt a little bit weak in the knees, did Babe, and he wondered if it would be natural for him to sit down by the fire. He finally sat down, slowly and cautiously. After awhile he got up and ambled around the fire a bit, being careful, exceedingly careful, not to make any gesture that might appear like the beginning of a bolt for freedom.

It seemed hours before he heard the rattling of loose stones that indicated that his two companions were on their way down the trail. As a matter of fact, not more than a half hour elapsed from the time Blackie and the Llano Kid started up the trail until they stepped again into the little area that was lighted by the fire. Blackie had a little sack on one of his shoulders and he wore a broad smile of satisfaction. The Llano Kid, too, appeared to be in chipper spirits and his sombrero was pushed exceptionally far back on his sleek head. Blackie looked at the Babe and he started back in alarm.

"What the hell's wrong with yo', Babe?" he asked. "Yo' look as though yo'd seen a flock of ghosts!"

"Thar's nothin' the matter with me a-tall," the Babe protested. "I had a little pain in the stomach, thet's all. I reckon it must 'a' come from somethin' I ate." He swore fervently. "Thar ain't a thing the matter with me. I feel as fit as a fiddle."

Blackie regarded him suspiciously for a moment and then, having no reason to disbelieve his companion, dismissed his vague fears from his mind.

"We got the stuff," he said jubilantly. "Thar's nothin' to do now but to git agoin' and join the other fellers agin."

BLACKIE had abandoned his scheme to double cross his own friends and get away alone with the ten thousand dollars in gold. He was perfectly willing to split his ten thousand and be cut in on the division of the twenty-five thousand which Pinkham had consented to pay for his release. It might not be quite as profitable for Blackie, with Jake and the Kid getting an extra rake-off for picking up the banker, but it would be decidedly safer. He had no desire to shoot it out with his two companions.

The horses were tethered back in the darkness and the Babe lingered near the fire while his two companions started in the direction of the animals. Then, because he had no other alternative, Babe was about to follow them when

he suddenly thought of the three prisoners.

"Are we goin' to leave these fellers tied up hyar, Blackie?" he asked. "They're li'ble to catch their death o' cold lying out in the open."

Babe was anxious to curry favor with his unseen foes, and to delay as long as possible the sudden blast of leaden hail which he expected at any minute. Blackie, decidedly puzzled by the strange appearance and unnatural attitude of his companion, stalked back into the firelight.

"What d'ye think we're goin' to do, Babe?" he asked. "Stick around hyar and build a house over these hombres? What's the matter wid yo', anyway?" he asked menacingly. "Yo' look to me as if yo' was scared stiff."

"Me scared!" exclaimed the Babe contemptuously, infinitely more frightened than he had ever been before. "What would I be scared of?"

"Nothin' thet I kin think of," replied Blackie scornfully. "Sometimes, though, men are jest natcherally yeller."

"Not me, Blackie," protested the Babe. "I ain't yeller."

"Well, let's git agoin'," urged Blackie impatiently. "Leave them hombres layin' right whar they are."

There was nothing else for the Babe to do, so he started back into the darkness with his two companions. Their horses were tied in a little thicket some distance away from the fire; they had dismounted sufficiently far away to enable them to creep up stealthily and surprise Red Knowles and the other two watchers at the fire. Babe did not expect to live from one moment to the next. He was so frightened that his teeth chattered audibly and he trembled like a man shaken with the ague. Even in the comparative darkness, Blackie became aware of Medford's inexplicable state, and gave vent to his indignation and contempt.

"Babe is shiverin' fit to jiggle his teeth out," he said to the Llano Kid with a little chuckle. "Now thet the danger's all over, he's plumb scared to death."

"People git that way sometimes," observed the Kid charitably. "Why, I've even had it happen to me!"

Which testimony, coming from a boy of twenty-two, could not be denied by Blackie.

"I ain't took no ways, 'cept with a chill," asserted Babe. "A feller ain't responsible fer his health, is he?"

There was silence, then, as they hastened toward the copse in which their horses had been left. Blackie plunged into the thicket first with the other two close on his heels. Suddenly, they seemed to be surrounded by men. There were two sharp reports which echoed back from the towering wall of the butte and a moving shadow that had been the Llano Kid merged with the darkness of the ground and moved no more.

A confused mass of men hastened toward the fire at the foot of the butte, and came into the light. Blackie Dunham and Babe Medford held their hands high in the air; their faces were haggard.

"Untie Red and the other two fellers," ordered Wanderin' Willie. "Then tie Blackie up and tie him tight. Now yo' two," he said to the freed Johnson and French Louis, "take Blackie back to Wallow and turn him over to Dumbarton. And take that sack of gold with yo' when yo' go."

Then Wanderin' Willie turned to the cowering Babe Medford and fixed him with a baleful eye.

"Git the rope fer this hombre, boys," he commanded. "We'll settle his score right hyar and now!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE OUTLAW'S CAVE.

SILAS PINKHAM, in accordance with his promise to Jake Savage, had returned with the ransom which the desperadoes had demanded

as the price of his liberty. He had ridden hard for hours after he had left Wallow, his one concern being to deliver the money and rescue his daughter from the dangerous situation that she was in. He had been concerned, too, for Sally Corbin who, despite his treatment of her, had gone to the aid of Penelope.

While Pinkham had not been aware of the fact, he had been seen on his way back to the cave by Blackie and his two companions, on their way to Lonesome Butte. Blackie, in fact, had lain in wait with his friends, in order to make certain that Pinkham would come through.

The banker had expected to leave the cave with the two girls the moment the money had been delivered, but he had found to his bitter disappointment that he had overestimated the honor of the gang he was doing business with. He had found the cave occupied by the two girls and two of the crooks. Jake Savage was on guard with Jeff Dalton.

For some reason or other, Pinkham was not as much afraid of Savage as he was of Dalton. Savage, while a brutal appearing specimen, had displayed a certain tendency to decency during the contact that Pinkham had had with him. In fact, he was about to turn the girls over to Pinkham when Jeff spoke up.

"It might be just as well, Jake," Dalton said, "to hold thet hombre and the gals hyar until Blackie and the rest git back."

"I don't see no reason fer that," Jake had objected. "The feller has brought the money and thet's all we asked of him, isn't it? Why not let him go now?"

"He might spill the beans somewhar along the road," complained Dalton, "and spoil the whole game. Besides," continued Dalton with a smirk, "it ain't every day thet we kin enjoy the companionship of such a nice pair of gals."

"Listen, Savage," said Pinkham. "I've carried out my part of the agreement and it's certainly up to you to carry out your part. I haven't done any squealing, have I? If you let me take the girls and go now, we won't be able to get back to Wallow until early in the morning and by that time, I expect, you fellows will be on your way."

Jake, however, had been considering the objections raised by Dalton and he had decided that, after all, a little caution would not be amiss.

"I reckon yo' better stay along hyar fer a few hours, hombre," he said. "A leetle delay won't hurt yo' none and it might save our necks."

"I'll be damned if I'll stay!" swore Pinkham violently. He was unarmed, but he picked up the most convenient missile that came to his hand, a loose rock that was on the floor of the cave.

"Put it down!" roared Jeff, pulling out his gun.

But the banker, exasperated beyond all thought of consequences hurled the rock at Dalton and caught him squarely in the face. The desperado went down unconscious.

Savage shouted a curse at Pinkham and leaped toward him. Pinkham fought gamely, but soon went down before the onslaught of the ruffian, who quickly had him bound and helpless. Pinkham was breathing hard and glaring at the more or less unruffled Savage.

"This is a fine way to treat a man," the banker exclaimed.

"It's as much yore fault as it is mine," said Savage. "I reckon I'll have to keep yo' tied up now till the gang gits back agin."

PENELOPE was in tears and was incapable of making any protest; Sally was outraged at the treatment they were being given, but she knew that it was best not to make any protest.

It was some time before Dalton revived, but when he did, he was in an ugly mood. He went outside of the

cave into the growing dusk, to wash the blood from his face.

When he returned and stepped into the glare of the fire, he looked doubly menacing and dangerous.

"I oughta polish yo' off right now," he said viciously to Pinkham. "Yo' oughta be taught thet yo' nor nobody like yo' kin stand up to a hombre like me."

He drew his gun and stood poised over Pinkham for a moment as if he were deliberating whether or not to put an abrupt end to the life of the banker. A scream from Penelope startled him; then he threw her off roughly as she tried to cling to his arms.

"So yo' don't want yore father killed," Dalton said with a grin. "I kin see very plain thet yo' don't. Well, then, honey, yo' and I might sorta make a bargain. S'pose I don't kill yore father? What then, huh?"

"You rotten scoundrel!" exclaimed Pinkham to Dalton. "If you as much as touch that girl I'll—"

"You'll what?" growled Dalton insolently. "I don't reckon, feller, thet yo'll do a single thing. Yo'll jest stay right thar and I'll make love to her right in front of yo' if I please!"

"Thet's enough of thet stuff, Dalton," said the gruff voice of Jake. "We made a bargain with thet thar hombre and we oughta keep it. Anyway, we shouldn't go pickin' on the gal. She did us a favor and we oughta consider thet a little."

"What's the matter, Jake?" asked Dalton. "Yo' ain't jealous, are yo'? Thar's a gal fer yo', too, if yo' want one. A fine blonde, too, she is. But me, I like gals with them snappin' black eyes and thet long black hair."

He advanced slowly toward Penelope who, with wide and frightened eyes, slowly retreated. She backed into the wall of the cave and he was close upon her. Then with the lightning stroke of a cat's paw, she reached out one hand and whipped the gun from Dalton's holster.

"Get back," she cried, "get back or I'll kill you!"

Sally was close to where Penelope was standing. She cast a quick glance at the Eastern girl, then like a flash, she wrested the gun from her trembling hand.

"Hands up!" Sally said. "Both of you!"

The hands of Dalton and Savage went over their heads and, at the same moment, Penelope Pinkham slumped to the floor of the cave in a dead faint.

Then for hours, without the quiver of an eyelid, Sally Corbin kept watch on the two men. She made them keep their hands raised until they pleaded pitifully for permission to lower them. She would not grant it, however, because she knew that she could not trust them.

"Never mind, Jake," growled Dalton in a moment of exasperation. "It won't be long before Blackie and the other two are back and then we'll have our turn. Those gal's 'll wish they was dead before I get through with them."

But, early in the morning, they heard a crashing sound outside and then Sally saw Wanderin' Willie loom in the entrance to the cave. The moment she saw him, the gun she had been holding slipped from her hand and she felt herself slipping away into the darkness.

THEY were alone in the cave together when she opened her eyes again.

"I sent them all away," Willie told her.

"But where am I?" she asked. "What happened?"

And then he told her how he had trapped the three outlaws at the foot of Lonesome Butte.

"They thought," said Wanderin' Willie, "thet only Red Knowles and two boys from the Bar-X were watching there. Red and Johnson and French Louis took good care to make themselves visible. It was our plan to

let them be captured, so that Blackie would think that the way was clear. You see, Red and his two pals were only a decoy; the rest of us, at all times, were hidden where we could await the moment that Blackie would appear on the scene and capture Knowles and the other two. It worked out, Sally dear," said Wanderin' Willie, "it worked out. Your money, right now, is safe in Wallow."

"But how, my dear," she asked him, "did you ever find your way out here?"

"We threatened to throw a rope around the neck of a feller they call Babe," he explained, "and he was glad to show us the way."

"And they have all gone now?" she asked.

"Yes," he told her. "They're all on their way back to Wallow, and I reckon thet to-night the sheriff 'll turn his back agin. And then they'll start on a longer journey than they ever took before."

"And you?" she asked. "Are you going on journeys any more?"

"Never again," he told her gently. "I'm goin' to stay with yo' for the rest of my days."

THE END.

## *The Cats of the Resaca*

THE cats of the steam sloop-of-war Resaca were famous in every deep-sea forecastle for many years; they brought bad luck with them and gave the ship such an evil reputation that the jack tar who got a billet on her was regarded as a doomed man.

The first cat was shipped at Portsmouth, and was washing her face on deck one fine morning when she vanished like a burst bubble. The next day her master, the boatswain, fell overboard and was drowned.

Her successor, a big tortoise-shell tom from Port au Prince, though not a nervous feline, took fright at an American visitor who came aboard at Callao and leaped into the sea. The visitor was taken ill a few minutes later and expired before he could be taken ashore.

An apprentice boy went ashore at Valparaiso and brought back a white pussy with blue eyes. She was killed by the dockmaster's dog the following day, and the apprentice was found in an alley stripped of clothes and money, with a knife in his back.

For awhile after that no one dared to bring a cat on the Resaca, but when the ship reached Talcahuana the officer of the starboard watch remarked: "What's a ship without a cat?" and introduced number four, a black beauty with green eyes. She waged war on the rats, and one day a big gray fellow got away from her and escaped to the deck. In her mad race to recapture him she fell into a fit and died. Half an hour after the dead cat was sorrowfully thrown overboard, her owner staggered against the bulwarks, clawing frantically at his throat with both hands and crying: "All throttled here!" He died before help could reach him.

No other cat was ever allowed on the Resaca. *Minna Irving.*

# Beyond the Draw

**By DON WATERS**

*The road had grown so large it had forgotten him, thought old Pop Green — but the aged pump attendant had not forgotten the railroad*

*He heard a crash and a grinding racket from the direction of the bridge*

WITH flashing side rods, a glint from her nickeled cylinder heads, a dazzling silver glare from her electric headlight, the ponderous locomotive straightened on to the down grade toward the bridge. Her markers gleamed bright; the reflection from the afterglow of the sunset shimmered off her number plate, shone glinting yellow on her polished brass flag holders. The crack train of the division, the exhibition engine of the road, hauling a solid, all-steel train of sleepers, was stopping at Sandy River.

A sweet sight that, the Sky Line Limited swinging around the curve, her big, high-wheeled locomotive running fast, with a gray wisp of smoke lipping out the stack, trailing back over the long train. A sweet sight that, to the old pump man standing, lantern in hand, beside the Sandy River pump shanty, watching her coast down the grade toward the bridge.

A couple of white puffs floated back from her whistle. *Boot! Boot!* Low, vibrant, the sound of her recognition signal answered his swinging lantern. From under her trucks along her train, little spurts of fire streaked out as the brake shoes clamped hard on the spinning wheels. The Sky Line Limited slowed down, crossed the bridge, and came to a stop before the pump shanty.

A porter opened a door. Old Pop Green clumsily clambered up the high step, leaned out the vestibule, waved his lantern.

*Whoot! Whoot!* The engineer answered the signal with two short toots on his whistle. Then harsh, staccato, the exhaust, *Wham! Wham! Wham!* blurted out as the locomotive stretched

out the drawbars on her heavy train. She slowly gathered way, and with her exhaust blaring harsh and reverberating on the air of the quiet spring evening, moved up the grade. It took all of two miles for the train to accelerate, get up her speed again.

Hardly had she begun to run fast when she came to a stop at a little country town five miles above Sandy River. There was no mail loaded nor unloaded, no passengers got on, and but one alighted. Pop Green, the Sandy River pump man, climbed down to the ground. From up in the cab, the engineer waved his hand at him as the Limited moved away, gathered speed. The twin rubies of the red marker lights on her observation coach vanished around a curve, the rustling shuffle of her exhaust became fainter and fainter. Five minutes later, a half-heard, faraway crossing blow, *who! who! whoohoo!* trembled on the night.

The Sandy River pump shanty is not a scheduled stop for the Sky Line Limited, neither is the "one-horse" town five miles above; yet each night, that crack train now makes both. An open secret, those stops, shared by both employees and officials. It costs money to bring a long string of heavy coaches to a stop, costs more to start them again.

Often the passengers on the Limited wonder at this. Often, too, visitors up in the superintendent's office wonder at the sight of a brass plate hanging conspicuously on the wall, strung up by a piece of bell cord; a circular polished disk with a series of crudely drilled holes around its edge. It seems out of place there, foreign and odd. As odd, perhaps, as the little old man from the Sandy River pump shanty who sits in the observation coach of the crack train of the division each evening for a short five-mile ride.

Totally unrelated these two things seem, yet the one is the reason for the other. Both witness the fact that a modern railroad, with all its speed and efficiency where each second counts, still finds time for sentiment.

A FAINT, faraway *who! who! whoo! whoohoo!* sounded. The Sky Line Limited had just gone past a few minutes ago. Silence fell, broken only by the chorus from the frogs in the ditch alongside and the half-heard rumble of the river running against the abutments of the bridge a hundred yards below.

Old Pop Green stood in the doorway of the pump house looking to the westward across the bridge where the afterglow of the sunset faded from the sky. A star showed; night was falling. It would soon be time to leave. In an hour, perhaps not for several hours, the local would come along, stop. He'd get aboard and ride back home as he had for years. To-morrow he'd come down to Sandy River on the morning local, a humdrum, monotonous day before him like a thousand of other humdrum days he'd put in at the Sandy River pump shanty.

The old man went inside, lit the big kerosene hanging lamp, and looked around him. The pump house was neat and clean. The pump was painted a garish red, its brass piston rod polished. Not a sign of grease nor dirt showed on the cement floor or the whitewashed walls. The tools were neatly racked on the wall. A methodical man, the Sandy River pump attendant; his place showed it.

He opened the door of the small boiler. The kindling was laid all ready for a fire. The thought struck him, he hadn't fired for up over two weeks. The Sandy River pump job was getting to be an easy berth. There really was no use to keep a man here.

His eyes fell on a long crowbar set on a couple of hooks on the wall. He shook his head at the sight of that, the bridge turntable bar. Sandy River was a drawbridge. That was part of his job, to open the draw for passing boats.

"Passing boats," he muttered. How few there were now.

Once upon a time, ten years ago, there had been traffic on the river. Big steel barges with scarce a foot clearance in the draw, loaded with brick from the brickyard above; long rafts of logs from the woods; twice a week a stern-wheel steamer went through. But these were things of the past. The steamer made its trips no more. There were no timber rafts coming down, for the timber had all been cut. And the brickyard on the river bank, it had fallen into ruins. The river had flooded the clay pits during high water. They never had pumped them out, had quit operating the plant. The big barges lay tied up to the rotting wharf.

A thin trickle of dripping water attracted his attention. He recognized the sound. It came from the tank across the tracks. A little leak. He'd refrained from calking that leak, his only excuse for starting the pump to fill the tank.

For it was seldom now an engine stopped for water. All the passenger locomotives were equipped with chutes, and watered as they drove along. No need to stop to refill their tanks. Long troughs set between the tracks had taken the place of old wooden tanks and spouts. The freight engineers, mindful of their long drags, and the grade to negotiate on either side of Sandy River bridge, were reluctant to stop. Only in case of emergency would an engineer take a chance on having to double his train over the grade.

Pop Green opened a bundle of newspapers that had been pitched off from a passing train that day, cut the string which bound it. He drew his big armchair under the lamp, put on his steel-rimmed glasses and prepared to read the daily happenings of the world. Slowly he read. Another plane attempting the transatlantic passage had been given up for lost. Two men and a woman had flown out into the night, high above a sullen ocean, dwindled from the sight of men and vanished into the unknown.

He shook his gray head. "Too bad, too bad," he muttered at the failure of this latest bid for fame and glory. "Why do they attempt it?" he asked himself half aloud. "Why do men risk their lives when they might be safe and comfortable at home? It's beyond me."

Another item met his eye. An army aviator had raised himself higher than ever man had been in the history of men, flown up and up, in widening spirals, up into the cold of the thin, rare atmosphere where men were never made to live. He'd broken the world's altitude record, his oxygen had given out. He was dead when his plane reached the ground.

The paper sagged down into the old man's lap. Behind his glasses, his eyes grew far-sighted, a thoughtful expression crossed his face. Out in the world, men were adventuring, pitting themselves against the might of nature, climbing up into the skies, roaring across the wide waters, conquering space, annihilating time, their lives as pawns, glory as their reward.

THE paper slid to the floor. He looked around the narrow confines of the Sandy River pump shanty. He knew every board in it, every nail almost. For twenty years, he had kept vigil here, a quiet, uneventful fifth of a century. Nothing happened here. Out in the world, men were playing for big stakes, gambling grandly with death. Out in the world, he might have done some of those things, he might have been somebody, done something. He was too old now.

Sitting with his eyes half closed, Pop Green's memories traveled back over the pathway of his life. He had never amounted to much. He'd gone to work on the section when he was scarce a man grown; he'd become section boss. Once he had been cited for having the prize section of the road.

A flush of pride spread across his lined and wrinkled face. Once the Sandy River pump house had been selected as the best kept on the system. The old man remembered with a fine thrill of pride, how the general manager of the road had complimented him on its appearance. He still had the yellowed issue of the monthly company magazine that featured his picture standing before the pump house door.

He'd never got another mention although he still took the same pride in the flowers around the shanty and the same care of the premises. The road had progressed beyond such small things. Why, they even grumbled about sending him a bushel of lime to whitewash the stones before the place. He'd ordered it two months ago, it hadn't come yet.

No, the old man reflected, the road had become a vast, impersonal machine. Was there no romance and adventure left in it? The automatic block signals had taken the hazards from the running of trains. Wrecks and collisions were few now. They had installed crossing warnings, swinging lights and ringing bells at every grade. Seldom a smash-up at a road crossing occurred.

The green and yellow block signals led the trains safely over the rails. The red danger signal was an imperative stop, not to be disregarded. Even if an engineer dropped dead in his cab, his engine could not pass a red light, for an automatic control would set the air on engine and train, set it hard without a touch of human hands, drag the train to a stop safely.

A long drawn-out *whooo!* brought the old man out from his reverie. He carefully folded his newspapers, set them on the bench.

"She's early to-night," he said to himself.

With a last look around, he blew out the light, picked up his lantern. A rattle of wheels sounded as he stepped out and locked the door. A minute later, the local stopped. Pop Green walked back, got into the caboose. The train started.

The conductor called down from the cupola above in a hesitant tone: "Oh, Pop, I just got a notice to-day! Come on up. I want you to read it."

The old man stiffly mounted the few rungs to the raised deck above. He held his lantern close to the yellow sheet of paper the conductor handed him.

A flush mounted to his face. He reread the order to make certain. There was no mistake. The trainmaster had given orders for the local to discontinue her usual stop at Sandy River. A hurt look was deep in the old man's eyes when he handed the order back.

"Never mind, Pop," the conductor spoke reassuringly. "I won't pass you up. This new trainmaster is grouching about the few hours overtime we usually check in. He's cutting off every minute he can. A scurvy trick, but we'll stop for you in spite of his orders."

The old man, however, did not answer. To think that he was held in such little respect that it wasn't worth the few minutes' delay to pick him up at night! That showed plainly how much the company thought of the job and of the man who held it. The conductor, making an effort to pass the matter off lightly, for he saw how the news had affected the old man, began a conversation.

"Say, Pop, I see by the papers where they've been having some heavy weather up in the mountains. Regular cloudbursts. A fellow from off the Sky Line division told me that they're having a hectic time of it. Mud sliding into the cuts, fills washing out, a couple of bridges shaky. They got all the extra gangs from the road up there, trying to keep the line open."

Pop Green nodded abstractedly, half-hearing the conductor's conversation above the *click-clack* of the wheels rapping the rail joints. From up ahead, the locomotive's whistle sounded in a

station blow. Pop Green climbed down from the cupola.

"Thank ye, and good night, Jimmy," he muttered to the conductor, passed out on to the caboose platform and alighted.

AS he went up the street to his daughter's home where he lived, he heard the local shunting cars and before he reached the house, they had finished and started away. The local's crew were in a hurry to-night. He stopped in mid-stride as the probable reason flashed through his mind. They were making up the time lost in stopping for him at Sandy River.

He'd not impose on those fellows, it wasn't right. They had a hard enough job without any extra stops. Once the local's crew had plenty of time. Not so many years ago, they were in no rush. But that was before the day of the sixteen-hour law, before the Interstate Commerce Commission and all the restrictions and rules that now governed the running of trains.

He stood for a few minutes before the gate, thinking. Then evidently a solution of his problem struck him for he straightened up, opened the gate and went slowly into the house.

Next morning, when old Pop Green met the local going down, he carried a battered suitcase in one hand, a bag in the other, a newspaper-covered bundle under his arm.

"Hey, Pop, going traveling?" the conductor greeted him.

He shook his head. "Nope, I've decided to stay at the pump shanty from now on," he answered. "I guess I can get a lift in on Saturday. I got grub enough to last till then."

"Be pretty lonesome there at night," the younger man replied.

Pop nodded. "Yep, I guess so, but I'm not going to be a nuisance to anybody. I'm not going to get you fellows in wrong with the trainmaster."

"Listen, Pop," the conductor spoke heatedly. "You're no nuisance, and as for those orders, forget them. We'll pick you up at night, orders or not."

The pump man smiled sadly. "Sure, and I know your heart is in the right place, but you've got your own job to handle, as I have mine. I'll find plenty to keep me occupied. There's a bit o' cleaning up to do that I've been putting off for some time. Painting—"

The conductor interrupted him. "That reminds me, Pop, I've a little jag o' stuff for you to-day. The bridge and building supervisor had it set aboard just before we left."

The old man's eyes brightened. "It's time they gave me something," he said. "It's been ordered for months. This fall weather will soon be over, and it's little painting I could do when winter sets in."

When the local stopped at the pump house, the old man hurried down to the open car. As the brakeman passed out a couple of bags, a half dozen cans of paint, a bundle or two, Pop exclaimed at each.

"Ah, there's paint for the shanty, glass for the window. Here's brushes; and behold, would ye? They've even sent me the lime! Sure, and they won't know the place in a day or two."

Long after the local had topped the hill, old Pop Green gloated over his acquisitions. One by one, he opened the packages. An exclamation of delight escaped him at the sight of a sheet of brass. Now he'd trim his pump. He'd decorate it with brass till it looked like the Sky Line Limited's engine.

He laid the sheet down on his bench, carefully with an old pump head gasket for a template, inscribed a circle on it. Whistling cheerily, he methodically cut around the circle with a cold chisel, filed the rough edges smooth. He fitted it over the pump cylinder head, propped it up with a bit of wood, stood back and surveyed his work, a round brass disk a foot in diameter that glistened like fire in the light of the morning sun.

"A pretty thing," he ruminated. "She sure does look nice."

All morning, the old man worked on it. There was a series of holes to drill, holes that had to be laid out carefully to fit over the cylinder head studs. Hard work that, with a hand brace and a dull twist drill. Noon came with the job still incomplete.

A passenger train thundered across the bridge. As the engine rumbled by the pump shanty, the engineer raised a series of low *boot-boot-boot's* on his whistle. Pop Green went to the door in time to see a bundle of papers and magazines sail down toward him. A warm smile of gratitude spread over his face. The company might neglect him, but the train crews were mindful of his isolation. He watched the train pass up the hill and vanish. Not till then did he become aware that the sky was overcast. A few pattering drops of rain fell.

HE picked up the paper and started inside, glancing up for a moment at the tell-tale on the water tank. It was partway down the side. The tank was a third emptied. That leak must be getting worse—he'd get up there soon and calk it. He'd have to run the pump this evening.

A few minutes later, a thin curl of smoke trailed out of the stack sluggishly, drifted low down, floated across the river. In an hour, the white, intermittent puffs of steam from the stack showed that the pump was working. Old Pop Green sat in his shanty listening to the slow *ca-chug, ca-chug,* glancing up from his paper occasionally at the brass piston rod sliding in and out of the cylinder.

As he looked, the piston rod slowed down, almost stopped. The exhaust became hard and labored. He knew what was wrong. The intake down at the river had clogged. The rain had carried trash and leaves with it and the suction was holding them over the intake strainer. That often happened.

Pop Green put on his raincoat and an old felt hat. He reached up on to the rafters above for a long stick lying across the beams. The drumming of the rain on the roof was loud. He opened the door and looked out at the downpour, a heavy sheet of water that shut out even the sight of the bridge or the river below.

When he got out on the bridge over the intake, he was surprised at the depth of water. Ordinarily the screen was submerged but a foot or two. At times, during long droughts, the river level had even fallen below the intake. Now it was at least six feet below water. He felt around with his pole, pushed and pried, clearing the screen. The tempo of the pump's exhaust changed to normal as it again caught free water.

Pop Green looked over the river. Its billowy yellow surface, a litter of trash and floating timber seen through the gaps between the crossties, swirled below, gurgling, rumbling and menacing.

An hour later when he again went out to clear the intake, the water had risen another foot. A big, uprooted tree had lodged against the structure. Heavy logs bumped the abutments, upended, and twisting and rolling, swept past. The old man looked at the massive concrete pillars, recalled when the new bridge had been built, how they had worked for months sinking their caissons down to bed rock. No danger of this bridge going out like the old wooden trestle had fifteen years ago.

Yet, as he watched, a thin doubt crept through his mind. The draw, that was the weak part. If, by chance, something lodged against it—

He shook his head at the thought. The draw was securely locked on either end by big square steel spuds that fitted into sockets on the stationary part of the structure. It would take a terrible strain indeed to start them. And the center pier that held the turntable was a solid shaft of concrete and steel sunk a half hundred feet below the surface of the water; an earthquake would scarcely jar that.

Yet as he went back to the shanty, he was not entirely at ease. The tank had filled, for a sheet of water splashed down from the overflow. He shut off the pump. Hardly had he done so when the sound of an approaching train came to him. He heard the rumble as it crossed the bridge.

"No. 11," he muttered.

Then he cocked his head in a listening attitude. No. 11 was late to-day. Running fast, the passenger train rumbled across the bridge without slackening speed, and swept up the hill on the other side. Pop Green recalled how once every train had orders to slow down at Sandy River. Not so long ago, there were lights on it, too. But not now. The draw was opened so seldom that the engineers had come to consider it a closed bridge. Often they did not even whistle as they approached. And if they were late, like No. 11 which had just passed, they drove fast across it.

Pop Green shook his head. Risky, that. What if something went wrong? He made up his mind that the next time the bridge and building supervisor came along he'd mention it to him. But what use? They'd just think it the overcautiousness of an old man. Besides what attention would they pay to the words of a pump house attendant? None at all. He was nobody. To make the time, to clip a few minutes from a fast run, to beat a competing road's schedule seemed to be all of railroading nowadays.

JUST before nightfall he again went down and looked at the river. The water had risen at least another foot, and a raffle of debris was piled against the upstream side of the steel structure of the bridge. A couple of feet more rise, and the tracks would be submerged. It had stopped raining, though, and the danger of the river's rising high enough to flood the bridge seemed slight to him. In a few hours, surely, the peak of the flood would be over and the river would begin to fall. The water roared loudly, an ominous sound. He rather dreaded the thought of spending the night here.

As he lit the lamp the feeling came over him once more that the company was not treating him right. Picking up one of the latest papers, he began to read. Most of the front page was given up to the news of the flood in the hills above. The rivers up there were all running bank full, roads were impassable, bridges washed away.

A paragraph met his eye:

> The Sky Line division has managed to keep the trains operating. The officials state that the peak of the flood has passed, and high water may be expected farther along down the road to-day.

So that was the reason for the rise in Sandy River. He glanced at his watch. It would soon be time for the Sky Line Limited and then the local would follow her. But he was not riding the local to-night. No need to get ready to leave.

He sat half dozing in his chair, almost fell asleep. Suddenly he leaped from his seat. Abrupt, loud, the clang of steel striking steel sounded. A grinding, grating racket followed. The crash came from the bridge.

"What the—" Pop ejaculated as he grabbed his lighted lantern and ran out into the darkness.

Down the board footpath between the rails, he ran. Halfway across he stopped, aghast. A big steel wall met his eyes, a slimy mud-covered expanse of rusty, riveted plates angled above him across the draw. And the draw, half outlined in the feeble lantern light, lay cocked up, one end high in the air, the other sagging down into the river. The explanation of how this had happened came to him quickly. An old barge had got away from the brickyard, floated down, struck the draw and knocked it off its pedestal.

He held his lantern over the lock

that had held the draw in line. It was broken off. The same had happened to the other side. The barge was wedged tight into the opening on his side. A clear space, twenty feet of muddy, swift running water lay beyond the rails on the other side.

He stepped back, surveyed the slimy steel in front of him. No chance to get on top of that and flag an approaching train. He caught his breath sharply at the thought—an approaching train! The Limited was almost due.

"The Limited," he muttered. "The Limited coming, and an open draw! If only she's late to-night."

He ran back to the pump shanty. With trembling fingers he lit a red lantern, grabbed a couple of torpedoes. Gasping for breath from his unaccustomed exertions, he stumbled up the tracks, set the lantern between the rails, clamped the torpedoes down a hundred feet farther ahead. That would stop anything from this side. Then back to the pump house, his breath coming fast, his heart pumping hard in excitement, he started to pick up the lantern, hesitated.

"What use?" he said to himself.

For he had made up his mind to try to swim the river, reach the other side of the bridge beyond the opening and flag the special. The lantern would be useless. What then? His time was short. The special would be running fast over the hill. He glanced at his watch. In three minutes she was due. Probably a few minutes late. Unless he flagged her long before she reached the bridge she could not stop. Her wheels would slide on the wet rails; into the river would go the locomotive. A terrible smash-up.

His white lantern stood on the bench before the disk of brass he had cut and polished for the pump head that day. At the dazzle from its shining surface reflecting the light, suddenly he was struck by an idea. He picked up a piece of bell cord, rove it through a hole in the brass plate, looped it over his arm and ran out into the darkness. He splashed through the ditch on the other side of the tracks, stumbled across a weed-grown field.

Upstream along the river bank he worked his way a hundred yards. The thicket of scrub slashed at his face, briers tore his clothes as he pushed along. Once he fell, the brass disk on his arm clanged loudly against a stone. Bruised, a thin trickle of blood running down his cheek where he had been raked by a brier, he reached the edge of the black water, a hundred and fifty yards above the bridge.

HE hesitated, as a great doubt assailed him. It had been years since he had tried to swim. What if he sank? What if he made it and then failed to get up the track in time? As he stood hesitant, from across the river, faint, high up in the sky, a white glow showed for a second, disappeared. That could be nothing else but the glare from the Limited's electric headlight. She was coming, pounding the rails, driving fast through the night, wheeling her string of steel coaches, each minute shoving a milepost behind her, each minute coming closer to that twenty-foot gap in the steel, coming closer to this sullen, gurgling yellow flood that sounded so terrifying to the old man on the bank.

Why take the chance? What would it bring him? The company cared little for him. Why should he attempt the almost impossible for them? But the fellows on that train, the engineer, the fireman, the passengers! Another flash swept across the sky, a long, white finger of light. Old Pop Green drew a deep breath, closed his eyes and leaped.

He struck the water, went under, turned around, struggled to the surface. The old knack of breasting a current came back to him. Choking, sputtering, he was caught in the full sweep of the stream. The bridge—he could make out its loom in the dark-

ness—raced toward him. The weight of the brass plate tied to him hampered his movements.

With all his ebbing strength, he pulled arm over arm, trying to put distance between himself and the bank before he reached the bridge. What if he swept through the draw? A cold dread reached deep into him at the thought. He'd go through and on down, struggling feebly in the grip of the running water. But not for long. Even now, his chest pained sharply, spatters of light danced before his eyes, a roaring was loud in his ears.

Then with an impact that shot a swift stabbing pain through his body, he struck solid against a steel girder. His desperate clutch caught at it, slipped off, caught again. Pulling hard against the tug of the river, he hauled himself up, his feet found an angling bar. Inch by inch, with the rumble of the water growling in his ears, he clambered up on a sloping steel beam. It came to him where he was. He'd missed the bridge, caught the draw.

And then he heard it. *Whaa, whaa, wa-wha-ha!* Like demoniacal, mocking laughter, a crossing blow swept windborne down to him. The sky above was lighted with a cold white light. *To-make-the-time, to-make-the-time, to-make-the-time!* The tune of a fast-running locomotive beat monotonously on the night. Up the hill the Sky Line Limited drove, topped the grade. Pop straightened up, high above the structure of the bridge. The stiff, dazzling beam of light swung, centered on him.

Half blinded in that fierce glare from a million radial candlepower, old Pop Green, hatless, his clothes dripping, balanced himself on his precarious footing. Back and forth, he swung his sheet of brass. The train never slackened speed. He saw the insulators on the cross arms beside the track, shining like serrated rows of jewels, saw the muddy flood below him. The thought of death was strong in him. A few minutes to live, that recurred again and again, a few minutes more, and that thousand-ton missile of steel would drive down, leap the gap below. And he would be no more.

Yet he never ceased his swinging arm. Suddenly, abrupt, explosive, the whistle shrieked, *Waaa! Waha!*

He heard the chattering, complaining squeal of brakes, saw the red sputter of flying sparks from back along the train as the locked wheels slid in an emergency application. Another second, and the stuttering crash of the locomotive's exhaust rattled loud. The engineer had knocked the brakes off the engine, and reversed. From under the coaches, the fire spurted out. The train brakes were still set hard.

A medley of crashing sounds, the air shook with their reverberations from out the stack as the coughing exhaust bellowed heavily.

Old Pop Green saw the sparks cascading up like an exhibition of fireworks. Near now, it was, not two train lengths away from him. He fancied he detected a slight slackening in the speed. A second later, he was certain of it. The Sky Line Limited jerked to a stop. Her pilot stuck four feet out over the river, her front truck wheels were scarce six inches from the ends of the rail. And then it seemed like silence, intensified by the thin piping squeal from the headlight turbine, punctuated by the slow beat of the air pumps on the engine, overlaid by the rushing gurgle of the water below.

STANDING up on the tilting draw of Sandy River bridge, suddenly a thought swept over old Pop Green. A fine thrill of pride ran through him. Silhouetted in the dazzling white glare from the Limited's headlight, he saw the crowd assembled on the bridge head. They were cheering him! A roar raised, the patter of clapping hands sounded. For a brief minute, he who had never heard applause directed at him, thrilled to the swelling, ringing shouts and cheers.

In that brief minute a warm glow of pleasure came over the Sandy River pump house attendant, the roar of the crowd, the applause, the shouts and the cheers, the reward for daring. He had done something; he was no longer a nobody. He was one of them, one of the breed that flirts with death. Not for him the sky-swinging climb into the heavens, nor the drone of plane winging across wide waters. The muddy surface of Sandy River was the scene of his daring, the open draw the place where he had taken the long chance.

Then he felt the girder under him sag, slip, cant down. He heard a groan from the crowd across the open space, saw the boiling, foam-flecked water raise up to meet him. The barge was shoving the draw off its support. Slowly it sagged down. He was level with the headlight now. A minute later he was a foot below its beam. He saw the attempts they were making to reach him, to help. Futile attempts. They had found a pole somewhere, shoved it toward him. The river clutched at it, jerked it away from them, sucked it off into the darkness. A bell cord looped through the air, fell short, flipped downstream.

Pop Green drew himself up farther, the surface of the water was but a few feet away. They were calling encouragement to him. He heard the shouts.

"Hold on, don't give up! Help coming!"

The engineer called over: "Hey, Pop, just a few minutes! The brakeman's gone back to order the wrecker. She'll soon be here."

The water was up to his knees, dragging heavily on his legs. His fingers were cramped from their grip on the sharp edge of the girder. He couldn't last long. The end was near. And yet there were no regrets in his thoughts. He had done what he could; he had taken the long, long chance. But for him, many would have been swept into the everlasting darkness, would have followed the Sky Line's engine into the river to-night.

He couldn't hold much longer. White-faced, grim, he lay hugging the cold, wet steel close, while his brass disk from its pendent loop, swung slowly back and forth a foot above the river. From across the open space they had stopped their futile efforts now. Fascinated, silent, they watched, impotent to help while slowly, imperceptibly, the water rose. Pop Green's head and shoulders alone were above the surface. He heard the startled cries of the watchers opposite. Involuntarily, he flinched and a big log swept past, missing him by a scant six inches.

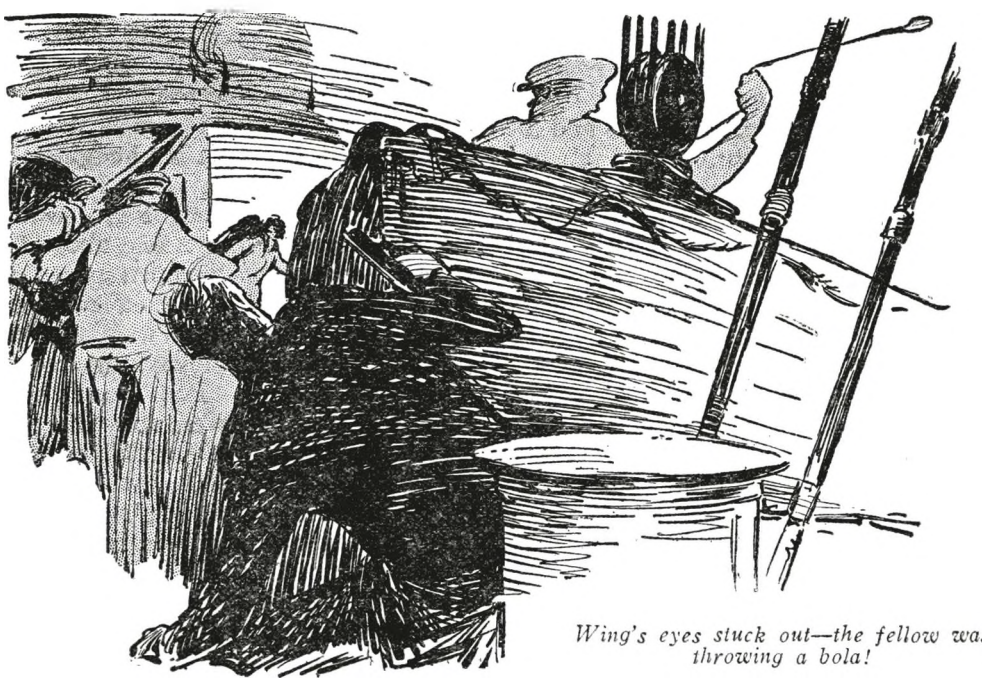
He was tired, his side hurt, he knew he must have a broken rib from where he had struck the bridge. His head felt light and giddy. He no longer saw the crowd twenty feet away. Even the bright glare of the headlight seemed but a silver haze. All his senses were numb, all save the blind, unreasoning sense of self-preservation.

Even that began to wane. What use to hold on? It would be so easy to loose his hold, float free. The river would soon quiet that throbbing side, soon cool that fevered brain. He'd done his work, he only wanted rest.

*Crack! Crack!* Sharp, pistol-like, a couple of reports reached down into his consciousness. He opened his eyes. Beyond the laced and riveted steel side of the bridge, he saw a long, bent neck, like that of some antediluvian monster. Below it, a big hook dangled. The wrecking crane had run over his torpedoes. He heard the whistle screech, a roar of shouts, the quick orders.

He saw the big hook swing out over him, a man riding it, felt strong hands grasp him. He heard the *tut-tut-tut!* of the wrecking crane engine, felt himself raised up away from the clutch of the river. He relaxed. He was safe now. Beyond the open draw, a mighty shout arose.

THE END.



*Wing's eyes stuck out—the fellow was throwing a bola!*

# The Spectral Passenger

***In the hands of pirates, the Stella Maris sails toward the reefs, while Lionel Wing, single-handed, pits himself against the gunmen***


**By FRED MacISAAC**

***Author of " The Press Agent," " The Golden Burden," etc.***


## LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LIONEL WING, exporter, is ordered to take a sea voyage for his health; and the financial problem is solved when one Hernando Sortez commissions him to take a verbal message to Jaime Portala, who lives in a suburb of Rio de Janeiro. The message is, " Let not the sun set until the moon rises."

Aboard the slow Stella Maris, Wing runs into a startling series of mysterious murders. First a Brazilian, Montana, is found stabbed in Wing's cabin. Then a Senhora Veliza, who came aboard with Montana, is strangled in her cabin, while Wing is walking near by with Maria Wenham. An attempt is made to kill Wing himself with a *bola,* an Argentine neck-breaking weapon of two lead balls fastened with a short catgut cord.

Kregan, Mott, and Peterson, New York gunmen, are aboard, but an overheard conversation indicates their innocence of these crimes.

Grimaldi, a hairless repulsive giant who reminds Wing of an octopus, has foretold disaster, and takes ghoulish delight in each one. He identifies Montana as a cousin of the president of Brazil, and names his friends aboard—Sousa, who is attentive to Miss Wen-


**This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 9.**

ham; Gratz, a German coffee merchant; Issoto, Jewish jeweler of Rio; and Augustus Wenham, the girl's father.

Captain Grigsby and Purser Sprowle fear Grimaldi as a jinx, and tell how men who had offended him on past voyages mysteriously died. Wing suspects Grimaldi, but the man always has an alibi.

An attempt is made to fill Wing's cabin with poison gas. His friend, Hank Gifford, a Westerner, suspects Montana was killed by mistake for Wing; and Maria Wenham warns him that somebody on board knows about his message for Sortez.

Grimaldi secretly summons Wenham and forces the old man to surrender a document Senhora Veliza gave him to deliver in Rio. Grimaldi finds the document is blank, but Wenham does not know it.

Issoto receives a code radiogram from New York, and tells Sousa that Wing should never reach Rio. Sousa is jealous of Wing's attentions to Miss Wenham. Hank Gifford is "rushing" Doris Drexel, a New York dancer; but for some reason the Wenhams forbid Maria to have anything more to do with Lionel Wing.

The Stella Maris goes on under forced draft, with five millions in gold in her hold being rushed to Rio. A stoker goes mad and jumps overboard; and finally a storm strikes, which forces them to heave to. During the storm, Wenham is found dead—possibly a suicide.

Under cover of the storm, a group of New York gunmen, aided by Owen, an Englishman who impersonates the captain, seize the vessel, locking the passengers in the deckhouse. Grigsby, Sprowle, the other officers, and Hank Gifford—who packs a gun and has incurred the enmity of Mott, one of the gunmen—are locked in the lazaret. The passengers are disarmed and warned to stay inside.

Wing guesses the pirates' plan—to scuttle the ship and all possible accusers with it, and have the Stella Maris reported as lost at sea. Grimaldi, repulsive as he is, strikes him as the wisest and craftiest ally Wing can get in an attempt to save the ship and all their lives. Grimaldi accepts the alliance, and outlines a desperate plan for reaching the lazaret, but he refuses to take any physical part in it, for all his great size.

Wing goes to the companionway leading to the captain's quarters, and engages Kregan, the gunman there, in conversation. Then, unarmed as he is, he jumps on the gunman, and they engage in a deadly struggle.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### REBELLION.

WING was a bigger and stronger man than Kregan under normal conditions, but he had not fully recovered from his illness, and the yegg was wiry and lithe as a cat. Wing had the advantage of surprise and of leaping upon a man who was sitting down.

For a moment Kregan yielded and then he came back ferociously. Wing stepped on the gun and kicked it behind him. He had his hands on the gunman's throat and he squeezed his gullet savagely. Kregan pummeled him in the stomach and in the face and kicked out with both feet. He was the under dog for a moment, then by a twist got on top and began to bang Wing's head against the stairs, then desisted to drive both fists to the stomach. Kregan's blows were hard and well directed, but weakened rapidly as he was being slowly choked to death. He tore and ripped cruelly and finally abandoned his fighting to grasp the hands which held his throat in an effort to tear them away. Wing clung on with the grip of a bulldog's jaws. He felt his own strength slipping away, but he saw Kregan's mouth opening and the tongue protruding. He saw his col-

or turning purple and he knew he was winning.

A few moments more, Kregan kicked at him, and the kicks hurt Wing terribly. But he must hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Ah!

Consciousness left Kregan suddenly; his body grew limp and Wing laid him on the deck. His own face was cut, his eyes were blacked, his clothes were torn, he was as weak as a rag, but he had conquered. He passed his hands across his forehead. There was something he had to do before he fainted. He must not faint. Kregan was not dead.

Ah, that was it! His eyes fell upon the automatic lying where he had kicked it. He swooped upon it, and fell over from weakness as he stooped. He got upon his feet, and searched the pockets of Kregan for additional clips of cartridges. He found two.

Now suddenly he felt strangely buoyant. Lock him up in the deckhouse like a rat in a trap, would they? Now he was armed! True, he had never fired a gun, but it was simple. All you had to do was to point it.

What next? Should he go back into the passenger quarters and wait to be hunted down, or take the offensive? If he could only get outside on deck. Kregan still lay unconscious, but the blackness was fading from his face and in a few moments he would be conscious and alert again.

He fished the fellow's pockets and brought out a large key. He ran up to the top of the short ladder and tried the door. Locked. Evidently Kregan was placed inside a locked door to hold that part of the deckhouse and, even if he were overcome by a rush, the passengers were still locked in. The key. He fitted it in the lock and it worked. Glory be, it worked! He opened the door and stepped into a small square hall. Directly ahead was the door which led into the captain's cabin and charthouse, to the left a door which opened out on the boat deck.

On impulse he locked the door through which he had passed. Kregan was now a prisoner with the other passengers; at least he was disposed of for a few minutes.

And now he hesitated. To push open the door to the deck would bring him in sight of the bridge and the war would be on. The pirates on the bridge would fire at him, and their cohorts would come running from all sides. One hundred to one he would be lying dead in a couple of minutes. One chance in a hundred. Dare he take it?

But dare he draw back? To reopen the door to the deck below would be to imprison himself again. Kregan was already banging on that door with his fists. He could shoot Kregan and run through the passenger quarters, but they would be after him in a moment. It was too late now for him to join the peaceful passengers; and anyway, if Grimaldi's conjecture and his own were correct, they all were to be sent to the bottom with the ship after the gold was transferred.

IT must be remembered that Lionel Wing was not a soldier, a plainsman or an exceptionally valiant individual. Until this minute he had never been placed where he must fight for his life. His attack upon Kregan had been without premeditation, for he had yielded to a wild and uncontrollable impulse. He had overpowered Kregan, and now he was committed to aggression without possibility of withdrawal. Well, death by bullets was quicker than death by drowning, and it would be a satisfaction if he could account for some of the miscreants.

He squared his shoulders, took a long breath and laid his left hand upon the knob of the door which opened on to the deck. The automatic was ready in his right.

As Wing pushed the door, it was pulled from without. It opened suddenly and the rotund face of Owen,

the false Captain Grigsby, appeared in the doorway.

Wing's astonishment was great, but not as utter as that of Captain Owen-Grigsby whose eyes glared at him as though they would blast him from their sight. Owen's hands were empty. Wing's right, holding the gun, mechanically came up and jammed the muzzle against the big stomach which bulged the blue uniform coat.

Then Wing's eyes danced delightedly. "Come right in," he said blithely. "Come right in, captain."

Owen had to obey.

"May I inquire where you were going?" asked Wing politely.

"Into the charthouse," snarled Owen. "How in hell—"

"Fine, we'll go in together. Wait a minute." He tapped Owen's pockets and drew from the right pocket of his uniform coat an automatic. Now he had two.

"Open the door," Wing invited. Owen drew out his keys, unlocked the door and pushed it open. Lionel pressed both guns against his back.

"March," he snapped. Owen entered and the captor followed.

They were in the captain's sitting room where Wing had had his first interview with Grigsby. A door to the left led into the captain's cabin and the door forward into the charthouse.

Owen swung around and faced him. "Look here," he pleaded. "You're a clever chap, but you can't take this ship. I have thirty men."

"Twenty-eight," retorted Wing. His spirits were exuberant. "I have already accounted for you and Kregan."

"Why don't you throw in with us?" urged the pirate. "I give you my word I'll take you on and your share will be fifty thousand dollars."

"Thanks. That wouldn't repay me for helping to drown a lot of women and children."

"What do you mean?" demanded Owen, stepping closer.

"Stand back! That's the way I got Kregan. Go to the farther side of the room," commanded Wing. "You're going to sink this ship with all on board."

"No, I'm not. I assure you I'm not a bloody murderer," exclaimed Owen as he backed away.

"Well, how were you going to get rid of us?"

"We're going to run the ship on the beach of an island not far away, disable her wireless and leave her. All we need is a few weeks to get away. The world is large and they'll never find us."

"That's what they told you," sneered Wing. "I can see you're not the boss of this outfit."

"Well," declared Owen, "you've got me. Kregan will stop banging on that door in a few minutes, and he'll go down to the lower deck and warn my men. You'll be captured in ten minutes. Better join us. We can use a bold fellow like you."

Wing had been looking around. "I think I'll lock you in your stateroom," he said. "Open the door."

"There's—there's somebody in there," stammered the captain. To prove he was not a liar there came a thumping on the door and a string of oaths in hearty English.

"Who is it?" snapped Wing.

"The second officer."

"Open that door, quick."

MAKING a gesture of helplessness, Owen inserted the key in the door and opened it. Immediately a man catapulted out and threw himself upon the false captain.

"Hey, stop that, he's captured already," exclaimed Wing.

Mr. Henderson's rush had carried Owen to the deck and he had fallen on top of him. Now he looked up, holding Owen pinned to the carpet.

"Who in hell are you?" Henderson demanded of the man with the gun.

"One of the passengers. I want you

to help me retake the ship. Let Owen up," Wing ordered.

"Get up, you blankety blanked son of a sea cook," commanded Henderson. "What shall we do with him, sir?"

Lionel smiled. "Better put him where he put you. He can't get out, can he?"

"I couldn't," admitted the second officer. "In with you, you stinking pirate."

"Wait a minute," said Wing. "See if he has the key of the ship's dungeon or whatever you call it. He has Captain Grigsby locked up there."

"Turn out your blasted pockets," commanded Henderson. "Here it is, sir. In with you now."

Captain Owen marched inside without a word and the door was closed behind him and locked.

"What's that banging outside?" asked Henderson.

"It's another one named Kregan. I got his gun away and that's how I got out of the passenger quarters."

"Good for you, sir. We'd better let him up here or he'll go through the ship and raise the whole crowd. It's a wonder he hasn't thought of it."

Wing smiled. "He's not acquainted with ships. He's a New York gunman."

"He'll be surprised to see who opens up for him," smiled the officer.

"Take one of these guns," Wing commanded. "I've got the key."

He opened the door and covered Kregan who ought to have suspected some such situation, but whose single-track mind seemed to have overlooked it.

They pushed him into the cabin with Owen, where each had a chance to explain things to the other.

"You're a very remarkable man, sir," said Henderson. "Suppose you manage things since you've started so well. My name is Henderson."

Lionel sat down in the captain's desk chair. "Mine's Wing. I'm stumped what to do now, Mr. Henderson. You'd better take command. How did they capture you?"

The Englishman flushed. "Like a lamb," he admitted. "I thought this duffer was Grigsby and was caught napping when he pulled a gun on me. I don't know anything about what happened. How many are there?"

"Owen says thirty. I'm sure I don't know. Some of them were passengers and some are in the crew."

"The bloody pirates! It's the gold they want, of course."

"They have all the passengers locked in the deckhouse, and that's all I know about the matter."

"I heard some talk through the stateroom keyhole," said Henderson. This captain has two navigating officers and they're to meet a ship this afternoon. We'll put a stop to that. The wireless man is in the gang because I heard him reporting to them an hour ago. I think the first and third officers are locked in their rooms on this deck. The first thing is to capture the bridge and then get them out. The keys to the officers' cabins are in this bunch I took out of this fellow's pocket. The man on watch could pot us unless we nab him first, so we'll rush the bridge."

"JUST a minute," said Wing, shamefacedly. "Will you show me how to fire this pistol? I don't seem to get the combination."

Henderson stared at him. Then he laughed shortly. "'Pon my word," he exclaimed. "You capture the pirate skipper and one of his buckaroos, and you don't know how to fire the gun you used on them! That's gorgeous. Shake hands, will you?"

Lionel shook and then the young Englishman explained the mystery of the automatic.

"It must be a quick rush," he went on. "The man on the bridge will shoot the instant he spots us. I'll go first and he may get me, so don't you be squeamish about firing."

"No-o," quavered Wing. There was a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach.

"Well, come on. They'll be missing the skipper."

Henderson opened the door and Wing followed him out on deck. There was a clear view of the bridge, but there was no officer in view.

"He's walked to the other side of the bridge. There's a bit of luck," whispered the seaman. "Come on."

It was ten feet to the bridge which was on the level of the captain's cabin and to Lionel it seemed a mile. The pirate, Foley, was standing on the opposite side of the bridge, a pair of glasses leveled at the horizon. Henderson walked toward him, past the helmsman whose eyes glittered triumphantly, but who dared say nothing.

"Hands up!" exclaimed Henderson in a loud voice. Foley dropped his glasses with a crash and swung about to face two pointed pistols. His jaw dropped and his arms shot upward.

"Good for you, sir," yelped the quartermaster. "Shoot the bleeding pirate."

"Stow your jaw," growled Henderson. "Come with us, Mr. What's-your-name. Search him, Mr. Wing, please."

Wing removed a big navy revolver from the hip of the captured navigating officer who still held his hands on high.

"Now walk quietly to the captain's cabin," commanded Henderson. "Utter an outcry and I'll drive half a dozen bullets into you."

"You win," said Foley, coolly.

They led him into the cabin and after some thought jammed him, also, into the stateroom containing Owen and Kregan.

"I suppose you know you'll all be hanged," Henderson observed pleasantly as he locked the door.

"Now to turn loose the chief and the third officer," he chuckled. "Come on, laddie."

They went on deck again and walked to the officers' cabins, opened that of the chief and found it empty.

"They've taken him below," groaned Henderson. "I suppose the third isn't here either." His supposition was correct. Both chief and third officers had been taken below.

"Most likely the skipper was coming in to get me, too," said Henderson. "You came in the nick of time, my lad."

"What now?" demanded Wing who was thrilling with excitement.

Henderson considered.

"We've got the bridge, and so far they don't know it. We've had all the luck. The quartermaster out there is one of the old guard. I suppose they just overawed the crew. Let's get the wireless man."

"Make him send out an S. O. S. for a warship," cried Wing. Henderson smiled wryly.

"At this minute we are in the least frequented spot in the Atlantic Ocean. I doubt if there is a vessel with wireless within three hundred miles and ours is an old-fashioned, low-powered set. However, we'll nab the fellow and make him try."

The wireless house was located aft, just forward of the funnel, and to reach it they had to climb over stanchions, ventilators and other obstructions and to work their way around life rafts.

The wireless man was captured as easily as Owen and Foley, but, upon consideration, Henderson dared not permit him to send a message.

"I don't know the code, and he might warn the other ship of what's happening here," the second explained. "Come along, young fellow. You'll be hanged with the other pirates."

"I swear to God I wasn't with 'em, sir," pleaded Sparks. He was a thin, pimply, unprepossessing person of about twenty-six.

"You lie," shouted the second officer. "I heard them talking with you

in the captain's cabin. Best lock him in the first officer's room, Wing."

When he was safely under lock and key the pair regarded each other.

"Well," said Henderson, "we're in command of the bridge and the boat deck. We have three guns. Blessed if I know the next move."

"The lazaret?"

HENDERSON shook his head. "If we go below, even for a few minutes, we may find ourselves locked in with the passengers. Look out!"

*Bing!* A bullet had flattened itself against a steel ventilator a few feet away.

*Bing!* A second shot struck nearer at hand.

"Come on, let's get out of range behind the captain's house," cried Henderson. "That fellow is shooting from the crow's nest on the foremast. The battle is on now."

They ran along the deck while three or four more shots were fired at them and then took shelter behind the steel structure of the cabin.

"Our goose is cooked now," said Henderson. "They'll gather and come up from aft, taking cover on this deck. We haven't the ghost of a chance."

A second later they were joined by the quartermaster, who was driven from the wheel by the gunfire, and had to take shelter with them. The sea was still sufficiently rough so that the vessel lurched heavily as she fell off without a guiding hand on the steering apparatus.

"Here's a gun," said Wing. "Can you use it?"

"Give me a chance, sir," pleaded the quartermaster.

"You say we haven't a show, Henderson?" Lionel asked.

"Not if there are a score of them."

"Won't the crew interfere?"

"I doubt it. They are unarmed."

"Then you two hold the fort here and I'll go below and try to get into the lazaret. The officers will fight anyway."

"You can't do it, but you might as well try," said Henderson. "Good luck, old fellow. We'll hold them off here as long as possible."

They shook hands, then Wing gripped hands with the quartermaster who chirped, "Best o' luck, sir."

"Remember they're pirates, so shoot to kill," warned the second officer.

Wing nodded, unlocked the door leading down into the passengers' deckhouse, waved his hand, and closed and locked the door after him.

He paused inside the lower door which he had so casually passed through half an hour before, and which had led him to the big moment of his thirty years of life. He thrust his gun in his pocket, opened the door and stepped into the companionway. Seated on a bench in the hallway were Doris Drexel and Maria Wenham and Doris exclaimed at the sight of him. Maria was pale as death and her eyes were inflamed from weeping, but she managed a little smile of welcome.

On the upper deck a battle was raging. Yet here the passengers were gathered in blissful ignorance that their own fate was in the balance. He saw a group of Brazilians talking and laughing, several women in a corner, and Grimaldi gazing through a window, and puffing violently on a cigarette. Every second was vital, but Maria's eyes drew him.

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am," he began.

"But what has happened to you?" she asked anxiously. "Your face is cut, your clothes are torn."

"Little Boy Blue has been in a fight," observed Doris. "Who did you find to pick it with?"

"I had an accident. I—I fell," he stammered.

"And you got that black eye by bumping into a door," she snapped shrewdly. "We may be dumb, but you don't give us a break, kid."

"I'll run down below and change," he said quickly. "I'll be right back."

"Sounded like shooting up above," said Doris. "The Brazilians claim it's signal rockets. Do you know?"

"No. Excuse me." Despite Maria's look of reproach he broke away and ran down the stairs two decks to the dining salon.

HE knew the pantries were aft of the salon and that the staircase to the lower deck was aft of the pantries. The chefs were at work in the kitchen, the stewards in the pantry and though his curious appearance was noted, no effort was made to question him.

He was cool enough to consider, as he moved swiftly along, the amazing influence of habit on humans. Here was a ship in the hands of pirates, headed none knew where, and the cooks and stewards must be greatly exercised over the situation, yet they were moving about their accustomed duties in their customary manner and did not permit their extreme perturbation to spoil their broth, though their cookery usually did that.

He passed out of the pantry along a narrow passage, slippery from drippings, at the end of which was the door to the ladder to the deck below. He laid hold of the knob and turned it, but the door was locked.

Of course he should have expected this, but he had not, he had taken it for granted that he was running from one desperate mêlée to another. He had come rushing down to rescue the men in the brig, and here was a locked door which put a stop to his whole enterprise. He pounded on the door in his exasperation.

Doubtless the man on guard inside assumed it was somebody from the kitchen after a sack of potatoes, for he heard the key turn in the lock and the door was pushed toward him. There was a beefy man with a revolver in his hand standing at the head of the stairs. It was Mott, whom Hank Gifford had knocked down a few days ago in the smoking room. The gunman recognized Wing instantly despite his disheveled appearance and lifted his gun, but Lionel had him covered; remembering the injunction of the second officer he pulled at the trigger. It did not yield. His inexperience had prevented him from releasing the safety catch.

Mott's gun was coming up and his eyes were deadly. With a yell provoked by hysteria, Wing leaped at him, grasping the fellow's right wrist with his left hand, and endeavored to hit him on top of the head with the metal butt of his own weapon.

"You'd come butting in, would you," gritted Mott who flung his left arm around Wing's middle and tried to force him out of the doorway. They struggled, then Mott's left foot twisted around Wing's right leg, while he tried to break his back with a bearlike, one-armed hug. At the same time, he tried to release his gun hand.

Wing threw himself forward desperately, and Mott, who was standing on one leg, lost his balance and fell backward, dragging his antagonist with him. The pirate uttered a roar as he realized that he was falling head-first down the steep staircase. Wing found himself falling also. He had time to realize that their skulls would probably be crushed against the steel deck below, for the ladder was so pitched that they fell almost perpendicularly. Then they crashed and everything went black for him.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### DESPERATE MEN.

THE brig of the Stella Maris was not intended to be a comfortable chamber. It was the ship's place of punishment and it was bare, almost unfurnished, poorly lighted and inexpressibly dismal. When Hank Gifford

was thrust inside, a couple of hours before the incidents of the last chapter, he saw half a dozen forms dimly outlined and strained his eyes in the murk trying to identify him. A familiar voice revealed one of the inmates.

"It's Mr. Gifford, the passenger," said Purser Sprowle. "You're in good company, Mr. Gifford. Here is the captain and these others are some of our watchmen."

"How do, Mr. Gifford," said the deep voice of Captain Grigsby. "What's happening up above?" The skipper was humped up on a bunk.

"I don't know, captain," replied the ex-cowboy. "I was pretty sick most of the night and very shaky this morning. First thing I knew a couple of fellows were jamming guns in my face and saying would I please come with them. I just came. I certainly didn't expect to meet you gentlemen here."

"Then you don't know anything about the mutiny?" said the captain in a tone of deep disappointment.

"Didn't know there was one, sir. I thought that some bad eggs I had a row with in the smokeroom were taking it out on me personally."

"You flattered yourself," replied Grigsby in a sour tone.

"A band of modern pirates took the ship by surprise during the storm," explained Sprowle. "Sit alongside of me here on the berth. They captured the skipper day before yesterday and they have some actor dressed up to represent him."

"Say, captain, please accept my apologies," chuckled Gifford who was not yet alive to the seriousness of the situation. "I spoke to you when you came along the deck, and you acted as if you didn't care to know me. It must have been the other fellow."

"Doubtless, doubtless," mumbled Grigsby. "Oh, my God." He buried his face in his hands.

"Well," queried Gifford. "Isn't there any way to get out of here?"

"Only the way you came in," replied Sprowle. "This is the ship's prison, man."

"What are they going to do to us?"

"In all probability," said Sprowle gravely, "they'll take the gold out of the ship and load it on some other vessel and then drown us all in this tight little box."

The cheerfulness of Gifford died a violent death. "You mean that?" he demanded.

"Naturally. I am not in the mood for persiflage."

"Then we've just got to get out."

"The walls, deck and ceiling are steel," said the purser.

"Have you any suggestions now?"

Gifford's eyes roamed about. "No-o, not now. When do we eat? I didn't have any breakfast."

"Awwwwr," snarled the unfortunate captain. "Make that fool shut up."

Silence settled in the brig. Two of the steward watchmen were squatting on the deck against the wall. Another was sitting on a berth. One was lying flat on the floor.

"May I ask how they got you, captain?" asked Gifford when he could endure the silence no longer.

GRIGSBY looked up. "If you must know," he said drably, "I came down from my quarters two nights ago about four bells and I was pacing the deck when two men slipped up behind me and pressed a handkerchief saturated with chloroform against my nose. When I woke up I was here. They must have had confederates among the night watchmen or they couldn't have carried an unconscious man down three decks. I found myself in my underwear with these clothes I am wearing lying alongside of me. Evidently they needed my uniform for the impostor."

Gifford nodded with sympathy. "It certainly wasn't your fault."

"I was criminally careless," answered Grigsby harshly. "They had

tried to capture me once and thanks to you I escaped. I should have taken more precautions."

"If you've been here several days they must have fed you," said the practical American.

"Oh, yes. They have sent a tray in a couple of times a day. Two armed men have accompanied the steward."

"That means that some of the stewards are in the plot," declared Sprowle. "The new men, no doubt. It would be a simple matter for a bedroom steward to get a tray of food from the pantry. The checker would assume it was intended for some lady who kept to her cabin."

"Well," said Hank, "armed men or not, we've got to rush them the next time they come in."

"They'll shoot us down like dogs," replied the purser.

"Listen, hombre. It's sort of dark in here and I probably know more about shooting than any of you. They may hit one or two of us, but a sudden rush will disturb their aim and we'll get out."

"Young man," said Captain Grigsby, "you are at sea, not on land. If we should escape from the brig, we would find ourselves on the ship which is in the hands of a score of ruffians with weapons. We are defenseless."

"Well, you said yourself they would probably sink the ship and us with it, so why not take a chance?" demanded Gifford.

The captain gazed at him steadily.

"You're right," he said finally. "There are seven of us here. We'll account for a few of the bloody pirates and die like men instead of rats." He rose. Sprowle and Gifford also arose.

"Men," said the skipper in his old manner. "We're going to rush the jailers when they enter. Two of you flatten yourselves against the wall on either side of the door and try to take them from behind. Mr. Gifford and Mr. Sprowle and myself will attack them from the front. Don't pay any attention to us if they shoot us; overpower them and get their weapons and try to kill a few of them."

"I sye," whined one of the watchmen. "I didn't sign up to get shot."

"Then drown and be damned to you," roared the skipper.

"Let me talk to the bloke, sir," pleaded another watchman. He whispered earnestly to him for a moment. "It's all right, sir," he said. "Tammas'll go through with the rest of us."

Gifford looked at his watch. "It's nearly nine," he said. "What time do they come, captain?"

"I never noticed. My watch is gone, anyway," replied Grigsby.

"May I suggest," said the purser, "that we can take our stations and we shall have a moment's warning by the sound of the key in the lock? We may have to wait hours or only a few minutes, but we can be ready."

"Two of you men take off your coats and cover the portholes. The darkness will confuse them for a few seconds and give us a fighting chance." This from Captain Grigsby.

Two stewards removed their white coats and hung them over the portholes and the light already dim was further obscure.

"Now silence," commanded the skipper.

"Mind if I suggest something?" asked Gifford.

"Go ahead, my lad."

"We three should crouch on the deck about a dozen feet from the door as runners do at the starting line, and plunge at them bent almost double. Grab them around the thighs as tacklers do in American football."

"That's a good suggestion," agreed Grigsby. "Men taken by surprise are apt to fire high anyway. Take your stations," he added.

TWO steward-watchmen immediately stood on either side of the door, their backs against the wall; and the three who were to charge seat-

ed themselves on the deck ready to scramble into position. The wait was long. They remained in the dark straining their ears for the rattle of the key in the lock and suffering more from nerves as every minute passed. Hours seemed to have elapsed.

And then came the awaited sound. "Ready," whispered Grigsby. The three assumed the crouch and then the key turned and the door was thrown open. A man stepped into the room and peered into the dark. A scuffle of feet and three black forms were upon him. Strong hands seized him from behind and for a few seconds the mêlée in the dark was as vicious as it was silent.

Crash! Down he went upon the deck and the mass piled upon him as in a football scrimmage.

"We've got him," cried Gifford triumphantly. "Get his gun."

"Gifford, you fool," squeaked the victim. "It's Wing."

"Hey, let him up!" exclaimed Hank.

"Hold him fast," snarled Grigsby. "I knew he was in the gang."

"Of course he isn't. Let him up, I say," demanded the cowboy.

"You're strangling me," moaned Wing. "For Heaven's sake, let me go."

Grigsby, who had his hands on the American's throat, released his grip somewhat.

"Quick," gasped Lionel. "I came here to let you out, not to be murdered."

"Get off him, men," commanded the captain. "What's happened, Mr. Wing?"

"There's a big fight on the top deck," explained Wing as he got on his feet. "The second officer and the quartermaster are holding off the whole mob. We've got Owen and two of his men locked up in your cabin. There was only one man on guard outside here and he and I fell downstairs. I think his skull is fractured. I took his gun and the key and opened the door here, and then you nearly tore me to pieces. Listen."

Very faintly they heard the reports of weapons as from a great distance. It convinced Grigsby.

"Sorry," he said curtly. "We thought you were one of the pirates. Now explain the situation so we may know what to do."

In a few words Lionel outlined the state of affairs on the top deck.

"We can go up through the ship and out through your quarters, captain."

"No," said Grigsby. "We are unarmed. We'll go out upon the main deck and go up the outside ladders to the after end of the boat deck. Where are the first and third officers and the chief engineer?"

"I don't know. I thought they were here."

"We'll find them."

"I have two guns," said Wing.

"Give me one," commanded the captain. "Now, men, I expect the pirates are closing in on Henderson and the quartermaster from aft. We'll take them in the rear. Let's see if the door to the main deck is open."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE FIGHT ON THE BOAT DECK.

HE rushed out of the brig followed by the others, stepped over the body of the man who lay at the foot of the ladder, ran down the passage to the steel door leading out upon the main deck. It was locked, but the key was in the lock on the inside. He turned it and pushed open the door. The seven were only a few steps behind him.

The ship was rolling heavily with no hand at the helm and the rattle of revolvers was very loud. A man stepped out of the engineroom entrance with a gun in his hand and Grigsby shot him dead before he had a chance to fire. Gifford made a rush and possessed himself of the gun.

"This way," cried Grigsby and ran up the ladder to the passenger deck, Gifford and Wing at his heels. The others held back. Being unarmed, they had no stomach for the fray.

From the promenade deck a ladder led to the boat deck and the skipper went up it like a monkey. He might have been pompous and indiscreet, but he was a first-class fighting man.

The boats obstructed this deck as did stanchions, ventilators, the wireless house and the funnel, but the forms of several men were visible firing from cover toward the defenders forward.

Gifford blazed away at one of these and he fell. Wing fired and missed, and the captain also missed. The pirates ducked out of sight and several shots came whizzing toward the dauntless trio.

"Take cover, men," ordered Grigsby who immediately ducked behind a ventilator. Wing dashed toward a boat and crawled under it, coming up directly behind a man who was peering forward. Suddenly the man stood upon a block which brought his head above the bow of the boat and began to swing his right arm. Wing's eyes stuck out, for the fellow was throwing a *bola!*

Forgetting his own weapon, remembering only that this was the man who had attempted his life, he plunged at him, and pulled his legs from under him just as the fantastic weapon left on its mission. The man fell heavily to the deck and Wing, on top of him, sent crashing blows into the face of Emanuel Sousa. He was not aware that the *bola* had missed Captain Grigsby by a scant yard. The skipper was plainly visible to the *bola* thrower as he stood behind his ventilator, and the man, who did not wish to draw a shot, resorted to the silent weapon which had so nearly finished Lionel Wing. He snarled viciously at Wing now and attempted to draw a gun from his pocket, but a terrific blow upon the point of the jaw sent him into slumber.

Wing grabbed the gun and meditated whether to empty it into the body of the Brazilian. He was not built that way. Instead he seized a coil of thick rope which lay at hand and rapidly fastened the arms and legs of the man he now believed to be the ship's murderer.

This operation occupied a minute and occurred during a lull. All concerned in the battle had taken cover and there was nobody in sight at whom to shoot.

Then there came a shot and a scream which seemed to come from high in the air. The ship had rolled heavily to port and at that moment the man in the crow's nest forward had risen and leaned over to pick off an enemy whom he had in range from his vantage point.

It gave the sharpshooter, Gifford, his opportunity. The fellow was struck squarely, toppled out of his nest, and with a shriek went into the sea on the port side.

Gifford, mad with the lust of battle, uttered the whoop of the plainsman and rushed from his post behind a ventilator to a boat just forward. At the moment Louis Peterson stepped out with leveled weapon. They fired at the same instant, and both men fell.

A MOMENT later came shouts and cheers from aft, and there swarmed on the boat deck a score of men waving shovels and steel bars, and brandishing knives and various improvised weapons. Sprowle, though he had been too discreet to climb to the boat deck, had nevertheless succeeded in releasing the first and third officers who had been thrust into the cabin with the chief engineer, and these had rallied deckhands, firemen and oilers and wipers, and now came dauntlessly to the rescue.

"Gifford, Wing," shouted Captain Grigsby. "Stand with me. The crew don't know you."

Poor Gifford lay groaning on the deck with a bullet in his shoulder, but

Wing hastily ran to the side of the skipper.

"Take cover, men," warned the captain, as their rescuers rushed past. "Crawl up on them. Don't try to rush them."

Heads appeared forward and both Grigsby and Wing fired at them. The skipper's man fell and to his distress, Wing saw his own target stagger, clasp hands to his breast and topple over.

"Keep firing," said the skipper. "That was a good shot, Wing. We'll provide the crew with a barrage."

And now, all around them there raged an unseen but savage combat. The seamen, crawling over stanchions, and buttresses, creeping around the boats, came upon armed individuals who fired point-blank at them, bringing down some but falling beneath crashing blows of heavy weapons in the hands of others.

The pirates were leaderless. Louis Peterson had marshaled the attack upon the bridge, and he was lying on the deck with Gifford's bullet in his heart. Owen, Kregan and Mott were locked up or *hors de combat*. Wing heard shrieks, moans, roars of rage and anguish, and the *pop-pop* of bullets. It continued for perhaps ten minutes. Finally there came a silence only broken by the groans of the wounded.

"Got 'em all, I fancy," said the captain grimly.

The members of the crew were emerging from various nooks and crannies and the first officer appeared and approached the skipper.

"It seems to be all over, sir," he said simply.

"Pick up Mr. Gifford there and carry him gently. Take him to the hospital," said Grigsby. Wing rushed over to his friend who was sitting up on deck holding his shoulder. Himself, he felt deathly sick, and the sight of the blood which had soaked through the coat of his friend didn't help. Gifford grinned at him.

"I'm not badly off. I got my man," he said. "And did you see me pick off that hombre up on the mast? Some little jamboree, this was."

"You were marvelous, old man," declared Wing. "I hope your wound isn't serious."

"Just in the shoulder. A fellow never dies of that. Listen, you men, just support me. I think I can walk."

"Carry him," commanded the skipper. "Are there any of those miscreants alive?" he demanded of the first officer.

"A few were knocked senseless and we found one man roped behind a boat. He says he's a passenger; that it's all a mistake."

"It's the *bola* thrower," declared Wing. "It's Sousa, captain. He was one of them, all right."

"Lock him up. Throw them all in the brig. We'll hang the lot. How are you, Henderson? I congratulate you. Is the quartermaster all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have him put the ship back on her course. Get Dr. Roundsby up to see to these wounded men."

The storming party of the crew had clustered around.

"Three cheers for Captain Grigsby," somebody shouted. They bellowed lustily.

"I suggest three cheers for Mr. Gifford and Mr. Wing, two passengers who had much to do with the victory," smiled the skipper.

These cheers came with a roar.

"Collect the names of the men who came to our rescue, Mr. Henderson," said the captain. "If any of them were killed, the company will take care of their families. Now I think I would like to see the damned Englishman who impersonated me!"

"HADN'T you better release the passengers, captain?" asked Sprowle, who had followed his troops to the boat deck.

"You inform them that the trouble is all over, but don't let them out until

this mess up here is cleared away. Come with me, Mr. Wing."

"I should like to go to my cabin. I'm in rags and tatters," said Wing.

"Very well. Come to my quarters as soon as you can. I wish you to be present when I question this man Owen. Have Sousa brought to my quarters also."

Wing unlocked the door leading into the passenger accommodations from the captain's house and, accompanied by Sprowle, descended the stairs and walked through the little passage in which he had had his terrific battle with Kregan.

When they opened the door they found an indescribable scene in the main companionway and on the stairs. The fusillade upon the top deck had been plainly heard, and the shouts, screams and cheers of the combatants. All the passengers were assembled and hysteria reigned. Wing discerned Doris and Maria and Mrs. Wenham in a group and went directly toward them.

Sprowle stopped a rush of men toward him by holding up his hand.

"Quiet, please," he cried. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to inform you that there is no further danger. The ship is now in the hands of her officers, the pirates have been overcome and killed or captured, we are back on our course and all is well."

There was an outburst of excited chatter. Wing went directly to Maria who, without speaking, extended both hands to him. Doris grasped his arm tightly.

"For the Lord's sake, Chuck, tell us what really happened. That blurb of the purser's don't mean a thing."

"You have been up there fighting for us all—er—Chuck," said Maria. "You are all torn and bruised. Are you badly hurt?"

"A little bit battered, but still in the ring. You're some invalid, kid," declared Doris. "Where's Hank?"

He looked suddenly sober. "I'm very sorry to say that he has been hurt."

The girl grew pale and sucked in her breath. "Not dead?" she whispered.

"No. He's wounded in the shoulder."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Where is he?"

"They've taken him to the ship's hospital."

She turned on him fiercely. "What business had you boys to mix up in this? Why didn't you let the men who are paid for it fight their own battles?" she demanded.

"Mr. Wing and Mr. Gifford were fighting for us all," said the purser who had come close to them. "You ladies must thank Mr. Wing most of all. It was he who broke through the steel ring around us and enabled us to retake the ship."

"You fighting son of a gun," admired Doris. "Can I see Mr. Gifford, Mr. Purser?"

"I think it can be arranged," he smiled. "Will you excuse Mr. Wing, ladies? The captain wants him. He's particularly anxious that Mr. Wing be present while he questions Sousa."

"Sousa?" said a sharp voice. "Where is Sousa?"

The purser turned and looked into the small anxious eyes of the frail Senhor Issoto.

"He's a prisoner with the rest of the pirates," he snapped.

"Oh, then he was a pirate?" asked the Portuguese Jew.

"So it appears."

The man said no more but shuffled away.

"IT seems I am always going away from you," Lionel whispered to Maria.

She smiled. "You will be sure to come back."

With her smile stamped in his eyes he bowed to Mrs. Wenham who sat pale and still, thinking of her dead husband below. Wing went down the stair-

case, pushed open the door of his stateroom, and started violently, for, sitting on his campstool with his legs crossed, was Grimaldi.

"It appears that you followed my plan of campaign," he said with his loathsome smile.

"Why are you here?" demanded the American.

"I saw you come down from above with the purser and naturally I assumed you were aware of what has been happening."

Lionel smiled. "I put some variations of my own into your plan," he said. "I'll give you information in exchange for some."

The man spread his hands out palm upward.

"What can I tell you?"

"Why has my life been attempted on this ship?"

Grimaldi's big gray eyes darkened.

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I think you know."

"You think I have attempted your life?"

"I don't accuse you personally, but I think you know why."

"Because you insisted upon being an actor in the drama instead of a spectator."

"Stop talking in figures of speech."

"There is a great drama being played in Rio," said Grimaldi, "and you entered the cast."

"In what respect?"

"It is known," said the specter, "that you bear a message from Hernandez Sortez to a person in Rio de Janeiro. It is a verbal message because your effects have been searched without avail."

"I suppose I may thank you for that."

"No. I had nothing to do with it."

"Then who are the people who did it?"

"I do not know. I may guess."

"Then guess."

"I would not venture. I value my own life. Now perhaps you will tell me what has happened."

"All right. There is no reason why I shouldn't." He began at the beginning and while he washed and changed his clothes he told the entire story though he lost most of its drama by his matter-of-fact manner of speech.

"Very remarkable," commented Grimaldi. "You are an extraordinary young man, Mr. Wing. It is amusing because you were, in a way, acting against the interests of your employer."

"In what respect."

"Sortez would have been very glad if the gold never reached Rio de Janeiro."

"Do you mean he is responsible for this pirate plot?"

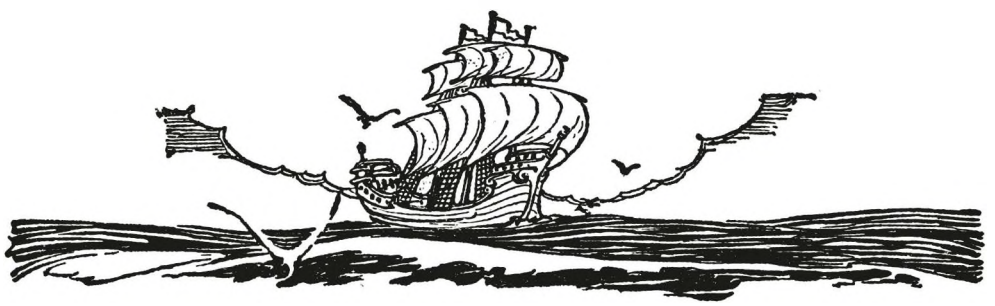
"Not at all. I said 'in a way.'"

"I saved my own life and incidentally yours."

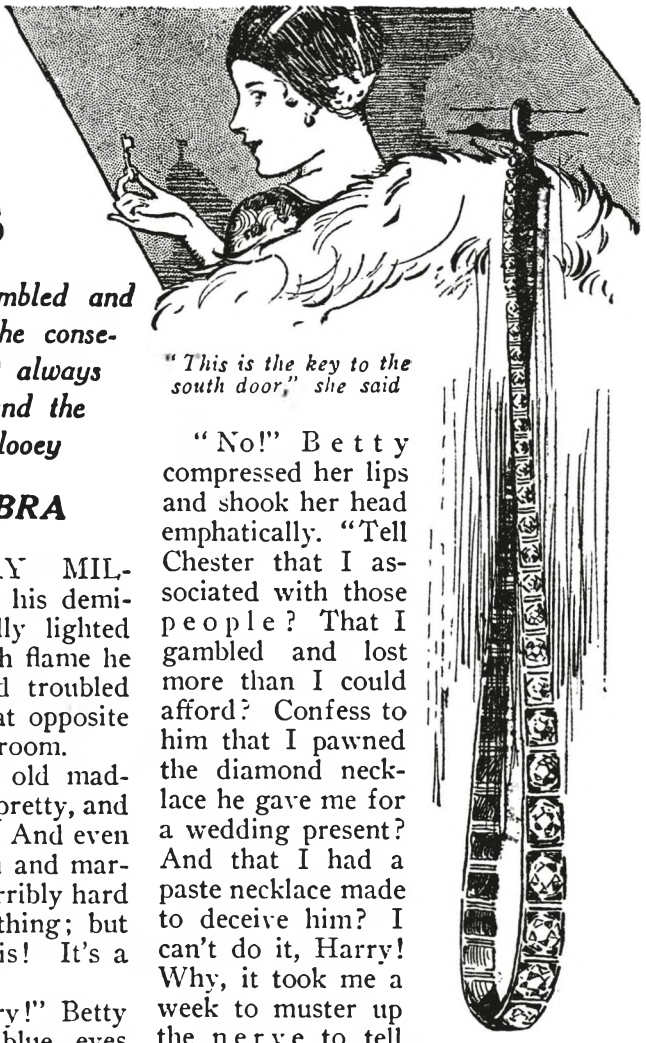
"Many thanks," said the man with his dreadful smile. "Now I am leaving you."

"Come again," Lionel invited with mock politeness.

**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.**



# Blue Eyes and Diamonds



*"This is the key to the south door," she said*

***When Betty Danford gambled and lost, she tried to dodge the consequences—but men cannot always be fooled or cajoled, and the best-laid plans oft go blooey***

***By LEMUEL DE BRA***

DETECTIVE HARRY MILHOLLAND finished his demitasse and thoughtfully lighted a cigarette. Over the match flame he looked into the serious and troubled blue eyes of the girl who sat opposite him in the private dining room.

"Betty, you're the same old madcap! As spoiled as you are pretty, and as selfish as you are sweet! And even though you turned me down and married Chester Danford, it's terribly hard for me to refuse you anything; but I'm going to refuse you this! It's a wild scheme and I won't—"

"Oh, yes, you will, Harry!" Betty Danford interrupted, her blue eyes pleading as she wagged a reproving finger at the man. "You haven't the heart to leave me in this awful predicament when you can help me so easily. Understand, I don't want *you* to steal the necklace; I just want you to hire some one to do it. Surely you know lots of clever thieves who—"

"Who are behind the bars where they belong." Milholland finished, smiling grimly. "Say, Bet, why don't you go right to your husband and tell him the whole thing? Chester is goodhearted, and as square as they make 'em."

"No!" Betty compressed her lips and shook her head emphatically. "Tell Chester that I associated with those people? That I gambled and lost more than I could afford? Confess to him that I pawned the diamond necklace he gave me for a wedding present? And that I had a paste necklace made to deceive him? I can't do it, Harry! Why, it took me a week to muster up the nerve to tell you! And now you must help me! My scheme—"

"How much have you lost?" Detective Milholland demanded abruptly.

"I won't tell you!" Betty pouted prettily. "I'm ashamed of it. Besides, I wouldn't take your money even if you had any, and since everyone admits that you're an honest policeman, I know you must be dreadfully poor."

"I'm satisfied, Betty." Milholland smiled at the girl's naïve frankness. "Say, why couldn't you steal the necklace yourself?"

"Because I'm too much of a bun-

gler. I've discovered that I can't even tell my husband a little fib without half choking. And the day I pawned the necklace and told Chester that I was having it cleaned and repaired was—was a regular nightmare. I'll never get over it. And I can't ever wear the paste string again. It chokes me. I'm in constant terror of my husband discovering the truth. Please don't keep me in torment any longer, Harry! Get some one you can trust and have him steal the paste string. I won't have to say a word. My darling hubby will think it was the genuine necklace that was stolen—and he'll want to get me another right away. In the meantime I'll have the pawnbroker break up the necklace, sell the stones, and what's due me will clear up everything. Please, Harry!"

"Don't coax, Betty! This thing isn't half as easy as you think."

"Don't you know a man you can trust?"

"Sure, but—"

"And that you can get to-night?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then it's settled!" Betty Danford opened her hand bag and got out a key. "This is the key to the south door. Your man can get in with this key and then leave it in my room. When he's ready to leave, he can open the window in my room that let's on the porch roof, and go out the door the way he came. Chester will think that I forgot to lock the window and that the thief got in that way. There isn't much in the room worth stealing except the necklace. That's in a secret compartment in the bottom of the upper right-hand drawer of my dressing table. Your man had better take out all the drawers and dump the contents on the bed. Make it look like a real robbery. See, Harry? Well, when he does that, he'll discover the catch that operates the secret compartment. You can trust your man not to go into the dining room, can't you? Our silverware—"

"You can't trust any thief too far," Milholland said grimly. "Where'll you be? And your husband?"

"I'll get him to take me to dinner some place. There'll be no one in the house. Better—er—what do you say?—pull the job early. Say, eight o'clock. Then if your thief is seen going to the house, or leaving, no one will think anything of it. Eh, Harry?"

"Eight o'clock will do, but—"

"But me no buts! Harry Milholland, how can you be so obstinate?" Impulsively, Betty Danford reached across the table and "spanked" Milholland's big hand.

"Darn you, Betty!" muttered the detective, drawing his hand away as if the touch of the girl's fingers brought back an old heartache. "I don't want to do this thing, but I suppose I'll have to. It isn't fair to your husband, and I wash my hands of the whole affair. If anything goes wrong—"

"It's all my grief! Certainly!"

"That wasn't what I meant, Betty."

"No matter! Cheer up, old gloom! And I must be going." The girl jumped up and stepped around the table to the door. "Remember, I'm depending on you, Harry! 'By!" Smiling, she blew him a kiss and was gone, leaving Detective Milholland staring at the curtains, a troubled look on his face.

CHESTER DANFORD arrived late that evening and, to Betty's dismay, promptly declared that he was tired, half sick, and was going to retire at once. No, he didn't want any dinner! Go out? Absolutely impossible!

Betty, who all her young life had had her own sweet way, spent a desperate half hour getting her husband to change his mind. And when it was done, she could not shake off the feeling that she had aroused his suspicions.

"Bet," he said as they were at the door ready to leave, "you seem darned anxious to get me out of the house to-night. What's the idea, hon? Surprise

party, or something? And, say—why'n thunder don't you wear your necklace any more? If this is a party, go put your sparklers on. You look half naked without 'em!"

Betty glanced at her wrist watch. It was five minutes to eight!

"All right, dear," she murmured. "If it pleases you, I'll wear them." She turned toward the stairway, then stopped. "No, Chester, let's do this: have our dinner at once, then come back here. I'll put on the necklace, all for you, and we'll go to—"

"You put it on now or I won't go a step," declared Chester Danford.

Betty stared at him, trying hard to hide her panic. "Chester Danford, just for that I won't wear that old necklace to-night—or ever again! How in the world can you be so obstinate?"

"The whole world is obstinate except you, isn't it, honey?"

"Certainly!" declared Betty, and tossed her head. "But, listen, sugar." Betty went to the hall seat and sat down beside her husband.

Two minutes later the front door closed behind them. As Betty stepped into the car she caught sight of a man strolling slowly down the sidewalk.

"Don't like the looks of that fellow," muttered Danford as he eased the car into the traffic. "You sure the house is all locked—windows 'n' everything, hon?"

"I think so," Betty half choked. "But I'm so hungry I—I can't think."

"Wish we'd stayed home. Bet, I got something to tell you. Was saving it for to-night—when we'd be all alone. Now that you've hustled me out of my house and home I think I'll make you wait awhile. Eh?"

"What's it about?" demanded Betty quickly.

"W-e-l-l, just to tease you a little, I'll tell you this much. Old Abe Arnstein has been a good friend of mine for years. Thinking, of course, that my darling little wife wouldn't have any secrets from me, he let something slip the other day. Well, here we are!"

"Let—s o m e t h i n g—slip!" The words came tonelessly from Betty's lips as she leaned on her husband's arm and stepped to the curb. "What on earth—"

"Don't talk here, Bet! Wait until we get a table."

Her appetite gone, Betty sat motionless while her husband gave the order.

"I don't suppose it amounts to anything," Betty managed to say when the waiter had left, "but what possible business could you have with Abe Arnstein that would interest me, Chester?"

Instead of replying, Chester Danford reached in his inside coat pocket and took out something wrapped in tissue paper, which he unfolded and held up.

"My necklace!" blurted Betty. "How in the world?"

"I told you Uncle Abe was a good friend of mine," said Danford. "When he discovered that I didn't know anything about your pawning your necklace he was in a terrible stew. Finally I got the whole story from him—and redeemed your necklace, of course."

Betty sat speechless.

"This afternoon I slipped home to tell you about it, but you were out. So I went to your room and got the phony string Abe had made for you. This is it. Do you—"

"This is it? Then where is the other—the genuine one?"

"Why, that's the surprise I was keeping for you, hon. I put your necklace in the secret compartment where you had this thing. Then— Gosh, Bet, what makes you so white?"

Chester's words seemed to come from afar off, yet they beat on Betty's ears like cruel hammers. The glass of water she reached for seemed to swim before her eyes.

"Close here—too warm. Back in a minute."

Her feet feeling as if they were made of lead, she ran for a taxi, tum-

bled in and gave a frantic order. As the taxi started Betty glanced at her wrist watch. Seven minutes past eight!

SO far as she could see, the house was dark when she reached home. Telling the driver to wait, Betty hurried up the walk and let herself in the front door. Punching on the lights, she ran up the stairs to her room. One look—and she flew to the phone.

"Harry!" she gasped when the connection had been made. "There's been a terrible mistake! I—"

"You better not talk over the phone!" cautioned Detective Milholland. "That man hasn't got here yet. I'm to meet him at the east end of Ellington Street bridge. You better hurry over there. I'll wait there."

Betty slammed up the receiver. As fast as her high heels could carry her, she tumbled down the stairs and out to the waiting taxi.

Two shadowy figures were standing on the sidewalk some fifteen feet from the end of the bridge when Betty slipped out of her taxi. As she hurried toward the men she caught a glimpse of the broad, slow-moving river, and the lights of the city beyond.

"So it's phony, eh?" one of the men shouted angrily. "Had me risk my life for a bunch o' bum rocks, did yuh? Well—"

The rest, Betty did not hear. Horrified, she saw the speaker spring back and raise his arm. His hand shot out. High over the bridge rail flew something that seemed alive with sparkling flame.

Fleeing steps pounding on the walk—a blur of voices—strong arms that caught her quickly—those were the last things Betty remembered.

"Never dreamed you'd faint!" exclaimed Chester Danford when she had regained her senses. "Harry and I were sure that a girl who had the nerve to buck the gaming tables like you did could stand a little rough play. Have another nip o' this Scotch!"

"No," said Betty firmly, pushing the glass way. "I—I want to think. I came to in the taxi, recognized your voice, and got suspicious. I could have walked into the house—but it was nicer to be carried." Betty looked up at Detective Milholland. "So you—er—squealed, eh?"

"I did, Betty," Milholland admitted, accepting the glass Danford offered. "I had to play square with your husband. You know, two wrongs never make one right. So Chester and I framed it up to have one of my own men slip into the house and get the phony necklace. Knowing, of course, that you would phone me, I waited for the call, then hurried to meet you. There, on the bridge, we went through the little play suggested by Chester—and threw the paste necklace into the river!"

"Uh, huh." Betty's blue eyes were thoughtful. "Then, Chester, that story you gave me about Uncle Abe spilling the beans was all a fake?"

"All except that I did redeem your necklace, hon. It was the real one that I showed you to-night at the table. Gosh, you looked so sick I felt sorry for you. If you hadn't got out so quick I'd have given in and told you the truth. Well, it's over now; here—" Danford took out the diamond necklace, but Betty waved it away.

"You keep it awhile," she said, rising. "I'm not going to wear it until—until I feel that I deserve it. As for you, Harry Milholland, I'm just going to murder you the first day I have time. Moreover, you remember that this afternoon I was so grateful to you that I blew you a kiss? Well, I want it back!"

Before the astonished detective could move to prevent her, Betty kissed him smack on the lips. Then she slipped into her husband's arms.

THE END.

# Argonotes.

## The Readers' Viewpoint

### STRANGE WATERS

TO those who visualize the Great Lakes as quiet little ponds, the idea of dangerous storms and perilous voyages on these inland seas may seem far-fetched. Kingsbury Scott, who contributes "Strange Waters" to this issue, has a few words to say about these waters he knows so well. He writes:

In "Strange Waters," I have tried to show the love of an humble man for his ship, the thing which for ages has kept men at their posts in time of peril at sea, kept engineers at their stations, and masters on their bridges until the waters closed over them. Tradition is not confined to salt water. It is just as strong on the Great Lakes, where giant steam craft plow through the blue-green waters, where danger is ever present in the fall battles with giant seas, roaring gales and blinding snow. Each great ship, each modest carrier, each aging schooner, each audacious fishing smack, represents the poetry, the romance, the adventure, the tragedy, and the red-blooded thrill of the "deep seas."

FRED MacISAAC has this reader puzzled. Yes, he is just one man and there really is nothing mysterious about him. We are asking him to step up and say a few words about himself in the near future.

Portland, Ore.

You can't imagine what a relief it is to have one advantage over one's family. I have, because I can read the ARGOSY the quickest. Therefore, I get it first. The rest of the family watch me read and sigh. But there is a disadvantage also, because I must wait longer for the next copy.

I like all sorts of stories. Of all of the stories I read I like those of the ARGOSY the best. My reading is not limited either, for a month seldom passes that I have not read from fifteen to twenty-five magazines. The ARGOSY is the only "regular" one that I get.

The authors that I like the best are: W. Wirt, Charles Alden Seltzer, George F. Worts, Garret Smith, Talbot Mundy, Max Brand, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, and last but not least Fred MacIsaac.

I would like to read a sketch of this author. There have been so many other authors mentioned and discussed, but I have never noticed anything of MacIsaac. I have often wondered if there is just one man writing under that name. I have read so many, many stories by this author, all different, each one as interesting as the one before.

MRS. A. E. STEVENS.

LIKE Jack Spratt and his wife, these ARGOSY fans clean up the magazine quite satisfactorily between them each week:

Greeley, Colo.

I like Geo. Worts, Hulbert Footner, Fred MacIsaac, and Garret Smith best, I think.

We have been regular readers of ARGOSY since a few months after our marriage, eight years ago next August. Have never missed an issue. ARGOSY is the only magazine my husband likes or reads. I don't like Westerns or historical novels, though I've read some so good in ARGOSY that I am almost cured of my aversion. My husband's favorites are Westerns, stories of prize fights, aviators, and other adventure stories, whereas I prefer love stories, detective stories and impossible stories. So you see your magazine is just right, as we are both satisfied. I read it from cover to cover, but like some stories better than others.

MRS. H. E. CALDWELL.

PERHAPS some other readers will be interested in trading snapshots with this Virginia member of the ARGOSY family:

McLean, Va.

Like some of your readers, I have read your magazine over a period of time dating back to the time when it was known as the *Golden Argosy*, and later in conjunction with the *All-Story Magazine*, which one of your readers refers to as an outlaw publication.

I can't help feeling that that same outlaw is largely responsible for the excellence of the publication of to-day. An outlaw, a successful one, that is, sharpens the wits and strengthens the forces of the law in its efforts to apprehend him. Eventually the outlaw is brought into custody, but the beneficial effects of his capture remain with the forces of law in the form of greater experience, wisdom and resourcefulness. This, I believe, is the secret of the ARGOSY'S leadership in the magazine world to-day.

I see one of my associate readers has called to mind "The Blind Spot," and I join in his

plea that this excellent story be reprinted or that its writer be persuaded to try to effect its publication in book form.

I would also ask that you consider the republication of "Haunted Hands," a story which you published years ago. It is my opinion, although the said opinion is worth little or nothing, that "Haunted Hands" would make excellent material for a motion picture scenario.

In closing may I ask one favor? Will you print a request for me? I would enjoy exchanging kodak shots or negatives with any of the readers of the ARGOSY in other parts of the country. WM. O. CLARKE.

L. H. G., of Jacksonville, Illinois, sent in ten Your Choice Coupons, but neglected to sign his name. We cannot send his illustration until we hear from him.

WE are glad Mr. Harkins was down to a thin dime—if it took that to make him an ARGOSY rooter.

Saginaw, Mich.

It was the night before pay day, and I had a thin dime and the whole evening to spend. I didn't have enough money to take in a show, so thought I'd get a magazine and stay at home. The ARGOSY was the only one on sale for a dime, so I had to buy it. I soon found that any story was worth the price of the whole magazine. Ever since then I spend Wednesday evening at home, although I have more than a dime.

I find all your stories interesting whether they take place out West, in a city, in the past, in a foreign country, or in a different world. I particularly like the impossible stories and share the opinion of those who believe you should have one running all the time.

LOTHAIR HARKINS.

YES, ARGOSY has changed a bit over the years. Mr. May notes a few of the variations—and approves of them:

Akron, Ohio.

Your stories are fine. "The Phantom in the Rainbow" is especially weird and gripping—one that does your magazine credit. "Buccaneers of the Air," "The Silver Fang," and "The Black Ace" are all good.

The Argonotes are as interesting as your stories. I noted a mistake or miscalculation in your present issue—January 12. It is stated that the story, "On the Brink of 2,000," was printed twelve years ago. The fact is, it was a serial starting in October, 1912, and ending in February, 1913. I have the copies before me now. I have read the magazine since some time before the story, "The Man Who Mastered Time," a vivid story which I plainly remember and enjoy.

I have several copies of the ARGOSY of 1912-1913, and I note many changes. "The Log Book" is the "Argonotes." You had neither "features" nor poems—where one story finished another started—this is improved upon now. Below the "contents" was what corresponds with "Looking Ahead!" All of these changes are a great improvement and they still continue, both in stories and in features, still, one cannot say one issue is better than another—they are *all* so good. GEORGE MAY.

WHAT is the matter with George M. Johnson? He just turned in a fine novelette, which will come to you soon. And Frank L. Packard? He is finishing up a great crime novel for ARGOSY now. More about that later.

Bridgeport, Conn.

It's about time you've heard from an ARGOSY fan in Bridgeport. Believe this or not, but nine years ago I was working on a moving van and came across an armful of ARGOSIES. You can bet I've been reading ARGOSY ever since. Some of my favorite authors are Fred MacIsaac, Garret Smith, John Hopper, and Talbot Mundy. There's a writer for you! How about getting Frank L. Packard and his mystery stories back? What's the matter with my namesake, George M. Johnson?

EDWIN C. JOHNSON.

HERE is another moving day experience:

Omaha, Neb.

All your stories are clean and interesting and as my father says, for boys and girls eight to eighty. I first started reading the ARGOSY once when we moved. The people who had lived in the house before left a lot of old magazines in the attic. While I was cleaning I happened to see an ARGOSY. From then until now I have managed to obtain an ARGOSY nearly every week. My favorite types of stories are: ghost, mystery, and scientific.

LA REINE MILLER.

ARGOSY seems to have plenty of friends in Canada—especially in Saskatchewan. Seven dollars is the subscription price for Canada.

Naicam, Saskatchewan, Canada.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for at least ten years. Do not remember the first story I read, but it must have been good, for I have not missed a copy since. My dealer does not always stock them, so I have driven fifty miles lots of times to get a copy. So tell me in your Argonotes what is the yearly subscription price of the ARGOSY in Canada.

The story I got the greatest kick out of was "The Scandal on Kitikat Key," by Loring Brent. But of them all I enjoy Fred Mac-

Isaac the best. Next *Mme. Storey's* quick work by Footner, and *Gillian Haseltine's* crafty work by Worts. Keep the ARGOSY as it is, for all the stories are sure worth reading.

E. M. BINGHAM.

A CANADIAN homesteader is this ARGOSY fan. Very shortly we begin a Canadian "Mounty" novel by Victor Rousseau.

Lisieux, Saskatchewan.

Glancing through the Readers' Viewpoint the other day I happened on a couple of moans from some grouch or other. Now, I wonder what *can* be wrong with those squawkers? I suppose they expect you to change a perfectly good policy to suit their selfish tastes, thereby spoiling the best magazine on the continent and depriving scores of satisfied readers of the healthiest and most wholesome assortment of reading one can find anywhere.

Your stories are all good, but some are undoubtedly better, according to my tastes. I have been a reader of your—I should say "our"—magazine for only five or six years, but every time I was in a position to get it and follow up I did so, and what I missed, I used to eat up when visiting my brother, who has them stacked up in their proper order and holds them until he's sure he has no more need of them. Then they are sent to the T B sanatorium. And are they appreciated there? I'll give you one guess.

That was in the good old days when I lived in Regina. Now I'm in the wilds almost. I'm trying to become a farmer while I'm proving a homestead and soldier's grant and, believe me, I don't miss much out of the back numbers I've got. I even read the ads. I'm getting the book regularly now. I started with "The Silver Fang"—and, say, that's good. So is "He Rules Who Can," "The Avenging Sword" and "More Than a Double Cross."

Slater LaMaster's "The Phantom in the Rainbow" is sure a corker and promises to eclipse "Luckett of the Moon" totally. The finish wasn't so good there—but, then, I like my stories impossible all the way through when they are that way; something like "Beyond the Stars" or "A Brand New World." Give us some more short ones like "Man o' Dreams." Why not give us "Canucks" a story about ourselves? The material is right there without hurting any one's feelings.

Yours for the same old book.

JACK LETOURNEAU.

THE "impossible" stories take this reader out of his every-day routine and let him go adventuring vicariously:

Cleveland, Ohio.

I have been a constant reader of your magazine for the past twenty years, and at times I read the notes in the back. Some are good and some are dumb. I wonder if some of the writers ever stop to think that your magazine is written for the public in general and not for any one individual. We humans are all different and it would be one terrible job to please them all.

I like your magazine because it appeals to the other side of my nature. As an insurance man I lead a very domesticated sort of life with the most excitement an auto smash-up or accident. I like to read the impossible or nearly so, and imagine what I would do in the same fix. I believe that your general run of stories are as good as any one can expect for the price of ten cents, and I hope that you continue to mix them up. The last few serial stories have been exceptionally good, and I usually finish the book the same night I get it.

During the war I was in the navy doing convoy duty, and as mail was irregular I had a dealer in Brooklyn save a copy each week for me, and then the next trip across I would have enough to last the whole trip. How they were read by the boys. We passed them along, and some of them got so "dog-eared" that you could hardly read them.

When I see a story that does not hit my idea I pass it up and figure that it may appeal to the other fellow. One of your best stories, I thought, I saved and passed to a friend of mine. He read part and said: "Some junk!" So you see how it is.

Good luck to you and may you continue just as you are going. C. W. TOTTEN.

# *Looking Ahead!*

## J. E. GRINSTEAD—

### Western Pioneer and Novelist

***Backed up by a lifetime spent in the West—years of strenuous living in Oklahoma and Texas when those states were wild and woolly frontier communities—J. E. Grinstead has at his command a vast store of first-hand experience. It is this complete familiarity with his West and its people that has earned for the author an enviable reputation for authenticity. Add to that a gift for writing fast-moving fiction, stories that move at whirlwind speed from start to finish, and it is easy to realize why J. E. Grinstead is one of the most popular Western novelists. Some years ago Mr. Grinstead was a frequent contributor to Argosy. Next week he reappears on our contents page with his latest novel—***

## THE SAGA OF SILVER BEND

It is a vivid tale of range warfare—of ranch pitted against ranch—of manhood forged and tested in the heat of strife. Do not miss the opening installment in—***The ISSUE OF MARCH 16th***

## THE GRAY GOD - By J. ALLAN DUNN

*A Complete Novelette*

takes us way off to the South Seas. A tale of adventure is this, with native superstition guarding a rich treasure—and white men battling each other in their determination to seize it. A tale with all the lure and romance of the far places.

***COMING SOON!***

## FRANK L. PACKARD

**WITH A NEW CRIME NOVEL**

# ARGOSY

## ALL-STORY WEEKLY

***"First In Fiction"*** ***Out Every Wednesday***

# Special! My 1929 Offer to You

# I Will Save You Money

*Read my 1929 Offer to You*

My sole aim, during the year 1929, shall be to place as many standard, dependable Watches as I can in the hands of men throughout the land REGARDLESS OF PRICE OR PROFIT. To do this I have cut the price to ABSOLUTELY ROCK BOTTOM. I know that if I can distribute 5,000 "Santa Fe Specials" this year on this NO-PROFIT PLAN, that every Watch will be a salesman and sell at least one more. I am making this STARTLING AND UNHEARD OF OFFER to those who will tell their friends of this remarkable Watch value, if they find the Watches all and more than I claim for them.

*Always A Thomas*

*President, Santa Fe Watch Co.*

## Save ⅓ to ½ of Your Money

### Most Liberal Offer Ever Made

Our "Direct-to-you" low wholesale terms and EXTRA SPECIAL DISTRIBUTION PLAN is fully explained in the New Santa Fe Special booklet just off the press. The "Santa Fe Special Plan" means a BIG SAVING of money and you get the BEST watch value on the market today. Watch sent to you to see without one penny down. These Watches are NOW in the service on practically every Railroad in the United States and in every branch of the Army and Naval service. Thousands of them are distributed all over the world.

### Write for FREE Watch Book Today

shows newest watch case designs in 4 colors. READ the so-called SECRETS of watch making. READ how you can save from ONE THIRD to ONE HALF of your money—Buy "Direct." The wise man will act quickly if he wants a watch.

EASY PAYMENTS TO SUIT YOU—Don't delay—Fill out and mail the coupon below for the FREE Watch Book.

**SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY**

**357 THOMAS BUILDING TOPEKA, KANSAS**

**SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY,**
**357 Thomas Building, Topeka, Kansas.**

Please send me the New Watch Book with the understanding that this request does not obligate me in any way.

*Name* .....

*Address* .....

*City* ..... *State* .....

# 20 Selections on Any 10 Records

# $1.98

**Send No Money**

## All the Latest Hits to Choose From—Less Than 20c a Record

Have you heard of the truly immense sensation caused by our new super electrically recorded Records? They have a great big mellow tone, clear as crystal, which is absolutely unobtainable elsewhere. For example, take our superb songs and dances, **Sonny Boy, All By Yourself in the Moonlight, Rock Candy Mountain, Hallelujah I'm a Bum, I'll Get By, Girl of My Dreams, Ramona, My Blue Heaven, Wreck of the Old 97, May I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight, Ford Has Made a Lady Out of Lizzie, Rovin' Gambler, Jigs and Reels, Casey Jones,** etc. We will positively guarantee that you have never heard records of this quality, no matter what price you paid. They are literally miles ahead of old style records. The following list contains the "Cream" of our entire catalog. Every selection is a masterpiece of its kind. Nothing but the very best is included and we guarantee that you will not be disappointed. All records are in standard 10-inch size with music on both sides and play on any phonograph. Send no money with your order. See coupon below for terms. All records are strictly on approval. Please act at once, as this is an introductory advertising price which may be discontinued shortly. Simply write catalog numbers of records you want on coupon below.

**10 Days' Approval**

### Popular Songs

2432 Sonny Boy
Dancing Neath Dixie Moon

2452 All By Yourself in the Moonlight
Every Day

2453 Me and the Man in the Moon
Dancing with My Baby

4225 Rock Candy Mountain
Bill, You Done Me Wrong

2451 You're the Cream in My Coffee
No One Can Steal You From Me

4237 Murder of Little Marion Parker
The Pardon Came Too Late

4236 Strolling Yodeler
Mountain Stream Yodel

2437 Rainbow Round My Shoulder
When You're Not Here

4228 Hallelujah I'm a Bum
The Dying Hobo

4227 Climbing Up Golden Stairs
Lindy Lou

2426 Jeannine I Dream of Lilac Time
Come Back to Romany

2398 Ramona
Valley of Memory

4174 Casey Jones
Waltz Me Around Again Willie

4131 Wreck of the Old 97
Wreck of the Titanic

4170 Gypsy's Warning
Don't You Remember

4135 Rovin' Gambler
Little Log Cabin in Lane

2407 Girl of My Dreams
Dear Old Pal of Yesterday

4133 Jesse James
Butcher Boy

2386 My Ohio Home
Alice of the Pines

2381 Ford Has Made a Lady Out of Lizzie
Clancy's Wooden Wedding

2366 My Blue Heaven
Back of Every Cloud

4141 I Wish I Was Single Again
Want to Find Love

4163 Sweet Hawaiian Kisses
Blue Hawaiian Moon

### Popular Songs

4118 May I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight
When I Saw Sweet Nellie Home

4117 Where River Shannon Flows
A Rose From Ireland

4119 Hand Me Down My Walking Cane
Captain Jinks

2323 Get Away Old Man
Well I Swan

8101 Roll 'Em Girls
Save It for a Rainy Day

4038 Sleep Baby Sleep (Yodel)
Roll On Silvery Moon

4086 Floyd Collins' Fate
Pickwick Club Tragedy

2344 Me and My Shadow
Sweet Hawaiian Kisses

4122 When I'm Gone You'll Soon Forget
Father, Dear Father Come Home

2272 Rudolph Valentino
Little Rosewood Casket

4173 Boston Burglar
Cowboy's Lament

### Hawaiian

4156 La Golondrina
Dreamy Moon

4023 My Old Kentucky Home
O Sole Mio

4034 Aloha Land
Honolulu Bay

4009 Palakiho Blues
One Two Three Four

### Sacred Songs

4146 Silent Night
Christmas Chimes

4075 Church in Wildwood
Voice of Chimes

4046 Nearer My God to Thee
Lord Is My Shepherd

4069 When Roll Is Called Up Yonder
Throw Out the Life Line

4091 Old Rugged Cross
Beyond the Clouds

### Comedy

4002 Flanagan's 2nd Hand Car
Hi and Si and Line Fence

4004 Flanagan in Restaurant
Flanagan's Married Life

4168 Jail Birds
Wedding Bells

4211 Andy Goes A'Hunting
Andy Gets Learnin'

### Popular Dances

All with vocal chorus and all fox trots except where otherwise marked.

1582 I'll Get By
What a Day

1585 All By Yourself in the Moonlight
Let's Pretend

1583 Me and the Man in the Moon
Please Don't Throw Me Down

1540 Old Man Sunshine
Sidewalks of New York

1510 Ramona, Waltz
If I Didn't Love You

1463 My Blue Heaven
Best Gal of All

1497 After My Laughter Came Tears
Back to Connemara

### Instrumental

4061 Listen to Mocking Bird
Song Bird (Both Whistling)

### Instrumental

4189 Drowsy Waters
Herd Girl's Dream

4162 Blue Danube Waltz
Skaters Waltz

4016 Irish Jigs and Reels, No. 1
Irish Jigs and Reels, No. 2

4138 By Waters of Minnetonka
Over the Waves

4068 Arkansas Traveler
Turkey in the Straw

4161 Dixie Favorites (Banjo Solo)
Medley of Southern Airs

4217 Irish Washerwoman
Mrs. McLeod's Reel

4218 Merry Widow Waltz
Lullaby from Erminie

### Blues

7023 John Henry Blues
St. Louis Blues

7025 Yellow Dog Blues
Hard Time Blues

7028 Varsity Drag
Sure Enough Blues

7029 Mississippi Mud Blues
I'm a One Man Gal

## TEAR OUT COUPON AND MAIL TODAY

**MUTUAL MUSIC CLUB,**
**MU-43, 135 Dorchester Ave., Boston, Mass.**

You may send me on 10 days' approval 10 records listed below by catalog numbers. When the 10 records arrive, I will pay postman a deposit of only $1.98 (plus postage from factory), in full payment. I will then try the records 10 days in my own home, and if I am disappointed in them or find them in any way unsatisfactory, I will return them, and you agree to refund at once all that I have paid, including my postage expense for returning the records.

1..... 6.....
2..... 7.....
3..... 8.....
4..... 9.....
5..... 10.....

(Write Clearly) (Write Clearly)

Write 3 substitutes below to be shipped only if other records are out of stock.

1.....2.....
3.....

**IMPORTANT** ☐ Place crossmark in square at left if you wish three 10-cent packages of steel needles included in your order—recommended for these records.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....
(Write Clearly)

CITY.....STATE.....