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ARGOSY

OCT. 9 WEEKLY

A New Novel
by
W.C. TUTTLE

AT LAST - THE TRUTH ABOUT DANDRUFF

AT LAST - A METHOD THAT WILL CURE!

Pityrosporum ovale, which causes dandruff, magnified many times.

Ten years' research shows queer bottle-shaped germ, called Pityrosporum ovale, causes dandruff. Listerine treatment brings quick relief to 76% of patients in New Jersey clinic

ARE you troubled with dandruff? Itching, burning scalp? Lifeless or falling hair? If so, remember: instead of merely treating the *symptoms* of dandruff, you can now attack the *cause* with Listerine Antiseptic.

Instead of momentarily ridding scalp surfaces of dandruff accumulations, you may now look for quick and more lasting relief and, in many cases, complete cure.

These benefits are now possible following one of the most searching studies ever undertaken on the subject of dandruff. It revealed the true cause of dandruff and a successful method of treating it with Listerine Antiseptic.*

Pityrosporum Ovale Causes Dandruff

In this study, test tube and microscope proved that a savage little bottle-shaped germ, called Pityrosporum ovale, caused dandruff. It is always present on the scalp, in hair follicles, and dandruff scales.

No less important to you than this startling discovery are the results of prolonged clinical research on the treatment for dandruff. First, rabbits suffering from dandruff were treated on one side only with Listerine Antiseptic. Within an average of 14 days, there was *complete cure* of dandruff on the sides treated with Listerine. On the sides not thus treated, dandruff was in evidence *nearly a month later*.

76% Got Relief

In a midwestern and an eastern skin clinic, definitely satisfactory results were obtained on men and women suffering from dandruff. In the midwestern clinic, a substantial number of those using Listerine once a day obtained marked relief in the first two weeks. In some cases a complete cure was noted in from three to eight weeks.

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Be Patient, It's Deep-Seated

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***For many years an odd bottle-shaped germ, Pityrosporum ovale, had been suspected of causing dandruff. No bacteriologist, however, had been able to isolate it and keep it sufficiently alive for dandruff experiments. Where older men had failed, modern technicians succeeded. Pityrosporum ovale was not only isolated and kept alive, but produced dandruff, by inoculation, in rabbits, guinea pigs, and man. From the dandruff thus artificially created, Pityrosporum ovale was re-isolated and again, by inoculation, produced dandruff. This sounds like a simple accomplishment, but actually it required years of application.**

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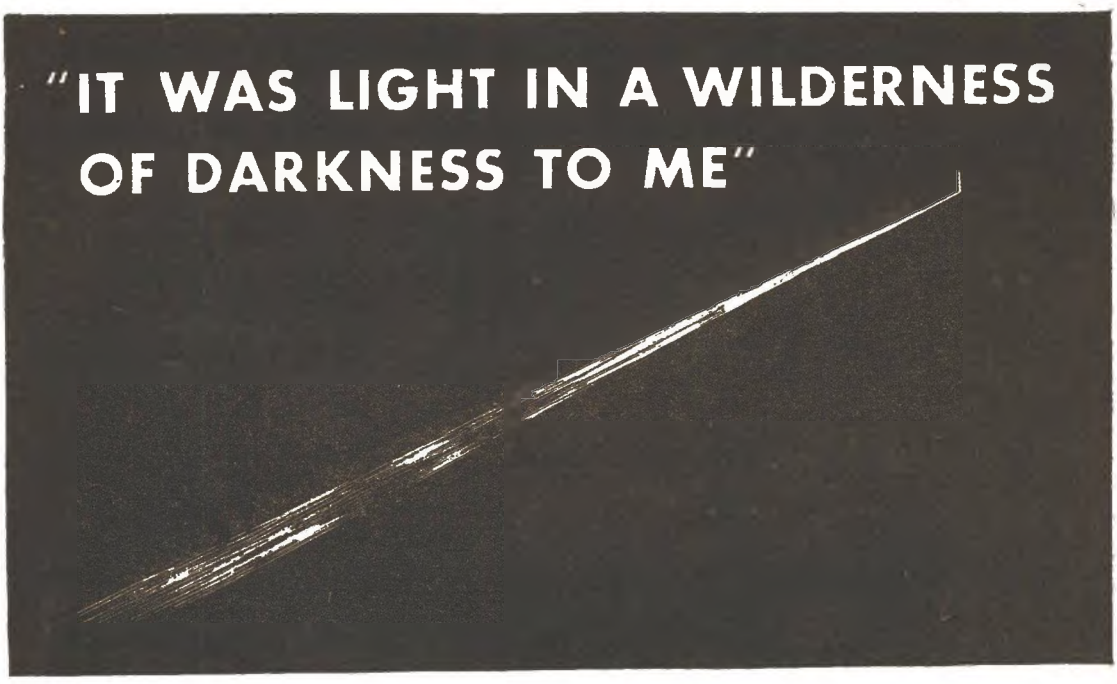
for Dandruff



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The Imperfect Gentleman

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

Author of "Red Snow at Darjeeling," the O'Reilly Sahib stories, etc.

I

GENTLEMAN DAN RAVEN walked into the bank carrying a small pigskin handbag. He paused at the top of the stairs leading down to the safe-deposit vaults, a tall, slim man in his early forties. From his dark-gray spats to his derby hat, he presented a picture of somber elegance. His erect carriage, his sharp, regular profile, and his steel-gray temples gave him an air of distinction. His chesterfield was so faultlessly tailored that it did not show the bulge of his shoulder holster.

With a glance that was too searching to be furtive, Dan surveyed the queues of customers lined up before the bronze and onyx of the tellers' cages. Then he walked rapidly out the side door, took a dozen steps down the street, and turned in to a telegraph office adjoining. Placing the pigskin bag on the counter, he said:

"I want a messenger to take this bag to the steamer *Picardie,* Pier 88, North River. It's to be put into Mr. Joseph Smythe's cabin, Stateroom 339."

As he paid the messenger fee, Dan's cold blue eyes lingered on the bag, as though he were reluctant to part with it. He was, in fact, extremely reluctant. He was taking an awful chance. The bag contained sixty thousand dollars—perhaps seventy thousand; it was in currency and he hadn't yet had time to count it. He'd have plenty of time once the liner sailed. In the meantime he had to get the bag out of circulation while he burned the last of his bridges behind him.

Dan re-entered the bank by the side door, went down the marble stairs,

The story of Gentleman Dan, American in Paris, Who Thought He Could Take Over the Apache Racket

signed a slip for admittance to the safe-deposit vaults. He sat in a private booth, looking at his watch, until two minutes before closing time. Then he emerged, climbed the stairs again, left the bank by the front door. At the curb, Piggy Dunning was waiting at the wheel of a long, sleek motor car. Dan climbed in.

"The old homestead, Piggy," he said. "And stop at the warehouse for a minute on the way."

"Okay, Dan."

The car purred away from the curb. Dan leaned back against the cushions and mused upon the flaring, fleshy ears of Piggy Dunning which protruded below his checkered cap. Piggy was a fat, thick-necked, thick-witted, wall-eyed young man who had been Dan's chauffeur and bodyguard for nearly ten years. If any man could have a real friend in the racket, Piggy was that friend. He was an unqualified admirer of Gentleman Dan Raven, yet he never tried to ape his suave manners. Piggy was frankly a dese-and-dose guy from Brooklyn, and knew his limitations. He was not quite bright, but he was loyal. Dan knew that if he would confide his plans to Piggy's large ears, Piggy would approve and keep his own counsel. Yet he had confided nothing—not

even to Piggy. As long as Gentleman Dan Raven was to disappear from the face of the earth, even Piggy Dunning had better not know about it. . . .

THE car was purring through the loft-building district of lower Manhattan when Piggy suddenly sat up and jammed on his brakes. The usual tangle of trucks and vans in the narrow street was replaced today by a squadron of green police cars. The sidewalks were swarming with bluecoats. The scene bristled with riot guns and axes from the emergency truck. Plainclothesmen were carrying out slot machines and pin-game tables, stacking them in the gutter. Dan Raven's thin lips curled with a faint smile of satisfaction. As Piggy Dunning turned his head, Dan's smile changed to a look of surprised alarm.

"It's a knock-over!" exclaimed Piggy.

"It's more than that, Piggy!" Dan said. "Back up and get out of here. Drop me at the corner and then try to head off Big Joe before he walks into the bull-trap. That's the new Special Prosecutor himself standing over there on the sidewalk. I told Joe the Grand Jury was getting ready to yank us up short. . . ."

Dan opened the door, stepped to the curb. "Call me when you contact Joe," he said. "And stay out of sight yourself."

Dan did not go home. He was expecting no news from Big Joe Storm because, unless his calculations had gone awry, Big Joe should be, at this moment, clamoring for lawyers, demanding a writ of habeas corpus or trying to raise bail. Besides this was Friday, and Gentleman Dan Raven wouldn't miss a Friday in the barber chair, not even the last Friday of his present incarnation. He had his usual shave, hair-trim, massage and manicure, and gave his usual dollar tip. It was nearly dark when he walked out.

On his way home he stopped at a live-poultry dealer's and bought a fresh-killed rabbit.

"Save me the blood," he said. "My wife uses it to cook rabbit stew."

"Sure, I know," said the butcher. "Givet. With red wine. French dish Very good." He put the blood in a jar.

When he unlocked the door to his eighteenth-floor, midtown apartment, Dan threw the rabbit into the incinerator chute, set the jar of blood on a table, took off his hat and coat. He stood a moment in the dark, lit a cigarette, strolled to the rear window, which looked down on the trans-Atlantic docks. He could see the smoke billowing from the three dull-red stacks of the *Picardie*, great black clouds swirling impatiently toward the glow of city lights on the overcast sky, pushing and surging upward, like an ominous shadow lifting. The shadow, Dan mused, must be the shadow of violent death that had darkened all his footsteps for the past fifteen years. It would be gone in two hours, when the *Picardie* sailed. Then Dan could begin to breathe—and live!

DISCIPLES of Nietzsche might argue that Dan had done plenty of living already. He had lived dangerously and well. He had gown rich through the prosperous years of Prohibition as No. 2 man in Big Joe Storm's beer organization. He had, in fact, created Big Joe's organization, for Dan Raven was a first-rate executive and organizer. He had never fired or even drawn the little .32 automatic that he had carried constantly for fifteen years. He was the brain; the brawn

was Big Joe Storm, who had beaten three raps for murder. And Brawn was boss, despite Dan's intellect. Big Joe was still boss of the slot-machine and pin-game racket they had been running since Repeal, even though Dan Raven had conceived of the idea and oganized its remunerative operation. Dan, however, did not begrudge him his power. He had no ambition to be a big-shot racketeer. He was ambitious only to achieve legitimately the title which the underworld had bestowed upon him facetiously: Gentleman. And when the *Picardie* sailed, he would have achieved it.

When the *Picardie* sailed, Gentleman Dan Raven would be no more. He had a passport in the name of Joseph Smythe—a transitory, pupa-like identity which would last only for the duration of the sea voyage. He had another passport establishing his ultimate identity into which he would emerge when he reached Paris—the final glorious stage for which he had been tediously and secretly spinning the cocoon these past years. George Daniel Poplar. There was an account in a Paris bank for George Poplar; had been since 1926, when Dan first conceived his plan and bought French francs at fifty to the dollar. The account had grown to comfortable proportions since then, and when he added the $60,000 in the pigskin bag . . . Well, he would be definitely independent of the underworld. He would move in the civilized, cultured society he had always admired and imitated. He would really enjoy life and leisure. He would—

The telephone rang. Dan frowned. It was the house phone. He picked up the instrument, put on his best Chinese-boy accent.

"Belly solly, nobody home," he said.

"Can the clowning, Dan. You seen Joe yet?" It was Piggy Dunning's voice, shrill with excitement.

"No," said Dan. "What—?"

"I'll be right up," said Piggy Dunning.

Dan hung up, switched on the lights. He gave a hurried glance around the apartment. There was no sign of his impending flight, for all his baggage aboard the *Picardie* was new baggage, packed with enough new clothes to last him until he reached Paris. It was part of his plan to create the illusion of sudden, unpremeditated disappearance.

He heard the elevator doors open and close. He picked up the jar of rabbit blood, put it into the ice box in the serving pantry. Then he came out and opened the door for Piggy Dunning.

The plump chauffeur was out of breath. His colorless eyes were bulging and his large ears were scarlet.

It was several seconds before he could blurt:

"Glad I got here foist, Dan. Big Joe's got a mad on. I t'ought maybe he was goin' to give you the woiks."

"What happened?" Dan asked, offeing Piggy a cigarette. "Can't Joe raise bail?"

"He ain't in the jug," said Piggy. "He saw the bulls, same as we did. He says you crossed him. Better take a powder, Dan."

"Powder my eye!" said Dan. "What for?"

Before Piggy Dunning could reply, a determined fist pounded on the door.

Dan's head jerked around.

"It's him," murmured Piggy. "I'll say you ain't here."

Dan smiled his best ubane smile. He laid a paternal hand reassuringly on Piggy's shoulder. The pounding continued. Dan walked to the door, threw it open.

"Come in, Joe," he said.

BIG JOE STORM did not come in at once. He stood on the threshold, a heavy man, almost as tall as Gentleman Dan Raven and twice as wide. He wore a purple suit with white pin stripes and there were purple stripes on his silk collar. His face was badly pock-marked, even to the broad expanse of his flattened nose. He kept his hands in his coat pockets, as he finally walked silently into the room and kicked the door closed with his heel.

"Glad Piggy managed to head you off in time, Joe," said Dan pleasantly. He flipped open his gold cigarette case, extended it to Joe Storm.

Storm didn't even glance at the case. His hard, accusing stare bored deep into the suave, smiling face of Gentleman Dan Raven.

"Nobody headed me off," he said. "I had a hunch."

Dan took one of his own cigarettes, lit it, sat down nonchalantly, crossed his legs with care not to spoil the knife creases on his trousers.

"Meaning what, Joe?" he asked cheerily.

"Meaning it's damn funny the cops start taking the warehouse apart just at the time I was supposed to meet you there . . . and funnier than hell that *you* happened to be late. I guess you don't think it's so funny that I had the lucky hunch to be late, too."

"Be yourself, Joe." Dan uncrossed his legs. "You don't think *I* tipped the Special Prosecutor—?"

"Yeah," interrupted Joe Storm icily. "I do."

Dan laughed. He gestured with his cigarette as though calling upon Piggy to witness the utter nonsense of Big Joe's statement.

"That's one for the book," he said. "As if I'd go out of my way to start a crew of government accountants checking over my back income-tax returns. When I go South for the winter, Joe, it won't be to Atlanta. Why—"

"Where's the mazuma?" Storm demanded. "Where's the cash you collected today?"

"In the vault. You said you wouldn't pay off till tomorrow, so—"

"I don't believe it."

Dan Raven shrugged. "I can't prove it tonight, Joe," he said. "The bank's closed. But you've got your own key to the box. In the morning—"

"In the morning," snapped Joe Storm, "you figure on being some place else."

Dan laughed again. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I think it would be a good idea, Joe, if we were both someplace else tomorrow—some place out of subpoena range. Why don't we hole up in Cuba until this all blows over? We'll be safe in Havana, and we can live like gentlemen—"

"Like gentlemen!" Big Joe Storm burst into a loud guffaw of genuine amusement. His hard, forbidding shell of reluctant suspicion seemed to explode with his hearty, unmusical laughter. He appeared relieved to find a familiar trait in an old friend who he feared had become an enemy. He withdrew one hand from his pocket long enough to slap Dan on the shoulder. "Forget that gentleman stuff, Dan. You'll always be a mug at heart, no matter what fork you use to shovel pie."

"I've noticed, though," said Dan, "that you're sending your own son to college."

"That's different," Big Joe Storm protested. "I ain't trying to change Young Joe into something he ain't already. He'll turn out to be what he wants, and whatever it is, it won't hurt

to have his brains raked over a little. That's like putting fertilizer around the roots of a tree—not trimming the top of the tree in some phoney, fancy shape, like you're trying to do with yourself."

He stopped suddenly, plunged his hand back into his coat pocket. The hard, suspicious glint returned to his eyes. "Piggy," he said without taking his stare from Dan, "open that closet door over there."

Piggy Dunning looked inquiringly at Dan.

"Listen to the boss, Piggy," said Dan.

"Bring out the gent's traveling bags," added Joe.

Piggy Dunning opened the closet. "I don't see no bags," he said.

"Try the other closet."

Piggy did, and came out carrying a valise and a satchel. "Don't feel like there's nothin' in 'em," he said.

"Open 'em," Joe Storm ordered.

Piggy Dunning's fat fingers fumbled with the catches. The bags yawned at Joe Storm's feet. They were empty.

JOE frowned in silence for a moment. Then he said, "Okay, Dan, let's call this business this afternoon a funny coincidence, then. And maybe we'd better go to Havana after all. I'll see you at the airport in an hour."

He strode toward the door, turned abruptly. "If you ain't there, Dan," he pronounced, "it won't be a coincidence. And it won't be funny."

The door slammed.

Dan grabbed Dunning's arm. "Get going, Piggy," he said. "Take it on the lam unless you want to be a Grand Jury witness."

"I'll drive you to the airport—"

"You'll drive like fury out of the state," Dan insisted. "Here's a couple of hundred to keep you going. If you're stuck after that, sell the car."

"They'll toss me in the can, tryin' to sell your car, Dan."

"It's your car, Piggy. The registration slip is in the dash compartment, and it's in your name."

"Gosh, Dan. Thanks."

"Goodbye, Piggy. Good luck."

When the door had closed again, Dan bolted it. He hurried to the icebox, took the jar of rabbit blood, went to the bathroom. He threw several towels into the tub, saturated them with blood, splashed a little on the white tiles. He made a trail of crimson drops leading to the bedroom. He splashed more blood on the rug, the bed, and a torn pair of pajamas which he tossed into a closet. Returning to the kitchen, he placed a carving knife in the sink, poured the rest of the blood over it. Then he threw out the jar, washed his hands, put on his hat and coat.

When he emerged from the street door, a taxi swooped up to the curb. The driver leaned out to open the door. Dan was about to get in when something made him pause. He scanned the driver's face, decided he had never seen him before. Perhaps the man's eagerness was merely professional. Still . . .

Dan looked at his watch. Nearly an hour until the *Picardie* sailed. He backed away a step.

"Changed my mind," he said. "I'll walk."

He did walk—as far as the subway entrance at the corner. He went down the steps, caught a downtown express which he rode as far as Fourteenth Street. Climbing to the surface, he walked across town to Ninth Avenue, took an uptown elevated. With a constant eye on his watch in order to time himself to within a few minutes of

sailing, he rode as far as Fifty-ninth Street. Here, he felt, he could take a taxi with perfect impunity.

"Pier 88, North River," he told the driver.

The *Picardie's* siren was already howling impatiently to announce the moment of departure as Dan hurried down the long pier shed, showed his ticket and passport, elbowed his way through the goodbye crowds gathered at the gray picket fence of the customs enclosure, climbed the gangplank. The siren howled again, an ear-splitting, exultant paean to the new life about to begin, as he strode down the gleaming white corridor toward Stateroom 339. He opened the cabin door, stepped in. As he closed the door behind him, the cold fingers of fear gripped his viscera.

Big Joe Storm sat on the berth in front of him, his hands in his coat pockets!

"Today's just full o' funny coincidences, ain't it, Dan?" said Joe Storm.

Dan forced a smile. Considering the fact that his joints had turned to water and he was cold and numb inside, it was a brave, smooth, even jaunty smile. He said: "You're a smart blood-hound, Joe. How'd you pick up the scent?"

Big Joe Storm got up off the berth, his hands still in his coat pockets, and advanced a step toward Dan.

"I ain't got time for clever repartee," he said. "Turn your back to me and lift your mitts."

GENTLEMAN DAN RAVEN turned around slowly. As he did so he heard the ship's siren break into a final scream that vibrated resoundingly through every beam and bulkhead of the liner. He raised his hands, the left one faster than the right. His right, in fact, never went higher than his shoulder. With a single, deft, swift movement, it whisked the .32 from the holster, fired backward under his left arm pit. The detonation was scarcely audible above the hysterical shriek of the *Picardie's* siren.

Dan whirled. Big Joe Storm was lying on the floor at his feet, his hands still in his coat pockets.

The ship shuddered as the quadruple screws churned in reverse, backing the great hulk away from the pier. Footsteps sounded in the corridor. Dan locked the door.

He bent over the crumpled figure. Big Joe was bleeding a little. He would have to get rid of him. He threw open the port. Thank the Lord for the large, square ports in these modern ships! He leaned out. Opposite him the lights of the next dock were slipping slowly past. Ahead were the red and green eyes of the flotilla of harbor tugs, wearing plumes of steam gilded by the lights of the *Picardie,* waiting to nose the liner into the stream.

He picked up Big Joe Storm. The boss was heavy but Dan managed to pack him to the port, work him through. He gave a last push, listened for the splash. He heard nothing but the throb of engines, the panting of tugs, the swirl of water, the faint chorus of goodbyes from the upper decks. He dropped the .32 through the port, his holster followed.

He turned back to examine the situation in his cabin. There was blood on the floor, blood on his shoes and trousers, a little blood on the berth. It would be hard to explain . . .

Next to the berth was a table. On the table was a thermos jug and a water tumbler. Dan picked up the glass, smashed it against the bulkhead, drew a long jagged sliver across his left wrist. He rang for the steward.

"I've had an accident," he said. "I've cut myself on this broken glass."

The steward's eyes widened as he saw Dan's dripping wrist, the blood-splattered cabin.

"I'll get the ship's surgeon right away, sir," he said.

Outside in the night the tugs hooted shrilly. The *Picardie* trembled as she swung her bow into the Hudson. Gentleman Dan Raven filled his lungs and smiled. His old life was ended—two lives were ended—but a new and glorious one had begun. He regretted nothing.

II

SPRING had come to Paris. The horsechestnut trees along the Boulevards were wearing ivory diadems of erect, fragrant flowers. The pot-bellied stoves which had allowed the inveterate sidewalk sitters to occupy their habitual tables all winter without freezing to death, had vanished into cafe basements. Strawberries had appeared on the market carts of the Rue des Martyrs and lilies-of-the-valley in the flower markets of the Madeleine. Lovers were holding hands on the benches of the Champs-Elysées. Stately mannequins, parading the latest creations of the masters of fashion, were attracting more attention than the race-horses at Auteuil and Longchamps. The gray, historic stones of the French Capital seemed to awake to new life in the warm sunshine. And into this atmosphere of rebirth came the reborn Gentleman Dan Raven.

Dan by this time had a new identity and a new beard. As George Daniel Poplar he wore a dark, pointed beard, touched here and there with a thread of silver. It was a distinguished beard which he had grown while loitering in Normandy for a few weeks before coming on to Paris. It seemed to change the very contours of his face, at least enough to prevent chance recognition by casual American acquaintances visiting Paris—which was all Dan desired of his beard. His appearance was not changed sufficiently to fool a professional detective, but Dan was not worried over detectives. Neither his photograph nor fingerprints were on file in America. He had never been arrested as a racketeer, and felt confident that he would not be as a murderer.

The murder of Big Joe Storm had left him singularly undisturbed. Morally, he felt completely justified. He had killed Big Joe in self-defense. If he hadn't fired, Big Joe would have killed him—just as he had killed three other insubordinates before. Legally, Big Joe should have died at Sing Sing; Dan was merely batting for the electric chair. And, practically, Dan felt quite safe in his new identity. He was confident that his tracks had been neatly and thoroughly obliterated. New York newspaper accounts of the slot-machine racket investigation of course spoke of the mysterious disappearance of the two key-witnesses. But when murder was suggested, Dan was mentioned as a probable victim, not a perpetrator.

So Dan began his new life with a clean slate, a clear conscience, an expensive Hispano-Suiza limousine, and a ten-room apartment in the Rue Picot, off the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

When he called on his banker in the Place Vendôme, he was received with the proper deference due a client who has just come to deposit another million francs to an already opulent account.

"I have come to Paris to live," he announced. "In America I mastered the art of making money. In France I expect to learn the art of enjoying it. I want your help."

"But willingly," said the banker.

"What Paris newspaper is most widely read by the upper crust?"

"The—pardon?—what crust?"

"The élite," Dan explained.

"Ah. Perhaps you mean the *Figaro?*"

"Perhaps I do. Will you have this advertisement translated into French and put in the *Figaro?* Let it run until further notice." Dan handed the banker a slip of paper.

The banker studied the text which read: *American gentleman seeks services of cultured Frenchman of aristocratic birth as companion, counsellor, and private secretary. Liberal compensation.*

"But this is unnecessary," said the banker. "I know just the person for you. He is a cousin-german of my wife . . . a splendid fellow but unfortunately a little pinched for funds at the moment."

"Send him around," said Dan.

THAT afternoon André de Manivelle came to Dan's apartment in the Rue Picot. He was a small, slim, wasp-waisted young man with the merest wisp of a silky black mustache. He was a very elegant person—perhaps a trifle too elegant, although Dan didn't think so. Dan liked the tired, sophisticated droop of André's worldly eyes, which made him look old and blasé although he was perhaps ten years Dan's junior. He admired the way the young man handled his cane and gloves, the graceful gestures of his small white hands. Dan knew at a glance that André de Manivelle was the man he wanted.

"In the first place, Monsieur de Manivelle," he said, "what do you think of the layout? Is it too much of a dump?"

"Layout?" André de Manivelle frowned his puzzlement.

"The apartment. Is it all right?"

The Frenchman's eyes swept over the brocaded silk with which the walls were covered, paused an instant on the massive fireplace of carved marble, the sparkling crystal chandeliers, the inlaid floors. He said:

"The apartment is correct, the address is chic, but the furnitures are—How do you say? *Camelotte.*"

"I guess you mean 'lousy'," said Dan. "And I agree with you. I rented the place furnished, just for the time being. I thought I'd let my daughter have the fun of helping buy antiques or whatever she wants to dress it up."

"Ah." André de Manivelle's interest quickened. "You have a daughter. She is married?"

"No," said Dan. "She's just nineteen. She's been away in a girl's school in Switzerland. I haven't seen her for nearly four years."

"But she is coming here to live with you, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"That's just the point," Dan said. "She's been at school, learning to be a lady, most of her life. I've been too busy making money to learn much about being a gentleman, except just a sketchy outline. . . ."

"You have an excellent start, *monsieur.* Your appearance is *distingué,* you have manners . . . ."

"I've got a lot to learn," Dan broke in. "And I want to learn enough in two weeks so I can send for my daughter without her being ashamed of me. That's your job. I want you to hire the servants, to start with. I want you to help me stock the cellar. For instance, Sauterne to me is just a label we—the bootleggers—put on vinegar bottles during Prohibition. I know it's white wine and should be drunk with fish.

But that's not enough. I want to buy the right years and I want to be able to tell by the taste whether I'm drinking Sauterne or claret."

"Claret?" André de Manivelle frowned. "Ah yes. That is the English word for some of our red Bordeaux wines. Well, we may include some, of course, if we get the best. Château Lafite, perhaps. And Château Margaux. Or Château Haut-Brion. But personally I would suggest a preponderance of Burgundy—"

"Sure," said Dan. "Sparkling Burgundy."

"No, no," André shook his head. He smiled pityingly. "Sparkling Burgundy is for export to America. Bubbles in Burgundy are like whipped cream on roast duck. They ruin the flavor. Wait until you taste our great still Burgundies from the Côte d'Or. Chambertin. Beaune. Corton. Clos Vougeot. Pommard. . . ."

"THAT'S the stuff!" Dan exclaimed. "That's the very thing I want from you. And I want to look at old furniture, so I can tell the difference between a Louis XV chair and a Louis XVI. We'd better see some pictures so I can learn a few names of artists and see what they painted, in case the girl wants to buy paintings. I want you to introduce me to some high-class people, so we can have real Parisian guests for dinner, after she gets here. Maybe I'd better join a few clubs."

"Tennis?" asked André. "Or golf?"

"I'm a sedentary person myself," said Dan, "although maybe a tennis club would be a good idea for the girl's sake. I could always sit on the sidelines and drink cocktails."

"No," said André. "Not cocktails. Cocktails are snob. They are parvenu. If you drink cocktails, people will think there has been money in your family only since the War. You must drink sherry. Or vermouth-cassis. Or perhaps Mandarin-curacao."

"Write those down for me," said Dan. "And what about a good, high-class stag club? A gentleman's club?"

"Ah. A *cercle,*" mused André. He smiled wistfully. "I could present you to one of mine," he said. "I belong to three. But unfortunately I am not . . . well, in good standing for the moment. There is a matter of some *dettes de jeu.* I think you say, 'IOU's.' "

"How much?"

"Nearly twenty thousand francs," sighed André.

"Simple." Dan whipped out his check book. "Go and square yourself right away," he said. "And tonight you can drag me around to one of the best."

André de Manivelle's smile was expansive. "I shall call for you tonight at ten," he said.

"Make it eight," said Dan, "so we can eat together. I may as well start learning about the best restaurants."

When André had gone, Dan went for a walk down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, feeling well satisfied with himself. He passed the Arc de Triomphe, strolled down the Champs Elysées. He stopped at a news kiosk to buy the Paris edition of the *New York Herald.* The crowd sipping *apéritifs* on the terrace of the Café Fouquet impressed him as being sufficiently elegant, so he sat down at one of the sidewalk tables.

"Mandarin-curacao," he told the waiter.

He lazed in the leafy sunshine of late afternoon while awaiting his drink, which turned out to be a tall, amber one with a pleasant bitter-sweet taste of orange. He savored its fragrance, relaxed, leaned back in his chair, spread

his newspaper. Almost instantly his muscles tensed, his mood of idleness vanished. Staring at him from the front page were the headlines:

**MISSING WITNESS
IN RACKET PROBE
FOUND MURDERED**

The story, cabled under a New York dateline, read:

> **The sea today gave up the bloated body of Big Joe Storm, alleged czar of New York's slot-machine and pin-game racket, who had been missing since the day Special Prosecutor Dowell opened his investigation into Storm's two-million-a-year "protective association."**
>
> **A bullet in his heart, Storm's corpse was washed ashore at South Beach, Staten Island. The Medical Examiner's office declared that the body had been in the water approximately a month, and that Storm was probably killed at the time the Special Prosecutor first began seeking him.**
>
> **Police would venture no theory as to where the murder had taken place, pointing out that the body had been at the mercy of tidal currents for weeks. Detective-Sergeant Benson of the Homicide Squad, however, who was loooking for Storm on suspicion of murdering his lieutenant, Gentleman Dan Raven, who disappeared from his blood-spattered Manhattan apartment at the same time Storm vanished, admitted last night that he had abandoned his original theory. He intimated to reporters that he was now seeking a third party, a man higher up, who had done away with both racketeers to prevent their testimony before the Special Grand Jury.**

Dan chuckled. He relaxed again, emptied his glass at one draught. He folded the newspaper carefully.

"Smart guys," he said aloud. "But not smart enough."

A waiter who heard him talking to himself, hurried to his table.

"Monsieur désire?" inquired the waiter.

Dan pointed to his empty glass. *"Encore,"* he said. "Mandarin-curacao."

III

BIG JOE STORM'S funeral was something of an event. All the big-shot racketeers of Greater New York —at least those who had no indictments outstanding against them—attended in person. Cronies of Prohibition days sent floral pieces from Chicago, Pittsburg, Kansas City and Miami. There were also flowers from Atlanta, Ossining and Alcatraz. The massive bronze coffin—it was sealed because, despite the best efforts of embalmers and undertakers' cosmetic experts, the mortal remains of Big Joe were startlingly unpleasant to look at—was literally buried in flowers.

Young Joe Storm, the dead man's son, stood near the front of the crowded funeral parlors. He was as tall and as broad as Big Joe, with the same rough-hewn, dynamic features, although some of the uncouth ruggedness had been refined out of them in the second generation. His nose was not flat, like his father's; in fact, it was straight, almost classical. And his clear brown eyes had none of the shiftiness of Big Joe's. They were thoughtful, logical, frank. If they seemed a trifle hard, it was because their grief had long since burned into dry, bitter rancor. For a month they had not mourned, for Young Joe was sure his father was dead the night the *Picardie* sailed; nearly sure, at least; the certainty that came with the finding of the body had been a relief. So now Young Joe's glance was pitiless, purposeful as it studied the people coming in; Racketeers, newspaper men, morbidly-curious strangers, more than a few plainclothesmen.

"Is he here, Joe?" asked a voice.

Young Joe turned, recognized Detective-sergeant Benson of the Homicide Squad. "Who, Sergeant?" he asked innocently.

"I've been watching you double-O the crowd," said Benson. "You're looking for the mug that killed Big Joe. Who is it?"

"I wouldn't know," replied Young Joe.

"Don't give me that song and dance," said Sergeant Benson. "That honor-among-thieves stuff don't suit you, Joe. You're a nice kid. You've got a chance to climb out of the muck your old man wallowed in most of his life. He sent you to college, didn't he?"

Young Joe nodded.

"Study?" asked Benson. "Or football?"

"Architecture."

"You'll go ahead with it, won't you, kid?"

Young Joe frowned.

"Maybe," said Young Joe. "The old man wanted me to go to Paris for a year at the Beaux Arts before I set up my drawing board."

"Do it, boy."

"Maybe I will," said Joe.

"And don't start packing a gat, boy, even to square things for Big Joe. Don't wreck your life by trying to take the law into your own hands. That's my job. Promise me if you get a tip on where the mug who bumped off Big Joe is hiding out, you'll come to me, and—"

"Listen, Sergeant," Young Joe pushed the detective gently away. "This is my father's funeral, not Centre Street. Will you have the decency to lay off, at least until the services are over?"

Sergeant Benson stared at the youth with a faint, knowing smile. Then he moved off into the crowd.

BUT Young Joe's mind was not on the services. While he was talking to Benson, looking through a window which gave on the street, he had seen a squat, plump young man with large ears loitering on the sidewalk opposite. He had seen him shy away from a plainclothesman, beat a furtive retreat, jump into a taxi . . . .

The funeral was hardly over before Young Joe Storm was knocking on the door of a dingy tenement in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. As the door opened a crack, Joe slid his foot inside.

"Let me in, Piggy," he said.

"You!" said Piggy Dunning. "I wanted to come to the funeral, Joe, but they's a warrant out fer me, and—"

"Where's Dan Raven?" Joe demanded.

"How'd I know—"

"He's your pal, isn't he?"

"But I ain't seen him in a month, Joe. Last I seen him, Big Joe and him was goin' to Havana. He must be in Cuba."

"He's not in Cuba. He's in Europe. Paris is my guess. He left on the *Picardie* the night he killed Big Joe."

"Naw, Joe. You're nuts. Dan wouldn't bump—"

"No? Well, he did. I warned the old man six months ago that Dan was planning to skip the country. I got the hunch last time I was down on vacation, and I saw those phonograph records for learning French up in Dan's apartment. The old man laughed at me. Then when the Special Prosecutor knocked over the warehouse, I knew I was right. It was a Friday—Dan's day in the barber chair. I went around to the barber shop and there was Dan with his head wrapped in hot towels. I slipped the porter fifty bucks to bring Dan's coat to the washroom, where

I could look in the pockets. I found a steamer ticket. I copied the number of the stateroom—339 on the *Picardie*—and took it to Big Joe. The old man went aboard the *Picardie* to rub Dan's nose in his own dirt. He never came back."

Joe took a step toward Piggy. His huge hand reached out impulsively, grasped the back of Dunning's collar, twisted savagely until the fat neck bulged white above the constricted collar band.

"I . . . I never knew . . . nothin' about that," gasped Piggy. "Jeez, Joe . . ! You don't . . t'ink . . . I had anyt'ing to do . . . wit' a lousy job like—?" Piggy choked.

Young Joe released his grasp, stepped back, breathing heavily.

"Maybe not, Piggy," he said, after a moment. "I guess Dan's smart enough not to shoot off his face to a nit-wit like you."

He spun on his heel, strode out. The door slammed behind him.

IV

THE Cercle des Pyramides, into which André de Manivelle introduced Dan, was, to reduce it to its common denomination, a sporting club. It was, however, by no means common. Its windows, heavily hung with rich damask, looked out upon the gardens of the Tuileries. Its furnishings glittered quietly with the ornate gold of Louis XV scrolls and rosettes. Huge gilt-framed mirrors reflected the flunkies in satin knee-breeches, with gold chains about their necks, who silently trod the deep rugs, bearing trays of caviar, truffled patties and aspics, goblets of champagne. The men about the gaming tables were faultlessly attired, distinguished. Those to whom Dan was introduced were viscounts, dukes, barons. There was scarcely a sound in the club rooms except the refined murmur of well-modulated voices and the click of roulette balls.

Dan was entranced by finding himself in the sort of surroundings and among the kind of people he had always dreamed of. In fact, he talked in whispers and walked on tiptoe, as though afraid of awakening himself from a pleasant dream. He passed a bundle of thousand-franc notes to the white-bearded cashier and received a stack of *louis d'or*—gold coins which haven't circulated in France for a quarter of a century. He stepped up to a roulette table, played the red. He won. He let his bet ride. Red came up five times running. He pushed the pile of gold coins to a number—18, because the *Picardie* had sailed on the eighteenth of the month. Number 18 came up.

Dan wanted to shout something, but he was able to restrain himself. No one at the Cercle des Pyramides betrayed by so much as a broad smile his joy at winning. It wasn't done. So Dan merely pinched the arm of André de Manivelle in lieu of singing. In return André smiled with his eyebrows, thus expressing fellow feeling.

Dan raked in his winnings, started riding the red again. Black came up four times straight.

Dan moved away from the roulette table. "What's that card game going on over there?" he murmured to his dapper mentor.

"*Trente et quarante*," murmured André. "Thirty and forty. It's rarely played outside of Monte Carlo."

Dan passed him a handful of gold coins. "I'll watch you play," he said. "Explain it to me."

André explained. The croupier dealt two rows of cards. Counting face cards

as ten, the others at their spot value, he continued dealing until he reached thirty-one—or less than forty. Punters played red or black. If the first row was closer to thirty-one, the black paid even money. If the second row was closer, red paid off.

"Sounds ridiculously simple," said Dan. "We'll try it."

He tried it for two hours, broke even.

"Tonight," said André looking at his watch, "there is roast pheasant in tarragon jelly at the cold buffet. I am informed that the pheasant has been particularly well hung. Shall we sup?"

THEY supped. Dan had never tasted pheasant before. He found it excellent. He was particularly appreciative of the delicate, golden Moselle wine that accompanied it. He was drinking his third glass when the crash of breaking dishes shattered the genteel atmosphere of the club. He looked up to see one of the flunkies in knee breeches brandishing a revolver and shouting something in raucous, ungentlemanly tones.

André, whose face had assumed a sickly, greenish pallor, interpreted. "It is—how do you say?—a stickup!" he said.

Dan looked suspiciously about him. Was he being played for a sucker? Was this a clip joint that André had brought him to—done on a scale of Continental elegance, of course? No, it couldn't be. The tense, frightened expressions on the aristocratic poker faces about him, faces that had not betrayed an iota of emotion all evening, testified that the hold-up was genuine.

The gentlemen were filing into the kitchen, one by one, leaving their wallets and bill-folds on the table by the door, at the dictation of the lone bandit in the flunky's costume.

Dan and André were near the door and were among the first to reach the kitchen. Dan's first reaction was a feeling of indignation—like that of a baseball player who is forced to pay his own way into the World Series, who resents such a fundamental violation of professional courtesy. Instantly, of course, he reminded himself that he was now on the other side of the fence. When he reached the kitchen, minus his wallet, he whispered to André: "Where's the phone? Maybe the mug forgot to have it covered, and I can get through to the police—"

But André wasn't listening. He was carrying on an animated conversation with two other victims in excited undertones.

More men came into the kitchen, white-faced and gesticulating.

At last someone cried: *"Il est parti."*

A nervous laugh of relief went up.

"He is gone," said André. "We may leave now. We will go to Montmartre for a drink. I need one after this unfortunate affair."

Everyone else, it seemed, was leaving also. Men were filing past the *vestiaire*, reclaiming evening cloaks, canes, top hats. . . .

"Don't we wait here till the police come?" asked Dan.

André looked at Dan along the straight ridge of his aristocratic nose. "The police," he said, a little coldly, "will not be summoned."

"Why not?" asked Dan.

André did not reply at once. They were downstairs by this time, and André was busy giving the number of Dan's Hispano-Suiza to the doorman.

"Why not?" Dan repeated.

"Because," said André, as the car rolled up and the door opened, "gaming clubs like the Cercle des Pyramides are not quite legal in Paris."

"You mean gambling isn't legal in France?"

"Gambling, yes. The pari-mutuel at the racetracks is legal. At certain casinos in various parts of France, some games are legal—boule and baccarat. But roulette, no! And in Paris, never. Parisians who want to gamble must play the races or take tickets in the National Lottery—or go to Enghien-les-Bains, in the suburbs. At watering places, the government is more lenient. But the Cercle des Pyramides—"

"You mean to tell me that a swell outfit like the Cercle des Pyramides takes a beating like we took tonight—lying down?"

ANDRÉ did not reply at once. He leaned forward to give an address to the chauffeur. The Hispano-Suiza purred along the Rue de Rivoli. Then André shrugged and leaned back against the deep upholstery.

"We are not quite legal," he repeated. "We can not afford to have an inquest by the Commissaire de Police."

Dan laughed—a croaking laugh. "I'll be damned!" he said. "Then that gang must have a picnic."

"What gang?" asked André innocently.

"The gang that stuck us up tonight."

"But there was no gang. There was only one *casse-cou,* one intrepid assassin."

"Don't be silly. He was working with a gang."

"No, no!" André insisted. "We French are not like you Americans. We are a race of individualists. Even our criminals are individualists. We have not your genius for organization. In America even your gangsters have admirable organization. . . ."

"What do you know about American gangsters?" Dan asked idly.

"Only what I see in the cinema."

"You admire them?"

"Oh, in many ways. *Ils sont trè forts.* They are brave, and they are always very rich."

"And you think this man tonight was working alone?"

"Oh, but certainly!" declared André.

"If he knows the police won't be called, he must knock over the Cercle quite often and quite regularly, then," said Dan.

"Oh, no," said André. "Such robberies are quite rare. First it is difficult to gain entry to clubs such as the Pyramides. Second, French criminals are quite class-conscious. They feel out of place among the aristocracy."

"And how many clubs like the Pyramides are there in Paris?" Dan asked.

"Perhaps forty," said André. "Perhaps fifty. But I asure you, tonight's unfortunate occurrence is indeed unusual. You need have no fear in becoming a member."

Dan lit a cigarette and leaned back, lost in thought. The car climbed the Montmartre hill. There was light mist falling, and the glistening pavement of the Rue Fontaine reflected the garish blue and red neon signs of the street of cabarets. The car stopped. A uniformed doorman pushed aside the beggars and flower-sellers who clustered around the luxurious limousine.

"This is a new night-box, the Boeuf au Sous-sol—how do you say?—the Bull in the Cellar," explained André. "It is quite gay. We will go in for a glass or two. Afterward we will go to the market quarter and have onion soup for breakfast. It is quite fashionable. Will that please you?"

Dan started up, as though aroused from a deep reverie. With a nervous gesture he flung away his cigarette.

"Why, sure," he said. "Let's go."

V

PARIS was drowsing in the first sultry days of summer. The Grand Prix had been run—largely at Dan's expense, he mused, as he tore up his pari-mutuel tickets on coming back from Longchamps. Parisians were off for the seashore and the mountains, leaving the sun-softened asphalt of the Boulevards to the incoming swarms of American tourists. Theatres were closing, as though in protest against the warm, foul breath now emerging from the subway entrances. But the languid sunshine which drenched the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne these days seemed only to make Dan the more restless.

Floria Tosca Poplar—Dan's daughter—had been living in the Rue Picot for two months now. She was a glorious creature, Dan thought, blonde and blue-eyed. She was neither the fragile, washed-out blonde of the Dresden-china type, nor the muscular Teutonic blonde of Wagnerian proportions. She was a healthy medium—young, dimpled, laughing and radiant. She had a quick tongue, but a forgiving, caressing smile—like her mother's.

Tosca's mother had been an opera singer who shone briefly in the role for which the girl was named. She had married Dan when he was a brash, handsome, flashy young gambler, flush with the winnings of a remarkable streak of luck. When Dan's luck ran out, just after Tosca was born, his wife did too. When she and her second husband, a man named Poplar, were killed in an automobile accident three years later, Dan inherited Tosca—and the name which he filed away for future use. He had Tosca brought up and educated away from him and ignorant of his profession. He visited her at rare intervals and he was genuinely glad when she came to Paris to live with him.

Tosca, too, seemed happy over the arrangement. She had been studying art and interior decoration, and had a rapturous time doing over the apartment in the Rue Picot. She dragged Dan through many foot-sore miles of art galleries—the Louvre, the Luxembourg, the Spring Salon, the contemporary exhibits in the Boulevard Malesherbes. And at night she took him to the Opéra, or occasionally to the Opéra-Comique, when the bill was *La Tosca*. So that when summer arrived, Dan was so surfeited with art and music and culture, that he began to find it all a little cloying. He was glad therefore, when Tosca decided to resume her art studies in a Left Bank academy near the Beaux-Arts, and was away painting five days and several nights a week.

André de Manivelle, however, was not quite as happy over the way things were going. In the first place he was a little disappointed because Tosca had failed to show great enthusiasm for his masculine charm and Old World elegance. In the second he was somewhat humiliated in being still in Paris when the exodus of the best people had already started.

"Monsieur Dan," he said one night, when they were alone together, "I must recall to you that unless we leave for Deauville almost instantly, we will miss the best weeks of the season."

"We'll run up next week-end and look it over," said Dan, immersed in reading. "Tosca doesn't want to leave Paris for long, while she's in the middle of her art course."

André made suggestive clucking sounds with his tongue.

"Are you certain," he asked slyly, "that it is art which keeps Mademoiselle Tosca in Paris? Is it not rather—how

do you say?—an affair of the heart?"

"YOU Frenchmen!" Dan commented with a shrug. He did not look up from his reading. He had discovered several weeks back, an amazing French weekly called *Détective*—a rotogravure sheet which out-tabloided the most lurid of American tabloids. Its pages were filled with pictures of corpses fished from the Seine, convicted white-slavers, half-wit matricides, crimes of passion, provincial poisonings. Dan read the sheet "to improve his French," he explained to André when the latter had reproved his tastes in periodicals. At least, with the aid of the pictures and his fragmentary French, he could get the drift of what the boys in the French underworld were doing.

"Say, André," he added suddenly, "what do you French mean by 'passage to the tobacco'?"

"Passage au tabac. That is the police expression for—how do you say?—the third degree."

"Do you know a French crook named Tin-tin le Filou?"

"The name, yes. He is an infamous Apache."

"It says here," Dan declared, "that the police have just given him the works on suspicion of his thirty-ninth crime, but had to turn him loose. Seems they always turn him loose, that he beats more raps than any crook in Paris." Dan held up a page of his paper. "Recognize him, André?" he asked.

André stared a moment at a full-page portrait of a thin, knife-like face, the two keen eyes, very close together, almost obscured by the visor of a cap; the long, pointed chin almost buried in the scarf that wrapped his neck.

"The head is familiar," said André. "I think I— *Non d'un nom!* It is the bandit who robbed the Cercle des Pyramides!"

"Exactly," said Dan. "And it says here his headquarters are in an Apache cabaret called the Bal du Petit Trou. Let's drop in on him tonight. I'd sort of like to get my money back."

"But Monsieur Dan, this Bal is a *bouge,* a—how do you say?—a low dive. We cannot go there."

"I'm going," said Dan. "And you're coming with me."

"But Monsieur Dan—"

"Listen," said Dan. "In the last ten weeks, over and above your salary, you've got into me, for debts and miscellaneous advances, for some 127,000 francs. . . ."

André smiled disarmingly. "What is that in your dollars?" he protested. "Nothing."

"For ten weeks that's a lot of dough, in anybody's money. Besides, André I'm bored stiff. I think a little visit to Tin-tin le Filou might take the taste of art galleries out of my mouth."

"But Monsieur Dan! Tin-tin le Filou —"

"Listen," said Dan. "Whether you come or not, I'm going. And I happen to need a secretary. Are you resigning as my secretary?"

"No, Monsieur Dan! But—"

"Then come on," said Dan.

THE Bal du Petit Trou was in one of those narrow, crooked streets which meander sordidly off the Boulevard de Sebastopol in the general direction of the Bastille. The pot-bellied buildings on each side of the sidewalkless alley were bedizened with electric signs which proclaimed a score of other *bals musettes* like the one Dan was seeking. Through open doors from which drifted the asthmatic strains of

accordion music, Dan could see men in caps dancing with frowsy women without hats—the proud badge of disrepute in Paris.

"Here we are, André," said Dan, pointing with a cane at the sign a few paces ahead.

Before André could comment, the shrill scream of a terrified woman vibrated in the night. Nearly simultaneously the figure of a man came hurtling through a doorway backward, landing in a heap, almost at the feet of a strolling *agent de police.* Without hastening his step, the policeman shrugged his cape a little closer around his shoulders, walked around the crumpled figure who was beginning to stir, continued his placid way. From within the Bal du Petit Trou came the crash of breaking glass, the bark of angry voices, the sounds of struggle.

"Paris cops seem pretty self-contained," commented Dan.

"French people are intense individualists," said André. "The police know that such places are frequented by no respectable people. These Apache fights are private affairs between themselves. The police do not violate privacy. I think we would be wise to do likewise."

André grabbed Dan's arm, held back. Dan strode ahead, pulled his unwilling mentor with him.

"Let's see what's going on," he said.

He stepped through the doorway into the dim-lit interior blue with tobacco smoke and profanity. His eyes gleamed. His quickened pulse leaped within him, like the pleasurable response of recognizing familiar music. Could it be that he had actually been missing these half-forgotten sounds of brawling—the smack of fist on flesh, the grunting, panting curses of force unleashed, the elemental shrieks of delighted terror of uninhibited women—sounds that he had erstwhile considered distasteful and foreign to his nature? What was it Big Joe Storm had said that day the *Picardie* sailed? "You'll always be a mug at heart, no matter what fork you use to shovel pie. . . ."

Something clipped Dan behind the ear. Instinctively he whirled, swung a looping haymaker. The stinging impact of his knuckles against jawbone vibrated along the entire length of his right arm. He saw his adversary sprawled at his feet.

An awed hush burst upon the dingy cabaret with the suddenness of a detonation. Surprise and shock froze the embattled customers into awkward poses of arrested motion—like living statues in a circus.

The man on the floor raised his head. Dan's racing heart stood still for three full beats. A drop of cold perspiration trickled down his spine. With a sick numbness he recognized the man he had floored was Tin-tin le Filou.

The Apache was getting up, slowly, then quickly. There was a gleam of metal in his hand.

AGAIN Dan swung—not instinctively this time, but with deliberate aim, the full weight of his six feet, the accurate timing born of desperate defense. Again there was a crunching impact, and again Tin-tin crumpled.

An uneasy murmur ran through the amazed group of onlookers.

Dan stooped, plucked the knife from the inert fingers of the Apache. He tossed it carelessly so that it rang to the top of the little zinc bar. He wiped his hands on his handkerchief. Then he slipped an arm around his fallen adversary, helped him to a chair.

"André!" he called.

André emerged from behind an overturned table.

"André, order a brandy for this gentleman," said Dan. "Order drinks for everybody in the place. It's on me. Then come here and explain to this gentleman that I'm sorry I had to knock him cold. Tell him I'm a gentleman. Tell him that I come here as his friend, and that if he hadn't swung first—"

"Patron!" André interpreted. *"Monsieur paie une tournée à tout le monde."*

A round red face with handle-bar mustaches arose cautiously above the zinc bar. The clink of bottles relieved the tension. A woman laughed. The accordion player edged around the upright piano, squeezed a tentative chord from his instrument. A waiter began righting the tables. André sat down beside Dan.

"Talk fast, André," said Dan, as he slid the brandy across the table to the Apache, who had opened his eyes and was regarding him with dull hostility. "Tell him I've come here on business—good business for him. Tell him I'm a great admirer of his, and that I want to show him how to get out of the amateur class. Tell him that he's wasting his talents; that he ought to be a rich man."

There was an exchange in French between André and the Apache.

"He says he's not ambitious," André translated. "He says that all he cares about is making a living."

"Then ask him why he tackled a big job like the Cercle des Pyramides?"

André swallowed hard—then translated the question.

"He says," said André a moment later, "that it was because of his *gonzesse*—how do you say?—his lady friend. She had *folies des grandeurs*. But he has dropped her like an old pair of socks when he found her tastes were permanently expensive."

"Tell him," said Dan, "that no woman should be too expensive for a man of his talents."

André told him.

"He says," was the translated reply, "that one cannot turn a trick like the Cercle every week."

"That's where he's wrong," declared Dan, leaning eagerly across the table. "Now listen."

DAN launched into his enthusiastic explanation. Of course every Cercle in Paris could not be tapped once a month, but every Cercle in Paris would be glad to pay a small monthly sum for protection against the ever present danger of being robbed—if that danger could be made very real, which it was, in view of the lack of police coöperation. Now, Dan was on the point of organizing a syndicate for the protection of the gambling clubs of Paris against robbery and other illegal molestation. It would be a serious organization, with offices in the Avenue de l'Opéra. Membership dues would total about one million francs a month. Of this amount, Tin-tin would receive a generous percentage for himself and whatever friends he needed to help him make the collections. The work would be almost nothing—unless, of course, some prospective member failed to see the benefits of belonging to such a syndicate; in that case a slight demonstration might be necessary. . . .

"Ah!" A light broke upon Tin-tin le Filou as André translated. A look of comprehension crossed his thin, suspicious face. *"C'est comme les gangstairs Américains!"* he said.

"Mais oui, mais oui!" exclaimed André who had begun to catch Dan's enthusiasm. His fears had been finally lulled by Dan's complete self-assurance in these unfamiliar surroundings, and

his appetite whetted by a prospective share in the million francs a month.

"Then it's a bargain?" asked Dan.

Apparently it was.

"Drinks around, then," Dan exclaimed. "On me. Champagne. Champagne for everybody."

André looked blank. "I am afraid," he said, "that there is no champagne in a *boite* like the Bal du Petit Trou."

"All right. What do they drink here, André?"

"Calvados, usually."

"Calvados for everybody, then. Double calvados."

Dan was smiling. He reached across to shake hands with Tin-tin. He tossed a fifty-franc note to the accordion player, a man with sideburns and a quarter-inch of cigarette drooping from a corner of his mouth, who immediately punched great chords from the complaining folds of his instrument. He gave another banknote to the waiter who was bustling about with bottles and small glasses.

Dan raised one of the glasses to his lips. His smile broadened as he set it down.

"Shades of Jersey and Jack Diamond!" he declared. "I haven't tasted that in—I don't know how long. Why, hell, it's apple-jack."

VI

YOUNG Joe Storm sat in a little cafe in the Rue Bonaparte, across from the Beaux-Arts. Five evenings a week for more than two months he had been coming to the same cafe. At first he came because of the Tavel—a light, rose-colored wine from the Valley of the Rhone, which was very good and very cheap here. But for more than a month he had been coming to meet Flo Poplar. Flo was late tonight, and he was glad. As much as he had looked forward to seeing her before, he dreaded her arrival now. This would probably be the last time he would ever see her.

Joe stiffened as he felt a hand on his shoulder. He did not look up until he heard a man's voice say, "Hi, Joe."

"Hello, Sergeant," said Joe. "Still in Paris, I see. I thought you were sailing for home."

Detective-sergeant Benson of the New York Homicide Squad sat down uninvited at Joe Storm's table. "You know why I didn't sail," he said.

"Better tell me, Sergeant," said Joe, "I'm not good at riddles."

"What's the matter? Don't you read the papers?"

"No," Joe lied.

Sergeant Benson drew a copy of the Paris *Herald* from his pocket, unfolded it, pushed it across the table. "Read that," he said, indicating an article with a thick forefinger.

Joe glanced listlessly at the headlines:

RACKET BLAMED FOR ATTACK ON PARIS CLUBMAN

Joe knew the story by heart, for he had read it a dozen times since that morning. Yet he made a pretense at perusing the familiar lines:

That American gangster methods have invaded Paris at last is the theory of the Sureté, following the brutal attack last night upon M. Leon Beauvit, secretary-treasurer of the Cercle Cosmopolite, said to be a select gaming club.

M. Beauvit was picked up in the Rue St. Honoré, badly beaten and suffering from two stab wounds. He had apparently been thrown from an automobile. From his semi-delirious, incoherent story, police learned that he was attacked by an unidentified man to whom he had refused payment of 25,000 francs for membership in a strong-arm society which would "protect" his club against robbery.

Pointing out similarity in the assault to the technique of American racketeers, detectives of the Sureté are today trying to link the crime to two other attacks on officials of alleged high-class gambling clubs earlier in the week.

Young Joe Storm pushed the paper across the table.

"What of it?" he asked.

"Spells Dan Raven to me," said Benson. "The best little organizer in Greater New York just couldn't keep his hands off the unorganized underworld of Paris."

"Forget it, Sergeant," said Joe. "Out of ten thousand American racketeers, why should it be just Dan Raven who's in Paris? I thought Raven was dead."

"If he's dead," said Benson, giving Joe a long, searching stare, "he must have died sudden, some time since last night."

Joe shrugged, sipped his rose-tinted wine, said nothing.

"Or haven't you found him yet, Joe?" Benson asked.

"Say, lay off, Sergeant," Joe protested. "You've been tailing me here all summer. You must be satisfied by this time that I'm studying architecture—on the level."

"On the side, maybe," said Benson, taking out his wallet. "Here's a little piece of paper I never showed you before. Lucky you architecture students go in for waterproof ink, because I found this in your old man's pocket, when they fished him out o' the bay."

Young Joe's expresion changed, in spite of himself. The fragment of paper in the palm of the detective's hand was the blurred and faded remnant of the memo he had given his father, the last time he saw him alive. It was his own handwriting that warned: *Dan will be in Stateroom 339, S.S. Picardie, Pier 88. . . .*

"The man in 339 went by the name of Joseph Smythe," Benson continued, "but his description couldn't fit anybody but Gentleman Dan Raven. I came to Europe to talk to the steward of 339—he's on another run now—and to trace Mr. Smythe. I lost the trail in a little village in Normandy, but now"—he tapped his newspaper—"I'm sure he's in Paris. And I'm afraid you're sure, too, Joe. I just want to remind you what I told you, back in New York. I—"

"Sure, sure, Sergeant. I remember all that."

"I want you to promise me again, Joe, that you'll leave this to me; because they guillotine murderers in France, Joe, and—"

"All right, all right. Don't start that all over again. And take a little walk, will you, Sergeant? I've got a date with a swell dame, and I'm afraid if you're here when she comes in, she'll fall for your manly wiles. Give me a break, will you, Sarge?"

"All right, Joe," Benson stood up. Suddenly he leaned across the table. With three rapid, unobtrusive motions he tapped Young Joe's armpits, pockets, hips. He nodded. "Just remember Joe—I don't want you to lose your head."

"So long, Sarge."

Young Joe watched Benson saunter out. He signaled the waiter for another Tavel. The price-marking saucers under his glass were mounting to a considerable pile. Then Flo Poplar came in.

JOE felt a catch in his throat at the sight of her blonde loveliness, the fresh vitality of her bearing, the warm glow of her sapphire eyes, the bloom of her young cheeks.

"Am I late, darling?" she began. "I tried to hurry, but—Joe—what's the

matter with you? You look positively ghastly! You're ill!"

"I'm all right," said Joe. He let his gaze linger on the sheen of unalloyed gold that made a halo about her jaunty blue beret. Then he said quickly: "Listen, Flo. There's something I want to tell you; something I want you to remember, no matter what happens in the next few days—or weeks. I love you, Flo."

Flo Poplar reached across the marble-topped table to pat his hand. "I know you do, darling," she said. "You don't have to tell me that. I couldn't help knowing it, because I love you too, Joe."

"I'm sorry," said Joe. "I've tried to make you think this was hopeless. I've refused to meet your father, or even come to your house. Only I lied when I said it was because a poor student had no place in the swank home of a rich family. . . ."

The girl's blue eyes clouded. "You're already married, Joe?"

"It's not that simple." He hesitated. His lips were bloodless. "Flo, I came to Paris to kill a man."

The girl started to smile. It was a startled, incredulous smile that never quite materialized. Her alarmed glance found the stack of saucers under Joe's glass. She said: " Darling, you've had a sun-stroke—this bottled sunshine you are drinking is—"

"I was never more sober in my life," Joe interrupted. "I came to France to kill the man who murdered my father. After I met you, I almost hoped I wouldn't find him. But now I'm sure he's here, and it's only a question of time."

"Joe darling, if the man's a murderer, why don't you get the police? Why carry on a feud like a Kentucky hillbilly—or a gangster?"

"My father," said Young Joe slowly, looking the girl squarely in the eyes, "was a gangster."

"But *you're* not, darling. You're not!"

"No, I was never actually in the racket. But I'm Big Joe Storm's son. I knew what he was and where the money came from—and I took the money to pay for my schooling. Besides, I'm responsible for his death, in a way. If I hadn't been such a wise-guy, if I'd let Dan Raven get away with his double-crossing, they wouldn't have fished the old man out of the Lower Bay with a bullet in him. Oh, I know it's silly and uncivilized and all that. I know it as well as you do—with part of me. But with the other part, I know I have to square things. That's the part of me that got into my bones while I was growing up. It's a little like religion, I guess. If you knew your father wouldn't rest easy in his grave unless somebody said mass for him every day for a year, you'd break your neck to have mass said. Or if he wanted a pink marble tombstone—or a stained glass memorial window . . . That's the way it is with me. I know Big Joe won't rest until I've evened things with Gentleman Dan Raven. So— But what's the use of trying to explain? It's something you can't understand with your reason. It's something you just feel—or you don't."

The girl was clinging tightly to Joe's hand. Her eyes were unnaturally bright, a little frightened perhaps, by the discovery of the magnitude of her love, a discovery hastened by the sudden demand that she choose between this tall, muscular young man and her old scale of values. After a long pause, she said:

"I do, darling." She got up quickly, released his hand. "I'm going now, darling. I'm going for a long walk,

somewhere I can be alone with myself —and think. I'll be waiting for you at the usual time. And all the time, I'll be thinking of you and hoping you'll find a way out—some way that won't hurt you—and me. But if you don't—" She smiled wistfully. "It won't make any difference, darling. I'll be wating for you anyhow."

She stooped, brushed his cheek with a hurried kiss, then, as though fleeing before an overwhelming torrent of emotion, she ran from the cafe.

Young Joe Storm stared after her for ten long seconds. Then he swallowed the last of his glass of Tavel, paid his bill, and walked out with long, determined strides. He turned the corner into the Rue de l'Université, slackened his pace as he approached the little hotel where he was living. In his room on the fifth floor, in the drawer of a rickety, marble-topped, worm-eaten, walnut dresser, there was a .45 caliber revolver.

VII

SUMMER was drawing to an end. The trees on the Avenue du Bois were turning to bronze and gold. Early dusk came to the boulevards bearing the crisp premonition of autumn and the fragrance of roasting chestnuts from street-corner stands. Mauve mists arose from the Seine to creep through the city.

When Dan entered his Rue Picot apartment, he handed his hat, cane and gloves to his butler with a quick, impatient motion of suppressed anger. He hurried into the drawing room, tried not to show his relief when from the threshold room he saw André sitting uneasily on the edge of an Empire chair.

"Why didn't you meet me at the bank?" Dan snapped.

"Something—something grave has arrived," murmured André. He was nervously pressing a silk handkerchief between the perspiring palms of his hands. His elegant, world-weary face was even paler than usual.

"Where's the money?" Dan demanded. "Where's the collections?"

André gestured across the room. A small black bag stood on a gold-legged gueridon.

"All right, let's hear it then," said Dan. "What's the bad news?"

"Tin-tin de Filou!" said André. "He is become dangerously—how do you say?—insubordinated."

"That's no news," said Dan.

"But he is complaining that the business has become too perilous and that he should have at least half the total collections—"

"I'm still running this show," Dan broke in. "He'll take what I give him."

"But he says the police are become annoying. He needs more money, in case he should have to go abroad suddenly . . . ."

"Let him talk," said Dan. "It's cheap."

"But he thinks himself now more *rusé* and clever than American gangsters," protested André. "This morning I saw him in a cafe with a young cadet engineer from some ship. Suppose he should go to Havre and give the cadet engineer twenty thousand francs as a bribe to let him—how do you say? —stowaway to New York. Suppose—"

"Did you give that crook twenty-thousand francs?" demanded Dan, suddenly suspicious.

"No, no, no!" André's whole body emphasized his denial. "But Tin-tin is a Frenchman. He is an individualist. He is not disciplined like Anglo-Saxons. He has no respect for authority. That is why I did not come to the bank.

I was afraid Tin-tin would make a *guet-apens*—how do you say?—ambush. That is why I took a long way 'round and came here. Tin-tin is planning something, *monsieur.*"

"How much in the bag?" Dan asked.

"Seven hundred thousand francs."

"Call the bank," Dan ordered.

"But, *monsieur,* the bank is closed."

"Of course it's closed. Get the president on the telephone. Call him at his home. Have him send someone to open up to receive a large deposit. Tell him it's urgent."

"But if Tin-tin—"

"Tin-tin, my eye! He knows who's boss. He won't try anything. Get on the phone, André."

"Very well, *monsieur.*"

WHEN André stepped into the next room, Dan went over to the gueridon and opened the bag. He stared down at the pastel pinks and lavenders of the huge, tissue-thin, thousand-franc notes, pinned together in bundles of a hundred each. He reached in one hand, allowed a loving thumb to ruffle the edges, counting. . . .

The door bell rang.

Dan snapped the bag shut. He drew a cigarette from his gold case, faced the hallway expectantly. After a moment André and the butler came in together.

"It is a countryman of *monsieur's* at the door," said André. "An American who says he has an important message for Monsieur Poplar in regard to a Mr. Dan Raven."

Dan was in the act of lighting his cigarette. His hand stopped in mid-air, remained rigidly motionless. The grim, stony set of his jaw was visible even through his beard. He stared at André as though he did not understand. The match burned his fingers. He dropped it to the rug. The butler stepped forward to pick it up.

"Shall I tell him to come in, *monsieur?*" André asked.

Dan started from his trance. "No," he said. "There must be some mistake. I don't know any Dan Raven. Tell him he must have the wrong address."

"Very well, *monsieur.*"

Dan struck another match. He was annoyed to see that his hands trembled. He called: "Wait! André! Come here!"

André turned back. Dan motioned him closer. With a deliberate effort to control the tingling nerves of his fingers, he finished lighting his cigarette. In low tones he asked: "What's this American look like, André?"

André shrugged. "He is not big," he replied. "But he is fat. He has large ears."

Dan inhaled deeply. His lips relaxed into the ghost of a smile as he breathed out a thin cloud of smoke. "Show him in," he said.

Piggy Dunning was genuinely and volubly glad to see Dan.

"Dan!" he exclaimed, as he rushed in. "It was you, after all. I wasn't sure, with them whiskers. It's sure good to—What's up, Dan? Y'ain't sore at me, are you, after I come all this way?"

Dunning pulled up short at the sight of Dan standing coldly undemonstrative in the middle of the room.

"How did you find me?" Dan asked casually.

"I almost didn't," said Piggy Dunning. "I had an awful time. I hung around all the bars and race-tracks where I t'ought you might be, and I was about ready to t'ink maybe I played a bum hunch, when I begin readin' little pieces in the paper about jobs 'at might be your woik. So—"

"How did you find me?" Dan repeated mechanically.

"THE car you give me, back in N'Yawk," said Piggy. "When I sold it, I cleaned it out, and I found a envelope slipped down back o' the front seat. It was from a Paris bank for George Poplar. I stuck it away somewheres and just happened to come across it th' other day. I says to myself, 'Maybe this guy Poplar knows where's Dan,' so I chased around to the bank, and they told me Monsoor Poplar comes in on Wednesdays. So I hung around today. I didn't get wise at first it was you behind all 'at shrubbery, but I followed you out here, and —Dan, I'm glad I got to you in time to tip you off!"

"About what?"

"About Joe Storm. He's gunnin' for you."

"I thought Big Joe was dead," said Dan.

"This is Young Joe Storm," said Piggy. "He's out to get you. He's in Paris—"

"How do you know?"

"I know he's out fer blood 'cause he came to see me the day o' Big Joe's funeral. And I know he's in Paris because I seen him a couple o' times. I seen him at the race-track, and I seen him once or twice, passin' my hotel—"

"Your hotel? Then he's camping on your trail!"

"Naw, Dan. He never give me a tumble. I don't t'ink he knows I live there."

"The hell he doesn't!" Dan roared. "That kid's smart, Piggy, as smart as you're dumb. Like a fool, you've probably led him right to my door!"

"I been careful. I didn't see nobody tailin' me . . ."

"You wouldn't!" Dan snorted. "You wouldn't notice the Garde Republicaine following you in a column of fours! Where does Young Joe Storm live?"

"I dunno, Dan. But if you want me to—"

"Pardon me for interrupting," said André de Manivelle, "but I think Mademoiselle Tosca might tell us where the young man lives."

Dan looked blankly at his elegant secretary. "Tosca?" he echoed, "What makes you think so, André?"

"For some time," smirked André, "Mademoiselle has been meeting a young American student. I am perhaps indiscreet, but I have been—how do you say?—emotionally interested in Mademoiselle Tosca. When she did not respond, I knew there must be someone else. So I took the liberty of watching her when she left her art school several times. I also took the liberty of investigating the young man. His name is Joseph Storm, and he studies at the Beaux Arts. He lives in a small hotel in the Rue de l'Université . . ."

"I don't believe it!" Dan declared.

André smiled confidently. "You might ask Mademoiselle," he said. "She has been listening behind that door during the past five minutes."

Dan sprang up, whirled. There was a patter of light footsteps in the corridor. Dan pushed open a door that stood slightly ajar.

"Tosca!' he called.

There was no answer. Somewhere in the apartment a door closed.

"Tosca! Suzette!"

A maid appeared.

"Where's my daughter?" Dan shouted.

"Mademoiselle est sortie—" began the maid.

"How long ago did she go out?"

The maid shook her head. She did not know how long. Mademoiselle was not in her room; that is all she knew.

"Look, *monsieur!*' André de Manivelle, still smiling smugly, was standing

by the window, pointing downward.

Dan walked quickly to his side, leaned out to follow the direction indicated by André's slim white forefinger. Three stories below, he saw Tosca leaving the street entrance of the apartment house, hurrying along the sidewalk in the direction of the Avenue du Bois.

"Come on, André," Dan said, grasping the Frenchman's arm. "And bring the bag."

"But, *monsieur*—"

"You telephoned someone from the bank?"

"Yes, *monsieur,* but—"

"Then bring the bag," said Dan. "And hurry."

VIII

WHEN Floria Tosca Poplar ran from the apartment in the Rue Picot, she did not even stop for her hat and coat. She was stunned, overwhelmed by the tumbling ruins of a universe collapsing about her pretty blonde head. Her ears still rang with names of Dan Raven and Joe Storm. She had not meant to be an eavesdropper. She had been on the point of asking her father to take her to the Opera, and remained motionless behind the door to the drawing room only bebause her legs had refused to carry her farther, after the first revealing words had reached her ears. She was still dazed by the shock of what she had overheard. She knew only that she had to do something; what, she didn't know. . . .

She emerged from the street entrance. Dan's sleek Hispano-Suiza was parked at the curb. She hesitated. No, she wouldn't take it. She'd get a taxi. There was one across the street. Or was it a private car? There seemed to be people in it. There were always taxis at the corner of the Avenue du Bois. She hurried toward the corner.

She had taken only a dozen steps when she felt someone seize her arm from behind. She turned, aroused to reality, indignant. Then, with a little cry, she flung herself into the arms of Young Joe Storm.

"Take me away from here, darling," she sobbed. "Take me away—far away—anywhere! I don't care what you do with me, darling! Only let's get away—together! I'll do anything, darling! I'll work for you! I'll—"

She stopped, suddenly aware that Joe Storm had pushed her away, was holding her at rigid arm's length. The glow of a street lamp gave his rough-hewn features a strange, fierce, tragic pallor. His lips scarcely moved as he said:

"What were you doing in that house?"

"I live there, darling!"

"You— Then you know Dan Raven!"

"I didn't know he was Dan Raven! Not until tonight! I swear it! As long as I can remember it's always been Poplar!"

Joe recoiled as if from a blow to the jaw. His mouth straightened in a tight, firm line.

"You're Tosca!" he exclaimed tonelessly. "I should have known it. You've lied to me."

"I didn't lie, Joe! Truly! I—"

"Flo Poplar! Tosca!" He laughed mirthlessly. "You might have been honest enough to tell me your name was Tosca. I knew Dan had a girl named Tosca. . . ."

"But my name's Floria Tosca, Joe. At school I was always Flo. I hate the name Tosca. Nobody ever called me that but my father. I—Joe! Joe!"

Young Joe Storm had started forward. Three men had come from the

apartment house, were crossing the sidewalk toward the Hispano-Suiza. One of them was carrying a small hand-bag. Joe was moving rapidly toward them.

"Joe! Joe! Please!"

Scarcely turning his head, Joe said something to her as he moved away. She could not make out what he said. She saw his arm jerk back as though he were throwing something at her. She paid no attention. She was running after him.

Two shots beat upon the night in rapid succession. A third followed, then a fourth.

A DAZZLING beam of light sprang from the car parked across the street, illuminating the figure of a man running, a black bag clasped tightly in one hand. For an instant, the thin, knife-like face of Tin-tin le Filou was lighted by the glare.

Quickly he ducked out of the range of the searchlight. Another fusillade of shots roared.

Scores of running feet thundered along the sidewalk. Windows went up. A crowd was gathering under the marquee of the apartment house. Two *agents cyclistes,* wheeling slowly like automatons on their appointed rounds, suddenly began pedalling furiously toward the sound of shooting. They leaned their bicycles against the curb, whipped out notebooks, calmly began asking questions.

Gentleman Dan Raven was lying on the sidewalk, bleeding a little. Piggy Dunning was kneeling beside him, tears on his fat cheeks.

"It's all my fault, Dan."

"No, no," protested André de Manivelle. "It was that Apache, Tin-tin ee Filou. There he goes. He will escape. *Monsieur* did not comprehend his mentality. Tin-tin was an individualist. All Frenchmen are individualists. . . ."

Detective-sergeant Benson walked over from the parked car, a gun in his hand. He sought out Joe Storm on the edge of the crowd, sidled up to him.

"You lucky stiff, Joe," he said, out of one corner of his mouth. "You're lucky that French yegg winged him before you got a chance. Now give me that gun, before the French cops find it on you."

"What gun?" asked Joe.

"The one you been packing all summer," said Benson. "Don't stall, now. I don't want the *flics* to find it on you. Quick, the gat!"

"Oh, that," said Joe. "It's back there in the gutter. I threw it away before the shooting started."

Benson tapped the youth's hips and arm pits. He looked long and earnestly at the lithe blonde girl kneeling on the sidewalk. He looked back at Joe—a little tenderly this time.

"You're a fool kid, Joe," said Benson. "But I guess you're a good kid, at that."

Under the marquee Dan Raven was beginning to stir. He raised himself on one elbow, lifted his head.

A tiny crimson rivulet trickled down his chin.

He tried to raise himself on one elbow, fell back again.

"André," he gasped. "Help me up. Where's my cane . . .? Hand me my hat." He struggled laboriously to his feet. A shaking hand verified his cravat, brushed back a wisp of gray hair as he tried to adjust his hat to the proper angle.

"André," he faltered. "Big Joe Storm—said I'd be . . . a mug . . . as long as I . . lived. . . . Am I, André?"

"No, *monsieur,* no. You are always a gentleman. A perfect gentleman!"

"Not perfect, André . . . not perfect, but—"

Dan tried his suave, urbane smile once more. It faded to a sheepish grin, like that of a child going to sleep. His knees buckled under him.

The police were clearing the crowd from the sidewalk.

"Circulez, messieurs-dames! Circulez!"

An ambulance drew up to the curb, but it wasn't needed.

Martian Laughter

IF there are planets besides the Earth which other men call home, there is no doubt that, gazing Earthward through their telescopes, they often shake their heads and sigh, bewildered by our works. For instance, when they focus their lenses around Ocala, Florida, they must get a start. A few miles to the south of Ocala there is a great ditch scooped in the sandy wasteland. Towering against the tropic sky are four huge bases upon which the Santos Highway Bridge was to have rested. This abandoned slash at the Earth—Martians will have no way of knowing—was to have been the Florida canal. Future congresses may authorize its completion; but meanwhile, pending action, rain and sun remain in control, powerful engineers of destruction.

—*Peter Kelly.*

That amazing, red-nosed, bespatted lawman, Sheriff Henry Harrison Conroy of Tonto, is back again with a fresh gallon of prune juice and a job to tackle as tough as any Wild Horse Valley has ever offered him

Henry Plays a Hunch

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Galloping Gold," "High Heels—and Henry," etc.

CHAPTER I

DUSTY PROPOSES

SANDY CRANE hunched dolefully on the top pole of the Bar M corral, his eyes centered on the front door of the ranch-house. Sandy, whose nickname had been shortened from Sandhill, was tall and gaunt and gangly. His face was deeply lined, his eyes sad brown, and he boasted the widest mouth in Wild Horse Valley. With muffled voice he sang:

If m' darlin's dead jist show the red,
But if she's better-r-r-r, show the blue.

But Sandy's mind was not on his song. It was a subconscious action, even if he did hang onto some of the notes with a coyote wail. He was watching that front door, waiting for Dusty Cole to appear. Dusty was on a dangerous mission. At least, Sandy thought so. He knew Peter—known locally as Peter the Great—Morris very well indeed. Peter had tremendous strength and a hair-trigger temper.

Sandy had warned Dusty of this, but the warning went unheeded, because Dusty Cole, reckless and young, was in love with Laura Morris. Sandy did not blame him for that. Nearly every cowboy from Scorpion Bend to Tonto Town was in love with Laura Morris. Dusty had, to outward appearance at least, rather the better of it, because he worked on the Morris ranch, the Bar M.

"I seen it comin' on," remarked Sandy, when Dusty told him. "I've seen the same expression in the eyes of a bogged-down calf."

And now Dusty Cole was in the main room of the ranch-house, telling Peter the Great that he, Dusty Cole, was in love with Laura and wished to marry her. Dusty had his speech all rehearsed.

Sandy, his voice still muffled, sang:

Ta-a-ake back your gold,
For gold will never buy me-e-e-e-e. . . .

And then the front door banged open, propelled by the hurtling body of Dusty Cole. There was a rather flimsy railing around the porch, and this proved but little obstruction to the body. Dusty Cole ended in a sitting position in the dirt about six feet from the edge of the porch.

For almost a minute he sat there, as though trying to puzzle out just what had happened. The door had shut behind him. Down at the corral, Sandy Crane's sombrero bobbed a trifle, due to the quizzical lifting of his brows. Then Sandy softly cleared his throat, and it seemed that a ripple of mirth jiggled his belt-buckle.

Dusty got slowly to his feet, felt himself over painfully. Then he limped down to the corral fence. He paused

there to look sourly at Sandy. Dusty was barely past his majority, well built, good-looking. A long lock of curly brown hair straggled down over one eye, and he shifted it with a gusty blow of his lips.

"Well, Romeo," remarked Sandy, "it kinda looks to me like yore balcony done busted."

"My what?" asked Dusty blankly.

Sandy sighed and rubbed his nose. "When you leave a place, yuh shore do leave it, Dusty."

"Oh, yeah," agreed Dusty, looking back at the porch. "If anybody ever tells me that Peter Morris is the strongest man in the whole danged world, I'm goin' to nod my head."

"Come up here and set down," invited Sandy.

"Yo're crazy," declared Dusty. I've done too much settin'."

He sighed dismally, shrugged his shoulders, then added:

"Well, we might as well pack our plunder, Sandy. We're fired."

Sandy removed his sombrero, looking wide-eyed at Dusty.

"*We're* fired?" he gasped. "Was that what yuh said, Dusty?"

"Both of us," agreed Dusty.

"Well, holy smoke, I didn't ask him for his daughter's hand!"

"That's exactly what I told him," declared Dusty. "He said, 'The next thing I know that saw-faced, two-by-four pardner of yours will want to marry her.'

"I said, 'Yo're wrong, Mr. Morris. He told me he wouldn't have her as a gift, if he had to have you for a daddy-in-law.' "

"You told him that, Dusty? Why, dang yore hide, I'll—"

"Wait a minute! He said you was saw-faced, didn't he? Heck, I won't let anybody slander you, Sandy. Anyway, I was the one that wanted her."

"Well, ain't that wonderful!" exclaimed Sandy. "You ask a man for his daughter's hand—and I get fired."

"Me, too," sighed Dusty. "But I told him a few things, y'betcha."

"Yeah, I'll bet you did! Well, I'm goin' up there and tell him I never said I wouldn't have her. Why wouldn't I have her? She's the prettiest girl in Wild Horse Valley."

Sandy got off the fence and tightened up his belt. Dusty looked him over sadly, and held out his right hand.

"Good-by, Sandy," he said, a sob in his voice. "I'll wait in Tonto City for the coroner to bring in yore remains."

Sandy shook hands solemnly with him, adjusted his sombrero, and looked thoughtfully at the house. But he seemed then to hesitate.

"After all," he said finally, "forty a month ain't worth fightin' over. But what about our money?"

"He said it would be at the bank for us."

"Uh-huh. Well, I don't reckon there's anything to keep us here. It's a lucky thing we own our own horses. But you ain't givin' up Laura without a struggle, are yuh—or do yuh figure you've just had one?"

"When Peter the Great gets hold of yuh—struggle and be danged. But I'm not givin' up Laura, and I'm not leavin' the country. Peter Morris is goin' to find out that I'm one cowwaddy he can't handle."

"Yuh better try out-guessin' him, Dusty," grinned Sandy.

"I s'pose," sighed Dusty. "But love or no love, if he ever puts a hand on me again—or before he does—"

"I wouldn't think about anything like that," said Sandy quietly.

Dusty changed the subject.

"Let's go up to the bunkhouse and

collect our stuff," he said, "before I get so stiff I can't walk. Man, I shore set down a long ways."

FROM a window of the big ranch-house Peter Morris watched the two cowboys leave the ranch. Morris was a huge man, bearded, powerful as a bull, and not lacking in arrogance. Peter Morris had nothing against Dusty Cole as a hand. To him, Dusty was a run-of-the-mill cowboy, capable of earning forty dollars a month, inclined to be as wild as a hawk, and not at all a suitable husband for Laura.

As he turned from the window Laura came down the stairs. Laura had inherited none of her father's likeness or traits. She was small and slender, with brown hair and gray eyes. But in spite of her size and beauty, there was nothing of the clinging-vine in her makeup. There was a defiant blaze in her eyes as she looked at her father.

"Dusty Cole," he said laconically, "had the nerve to ask me to let you marry him."

"I saw your answer from my window," she answered coldly.

"You saw it, did yuh?" Peter Morris chuckled.

"I saw you throw him out."

A shadow of surprise crossed his face. "Well, what could he expect?" he demanded.

"Civil treatment—at least."

"Huh?" Peter Morris stared at her. "You don't mean to stand there and intimate that you'd marry *him,* do yuh?"

"I told him I would. Maybe he didn't tell you what I said."

Peter Morris turned slowly to the window again.

"Well, yeah, he did mention it. But what of it? He hasn't anything. I owe him about six dollars, and I'll bet he hasn't got another cent. Marriage! You'd starve with Dusty Cole."

"Did mother starve, when she married you?" asked Laura.

Peter Morris turned quickly. "No, you can't use that as an example. Things was different in them days. Why, we—stop that danged grinnin', will yuh?"

"I am not grinning—I'm showing my teeth," retorted Laura. "If I know Dusty Cole, he hasn't started fighting yet."

"Stubborn, eh—along with his other bad habits. Drinks whisky, smokes cigarettes and plays poker."

"So do you—and in addition, you chew."

"You let my personal habits alone, young lady."

"Then you stop defaming Dusty Cole," she snapped. "He doesn't chew—and that's a lot in his favor."

"Prob'ly make him sick—and that's why he don't. Anyway, I fired him and Sandy Crane today, and they're off the ranch for good."

"Why did you fire Sandy Crane?" asked Laura.

"Why? Because he told Dusty he wouldn't have you as a gift, if he had to have me for a father-in-law."

Laura's gray eyes were dancing, but her face was sober as she said: "That would be quite a responsibility, I suppose."

Peter Morris ignored the jibe. He picked up his hat.

"I'm goin' to town," he told her. "I've got to pay the boys off, this afternoon, 'cause they'll all want to go to town tonight."

"I believe I'll go to town, too," remarked Laura.

"You will, eh?" growled her father. "Well, you keep away from Dusty Cole. I won't have it, I tell yuh. You'll

obey my orders, or I'll lock yuh up."

Laura laughed at his threat. "You'll be there to watch me, won't you?"

"I will not, because I have to meet a man here tonight."

"Well, I'll try and get along alone," said Laura soberly. "I might go out and have a visit with Molly Hope."

"Yeah!" snorted Peter Morris. "There's an example for yuh. She married in haste, and look what she got. Oh, I don't care if she is Judge Myers' daughter. If I had a son-in-law like Sam Hope, I'd trade him for a sidewinder."

"Molly is the sweetest girl on earth," declared Laura warmly.

"Sure," agreed her father. "But she was bull-headed. The judge didn't want her to marry Sam—but she knew best, and look at the cripple-brain she got."

"She loves him, Dad."

"Love!" Peter Morris laughed harshly. "There's no accountin' for taste, as the prospector said when he kissed his burro. But I sure ain't goin' to let you make the same mistake Molly Myers made."

CHAPTER II

PRUNE JUICE AND CHICKENS

HENRY HARRISON CONROY had been born back-stage in a theater, and all his life had been spent behind the footlights, until he came to Tonto City. When vaudeville waned, his contract had been cancelled. Soon after that an aged uncle died and willed Henry the JHC Ranch in Wild Horse Valley, Arizona. Up to that time Henry's knowledge of the West had been gained by watching a stage production of *The Squaw Man*.

Henry was short and very fat, with a moon-like face, squinty, blue eyes and a huge red nose, which had been featured in vaudeville from coast to coast for years. Tonto City and Wild Horse Valley, intrigued and amused by this red-nosed, derby-hatted, white-spatted and gold-caned personage, welcomed him as an innovation, and in a spirit of fun elected him sheriff of the county.

Henry accepted the honor in the same spirit by appointing "Judge" Van Treece as his deputy, and Oscar Johnson as his jailer. Judge was sixty years of age, tall and gaunt, had managed to drink himself out of the limelight as a criminal lawyer, and was more or less of a derelict when Henry appointed him. Oscar Johnson, a giant of a Swede, whom Judge nicknamed "The Vitrified Viking," had been a horse-wrangler on the JHC until Henry made him jailer. But in spite of their combined eccentricities, the sheriff's office at Tonto managed to function with reasonable efficiency.

Just now the three peace officers were in the office, with Henry at his desk, Judge tilted back against the wall, his heels hooked over the top rung of his chair, while Oscar sprawled on a cot, clad in a badly-wrinkled, sickly-green suit of clothes, his once-white collar hiked up around his big ears.

"Sifting your rambling statement to plain facts," Judge was remarking soberly to Oscar, "you hired a horse and buggy here last evening, with the intention of taking Josephine Swensen to a dance last night at the city of Scorpion Bend. During the evening you, as usual, drank too much whisky, became exasperated at Josephine and drove home, taking the wrong horse and buggy. Am I right, Oscar?"

"Ay yust got de wrong hurse and boggy," nodded Oscar.

"And smashed the buggy wheels

against the first obstacle you saw," added Henry dryly. "I understand that you drove into the livery stable at some ungodly hour this morning, with both the wheels on one side of the buggy ground down to the hubs."

"Ay t'ought de road vars high on vone side," grinned Oscar. "But Ay am t'rough vit Yosephine, you bat you. She can't make no fule out of me—sometime."

"I suppose it was Olaf again," said Henry.

Olaf was a huge Norwegian who had tried to take Josephine away from Oscar, but with no physical success.

"It vars not," declared Oscar indignantly. "It vars a shiphorder from Black River City, named Nels Yensen. Yust a damn shiphorder."

Henry blinked back some riotous tears. "What started the trouble, Oscar?"

"Va'al, it vars like dis," began Oscar, enumerating on his huge, cucumber-like fingers, as though counting. "Nels Yensen gave Yosephine a ring, and she shows it to me. Ay made her give it back, and Ay said to him, 'If you give yewelry to my girl again Ay vill knock your ears off.'

"Nels he say to me, 'Ay yust gave it to her so she vould remamber me.'

"Ay said to him, 'She don't need it, because every time she sees a yackass she vill remamber you.' "

"And so you fought with him, eh?" queried Judge.

"To ha'al *vit* him!" snorted Oscar. "Ay fought *against* him, Yudge."

"Who won the fight?" choked Henry.

Oscar grinned sourly. "Yosephine," he admitted.

"How on earth did Josephine get into the brawl?"

"It vars in de holl, vere dey serve de sopper. Yosephine had small piece two-by-four. Ven Ay voke up dey vars taking Nels out. Yosephine vars dere, and she says, "What in de ha'al are *you* vaiting for?' Ay yust vent out oll by myself.

"Ay vent to de Scorpion Saloon. Nels vars dere and he says, 'Yudas Priest, you hit me so quick I never see it.' Ay says to him, 'You bat you, Ay am great fighter. Ay can vip anybody in de vorld.'

"And den he hit me right on de nose. Ve busted up all de furniture in de saloon before Ay got squvare poke at him. Ay knock him as cold as Nervegian iceborg. Den Ay take him outside, put him in boggy, untie de hurse and give him de lines. Dat vars de end of it."

"You put him in your own buggy, didn't you?" queried Judge.

"By yeeminee, Ay bet Ay did!" snorted Oscar.

Judge shook his head sadly.

"You're a fine example of law and order. Drunken jailer fights with a sheepherder. Henry, is it any wonder that they call us the Shame of Arizona? Is it any wonder that they point the finger of shame at your regime?"

"Have I ever denied the allegation, Judge?" asked Henry.

"Confound it, sir, we should have a little dignity!"

Oscar was peering out the door. "Ha'ar comes Freeholey," he announced. "Yust about time."

FRIJOLE BILL CULLISON was the cook at the JHC. He was past sixty years of age, a little, skinny rawhider, with a peaked face and long mustaches. When he wasn't cooking food or cleaning house, he was distilling prunes—and there was little cooking or housekeeping to do these days.

Frijole had a gallon jug, all wrapped up in a burlap sack, which he carefully placed on the cot beside Oscar.

"And that," he declared, "will whip anything ever made in Kentucky. Twenty years old, if it's a day, and it was made yesterday. That stuff ages so fast that if yuh left it alone for a week, it'd turn into a mummy."

"I give you good afternoon, Frijole," said Henry soberly.

"I'll take it—and thank yuh, Sheriff," said Frijole. "Everything is fine at the rancho—except Bill Shakespeare, the rooster."

"What happened to Bill?" asked Judge. "Now, don't lie about him."

"I hope t' die sometime, if I ever lied about him, Judge. Yuh know how Bill's allus been about my prune mash. Him fillin' up on it and goin' out to pick a fight with a wildcat. Well, sir, Old Bill finally jist about cleaned all the wildcats out of that country. When he fanned them two lions out of Jawbone Canyon, I figured he'd gnawed off a chunk, but he got rid of 'em awful quick.

"Yesterday, when I dumped my mash, I noticed that Bill was kinda shinin' up to a red hen I named Emmelina. Well, he started bowin' and scrapin' beside the mash-pile; so she comes over and starts eatin' of it. Old Bill, with sort of a grin on his face, digs into it himself. Well, sir, inside of ten minutes them two are fightin'. I'll tell yuh this much, Old Bill ain't no gentleman. Him havin' spurs and a five, six pound advantage. So I separates 'em, catches the hen, and I wires a couple ten-penny spikes on her legs. Whooee-e-e-e!

"Well, to make a long story short, Old Bill's up on the ridgepole of the house. Been up there since yesterday afternoon, and danged if he'll come down. All he's got left in the feather line is his wings and one tail feather."

"And where, if I may be so bold as to ask, is Emmelina?" asked Henry.

"Oh, her," said Frijole, a faraway look in his eyes. "Well, sir, she pulled off what a Frenchman would call a *fox pass*. There's a coyote been hangin' around the ranch, aimin' to have a chicken dinner. When he made his visit last evenin', he didn't see Emmalina on the top pole of the corral fence. She landed plumb straddle of him. Then she socked them ten-penny spurs into him, and away they went.

"I've been doin' a heap of thinkin' about it since then. Yuh see, she ain't had much experience with spurs, and I figured she's done mastered the art of sockin' 'em in, but she didn't know how to yank 'em out. Anyway, she ain't such a loss, bein' as she ain't layed any eggs for months."

"I don't believe a word of it!" snorted Judge.

"Why, Judge!" exclaimed Frijole. "Wouldn't I *know* if she laid any eggs?"

Henry wiped the tears away and rubbed his waistline, while Judge rumbled and mumbled, deep in his skinny throat.

"I rode in with Dusty Cole and Sandy Crane," remarked Frijole. No one seemed interested, so Frijole continued: "Peter the Great fired both of 'em today."

"Why?" asked Henry.

"Love—they told me."

"Love?"

"Yeah. Dusty asked Peter the Great for the hand of his daughter, and Peter throwed Dusty out of the house. Then he tied a can on both of 'em."

"Well, my goodness!" exclaimed Judge. "Dusty is a nice boy."

"Laura Morris is a nice girl, too," added Henry. "Love seemed doomed to setbacks in Wild Horse Valley. Look at Oscar."

"What went wrong with the big Swede?" asked Frijole.

"Ay have bruk off vit Yosephine."

"Well, I dunno," sighed Frijole. "After what I seen Old Bill do to Emmelina, I'll—"

"Don't!" interrupted Judge. "You told that once, Frijole."

"Ay vould like to try dis prune yuice," remarked Oscar.

"On top of the hangover you already have?" queried Judge. "Don't do it, Oscar."

"His love has been shattered, Judge," reminded Henry dryly.

"Well," declared Judge, "there is no use of dynamiting the remains. My advice is to keep that stuff corked."

Frijole shook his head vehemently.

"I wouldn't," he said. "Yuh notice I've got a string tied to the cork, in case she blows. I dunno how many corks I've lost. I done tried standin' a jug on the cork; but it blowed the jug through the roof. That happened 'bout nine o'clock at night, and next mornin' that cork was still bouncin' around the room."

"Of all the confounded liars." wailed Judge.

"Yea-a-ah?" queried Frijole. "Well, you come out and I'll prove it."

"How can you prove it?" demanded Judge.

"I'll show yuh the cork."

Henry reached for his hat and went waddling out of the office, his expansive equator jerking from internal convulsions.

THERE was nothing dry nor dull about Tonto City. When Henry had been elected sheriff Tonto was strictly a cowtown, but the discovery of gold had made it both cowtown and mining camp. Muck-covered miners just off shift, burro-punching prospectors, cowboys, gamblers and the usual riff-raff of a mining town rubbed elbows together in the saloons and gambling houses.

The town smiled at Henry Harrison Conroy and his misfit helpers—and Henry smiled back at them. Part of the time he wore high-heel boots, huge Stetson sombrero and a holstered gun; and sometimes he appeared in a pastel-gray suit, gray derby—and spats. At those times he also carried a gold-headed cane. But at all times his nose had the color and sheen of a polished beet.

Henry was wearing his Western outfit this day, as he strolled up to the weathered old building which housed the county offices. He saw Judge Myers, the Superior Court justice, motioning to him from an office window. Nodding, he entered the building.

Judge Myers was decidedly of the Abraham Lincoln type, tall and awkward, thin-faced, sharp of eye, and with a sense of humor. As he motioned Henry to a seat, it was evident that he was disturbed. Henry sat down, folded his fat hands and squinted quizzically at the judge.

"Judge," he said, "after looking at you I would decide that all is not beer and skittles. May I ask what is on your mind?"

Judge Myers sat down at his desk. For several moments he nervously shuffled some papers. Finally he asked:

"Has Peter Morris said anything to you about—er—Sam Hope?"

"No, Judge—not of late."

"He promised he wouldn't."

"Sam in trouble again, Judge?"

"He was," sighed the judge.

"By the way, you started Sam in the cattle business a few months ago, Judge. Bought out that Bar N brand, I understood."

"It wasn't much, Henry—but I had to dig into my savings. Confound it, I didn't do it for Sam—I did it for Molly. Sam isn't worth the price of the dynamite it would take to blow his head off. Oh, he was grateful and all that. Promised to reform, of course. And it made Molly very happy."

"Too bad about Sam," sighed Henry. "Molly is as sweet as any woman on earth. Damn it, Judge. I don't know why sweet women cling to no-good folks like Sam Hope. But what was the trouble?"

"The trouble," explained Judge grimly, "was the fact that Peter Morris caught Sam herding a Bar M calf with a Bar N cow. Whether he intended altering the calf to a Bar N—I do not know. Peter drew a gun on Sam, and took the calf. He came to see me today. Because of Molly he did not have Sam arrested."

"What did Morris want?" asked Henry curiously.

"He asked me to have that Bar N brand cancelled and register another mark. He thought that the similarity of brands might influence my dear son-in-law. Henry, I believe I am the only Superior Court judge in the world whose son-in-law is a protected cattle rustler."

"A doubtful honor, I am obliged to admit," said Henry gravely. "Does Molly know this?"

"Not unless Sam has told her. I haven't talked with Sam. Don't believe I shall. Confound it, Henry, the young man hasn't a single redeeming feature."

"He has a winning smile—and an uncanny ability at throwing a knife," remarked Henry.

"Yes, he has that ability."

"But he doesn't carry his liquor well, Judge."

"Not well—but often, Henry. Oh, I've talked things over with Molly many times, and begged her to divorce Sam. But she only smiles and says that Sam needs her. Needs her!"

"I suppose he was indignant at Peter Morris."

"Of course. Oh, he has plenty of nerve. I believe he told Peter Morris that some day he would make him eat his gun."

"Rather a hard dish," mused Henry. "Even with such jaws as his. I misdoubt that Peter could masticate it entirely. Well, I suppose there is nothing to be done about it, Judge. I believe there is a saying that if you give a calf enough rope, he will hang himself."

"That is exactly what I am afraid might happen, Henry."

"Worry will not help matters, Judge. I suggest that we advance on that pool of iniquity known as the Tonto, and indulge in the cup that cheers. I am several minutes past my drinking time."

"And mine, too," agreed the judge, reaching for his hat. "We must look on the bright side of things, I suppose."

THEY found Sandy Crane at the bar in the Tonto Saloon. Sandy was still able to stay upright—but with an effort.

"Misser Conroy," he said expansively, "you are jus' 'n time to shettle grave debate. Me and the barten'er has problem. Take look at me, will yuh. Conshider me from every angle. Tha's right. All right. To the bes' of your ability and judgment, would you shay I'm drunk?"

"My dear Mr. Crane!" exclaimed Henry.

"Then I win!" exploded Sandy triumphantly. "Gimme that four-bits, barten'er."

"Aw, he didn't say yuh ain't drunk."

"I believe," smiled Henry, "that Mr. Crane is in the same position as the traveler who stops a few rods out of town and asks someone if he is headed in the general direction of Tonto City."

"How's that?" queried Sandy.

"Well, he is headed right and has only a short distance to go."

"I shee," grinned Sandy. "But in order to be real good 'n drunk, I've still got a ways to go, eh?"

"After all," smiled Henry, "I am not able to state the degree of sobriety or intoxication which you are enjoying. I would declare the bet a draw."

"Tha's shenshible," agreed Sandy. "Will you and Judge honor me?"

Of course they would, they assured him. And they did. Henry inquired about Dusty Cole.

Sandy chuckled over his glass. "Dusty's gone out to Sam Hope's ranch," he told them confidently—in a loud voice. "Peter the Great kicked us both off the ranch t'day. But Dusty knowed that a shertain lady was goin' to Hope's ranch; so Dusty went there."

"Have you seen Sam Hope in town today, Sandy?" asked the judge.

" 'Bout an hour ago," nodded Sandy. "And was he pickled! Had hard time gettin' on his horsh."

"Nothing unusual about that," sighed Judge Myers.

"Jus' a little stiffer 'n usual," remarked Sandy Crane.

CHAPTER III

LIGHTNING TESTIFIES

OUT at the JHC Ranch, Thunder and Lightning Mendoza prepared to go visiting. They were a pair of undersized and over-fat, half-Mexican, half-Yaqui breeds whom Henry had hired, more because of their misuse of the English language than any ability with cows.

Juan Mendoza, cook at the Morris ranch, was their uncle, and it was to visit Juan that they were all dressed up that Saturday evening. Lightning was smooth of face, while Thunder boasted a six-hair mustache which he nursed carefully.

"*Madre de Dios!*" exclaimed Thunder. "Those stove polish make theese boot shine like neeger's hill."

"She's shine like hell," agreed Lightning admiringly. "But w'at ees a neeger's hill?"

"*Por Dios,* I am ashame from my own ignorance," declared Thunder. "You know w'at ees a toe?"

"Sure. I'm got me t'ree, four, myself."

"Well, theese hill I'm spik 'bout is the firs' bend—"

"Oh, sure! You mean hill. Like theese hill of a boot. You spik Englis' like a shipherder."

"Leesten!" exploded Thunder. "Leesten, my leetle brodder! W'ere you get those rad necktie?"

"You like heem, eh?" smiled Lightning proudly. "I buy heem from Frijole for twenty-five *centavos*. W'en he ees ver' young he ees four-handed, but Frijole cut heem off and he mak' ver' nice bow, eh? He say he cut off the soup ends."

"Frijole, eh? That son-of-a-gonn! Twenty-five *centavos* for my rad necktie. That mak' me very seek."

"How long you have rad necktie?" asked Lightning.

"How long? That necktie ees almos' new. I bet I don' have heem over seek year—that's all I hope."

"Well," remarked Lightning, "she

look damn good on me. How we go see Juan?"

"Everybodee ees gone to Tonto Ceety. There ees team in the stable, and bockboard in the yard."

"That team from 'orses ees not broke ver' well."

"Are you scare from 'orses? Bah! I drove worse 'orse than this all your life. Señor 'Enry hees saying I am worse driver than Ben Hur. He say I can do more dang' theeng weeth 'orse and boggy than Oscar Johnson, who ees the worl' champinn. W'at you theenk of those?"

"That sound damn good," agreed Lightning. "But after I am dead, w'at ees the use of leestening to you. Sure, I go. You are jus' as crazy as I am."

DUSTY COLE came back to Tonto City about dark, and found Sandy Crane sound asleep in a chair at the Tonto Saloon. Dusty had discovered that he had forgotten his Sunday boots at the Bar M, and wanted Sandy to ride out there with him, but Sandy was in no condition to mount a horse.

Laura Morris had told him that her father would come to take her home about ten o'clock, and urged Dusty in the meanwhile to have another talk with him when he went out to get his boots.

Still, Dusty did not share her optimism when she said that "He might look at things differently now."

Nevertheless, Dusty wanted his boots; so he rode out there alone. There was a light in the ranch-house. When he arrived Laura had mentioned something about her father having an appointment, but she did not know who was coming out to see him. Dusty rode quietly up near the bunkhouse. He could go into the bunkhouse, secure his boots, and ride away, without disturbing anyone.

He dismounted beside the bunkhouse and walked to the door. He opened it and stepped inside. In the darkness he started to the rear, where he knew there would be a lamp on the table. Halfway across the room he tripped over something and went to his knees.

His groping hand touched a thing that yielded, and he jerked back quickly. Carefully he reached out again, running his fingers over the object. It was a man's face, sticky with blood.

Dusty jerked his hand away, got slowly to his feet, reaching around for the table. With shaking fingers he took a match from his pocket and lighted the lamp.

In the middle of the floor lay Juan Mendoza, the Mexican cook, flat on his back, apparently dead.

Dusty's eyes circled the room, his face grim in the lamplight. What on earth had happened to Juan, he wondered? And where was Peter the Great Morris?

At a sound from outside, Dusty jerked up his head.

From out in the yard came the thudding of hoofs, the rattle and squeak of a wheeled vehicle. Dusty ran to the doorway. At that moment a crash shook the bunkhouse. A heavy body hurtled into him, hurled him back against a bunk. His head collided with the wall, and consciousness disappeared in a flash of light.

BUSINESS was good that evening at the Tonto Saloon and Gambling Palace. It was payday at the ranches and the mines, and the main idea seemed to get rid of the money as quickly as possible. Henry and Judge were at the bar, talking with Jim McDonald, one of Morris' cowboys, when

a very disheveled Lightning Mendoza staggered into the place. Lightning's nose was skinned, and the blood had not improved his appearance in the least.

"Madre de Dios!" he howled. "Dusty Cole hees keel our onkle!"

Henry grasped Lightning by the arm and shook him violently.

"Take a deep breath and count ten," advised Henry.

"No can count," panted Lightning. "Spik damn good, but no count."

"What happened?" queried Henry.

"Our onkle—he's dead."

"Do yuh mean Juan Mendoza?" asked Jim McDonald.

"Si, si! He ees dead on hees back, flat."

"Wait a minute," said Judge. "You are excited, Lightning."

"Sure," agreed Lightning. "Dosty keel heem."

"Where is this dead man?" asked someone in the crowd.

"In de bonkhouse, on de floor!" snorted Lightning. "Can't you onnerstand United States?"

"In our bunkhouse?" asked McDonald.

"Eef that ees where you leeve—sure. My onkle ees Juan Mendoza."

"That's the boy. Where is Dusty Cole?"

"Thunder knock heem steef like a post," declared Lightning. "He ees lock up in the bonkhouse."

"Did you see Dusty Cole kill Juan Mendoza?" asked Judge.

"W'at you theenk I'm talking 'bout? *Por Dios—"*

A dozen men raced for the hitch-racks. Judge, who detested riding on a horse, halted Henry long enough to say:

"You lead the posse, while I watch the town, Henry."

THEY found the situation exactly as described by Lightning. Dusty was unconscious, his head swollen where it had banged against the bunk. Juan Mendoza was not dead, but unconscious from a blow on the head, which had cut his scalp badly. Henry kept the crowd back until he had studied the situation, and then ordered one of the men to get a doctor. Neither Thunder nor Lightning came along.

While Henry was trying to figure out what had really happened, Jim McDonald came crashing his way through the men.

"This is only part of it!" he roared. "Peter Morris is dead in the main room of the house. C'mon!"

Henry, in spite of his lack of foot-speed, was the first one there.

"Keep the men back, Jim," he ordered. "Let me handle this alone."

He knelt and examined Peter Morris. The big cattleman was dead—and no mistake about that. A bottle of ink had upset on the carpet, and there was a pen sticking point down in the floor. Henry's squinty eyes peered around the room. He was low enough to see an object under an old sofa, but he said nothing. He got to his feet and turned to the men in the doorway.

"Peter Morris is without a doubt dead, gentlemen," he said ."You will please stay out there in the kitchen until after the coroner views the body. McDonald, I deputize you to take care of Dusty Cole."

"Do yuh reckon he killed Morris?" asked McDonald.

"I hope not, Jim," replied Henry.

As soon as the men moved away from the doorway, Henry secured the object from under the sofa, hurriedly wrapped it in his handkerchief, and put it in his pocket. After which he sat down to wait for Doctor Bogart, the

coroner, who was now attending the injured.

After the coroner had at last found time to view the tragedy in the main room, Henry was obliged, on the strength of Lightning's direct testimony, to place Dusty Cole under arrest. By the time they arrived in Tonto City, Dusty was conscious, but very vague as to what had happened. Jim McDonald went out to the Hope ranch to break the news to Laura.

"As I viewed the tragedy," Henry explained to Judge when they were gathered again in the sheriff's office, "someone killed Peter Morris, reason unknown. Juan, the cook, possibly recognizing the killer—"

Judge, quite unimpressed, yanked off a shoe. "Marvelous!" he exclaimed.

"Have you a better theory, sir?" asked Henry stiffly.

"Must I remind you that I am not a detective?"

"I see. Merely a first-class sneerologist."

Judge sniffed, continued to undress. "I was merely reminding you," he said, "that your deductions are elemental. A ten-year-old child—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Henry.

"Mm-m-m," muttered Judge. "I wonder how much credence we may attach to Thunder and Lightning's statements. And how on earth could either one of them knock Dusty Cole unconscious? Why, he could whip a colony of them, Henry."

"Dusty is still a trifle vague over what happened," replied Henry.

"Perhaps the morrow will bring enlightenment."

Henry nestled back a little in his chair, said soberly: "I hope it may, Judge. If Juan Mendoza lives—he might be able to name the murderer."

"You aren't sure it was Dusty Cole?"

"How on earth could I be sure?"

"Not absolutely, of course, Henry. But there was a motive. Peter Morris kicked him out of the house and discharged him. Why did he go back there tonight—except to do evil?"

"I feel," replied Henry, "that it is a little too soon to try the case, Judge. Try and relax a little. Remember to not get excited. At your advanced age, it might prove fatal."

"Advanced age, indeed!" snorted Judge. "I am in my prime."

"At the moment you are in your shirttail, sir; and neither youth nor prime ever had knees like yours. The unmistakable doorknobs of a misspent life."

CHAPTER IV

INQUEST IN EENGLIS'

JOHN CAMPBELL, the prosecuting attorney, came early next morning to see Henry. He wanted all the facts of the case, wanted to know just how much direct evidence there was against Dusty Cole.

"You will have to keep a close guard on Cole," declared the lawyer. "Peter Morris was one of our best-liked citizens, and some of the folks might try to take the law in their own hands. No doubt Cole killed him in retaliation for kicking him out of the house."

Henry rubbed his nose thoughtfully, his eyes still sleepy.

"Nothing has been established yet."

"Mighty strong circumstantial evidence, it seems to me, Conroy. I have talked already with Laura Morris. Mrs. Hope brought her to town this morning, and they have gone out to the ranch. She is too upset over it to talk to anyone. How soon may I talk with Dusty Cole?"

"Well, I do not know how he feels this morning, John. Let us give him time to gather his wits, at least, before asking questions. Last night he did not know what it was all about."

"Probably shamming," said the lawyer.

"Not with a bump on his head the size of a goose egg."

Campbell grunted, turned toward the door. "I shall be down at the jail in an hour, Conroy," he said. "Bump or no bump, he must talk with me."

Henry sighed and nodded. He stood there a moment, watching the lawyer hurry away toward his office. Then he himself walked slowly up to the courthouse and entered Judge Myers' office. The judge, looking over some papers, nodded a welcome to Henry.

"It was a terrible thing that happened last night," said the judge. "Peter Morris was a fine man, Henry. Luckily we have his murderer."

"A most brutal murder, Judge, agreed Henry.

The judge shook his head sadly. "I have known Peter Morris for several years," he said. "He was a fine, honorable citizen; too fine to die at the hands of a wild, vindictive young cowboy. My personal feelings are that a sentence of hanging is far too lenient for such a crime. By the way, Henry, was he shot from behind?"

"Judge," replied Henry soberly, "he was not shot."

"Not shot? Why—"

The judge broke off to stare keenly at Henry. The latter was drawing an object from his pocket; an object wrapped in a handkerchief.

Slowly Henry unrolled it and placed it on the judge's desk. It was a knife of the hunting type, bloodstained. On the handle, inlaid in a white metal, were the initials S. H.

"It was under the sofa in the room where Peter Morris died," said Henry. "You and I are the only ones who know about it, Judge."

Judge Myers started to touch the knife, but drew his hand away. He sank back in his chair, staring at Henry. The sheriff wrapped the knife again and put it in his pocket.

"I saw Molly this morning," the judge whispered. "She said that Sam did not come home last night. My God, this will kill her! Henry, don't you realize what this means to her—and to me?"

"I've been thinking about it," nodded Henry. "Dusty Cole is in jail. I am not accusing Sam Hope, Judge."

"But that is Sam's knife. You know how he can throw a knife."

"I have seen him impale a playing card at fifty feet," replied Henry. "But that doesn't mean he threw the knife that killed Peter."

"There is a motive," whispered the judge. "That trouble about the calf."

"You are trying to convict him, Judge," remarked Henry.

The old judge shut his jaws tightly, and his knuckles were white from his grip on the arms of his chair. After a moment he relaxed.

"I am thinking of Molly," he said wearily.

"I do not believe they can convict Dusty Cole," said Henry with seeming irrelevance. "At the same time, we do not know that he isn't guilty."

The judge leaned forward, sudden hope in his eyes. "You mean—not mention the knife, Henry?" he whispered.

"If worst came to the worst," replied Henry quietly, "it might be that —well, I have never lost a prisoner—before, Judge."

"And he might be proved not guilty," added the judge.

Henry got slowly to his feet and put on his hat.

"The Shame of Arizona," he muttered. "I believe we are a pair of damned conniving old law-breakers, Judge. I give you good morning, sir."

Henry walked out of the office, gently closing the door. Behind him, he left Judge Myers staring into space, blinking thoughtfully.

THE prosecuting attorney was waiting at the office for Henry, when he returned. They went at once to Dusty's cell.

They found Dusty clear-minded and indignant. Talk? Certainly!

"But remember," cautioned the lawyear, "that anything you say may be used against you, Cole."

"I'll try and protect myself," said Dusty grimly. "I never shot Peter Morris nor Juan Mendoza. I went out there to get my Sunday boots, and I fell over Juan in the bunkhouse. After I lighted the lamp and discovered who I'd fell over, I heard a team comin'; so I went to the doorway, where somethin' landed on me so hard that I went plumb out."

The lawyer looked his unbelief. "You had trouble with Peter Morris yesterday, I understand, Cole," he said.

"Well," Dusty grinned sourly," he threw me out of the house. It wasn't any trouble for him—and I wasn't hurt any."

"Then you went back last night and shot him, eh?"

"I did?" gasped Dusty in amazement.

"And when Juan Mendoza saw you —you tried to kill him, too."

"Gee, I'm shore a tough vaquero! You ain't been readin' about Billy the Kid, and got yourself all confused, have yuh, Campbell?"

"Being sarcastic will not help your case, Cole," reminded the lawyer warmly.

"Well, you've got my story," replied Dusty. And he refused to talk any more.

The lawyer and Henry went back into the office, sat down. Henry asked Campbell what he thought of the matter.

"I don't believe there is any question that Cole shot Morris."

Henry settled himself in his chair." "I haven't much money," he remarked. "Oh, I might be able to dig up a few hundred. With what I have, I am offering you two-to-one odds that Dusty Cole did not shoot Peter Morris."

Campbell started. "You—you have other information?" he queried.

"Not a scintilla, as you lawyers say."

"Then what are you betting on?"

"On the simple fact that Peter Morris was stabbed—not shot."

"He—he was *stabbed?* Why wasn't I told of this?"

A trace of a smile creased Henry's lips. "You never asked—you merely presumed, my dear attorney at law," he answered. "In your own mind, it seems, you have already convicted Dusty Cole for shooting Peter Morris."

John Campbell looked balefully at the fat sheriff.

"I suppose," he said harshly, "I am the last one to know how the murder was committed."

Henry smiled—broadly now. "No, I believe Dusty Cole is also ignorant of the weapon used. He thinks that Morris was shot."

"Well," grunted the lawyer, "I'm not so sure of that. However, we will find out a few things at the inquest. You say that those two Mexicans saw Dusty Cole kill Juan Mendoza?"

"I have found their words to be

most unreliable, sir," replied Henry. "Their imaginations are boundless—and their English atrocious."

"They are the state's witnesses," reminded the lawyer.

Henry sighed. "God help our state," he said.

DOWN at the Tonto, Sandy Crane was nearly as indignant as had Dusty Cole. He swore by all the gods and to all present, including Judge Van Treece, that Dusty was innocent.

"Why don't you do something for him?" suggested Judge.

"I am," replied Sandy, leaning heavily on the bar. "I'm drinkin' enough for both of us."

"You'd better sober up for the inquest," advised Judge. "They will want to know what happened yesterday at Morris' ranch. The prosecution will base their case on the fact that Dusty had a motive for the killing."

"You mean—'cause Morris throwed him out of the house?" queried Sandy.

"Exactly. He went back there to get even with Morris."

"The hell he did!" exclaimed Sandy. Then he paused to reconsider. "Well, I do 'member Dusty sayin'—"

"Saying what?" prompted Judge quickly.

"Oh, nothin'. I was thinkin' out loud, Judge. Forget it." And he would say no more.

Back in the sheriff's office a little later, Judge told Henry about Sandy's broken remark.

"It looks as though Dusty had made a threat," remarked Judge.

"Who hasn't?" grunted Henry. "Take Sandy's advice—forget it. Just forget your legal training and remember that the sheriff's office is not rated on convictions. We are merely guardians of the law."

"And that statement, sir," declared Judge soberly, "would bring a smile at any spot in the state, except in this office."

Henry rose from his chair. "I believe," he remarked, "that this is the opportune time to sample Frijole Bill's latest concoction. You are getting dyspeptic."

AS FAR as general opinions were concerned there was no mystery about the murder of Peter Morris. Peter Morris had rejected Dusty Cole as a suitor for Laura Morris, kicked him out of the house and sent him packing off the Circle M. Dusty had returned to the house, continued the argument and finally killed Peter Morris. Fearing that Juan Mendoza, the cook, had recognized him, he had beaten the Mexican over the head with a blunt weapon, presumably a gun, and had left him for dead.

Juan Mendoza, suffering from concussion, was still unconscious when the inquest was held in Tonto City.

Fearing the temper of the crowd, Henry had refused to take Dusty to the inquest. The place was crowded to suffocation. Thunder and Lightning Mendoza were there, important, but a little frightened.

Doctor Bogart stated the cause of death, described the wound, and how the body was lying on the floor. Henry added his testimony. Then Thunder Mendoza was called to the stand and sworn. He eyed the jury of six men, looked apprehensively at the coroner, and swallowed painfully. Then he said:

"My Onkle Juan, hees got confusion from hees head."

"We understand all that," replied the coroner dryly.

"Juan hees not onnerstand anytheeng."

"Please confine your conversation to answering questions," reprimanded the coroner. "You stated last night that Dusty Cole had killed your uncle?"

"Si, si."

"Did you see Dusty Cole strike your uncle?"

"Sure, I'm theenk so."

"You are not sure?"

Thunder looked quizzically at Lightning and said:

"Am I sure?"

Lightning shrugged his shoulders, spread his hands.

"Dios mio, how am I from knowing?" he demanded. "I am driving weeth both hands."

"Just a moment," begged the coroner. "You say you were *driving?"*

"Going like devil," nodded Thunder violently.

"This testimony," declared the coroner, "doesn't make sense. Is there someone in the room capable of taking this testimony in Mexican?"

"I'm spik *Mejicano* pretty good," offered Lightning. "I'm spiking pretty dam good *Americano,* too. W'at you want know, Doc?"

"All right—you take the stand, Lightning."

The change was effected, much to the amusement of Henry and Judge.

"Now, Lightning, I want you to tell us exactly what happened last night at the Bar M ranch," stated the coroner.

"Those dang 'orse run away," stated Lightning. "I'm lose one line."

"I am not asking about horses," said the coroner wearily. "What I want to know is this: did you see Dusty Cole strike Juan Mendoza?"

"You theenk I can see een the dark? *Por Dios,* theese dang 'orses run under clothesline, and theese damn line catch me right onder your cheen. I am almos' hong."

The coroner sighed deeply, shoved his hands deep in his pockets and rocked on his feet.

"Did Thunder see Dusty Cole hit Juan Mendoza?" he asked hoarsely.

"W'y don't you ask *heem?"* queried Lightning blandly.

"Pardon me, Doctor," interrupted Henry, "but I may be able to salvage something from this chaotic situation."

"Thank you, Mr. Sheriff," sighed the doctor. "Take the witness."

"Lightning," said Henry, "I know all about those horses and the buckboard. Without my permission, you and Thunder took that team and vehicle last night. The team ran away near the Bar M Ranch. The team deserted the buckboard behind the Bar M ranchhouse, and it is still there, one front wheel ruined, the other three decidedly in a bowed condition.

"You may forget the runaway, and confine your answers to a few simple questions. Did . . . you . . . see . . . Dusty . . . Cole . . . strike . . . Juan . . . Mendoza?"

"Thunder see heem."

"Did he tell you he saw Dusty Cole strike Juan Mendoza?"

Lightning scratched his head and looked thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"You wan' know if Dusty Cole hit heem?" he queried.

"W'at ees use of telling heem?" demanded Thunder, getting out of his chair. "I am the one w'at ees doing all the seeing. Lightning has got clothesline under your cheen."

Henry looked around the convulsed crowd; a look which only added to the convulsions. Solemnly he said:

" . . . to tell the whole truth, so help you God."

"I do," nodded Lightning, holding up his *left* hand.

"Thank you," said Henry dryly.

"Now that we have so much settled, perhaps we might try another angle to the matter. Lightning, are we to understand that Thunder knocked out Dusty Cole?"

"Sure," grinned Lightning. "Thonder ees fighting jeeger."

"I see. He saw Dusty Cole knock out Uncle Juan; so he proceeded to knock out Dusty Cole, eh?"

"I'm theenk so."

"You merely think so. Don't you *know* anything?"

"He ees not ver' smart," interrupted Thunder. "Lightning ees mos' always theenking, but from knowing he ees most' always w'at you call—damn domb. I am the smart one—personally."

"Now," remarked Henry, "we are making progress. Thunder, did you knock out Dusty Cole—and how did you knock him out?"

"Sure," grinned Thunder expansively.

"How?" barked Henry in exasperation.

"Easy," replied Thunder.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" wailed Doctor Bogart, trying to still the uproar. "This is serious."

"Damn right," added Lightning.

WHEN order was restored, Henry wiped away his tears and considered the two Mexicans gravely. It was his opinion that neither of them was clear as to whether they saw Dusty Cole strike Juan Mendoza, nor how they knocked out Dusty Cole. The wrecked buckboard in the rear of the ranch-house, and the fact that Lightning had been nearly hung on a clothesline, gave him an idea.

"Your team ran away at the Bar M last night," he said to Thunder. "Isn't it a fact that you were thrown through the doorway of the bunkhouse and collided with Dusty Cole?"

"Col—what?" queried Thunder.

"You were thrown through the doorway of the ranch-house and bumped into Dusty Cole."

"Dios mio!" exclaimed Thunder. "I'll bet that ees w'at 'appened!"

"Su-u-u-ure!" exploded Lightning. "One boggy wheel hit those corner from the bonkhouse. Thonder, you know sometheeng?"

"Sure," nodded Thunder. "W'at ees eet?"

"Henry ees got more brains than both of you put together."

"You are both excused," choked Henry. "Thank you for coming; you have been a great help."

"Somebody ort to wring both their necks," growled a juryman.

Jim McDonald, acting as foreman for the Bar M, then asked to testify for Laura Morris, who was not present. He was told to come forward.

"Miss Morris," he said, "told me that yesterday, before her father came to town to get his payroll fixed up, he said he would not stay in town last night, because he had an appointment with someone at the ranch. He didn't tell her who the appointment was with. That was why Peter Morris was not in Tonto City last night."

McDonald had no further information to offer, except that he himself knew nothing about any appointment. Nor did anyone else. No murder instrument had been brought forth. The evidence against Dusty Cole, then, was entirely circumstantial. Nonetheless, the coroner's jury decided that the evidence was sufficient to hold Dusty for the murder of Peter Morris.

Back at the jail, Henry detailed the testimony to Dusty.

"It seems," he explained, "that a

front wheel of the buggy hit the corner of the bunkhouse and catapulted one of the Mexicans into you, as you came to the doorway."

"So that was it, eh?" muttered Dusty. "I knew it was a heavy body, travelin' mighty fast. But the law can't convict me of murder. Heck, I wasn't near the house. In fact, I was goin' to get my boots and get out of there as quiet as possible. When I lit that lamp, I found Juan. He ain't dead, is he, Sheriff?"

"No. He is still alive. Thunder says he's got confusion of the brain."

"I reckon I've got the same thing," sighed Dusty. "Was Laura at the inquest?"

"No, she did not attend, Dusty."

"I wonder if she thinks I killed her father."

"If she doesn't," answered Henry, "she's a novelty in Wild Horse Valley."

"Do you think I did, Sheriff?"

"My dear boy," replied Henry gently, "thinking is something that I put aside years ago. To some it may show a profit, but to me it merely meant a headache. I am merely an instrument of the people—and in most cases, a pretty dull one. However, they can't hang you until after the trial—I hope."

"Why do yuh say—you hope, Sheriff?"

"That was only a slip of the tongue, Dusty. That inquest was rather a farce. Men laughed heartily, but later they might become sober and fill up with virtuous wrath over the murder of Peter Morris."

"Yeah, I see what yuh mean," remarked Dusty.

"And," added Henry, "they are usually the ones who would kill an enemy as quick as they would kill a snake."

CHAPTER V

TRIAL BY JURY

JUDGE MYERS hunched dejectedly at his desk, his arms folded. Slouched against the desk was Sam Hope, his ne'er-do-well son-in-law, handsome in spite of his dissipations, and smelling of whisky.

"I sent for you, Sam," stated the judge, "but I didn't expect you would come."

"I wanted to see yuh myself—or I wouldn't," replied Sam. "Shoot. I suppose yuh called me here to give me another of yore damn fool lectures. Go ahead—for all the good it'll do, Judge."

"Will you give me an honest answer to one question, Sam?"

Sam shrugged his shoulders. "If it suits me—yes."

"Where were you the night Peter Morris was murdered?"

Sam Hope stared intently at the judge, his eyes narrowing. Suddenly he lurched against the desk, shoving a forefinger almost against the judge's nose.

"Don't you try to hang that onto me!" he snarled. "Just because Peter Morris called me a rustler, and—what the hell are you talkin' about?"

"I asked you where you were that night, Sam," repeated the judge.

"Damn yuh, I was home!"

"I requested an honest answer, Sam," reminded the judge.

"Oh, so somebody told yuh I wasn't home, eh? Well, yuh might ask 'em where I was—I don't remember. But what has the murder of Morris got to do with me?"

"Peter Morris was killed with a knife, Sam."

Sam Hope's face twisted bitterly. "And because I'm—I'm a knife

thrower—why, anybody could use a knife. Who said I done it?"

"Your knife killed him, Sam."

"My knife?" Some of the color drained from Sam's face. "Why, they said—you're lyin' to me! There wasn't any knife found."

The judge shook his head. "There are only two other men beside yourself who know this, Sam—and I am one of them. The knife has your initials on the handle."

Sam brushed his fingers across his mouth. His hand trembled, and there was a furtive expression in his eyes.

"That—that's funny," he said huskily.

"Now," said the judge, "will you tell me where you were that night?"

"I don't know," replied Sam dully. "I tell yuh, I don't. I was too drunk to remember—or too crazy."

"Crazy?" queried the judge.

"We won't talk about that. I told yuh that I didn't know where I was that night."

"Then you don't know that you did not kill Peter Morris?"

"How could I know—if I don't know where I was? You've got Dusty Cole in jail for the murder."

"I know. But Morris was killed with your knife, Sam."

"All right—what if he was. Dusty Cole was out at my place the night Morris was killed. He came out to see Laura Morris. Is there any reason why he couldn't have picked up one of my knives?"

"I suppose not," admitted the judge wearily. And then, "Well, why did you want to see me, Sam?"

Sam Hope laughed harshly. "I wanted to tell yuh somethin' that won't set so good with yuh, Judge. While I've been hellin' around, Mack Taylor has been goin' out to see Molly."

The judge half rose from his chair, glared at Sam.

"That's a lie, Sam."

"Is it? A devil of a lot you know about it."

Mack Taylor and his partner Tuck Nash owned a small gold mine, known as the Spotted Horse, about seven miles from Tonto City. Mack Taylor was tall, good-looking, and seemed to tend strictly to business. Tuck Nash was an inveterate gambler, several years older than Taylor, and was inclined to hit the high spots.

"I don't believe it," declared the judge. "I've tried to get Molly to divorce you, Sam, but she won't do it. If she was in love with Mack Taylor, she wouldn't stick with you."

"I'm just tellin' yuh what I know," said Sam. "And I don't mind tellin' yuh that Mack Taylor won't get her. I'll keep what I've got."

"Have you told Molly about this?" asked the judge.

"You're the only one I've told. What the devil, I'm not shoutin' it to all the world. He goes out there danged near every day. Some day he'll be carried back."

The judge sat staring at his son-in-law. It was plain in that moment that he would have liked to throttle him. But he made no move.

Without another word then, Sam Hope turned and walked out. The judge saw him crossing to the Tonto Saloon. For a long moment Judge Myers stood staring through the dusty window at the street. He had cut heavily into his savings to buy that ranch for Molly and Sam, hoping that Sam would brace up and make a living for Molly—and what a mess they both seemed to be making of things.

Finally he turned away. He locked his office and went down to his little

cottage. There he hitched up his horse to an old buggy and started out toward the ranch. He wanted to talk with Molly, to try to get her angle of things. He felt old and tired, and the sun beat harshly on the flapping top of the old buggy.

THE little ranch-house was hidden away in a grove of sycamores, and as the judge came up through the the ancient grove he saw a saddled horse tied beside the porch. He turned off the road and stopped his horse under a tree near the rear of the house. There was no one in sight, but as he walked beside the house he heard voices. Without quite intending to eavesdrop, he stopped for a moment near the corner of the front porch and listened.

"You must not come here any more, Mack," Molly was saying. "Sam isn't responsible for what he might do, if he knew you came here."

"He isn't responsible for anything, Molly," came back the voice of Mack Taylor. "That's exactly why I want you to go with me. You're not safe with him. Any judge in the world would give you a divorce."

"Sam wouldn't harm me," replied Molly.

"Not if he was in his right mind," agreed Mack. "He don't appreciate you, Molly. Even when your father gave him this ranch, he didn't appreciate it. If he did he wouldn't act like he does."

They lowered their voices sufficiently then so that the judge missed most of the rest of conversation, but he heard Molly say:

"Sam needs me more than ever now, Mack. As I told you before, as long as he lives, I must not give him up."

The judge, grim-faced, wishing now that he hadn't passed to listen, backed up to the corner of the house. He went quietly back to his buggy, sat there until he saw Mack Taylor ride off across the hills. After a sufficient length of time the judge drove around to the house.

Molly met him with a smile of welcome. Neither of them mentioned Mack Taylor. Molly's eyes clouded as she spoke about Sam. Obviously, though, no one had told her of trouble between Sam and Peter Morris, and the judge did not tell her now.

"I'm so sorry for Laura Morris," she told him. "Laura loves Dusty Cole. Do you think they will find him guilty, Dad?"

Judge Myers shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows what an Arizona jury might do?" he countered.

"Oh, I hope not. Why, Dad, you would have to sentence him!"

Molly took a quick step forward, then stopped.

"We won't discuss that, Molly. Is Sam doing any work nowadays?"

"He isn't out here—much," she confessed. "Laura wants me to come and stay with her for a while, but I can't leave Sam."

"If he doesn't come home, he wouldn't know you were away, Molly."

"I suppose not. I might stay with her a while. She's so lonesome." Again the judge urged her to get a divorce, but she refused.

"I loved him enough to marry him," Molly said, "and I guess I still love him enough to stay with him, Dad. He isn't all bad."

"I'm afraid there is mighty little good in him," sighed the judge. "I'd advise you to go away and stay with Laura Morris for a while. Let Sam do his own cooking; it might sober him up."

But Molly made no promises.

WHEN the judge returned to Tonto City, he found Henry Harrison Conroy waiting for him outside his office. They went inside together and sat down.

"Juan Mendoza recovered consciousness a while ago, but has no idea who hit him," Henry announced. "He says that someone came to see Peter Morris. Later he heard loud voices in the house. He went up and stepped inside the kitchen door, and was promptly knocked down by someone he didn't see. Badly dazed, he ran out to get away from his assailant, but evidently the man pursued him into the bunkhouse, and there beat Juan into insensibility."

"Thinking that Juan had recognized him, I suppose," sighed the judge. "I'm sorry it was not true, Henry."

"And here is another bit of information," said Henry. "John Reed, the cashier of the Scorpion Bend Bank, was in town today. He said that Peter Morris drew fifteen thousand dollars in cash the day before he was killed. He remarked to the cashier that he was going to make a cash investment.

"I went to the Tonto bank, but they said that Morris had not made a deposit. Unless the money is out at the Bar M, I'm afraid that Peter Morris was robbed of fifteen thousand. Dusty Cole had no money on him. He was knocked out and locked in the bunkhouse; so he had no opportunity to hide the money."

The judge shook his head hopelessly. "If we only knew who had that appointment with Peter Morris . . ." he sighed. "I am afraid of that trial, Henry; afraid that any jury drawn from Wild Horse Valley will convict Dusty Cole. It starts Monday, with everything fresh in the minds of the public. The court will have to appoint an attorney for Cole at once, so that some sort of defense may be worked out. John Campbell says he can get a conviction."

"I am afraid he is right, Judge," nodded Henry soberly.

"I have never hung a man," said the judge. "In all my years on the bench I have never taken a life."

"I hope you never will, sir," declared Henry. "The law has enough blood on its hands, it seems to me. Have you seen Samuel Hope?"

The judge nodded. "He was here at my office today, Henry. He knows about his knife. Yes, I told him. He says he doesn't know where he was the night Peter Morris died."

"Doesn't know where he was, Judge?"

"That was his statement to me."

Henry looked his astonishment. "What on earth," he asked, "was wrong with him that night?"

"I do not know, Henry. He said he was either drunk or crazy."

"Most killers are," said Henry. "I'm afraid that Sam is about as much help to us as Juan Mendoza. I guess I'll go out to the Morris ranch and see if Laura knows anything about the fifteen thousand dollars. Were you out to see Molly?"

The judge nodded. Then he unburdened himself, told Henry about Sam's visit to his office, during which he had accused Mack Taylor of making love to Molly.

"That is ridiculous!" exploded Henry.

"That was what I thought," sighed the judge.

"You—you mean that it is true, Judge?" asked Henry.

Judge Myers explained what he had heard of Taylor's and Molly's conversation.

"Well," remarked the philosophical Henry, "I—I can not quite blame Mack Taylor—nor Molly. As long as she told him what she did, it may end right there."

"I hope so," sighed the judge. "Time will tell."

HENRY'S trip to the Morris ranch proved fruitless. Laura knew nothing about her father drawing money from the Scorpion Bend bank. Laura had hired Sandy Crane back again. She wanted to know all about Dusty, and how Henry felt about the trial. He tried to evade her questions, answered them lamely, if at all.

"You haven't tried to find the right man," she told him. "You are satisfied to crucify Dusty Cole. I know all about the evidence. The law is satisfied to convict anybody, whether he is guilty of murder or not, as the man who killed my father."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Henry weakly, and hurried out to his horse.

"And you can tell Judge Myers that I'm sending him the same message," called Laura.

"I—I'm sure he will appreciate it, Miss Morris," replied Henry.

And Judge Myers did appreciate it. He listened grimly to Henry.

"I don't like it," declared the judge. "I have appointed Frank Haley to defend Dusty Cole, and—and I went so far as to instruct him how to try and rip the devil out of Campbell's prosecution—but I don't know. Perhaps I talked too much."

"You didn't tell him who we suspected, did you, Judge?"

"No, no! But I did say that I was satisfied that Dusty did not kill Morris."

Henry carefully polished his nose. "Well," he said, "I have a feeling that before this thing is settled, we will both be heading toward Mexico."

"Are you planning something, Henry?" whispered the judge.

"Yes," answered Henry, likewise whispering. "When I leave here I am going to find that jug of Frijole's prune juice, and drink myself into blissful oblivion. Have you any appointments this afternoon?"

"No," replied the judge solemnly. "But it is such a mighty undignified thing to do, Henry."

"We could take the jug out to your house, Judge."

"Yes, yes—we could do that. Well. sir, what are we waiting for?"

Henry went down to the office to get the jug. He found Judge Van Treece there, an expression of satisfaction on his long, lean face.

"Judge," said Henry, "you look like the cat that found the cream. Has anything new developed?"

"A plot has been thwarted, sir," replied Judge.

"Thwarted? I love that word. It sounds like a lisping duck."

"You understand its meaning, I hope, sir."

"Certainly—I hope. What has happened?"

"Observe," replied Judge, pointing at the desk-top. "I found those in Dusty's cell a while ago."

"Hm-m-m," mused Henry. "Four hacksaw blades—nearly new."

"You, sir," declared Judge, "were about to have a jail-break."

"I see-e-e," muttered Henry. "And you—er—thwarted it. Well! Hm-m-m. Frail little things, aren't they? Not much use against the steel bars of that window, my dear Judge."

"Steel bars, indeed," snorted Judge. "So I thought, until I made a test. Dusty Cole could have sawed his way

out in two hours of uninterrupted labor."

"He could?" Henry straightened up and glared at Judge. "And you—stopped him?"

"You seem displeased, sir."

"Why, damn it, I—I wonder where he got these blades. Perhaps a friend."

"One would suppose so," murmured Judge, but added, "except that he might have a queer enemy."

"Thrown through the barred window, eh? Did Dusty make any explanation—er—say anything to throw light on the incident?"

"Well," replied Judge soberly," he told me to go to hell."

"I see, not realizing, perhaps, that you are quite busy just now. Later, perhaps. Hm-m-m."

Henry walked outside and went around to the barred window, which was about eight feet above the ground level. No doubt the blades had been pitched through the window at night. He went on back to their little stable, where Oscar Johnson usually kept that jug of liquid dynamite known as Frijole's Fermentation. Halting at the stable door he looked back at the jail.

"Damn Judge!" he exclaimed. "An excellent chance—thwarted." As he started to open the stable door, his attention was attracted by a small, tightly-folded piece of paper, lying against the wall. He picked it up, unfolded it and looked closely at the penciled words:

DESTROY THIS NOTE AND COME TO THE MINE.

MACK

Henry rubbed his red nose thoughtfully. He glanced back at the jail, only a short distance away.

"Hm-m-m," he mused. "Come to the mine, eh? That would be Mack Taylor. Well, well. Possibly the note blew away, when he attempted to throw it through the window. Again it is possible that this note has nothing to do with the case. Might have lain there for weeks. Hm-m-m. Still, that word 'destroy' looks suspicious. Damn Judge!"

Henry put the note in his pocket, put the jug into a paper sack, and went strolling up toward Judge Myers' home.

THE trial of Dusty Cole, charged with the wilful murder of Peter Morris, was at an end. It had been one of the quickest trials in the history of the county. Tonto City had closed up and crowded the courtroom to suffocation. Judge Myers, worn and weary, had instructed the jury to weigh the evidence carefully, and because it was purely circumstantial, to give the prisoner the benefit of any doubt in their minds.

The defense was weak. There was only Dusty's unsupported word, and the judge knew that the jury did not believe him. Their faces told the verdict before they came filing in, never looking at the prisoner. Henry and the judge exchanged glances. Henry's face was very red, and he seemed under a strain.

Seated beside him was Dusty Cole, unshackled, cool, but slightly pale. At the same table was Judge Van Treece, slightly drunk, but entirely serious. Henry sat with his fat hands gripped together on the table, studying the jury.

Judge Myers looked old, and his voice was husky, as he asked:

"Gentlemen, have you reached a verdict?"

The foreman arose, a paper in his hand.

"We have, Judge," he said, and

handed the paper to the clerk of the court. The clerk adjusted his glasses, glanced at the paper, and then stepped back near the judge's desk. Again he looked at it, this time more carefully. Finally he looked up at the judge.

"Please—read the verdict," said the judge.

There was a moment of silence.

"Guilty of murder in the *first degree*," croaked the clerk.

Dusty Cole jerked forward, his lips shut tightly. The room was as still as a tomb. There was not a sound, except the ticking of a big clock on the wall.

Judge Myers did not look at Dusty, as he said with obvious effort:

"Dusty Cole, stand up."

Slowly the young cowboy got to his feet. Then, suddenly, his body jerked against Henry, knocking him off balance. Another instant and he swiftly stepped aside toward a rear door, Henry's forty-five in his right hand.

"Don't move!" he snapped sharply. "Hold still—all of yuh. I can hit a dime the length of this room—and you know it. Don't move. I'm goin' out—and I'll kill anybody who tries to stop me."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

America Munches On

PROBABLY no subject about which exact knowledge is possible has suffered as much in the past decade at the hands of faddists and charlatans as diet. Eating is a function fairly important with everyone and it would be only natural to suppose that those who invest their health in advice about food would be pretty careful to check the reliability of that advice. As it is, the American public has eaten an apple-a-day—just as it has bought stock—on practically anybody's say-so. But exact laboratory workers are gradually making most dietitians eat their words, and it has been recently proved that even Mr. Henry Ford has been misled by the food faddists.

Mr. Ford, on the advice of a dietitian, would not combine protein and starch at the same meal. For years luncheons at the River Rouge headquarters have included one or the other, but never both.

For the public, the protein-starch taboo was pretty hard to take because it meant, in effect, that steak-and-potatoes—certainly, next to ham-and-eggs, the national dish—must go. It spelled gastronomic tragedy for America, this taking the potato from the steak. Next, patriotic gourmets feared, the egg would be taken from the ham, pork would be removed from beans. . . .

But Dr. Eugene Földes, writing in the Review of Gastroenterology, calls a halt to the protein-starch propaganda. Step by step, with objective chemical proof, Dr. Földes brings steak and potatoes back to the American table. The combination won't harm anyone, he says, including Mr. Ford.

As this gratifying news appears in the public prints, a sigh of relief sweeps the nation, its palate waters once again and in the ears of that unnamed dietitian who turned thumbs down on steak-and-potatoes there is the mocking roar of America placidly masticating, as it always has, its kine and its tubers —together.

—*George Preston*

Wildcat Talk

By CHARLES T. JACKSON

Author of "Getaway Money," "The Pup Comes Home," etc.

THE roar of the pump-gun brought Bill Tester back through the sawgrass boiling with wrath. Mase McCay had shot the cow. Devilin' Mase sat now with his feet through the frame of what had been the windshield of Seminole Johnny's old Ford before the '33 hurricane. The top had gone in the '26 hurricane, and Mase had told Seminole Johnny that this was a great improvement for now a gladesman could swing his gun in any direction.

Bill Tester had gone ahead to see if this was really a road or just a down swathe of grass, and when Mase McCay shot the cow he had loped into view with his automatic out. Now he looked foolish, shoving the pistol to its case. Then he yelled at young Mase McCay.

"Ain't you no sense? Gimme my buckshot gun! They could hear that shot ten mile!"

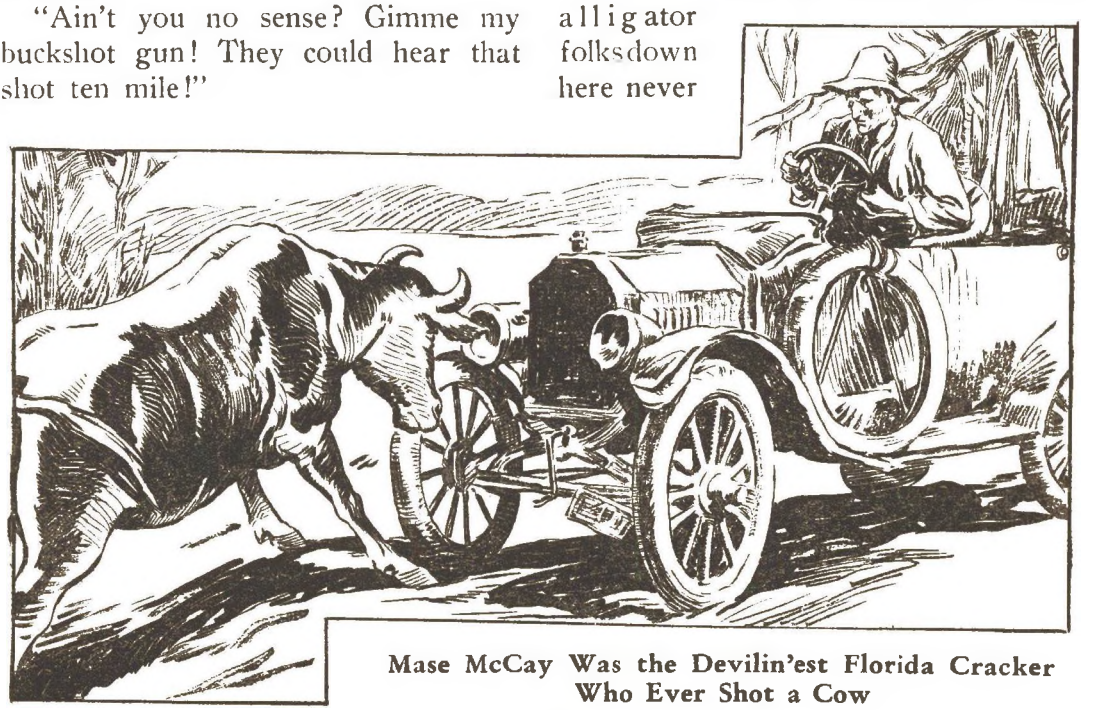
"Who could? What's worryin' you, Bill?" Mase handed Bill his gun. "I argyed long enough with that cow. She come out the grass and wouldn't move. She never saw a automobile afore so she died happy. Lookit the smile on her face."

"Listen," Bill Tester grunted, "that's a land-comp'ny cow. They'll be findin' her an' that's plenty clue which way we—"

Tester stopped, a grimace of cunning on his hard face. Mase McKay grinned but his blue eyes hardened a bit also. Tester was listening, watching the distant hammocks under the Florida noon sun.

"Clue to what? What we done? Ain't this a free country? That cow was jest full o' ticks and sorrer. My old man told me that when a cow gits so full o' ticks she can't think o' nothin' else then the law says put 'em down."

"Law—" Bill grumbled, "you half-alligator folksdown here never



Mase McCay Was the Devilin'est Florida Cracker Who Ever Shot a Cow

heard o' law. But the company has. Lookit the cow's ear."

Mase looked hard and then got out of Seminole Johnny's car. He took off his battered hat and bowed. "Doggone. Mebbe you're right. I thought that was a McCay mark. Excuse me, cow. I was jest aimin' to put you outa yore misery. Even a good-hearted feller makes mistakes."

He dragged some dried water-hyacinths from a sun-caked slough and put them between the cow's hoofs. He closed her eyes and then yanked a piece of rusty fender from the car and laid it over the cow's head like a bonnet. Bill's nervous eyes roved from watching the gleam of egrets' wings against the gray-green horizon.

"Git in the car! All day you been devilin'. Jest a fish-camp smartie, that's you. Them company riders find this cow and they'll know you did it, fer who else back in this jungle would give flowers to a dead cow? Git in and git!"

Mase got in and the car sagged down on his side. It was that kind of a car; you had to sit with your feet up on the dash or they would tangle up in the gears and stop everything.

"Goodby, ol' moo-cow," said Mase. "Little bitty sorry cow, you gits a funeral instead o' jest bein' alligator bait."

He wobbled the car past the cow into the big grass and it wheezed and shivered another mile. Bill's face was an ugly scowl. He had offered Mase four dollars to get him up to Tamiami Trail from Seminole Hammock. Tester's folks had been swamp folks but Bill had been away for years, up to Tampa and big places, he said. He had come in by the Ten Thousand Islands and back to the head of Shark River and then into the McCay settlement, but he didn't want to go out that way. Four dollars is a sight of money, so Mase took Bill up. Not until they were half a day out in the glades did Bill learn certain details of the trip. Mase had showed up with a car all right, that is you could call it a car; and started north in a general direction on the road—if you called it a road. Mase had apologized for both, and complained that Seminole Johnny hadn't greased his car since '34 because he had heard that folks were hard up.

"Well, she don't need grease," Mase had explained. "Johnny's car come down on a fishboat and ain't been off the hammock since the camp road washed out. Johnny jest runs her up the hammock an' down, half a mile each way, full o' kids on Sunday. She's the only car I ever run in my born days an' afore she passes out I aim to git her on a real road an' show 'em war smoke. I wonder what kind o' stuff that was in the can that I put in her insides, anyhow? It sure made her perk up."

"Listen," Bill said, "you mean the owner didn't know you took his car?"

"Seminole Johnny Cumso took his fambly in the dugouts down turtle-huntin', and the camp's shut fer a week."

"Stole a car," Bill grunted. "No license, and no tag except an Indiany tag that's four years old and fished outa a schooner wreck on the beach. Wait till you hit Tamiami Trail and them road cops—"

"Stealin'?" Young Mase spoke softly but looked sideways at his passenger. "Man, that's fightin' talk."

Tester hedged uneasily. "I'm jest wonderin' what them cops'd call it. You can't devil 'em like you do home folks, hear me?"

"Guess you kinda outgrowed us folks, hey?"

TESTER was staring at the car door. Like the hood and the sides the door was a kind of rusty lacework where the salt spray of a dozen gales up from Cuba had chewed it; and the tires looked like frowsy old rubber boots that had been salvaged off drowned men and tied on with wire and string. Mebbe so, but if you didn't have any road what did you need tires for?

Tester put a finger out to the door. "Look there, you—blood on that metal."

Mase looked at his fingers and the wheel. "Yeah, off that ol' moo-cow, me havin' to be undertaker like that. What about it?"

"Wipe that off," Bill was muttering. "You hit the trail an' they see that blood—"

Mase grinned and the car nosed grass hummocks and bawled. Bits of rust-dust filtered off on the dried mud but the car scuffed along as it did in the sand of Johnny's camp. "Mister," said Mase, "they ain't goin' to see nothin' but war smoke when I hit Tamiami Trail. I'll learn them millionaires a-hellin' around eighty miles an hour like I read in the paper. Man, there's a drain-canal ahead."

Bill Tester stood up in relief. Sure enough the grassy swathe gave place to a dirt mark along a scummy ditch, and this turned into an abandoned rock road leading north again, and there far off was a line of poles. Tester sat down and mopped his red face.

"Boy, we hit it. Civilization right on the nose. The first fillin' station I'll gas you up and git change for four dollars. I gits me a bus to Miami mebbe tonight. You better tail fer the swamp agin, an' don't say you seen me no place, no time, understand?"

Mase's blue eyes narrowed. "Who—me? Man, I aim to burn me some gas on that road. Bill, you ain't quittin' a feller, are you? Ain't this a free country? What I done to be skairt of?"

"It ain't what you done except swipin' a car; it's what you look. This outfit is goin' to attract more attention than a dead polecat under a meetin'-house, so you gas up an' git. I'm goin' to hide up these guns and git a bus to Miami soon as one comes."

"You been on this here millionaires' road afore, Bill?"

"Yeah, I been along all them swell bullyvards. Boy, there's the first house now right by the next drain-ditch. That's the Trail now beyond, and here's where you turn tail into the jungle agin."

"Who—me?" Mase clattered across a wooden culvert over a scummy ditch and sprinkled more hurricane rust on the planks. On the far side was a closed shack, gray and unpainted, and beyond this was the great Trail, shining and smooth leading into the sunset, and east into the twilight. Such a road Mase McCay had never dreamed of, miles and miles with never a turn, the canal on one side and the grass on the other and at the end must be the big world Tester had told him about—one sweet mess of race hosses, women and gamblin' folks.

Seminole Johnny's automobile stood panting on the asphalt, and Bill Tester got out and dragged at a new paper-suitcase. Not a thing in sight except the shack and the bridge over the ditch.

"Thought this was a fillin' station," grumbled Bill. "Well, I guess you got to go along the Trail a piece. I got to git in my town clothes and pack them guns. Hey!"

He yelled furiously at Mase and then jumped at the car. Far in the eastern dusk two lights showed. Mase eyed

them calmly but Johnny's car began to twitch and shiver. Bill seized a wheel.

"Outa here—back up!"

"This machine ain't backed up since the blow on the keys."

"Hop out—git a hold! That feller needs room, you're right across the road! Heave on it, boy!"

THEY backed Johnny's bus down the bridge-bank around the shack and Bill wiped sweat from his chin. Something went thundering past Mase, pelting him with dust and dried grass, and he saw red lights vanishing west. Tester sat down upon a wash-bench behind the shack.

"I guess mebbe you better keep this car hid up here. Mebbe I can figger some gas. First I gits in my store clothes so we don't look like we been fished out of a loblolly. You wait here."

"Where that four dollars?" said Mase.

"I'll git change. There must be some gas station somewhere. Anyhow I perouse up the road and back for a look." Bill was getting off his denims and into a shirt which would make any swamp boy happy. Then big yellow shoes and a straw hat. He stuffed his grimy old things into the suitcase and stood staring at the scummed canal.

"Hey," grumbled Mase, "don't git shut of them clothes. I'll take 'em back to Johnny's camp for borryin' his car."

"No." Bill watched the ditch. "Then this car—it's a stole car up here no matter what you think. Then if they knowed up here you'd shot a company cow you'd be up skeeter crick with no pants on. This is a law country and no devilin' swamper can climb its neck like you do back-in."

"Back-in is a good country if the law stays out. Bill, you changed some. Them clothes got you all towned up."

Bill was unlocking his gun breech, trying to get the barrel into his paper suitcase. Mase McCay rounded the shack to look up and down Tamiami Trail. Boy, wouldn't that be a place for a pilgrim to clatter a car on? Folks back-in never saw a trail like this. Mase looked at the front of the shack. Doors and windows hurricane barred and a big diamondback skin nailed to the planks. There was a scrawled chalk sign on the door. *For Sail.*

Mase peered in a crack where a bent hinge allowed the door to sag an inch. If this rattlesnake business could be had for four dollars he'd buy it—just for devilment. The last sunset showed a rough center along one side of the room and on it was a row of 'shine jars but there was no alligator whisky in these. There were bottled scorpions, centipedes, coral snakes and the fearsome grampus, all the unpleasant things that make Florida real-estaters frantic if you mention them. Around the walls were nailed bigger snake skins and 'gator hides and there were home-carved coconut heads with pink seed-eyes and toothy shell grins. But what took Mase's eye was a small boy on the table peering out a crack to the canal where Bill Tester was holstering his automatic under his arm. Mase was just going to sing out to the absorbed youngster when a pair of black eyes came before his vision close up. There was a scared whisper.

"Mister, we give up. Don't shoot!"

Mase saw a girl not more than fourteen, and by every sign she was grass-folks. He grinned back guardedly.

"All right, open up then."

She unbarred the door and whispered again. "Tell the sheriff we won't make any trouble. When I heard that car sneak back of the place I told Sammy we'd give up."

"Sheriff—" Mase dodged a look at Bill Tester who was duding his sleek black hair up before a hand-glass from his grip. "Oh, yeah! Where's the rest o' yore gang—hear me?"

Her thin face showed surprise. The little boy sniffled a sob away. His sister went on. "Why you deputies ought to know. You got Timmy yestiddy, didn't you, when he went in to Wildcat Corners to git the druggis' to pick his sores. The law grabbed him, and Joe Brooks dropped off the bus this mornin' and said the sheriff'd come to git us. Sammy, don't you cry."

Mase sidled in carefully. "Hush, Sammy. Us deputies we ain't come gun-shootin' on you. Where's yore mammy?"

"Dead. Over near Immolakee, three years ago."

"Oh," Mase rubbed his chin. "Where's yore dad?"

"Why you sure know. He got three years fer cuttin' and fightin' but the lawyer says if he don't quit tryin' to beat up them camp guards Lord knows when he'll git out. Us Spencers just don't know when to quit."

"No," said Mase, "just like the McCays. That is, I mean—"

HE BACKED to the door, motioning to the Spencer kid. She thought he was a deputy and her elder brother Timmy had gone to Wildcat to get his Florida sores picked and the law got him; so Mase grinned back in sympathy. But the girl's face fought grim tears.

"Mister, Timmy never shot that land-company rider. They fussed over the fence and Sam and me heard shootin'. We ran over there and found Slade dead in the grass. We never told anybody till they said it was Timmy killed him. But I saw who did the shootin' only they won't believe me. It was a strange rider but the law says we're only tryin' to clear Timmy."

Mase grinned back again. "Well, the law is kind of foo—I mean lawyers can ask such fool questions. Now take cowses—"

He heard a hiss at the corner of the shack. Maybe one of the curios in this roadside shop had come to life and taken to the road. But it was just Bill Tester standing in the dusk, gun in hand, listening.

"Hey, Sheriff," Mase called. "Wait a minute. They give up."

Mase went around the corner, motioning Bill along the canal behind the car. There he bent close to the other man and whispered.

"Man, yo're elected. They think yo're sheriff."

Bill's mouth was a hard line. Mase grinned. "No devilin'. Them kids has barred up fer battle. Outlaw folks, what I admire for to see. Got a shop fer tourists with a couple o' snakes and some bugs but the law done find 'em out. Sheriff's comin'."

"I heard you talkin'." Bill's eyes were full of cunning. "Listen, I'm gonna be sheriff. Go fetch them Spencers out."

Mase was surprised. "You know about 'em? Paw's in the chain gang fer cuttin' an' fightin'. Timmy's caught fer shootin' a comp'ny fence-man over west. Ain't it sorry, now?"

Bill was in a trance. "Yeah. Listen, go get 'em. Load 'em in yore car and run 'em back to the grass. Yeah, I'm sheriff." Bill weaved back and forth noiseless as a cat, gun out. "Hear me? I don't aim fer 'em talkin' to a sheriff when they seen you and me come in from Shark River. Man, I come to a hot spot."

Mase grew cold. "Yeah? You don't

want any talk about two fellers come up from below? You killed that feller Slade—an' the kids' brother Timmy's in fer it. I ain't no fool!"

Bill leaned close. "Hear me? We're takin' 'em back. Yeah, I got Slade. Old grudge-fight, but you ain't talkin'. Nor them kids—"

He was close but Devilin' Mase swung above the gun. Fair on Bill's chin and Bill reeled. But the gun came up. Bill choked.

"Go get 'em 'less you want to get smeared here. See?"

"Wildcat talk," grunted Mase and he eyed the gun and then Bill Tester's eyes. Killer's eyes. "Don't hurt them kids."

"Call 'em out," said Bill and raised the gun. Mase sang out cheerily, and the two Spencers came around the corner. Sammy, aged seven, sullen and dry-eyed now. Ellen, grim and silent. Sure outlaw folks. Mase grinned at them. Tester averted his face but he watched Mase, the gun low.

"Don't hurt them kids," Mase grunted sourly.

"We're givin' 'em a ride," Bill rasped to Mase's ear. "Hear me?"

"Yeah, I hear you. Don't like that talk. Fightin' talk—if I had a gun. You don't want to see a sheriff, hey—"

The gun came against Mase's back. Bill's whisper was a snarl. "Start that car. Git 'em in. " He raised his voice and half turned. "Hey, sister, climb in with the deputy. You and bub. I'm the sheriff a-ridin' behind. Don't try no funny stuff."

THE outlaw Spencers stood staring in the twilight. Mase McCay was on the runningboard of Seminole Johnny's car, bending over the wheel until it began to wheeze and shiver. Mase played with the gas some more, hoping it would run out or the battery fail; and all the time he kept his eyes shifting to the Trail vanishing eastward like a gray snake into the glades, hoping he'd see the lights of a car and it would be the sheriff's. Mase was full of ideas; then the automatic nudged to his ribs. Bill crouched there, his face taut and mean.

"Devilin' feller, hey? Well, you gone far enough with it. You're through. Git in, all o' you. I'm sheriff, sure enough!"

The Spencer kids came on slowly, eyeing that car. Even a cracker from 'way in back of Immolakee would know it was a funny car for the Law to ride. This sheriff had dragged his hat brim down and hunched his shoulder up as he waggled the gun on the other side of the car. Mase was jerking out low words to him. He had it figured out now.

"No use talkin', the joke's on me. Bill, you come home this summer eatin' on folks down to Shark River just to hide out. Man up to Immolakee gits gunshot, and you—"

"Git goin'," rasped Tester. "The sheriff's tellin' you-all. Don't argue with the Law."

He stood behind until Ellen Spencer had climbed into the board backless seat beside Mase McCay. She held her brother on her lap and they stared straight ahead grimly disdaining to look at any sheriff. Mase looked back and the sheriff motioned with his gun as he swung into what should have been the back seat but was a fish box instead.

"Git goin'," repeated the Law, "across the culvert and turn. See—the big hammock? Git goin'."

"Git goin', ol' belly-buster," said Mase to the car, "hang on, you Spencers. Jail-house is too good fer

cuttin' an' fightin' folks. Hang to yore town hat, Mr. Sheriff. We're cuttin' war smoke now."

The car wailed and started. It came up the culvert bank on the bias and across the planks with no change of direction. It gave one last pant and clamor as the front wheels left the edge and jumped. Mase McCay had let go of everything and lunged back clawing at the Spencers to shove them free of the tangling water-hyacinths. But they al' plunged under, struggling in the scummy stagnant water.

Mase knew that a gun had exploded under his left arm and loosened skin where the slug burned, so he let go of the outlaw Spencers and twisted into the sheriff. They were both strangling in bottom mud, clutching for each other's throats when the Seminole's car eased over gently and rubbed their backs.

Bill let go and pawed for the top. Mase was at his heels. When Bill's head came above, Mase lunged for him. The two Spencer outlaws had climbed the canal bank wreathed with frog eggs and plastered with green scum.

"The feller's drownin' the sheriff," said Sammy. "He's shovin' the Law's head under the water."

"Jest fightin' like two muskrats," said Ellen. "If only Timmy'd left his gun to home we'd run the Law tail-draggin'."

Bill Tester heard that. He was older and bigger than Mase and a better swimmer. He was wearing the younger man down. There was escape yet if he butted and clutched. Mase tried to touch bottom and got a mouthful of the green scummy water.

"You shoved that car off a-purpose," Bill gritted.

"Jest like the cow. I put it outa its misery—"

"Devilin' yet, hey? Smart swamp boy, you're through—"

Mase McCay *felt* about through. He was bleeding fast. When he lifted his left arm, mud and blood fogged his eyes, and the only kind of swimming he knew was dog-fashion which takes all your legs and arms, and you can't make good war sign for the enemy. Tester was swimming free and easily, and he got behind the tired and bleeding dog-paddler. He raised and clipped Mase on the chin and Mase sank and gurgled. Bill clipped him again and kept from a clinch. There was no mercy in his eyes now.

"Come on again, polecat," gasped Mase, "is that the best you can punch? Kill a man an' let a young feller git hanged fer it maybe— Come on an' fight, you and yore yeller shoes—snake-belly town shoes—on a sneakin' swamp varmint—yeller bug—"

MASE kept begging him to fight but Mase couldn't fight. Even when he got his feet into mud and his arms up, he was blinded. Bill smashed into him against the bank, wrestled to drag him under. Mase wasn't to live to tell what he knew. Nor those Spencers. Mase suddenly thought of that, just as he saw Ellen Spencer loom up on the canal bank above him. Somehow those two kids gave him more strength. He got foothold to hold Bill off until Bill found firmer stuff also. Then Tester came on again. He had a dazed bleeding man to deal with but Mase dragged his good arm above the muck and swung. Bill shoved his head aside and then Mase heard the Spencer outlaws consulting just above him. Sammy Spencer was telling what should be done.

"Hit the sheriff first, he's the biggest—"

"Doggone if I don't," said his sister firmly, "big one first—"

She swung something in the brush. Mase saw it coming but Bill got it. Some road-maker, when the Trail was gouged through the coral bedrock, had lost a drill and the rusted remnant was what took Tester between the ears. He slid under the muck but Mase grabbed him. Then he said:

"Listen, Mis' Spencer, we surrender. Don't hit a feller when he's down."

"Then you git up on the bank an' see!" yelled the Spencer kid.

"Aw, now," protested Mase. "You got us, hide, hair an' teeth—"

"Run git the hatchet, Sammy! We can keep 'em down in the ditch till mebbe they git drowned—"

"Aw—listen," Mase pleaded. "That's wildcat talk. You jest knocked this sheriff's brains loose. But he ain't sheriff. I ain't no deputy. I was jest devilin' you, an' see what happened? Wait till yore sheriff gits here, an' I'll tell him. You know what I'm goin' to tell him?"

Sammy had run and got the hatchet and little Mis' Spencer knelt down and peered grimly at her two victims under the bank. Mase held Bill Tester by the neck and Bill's mouth was open.

"What?" demanded Ellen Spencer, "jest a devilin' smartie up from the grass—that's you, Mister!"

"Aw, now," said Mase. "If I wasn't such a deviler you an' Sammy'd be off in the swamp and yore heads knocked in. Me, too—mebbe. This gun-shooter's a bad one—an' he's the one who shot that fence-rider up in yore tail o' the swamps. He said so—and he was goin' to shut us up fer keeps, Mis' Spencer."

Mis' Spencer was gasping: "That so? Then we can clear Timmy with the Law?"

"Sure as shootin' fish in a bucket. You'll be glad to talk to the law now. Let me git up and hog-tie Bill Tester. Don't pester me none with that hatchet."

She backed away and Mase dragged the senseless Tester to the bank. She held to the hatchet and Mase kept her in sight. His old man had said you can't tell about women folks. But Mase tied Bill up and then bound his own arm. The girl lit the oil lamp and the two Spencers stared at Mase across their table full of bottled scorpions and centipedes. Mase grinned tiredly.

"Jest a couple o' dang wildcats—that's you. But if I can git the sheriff to snake Seminole Johnny's car outa the ditch I'm goin' to give you-all a ride afore I go home."

"No, you don't," said Mis' Spencer. "I don't go ridin' with no man."

"Wildcat talk," said Mase. "How old are you, Mis' Spencer?"

"Dunno. Sometimes about twelve and sometimes about fifteen, whichever paw can remember first."

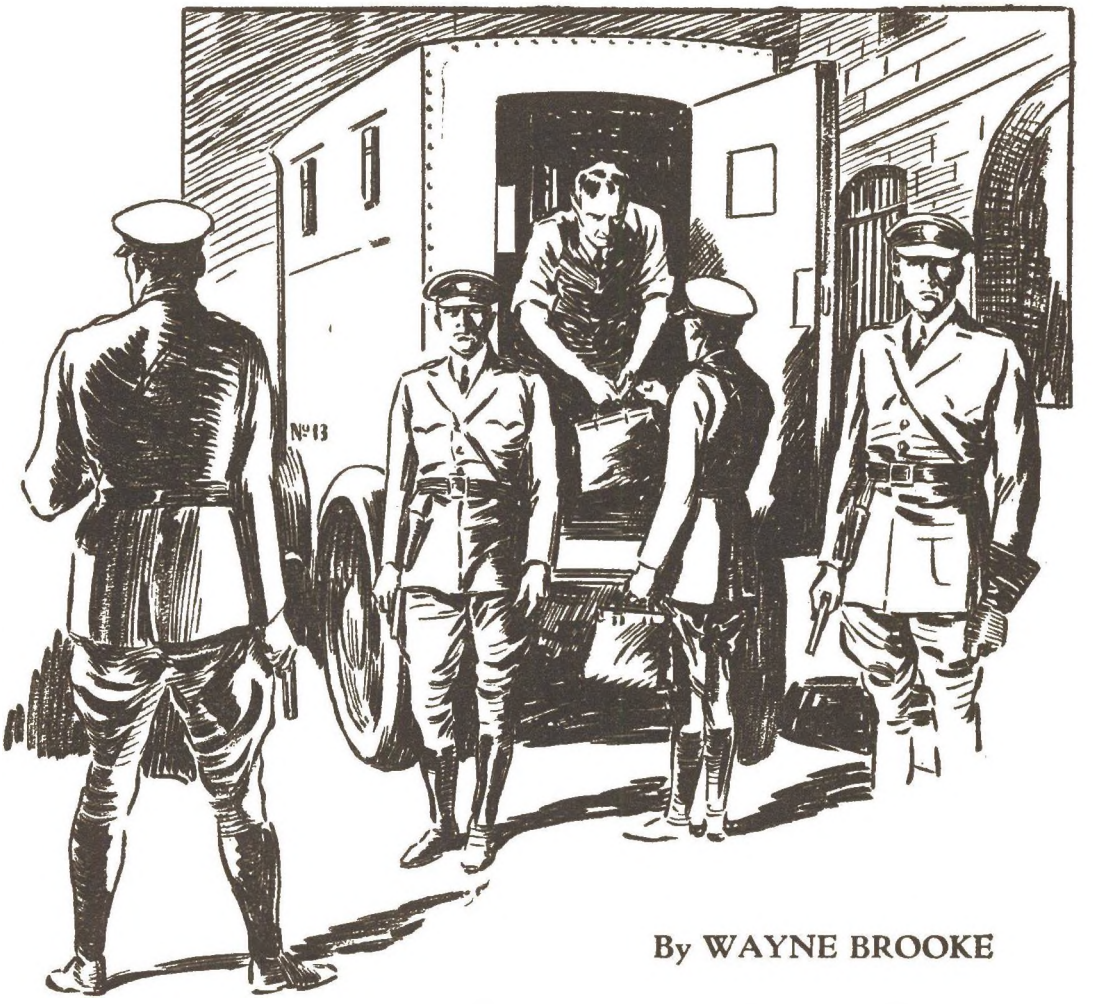
"When yore paw gits outa that fightin' an' cuttin' charge in the county gang, and yore brother Timmy is clear o' the law in that fence-line killin' that Bill Tester did, I'm comin' to see you-all."

"Come ahead," said Mis' Spencer, and eyed the hatchet.

"An' when you growed up about seventeen I'm comin' outa the big grass an' marry you."

"That's fightin' talk. You better grow up and quit devilin' people."

"Ain't it the trewth? But if I had, today, yore brother Timmy wouldn't git out the jail-house. An' Bill'd had you-all laid away in the jungle. I'm jest Devilin' Mase McCay up from Shark River."



By WAYNE BROOKE

Armored Car No. 13

An Unusual Story of a Hold-Up That Failed

A SLIGHT, bespectacled man stood among a group of people at the curb of a busy thoroughfare in a large Midwestern city one afternoon. The spot was a streetcar stop, and every now and then he would look up from his newspaper and peer over the top of his lenses, scanning the signboards of the passing trolleys. Once, as he raised his glance, an armored car rolled by. It was one of those small, grim, gray-green fortresses on wheels within whose battleship-plated confines are daily transported fortunes in gold and silver coin, in greenbacks, securities and jewels. From the slitted portholes with their revolving sights, cut into the heavy chrome-steel sides, the eyes of the guards peeped out into the street. Below them the muzzles of riot-guns, with a firing speed of twenty-one shots per second, were starkly visible. Painted in neat black on the car's sides was the number *13*. The driver, a powerful young man in uniform, with visored cap and polished leggings, sat rigidly alert in his bullet-proof cage. Sagging from his belt was a large pistol.

The crew of one of these formidable cars appears at a glance to be the most wary collection of men you have ever seen; there is a bleakness about their keen eyes, a certain suggestion of distrust of everyone and everything that implies that upon general principles their own parents would not be above suspicion. If you have ever chanced to pass one while it was parked for business in front of a bank or store, you have doubtless experienced this searching, almost accusatory scrutiny of these vigilant men, bristling as they are with arms and caution. Something of this frowning suspicion seemed to animate the driver's freckled face as he swept with a glance the people at the trolley stop. His ice-blue eyes rested for a fleeting second on the meek-looking man with the newspaper and spectacles. This individual, as if disconcerted by the glance, hastily dropped his own eyes back to the column of type held myopically close to his bony beak-nose.

Armored Car No. 13, bowling smoothly along, was soon blocks away. In the guards' compartment, separated from that of the driver by a steel partition in which was set a small pane of bullet-proof glass, the conductor, "Pop" Carradine, and his two guards, Brad Fenton and Earl Walsh, half sat, half crouched at their ports. Pop was a man in his early forties who had gained both the shooting ability for which he was renowned (being the best marksman at the practice range the company maintained) and his decided portliness in his years of serving as sheriff. It is the conductor who is in complete charge of the armored car on duty. He alone knows the nature and value of the assignment to be delivered; he alone has the combination to the safe within the guards' compartment; it is his job, even, to set the brake on the car when he leaves it, so that it cannot be moved by anyone, not excepting the chauffeur, before he returns. Thus he is, as it were, the spearhead of the armored car's effectiveness. All the crew members are carefully selected, their trustworthiness heavily insured by bonding companies. But the conductor, who weekly may oversee the transportation of millions, must indeed be a paragon of courage and integrity.

IT WAS a summer's day, the sun was pitiless, and though the slotlike ventilators were all open, the air within that close, steel-sided box was less than comfortable. All the men, even without their uniform coats, were sweating like stevedores, struggling for breath.

"Try that darn fan again, Brad," Pop grunted as he patted his heavy jowl and neck with his handkerchief.

Brad Fenton eased his Thompson gun onto the leather arm-rest beside him, and snapped a switch-button. Pop cast an anxious glance up at the revolving fan set in the turreted ceiling above them. But the burnished metal propeller refused to revolve, or even stir.

Brad pushed out his lip and shook his head. "It's on the blink all right," he said.

"Yeah, it would go flooey on a day like this," Pop complained. Then arching his ponderous body, he put his mouth to the small circular hole in the glass behind the driver. "Red!"

The chauffeur, Red Beales, twisted his head so that the conch of his ear almost filled the aperture.

"For heaven's sake, don't forget to tell 'em at the garage tonight about the fan," Pop said to him. "It's like a bake-oven back here."

"Okay, Pop," Red threw over his shoulder and nodded.

The guards in their compartment clung close to the ports to catch what breath of traffic-polluted air strayed through the meager openings. They had a thirty-mile trip ahead of them. Pop Carradine drew a little comfort at the thought that in the cool of the evening, he would be sitting on his shaded front porch, with his slippers, his pipe and his newspaper, while his two small sons romped about him.

At the moment Pop was much more worried about the prickly heat that tortured his dripping skin than about the rich

freight in currency of the realm that reposed in the compartment safe—funds collected in two branch depositories of the Farmers & Miners Trust Company and being transferred to the main bank at the State capital. There really wasn't any reason to worry about the shipment. It was the proud boast of the Armored Car Company that none of their cars had ever been molested; that never had they suffered the loss of a single dollar. Their cars were bullet-proof, bomb-proof, gas-proof—in short, impregnable.

Armored Car No. 13 reached the outskirts of the city, purred through several outlying hamlets, then through a broad, rolling stretch of prairie shining with wheat and waving corn, that sent back stabs of fierce light into the hot eyes of the guard. Of a sudden the driver pulled up at the rock-strewn side of the macadam road, the heavy car groaning to a stop.

"What's wrong?" called Pop.

"Feels like one of the rear shoes is flat," Red said as he climbed down and went around the side of the car. The men in the compartment heard him kick the left rear tire, then the right. They did not, however, observe him do a very strange thing. As he stood at the back of the car, he pulled from his blouse a black object that might have been a leather dog-collar. It was in point of fact a bit of stout steel chain encased in leather, clamped at the end to form a circlet. Soundlessly the driver slipped this over the outside handles of the doors, thus effecting a potent bar to egress from the compartment, for both the handles and the chain would stand considerable battering. Then as he passed between the body of the car and a large rock at the road edge, he stooped and surreptitiously caught up what appeared to be a folded newspaper that lay there. Hopping back into his cage and slamming the door, Red assured Pop that he had been mistaken and drove on.

They had progressed perhaps another couple of miles or so when the driver, after glancing back through the glass panel several times, took one of his hands from the steering wheel and probed for something in the folded newspaper beside him. Carefully he brought out a metal-cased tube like a small bicycle pump. It was a chemical syringe of precise manufacture. Fitted tightly near the plunger end was a cuplike affair of soft rubber. In circumference this suction cup was just large enough to cover the round hole in the glass panel of the armored car petition.

RED handled this odd tube with immense precaution. He laid it in his lap and turned his head once more to look inside the car. Beads of sweat stood out on his upper lip and chin, and trickled down his cheeks from beneath his cap—cold perspiration induced by a terrific inner tension. His eyes glittered with a look half of fear, half of ferocity. If one of the guards at the other side of the partition had happened to catch a glimpse of his face at that moment, he would have been shocked to the core, for it was the face of a ghost or a maniac.

But none of the three were paying Red the slightest attention. Earl Walsh was slouched at the far corner, gazing out of the port. Pop was chatting with Fenton, and his broad back nearly blocked the view of the driver. Pop stood about two feet away from the aperture in the glass. Expertly guiding the car with one hand, Red began to raise the tube in his lap. He paused, as in the mirror he saw another machine close behind. A moment later it passed, but a light truck, traveling fast, was right behind it. Cursing, Red slowed down, hoping it would go by, but perversely it trailed behind till Red put on speed and saw it fall gradually back.

Another darting glance into the glass panel. Pop's back was still turned. Quickly Red caught up the syringe and thrust its pointed nose through the aperture. He pressed hard, felt the suction grip the rubber. Then he gave the plunger two half-turns and slowly pressed it home.

The syringe was filled with compressed cyanogen, the deadliest gas known to science.

Killing a man, killing several, was nothing new to Red Beales. Indeed it was his proficiency in this line that was, indirectly at least, responsible for his holding his present position as driver for the Armored Car Company. During the War he had fought in France and had gained a distinguished record as a soldier. It was in the record that he had once cleaned out a German machine-gun nest of seven men single-handed. He had returned home a hero, with a hatful of assorted Allied medals and had been singled out by the State Governor for public congratulation. And it was because of that War record and the Governor's recommendation that the Armored Car Company's usually severe investigation of a prospective employee was curtailed in his case. Thus certain important details of his earlier history never came to light. For instance, that the name of Beales was an alias, and that, fleeing the East at the age of twenty, he was wanted by the police in connection with several robberies. No, Red had dealt death more than once before; but not all his killings together had made such harrowing inroads on his nerve as this one, which he and his partner had meticulously been plotting for months.

Except that it would have been noisy and risky, Red would have preferred to turn loose his automatic into the compartment instead of this subtler weapon. He did not relish the idea of working with poison gas. It might be all right for his partner, Lee Griswold, who was an ex-doctor and was always playing around with chemicals and gases. Griswold had lost his license and had served a term in prison for a criminal violation in his practice. But Doc had convinced him that this was the simplest, in fact the only way.

A very methodical, and at the same time ingenious, man was Doc Griswold. Had he been honest, his talents should have made of him an excellent research scientist. But there was no money in research; and more in illegal medical practice than legal. But the law had finally caught up with him and given him two years in the penetentiary. Before Red made his acquaintance Doc had been living by his wits. He had a large room and an alcove fitted out as a laboratory in the same lodging house as Red's. Here he carried on various chemical experiments and told Red he was inventing some new patent medicines; but Red learned later this was mainly a blind for a precarious trade in narcotics.

RED, who had a great respect for learning, first met Doc in a neighborhood cafeteria. He liked to listen to Doc talk, and once had told him that he used bigger words than even the Governor, his former employer. From the first Griswold had shown exceptional interest in Red's job as driver of an armored delivery car. He had pumped him for all the details, the structure of the cars, the types of shipments, the routine duties of the crew during a trip, everything from the time they reported for work in the morning till they checked out at night.

Griswold learned of the precautions the company took against collusion in dishonesty among the crews by constantly interchanging them, so that only infrequently did even two of the same group work together. He learned how the conductor acted as a check on the driver, and both the driver and other guards on the conductor in turn. Two or three times he had stood among the spectators as one of the armored cars was opened at a bank and, mistrusting even Red's minute description, carried away a good enough mental picture of the interior to enable him to sketch it as accurately as a draughtsman.

Finally he had broached his plan to Red. He did it subtly, not committing himself, with an airiness that made it sound like jest. Knowing nothing of Red's background, he was surprised how readily Red fell in with it. He could not be aware that Red himself had for almost a year been racking his mind to figure out how he might crack the apparently unassailable perfection of the armored car's safeguards and realize enough from one big haul to

keep him on Easy Street the rest of his life. But no single flaw had he discovered in the system. The only conceivable way to manage it, he decided—and the chance of success was mighty slim—was to fire without warning into the compartment and shoot the guards down. But even so he would need a confederate to aid him; and until he fell in with Doc Griswold he had not found one.

Doc had vetoed Red's idea at once. He pointed out the chief objection, which Red had slighted, that, since only the conductor could open the safe in the car, it would be necessary to blow it open. This would naturally require a little time and privacy; and these two elements would hardly be available on a public highway after an exchange of gunfire.

No, the thing to do was to dispose of the guards quietly, quickly, with certainty. There was but one way to accomplish this—poison gas. To Red's assertion that the cars, through their ventilators and fans, were equipped to withstand gas attacks, the Doc's beady black eyes had glittered with amusement behind their spectacles.

"Not the gas I'm thinking of. One or two whiffs and—pouf!" He snapped his finger in the air and grinned. "They won't even know they're being gassed, they'll keel over so quick. However, just to make doubly sure, you can play it safe and disconnect the fan wires. That's simple. Though it isn't really necessary."

And then in his painstaking way, Doc Griswold set to work to invent a portable container for the gas. He decided after various tests with non-lethal gases that an instrument in the form of a syringe would serve the purpose best. Using all his ingenuity, he perfected one of metal, capable of withstanding pressure and at the same time absolutely leak-proof, light and easily worked with one hand. The gas could be released through a valve, and until then, the plunger was locked by a safety device.

But this was only a beginning. With truly scientific meticulousness Doc tested the instrument. He built a large air-tight glass case which he set on the window bench of his laboratory alcove, which faced a vacant lot and was, moreover, on the top floor of the house. In one side of this case he cut a round hole of the exact dimension of the speaking aperture in the partition of an armored car. After considerable experiment he hit upon the rubber vacuum cup to stopper the opening to prevent a back-flow of the gas. Then using iodine gas, since it was relatively harmless and its deep purple color and sharp odor made it easy to watch and detect any leakage, Doc gave the syringe its first trial. Red watched him apply the instrument to the hole and with the contents of that comparatively small tube fill the case with billowing purple fumes. Doc left the syringe in place for some time and after sniffing all around the apparatus, beamed triumphantly at Red.

"You see? Not a taint of gas!"

But despite this assurance, Doc was not yet satisfied. He tested the contrivance again and again, using gases of various weights, and at different pressures which he obtained by means of a small water-pump. At length one evening he called Red in—they had decided they must not appear too intimate to the other residents of the house—and locked the door. Red was surprised to see a big black tomcat mewing on the floor, since Doc had once told him he abominated cats. The tom made a leap for the door as Red entered, but Griswold forestalled it with a kick that sent it back into the room sprawling and snarling.

"Tonight," said Doc, grinning, "we'll try the real thing, Red."

Red looked at Doc's cadaverous, toothy visage, like a death's head with spectacles, and felt a slight prickling of the scalp. He swallowed hard and blurted out:

"You sure you got everything under control, Doc? Me, I got a few whiffs of phosgene over in France and I don't crave to get a lungful of anything worse."

GRISWOLD, chuckling, slapped him on the back. "You can trust me, lad. I haven't been working on this thing for the last month for nothing. It's letter-

perfect. This is our dress rehearsal. After that, if you follow directions and make no mistakes, we'll both be sitting pretty."

All the windows of the room and alcove were thrown wide open. On the work bench a complicated apparatus was set up. Over a Bunsen burner a flask containing a snow-white solid was being subjected to heat. From this extended glass tubing connected with a pump that chugged softly on the floor. This in turn connected with the syringe, which was held fast clamped in a bracket. The white substance was mercuric cyanide, which under the action of heat released the deadly cyanogen, and the gas, invisible to the eye, was being compressed by the pump into the poison syringe.

When the instrument was sufficiently charged Griswold stopped the flow of the gas by turning a tiny glass stopcock in the tubing, turned off the pump and carefully removed the syringe.

"Now then, Red, I'll show you how your friends in the car will react when they get a breath or two of this perfume." Doc reached to seize the cat by the neck. The tom spat, whirled with something of the movement of a clock-spring suddenly unwinding, and clawed viciously at his hand.

Griswold jerked back, swearing. Three long, deep gouges, parallel streaks that slowly turned crimson with blood, showed on the back of his lean, dry hand.

"Let me get him," said Red. "He don't like you." And talking softly to the tom, which, fur bristling, was growling under a chair, Beales calmed the animal so that in a few moments it allowed him to pet it on his knee. "Where do you want me to put him?" asked Red.

"Under the case there." Griswold lifted the glass case partly off its base and Red imprisoned the tomcat under it. The cat was frantic when it found itself trapped.

"Say, he gave you quite a raking, didn't he?" said Red, as he saw Griswold wipe the welling blood from his hand with gauze.

"Oh, it's nothing," Doc said, and painted the scratches with iodine. "Now listen, Red. The only thing you must be sure of is that the vacuum cup completely covers the opening." He inserted the syringe in the opening in the glass. "Now under ordinary circumstances, when this box is air-tight as it is now, that cat has enough oxygen under there to live half a day or more. Notice now. I'm not going to release all the gas in the tube, only a very little, because there's enough here to kill a dozen men or a hundred cats. Watch!"

Red watched, gripped in fascination. He saw Doc press lightly on the plunger. At one instant the cat was scratching energetically at the glass, fangs bared; the next it had collapsed. Its flanks heaved a moment or two as it lay on its side and then it was still.

AT the time of that gruesome demonstration Red had experienced the same feeling of nausea, the same clammy sensation in the region of his heart as he felt now, as he himself sent the gas in on the guards. If Pop should turn; if the vacuum cup should leak and some of the gas should filter back into his own compartment . . .

He felt the plunger touch the top of the tube, and knew that all the gas had been discharged. Pop was still chatting with Fenton, his back completely screening Red's movements. The truck had caught up again and Red, his teeth clenched in fury, motioned for the driver to pass him. The driver, a fat, jolly man, waved and went by.

Warily Red opened his own door a little, so that if any of the gas had escaped it would be well diluted with air. His nerves crackling within him, his throat choked, he flicked his eyes over his shoulder again. Doc had told him that the odor of the gas was not very penetrating, that it smelled like peach kernels or the oil of bitter almonds. Unless the guards were looking for it, they would drop before they were aware of its presence.

But nothing was happening And then . . .

Look at Pop! He was bending over and coughing. His hand was at his throat, as if trying to release it from somebody's throttling fingers. He slumped down out of sight. Fenton must have dropped to the floor, too. Only Earl Walsh was still upright in the far corner. He was staggering, his hand over mouth and nose. Wildly he struggled with the doors but they refused to open.

The guard's eyes fell upon the strange tube in the speaking aperture. They caught a glimpse of the ghastly, staring face of Red Beales. And in a flash the dying man understood. With all his rapidly draining strength he raised his riot-gun and smashed its steel-plated butt against the window. There was a grinding sound, the clear glass appeared to become suddenly frosted with rime, but it did not break. The next moment the gun clattered down and Walsh followed it to the floor . . .

With a sense of relief that surged over him like cool water, Red opened his door farther and, leaning out breathed deeply, just to reassure himself. Then he stepped on the gas and drove three miles at a rapid clip, turning off at length into a dirt side-road which after some distance became a meandering cowpath through fields of alfalfa and finally lost itself in a big grove of willows. As the car approached the fringe of the grove a figure appeared from among the trees.

IT WAS the slender, bespectacled man who earlier that afternoon had stood seemingly immersed in his newspaper at the trolley stop when Armored Car No. 13 passed by. This was Doc Griswold. Unimpressive, even ineffectual-looking, the true character of the man was not apparent until you looked closely at his features. Craft and rapacity were written in every line of the bony face, from the vulturine hook of the nose to the thin mouth that shut over grayish teeth like a steel trap. Even the spectacles that somehow lend an air of benignity to most people seemed to emphasize in him the lurking greed in his protuberant black eyes.

His presence at that street corner had been arranged so that he might station himself there and be on the lookout, with the murderous syringe concealed in the side-pocket of his coupé that was parked out of sight a block or two away. He was to do this every Friday afternoon, according to their plan, until the day should arrive when Red appeared driving the armored car that usually passed that certain street corner on Friday afternoons. Red, like the other members of the armored car crews, never knew his next assignment up until the moment of starting, and even then was in the dark as to the nature and value of the shipment. But he did know that the Merchants & Miners Bank used their service regularly and that every Friday a collection from the two branch banks in town was transported to the main depository at the capital. Also, since the F&M practically monopolized the banking business of the town and neighboring communities, these collections were large. One of the conductors had once dropped a word to the effect that they ran well over two hundred thousand dollars.

The only other regular customers were companies using the armored cars to carry their payrolls. But Doc and Red figured that a payroll seldom would average more than ten or twenty thousand dollars; and to them anything like that was chicken feed, certainly not worth their pains and risk. No, they were shooting at a mark that would at a stroke make them both rich for life; and hence it required not a great deal of elimination of the Armored Car Company's clients to decide on the F&M Bank as their source of quick wealth.

During all their sedulous planning, the fact that to achieve their purpose meant the murder of three men didn't bother them at all. Having fixed upon the shipment they wished to lift, they needed only to fix on the right time—the chief unaccountable element. But it was mathematically certain that sooner or later it would be Red's turn to drive the F&M collection car. It might be two weeks, it might be five months, but the day was

bound to come. And until it did, Doc was prepared to make a weekly visit to that particular street corner, hoping to catch Red's signal.

As it happened, through one of those miracles of luck which sometimes happen, they did not have to wait many weeks. The first Friday following the black-cat episode in Griswold's laboratory, Red found himself selected for the coveted job. The glance Red had thrown Griswold from the driver's seat and a casual tug at the visor of his cap had informed the ex-doctor that this was their day. Whereupon Griswold had hastened to his coupé, taken a shorter route to the spot where it had been arranged he should leave the syringe. Then he had driven on ahead to the isolated willow grove, to wait for Red.

THE coupé was half hidden under the low-hanging branches some fifty yards off, and Doc waved Red to drive the armored car deep in among the over-arching trees.

Red jumped down. "Got the nitro?"

"Wait a minute," Doc cautioned as Red was about to throw open the rear doors of the armored car. "Got the fan working in there?"

"No."

"Well, you'd better. Some of the gas may still linger in the crevices even after the air gets in there. Better not take any chances. Connect up those wires again. We've got plenty of time. Nobody's likely to come by here."

Only when Griswold was sure the air within was fully cleansed did Red remove the steel chain from the door-handles and enter with the bottle of pale yellowish oil that Doc gave him. The three guards, their faces contorted in death, lay in grotesque postures, Pop Carradine sprawled as if protectively against the safe.

"What'll we do—leave 'em in here?" asked Red. "They'll spatter all over the walls."

"So much the better," said Griswold. "It'll confuse the police."

Red was no novice at safe-cracking, and in no time at all he had the nitroglycerin neatly poured in the hairline crack of the safe's door joint. When he emerged from the compartment, he shut the doors to deaden the sound; and a few moments later came a dull explosion that fairly lifted the heavy armored car from the ground. It rocked like a celluloid duck in a bathtub, and when it settled, the steel-plated body sagged on a fractured spring. Great clouds of acrid smoke welled from the compartment as Red swung the doors open and lurched through a shambles of human flesh and blood to the safe. There was hardly enough left intact of the guards for identification. As for the safe, its door had been half torn off and, twisted, it hung askew on the hinges. Inside, practically undamaged, were three heavy leather sacks of currency, which Red, without further ado, threw out to Doc.

Red hopped out and scuffed his blood-stained shoes in the undergrowth.

"All right, let's go," he said. "Did you bring me my suit of clothes to change?"

"Yes, I've got a whole outfit for you in the coupé," Doc replied. He had in his hands one of the Thompson guns, which they had decided to take along with them in their flight.

Red stooped to pick up two of the sacks of currency, when Griswold suddenly elevated the riot-gun to his hip and began shooting. Red never knew what hit him. For an instant he swayed on his knees in a horrible sort of genuflection and then he fell over on his face. He had died almost as instantaneously as the rest of Armored Car No. 13's crew.

THE next moment Doc Griswold, after wiping any possible fingerprints from the Thompson gun with his handkerchief, tossed it back into the wrecked compartment. He had already retrieved the syringe, and now he removed from Red's pocket the bit of leather-covered chain the driver had used to imprison the guards. And shortly afterward, the loot stored safely in his car, he faded from the scene.

Little more than a half-hour later found him back in town. His wiry frame tingled with a supernal exultation; he felt like laughing in the faces of the very traffic cops he passed. The red gods of high emprise were with him! Every detail had gone off without a hitch. Best of all, he had eliminated the single weak link in the chain of an otherwise flawless crime.

Now the loot was all his own. A fortune! No longer would he have to sneak and skulk, with the shadow of the prison gate always in the offing, to make a hazardous living. He was rich, rich, rich!

He drove to his garage, and left the coupé. He did not disturb the three sacks of currency. They reposed on the floor in the rear of the car, concealed by a couple of old blankets thrown carelessly over them. The only precaution Doc took was to shut the windows and lock the car securely.

Arrived in his room, he destroyed the syringe, pounding it into an unrecognizable chunk of metal. Likewise he demolished the glass case he had laboriously constructed, and such bits of apparatus as might suggest his recent manufacture of poison gas. There was small chance that the police would even suspect that poison gas had been employed in the crime; but if they did, it should never be traced to him.

That evening, just before he went out to dinner, he turned on his radio to the news flashes and received the first public intimation of the crime. The report was brief and factual. Armored Car No. 13 had not yet been found.

It was not till early the next morning that Doc discovered just how rich he really was. For the first item of the radio news broadcast was the robbery. State police, after an all-night search, had found the pillaged armored car and its dead crew in the secluded willow grove. "The most vicious crime in the history of the State," the announcer termed it. The police were completely baffled. One thing alone they were convinced of, and that was that the coup could have been effected only by a gang—a fiendishly clever and daring gang. The amount of the plunder, according to an F&M vice-president was two hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

There was some commotion in the lodging-house that morning when it got about that one of the slain crew had been a roomer there. As Doc was passing from the bathroom in the hall, he heard Mrs. Schoonover, the owner of the house, saying:

"Such a nice young man he was. So big and handsome in his uniform and all! He was that quiet you'd never know he was in the house. Poor Mr. Beales. And him without no relatives or friends to even mourn for him, the paper says!"

Later, as Doc was leaving the house, he ran into her. The chattering conference was still in session on the ground floor. Mrs. Schoonover turned from the awed and gaping little group before whom she was holding forth and addressed him, throwing up her arms:

"Oh, Doctor, have you heard the awful thing that's happened? My Mr. Beales—you must have seen him in the house—tall, red-haired, wore a uniform, mostly—oh, of course you know him! I remember seeing you talking to him one day. Well, heaven save us all. Do you know—"

"Yes, I do," interrupted Griswold somberly. "I heard all about it on the radio. A sad business. I only met the young chap to speak to once or twice but he struck me as a very fine type." He gave his head a despondent shake. "Well, that's the way it goes. Here today and gone tomorrow."

HE was about to pass on when one of the room doors suddenly opened and on the threshold stood a lean, bitter-mouthed woman who glared at him so fiercely that all turned to look at her. Her name was Miss Deasey, she was a retired school teacher and was known in the house as a recluse and a crank. Her graying, short-cut hair was frizzled and crimped extravagantly; her unskillfully rouged cheeks, wrinkled and sallow, and the gaudy flowered kimono that encased a body as

figureless as a yardstick, bespoke an acidulous old maid's abnormal preoccupation with her appearance.

"It's too bad the wrong people meet with such accidents," she rasped, her eyes burning into Griswold. He was so taken aback that he just stood there staring. "You know who I mean. Yes, it's *you* I'm talking to!" she raised her voice, shaking with vehemence. "You devil, you killed my Claudius!"

Doc's scalp felt suddenly tight and his mouth went dry. He turned with an air of puzzlement.

"Is that lady talking to me, Mrs. Schoonover?"

"Miss Deasey's upset about her black cat," explained the landlady. "It was found in the lot back of the house yesterday."

Doc forced a smile that was at once mocking and disparaging.

"What, if I may ask, has that to do with me?"

Miss Deasey, with furious steps, came toward him from her doorway. Her arms were crossed on her flat chest and she clutched her kimono with convulsive fingers.

"Don't you dare deny it, you wicked old man! Claudius was always running upstairs to Mrs. Quillan's room on your floor and you caught him and killed him with one of your nasty experiments!"

"My dear woman, you're absurd."

"Don't tell me I'm absurd!" she flung herself forward so sharply that Griswold expected to feel her sharp-pointed nails in his face. "I saw you myself, with my own eyes, throw that bundle wrapped in a newspaper in the lot the other night. I was undressing and I saw somebody prowling around out there, so I watched and I recognized you. But I didn't know then it was my poor Claudius in that bundle. I've been half out of my wits asking everybody if they'd seen my poor darling, and all the time he was lying out there in the lot!"

"I assure you, my dear lady, that you no more saw me in the lot than I saw your cat," said Griswold. "I've never set foot out there since I've lived in the house. And my experiments, as you call them, don't call for killing people's pets. I may say for your information that I am a strict anti-vivisectionist. I would not hurt a hair of a dumb animal."

"Miss Deasey, I'm sure a man like Dr. Griswold would not—" the landlady began but the choleric Miss Deasey cut her off with a look.

"Please believe me, Miss Deasey, I've never seen your cat. I didn't know there was one in the house."

"You lie! You brazen, black-hearted liar! You've never seen my cat, have you? Look at your hand!"

Griswold held out his hand in a gesture of protestation. Now his gaze flicked down to it.

"Look at those scratches," cried Miss Deasey. "It's as plain as day only a cat could have made them. Look at them! They cry out your guilt to the high heavens. Never fear, you won't get away with this. I'll have you arrested. I'll have you put in jail! Oh, oh! My poor Claudius!" Wailing loudly, she turned and rushed back into her room.

"The woman's insane," said Griswold, recovering himself. "I got these marks when I rubbed up against some apparatus in my laboratory. No question about it, she's a mental case if I ever saw one."

With that he excused himself and went off, shaking his head.

BUT despite his air of righteous calm, Doc Griswold felt a deep inner agitation. It was a stupid thing to do, he reproached himself. He might have known the tomcat belong to one of the tenants: he had often seen it around the house. It would have been just as simple to capture one of the numerous stray cats that infested the neighborhood and made the night hideous with their yowls. There was no telling what a repressed and cantankerous old maid like that might do.

But his anxiety was calmed by the growing bewilderment on the part of the police as announced in black block letters that

marched across the front pages of every evening paper. And after all who would connect the death of a black cat with a crime that was obviously the work of a gang?

All in all, Doc Griswold felt he had good cause to feel elated. Instinctively he sensed that the case had reached a stalemate already. Considering the tangled clues, the difference of opinion among the authorities, their readiness to attribute the crime to the highly publicized Cade gang —all this pointed to the probability that the case would in the end be relegated to the roster of unsolved mysteries.

Humming cheerfully, he traveled by streetcar to the offices of a wholesale drug house where he had left some samples of a couple of preparations he had invented. He was not at all dispirited when informed that after testing by the firm's chemists, it had been decided that it was not feasible to handle the products at that time. The fact was that Griswold never hoped to sell his preparations to these firms. He made these visits and left his samples of cough medicine and hair tonic only to establish an alibi he might require at some future time, if hailed into court for peddling narcotics. He could claim that instead of being engaged in any such nefarious trade, he was engaged in legitimate research.

THUS, without any considerable change in his daily habits, Doc Griswold saw that week and that month pass into eternity. Still another month went by. He continued to live at his inexpensive lodging-house. He continued to potter around in his alcove laboratory and pay fruitless visits to the drug-houses. But he did give up making the rounds of the depots of the narcotics purveyors. He had informed them that his source of supply had been tapped by the police and until he had located a new one he would be unable to supply them again. He did not care to risk being picked up by the police at this stage, and at any rate he had enough money to carry him till he thought it opportune to make use of his loot.

The three sacks plundered from Armored Car No. 13 had never, during all the intervening period, been moved from their place of concealment in the rear of Griswold's machine. He had not used the coupé since that afternoon. He took a trolley if he had any distance to go in town. There were upward of a hundred other cars in the garage he patronized, and as long as he paid his storage fee he knew that no one would show any further interest in his machine.

Meanwhile the hold-up had long since retreated from the front pages of the newspapers to the back sections, and thence into the realm of those legendary crimes whose equation on the police blotters equals a question mark. Not a breath of suspicion touched Red Beales. The fact that the Thomson gun that had killed him had been carefully wiped clean of finger-prints convinced the police that crime-wise gangsters of the type of Conny-Boy Cade had done the job.

Feeling at length that the time for precautionary inaction was over, the bespectacled, meek-looking murderer began to lay plans for a triumphant exodus to some foreign clime where he could enjoy the fruits of his success without fear of detection. England, he thought, would suit him very well. Why, for a mere fifty thousand dollars he could purchase a veritable mansion, with acres of park and woodland. He would raise flowers and fine livestock. Probably he'd marry. After all, he was still comparatively young himself, only forty-eight.

Of remorse Doc Griswold had not a trace. His conscience, vestigial to begin with, had been quite completely withered during his long prison term. Even his dreams were untroubled, and his sleep was as peaceful as a babe's. Except for one harrowing occasion when he dreamed that the garage that housed his car was burning down. In his nightmare he saw the flames shooting up to the stars, saw the coupé catch fire and shrivel like a sheet of paper. He had torn himself out of sleep, shaking with palsy, and lurched to a win-

dow. Wild-eyed, he had listened for the shriek of sirens, the clang of the fire-bells. But the night was still and serene. The street was deserted. There was no red glare in the sky. Instead somewhere in the house a clock droned out three sleepy strokes. Wiping the drenching sweat from his face with both hands, Doc Griswold stumbled back to bed.

Perhaps it was the impetus of that odious nightmare that spurred him to make his departure without further delay. It was now mid-September and the sweltering heat of a prairie summer was still on the city.

Instead of waiting out his month, Griswold informed his landlady he was leaving at the end of that week. Mrs. Schoonover anxiously inquired if it was on Miss Deasey's account. The old maid, though she had not kept her threat and gone to the police, had subsequently been a source of some annoyance to Griswold. Whenever they met she assailed him orally. One evening, running into him in the hall, she had gone into hysterics as she berated him at the top of her voice till the whole house was roused. Miss Deasy had been with Mrs. Schoonover a good many years and the landlady didn't want to lose her, but still she didn't care to lose her doctor, either. Griswold assured her his departure was necessitated for purely business reasons, and that he was going to the Pacific Coast.

THAT night, for the first time since the hold-up, Griswold drove his coupé from the garage. It was the last time, too, for he intended to park it in front of his lodgings for the night and turn it over to a second-hand car dealer in the morning. It was nearly midnight when he drove the car up to the house. Most of the windows were dark. There was not a soul to be seen on the street. Doc lifted the blankets and touched the leather pouches beneath. Something like a sigh of relief escaped him, though he knew they could not be otherwise than safe.

He spread a blanket out, piled the flat pouches one atop the other, and lifted them from the interior of the car. Then he let himself into the house. The hallways, except for a dim bulb at the end near the fire-escape windows, were in darkness.

He was hot and out of breath when he put down his burden in his own room, with the key turned in the lock behind him. He let the tap in his alcove run awhile, then drank off two glasses of water, before he began the work he had to do, by the light of a small, shaded desk lamp. There was an open trunk in the center of the room, with odds and ends of clothing and personal belongings lying by it on the floor. It was Doc's plan to pack his loot in this and send it on ahead to be held for him at the express company office in New York. There was still the physical evidence of the pouches to get rid of, and he debated with himself whether to destroy them here or send them on with the currency. It would be only a few minutes' work to cut up the pouches into strips, make a bundle of them and drop them somewhere. But on second thought he decided against this. That job could wait till he got to New York. Who knew but what such a find might offer the police a clue?

He lifted the top tray from the trunk and fitted one of the pouches into the bottom. Suddenly he froze as he stood bending over. He had a distinct sensation that he was being watched. Not from without, for no windows of adjacent houses faced his own. No, it was in that very room. He felt eyes like tangible fingers on his back.

A chill tremor raced along his spine as he straightened, peering through his spectacles into the gloomy corners of the big room. He could see nothing, hear nothing. Through the drawn-back portieres of faded green velour that separated the room from the alcove the moonlight streamed to throw a latticed patch of silver and black on the floor. The night was completely silent.

Even as his brain told him his apprehensions were groundless, his more primal senses rejected the assurance. His nerves throbbed, as if some vague disturbance in

the invisible currents that surround us had galvanized them into uncanny vibration. Doc remained as if rooted.

Doc forced himself to relax a little, tearing his gaze from the curtain, and softly, trying to appear unconcerned, moved over to a nearby chest of drawers. Without undue haste, he drew out one of the drawers; then in a flash he had whirled about with an automatic pistol in his hand.

"Come out of there," he said in a grating whisper.

NOTHING stirred. After the space of about ten breaths, Griswold moved toward the curtain with measured tread. He flung back one side of the hangings, then the other. Of course there was nothing! Uncomfortably, he sniggered at his own foolishness. He dropped the pistol into his pocket and returned to the trunk. Two of the pouches laid side by side made a perfect fit in the bottom. Then he had jerked to attention again. It was a noise, a distinct noise as of a soft footstep. It was as if someone had darted from behind the davenport near the portieres to the alcove. Even as he stood there, his clammy hand gripping the butt of the gun in his pocket, he saw the curtain move—and there was not a breath of breeze!

With a queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach, the automatic once more gripped in front of him, Doc started toward the alcove again. The sound of his own breathing seemed to make the walls of the room pulse like a bellows. Just as he reached it he heard a loud thump on the zinc top of his work-bench, then a sharp tinkle of glass as if something had landed among his bottles of chemicals along the shelves. His heart fairly leaped into his mouth as, craning his head wildly about the gloom of the alcove, he stared full into two bright orbs, two greenish, glowing eyes that peered at him from a height of about two feet above his head. At that instant, the eyes seemed to detach themselves from the surrounding darkness and float by him in the air. The next moment he saw an enormous black cat scamper by his feet and across the floor, to project itself like a sable streak under the bureau.

For some little time Doc was too startled even to curse. Finally with a hollow laugh he muttered: "How did *you* get in here? Curse you, you certainly gave me a turn!"

It occurred to him that probably the cat had slipped into the house when he opened the street door and, unnoticed, had entered his room when he did. His throat felt parched after that flurry of excitement, and he drank another glass of water. He set down the tumbler and approached the chest of drawers with the intention of dislodging the unwelcome visitor and booting it from the premises. He extended his foot beneath the bureau when of a sudden he clutched convulsively at its top. A terrific spasm shook him to the core and he hung on to the bureau like a drowning man to a log.

He choked for breath and a dull groan escaped him. His face had gone the color of milk long soured. A froth bubbled at his bloodless lips and his eyes protruded till they seemed to touch the very lenses of his glasses. Another spasm wrenched through him and his eyes rolled in his head. Slowly, his hands sliding down the sides of the bureau, he sagged to the floor, where with a last feeble quiver he lay still.

AT TEN o'clock the next morning Miss Deasey of the first floor front poured some milk into a saucer and began to call her new pet, Claudius II, which she had acquired only the day before. Her hair elaborately primped and sheathed in her flowered kimono, she went out into the landing and called: "Come, Claudius! Come, puss-puss!"

From somewhere above her came the emphatic meowing of a cat. Miss Deasey continued her coaxing, as she gazed up through the railing pins of the staircase to the floor above. Finally, out of patience, she started upstairs, the pompons on her red morocco slippers bouncing vigorously. It was only then she realized that the feline plaint came from the top floor. Seized with a terrible suspicion she fairly flew up

the remaining flight. It was as she thought! Claudius was in there in that monster's room. The unholy wretch had captured her new pet and was planning to serve him as he had his predecessor!

Miss Deasey, quite beside herself, dashed up and pounded her knuckles on the door. Pale with anger she rattled the doorknob. The only reply she received was the piteous yowling of the cat on the other side. Craftily she bent down and peered into the keyhole. Her vision was obstructed by the end of a key. Then he was inside, the villain! She pounded some more, then tore downstairs to find the landlady. Mrs. Schoonover seemed to be out. She might be out front or in the yard. Out scurried the wild-eyed Miss Deasey. Yanking open the front door, the first thing that met her choleric gaze was a policeman. He was on the other side of the street, nonchalantly performing calisthenics with his club as he walked his beat.

Aroused beyond endurance, she motioned him frantically. He was a tall, spry young Irishman, and he came running. In breathless rage she blurted out to him the story of Griswold's infamy.

"Calm yourself, ma'am, calm yourself," cautioned the officer, scarcely able to make sense of her tirade. "This Griswold, is he up there now?"

"He is! His key is in his door. He won't answer me. I want you to arrest him!"

The patrolman stared at the overwrought woman quizzically a moment, then entered the house. He climbed to the top floor, with Miss Deasey at his heels, clamoring all the way. The officer knocked and called: "Open the door, you! This is the police." Just then the landlady, attracted by the disturbance, came running upstairs to join them.

Mrs. Schoonover fumblingly produced a master-key from her apron, and the patrolman worried the key in the lock till he dislodged it and it fell to the floor. A moment later he opened the door. A big black tomcat pounced out and Miss Deasey, cooing, caught him up. And then a ghastly sight met their eyes and the landlady stifled a scream with her hand. Sprawled by the bureau, his mouth twisted horribly, his eyes staring at the ceiling, lay Griswold. It required only a glance on the officer's part to prove that he was dead.

THE patrolman stared down at the open trunk. He stooped and picked up by its strap the pouch that lay there. The heavy leather flap was fastened by a small tubular padlock and on it was stamped words that made the officer's eyes pop wide open.

"The Farmers and Miners Bank!" he ejaculated. "Holy mackerel!"

He yanked out the other two sacks from the trunk and prodded them to make sure they still contained packets of greenbacks. "Quick! Got a phone here? Where's your phone?"

A few minutes later the chief of police and several detectives arrived post-haste, followed almost at once by the coroner. The latter, after a cursory examination of the body, glanced toward the alcove where, ranged on the shelves and workbench, glittered numerous flasks, retorts, and bottles of reagents. The chief of police had been bombarding the landlady with questions. He recalled that the driver of Armored Car No. 13 had lived in this same house and now, with the evidence before him he put two and two together and got the inevitable four.

"Why, this bird must've been in cahoots with Beales," he announced to the world at large. "Looks like he doublecrossed him to keep all the swag for himself. The landlady, here, tells me he was planning to clear out at the end of the week, and there he was packing when he passed out. What do you make of it, Coroner?"

"Looks like poison to me, Chief," he grunted as he moved toward the alcove, followed by the official. The coroner's eyes swept the bottles on the shelves. One, on the first shelf above the sink, lay on its side. Its glass stopper had dropped into the sink, and the bottle itself had apparently rolled some distance along the shelf; for along the coping of the sink was a thin

line of white powder that had clearly spilled from the overturned bottle. On the coping, near the tap, stood a tumbler. The coroner picked it up carefully and scrutinized it. On its base and along the side was a fine dusting of the same white powder, and inside on the bottom traces of white sediment. He righted the bottle glancing at its label. The next moment, with an awed expression, he furiously washed his hands.

"For heaven's sake, don't let any of your men get that stuff on their hands, Chief," he cried. "It's cyanide—a mere taste is fatal!"

The chief's brows went up. "What? Do you think he bumped himself off?"

"No, there's the whole story right there before you," the coroner waved wet fingers toward the shelf and sink coping. "Written plain as day. That bottle of mercuric cyanide got upset somehow without his knowing it. It rolled along the shelf, spilling some of it. Some dropped into that tumbler, and the next time he took a drink he poisoned himself."

"I know what knocked it over," ventured the young Irishman of that beat. "It must've been the cat."

"What cat?" stared the chief.

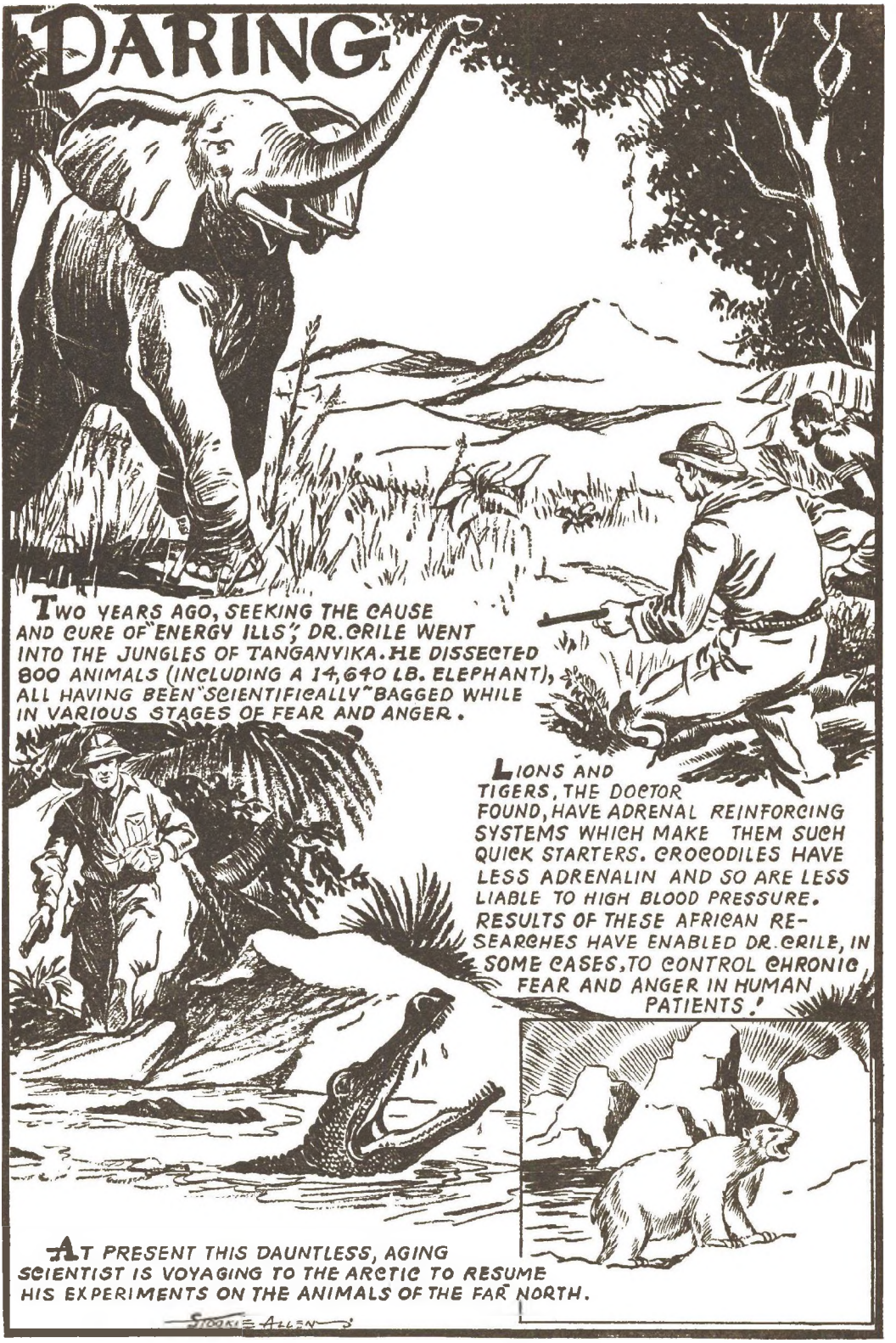
"I meant to tell you, sir," said the young patrolman. "Some dame that lives downstairs. She called me because this guy had stolen her cat. It was in here when I opened up. Funny thing, the reason she was so excited was she was scared this here Griswold was going to poison the cat."

Whoa Mankind!

ANYONE who has ever brooded over the sociological shelves in a good public library will recall seeing several square yards of matter relating to man vs. machine. These sober works will bear such unwieldy titles as: Whither the Machine Age?; What Price Machine; This Mechanistic Society; Homo Sapiens and the Gadget—and by this time a timid spirit will have fled to the fiction shelves. Yet, all the while, men are locked in death-struggles with machinery: one man labors to crank an old Ford; another flings horrible curses at a machine that makes buttons; a host of listeners is driven slowly toward idiocy by the radio-machine; macabre machines of war go spurting over unmechanized countrysides, enslaving platoons of khaki-clad mankind. The housewife tinkers over a machine for making ice and, at the office, her husband tinkers with a machine for writing checks to pay for such things as machines for making ice. As the years roll by it is getting pretty evident that the Machine has Man down and is jumping on him.

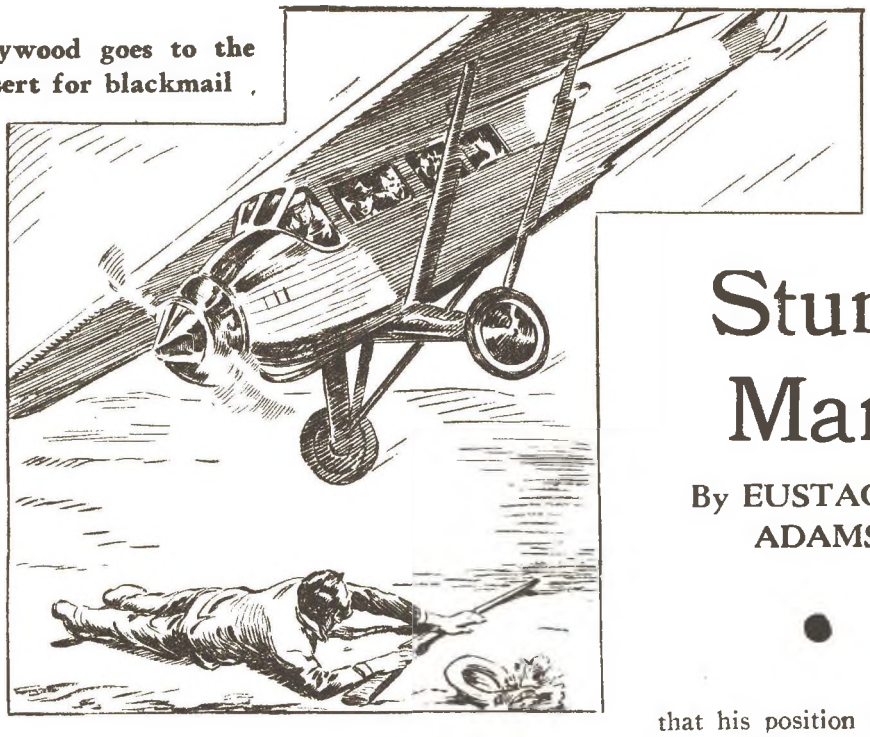
Reputable psychiatrists report that some men are having dreams wherein they come to resemble a machine. These victims imagine that they have become a complicated arrangement of belts, flywheels, cylinders and pistons. This illusion, according to the findings of Dr. Raymond Pearl, professor of biometry in the school of Hygiene and Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, is due to the fact that the fast-evolving Machine has also speeded up Man's evolution. Man has become physically capable of coping with the machines he has built, but he is not mentally able to assimilate them. Not quite—but in a giddy whirl of mutations that would have made Darwin dizzy, Man is rapidly catching up. And in this direction, says Dr. Pearl, lies Man's peril. If Man adjusts himself to the highly complicated society of the Machine and then, for some reason, the Machine is broken or taken away, Man will perish. He will become extinct, just as any other highly specialized species does when thrown in a new environment—like the Great Auk, for instance. —*Eric Sharpe.*


MEN
Aventurous Savant
DR. GEORGE WASHINGTON CRILE IS NOT ONLY A RENOWNED WAR SURGEON; HE HAS ALSO VENTURED WITH GUN AND SCALPEL INTO DARKEST AFRICA TO TRY TO FIND OUT WHY THE FELINE BEHEMOTHS OF THE JUNGLE CHARGE SO QUICKLY, WHY THE ELEPHANT REMEMBERS, AND WHY THE CROCODILE IS NOT SUBJECT TO HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.
Dr. George Washington Crile
BORN IN CHILI, OHIO IN 1864 AND NAMED FOR THE "FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY," CRILE MIGHT BETTER HAVE BEEN A WARRIOR THAN A HEALER. AS IT TURNED OUT, HE COMBINED THE TWO -- HE BROUGHT THE CLINIC TO THE BATTLEFIELD. AFTER COMPLETING HIS MEDICAL TRAINING AT WOOSTER UNIVERSITY AND ABROAD, DR. CRILE SETTLED DOWN IN A PROFESSORSHIP; BUT HIS ACADEMIC LIFE ENDED WHEN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR BEGAN. HE SAILED FOR CUBA AS A BRIGADE SURGEON.
HE RETURNED FROM THE WAR A MAJOR AND DOFFED HIS KHAKI. IN 1911 HE HELPED FOUND THE FAMOUS CLEVELAND CLINIC. BUT IN 1915 HE WAS OFF TO THE WARS AGAIN WITH AN AMBULANCE UNIT IN FRANCE. WHEN THE U.S. JOINED THE SCRAP, DR. CRILE TOOK CHARGE OF A BASE HOSPITAL.



Coming: James Harden-Hickey—the Half-King

Hollywood goes to the desert for blackmail



Stunt Man

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

ACCORDING to Jerry Banning, who is telling the story, nothing that happens in Hollywood can be considered strange. There was, for example, the case, a little while back, of Dexter Hathaway, a popular and newly-established star. It happened that Dexter Hathaway's unsavory past caught up almost as soon as he achieved stardom. Rather than continue to pay blackmail or face death by refusing, Hathaway hires Banning, who has doubled for him on the screen, to take his place in real life.

Coached by Hathaway's secretary, Erl Gorley, and with his face surgically altered to develop his slight resemblance to the star into an almost perfect likeness, Jerry passes succesfully enough among Hathaway's associates. The story is given out that Hathaway has had a nervous breakdown—thus accounting for the star's continued absence from the studio, and for any small slips Banning might make in the Hathaway-rôle.

It does not take Banning long to realize that Hathaway is in a very bad jam, indeed. There are repeated demands for large sums of money. When Banning refuses to pay—as he must, under the terms of his agreement—several attacks are made on his life.

HIS fists and courage manage to keep him momentarily on top of the heap of trouble he has taken over, but he realizes that his position is precarious; and he resolves to take a desperate chance to force the fight out into the open. Not even Gorley knows the identity of the mysterious head of the syndicate that is threatening Hathaway-Banning's life.

In answer to a final threat, Banning agrees to leave a suitcase containing twenty-five thousand dollars at a stipulated place in the desert. But the suitcase contains only wads of newspaper, and Banning means to hide nearby to see who will come to collect the money.

Florida Craig, a girl who seems to be trying to regain her former place in Hathaway's life—and Banning cannot be sure exactly what that was—announces her intention of accompanying him. Nothing he can do will dissuade her.

Banning does manage, though, to persuade her to leave him in the sagebrush and to drive to Desert Springs for the night. She can return and pick him up in the morning—if, by any chance, he is still alive. He puts the suitcase in the spot agreed upon, finds cover nearby, and settles down to wait.

The hours drag by; the desert turns pink with dawn. And then Banning catches the sound of a plane flying toward him at a low altitude. This is the one thing he hadn't counted on. Determined to make a fight of it anyhow, he picks up the hunting rifle he has brought along, and waits until the plane gets near enough to shoot at. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for September 25

CHAPTER X

ASKING FOR IT

THERE wasn't a blamed thing I could do about it. In all the lonely expanse of that desert road I couldn't see a single car. So I could just wait there and take it.

The plane, a small and cheap four-place monoplane, swerved and came roaring down the road as if looking for that enameled sign, *Danger, Curve.* They apparently saw it, for they banked sharply to the left, and I could see the heads of two men staring down out of the cabin windows—hunting, obviously, for the suitcase. They saw the suitcase before they noticed me, for the pilot cut the gun and began to slant down for his landing.

The plane was not fifty feet over my head when suddenly the thing veered up and away like a frightened gull. It careened hard on its left-wing tip while they had their careful look at me. And then down they came, engine screaming, wind whistling through wires and struts, in a dive which leveled off thirty or forty feet to the west of me. They cut the motor and in the relative silence I heard one of them shout:

"Put down that gun and walk away from it!"

There wasn't any use trying to yell at them against the tornado of sound after they turned on their engine again and went shrilling up in a zoom. After all, there was nothing I had in mind to say to them. They knew who I was, and now, of course, I knew who they were, and that was all there was to it. They had me behind the eight ball, and that was that.

But they still wanted to talk. The plane did a split-air at the top of the zoom and came diving down. I could see an ugly-faced monkey leaning out of the window to yell something else at me. I got my gun up and threw two shots at them before they went up and away like a piece of cardboard in a gale.

An airplane is a fairly big target. And I'm a pretty fair shot. But hitting a plane with a rifle is something else again. You have to shoot ahead of the darn thing. Two or three plane-lengths ahead, I've heard, but I wouldn't know. And unless you hit the engine in an important place, or the crew, or the gas tanks, or a control wire, you might as well blow kisses at it for all the harm you do. I knew I hadn't accomplished anything. It was a pretty hopeless feeling I had, standing there and waiting for them to come down again.

And they came. Fortunately they couldn't shoot through their windscreen, but a gun arm was extended out of the right side window and I could see tiny pin points of flame as the ship hurtled down at me.

LITTLE puffs of sand leaped up from the desert six or eight feet to my left, darted toward me, passed directly before me. I stood up, my feet braced, pouring slug after slug up at that mushrooming plane until I had to dive frantically on my face as the thing shrieked down at me and missed me by so narrow a margin that I thought the wind would tear the clothes off my body.

Up, then. Scrambling to my feet, I got in one shot just as the ship was racing around for a return dive. My heart leaped. Visibly the monoplane faltered in the air, so I had struck home somehow, somewhere.

And then she came down again. Straight at me like a screaming banshee, a wickedly hurtling thing that seemed to have a malevolent mind of its own, bent on stamping me to the ground and destroying me. There was only time for one shot from my rifle. Then the wheels swooped down at me and the glittering arc of the propeller licked down at me. So low was it that I actually saw the left wheel touch the sand as it pounced at me. In a wild sideward dive I threw myself to the right, hit the ground and let myself roll. A hurricane of wind and noise roared past and the slipstream plucked at my clothes, tore at them like a cyclone. Scrambling to my feet I saw tire-marks not twenty inches from my right leg. A whirling cloud of sand, following

the zooming ship encompassed me, nearly strangled me in its gritty atmosphere. It got in my eyes, nose, mouth. I couldn't even see the ship which I knew, by the sound, was banking over for another try at me.

No use running. They'd catch me in a human steeplechase and have fun doing it. A man couldn't be too choosy about the way he dies, but I couldn't see myself running like a rabbit across the sand with those flyers laughing as they dived at me, time and time again, before they finally cut me down.

So I stood there, spraddle-legged, determined to empty as many bullets as I could in the time that was left me—and then to take it standing up. Every stunt man, if he stays in the business long enough, pushes his luck just a little too hard. And now I knew—too late—that I'd asked too much of mine. I had no particular fear, only a bitter regret that there hadn't been time to play this particular stunt out to whatever conclusion the fates had in store for it. I told myself with an inward feeling of surprise, that this—right here and now—*was* the conclusion the fates had in store for it, and for me, too.

I felt the butt of the rifle smacking hard against my right shoulder. Actually I saw a black dot appear in the windscreen of the diving plane. It was that close to me with my last shot.

And then two things happened. Happened in the fragment of time it took that plane to dive through twenty or thirty—maybe fifty feet— of space. I got mad. An immense rage overwhelmed me that these rats should be playing with me, harrying me, probably laughing at me as I stood there unprotected before that careening juggernaut. And simultaneously my muscles, trained by three years of avoiding death by fractions of seconds and fractions of inches, acted of their own accord, without conscious command of my brain.

In that onrushing maelstrom of noise I heard my own voice screaming curses at those in the plane. I felt my own arm, shoulder and back muscles tighten, then snap forward and upward as I hurled the now-useless rifle slanting upward into the path of that diving ship. And at the same instant I was throwing myself aside once more, not wanting to, ashamed of myself for doing so, but dimly aware that the human wish to live is stronger than any vain decision to stand up and take it like a man.

I guess I had just hit the ground when that rifle went into the arc of the downrushing propeller. I heard a sharp crack. Fragments of splintered wood whined past me. The roar of the engine lifted to an ear-stabbing shriek. For an instant, flat on my face on the sand, I didn't know what had happened. I hadn't aimed at the propeller. I had thrown that rifle up at that plane just as instinctively as I ducked when the thing swooped to cut me down.

THE plane *whished* past me, but it missed me by a dozen feet this time because it was zooming, its unleashed engine still screaming its heart out. I scrambled to my feet just as the pilot cut his motor, dipped his left wing and shot for a landing, diving hard and fast to hold his flying speed.

I started running for the rifle, but saw it fifty or sixty feet away, its barrel bent almost into the form of a horseshoe. The plane leveled out. I knew what was coming about as soon as the pilot did. He tried to hold it up, to hedge-hop over a big clump of sage brush. His wing wavered, yawed wildly. The ship pancaked, rolled a dozen feet and tripped. Over it went, its tail completing a full semi-circle as the thing rolled completely over on its back with a crumpling, crashing roar. A great cloud of dust obscured the entire wreck.

From habit born of long years around planes, I found myself running toward the wreck. Then I stopped short. If they were all dead or dying in there it was perfectly fine with me. Hadn't they just been trying to kill me?

But they weren't all dead or dying. Two of them came tumbling out of the upside-

down cabin. Another crawled out, laboriously. A fourth remained inside and almost before the cloud of dust had settled, he began to scream.

The other three didn't bother about him. They started for me. Two of them had guns in their hands. The third, limping badly, hobbled after them dragging a big pistol out of his pocket. They did not even look back at the wreck as the screaming inside lifted to a horrible wail and went on and on, endlessly.

Three against one. Gamblers would call those odds practically a sure thing; in a gun fight it usually is. I remembered a deep drainage ditch which ran along the other side of the concerte highway behind me. With that as a trench and the cleared streak of concrete as a no-man's land, I might be able to hold them for a while, anyway.

I went in after my holstered gun. Those three men were coming on. The distance was still too great for accurate work with a pistol, but I threw two bullets at them. Two dived for clumps of sagebrush, the third threw himself flat on the sand and began to return my fire, sending bullets which whined around me like deadly hornets.

I spun around and ran for the road, zigzagging as I covered the ground like a sprinter. Bullets kicked up puffs of sand ahead of me, snapped close by me, but my luck was still in. I hit the concrete at full speed, dived for the ditch like a swimmer into deep water. I lay there a moment to catch my breath. When I peered over the edge of the road I knew that those turkeys knew their business. Already they were scattering, one moving eastward, the other westward, crawling from bush to bush. So they were going to flank me? I had a vision of seeing them racing across the road, well out of range, one on each side of me, and crawling up my ditch so if I turned my back on one of them to get the other, they'd have me. And always there was the third for a frontal attack. Not so good. They'd want a little time, but they'd have it. Plenty of it.

Behind them the plane, its wings crumpled and askew, its landing gear torn off, still lay on its back, and inside it a man still screamed and screamed. But if his own friends didn't care, why should I?

I TRIED to stop that wide, circling movement by putting over a shot aimed high, but it didn't do any good. Those babies knew their stuff and were going right at it. The one in front of me began to wriggle toward the clump of sagebrush where I had placed the suitcase. The other two began to cut a slanting course toward the concrete. No use shooting again at them until they got closer.

In front of me the man had reached the suitcase. I saw him rip off the oilcloth, open the lid and rummage into the interior. He pushed the thing aside and began to work his way directly toward me. I sent one bullet toward him and he flattened out, but I didn't kid myself. I knew he would be coming along as soon as his buddies had gotten safely across the road and into my ditch.

I glanced behind me, hunting a possible line of retreat, but there was none. Just open desert, an infinite stretch of it, and no cover anywhere. Might as well shoot it out with them here as anywhere.

The two, each beyond accurate range, scurried across the road and plopped into my ditch, one well to my right, the other about the same distance to my left. I lay down, estimated the distance and fired four times at the one to my left. He hugged sand and for a moment I thought I had him. But bullets began to hop around me from the bird behind me and the other picked himself up and moved closer. And just to keep my mind busy the guy across the road let fly a whole clipful of bullets that skipped across the concrete like flat stones dancing across a millpond.

The voice from the wrecked plane broke off in a choking sob. There was one more faint wail and that was all. A relief to have that irritating sound cut off.

The man across the road hailed me. "All right, Hathaway," he called. "We've got

you now. You can see it for yourself. Throw your gun out into the middle of the road and stand up."

"If you've got me," I retorted, "why don't you take me?"

"Listen to me," he snapped. "Our orders are to get the money. All right, you played dumb and tried to fool us. We got orders not to kill you—"

I laughed at that. "What were you trying to do with the wheels of that plane, kiss me?"

"Wait. We got orders not to kill you except in self-defense. But we got to do one of three things, bring back the money, give you a good licking for being so smart, or fill you so full of lead you'll be too heavy to lift without a crowbar. The first is out, so you got your choice on the other two. You going to come up out of there?"

"So you can give me a licking?" I demanded.

"That's it," he said. "And we'll try not to spoil your face."

"I guess," I returned, "that you'd better come and get me."

"Okay," he said with a tone of finality. "You're asking for it."

CHAPTER XI

LADY ON THE SPOT

HE didn't give any orders. They knew their work, all right. The two who were flanking me began to crawl up the ditch. And the one making the frontal drive wriggled from one clump of brush to another, always moving up. No use wasting any more shots until they got within range. And that wouldn't be long, now.

From the distance I heard a remembered sound. The purring hum or a powerful motor. It was from the east. The others heard it, too. And they stopped their crawling to turn around and to look. It was coming from down the road. A car. It was coming fast, its motor pitched up to a high whine. And then I saw it, coming around the long, easy bend in the road. It was the Sunbeam! And crouched low behind the rakish wheel was Florida Craig!

The man directly in front of me rose to his feet and began to charge toward me. A quick glance to right and to left showed me the others had gone into action, too. They were coming down the ditch at the double. But the nearest of the three was the one who had yelled for me to surrender.

No use fooling around any more. I stood up and lifted my gun. All my nerves went steady. The man's face was hidden behind his gun. He was squinting down the barrel, aiming full at me. I pulled my trigger twice—fast. No time for fooling around. I don't know what happened to my first shot, but I knew my second one hit him. He stiffened up. He lost interest in aiming at me. He opened his right hand and let his pistol drop to the ground as if he had decided he would have no more need for it. Carefully he placed both hands against his stomach. And then, slowly, he bent forward, folding over those hands as if he had a bellyache too great to be endured—which he probably had. Suddenly he pitched forward, and the first thing to hit the sand was his face. He straightened out, pulled his knees up as if to get himself into a comfortable position, and did not move again while I could see him.

The Sunbeam was whining almost full-out. I poured three shots—all that were left—at the guy in the ditch toward the approaching car. He hadn't been looking at me right then. He had been more interested in the car. Now he paid attention to me. And the mug behind me was paying plenty of attention to me. His bullets were snapping past me too close to be funny.

The big roadster was almost on us. I heard the engine fade, heard the protesting of brakes and the screaming of skidding tires. I picked myself out of the ditch and began to scramble for the road. Things were happening fast. I didn't even know who was firing the bullets that were flicking around me. I saw the gunman nearest the Sunbeam try to climb out of the ditch, lifting his gun to cover Florida as he

climbed. But he slipped, went sprawling on his face. So the bullets that were still coming as I landed on my feet at the edge of the concrete must be coming from the monkey behind me.

Good gal, Florida! No time to wonder how she happened to turn up. Time only to leap for the running board as she slowed down in front of me, time only to roll over the edge of the door and land all askew in the seat. The car jerked ahead as she pulled her foot off the clutch.

I FELT the thing sway and bump. I was all tangled up there on the seat. Trying to get myself organized, I grabbed the edge of the door to pull myself to a decent sitting position. And I found myself looking straight into the face of the gunman who had been at the far end of the ditch. He had jumped on the runningboard before we had gathered headway and was holding on to the door with one hand while the other was pulling a big automatic around and pushing it right into my face. Florida screamed and swerved the car wildly, but he held on.

I'd like to tell you that what I did was carefully thought out, efficiently planned. But if I did it knowingly, it was entirely instinctive. I discovered my hand on the lever which latched the door. I couldn't get my gun hand up fast enough. I'd be dead, with my head blown away, long before I got my pistol where I wanted it. So I threw all my weight into twisting that door handle. The door flew open, carrying him with it. It was funny to see how fast he left that running board.

The car gave a sudden bump and a quick lurch. Florida straightened it out and clamped on the brakes.

"We ran over him!" she screamed.

"What are you stopping for?" I snapped.

We both glanced back. The mug was still rolling over and over in the middle of the concrete. "Is—is he dead?" she cried.

"I hope so," I snapped. "Let's go."

We went. We went away from there fast with the Sunbeam roaring full-out.

WE WERE between Indio and White Water before either of us spoke. Florida was still driving. She was pushing right along. And for my part I was fairly content to sit back and let some of the strain seep out of my nerves and muscles. I was thirty-two years old and not able to snap back as I had when I was in my twenties. Now, and perhaps for the first time in my life, I felt that I was getting old in a young man's business. Professional stunting breaks the resilient bones of a kid of eighteen; I had taken my share of the bumps. I had taken plenty in the last few days. And for twenty or thirty miles reaction had me. I was too tired even to ask Florida how she got there in time to take me out from under those rats who would most certainly have given it to me in another five or ten minutes at the most.

Slumped far back in the upholstery and watching the mammoth black pile of San Jacinto lift its summit out of the ragged mountains ahead, I was quite content to let things drift, content not to wonder about anything. But some power stronger than my wishes had to know.

"All right, sister," I said. "Tell me. What brought you there just then?"

Florida's face was set and expressionless, hiding something that was in her "I was waiting about four miles down the road—beyond the curve."

"I told you to go to Desert Center," I said.

"Yes, I know. But I didn't. I just waited. From midnight I waited. Only half a dozen cars passed and I looked into them to see if you were in one of them. But you weren't, so I knew you were still there."

"I might have been in one of them while it was still dark," I reminded her, gently.

"You'd have come back from Desert Center when you found I wasn't there," she pointed out, reasonably. "But you'd have seen the Sunbeam in the road, anyway. And when the plane came, I saw it. I saw it dive and crash, and I knew there was trouble. I tried to start the car right away but I was excited and flooded the

motor. But after a while I got it started and I came right along."

"Yes," I said. "You came right along."

She turned her face and looked full at me. "And do you still think you're acting like Dexter Hathaway?" she asked, coolly.

That got through to me. I sat bolt upright and stared at her.

"What was that crack?" I asked her.

"You've forgotten I was out at the airport while you were getting an old plane fixed up with crash pads to use in some stunt you were doing for Mammoth. No, come to think of it, you were so interested in your work you didn't see me."

FOR a minute I didn't say a word. I was watching all our plans go haywire, wondering how Erl Gorley would look when I told him, wishing I knew how the real Dexter Hathaway would act when he heard. Me, I didn't care so much, except I'm stubborn enough to want to finish what I start. And one other thing—I hated to quit this thing before I found that mug who had been telephoning me—and nailed him so he'd stay nailed. I had been pushed around just long enough to be sore about it and to want to see this syndicate thing through.

"You're in a flat spin, sister," I said. "A little sun-touched, maybe."

"I'd have to be," she said, "to go on thinking you were Dexter Hathaway! How did it happen you couldn't remember where your own telephone was in your own library? You looked all over the room when when it rang, trying to find it. And I thought maybe you were all doped up, in spite of saying you were off the marijuana, so I answered it for you, and it was Maida Watkins."

"I was thinking about something else," I said, lamely.

"Do you think Dexter Hathaway would have laid that man Louis over a table and threatened to crack his spine?" she demanded. "And come pretty close to doing it, too? Do you think he would have shot it out with those men a few minutes ago? Don't be silly!"

"I still say you're nuts," I told her.

"Where is Dexter right now?" she snapped.

"Right beside you," I said.

"If you lie any more to me," she flamed, "I'll stop the car and tell the first cop I see."

"Tell him what?"

"Tell him Dexter Hathaway has disappeared, is maybe kidnaped, and you're passing yourself off in his place. Maybe he's dead!"

"He's as well as you are right this minute."

"Who is?" she asked, quickly.

"Dexter Hathaway is. I am."

"You've got some racket on with Erl Gorley," she said, angrily. "If it were you alone, I'd think maybe it was all right. But Erl Gorley is as crooked as a French horn."

"How do you know that?" I asked her, wanting very much to know myself.

But her answer was characteristically feminine. "He just is, that's all. Tell me what you did with Dexter Hathaway."

"Whatever Dexter Hathaway did," I said, "he did of his own free will and accord."

"Are you going to tell me about it, or aren't you?"

"I'm not," I said.

"All right, we stop now."

"If you make a complaint to a cop," I said, slowly, "you'll be breaking things that can't be mended. And the one who'll suffer from it the most will be Dexter Hathaway." I turned and looked at her stormy profile. I put my hand on her slim arm. "Listen, Florida," I said, earnestly, "if you'll give me two days to think things over, and try to work this business out with the syndicate, I'll answer every question you want to ask. I gave my promise—I signed a paper not to, but I have to use my own judgment."

"Why will things be different two days from now than they are right this minute?" she wanted to know.

"If that buzzard who's the head of the syndicate isn't dead—if he isn't the one

I shot back there—I'll be hearing from him. He'll be moving fast from now on. He'll know he isn't going to get any more blackmail money, so the lid'll be off and we'll have our showdown. After that, I don't suppose it'll matter so much. How about it? Is it a bargain?"

"And you give me your word of honor," she said, slowly, "that Dexter is alive?"

"Yes."

"And that he hasn't been kidnapped—isn't being kept prisoner somewhere?"

"Yes."

We drove for perhaps a mile before she spoke again. "All right," she said with an air of finality. "I'll play along for two days. That brings us up to about ten o'clock the day after tomorrow. And let me give you a tip. As long as you're playing Dexter Hathaway, soften up. The chief difference in your characters is that you are hard—he isn't. Try to remember that—Jerry!"

CHAPTER XII

IN A BOX

FLORIDA, perhaps out of sheer perversity, still lived on Whitley Heights. The tide of motion-picture fashion, always ebbing and flowing, had washed away from that hilltop between Cahuenga and Highland Avenues, but Florida had bought a house there when she began to hit her stride, and there she still lived. It was just after one when I dropped her off there. Then I coasted down the winding road to Highland and highballed for Laurel Canyon.

Erl Gorley must have heard the deep-voiced purring of the Sunbeam. He was standing just inside the door when the uniformed houseman let me in. Gorley's face was as pale as his prematurely white hair. He stared at me as if he were seeing a ghost.

"What's the matter." I snapped, wearily. "Didn't you expect to see me come back?"

"Of course," he said, breathlessly, but there was a quality to his voice that confirmed my impression that he was astonished to see me alive. "What—what happened, sir?"

"They came in an airplane," I said, succinctly. "It crashed. One of them died in the wreck. I shot one. That's all there was to it."

And with that I brushed past him, marched up to my room, threw myself on my bed, and tried to take a nap. But sleep would not come. I had the sense of waiting for something to happen—of listening for something I couldn't put a name to. I was all wound up. And I couldn't relax. I knew that feeling. I had it when I was waiting to do a crash scene for the pictures. No matter how carefully I had planned my timing and my spotting, there was always an empty space of time before I climbed into the cockpit.

Gorley knocked at the door. Queerly, my nerves jerked to attention.

"There's a man on the 'phone," he said in that flat voice of his. "It's the same one who talked to you yesterday—the man from the syndicate. He says it will be worth your while to speak to him."

I knew an instant feeling of relief. I knew, now, that this was what I had been waiting for. And now it had come, I felt fine. I walked over to the taboret and poured myself a good three ounces of Hathaway's scotch. Then I went to my extension telephone, which had no bell. Gorley answered the bell on another instrument, probably in the library.

"Hello," I said. "Aren't you getting tired buying flowers for all your comrades who stub their toes here and there? I know where you can find some more of them."

"So do I," he said quite calmly. "I just got a call from Indio. It was their penalty for carelessness. But the matter of the suitcase filled with waste paper was your error. I don't take kindly to jokes of that kind. I really think I shall have to do what I have avoided for years—take an active hand in this matter."

"Fine!" I purred into the phone. "Look, sweetheart, why don't you and I get together in some nice, quiet place and talk this over? I'm getting bored with it and I

know it can't be any treat to you. I'd like to meet you and—"

"But you have met me a number of times, socially," the other interrupted.

"When?" I snapped.

"Just to name two recent times, at Moe Block's cocktail party and Maida Watkins' dance."

"How is it I don't know you?" I demanded, and then caught my breath for fear I had said the wrong thing.

"You mean," he said in a voice so silky I knew I hadn't made a wild pitch, "how is it you don't recognize me as an old business associate?"

"Exactly," I said.

"Because," he said, his voice hardening, "when you worked for us you weren't important enough to see the Chief! Only five men in the syndicate know who I am and the rest, as you ought to know, work under them."

"But now I'm so important you deign to speak to me, eh?" I said. "You can't imagine how flattered I am."

His voice sounded puzzled, "I wonder," he said, slowly, "what's been happening to you lately? Who has been giving you courage? I'm sure, now, that I must handle the situation myself."

"A beautiful thought," I said. "I'll make you a proposition. I'll give you a wide-open opportunity. You seem to like cocktail parties. All right, I'll throw one. Tell me where to send you an invitation and you'll get one."

I heard a throaty chuckle over the phone. "Perhaps we made a mistake about you," he said. "Perhaps we didn't recognize your abilities when you were working for us. It might be you could be of service to us yet."

"Tell me where to send the invitation," I snapped.

"Don't bother," he said, carelessly. "I'll be there."

"How will you be there," I demanded, "if I don't send you an invitation."

Once again that laugh burned me. "Oh, I'll be there, all right. You'd be surprised how I get around."

SUDDENLY I remembered that Dexter Hathaway owned a yacht. I knew nothing about it except that it was supposed to be a big one. An idea came to me. "Hold the line," I said. I turned to Gorley, who was listening, his face pallid. Even his lips were bloodless. I made no effort to cover the transmitter with my hand. I wanted the man at the other end to hear.

"Gorley," I said, "is my yacht ready to sail on twenty-four hours' notice? Not a cruise. Just a little run down the coast and back. Say from five to midnight."

"I—I don't advise it, sir!" Gorley burst out.

Again came that laugh that so irritated me.

"I didn't ask you for advice, Gorley," I snapped. "Can she be ready to sail?"

Gorley licked his lips and swallowed visibly. "Yes, sir," he said with an effort. "She is always ready to sail."

I wheeled back to the 'phone. "Are you listening?"

"Of course. And you might remind the good Gorley that we are becoming impatient with him. Tell him we will bury him in the same box with you."

I glanced at Gorley. I thought he was about to faint. But he pulled himself together.

"How many will you ask to your cocktail party?" the voice asked.

"Just a minute," I said. This time I covered the transmitter tightly with my palm as I turned again to Gorley. "How many really intimate friends has—have I?" I asked. "For a small party, composed of friends I can trust, how many?"

Gorley's lids were down, hiding his eyes. His lips moved twice before he said, "Twelve or fifteen."

"I'll invite a dozen or fifteen," I said to the man at the other end. "Won't you reconsider and tell me where to send your ticket?"

"Oh, no. I'll be there."

The gall of the man burned me plenty. "You mean to tell me that your name would be on any guest list of fifteen or

twenty that I'd be likely to make out?"

"I said no such thing," the voice said, smoothly. "I just told you I'd be there."

"And will I be glad to see you—in person! Will you promise to identify yourself to me? If not, the whole party is off."

"Of course I'll identify myself," he answered. "I'll do it just a minute or two before I kill you."

And the line went dead. I stood there for some instants, with something nagging at the loose strings of memory. In that last sentence the man's voice had changed a little. Not much, but just enough to tell me that he, like I, had changed the timbre of his voice so I would not recognize it. I had been trying to talk like Hathaway; he, like someone I had never seen before. But I had seen him, had heard him talk. I rummaged my memory, trying to place that voice. But the blamed thing escaped me.

GORLEY'S hand grabbed my arm, shook me out of my absorption. His face was livid.

"You've gone too far, Jerry Banning!" he said in a voice of suppressed fury.

"Oh, so I'm Jerry Banning now, am I?" I asked. "Okay. Right now I walk out on this whole damned deal. Try holding the bag yourself a while. And by the way, did you hear what he said about putting you in a box, too?"

Gorley grabbed me with his two hands. I pulled up and yanked my arm away with a jerk that spun him around in a three-quarters circle and almost felled him.

"You can't walk out now," he cried. "You signed a contract! But you can't go on—"

"Exactly who would prevent my walking out?" I demanded harshly. "You? Listen, you, just try to stop me and I'll tie your legs around your neck and throw you up against the wall! Do you think I'm having any fun getting pushed around and shot at and burned? I don't need five grand a month. I can get along all right on what I make in my own racket. So you can jump plop into the big blue Pacific!"

I started to march out of the room. He followed me. "Mr. Hathaway!" he begged. "It was my mistake. I was upset. I was worrying about your own safety."

"You'd better start giving a little thought to your own," I reminded him. Who is that man who calls himself the Chief? Didn't you ever hear his voice before?"

"I've thought so, sometimes," he admitted. "But I've never been able to figure out who it could be."

"You put the finger on that man for me before he jumps me," I said, "and from then on you won't have to worry about what he meant by laying you out in a box. I'll—"

"Mr. Hathaway," he interrupted, worriedly, "he'll be aboard the yacht. Perhaps we can spot him there."

"How do you know he'll be aboard?" I snapped.

"He has never broken a promise yet. That's what drove Mr. Hatha—drove you—to marijuana. He seems to have spies that know everything you're doing. There'll be no protection on that yacht. He'll have a dozen—a hundred—chances to stab you, or shoot you, or throw acid in your face. And maybe in mine, too."

I couldn't doubt that the man was frightened. There had been times, I'll confess, when I had had faint doubts about Gorley's regard for my health. And I had wondered if he were not, perhaps, in league with the blackmailers. But not any longer. He was too scared. The man who called himself the Chief wanted me on the yacht. Gorley didn't. Gorley might have some unsavory racket of his own, but I didn't think that he had much in common with the Chief.

"All right, Gorley," I said. "I won't run out on you this time. But don't ever use that tone of voice on me again. Don't tell me what I must and mustn't do. When I want your advice I'll ask for it. But when you get too bossy, I don't like it."

"Yes, sir," Gorley said, and his voice was chastened. His eyes, however, were different. I looked at them thoughtfully,

thinking again that they were mean eyes and that I did not like them. "What do you want me to do now, sir?"

"That man said he was at Moe Block's cocktail party and at Maida Watkins' dance. I want you to get me the lists of the guests at each of those parties. Can you do it?"

"Yes, sir, but I don't think it will help much. They were both big jams. There were about two hundred at the Watkins dance, I think."

"Well, get the lists, anyway. Then do whatever is necessary about the yacht. I haven't owned any yachts before, but see they are ready to shove off at five tomorrow night."

HE turned on his heel and hurried out. I grabbed up the telephone. I dialed my business agent. *My* business agent? No, I dialed Jimmy Carling, who was my agent while I was only Jerry Banning, and who was now Sleepy's, and agent for most of the stunt men in Hollywood. He had been a "bump man" himself before he broke more bones than would mend. Now he ran his agency from a wheel chair. I was very careful about my voice. I knew Jimmy too well.

"This is Dexter Hathaway," I said. "Is Sleepy Smith back from Catalina yet?"

"Yeah, he came back this morning," Jimmy said. "He's around somewhere, I guess."

"How long would it take you to find him and to ask him to telephone me? The matter is important."

"Well, he has some money in his pocket, so it depends how many bars I have to call before I find him. Is it about a job?"

"Well, yes. I want him to go on a floating cocktail party on my yacht, and I'll pay him at the going scale for studio time."

"That's a new one. A paid guest at a cocktail party. Like paying a duck to swim. You mean the going scale for stunt work?"

"Yes. Call it one hundred dollars for the evening."

"I guess he'd even go to a star's cocktail party for that," Jimmy said. "But I don't know. I hear something about a lot of the boys getting together tonight for a binge. I'll have him call you if he's sober enough."

"Tell him not to bother," I said with sudden inspiration, "if he's afraid of getting in a fight."

That would bring him, I told myself as I put the instrument down. And I felt better right away. Amid all the uncertainties and the danger, Sleepy's presence would be something I could count on, as loyal and steadfast as the sun is bright. If he had only been along last night on the desert—but still, Florida hadn't done so badly. With both Sleepy and Florida aboard the yacht there would be two I could depend upon, and that was reassuring.

The butler appeared in the doorway. "Miss Watkins' chauffeur is at the door to find out if you are well enough to see Miss Watkins, sir. She's in her car."

My heart leaped, did a couple of wingovers and pancaked back into place. I rushed past the butler, hurried down the hall and, brushing the chauffeur aside, came to a stop at the open door of Maida's limousine. She was there in the dim interior, her bright head a spot of golden color against the dark upholstery.

"I had to see you, Dexter," she said in that low, compelling voice of hers. "They are ready to cast *Hearts Aflame* at the studio. This afternoon I told Moe Block I wouldn't take a part if you weren't playing the lead. So it's about time you made up your mind."

"Come on in," I said, reaching in and taking her hand, pulling her gently. "We'll talk about it over a highball, or something."

Maida got out of the limousine and walked into the house with me. She was not tall, like Florida. Her head scarcely came to my shoulder. She was not as beautiful as Florida, either, but the power of her personality was more stirring than mere beauty. She was—well, she was just Maida Watkins, and if you've ever seen

her, you'll know exactly what I mean. Even from the screen she had the power of reaching out and tugging at your heart strings.

WE went into the library. I rang for the butler, ordered a sherry for her and a stiff scotch highball for myself. I needed it. Waiting for the drinks, we saw Erl Gorley go past the door, walking on his noiseless feet. Maida frowned.

"That man," she said in a low voice, "gives me the creeps. When he looks at me, I feel as if dead fingers were being dragged across my bare skin. Why do you have him around, Dexter?"

My mind leaped back a few hours when another girl had said almost the same thing. Well, so far as that went, I wasn't any too fond of the Gorley monkey myself. What's more, I never had been, even when I had known him only as the secretary for a star I sometimes doubled for. But with Maida right there in the room and half a scotch highball beginning to work, I could almost feel sorry for Erl Gorley, sorry that nobody liked him.

"Oh, he's all right," I told Maida. "He's pretty handy."

There was an undertone of fire in her voice when she said, "Too handy. He runs you. You do everything he tells you to, and you always have."

"Not any more," I said, grinning. "All that's over now. Wait and see."

"I hope you're right," she said, earnestly. "Now what about the picture?"

"I'm not going to make it," I said. "I'm not going to make another picture for at least a year."

"So that printed note I got a few days ago was right?" she murmured. "The one that advised me to team up with a new co-star."

"I guess it was," I said. "I'm pulling a cocktail party on the yacht. Will you come at five-thirty?"

"Of course, Dexter. But are you well enough?"

I laughed at her. "I never felt better in my life," I said.

Just then the telephone rang. I was not yet accustomed to a secretary, so I answered it without thinking. And when I heard Sleepy Smith's drawling voice, I wanted to shout, "Hi you old so-and-so!" But I remember just in time. I pitched my voice carefully, and said:

"Mr. Smith, an old friend of yours recommended you to me. I've already spoken to your agent. Are you free tomorrow afternoon and evening from five-thirty on?"

"I don't know," came Sleepy's voice with no particular enthusiasm. "I've sort of got a date."

"There's a hundred in it," I said.

"I've got a hundred," Sleepy said in a bored voice. "I just fell out of a mast into the water for a sweet-smelling actor and I'm sort of turned against actors right now. It might take me four or five days to get over it. Call me up some other time."

"Listen, you punk!" I ripped out. "For two cents I'd—"

And then I caught myself, realizing how my voice had hardened. There was a long silence at the other end of the wire. I heard Sleepy's voice again, and now it was almost interested.

"Well, spin me dizzy!" it said. "What's the idea in giving the bunch the old runaround? I thought you were on your way—on your— Say, just exactly who is this, anyway?"

"Dexter Hathaway," I said, very careful again.

"Sure it is," Sleepy said, "and I'm Adolph Hitler. I once knew a guy who, when he got mad, said, 'Listen, you punk!' just like that. And he was always saying that for two cents he'd give someone a bust on beezer, too. I'm changing my mind. I'm just curious enough to break a lifelong prejudice against actors' parties. So I'll be there. Five-thirty, you said?"

"Make it five."

"And just where do I go to find this yacht?"

For an instant I was stumped. I didn't even know the yacht's name. But I did

remember having read in some Hollywood gossip column that it was the pride of the Santa Monica yacht basin.

"Just ask for Mr. Hathaway's yacht at Santa Monica," I said, glibly.

Sleepy's voice was sardonic. "Wouldn't it be a gag," he said, "if I should ask you its name. Lucky I'm not a curious guy."

And he hung up. So that made two who knew I was not Dexter Hathaway. Florida by my actions, Sleepy by my voice and my habits of speech. How long was it going to be before everybody knew? Not long, if I kept on pitching balls instead of strikes.

"Who is that man?" Maida asked when I turned away from the 'phone. "And why were you so anxious for him to come to your party?"

"His name is Sleepy Smith," I said, negligently, "and he's a stunt man. I just happen to like him. Now, listen, Maida, I want you to help me fix up the guest list for the party. A small crowd, this time. Fifteen, say. Who'll I have?"

"Why so small? A lot of people are going to feel hurt at being left out?"

"The doctor," I said, trying not to smile, "told me I could see a few people, but not many. So I'll just have my most intimate friends on this one. Come on, you name them and I'll write them down and have Gorley call them up to invite them."

"You'll have to have Moe Block, your producer," she said, beginning to count on her fingers, "and Ansel Bittner, your agent, and Cliff Furber—"

I did not put that name down at first. I looked at her, remembering what Erl Gorley had told me about him at Arrowhead.

"Would I be inviting Cliff Furber because he's going pretty hard for you?"

"Both," she said, promptly, and gave me a look that sent my pulses to racing.

"A pal, eh?" I snapped. "If he makes one pass at you, I'll kick my initials in him! All right who else gets on the list?"

Maida's cheeks were bright as she counted them off: "You'll want Clyde Macklyn and Frida Carle—"

One at a time she named others, while I wrote them down, my mind wary for anyone who might be the Chief. Fortunately I knew all of them by sight or by reputation, for Hollywood is really a small town where everybody—even the hangers-on at the edge of the picture business—knows, or knows of, everybody else. Maida named thirteen and then stopped. Sleepy, at the head of the list, made fourteen.

"And you forgot Florida Craig," I said, writing her name down.

"That girl!" Maida said, her smooth face tightening.

"Yes, that girl," I agreed.

"I don't go if she goes," Maida said flatly.

I thought of Florida, racing up the road and stopping the big roadster in the midst of a hail of bullets. I thought of her waiting through all those hot hours in the ink-black desert when I had ordered her to have a cool swim and a good night's sleep a few miles up the road. I thought of her knowing that I wasn't Hathaway at all, yet giving me forty-eight hours to prove I wasn't running a rotten racket of some kind.

"What's the matter with Florida?" I asked Maida, curiously.

"And you don't know?" she flung at me. "When it's so she even answers the telephone when I call you up, there are limits even to my broadmindedness."

"Maida," I said, evenly, "that was an accident. You'll have to take my word for it. And Florida comes to the party."

"You decided?" she asked, her eyes taking fire.

"Certainly I decided. She's done nothing to make me put the freeze on her."

We were both standing, looking at one another, with tension building up between us like static electricity before a shattering clap of thunder. So suddenly that it almost knocked me off my feet, it ceased to be the tension of conflict and became something else. I could feel her swaying toward me and I was swept away on a high, hot tide of recklessness.

I pulled her into my arms and took the

kiss I had wanted ever since I had first seen her on the Mammoth lot. That made two years I had waited without even the slightest hope. A long time, two years, but I made up for it now. And I kissed her with all the more desperate avidity because I knew that pretty soon I would wake up, and then I'd be Jerry Banning again, while she would still be Maida Watkins. And then all the rest of my life I'd remember what I had lost and everything would be in a mess.

After a while she pushed herself away. Not far away. Just far enough so she could breathe. Her lovely eyes came up to mine.

"Dexter," she said in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper, "I've always known I could love you if—if you really made me. The other day you asked me to fly down to Yuma with you. If you still want me to, all right. Tomorrow night after the yacht comes in we'll fly down there. Then, instead of making another picture right away, we'll take a honeymoon until we both feel like going back to work again. I'll pack an overnight bag and bring it to the yacht. Then we can go right to Burbank and get a plane."

She did not even give me time to answer. She did not give me time to say anything at all, nor even to think. She lifted her sweet young face again to mine, and then broke away and hurried toward the door.

She left me to stand there staring at an empty doorway and wondering what I was going to do now.

CHAPTER XIII

GORLEY?

IT WAS midnight and I was sitting in the great bedroom which overlooked the lights of Hollywood and Los Angeles. I was tired. My body felt as if it had been run through a cement mixer. The night before I had slept in catnaps out there on the desert, waking every time a motor car went past. But I couldn't sleep now. Every time I'd put my head on the pillow I would think about Maida, and what a spot I was in with her. And I'd think about Florida, too. Thinking about her, I would forget the hard recklessness of her mouth, and the careless disregard for the conventions I could see in her dark eyes; instead, I would find myself remembering her complete honesty, and her utter bravery, which had certainly saved my life some twelve or fourteen hours ago. Florida had been around. She knew there there was no Santa Claus, no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. She took her world as she found it—and, no doubt, her men. So what? Nothing, of course. If there had been any answer to all this milling around in my brain, I might have slept.

And what about tomorrow night? My brain told me I couldn't go ahead and marry Maida Watkins, but my heart told me to go ahead and marry her anyway. After all, she hadn't married the real Dexter Hathaway, had she? No, she had waited until I had come along before she had decided to marry him—*me!* Certainly she'd be little better off with the real Dexter Hathaway than with me. He had plenty of money and a reputation, and all that, but he was a hophead and a liar and a coward. What happiness could she find with him? At least I could give her happiness for a while, until Florida Craig blew the top off everything by going to the police. As she would do, of course.

There I was, right back where I started. Scotch helped a lot. I killed a pint, then opened a quart and went to work on that. About a third of the way down the bottle I began to get a lift out of it, so I could laugh. Here I was, sitting plumb on top of the world and developing a crying jag over it! I could remember lonely nights, in some forsaken corner of the world, crouching in front of a campfire and wondering how it would feel to have a big house, no worries about money, plenty of good food and liquor, and beautiful women making passes at me. And now I had all of these, plus that essential ingredient without which all of them would have been insipid, flat to the taste—danger!

Tomorrow night, if the annoymous voice on the telephone hadn't lied, the man who had sent his plug-uglies after me would be aboard the yacht and I'd have a showdown with him. There was that to look forward to, so why was I brooding now?

FOR all I knew, Erl Gorley knocked on my door for an hour before I snapped out of my moody abstraction and heard him. Quietly I tramped across the room, grabbed up my gun and moved to the door. Standing on the hinge side, I got the gun ready at belly-level and swung the door wide.

"Come in," I said, gently.

Hesitatingly his footsteps came past the door. When he emerged behind its protecting panel I saw who it was and dropped the gun. "Well?" I snapped. Then I saw how pale he was. He tried twice before he got it out.

"I—I called up the yacht this afternoon, sir," he said, "and told them to be ready to sail tomorrow afternoon."

"Well?" I said.

"I just got a message. Captain Jamison has been killed, sir."

"You break my heart," I said. "And who is Captain Jamison?"

"The skipper of Mr. Hathaway's yacht, the *Adventurer*."

"Oh!" I said, alert at last. "And who killed him?"

"A car. He was at a picture theatre at Santa Monica. On the way home he stepped off a curb and a car hit him. He died instantly."

"Have they found the car?" I asked.

"No, sir. It was a hit-and-run driver. It got away."

"A thing like that," I said, slowly, "might happen to anybody."

"Yes, sir," he said, a shade too eagerly. "Shall I call off the sail tomorrow afternoon?"

"Not by a long sight," I snapped. "Let the mate act as captain until we can find a new master."

"I'm sorry, but the mate doesn't have master's papers."

"Just how would you know that?"

"It was one of Mr. Hathaway's little economies, sir. He could get a mate cheaper who didn't have master's papers. He said he didn't see why a yacht the size of the *Adventurer* had to have two captains."

"Well, get a new captain the first thing in the morning. And be sure he's all right. Have you those guest lists I asked you for—the names of all the guests at Moe Block's party and Maida Watkins' balloon dance?"

"Yes, sir," he said, pulling some sheets of paper out of his pocket. "But they don't help much. Mr. Block had sixty guests and Miss Watkins nearly two hundred, and at each of them were the usual number of gate-crashers."

He passed them to me and I sat at the desk, trying to look them over. But I couldn't concentrate on the names. I had found myself suddenly remembering the weasel-faced plastic surgeon who had fixed me up to impersonate Dexter Hathaway. He had, I now recalled with startling vividness, been killed on the way back to Hollywood, seemingly by accident. And now, also seemingly by accident, my yacht captain had died.

I became aware that Gorley was standing directly behind me. I didn't like anybody standing directly behind me, even my friends. A matter of habit, I suppose. There was a mirror over the desk. I glanced into it and saw Gorley's pale face. There was an expression on it that bothered me.

"All right, Gorley, you can go now," I said, quietly.

But I didn't take my eyes away from that mirror. Slowly Gorley's lips drew back and his eyes expanded. His face looked positively murderous. I got my feet under my chair, bright anger flooding through me.

"Did you hear me? Scram!"

For one single instant he hesitated and I worked myself forward in my chair, ready to kick it back into his legs as I got out of it. Then, without a word, he turned and walked silently out of the room.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Two men on a raft . . . one of them afraid of fear

Taste of Brass

By PERRY ADAMS
Author of "Cobra"

WHEN the broken raft swung up sluggishly on the crest of the next roller, Norman thought he saw smoke on the horizon. "Back of you," he said to his companion. "Quick."

Rattray, a little Irishman who looked like a wiry blond monkey, pivoted painfully on his hips. But already the raft was sliding down and he lost the horizon. "Whatever it is, let it go," Rattray said. "Turnin' only makes things worse."

The raft rose again. Norman said, "It's smoke, all right. Maybe they'll spot us."

Rattray grunted indifferently. He hadn't been much use since the *Black Prince*, westbound out of Singapore, had ploughed into an unexpected solid in the Indian Ocean and gone down in fifteen minutes. Perhaps it had been a section torn from this very ship's raft that had hit him and made a mess of his insides; in the darkness he hadn't been sure of anything. He had no memory of reaching the raft, and for some time he had not even known that his pot-bellied American partner, Norman, was here with him.

"Spot us? Maybe they won't, too," he said.

Norman spoke mechanically.

"Oh, cheer up. Why—don't you remember?—we were due in Colombo that next day. The land we've kept seeing every once in a while—that's Ceylon. We're close—right in the shipping lane. They're bound to find us." He had talked like that a good deal, to bolster up his own spirits.

He did not want to die like this.

Often when death seemed remote he had told himself he would welcome it, but faced with the thing it was different. This was no way to go—two fellows on a raft, like one of those comic cartoons you always saw in the magazines. Norman thought of death in vague terms of splendor. It would be a highly dignified proceeding, preferably with an audience composed of all the people who hadn't liked him; but who,

spellbound by the manner of his passing, discovered in him a virtue and a lofty, fine hardiness he had somehow failed to reveal in life.

"How long we been on this thing?" Rattray asked suddenly. For him, time had telescoped into a confusing blur of light and darkness.

Norman fingered a thick lip.

"Two—no, three days. Three full days last night. A little more than three and a half days now. But they're bound—"

"We been bloody lucky to last so long. 'Tis the monsoon clouds have kept the sun from us, or we couldn't have stood the thirst."

"Thirsty," Norman echoed resentfully. He wished Rattray had not reminded him, for it made his swelling tongue feel like so much hot fur stuffed into the smoking kiln that was his mouth.

"The good life's all behind us," Rattray muttered. "We saw the trees grow and the rubber come. Och, 'twas fun whin we were up to our eyes in debt; every day was a scrap, then. But whin all the debts were paid, one year was exactly like another. Up with the dawn an' a swing round the plantation, day after day the same. The same, too, whin we'd go down into Kuala Lumpur. Too much whisky at the club, too much everythin'. An' always the *same* things, Norman. I tell ye, whin the day came we didn't have to fight for our bread, we stopped livin'. We been dead for ten years."

That was nonsense, Norman thought. He said:

"I think the smoke's getting nearer."

"TEN years," Rattray went on, more loquacious than he had been for a long time, "ten years pilin' up a bank balance wid never a fight for it. Me, I didn't want to sell out like we did—an' I didn't want to stay. I didn't want anything, because there wasn't anny more. . . . To the devil wid your smoke." He closed his eyes, sighing.

Norman scratched the stubble on his chin and stared at him. "You're nuts. We've each got enough to give us a decent income. I want to enjoy mine. In New York—"

"Sure, sure, I know ye." Eyes still closed, Rattray's mouth widened into a kind of contemptuous grin. "Booze—booze and women ye'd safely buy. Cheap, young, painted things wid slender legs on slick, high heels. Ye'd fair wallow in it all. But not me."

Norman didn't like that word "safely." He shrugged uncomfortably.

His partner had found him out many years ago. That was the whole trouble: If he gave people enough time, they always found him out. With Rattray, Norman had talked himself up as the man he had always hoped to be and never had been—he did it cleverly, plausibly—and because Rattray was kindly and unsuspicious, he had been fooled for almost two years. Then came the day when Norman saw the other look in his eyes. Rattray knew.

Norman's life had been a succession of such moments. Bitter moments. With a kind of dreary fascination he could recreate the mood of each one—the sensatory trivia of the instant—and this time it was the club at Kuala Lumpur, the afternoon dripping humidity, and a rusty electric fan at the end of the bar droning a hushed minor as it churned air pungent with the reek of liquor and cut limes. Save for the three at the bar and the Chinese half-caste behind it, the place was deserted.

Norman was standing between Roelker the ship chandler, a thickset, pig-faced Dutchman of about the same height and weight as himself, and little Rattray, neat in white ducks which never seemed to soil. They had been at the bar since tiffin, rolling dice for the drinks. All were a little drunk—just enough to freight the talk with an undercurrent of hard significance.

Roelker rattled the dice in their leather cup and said, "Dis fine-shaped woman who comes now to de hotel. Who iss she? Vere iss she from, eh?"

Norman raised his eyebrows.

"A new woman?"

He turned to Rattray.

"Name's Harper," Rattray nodded. "I was introduced to her last night while ye filled your snoot here at the bar. Husband was somethin' or other in the Islands. He died. She came in the bark *Gaa Paa* an' she's waitin' for the next boat home."

"She iss English?" Roelker asked. "I haf so liddle luck mit English ladies. Dey are cold."

He smirked.

"She happens to be American," Rattray said evenly, "an' she's not your kind."

Rattray's mouth grew dour.

"So?" Roelker's expression turned slyly malicious. He leaned toward Norman and spoke across him to Rattray. "Ach, dere you are wrong. If American she iss—well—" and he smiled as if to say that he had a sort of special and infallible charm for American women.

Norman half pushed him away. "That's a nice thing to say. That's lovely. You better not try to kid about a thing like that, Roelker."

"But I do not make a joke. I mean idt."

Roelker bristled.

Norman felt Rattray's urgent nudge. It was as though he said, "You're an American. Don't let him get away with that."

"You're a liar," Norman shot at Roelker. "A dirty Dutch liar."

For an unconsidered fragment of time there was no sound save the wail of the fan.

Roelker's flabby wattles turned a deeper crimson. "So," he murmured, "so I am a liar, eh? You vill come oudt back mit me, Norman—*ja?*"

Through the flavor of gin sling that lingered in his mouth Norman had the sudden taste of brass. Too well he knew what that meant. He had been finding out all his life.

Somehow he went all shaky and sick inside with a kind of mental ague he could not control. His stomach muscles tightened.

"I—there's no use making ruddy fools of ourselves," he said weakly, "but you ought to be more careful, Roelker."

Rattray moved abruptly. "What—?"

Roelker smiled with scornful understanding, picked up his drink.

Then Rattray gripped Norman's arm. Gripped it so tighlty that Norman winced, and bit his lip.

"Come away"—harshly—"let's get out of here."

And that was how Rattray had come to know.

THERE was a lull in the orderly procession of rollers; for a while the raft lay in water almost still. For the first time Norman became aware that this splintered section, never more than just big enough to support their joint weight, was unmistakably settling.

The whole surface was awash.

A queer light played in Norman's bloodshot, unpredictable gray-brown eyes.

He looked quickly at Rattray, who, hands clasped about drawn-up knees, continued to sit with eyes closed. Then they recommenced rising and falling with the smooth gray waves, and since thus they had been shipping and spilling more or less water from the beginning, Norman felt that if Rattray looked now, he would not see what had been so apparent during the lull.

There I go again, Norman thought. The poor devil's helpless and half my size and he's the man I've worked with more than a quarter of my life; and yet the second this new danger presents itself, I think only of my own hide.

It was like a hateful nightmare—this thing that lay siege to his mind and filled him with self-loathing and contempt.

What is it? What awful thing is in me, or what was left out of me? Did I always know? I was so young before that first time, I can hardly remember how it felt to have everything straight sailing.

I was ten—no, nine years old. First term away at boarding school. Doc Hunter's, over in the Jersey Hills.

Billy Aboe in my form. About my size and a nasty little bully, with his mop of black hair hanging in his eyes. He kept picking on me. Then the kids' football

team, and the day I tackled him. Brought him down good and hard, too. Hurt him. He was raging when he got up. He started for me, but Old Man Green saw and held him off.

"You wait," Billy said. Funny I didn't taste brass right then. Well, but I'd never tasted it—then.

He separated us and gave Billy a smug little lecture on the virtues of good sportsmanship.

It wasn't until the following Saturday—boxing night. Whole school in the gym, watching to see what boys the masters would pick. Billy was one of the first chosen. He had the right to indicate his opponent, and he came straight over and tapped me on the shoulder.

I got up, thinking that even with the big, soft gloves he'd murder me. I climbed into the ring. But even *then* there was no brass in my mouth. We began milling about and suddenly I was all over him. In the second round I knocked him down three or four times, until Old Man Green jumped in and stopped the bout.

I went to my corner blinking at the lights and as they freed my hands I got that odd, sweet-sour smell of sweaty leather that seems to come only from boxing gloves.

Whenever I've smelled that since, I've always thought of Billy coming across to my corner and whispering.

"Listen, you. Afterward we'll fight it out with bare knuckles."

That's when the brass taste came—there. I wanted to look tough and say "Yes," but all I did was shake my head. The bouts were soon over and I wouldn't go out with him.

I'd made a monkey of him in the ring, but I couldn't force myself to go outside. I couldn't.

I wanted to—oh, I wanted to. That first time—then! Right there was the turning point of my life—at nine years old. How could I know? After that the other kids put me through agony and when I went home for Christmas I persuaded Mother to take me out of school.

What was it Dad said? "You're making a little quitter of him, Harriet."

"No, it's this school that's wrong for him," Mother argued.

The discussed it, very solemnly, for a long time. Mother got very excited about it. Dad was calmer, but I knew he was worried. But Mother gained her point at last.

And Dad said: "Well, change schools if you insist, but it won't do any good. Human nature's the same everywhere."

DAD knew. And if he'd lived—I'm glad he died before I got older, because every school I went to it was the same story. They found you out very quickly at school. Later it took a little longer, because you were hedged about with protecting conventions that meant nothing to kids. But it was never long enough. . . .

Yet if instead of that first idea he were to leave Rattray alone on the raft, it would probably bear his weight for a long time, he was so light. Yes. No matter what Rattray said about not caring, it should be he who got the chance to live. He was all guts and gold clear through and everybody liked him. Some ship would pick him up and they'd nurse him in the ship's hospital and then he would be able to go live with his widowed sister in County Clare. She had been writing him for years. Rattray was very fond of her; with his money they'd have a grand time. Perhaps he might even marry. He was only fifty-one. Norman had no one, not a soul, and he knew he could never tie himself down to one woman.

He felt his loneliness now as he never had before.

Yes, *yes!* Here was the chance, with a single entry, to square the books at last. Norman liked the picture of himself slipping off into the water: He'd take a deep breath and feel *clean*. The way he hadn't been able to feel since that night with Billy Aboe, forty years ago.

Norman looked once more for the smoke, found it, and then he saw that the face of the sea was subtly changing. All through

the long May afternoon it had been yellow-gray under the scurrying clouds, with a certain life to it. Now the yellow was gone and the gray was newly somber. The day would soon end.

Norman shivered.

Dying in the dark. He considered it; was elated when the brass taste did not come. He was ready and he would go. Always, all his life, in every situation that confronted him, he had wanted to do the right thing. Wanted. Well, here he was, at last, with the strength to carry through.

All the long line of boys and men who had seen him fail—the audience he so craved now in his new-found determination—somehow merged into his audience of one. Rattray would know and that was all that mattered.

Norman began inching his way toward the edge of the raft. Somewhere close by he heard a curious, sharp sound.

Th-th-i-p-p!

He turned. A small, three-cornered black sail moved gracefully along in the water, only a few feet away. Then it was gone. Almost at once he saw it again. Others, too.

Not sails . . . Fins . . .

In honest agony he cried out: "No, by heaven! This time—"

The brass taste filled his mouth.

Rattray opened his eyes. "Huh? You speak? Must've dozed." He stared stupidly, eyes not quite in focus.

"You wouldn't have lasted 'til morning anyway," Norman whispered, licking the salt from his puffed lips. Rattray wouldn't last—wasn't that justification for what he was about to do?

Wasn't it?

Rattray had closed his eyes again, his head rolled with the sea. Stealthily Norman crawled toward his partner, then laid hands on him with a purposeful, palsied eagerness.

And Rattray understood. He managed to twist. Crushed together they flopped and splashed, grunting and mouthing and spewing water obscenely.

It seemed to take agonizing hours—that stupid, horrible struggle.

It came to Norman at last that even this small, stricken man was too much for him. Far gone Rattray might be, but he had the heart and the will to fight—and Norman had neither. He freed himself and started to crawl away. A little later, perhaps . . .

"Louse," Rattray said distinctly. He came up on his knees and pitched weakly after the retreating form. He fell on Norman's legs, locked his arms about them, and slowly both bodies flattened to the raft. Mouths gaped open to the constant wash of the sea.

SHORTLY after dawn a British destroyer—one of a growing fleet quartering the area since the disaster—hove to a half-cable's length from the raft, which through the night had settled only a little more.

A tender put off from the destroyer, and presently a boat-hook bit through the sodden canvas and into the rotten wood beneath.

The tender's crew stared down at the two half-submerged forms.

"Blimey, sir," said the seaman with the boathook to the officer in command, "why would the little 'un 'ave been 'oldin' onter the big bloke like that? A proper Rugger tackle, I calls it."

"Oh, perhaps the smaller man lost his nerve," the officer shrugged. He looked more closely. "No, somehow that doesn't seem to fit. . . . I think I see now. The larger man decided to abandon the raft—all it is is punk, held together by that bit o' canvas. Yes, that's it, I'm sure. The big fellow thought he'd be giving the other a chance for life. But the smaller man wouldn't let him make the sacrifice. He saw the big one's intention and nailed him just in time. . . . Gad! Can you imagine that big fellow trying to push off into these shark-infested waters? There's courage for you. What a grand chap he must have been!"

Higher Than Haman

By JAMES R. WEBB

A TENSE silence fell upon the polyglot assemblage of Miracle City sourdoughs jammed into the stuffy warmth of "Big Nose" Slater's store. Young "Texas" Ballard was being led in from the adjoining lean-to warehouse. Bearded men craned their whiskery necks forward for a glimpse of him. Gray tendrils of tobacco smoke eddied and swirled above them in the pale light cast by the frost-covered windows and rose in a murky column from the heat of the pot-bellied, crackling stove. Calked boots scraped harshly against the splintery surface of the floor, and now and again the stove hissed in mild protest as a brown stream of tobacco juice splashed against it.

A door opened at the other end of the room and curious eyes swung from Ballard's tall figure to watch another man, not so tall as Ballard, but broader, chunkier, and older, being ushered in from Big Nose's tiny bedroom.

Evidently taking his cue from this latter man's entrance, Big Nose rose from his seat upon a bulging sack of potatoes and stepped in front of the stove. Texas Ballard watched him with a turbulent, youthful gaze, his big hands resting easily on his lean hips, his body inclined slightly forward with relaxed, pantherish eagerness.

"Gentlemen," Big Nose Slater rasped in a nasal voice. "As this is a duly posted and recognized miners' meeting, and you fellers has seen fit to arrive at a conclusion concerning these two prisoners, I now propose to make 'em acquainted with our decision. If there's any objection, speak up now."

A gaunt man with burning eyes and thin, downward-curving lips stood up. He was Chuck Fenton, one of the gold seekers who had missed. Forced to eke out an existence by odd jobs around the camp, he had become bitter and morose. His voice was sour as his long-jawed face when he spoke.

"Yup, Mr. Chairman," he said, cracking his knobby knuckles together between clasped hands, "I object, I think that if two men—growed-up men, mind you—ain't got no more gumption than to gun-fight about which state is better—Maine or Texas—they'd ought to be hung without no foolishness. Why put it off? We'll have to hang 'em sooner or later!"

Fenton's words started a new discussion, which threatened to break down the crude parliamentary-debate system in force. There were other bitter men there. Men who looked forward to the diversion of a hanging.

"Sure," put in Dan Ivy, Big Nose's pinched-face young clerk, who was from New York. "What difference does it make which is tougher—a Maine logger, or a Texas cowpuncher—they're both roughnecks, and we're better off without 'em!"

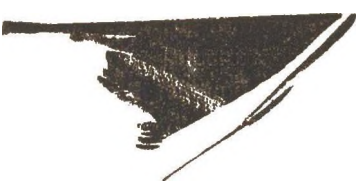
THE debate swelled and surged, but Big Nose had his ear tuned to the majority. He held up his hand.

"Shut up," he said bluntly. "I can see most of you is still favorin' the original sentence, so here goes!"

"Texas Ballard," he continued, "an' you, Bill Falker, you fellers has done your best to put Miracle City in a bad light. The Canucks up at Dawson has been claimin' for quite a spell that we was a wild, lawless bunch, and when you started tossin' lead at each other it didn't help matters none. Now, this miners' meetin' proposes to put a stop to this blood-lettin' once an' for all. Ain't no reason why we Yanks can't be just as law-abidin' as Canucks!"

He waited for the murmur of approval. It came; only Fenton and a few cohorts dissenting.

"All right. This is the verdict." If Big Nose realized it was one of the strangest,



A kangaroo court in the Arctic passes a judgment that would have made Solomon proud

in a land of strange verdicts, he made no sign. "We ain't gonna hang you two, on account of you was prevented from killin' each other by the quick action of the bystanders, *but* your intentions was plain—so you two hereby take warnin'—if either of you is found dead under any circumstances what can by any stretch of imagination be called suspicious, the one survivin' is gonna be hung higher'n Haman! It won't take no miners' meetin' to do it—any three men assembled together is hereby empowered to carry out the sentence!"

For a moment the silence was heavy, but it was soon broken by Falkner's hoarse growl. "Now if that ain't a helluva note!" His face, scarred by the calks of many a loggers' rough-and-tumble fight, twisted with contempt. "Who do you birds think you are to pull a fool stunt like that? What if this Texas buzzard gets hisself killed by a drunk Eskimo or somethin'? Do you think you can hang me for that?"

"We do," Big nose replied quickly, his long, thin bluish beak quivering with righteousness. "We aim to be done with shootin' scrapes! And we got no time to be makin' investigations. If either of you is killed the other gets hung without no formalities. Maybe this'll make you think twice before pullin' that Colt's o' yours!"

Bill Falker was a choleric man. The pupils of his smart, jet-back eyes dilated until they almost obliterated the iris. His blunt fingers twitched.

"All right!" he roared. "That goes with me, but there ain't nawthin' in that sentence about fists!"

Abruptly he swung his hunched body around to confront Texas Ballard, and, barely pausing to steady himself, swung a murderous right upward from the hip. Texas jerked his blond head imperceptibly to one side and let the blow whistle by him, bringing his own right fist up to meet Falkner's rush with a jolting uppercut.

Men swarmed in from all sides to halt the fight, but they weren't fast enough to keep Texas from swarming all over his stockier opponent. With the fierce exultation of a man who truly loves to fight, the

Texan fairly smothered Falker with fists that came from nowhere, everywhere, and landed with vicious, explosive cracks.

Even Big Nose, who had the best view of the proceedings, couldn't identify the punch that finished Bill Falker. It was more the dazzling accumulation rather than any single blow that ended the fight, and the whole thing didn't take over thirty seconds. Falker was on the floor before he'd ever had a chance to get set.

"Now listen here, you sanctimonious buzzards!" Texas yelled with the challenging note of a game cock. "You know I didn't start the trouble with Falker, but I'm announcin' here an' now that I don't take insults from anybody! Sentence or no sentence! I'm headin' for the Dog Creek mines, an' you can tell Falker where to find me!"

Big Nose stretched out a skinny arm and and grabbed Texas by the collar. "You're a good boy, Texas, but you got too many fool Southern notions of honor, and you insult too easy! I'd hate to hang you, but I'm tellin' you straight . . . If Falker dies on this side of the Line, even from a belly-ache, you're gonna stretch rope!"

Texas smiled once, a quick, impudent grin, and looked down at Bill Falker's feeble efforts to move. Then he pulled on his mittens and opened the front door. If he felt the eyes of fifty men upon him, he showed it only in the ramroad-like erectness of his back. As the door slammed, Falker rose shakily to his feet and rubbed his fingers across swelling lips.

AS SOON as he could harness his dogs, Texas pulled out of Miracle City. His sleds had been loaded that morning, before his altercation with Falker and the resulting miners' meeting. Now, with eight dogs hauling two flat Yukon sleds, hitched one behind the other by cross chains, train-fashion, he headed for the hills.

Behind him, the straggling log and canvas buildings of Miracle City looked like the base of a giant gray-black mushroom as the smoke from dozens of stove-pipes spiraled up through the still, bitterly cold air and then spread fan-shaped in a dark, motionless cloud, gloomy and foreboding. He paused for a moment to look at it; it was a sight peculiar to this frigid country, and it had always fascinated him. As he watched, daylight ended, and night came. Night at three o'clock in the afternoon. He knew it meant that he was an impulsive fool for not waiting until morning to make his start. The temperature was dropping fast, and he would have to sleep out tonight; he could never hope to make Twenty-Mile House.

"Fool or no fool," Texas muttered, "I'm not stayin' in the same town with Falker —not if I can't shoot him like he deserves! A fine how-de-do, when a man can't avenge an insult without hangin' for it!"

He swung his whip in a harmless crack. "Mush, you fightin' fools! Mush!"

Mush they did. Silently, untiringly, those malemutes swung along over the white miles until the Texan's hot anger died and he decided he'd better make camp. It was a simple process, but a cold, tiring one. There was wood to be collected, and wood was a problem near the well-used trail. Meal and tallow to be heated for the dogs. Tent-pitching with cold, stiff fingers. But in less than two hours Texas was eating his warmed-up beans and crisp fried bacon. The small tent was warm, and he relaxed fully for the first time since his encounter with Bill Falker.

His mind swung pleasantly to the contents of his sleds. His entire capital was tied up in that cargo. Food, liquor, decks of cards, a few old newspapers—all those things would be worth big money at the mines. He'd make profit enough to buy a steam boiler to thaw his way down to bedrock on his claim, and he'd still have money enough for food to see him through the winter. And when he washed that dirt out next summer! He could just see the fat steers and rolling grass-land that gold would buy!

Sleep beckoned warmly, pleasantly, and he was stoking up his little sheet-iron stove preparatory to turning in, when something blazed through the light canvas of

the tent and smacked into his heavy parka, knocking him backward with the sudden violence of a mule's kick!

SWIFT pain, and then a dull numbness spread over the Texan's left side as he gazed unsteadily at a small, round hole in the parka, two or three inches to the right of his left arm-pit. Realizing that the light within the tent made his shadow a fair target for anyone in the outer darkness, he snuffed out the candle and cursed.

"Bullet," he muttered weakly, but with a cold, choking anger that was terrible. "That murderin' Falker's bushwacked me!"

He could feel something warm trickling down his chest and side as he struggled awkwardly to his feet and clutched at his Winchester. Grimly he pushed the canvas aside and staggered out into the soft, powdery snow.

The night was black. There was an eerie light in the sky, and he could see in all directions for at least a hundred yards, but it was of little help to him. Just gray, smooth tundra, with the faint depression of the trail barely discernible to right and left. And the dogs hadn't made a sound! Only now were they beginning to rouse from their holes. That meant the sniper had stayed well away from the camp. Sure, that's what it meant; but why did it have to be so fiercely, so numbingly cold? Texas shook his head, tried to see better. Instead of stimulating him, the sudden cold had merely added to the shock of the heavy bullet. He realized that his left arm was stiffening. He tried to raise the rifle—and pitched limply forward on his face!

And he never knew what brought him back from that black, painless void—whether it was the abrupt, ominous growling and snarling of the dogs, or the subconscious realization of the cold's freezing peril. He didn't pause to search his mind for the answer. All he knew was that there was a dark, squat shape before his blurring eyes: Bill Falker!

Painfully he wrestled with the Winchester, brought the muscle up.. No bushwhacking skunk was going to pot him and get away with it—whether the miners' meeting hanged him for it or not!

The figure was nearer now. Texas Ballard forced the butt-stock to his shoulder, squeezed the trigger. The jarring explosion, the slamming of the rifle against his body, rocked him back into the borderland of insensibility, but he fought against it this time. He saw a streak of flame, heard the sharp crack of Falker's rifle. Bullets and cold! They couldn't get him; the will to live, even under the shadow of Judge Lynch's noose, was too strong. He couldn't, wouldn't die now—not without another shot—and he couldn't see the squat figure any more. Slowly, with a strength that came from the soul rather than shocked, numbed muscles, he forced the rifle under him, used it as a fulcrum to raise his sagging body.

PERHAPS fifty feet away he could see his dogs sniffing curiously around a dark spot on the snow, while a little farther back other dogs growled deep in their shaggy throats as they tugged and leaped against the traces of a light basket-sled. Painfully, feet sinking in the soft fluff, Texas forced his way through the circling malemutes and bent over the body of the man he had knocked over with that single shot.

"Bill Falker!" he gritted, turning the limp body over so that the face was exposed. "Bill Falker . . . but the sidewinder ain't dead!"

Even in the cloud of mist rising from the dogs, Texas could see pale breath coming jerkily from Falker's mouth and nostrils, hear the labored panting as he fought for air.

This was a poser. Just as his Texas code made it vital to him that he resent an injury with his fists or his guns, so did it backfire on him now. He couldn't sit by and let a man die. You couldn't do it in the Panhandle and call yourself a white man, neither could you do it up here near the Arctic circle. Because he was a Texan, Ballard thought of that before he thought

of another reason . . . the rope for the man who survived if either he or Falker died violently.

"Have to get him to the tent," Texas muttered over and over in unthinking monotony. "Have to get him to the tent. Can't let the murderin' skunk die."

He kicked Falker's carbine into the snow, followed it with the Maine man's double-action Colt. Then he took him to the tent, and the broad, uneven track behind him, spotted here and there with a smear of red, was testimony as to how he did it. Then he put more wood into the stove and melted some snow.

Removing his own parka and heavy underclothing was torture, but he did it, and discovered that the gods had watched over him. The bullet, headed for his heart, had pierced the heavy pectoral muscles and then glanced off a rib. Unless it brought fever, he had nothing to worry about. He couldn't be sure about Falker's injury. The bullet had torn through Falker's mouth, knocking out several teeth, and come out through the thick, muscular neck. There was nothing Texas could do but clean him up. The rest was up to Falker.

His own banadge was crude; the iodine burned like fire. But he slept . . . and awoke to the keening howl of a blizzard. His watch said that it was eight o'clock in the morning, but it was the only evidence he had to go by. His eyes couldn't penetrate the driving snow more than a few feet, and he remembered with a twinge of conscience that Falker's dogs were still in the traces. Dogs couldn't be made to suffer for the sins of the master; they had to be unharnessed and fed. When that was done the problem of firewood was still to be faced. Texas knew he was too weak to face the storm's growing fury; he might lose himself a hundred yards from camp. Falker's sled was the solution. He dragged it to the tent, broke it up with an axe.

AS HE turned from the stove, he saw that Bill Falker's eyes were open. Sullen eyes, as loaded with hate as a wounded man's could be.

"How do you feel—bushwhacker?" Texas asked scornfully.

Falker tried to move his jaw, tried to talk. He succeeded in only a slobbering, unintelligible mumble. Streaks of red ran down his swollen cheeks.

"Hurts mighty bad, don't it?" Ballard went on without pity. "Well, reckon it don't hurt no more'n what you done to me. I knew you was a skunk, Falker, but I didn't figger you was so plumb rotten that you'd foller a man an' shoot him without warnin'. Too blame anxious to see how I looked dead, weren't you, Falker? Couldn't wait. Had to come take a look. Well, reckon you found out!"

Falker tried desperately to talk, and it started his neck and mouth to bleeding again. Texas stopped the hemorrhage with difficulty, and Falker fought like a tiger when Texas swabbed the raw flesh with iodine. He handaged him with a piece of flannel shirt until Falker was barely recognizable. Feeding the man was an even greater problem. He needed a hollow tube, but such luxuries were out of the question. Finally he soaked some flannel in precious canned milk and let Falker suck on that, like a whiskery, smouldering-eyed baby.

The Texan's chest throbbed and twinged almost unbearably, but his enemy was obviously in worse pain. Then Texas remembered the pain-killer. He'd never used the stuff, but he'd bought a big bottle to sell at the mines. He soaked some more flannel with that and gave it to Falker to suck, then he took a sip himself. Confound the blizzard, anyway! If it weren't for that he could take Falker back to Miracle City and be rid of him. He poked his nose out of the tent, but the wind was driving icy pellets like bullets; nothing soft and flaky about this snow, it cut a little sand-blast, and no dog would face it long. He could expect no help from travellers; nobody would be mushing to or from the mines in such weather.

He soaked the rag with some more pain-killer, fortified himself with another swig. The storm's fury seemed to grow greater with every howling minute. Only the in-

creasing blanket of snow kept the little tent from being torn away. Falkner moaned and cursed unintelligibly. His jaw apparently wasn't shattered; his curses were growing more recognizable. The dogs tried so hard to force their way into the warmth of the tent that Texas had to beat them away with the butt of the Winchester.

LATE that afternoon Texas gave the Maine man some more condensed milk. This time Falker managed to make himself understood.

"Don't think . . . I'm thankin' . . . you for it," he slobbered. "If you had . . . the nerve of a rabbit . . . you'd have let me die. Scared o' dancin' with a rope around your neck . . . that's why you're nursin' me! Hope that hole in your chest hurts like hell!"

"Why else would I save you, bushwhacker?" Texas flared, jamming the last of the wood into the greedy maw of the crackling stove. "What do you expect?"

Falker's one unbandaged eye swung toward the stove. "No more . . . wood?"

"My sleds, that all. And they're buried so deep by now I don't know as I can get at 'em. Looks like we're gonna make suckers o' that miners' meetin' . . . we're both gonna pass out! But, listen, Falker, you ain't so blasted weak . . . strap up my chest and shoulder good, an' I'll try to get some more wood. If you don't, we're gonna freeze!"

Falker wriggled weakly from under his robe, blunt fingers flexing uncertainly. "Try," he said briefly. "Never knew a Texan what could take care o' hisself nohow!"

The bandaging was crude, but it was better than Ballard had been able to do alone. He pulled his wolverine-faced hood well around his drawn, haggard face and shuffled wordlessly from the tent. A minute later he was back.

"Nothin' can face that wind," he muttered dismally. Falker stared glumly. The stove was begininng to pop as it cooled.

Texas looked at the pain-killer, poured a little into a tin cup, which he placed outside the tent. A few minutes later he brought it back inside. The pain-killer, the sure barometer of the North Country, was frozen. When it was snowing, and still cold enough to freeze pain-killer, it meant that this was no ordinary blizzard.

Falker didn't say anything; he just wriggled deeper into his robes and faced the tent-wall. Texas Ballard stood up, bending his wiry height low to clear the canvas.

"I've got to try again," he said, and forced his way out, the frozen canvas brushing harshly against his parka.

He could see nothing, but he remembered where his sleds had been. First with a shovel, and then with his hands—to keep them from freezing—he dug through interminable hard, granular snow. At last he reached the packed surface of the trail. No sled. Probably it was a little farther to the right. He tried to tunnel; the loose snow came down on top of him. He cleared it away, yards of it, tons of it. The muscles of his left shoulder ached like a thousand devils when he tried to use the arm. At last he felt something hard, the metal-shod wood of a runner. He held it with his numb left hand, while he scooped snow away with his right.

WHEN he had a few feet of the sled clear, he decided to use the axe. But when he tugged at his left hand, tried to pull it away from the runner, sweat broke out on his forehead in tiny beads. Heartbreakingly, he knew what had happened: moisture from the palm of his mitten had frozen to the steel of the runner. Nor could he pull his hand from the glove; the fingers were stiff, numb, hooked like talons.

Texas Ballard was a brave man. He had the reckless, pugnacious bravery of youth, and something more . . . the courage that enables a man to fight in the dark. But he knew fear then, the stark, terrible fear of slowly freezing to death, completely, utterly alone. Only courage kept that fear from becoming panic. But what could he do? He thought of cutting his hand off with the axe, but he knew he no longer

had the strength, the stamina, to stand the shock. He would faint, and then he would die.

He had found no answer when a squat, heavy man, mumbling and cursing through the shrieks of the wind, bent over him, tore his hand from the runner. Texas was barely conscious, but somehow he realized that he was being saved, that the tent, cold as it was, was warmer than that fierce tundra.

"Yeller!" he gritted through blue lips to that grotesque face with the mountainous bandage. "Yeller. Couldn't face a rope . . . couldn't let me die. You knew, Falker. You knew that when they found me . . . with a bullet hole in me . . . they'd hang you . . . like Big Nose said . . . higher'n Haman!"

His breath came wildly through lungs that seemed choked with his anger and his pain.

Falker didn't reply. He sucked some pain-killer, then forced his way out of the tent. After a time he was back, dragging pieces of the sled behind him. He relighted the fire. He soaked the flannel again, sucked it mournfully while he mumbled curses at Texas Ballard, adding picturesque reflections on the sovereign State of Texas.

Both of them were half asleep when the faint sound of scratching at the door of the tent made itself heard through the keening of the wind.

Texas roused. "Blasted dogs," he growled, picking up the rifle. He opened the flaps, butt-stock upraised, and then swore in amazement.

A man was there! Shrouded in icy parka, he looked like some great, awkward bear as he sprawled there, mittened hands clawing aimlessly at the stiff canvas.

"Lend a hand, sidewinder!" Texas commanded. "I can't handle this jasper alone!"

With Falker's help he pulled the newcomer into the crowded, steaming tent. Texas turned him over on his back, pulled the hood from the face. Where the oily wolverine fur hadn't brushed his features, the man's face was glistening with ice. His eye-lids were frozen shut, but he was recognizable.

"Chuck Fenton!" the two enemies exclaimed in a breath. "Chuck Fenton—and damn near dead!"

TEXAS slapped Fenton's face, rubbed it with Falker's feeding rag. Then he forced a little of the potent pain-killer between the blue lips. Chuck Fenton began to come around. He coughed, blinked, rubbed weakly at his eyes, looked at the two faces crowding over him . . . and fainted.

"Now how in all that's holy did that catamount get here?" Texas wanted to know.

"Didn't you see him?" Bill Falker mumbled wetly. "He passed me on the trail from Miracle."

Texas' eyes narrowed.

"No, I didn't see nobody . . . not until I got the chance to blow your ugly teeth down your throat, Falker!"

"Then he must have passed you after you'd camped," Falker decided. "Naturally he wouldn't want to hole up with a longhorn Texas skunk the likes o' you—even though Fenton don't smell so good himself."

Texas' face flamed red, and he started a right swing at Falker's jaw—and stopped in mid-air.

"But, Falker—you was comin' from the direction o' Miracle when I plugged you."

"Blame well right I was," Falker glared. "Fixin' to show you no lowdown cowpuncher could beat a Maine logger in fair fight. You kinda took me by surprise the first time." His ugly, swollen face winced with pain. "Course I was crazy. Might o' known you'd never give me the chance—sentence or no sentence—but I'm plenty glad I got one slug in before I keeled over!"

But Texas Ballard wasn't listening. He was looking at a small round hole in the tent-wall—a bullet hole, on the opposite side from Miracle City.

"Before you keeled over . . ." Texas repeated with a queer light in his gray eyes. "Falker," he clipped, "hand me the rest o' that pain-killer."

Falker, small black eyes wondering, did as he was bid. Texas forced the entire contents of the bottle between Chuck Fenton's yellow teeth. No human being could stay dormant when that fiery liquid burnt his gullet. Fenton blinked, opened his mouth and gurgled.

He didn't ask "Where am I?"; instead he gasped: "Ballard, ain't you dead?"

"No," Texas Ballard rapped. "I ain't dead, but," he raised his deadly right fist threateningly, "you're gonna be if you don't start talkin' plumb lucid!"

Fenton's eyes rolled wildly. "Are you crazy? You ain't gonna hit a man what's all froze up!"

"NO?" BALLARD'S fist lashed out, knocked Fenton back against the canvas. "How come you passed me in the dark? How come you didn't camp with me like any white man would o' done on the trail? How come you had to crawl in here to keep from freezin' to death? Why? Because you didn't have no tent, that's why! You was figgerin' on sleepin' in my tent—with me buried in the snow!"

"I figgered to make Twenty-Mile," Fenton replied sullenly. "Damn fine hospitality you offer!"

"Yeah, well I don't bushwhack nobody! I don't figger to steal a man's outfit just 'cause I can't find no diggin's myself! I don't figger to do my killin' safe, on account of another man—Bill Falker—will hang if Texas Ballard's found dead!"

"It's a lie . . . a filthy lie!" Fenton squeaked.

Then Falker stuck in his oar. "Texas, didn't I hit you when I fired . . . out there when you shot me down?"

Falker looked honestly puzzled. His mind was groping for an answer to this crazy business.

"A Maine logger couldn't hit a bull with a bass fiddle!" Texas replied scathingly. "Fenton shot me before you showed up. No doubt about it. The blizzard clinches it. Nobody comin' from the mines would've risked it, seein' as they didn't know about that fool sentence what made me fair game for anybody but you, Falker! Fenton was there, you remember. An' nobody else could've passed me from Miracle. They wouldn't mush in that blizzard, an' if they had, either you or me would've seen 'em!"

He looked at Falker meaningly. Falker nodded. Fenton's terrified eyes swung from that hideous man with the bandaged face to that fiery one with the breath of Texas in his voice.

Texas bunched his fist. "It's decided, Fenton. Prob'ly the miners' meetin' won't hang you, seein' as I ain't dead. But, is you don't own up, Falker an' me is gonna beat you to death right now!"

Fenton's thin lips quivered. His frozen nose shown blue in the flickering candlelight. He was broke, and the temptation of killing and stealing without danger had been too much, he admitted with the fear of death in his eyes. After shooting Texas, he had been scared away by Falker's arrival. He couldn't see the result of the exchange of shots, but he knew if he killed Falker he would lose his scapegoat. So Fenton had skulked away, until the blizzard had driven him in, hoping that if he found both men dead, he could arrange the bodies to look like each had killed the other.

Texas Ballard looked at Bill Falker. "I'm sorry I plugged you," he admitted.

Falker hesitated. "Uh . . ." he mumbled. "Uh . . . did you drag me out o' that snow and dose me with pain-killer 'cause you'd hang if I died, Texas?"

Texas looked ashamed. "Naw," he owned up, finally. "I'm just a sentimental cuss, I reckon. I couldn't let you die . . . in cold blood that way. Falker, what was you thinkin' about when you drug me back in the tent after I froze to the sled?"

Falker stroked his bandaged jaw. "Guess I'm kinda sentimental too. Bunch o' old women up in Maine."

Texas grinned. "Yeah, an' the Panhandle's full o' schoolmarms." He looked at the third man, eyes cold and grim. "What part o' hell are you from, Fenton?"

Blue-White and Perfect

By BORDEN CHASE

SMOOTH KYLE, on the trail of a combine that is flooding the United States with smuggled diamonds, sails for Havana. With him aboard the *Princess Nola* is Sonia Clonet, a sultry, unprincipled young lady who is a cog in the smuggling machine. Twice, on shipboard, she tries to arrange Smooth's death. Murder is a little out of her line, however, and she tells Smooth that she is going to quit her present ruthless company and be a nice girl.

When Smooth sailed he left Gilda Garland in New York. Gilda, lovely, Broadway-wise blonde, loves Smooth and wants to marry him; but she does not want him to remain a Treasury Agent. Rod Martell, ostensible head of the diamond combine, doesn't want Smooth to remain a Treasury Agent either. He's afraid the fast-shooting, quick-thinking Smooth will smash his racket. So he tries to persuade Gilda to get Smooth to quit. "It's either quit," Rod says, "or curtains for the lad."

IN Havana Smooth is shocked when he goes to Sonia Clonet's hotel room and finds not Sonia but Gilda. Gilda, in her playful competent way, has bound and gagged Sonia and left her in the bathroom. Rod Martell, too, has arrived in Havana and Gilda, thinking only of her beloved's safety, arranges with Martell to deceive the undeceivable Smooth. Martell plans to let the Clonet girl and one or two other minor members of the gang hold the bag. It will be arranged for Smooth to catch them, take possession of a few planted diamonds, and the smuggling case will be closed. Martell also thinks it would be nice if Smooth were to believe him dead. So that, too, becomes part of the plan.

ON the *Princess Nola* there was a small English steward named Tibbs. He has offered to take Smooth sightseeing. He does. . . . Tibbs, Gilda, Smooth, and the taximan who is a friend of Smooth's, are picked up by two pseudo Havana police. Only Gilda's wit and Smooth's fast trigger-finger save them from a trap which they suspect may have been set by innocuous-looking little Mr. Tibbs. . . .

CHAPTER XII

EAVESDROPPER

TIBBS hurried to the street but drew back as a car swung into the curb. Smooth lifted the gun and moved forward. When he saw the driver he laughed and beckoned to Gilda.

"It's our hackman," he said. "A little late, but here he is."

"We don't want him," said Gilda. "We'll walk to the corner and get another."

"He's all right," said Smooth and crossed to Gerry. "What kept you, pal?"

"I lost you coming into town," said Gerry quietly. "When those phonies told me to scram I cut around behind your car and tried to follow."

This story began in The Argosy for September 18

"So you knew they were phonies?"

"Sure. I tried to tip you when they made that trick pinch."

Gilda had come forward and she tapped a forefinger on Gerry's arm. "You seem to have learned a lot of English in a hurry," she said. "How come?"

"Never mind," said Smooth quickly. "Get in and let's roll."

He called to Tibbs, motioned to the front seat and opened the door. The little steward climbed in and Smooth helped Gilda into the back. The car rolled along the narrow street and Gerry glanced into the mirror questioningly.

"Back to the hotel," said Smooth. "I think we've seen enough of the town for one day."

"Too much," Gilda agreed. "But I'll get off at Avenida Italia."

"Why?" asked Smooth.

"I've got some shopping to do."

"Stop kidding. Who are you going to meet?"

"Clark Gable. We're going to elope."

"Be nice. I don't want you floating around this town if someone is out to get you."

"Get *me?*" laughed Gilda. "Don't be a chump all of your life. That reception committee was meant for you."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," said Smooth. He glanced down at a hole in his coat where a bullet had burned.

"Your pal Rod Martell doesn't waste much time when he comes to town. But when you see him, tell him I'm sick of being shot at."

"I know he'll be worried about that."

"Maybe not. But he will if I catch him in a nice quiet alley."

"I thought the Treasury Department wanted convictions—not funerals."

"A nice funeral helps sometimes," said Smooth.

Gerry stopped the car at Neptuno and Italia. Smooth opened the door and helped Gilda to the street. She caught his arm and drew him across the sidewalk out of earshot of the car.

"Listen, Handsome," she said quietly. "One of those two birds in the car walked us into that party. Are you going to give him a second chance?"

"What do you mean?"

"Pay them both off right here and get rid of them. This is a nice crowded corner—too many people around for a killing. That's why I picked it."

"Smart girl," laughed Smooth. "Are you afraid I can't handle those birds?"

"Maybe I am," said Gilda.

"All right, Beautiful," said Smooth. "We'll do it your way."

HE WALKED to the car and drew some bills from his pocket. Tibbs was sitting very straight in his seat staring through the windshield at the hood of the car. The steward had been badly frightened and his hands still twitched nervously. Gerry leaned against the wheel and there was amusement in his eyes as he looked at Smooth.

"Don't need the car any more?" he asked.

"I guess not," said Smooth. "And while I'm at it I'll pay you off, too, Tibbs. But first show me where I can get in touch with you."

"*Show* you, sir?"

"Yes. Got any letters in your pocket that are addressed to you?"

"Oh, certainly, sir," said Tibbs.

He reached into his coat pocket and drew out several envelopes. He thumbed through them and handed one to Smooth. The address was that of the Cuban Steamship Company. Smooth handed it back and reached for the others. He looked at one and nodded.

"Mind if I tear the front of this?" he asked.

"Not at all, sir. It's my home address."

"That's what I want," said Smooth.

He tore the front of the envelope away and put it in his pocket. Then he turned to Gerry and asked for his license. The hackman grinned and offered Smooth a leather billfold. He also took a piece of paper and a pencil from the lining of his cap and offered these. Smooth copied the

address and handed him five pesos. He gave the same to Tibbs and told him he would get in touch with him the following week. Then he crossed to where Gilda was standing near a shop window. She was watching the car and did not take her eyes from it until it had turned a corner. Then she slipped an arm through Smooth's and led him into the restaurant of a nearby hotel.

"Hungry so soon?" asked Smooth.

"Not a bit," said Gilda. "But I want lots of people around me while I talk."

"Still worried?"

"Of course. And I will be until you get out of Cuba."

She followed a waiter to a table near the sidewalk and ordered two coffees. Then she lit a cigarette, passed one to Smooth and watched the mid-day crowds on the avenue. For a time she said nothing and Smooth knew her mind was again fitting together the pieces of a puzzle. He waited until she ground out her cigarette and turned toward him.

"Well?" he said.

"How long have you known that hackman?" she asked.

"Since yesterday."

"But you decided to play smart and pretend you had just met him this morning?"

"Any objections?"

"None. But I think you outsmarted yourself. He walked you right into a jam."

"Maybe," admitted Smooth. "But if he did, I'll square things with him later."

"How about the steward?"

"Oh, he's a harmless little guy. He was scared to death when the shooting started."

"Maybe he was scared because the wrong people got shot."

"I doubt it," said Smooth. "Tibbs is all right."

"Nobody is all right in this place," said Gilda. "It's the home of the double-cross."

"Why? Did someone cross you?"

"None of your business."

Smooth laughed. "Why don't you get confidential and tell me what it's all about? You're up to something, Gilda. And the sooner you let me in on it, the better it will be for us both."

"That's just you guess," said Gilda.

She sipped her coffee and stared out at the street. A bellboy hurried across the restaurant and extended a tray upon which was a letter. Gilda turned and looked at him in surprise.

"For me?" she asked.

"*Si,*" he said. "*Por Senorita Garland.*"

GILDA took the letter, dipped into her purse and handed the boy a tip. She opened the envelope and glanced at the single sheet of paper. Her eyes widened slightly then she folded the letter, replaced it in the envelope and dropped it into her purse. She glanced at Smooth.

"Pay the check and let's get out of here," she said.

"Anything serious?" asked Smooth as he dropped some change on the table.

"Not very. A girl friend of mine wants to meet me this afternoon."

"A girl friend? In Havana?"

"Why not?" asked Gilda. "Don't you suppose I know anyone here?"

"For my money, you know too many people here," said Smooth.

He followed Gilda to the street and hailed a cab. On the ride to the hotel Gilda seemed to be rather uneasy. At times Smooth caught her glancing at him from the corners of her eyes. When he attempted to make conversation she did not answer. At the hotel she did not wait until he had paid off the hackman but crossed directly to the elevator. Smooth followed. The elevator boy asked for the floor number and Gilda told him the sixth. When the car stopped she patted Smooth's arm and stepped out.

"See you later," she said quickly.

"Later, nothing!" said Smooth and left the elevator. "I'd like to know who this guy is you're going to meet."

"I said it was a girl."

"Now I'll tell one."

"Oh, don't stand there shouting at me," said Gilda. "If you must argue, do it in my room. Come on."

She walked along the hall to a door near the end. She took a key from her purse and set it in the lock. Smooth made a mental note of the room number—633. He followed her inside and closed the door. There were windows on two sides that looked out over the city. The usual high ceiling and light-tinted walls made the room cool and restful. Gilda's personal belongings were scattered about and on the dresser was the usual collection of cosmetics, handkerchiefs and gloves. Through the open door of the bath Smooth saw a pair of stockings spread over the side of the tub to dry. There were three bags on a rack near the bed and throughout the room there hung a trace of perfume that Smooth had long ago learned was Gilda's favorite scent.

Gilda tossed her purse on the dresser and took off her open white turban. She glanced in the dresser mirror and then walked to the bath.

"Excuse me, darling," she said. "But I'm so warm. I'm going to splash a little cold water on the face and then put on a new paint job."

"Don't hurry," said Smooth and seated himself near a window.

"Would you mind doing a girl a favor?" asked Gilda from the doorway. She took a hand towel from the rack and tossed it to Smooth. "Be a sweet boy and clean my automatic. You'll find some extra shells in the top drawer. Load the clip while you're at it. The gun is in my purse."

She closed the door and Smooth grinned. As a practical-minded woman Gilda was in a class by herself. Automatics had a nasty habit of jamming if they were not cleaned after use and the ivory-handled toy of hers was no exception. That she should think of such a thing was typical of Gilda. And to hand the job to Smooth was to be sure it would be done well.

He opened her purse and took out the automatic. He was about to snap the purse closed when he saw the envelope that had been handed to Gilda by the bellboy. Her name was written in bold letters across it —letters that looked as though they had been written by a man's hand. Smooth hesitated. It seemed like a shabby thing to do but Gilda's actions lately had made him suspicious. He drew the letter out of the envelope and read it.

"Please be in your room in an hour"—it read—*"and I will see you there."*

It was signed, Rod.

SMOOTH replaced the letter and glanced at the closed door nearby. So Rod Martell was the "girl friend" Gilda expected to meet. And the time was getting close when he would arrive. Smooth decided it might be well to cause Gilda a few headaches. He twisted the barrel of the gun and worked the slide free. There was a pair of eyebrow tweezers on the dresser and he used one prong as a screw-driver. Seating himself on the edge of the bed he proceeded to break down the automatic.

A dozen small parts were laid out in line when Gilda stepped into the room. Smooth was cleaning each part carefully and wiping it free of oil. When Gilda saw the tool he was using she reached out and grabbed it.

"My tweezers!" she cried. "Of all the—"

"They make a swell tool," said Smooth innocently. "What's all the excitement."

"You egg! You've not only ruined a good set of tweezers, you've scattered my gun all over the bed."

"I'll put it together again," grinned Smooth. "It won't take more than a half hour."

"What makes you think you're going to be here a half hour?"

"Why not? Are you in a hurry to get rid of me?"

"I told you I have a date," said Gilda. "Now scram out of here while I change my dress."

"Oh, take it easy. You don't want me to leave this gun broken down, do you?"

"Take it with you and give it to me later."

"I wouldn't think of such a thing," said Smooth lightly. "I've got plenty of time. I'll finish it now."

Gilda seated herself near a dressing table

and crossed her legs. She took off one shoe and balanced it thoughtfully. When Smooth took another part from the gun she lifted the shoe and threw it. It caught him on the side of the neck and he turned toward her in pretended surprise.

"Such manners!"

"Get out of here!" cried Gilda. "The next shoe that lands under your ear will have my foot in it."

"Does that mean I'm not welcome?"

"It means, *get out!*"

"Is that a hint that I'm not wanted?"

"Smooth Kyle, if you don't get out I'll—"

Smooth gathered the parts of the gun and wrapped them in the towel. He stood up and stared at Gilda in pretended indignation. Then he dropped the towel in her lap and walked to the door. He opened it and looked back at her.

"I believe I've been insulted," he said mournfully.

"Take this cross-word puzzle with you and put it together," she called. "I may need it again."

"You can't insult me and then make me work cross-word puzzles," said Smooth. Another shoe sailed across the room and Smooth hastily pulled the door closed. He heard the shoe land. He grinned and sprinted toward the elevator. A moment of button jiggling brought the car to the sixth floor.

Smooth rode down and hurried to the desk in the lobby.

"Is room 632 occupied?" he asked the clerk.

"Just a moment, sir." The clerk consulted the files and shook his head. "No. Miss Garland has the only room at that end of the hall. She's in 633."

"Those rooms are adjoining, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let me have 632."

"But—"

"Yeah—I know," said Smooth quickly. "You'll have to see the manager. But give me the key now and see him later. Charge the room to Mr. Kyle. I'm in 708."

SMOOTH extended a leather wallet toward the clerk and grinned. The clerk looked at his credentials and became apologetic. Smooth stopped his explanations short and grabbed the key. Then he hurried across the lobby to a doorway that led to the bar. There was a row of reed baskets near this door that held a colorful assortment of growing flowers. They served as a screen to the bar and blocked the view from the lobby. Smooth ordered scotch, tossed a coin on the bar and carried his drink to a small table near the flower baskets. Here he could see anyone who entered the lobby but was quite affectively screened himself.

In a few moments he saw Rod Martell cross to the telephones and put in a call. The gambler was well-groomed as ever and was wearing a small white flower in the buttonhole of his jacket. Smooth thought this would make a perfect bullseye and hoped Martell would be thoughtful enough to wear such a flower if they should ever meet in a dark alley.

When the gambler walked to the elevators Smooth finished his drink and followed. There were two cars but due to the slack season only one was in use. Smooth watched the hand of the indicator turn slowly to the sixth floor. He grinned and pushed the button. When the car had made its slow descent Smooth stepped in and nodded to the boy.

"Sixth, please," he said.

At the floor he stepped cautiously from the car. The hall was empty and Smooth hurried to room 632. He opened the door and stepped inside. To the right was a door that served as a connecting entrance when this and Gilda's room were rented as a suite. The door was substantial as were the others in this hotel but Smooth noticed a wide space between the bottom of it and the floor. The shutters of the room were tightly drawn and the light from Gilda's room formed a thin white shaft across the floor.

Smooth closed the hall door quietly and turned the key. He took two pillows from the bed and placed them carefully on the

floor near the door to Gilda's room. He knelt down and then stretched at full length with his head upon one of the pillows. He could see little in the next room—Gilda's feet and part of her ankles, some furniture legs and a waste basket. But Martell's voice was as clear as though Smooth were seated beside the man. Smooth grinned, twisted his shoulders into a comfortable position and listened.

"But it couldn't be helped," Martell was saying. "Besides it was only a gag. Those men had orders not to hurt Smooth."

"Act your age!" Gilda's voice was sharp. "If Smooth hadn't beat them to it, he and I would be thinking up answers for Saint Peter."

"Of course not. We simply wanted Smooth to think we were afraid of him. Actually, we're not worried at all. We have no reason to be if you earn your money, Gilda."

"I'll earn it. But it isn't easy keeping Smooth busy in Havana. I wish there were some way to get him back to the States."

"I think we can arrange that," said Martell. "Falero gave him an idea we were operating through Miami. And you've told me that Smooth wants to see me."

"Well?"

"In that case, I'll go to Miami and cable you from there. You show him the cable and he'll probably grab the next plane."

"Suppose he catches up with you?"

"He won't," laughed Martell. "Before he gets a chance to find me I'll be on my way to New York."

SMOOTH grinned contentedly. Gilda had decided to run with the hare and chase with the hounds. The thought of a Treasury Agent's pay envelope had undoubtedly decided her present course. She was working with Martell and getting well paid for it. But wouldn't she be surprised when Smooth faced her with what he knew? His grin became broader as he pictured himself flying into a supposed rage and laying down the law. She would cry and ask him to be a sport. There would follow a scene with the Treasury Officials in which Gilda would be warned. Smooth knew she had been of sufficient service to the Department during the past few years to warrant official leniency. But he would ask the District Supervisor to tell Gilda this was her last chance. After that—

"When does the next shipment go through?" said Gilda. Smooth stopped his dreaming and listened attentively.

"We're expecting Murchison in from Antwerp tomorrow morning. He took a slow freighter across this time and we're not sure when it will dock. But we hope to make connections with the *Princess Nola* before she leaves."

"When is that?"

"Tomorrow evening. It's close figuring but I think we can do it."

"Are you going to let Sonia carry the stones again?"

"Why not?"

"I don't trust that dame," said Gilda. "She isn't smart."

Martell laughed. "She's been smart enough to fool the Customs Guards for six months."

"Maybe you're right. And I suppose her job with Gonzales helps."

"Certainly."

"But Smooth knows Gonzales is working with you. He told me so."

"What of it? Gonzales won't talk. And Smooth can't prove anything."

"Suppose the Cuban Customs Officials are told about this?"

"You mean about Gonzales?" asked Martell.

"Yes."

"They won't learn anything. When the diamonds go into the shop they're so well hidden no one could find them. Even Sonia doesn't know which dresses are carrying stones. They all have plenty of buttons."

Smooth heard him laugh and Gilda joined in. He heard a match scratch and then Gilda picked up the conversation.

"I'll bet that dame gets mighty sick of dresses with buttons," she said. "This year they're about as stylish as pink elephants."

"We can't worry about styles," said Martell. "Her job is to wear the dresses made

for her. Besides—she can shop for new ones in New York when she gets there. We don't care what she wears back."

"She's welcome to that job," said Gilda. "I'll keep the ones I've got."

"See that you do," said Martell evenly. "We don't want Smooth Kyle in our way. And while I think of it—where is he now?"

"In his room, I think."

"Then you'd better phone him and make a date for tomorrow. Keep him busy until after Murchison arrives. And try to have him out of town when the *Princess Nola* leaves."

"All right. I'll call him in a few moments," agreed Gilda. "But before you go, I wish you'd change your mind about Sonia. I'm sure she can't be trusted."

"Well, suppose I send Falero along with her on the *Princess Nola?* He can keep an eye on her."

"Will that leave you short-handed here in Havana?"

"No," said Martell. "I can handle this end with old Gonzales. The organization is running so smoothly we only need a few men."

"The organization?" laughed Gilda. "That means Rod Martell, doesn't it?"

"Just about," said Martell with an answering laugh. "I let Murchison buy the stones in Europe and bring them into Cuba. Gonzales and Falero put them into the dresses here and Sonia takes them to New York."

"And then you get rid of them there?"

"Yes. Tom Caraway helps me. He generally meets Sonia at the dock."

"Very efficient," laughed Gilda. "And very profitable."

"I can't complain," said Martell. "But now I'll be running along. Don't forget to keep Smooth busy tomorrow."

"I won't forget," said Gilda. "And don't you forget to have my cut waiting when I meet you in New York."

"It will be there," promised Martell. "And if I once get Smooth out of Havana, it will be up to you to keep him out."

"When are you going to leave?"

"I'll let you know, Gilda."

Smooth heard a door open. He saw Gilda's feet move across the room and then there came the sound of the usual goodbyes. The door closed and Smooth sat up. He stretched and climbed to his feet. There was a satisfied smile about his lips when he tossed the pillows back onto the bed. He was still grinning when he went to his room and started to make out his report to the District Supervisor.

CHAPTER XIII

BUTTONS AND RED TAPE

FOR the next half hour Smooth's pencil moved busily over white paper. Page after page of what he had heard was put into report form. One thing was lacking. He did not say how he had gained the information, nor did he make any mention of Gilda. Time enough for that when he returned to New York. However, he did suggest it might be well to contact the Cuban authorities and inform them Smooth Kyle was a Treasury Agent. He had his credentials but official confirmation might help things.

Before he had finished writing the phone bell rang. "It's me, Handsome," said Gilda's voice. "I was wondering if you'd like to finish the sightseeing tour tomorrow?"

"We can finish it today, if you wish?"

"No, not today. I'm about all in. But you can take me to a show tonight."

"There isn't a good show in town," said Smooth. "Besides, I'm busy."

"I hope you break a leg."

"Nice of you, darling."

"What time shall we meet tomorrow?"

"About nine. I'll have breakfast with you in the hotel."

"It's a date," said Gilda.

Smooth grinned as he dropped the receiver on the hook. Gilda was being entirely too lenient. Under ordinary circumstances his refusal to see her that night would have sent her into a storm of protest.

He completed his report, sealed it in a stout envelope that he took from one of

his grips and put it on a chair near the door. He looked at the tear in his coat where a slug had come too close for comfort. The material was powder-stained and Smooth decided upon a change. He dressed quickly, picked up the envelope and left the room. In the lobby he mailed his report and stepped into the restaurant for a hasty lunch. When he left the hotel he found Gerry Portela waiting patiently near the end of the hack line. The hackman grinned and opened the door of his car.

"Where to?" he asked.

"I didn't expect to find you here," said Smooth. "How come?"

"It was worth the chance," said Gerry. "Five dollar bills don't grow in Havana this time of year. You're the best customer I've had since the winter."

"Fair enough," said Smooth. "Wind up the crate and take me to *La Aduana.*"

"La Aduana?" laughed Gerry. "Do you know what that means?"

"Sure. The Customs House. That's one word in Spanish right up my alley."

Gerry looked wisely at Smooth but made no comment. He started the car and Smooth scored one point for the hackman. He liked people who did not ask too many questions. And apparently Gerry knew when to keep his mouth closed. The car moved quickly across town and drew up to a gray stone building. Gerry jerked a thumb toward the entrance and lit a cigarette.

"Wait," said Smooth. "I may need you again."

"Don't worry. I'd wait anyway."

SMOOTH went inside and presented his credentials to an attendant who sat at a desk in the front office. He was taken to an inner office and presented to a dapper, thin-shouldered official who extended his hand in welcome.

"I am Señor Placido Lorenzo Armas. I am at your service, Señor Kyle. The Treasury Department of your country has informed me of your presence in Havana."

"Glad to know you, Señor Armas," said Smooth as he gripped the official's hand. "I've just written to the Department asking them to confirm my credentials, but I guess they beat me to it."

"Oh, yes. We have been waiting to see you."

"Great," said Smooth. "There may be a few things breaking and I'd like some coöperation."

Señor Armas motioned Smooth to a chair. He offered a cigarette which Smooth accepted. Blue smoke lifted above their heads as Smooth leaned forward and gave a hurried account of his activities in Cuba. Armas sat quietly until he had finished and then smiled in slow astonishment.

"Such speed, *señor,*" he said. "I do not see how you have accomplished so much in such a short time. It takes my breath away."

"I haven't actually accomplished very much," said Smooth. "Information is one thing—convictions another. In the States we need an iron-bound case before we go into court. Juries want plenty of proof to convict and we have to furnish it."

"In Cuba," said Armas as he looked toward a near-by window, "we are not quite so tolerant with our criminals. And if you will not think me too boastful, I might say we have very, very little crime on this island. Very little."

"So I've heard," said Smooth. "You've got a gentleman in charge who believes in rather stern measures."

"With criminals—yes. They are not wanted here and we make it quite plain. And in the case of these smugglers, we will have them safely in jail before morning."

"Oh, no!" said Smooth quickly. "That won't do at all. We want everyone connected with the outfit. Not just a few of the lesser members."

"Have you any suggestions?"

"A few."

"Name them and we shall be glad to assist."

"Well," said Smooth, "we know Murchison is coming in tomorrow. He's bringing some stones from Antwerp and these are to be forwarded to the States. If you don't

mind, I'd like to have that shipment go through as the others have been doing."

"I can not understand how this man has been fooling *Los Aduaneros*—the Custom Guards," said Armas. "His method of bringing in the stones must be clever. Our men are very watchful."

Smooth grinned. "They didn't seem to pay much attention to my baggage."

"But you were coming from the States. Had you come from Europe they would have been more thorough."

"I suppose you're right."

"Lately the examinations have been most rigid. We have been looking for narcotics."

"I suppose your men know all the usual tricks—hollow heels, false-bottom trunks, hollow teeth and so forth."

"But of course," said Armas. "We have found contraband in all of the many places it is usually carried. In this respect I do not think your service in the States is more thorough."

"I don't doubt it," said Smooth. "But the fact remains that Murchison has been bringing in large quantities of diamonds. They are small stones so he must bring them in bulk. A few hundred each trip."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is obvious he makes only a few trips each year. And shipments are constantly being made to the States."

"I agree with you," said Armas thoughtfully. "But I do not understand how this man Murchison could bring stones in bulk. One—two—a dozen perhaps. But not by the hundred."

"Perhaps he doesn't bring them in himself," said Smooth.

"You mean the crew?"

"No. Murchison might bring them only as far as the harbor and then transfer them to another boat. That's been tried a good many times in the States."

"*Madre de Dios!* That could be!"

"IT SEEMS logical," said Smooth. "I've been going over all of the usual routines in my mind. For bulk stuff, there isn't a better way."

"The transfer could be made to a fishing boat," suggested Armas. "There are many in the harbor."

"That's what they do in the States. A fishing boat—or at least a boat that looks like one—trails the steamer and picks up the stuff when it is dropped over."

"But how can we catch them?"

Smooth laughed. "Follow along in another boat."

"Excellent! We shall do it."

He picked up the phone and spoke rapidly in Spanish for a moment or two. When he had finished he turned to Smooth.

"There is a freighter due from Belgium sometime tomorrow," he said. "Do you suppose that could be the one?"

"Probably. When is it supposed to dock?"

"We have no definite time but when she is sighted the flags will fly at Morro."

"Hold everything," laughed Smooth. "What flags?"

"It is a signal system we use here in Havana," Armas explained. "For instance, when you arrived on the *Princess Nola* you may have noticed a red-and-white flag with a red ball flying above the American flag at Morro Castle. That means an American ship has been sighted coming toward the harbor. If it had been a yacht there would have been a white flag on the second pole."

"I get it," said Smooth. "And I'll bet Martell's crowd have been using your signal system and thanking you for the help."

"We shall know definitely tomorrow," said Armas. "There will be a boat waiting for us and when the flags fly we shall go out to meet this ship from Belgium."

"Mind if I come along?"

"We shall be pleased to have you with us, Señor Kyle."

"Great. I'll be here early. But remember—we want the diamonds to be delivered as usual."

"As you wish."

Smooth drew thoughtfully at his cigarette for a moment. If the Cuban officials were satisfied to string along with him it would be a simple matter to catch up with Martell's crowd. Sonia could be nabbed in

New York and the Cuban authorities would take care of the organization in Havana. From the way Armas had smiled at his remark about stubborn juries, Smooth did not think Gonzales had much hope of beating the case. Almost any evidence at all seemed sufficient for the Cuban authorities.

"I'd like to check up on the system they are using," said Smooth at length. "Do you suppose you could arrange for me to do a little burglary this evening?"

"Burglary?"

"Yes," laughed Smooth. "I want to have a look at the inside of Sonia Clonet's house —without her knowing it."

"You mean break in tonight?"

"Yes. Can it be arranged? I don't want to tangle with the police."

Armas laughed and stroked his chin with long thin fingers. "I would like to join you," he said. "And I am sure the police will not interfere."

"Then that's settled," said Smooth. "I'll meet you about midnight. Any place in particular?"

"Suppose we say the Café H," suggested Armas. "It is at the Manzana de Gomez—facing Parque Central."

"Fine. I'll be waiting."

He left the office after again shaking hands with Armas and hurried to the waiting taxi. When he told Gerry to drive to Gonzales' shop the hackman looked at him quizzically.

"More trouble?" he asked.

"I don't think so," laughed Smooth. "This is a social call."

TRAFFIC was light and in a few moments they cut across the square in front of the Capitol and swung along the Prado. People were seated on stone benches that were part of the wall along the central walk. Above them the laurel trees moved languidly in the light breeze. A peaceful attitude of ease and content was part of the scheme of things and Smooth wished he could join the strollers who moved slowly along the polished walk. The day was warm and a Cuban sun beat steadily from a blue sky. But there was a breeze that kept a freshness in the air. Havana in August was far nicer than Smooth had imagined.

When the car stopped near the dress shop he told Gerry to wait and walked slowly inside. Gonzales was near the door and the Cuban's face was like a mask of weariness. He bowed and motioned toward his office in the rear but Smooth shook his head. He caught sight of Sonia standing near a rack of dresses and crossed to her.

"Hello, Gorgeous," he said. "Can you spare a minute to a busy man?"

"An hour if you wish, Smooth," said Sonia. "I'm sorry I was rude yesterday but—"

"I don't blame you," laughed Smooth. "Gilda's reception wasn't exactly pleasant."

"Hardly," smiled Sonia. "But she loves you and that explains everything."

"I wouldn't know about that. I'm only a man."

"But one worth fighting for."

"Nix!" said Smooth. "Save that for the wide-eyed boys you meet aboard the *Princess Nola*. Never try to kid your friends."

"Are you my friend, Smooth?"

"I've tried to be. I've told you to quit this racket and save yourself a lot of trouble. But you seem to think I'm screwy."

"I haven't said that."

"Maybe you don't use that kind of language but the idea is the same."

"Perhaps it is," she laughed.

"Far be it from me to argue," said Smooth. "But there is one little thing I want you to remember."

"What is that?"

"When the crash comes—and it will come, Sonia—remember that Smooth Kyle offered you an out. I asked you to play ball with me and you refused. If you ever change your mind, the offer is still good."

"Thanks, Smooth," she said quietly. "I wish it were possible for me to take you up. Honestly, I do. But—"

"Sure," said Smooth quickly. "I get it. Martell probably told you he would slit your pretty little throat if you didn't behave. And you believe him."

He took Sonia's hand and held it for

a time. There was no smile about his lips when he looked at her. Before him he saw a girl who had not been quite so wise as she imagined. Perhaps she knew it now. But it was too late. She was in—and she had to play it through.

He thought of the scene that would take place in New York when the Customs Guards found the stones. There would be tears—anxious days while she waited for Martell to come to her assistance. Then a trial and conviction. After that—

"Think it over, Sonia," he said and started for the door. "The nights are long when you're inside looking out."

She didn't answer and Smooth walked to the cab. He drove to the hotel and told Gerry he would not need him until midnight. Then he went to his room and picked up the phone. He called the Cuban Steamship Company and asked if a stateroom had been reserved for Miss Sonia Clonet.

"*Si señor,*" answered the clerk. "Her usual stateroom."

"And when does the *Princess Nola* sail?"

"Tomorrow at six in the evening."

Well, that was that. Smooth hung up and walked to the window. He looked out across the rooftops to the left where the walls of old Morro were gray against the sky. He located the flagpoles of which Señor Armas had spoken, and smiled at the use to which they had undoubtedly been put. Tomorrow would tell if his guess had been a good one.

He ordered supper sent to his room and stretched out on the bed to get some rest. There was a chance the night would be a busy one and he wanted to be fit.

IT WAS close to midnight when Señor Armas met Smooth at the Café H. Gerry was parked at the curb and Smooth pointed him out to the Cuban official.

"I've been using that driver since I came to Havana," he said. "He seems to be a regular fellow but I wish you'd check up on him."

"Certainly," said Armas. "But if you have any doubts I can use a government car tonight."

"I'd rather not," said Smooth. "This little excursion isn't exactly legal and if things go wrong we don't want too much explaining."

"Wrong? What can go wrong?"

"Martell's crowd play marbles for keeps," said Smooth and grinned at the puzzled expression that came to Armas's face. "I mean they usually shoot first and ask questions later. If something like that should happen we don't want to unravel a lot of governmental red tape.

"I understand. Sometimes it is better to forget the law—no?"

"*Señor*—I think we agree perfectly. Shall we go?"

Gerry showed no surprise when Smooth ordered him to drive to Sonia's house. He hurried the car to the residential section of the city and turned into Avenida de los Alcaldes. At the corner he slowed and looked at Smooth.

"Right to the house?" he asked.

"No. Park here and wait for us."

Smooth and Armas left the car and walked slowly past the house. There were no lights visible and the shutters were drawn. Smooth noticed the iron gates barring the driveway were slightly ajar. He touched Armas' elbow and stepped through the opening. Armas followed but there was surprise in his eyes.

"Would it not be better to watch first?" he asked in a nervous whisper. "Perhaps someone is in the patio."

"The best way to find out is to go to the patio," grinned Smooth. "Only amateur burglars roam around a house. Professionals move right in."

"I wouldn't know," shrugged Armas.

Smooth walked lightly along the driveway to a low wall that extended between two wings of the house. Another wrought-iron gate swung open at his touch and he moved quietly into an awning-covered patio. There were two doors leading off this to the house and Smooth tried the knob of the nearest. It turned and the door swung inward. He grinned again to

Armas and took a small flash from his pocket. The light picked out the furnishings of the room where Smooth had talked with Falero on his first visit.

Smooth remembered the hall where the old servant had gone to get the coffee. He moved silently toward it with the customs official never more than a few paces behind him and making no sound. When a door squeaked under the pressure of Smooth's hand both men froze. Once again the light played over a room. A long, ornately-carved table was set under the windows and Smooth guessed this to be the dining room. He crossed it and opened another door. It also squeaked and Smooth wished that old servant had not been quite so punctillious about closing doors.

When he at length stepped into the next room Smooth's light showed him what he had been hunting. Evidently this place had once been a study. But now a work table stood against one wall and on it were sets of moulds. Smooth moved closer. He held his light on the moulds and beckoned to Armas.

"To make the buttons," he whispered.

HE SWUNG his light along the table and picked out sticks of colored wax. Blue, pink, light green—a variety of shades to match Sonia's dresses. A small electric heater, pot and ladle completed an outfit that would fit in a small trunk with room to spare. Smooth started toward the door when his light touched a leather camera case on the end of the table. He recalled the films Sonia had taken of the falling boom and decided it would be interesting to see a record of an attempt upon his life.

There was no film in the camera but in the case were three rolls that had been exposed. Smooth slipped them into his pocket and motioned to Armas. They left the house and hurried to the car. Gerry was seated patiently at the wheel, his chin on his chest and his eyes closed.

"Wake up, pal," said Smooth. "We're all finished."

"What? No shooting?" grinned Gerry.

"Not tonight," said Smooth. "We're going back to the hotel."

When Smooth and Armas were seated across a pair of drinks in the hotel bar, Smooth was forced to listen patiently to a running fire of compliments from his companion. The Cuban was amazed at the directness with which the Treasury Agent had gone about his mission. That Smooth had been able to find the button mold with such speed was nothing short of miraculous.

Smooth thanked him and explained he seldom if ever planned his moves in advance. He admitted luck played a great part in his successful ventures and told Armas to keep his fingers crossed until they had completed their job.

"One thing more," he said to Armas. "There is a Miss Gilda Garland stopping at this hotel. Her room number is 633. Would it be possible to have her phone tapped?"

"Is she also connected with this Rod Martell?"

"Oh, no," said Smooth easily. "She's working on the case for a private detective agency. But I thought it might be well to keep an eye on her."

"A very good idea," agreed Armas. "I will have her phone tapped in the morning. A man will be stationed in the hotel to make a record of all calls."

"Why not let him use my room?" said Smooth. "He's welcome to it any time after five tomorrow morning."

"Ah, yes. Five o'clock. That is when we are to meet at my office," said Armas. "Very well—I shall install an operative in your room. He will be a good man—one who speaks English perfectly."

Smooth thanked him and they shook hands.

CHAPTER XIV

THAT GIRL GILDA

MORNING had come but the sun was not yet over the horizon when Smooth and Señor Armas made their way to a small dock at the Castillo de la

Punta. This old fort at the mouth of the harbor was used by the government as a naval base and it was not until Armas had spoken with an officer that he and Smooth were permitted to enter. Morro Castle was grim across the harbor and farther to the east were the walls and roadways of La Cabaña. Smooth looked across the water to where the silent hoists of a coal yard pointed their dirty fingers at a pastel sky. The city of Havana was not yet awake but already the fishermen were bringing their catch to market.

A small boat with a powerful motor rubbed gently at her mooring. Armas motioned Smooth aboard, handed him a pair of field glasses and pointed to a comfortable cushioned seat at the stern.

"We may have a long wait," he said. "There has been no word from the *Lille*."

"Is that the freighter?"

"Yes. Belgian registry. She carries only five passengers and has been doing that but recently."

"Most of the freighters carry a few," said Smooth. "And that would be a smart way for Martell's man to travel."

They talked for a time as they watched the flag poles above Morro. A white-uniformed sailor brought them coffee and a light pastry of which Smooth made short work. He thought of Gilda as he sipped his coffee and wondered what that short-tempered blonde would say when he did not appear for breakfast. First of course she would call his room and get no answer. Then would come fireworks. There would be calls to Martell—calls from Martell. A search would be made for Smooth, and Martell and Gilda would spend an unpleasant day.

The thought made Smooth laugh. He hoped Martell would be careless enough to say something important over the tapped wire. It might very well happen. Anger usually made fools of people.

"There is the signal!" said Armas suddenly. "The freighter has been sighted."

He pointed excitedly to the flags flying above Morro. Next he gave orders to the two men who handled the boat. Lines were cast off and the motor purred. The boat swept out from the dock and headed to sea. They threaded a path through numerous small craft at the harbor mouth and soon were in the clear. There was a light breeze that did scarcely more than ripple the surface of the water. Smooth saw a languid fin that moved slowly through the blue crystal. Another followed it. He pointed to them and nudged Armas.

"Sharks," said the official. "There are a great many about here. It is said they make their homes in the coral caves beneath Morro. And it is also said that our ancestors kept them well-fed with political prisoners."

"Nice people," said Smooth. "I'm glad they've changed their way of holding elections."

THE motor beat out a steady rhythm and the city of Havana faded behind the early morning mists. Smooth turned his glasses toward the distant horizon and saw the outlines of a freighter beneath a plume of smoke. Closer, he could distinguish a few fishing boats headed along the coast. One was racing toward the *Lille* and throwing a white wake behind her. He brought the boat into sharper focus and saw the figures of three men grouped in the stern.

"Can this tub step any faster?" he asked.

"Ah—you see the boat, eh?" said Armas. "I think that is the one we want."

"If it is, we'd better hurry."

"Don't worry. We will be there first. But I think it would be wise if you sat in the bottom of the boat. Those men may be using glasses also."

"Not a bad idea," agreed Smooth.

He dropped a cushion on the deck and seated himself. Armas joined him and the man at the engine advanced the throttle. The little boat leaped ahead. White water knifed from her bow in twin fountains and glistened in the rays of the early sun. Steadily they overhauled the other boat and within a few moments had passed it. They swung wide and cut toward the in-

coming freighter. Armas gave a command in Spanish and the motor was slowed.

One of the sailors unlimbered a fishing rod. The other joined him and the two men pretended a great interest in their lines. Smooth lifted his glasses above the gunwale and trained them on the small boat. He grinned when he saw a man studying them through glasses.

"Good guess, *señor*," he said. "Those birds are watching us."

"Keep down," said Armas. "Our men will fool them."

Smooth grinned at the show put on by the sailors. They cast and reeled in their lines. At times they talked excitedly and one motioned to the other. The other objected violently. It was obvious the discussion concerned the selection of a fishing ground. One pointed out to sea. The other shouted a negation and pointed toward shore. Smooth decided any watcher would figure it to be a typical fisherman's discussion. He lifted the glasses carefully.

In the stern of the nearby boat he saw Falero, the man he had met at Sonia's home in Havana. He was standing erect with his glasses trained upon the approaching freighter. At times he gave an order to the man at the wheel and the course of the boat was altered slightly. It pulled to starboard of the *Lille* and headed into the wake. Smooth touched Armas' shoulder and swung his glasses toward the freighter.

"Be careful," warned Armas. "You must not be seen."

"Not a chance," said Smooth. "Those birds are plenty busy. Keep your glasses on the freighter. Do you see that man in the stern?"

"Ah, yes. The man in white."

A thick-set man in a white linen suit stood at the after rail of the *Lille*. He was apparently interested in the wake left by the churning propeller. Soon he lifted his eyes to stare at the motor-boat that trailed along behind. It moved closer, paralleled the freighter and for a moment Smooth thought it would crash against the side. Falero tossed what was evidently a weighted message aboard and the passenger on the freighter picked it up. He read it, turned and hurried to a stateroom. When he returned he carried an oval package. It seemed to Smooth slightly larger than a football and of about the same shape. Quickly the package was dropped into the wake and the man waved an arm.

THE motor-boat moved forward. A sailor reached over the side and grabbed the package from the bubbling water. The boat swung toward shore and picked up speed. Smooth did not bother to watch it. His glass was steady on the man at the stern of the freighter—studying his face. He turned and found Armas was doing the same. The Cuban official then put down his glasses and ordered the men to stop fishing. Lines were reeled in and the poles dropped onto the deck. The motor kicked over and they started toward the distant shore.

"It would be a great pleasure to overtake that motor-boat," said Armas. "My case would be absolutely perfect."

"Have patience," said Smooth. "You'll get them later."

"Did you recognize any of them?"

"Yes. That bird with the glasses is Falero. He's going to make the trip to the States with Sonia. We'll get him there."

"And the others?"

"Just a pair of mugs, I guess. They're not important."

"They will think they are when they serve the first ten years," said Armas quietly. "All criminals are important in Cuba."

"Think you'll have any trouble getting that conviction?" grinned Smooth.

"None at all. These sailors are my witnesses."

"You fellows certainly have a nice way of doing business. I wish our courts would learn a few lessons from you."

"That man Falero—if you think he will be any trouble, we will be glad to take him off your hands."

"No. I'll nail that bird in New York. But if you don't mind wasting some time I'd like to see this thing through today."

"By all means," said Armas quickly. "What is the next move?"

The boat was skirting the shore and heading toward the dock. Smooth outlined his plan and Armas agreed. They leaped ashore as the lines went out and hurried toward a taxi. Smooth gave the address of the house on Avenida de los Alcaldes and the car raced along the Malecon. When they were near Sonia's house Smooth stopped the driver and paid him off. He and Armas walked to the corner and waited. In a short time a car pulled to the door. Falero stepped out and hurried into the house.

"He didn't lose much time," said Smooth. "That bundle is still wet."

"It proves everything," said Armas. "A perfect case."

"Not quite," said Smooth. "Now we've got about an hour to wait if my guess is good."

It lacked but a few moments of that time when a small delivery truck swung into the driveway. It was such a car as a dress manufacturer might use for small deliveries. The driver went into the house and there was another wait. Smooth glanced at his watch and noticed they had been there almost two hours. His legs were tired and he was hungry but things were breaking exactly as they should. When the truck pulled away from the house he motioned to Armas.

"Let's get into town and see the end of this," he said. "Can we get a taxi around here?"

"We should have kept the other," said Armas. "But perhaps we will be lucky."

"Perhaps, nothing!" laughed Smooth. "Our luck is running great."

"I agree with you," said Armas. He lifted an arm and waved to a passing cab.

THERE was a fast trip into town and Smooth stopped the driver at the Prado near Gonzales' shop. The delivery truck was parked at the curb and the driver was carrying a rack of dresses into the store. Smooth grinned and lifted his hands.

"And that winds it up," he said. "The stones were pressed into the buttons, sewed on the dresses and here they are—all ready for Sonia to wear to New York. Nice, eh?"

"Very nice," said Armas. "So nice that I am overcome with admiration of Señor Martell."

"Say!" cried Smooth. "I'm glad you mentioned that guy. Let's see what he's been doing today."

"How can you tell?"

"Stick around. I'll give you a detailed report as soon as we get to the hotel."

He caught Armas by the elbow and hurried along the Prado. Turning into the Sevilla he cut across the lobby and told the elevator boy to take them to the seventh floor. A knock on the door of his room brought an answer in Spanish. Armas told the operative to open the door.

"Any news?" asked Smooth when Armas had told him the man's name was Fernandez.

"A good deal, *señor,*" said the operative. "If you wish, I will read my notes to you. They are in shorthand."

"Swell! Let's hear them."

Fernandez thumbed through the pages of a notebook on the table beside the telephone. He cleared his throat and read.

"Call number one—the lady in 633 said, 'Hello, this is Gilda.' The caller said, 'This is Rod. Have you seen Smooth this morning?' "

"What time was that?" asked Smooth.

"Ten-thirty, *señor,*" said Fernandez. "And the lady then said, 'No. I can't find the screwble.' "

"The which?" asked Smooth.

"It sounded like 'screwble,' *señor.*"

Smooth laughed. "That's close enough. But screwball is the word. It's a pet name Gilda has for me. Read the rest of it."

"Rod said, 'I told you to keep an eye on him.' The lady replied, 'It's like trying to find a flea on a St. Bernard dog.' "

"Nice gal, Gilda," said Smooth.

"A very strange woman," said Armas.

"Very," agreed Smooth. "But go on with the story, *señor.*"

"Rod said, 'I called to tell you I am taking a plane to Miami at seven this evening. It's up to you to keep that guy away from the dock.' The lady then said, 'Are you taking a regular passenger plane?' Rod answered, 'No. I'm hiring a special. I'll send a cable that should reach you about noon tomorrow. Have Smooth in your room then and let him see it accidentally.' The lady laughed and said, 'Nice work, Professor.' "

"I'll say it is," said Smooth thoughtfully. "Too nice. But was there anything else?"

"*Si, señor*. Rod said, 'Sonia will leave on the *Princess* with the stones. This is a shipment of twenty-five and they are all pretty good diamonds.' The lady then said, 'You are a piker, Rod. Why didn't you send more?' And Rod said, 'I'm not Santa Claus, darling. I'll be seeing you.' He then hung up and so did the lady."

"Very interesting," grinned Smooth. He turned to Armas. "The New York agents will take care of Sonia when she arirves. I'll follow Martell and see what I can learn in Miami."

"Is there anything further I can do?" asked Armas.

"Not a thing," said Smooth. "Thanks a million for your trouble."

"But what of the members of this group who are still in Havana? Shall we arrest them?"

"Why not wait until you get word from me? I'll radio you when we've grabbed the bunch in the States. Then you can clean out the rest here."

"A very good idea," said Armas. He turned to Fernandez. "That will be all today."

THERE was a sharp knock on the door and Smooth winked knowingly to Armas. He opened the door and found Gilda staring at him.

"Is this the way you keep a breakfast date?" she said coldly. "If I waited for you I'd starve to death."

"I was busy, darling," said Smooth. "These friends of mine have been trying to sell me some real estate. This gentleman is Señor Armas and the other is Señor Fernandez." He turned to the Cubans. "*Señors*—I want you to know Miss Gilda Garland."

Armas and Fernandez were startled but they bowed low over Gilda's hand. There were some casual pleasantries exchanged and then they left the room. Gilda faced Smooth and her eyes were steady.

"Who were those birds?" she asked.

"Amos and Andy," said Smooth. "Sit down and cool off, Beautiful. Or better still, let's drive to the waterfront where there's a breeze."

"I'll get along without a breeze," said Gilda quickly. "All I want to know now is when you are going to leave Havana?"

"Sooner than you think, Angel Puss. Almost any minute."

"Stop kidding," snapped Gilda. "I'm about fed up with Cuba."

"Then why stick around?"

"To be near you, darling," said Gilda coldly. "There's something about you I can't resist."

"My smile," said Smooth.

"Nuts!" said Gilda. "You're a chump and you know it. You've been clowning around Cuba for days and you know less now than when you arrived. Why don't you give up and relax?"

Smooth grinned and walked to the mirror. As he combed his hair he thought he had never enjoyed a situation quite so much as this. Because Gilda must keep an eye on him he was able to tease her unmercifully. Under ordinary conditions this quick-tempered blonde would have thrown something at him. But today she must take anything Smooth cared to hand out. And Smooth knew a setup like this might not come again in years.

For the better part of an hour he tormented her and when he saw she was at the boiling point he suggested again that they walk along the waterfront. Gilda wanted to drive out of the city. She wanted to go to a bathing beach. She suggested a walk along the Prado. Everything—anything but the waterfront. To each of these

suggestions Smooth waved a dismissing hand.

Later in the afternoon he went with Gilda to a small café and ordered a light lunch. With each mouthful he remarked that Gilda should be more careful of her diet. When dark-haired *señoritas* walked by the open windows, Smooth commented upon the beauty of their hair. He said blondes did not look good under the Cuban sun and advised Gilda to substitute black dye for her usual henna treatments.

At five o'clock he went to a telephone and called Armas. He asked the Cuban official to charter a plane for him—one that would be ready to leave at seven o'clock or a few minutes after.

When Gilda asked to come along with him Smooth agreed and hailed a taxi. For almost an hour he drove about the town, refusing to answer any of Gilda's questions. At length he directed the driver to the seaplane landing and grinned at Gilda.

"What's the idea?" she asked sharply.

"Just decided to take a ride," he said. "Want to come along?"

"Where to?"

"Miami, perhaps."

"Are you crazy?"

"I guess so," said Smooth. "But think of the fun I have."

CHAPTER XV

THE TRAIL TO MIAMI

ONE of the huge passenger planes was moored at the dock when they arrived. Near it was a smaller plane that would carry two passengers as well as a pilot. Smooth glanced at it and then walked to the ticket desk. Gilda followed him and at times looked anxiously about the large office. When he asked if his plane were ready the clerk told him it would be rolled out to the dock immediately after the first small plane took off.

"Who's taking that?" asked Smooth innocently.

Gilda caught his arm and swung him about. "Listen to me, Handsome," she said quickly. "I'd like to know what gave you this sudden urge to fly. Is it another of your cute tricks, or is the heat getting you?"

The clerk answered Smooth but Gilda's words had lifted above the answer. She did not wait for Smooth's reply but continued talking and tapping her finger against his chest. Smooth pretended to be angry but actually his amusement grew until it was hard to smother a laugh. From the corners of his eyes he saw Martell hurry across the office and walk toward the mooring float. Gilda was still talking and Smooth allowed her to walk him toward the street while Martell's plane took off.

"Mr. Kyle!" called the clerk. "Your plane will be ready in a moment."

"Thanks," said Smooth and turned to Gilda. "Want to come along?"

"Yes, if you'll tell me where you're going."

"I'll tell you as soon as we get in the air," said Smooth.

He took her arm and walked out to the dock. Attendants were hauling a small plane into place at the mooring and a pilot had gone aboard. The propeller whipped a miniature gale toward them and Smooth helped Gilda over the side. He stepped in beside her and leaned toward the pilot. The ropes were cast off and Smooth cupped a hand to his mouth.

"Follow that other plane to Miami," he shouted.

The pilot nodded and the motor roared as the throttle was advanced. It was impossible to talk against the combined noises of motor, propeller and rushing water that streamed in thin sheets from the plane's hull. When they lifted into the air Smooth turned for a last glance at the City of Havana set like a jewel in the dip of the bay. Then he looked forward to where the first plane was a dot against the darkening sky.

"Just playing escort for your pal," he shouted. "We may visit Martell in Miami."

Gilda wrinkled the tip of her nose at

him and said nothing. She too, turned to watch the plane ahead. As Cuba slipped over the horizon behind them the two planes drew closer together. Below, the waters of the Gulf Stream were a deep blue that shaded almost to purple with the coming darkness. The planes flew steadily into the night and left a flaming sunset behind them.

Gilda was very quiet.

Smooth glanced at his watch. They had been in the air slightly under an hour. He knew this route and glanced down to see if they had come to the shallow water in which lie the Florida keys. When he found they were still over deep water he realized neither pilot was making more than a hundred and twenty miles an hour. He settled back against the seat cushions and watched the plane ahead.

It was flying at an altitude of about two thousand feet, taking advantage of a light wind that blew toward the coast. Suddenly Smooth shouted and grabbed Gilda's arm. A yellow flame fanned into the night. It belched from the leading plane and formed a golden ball of light in the sky. Red streamers laced it and twisted like forked tongues through a surrounding billow of black smoke. Seconds later a thunderous explosion beat against Smooth's ears.

The shattered parts of the plane seemed to hang poised in flight for an instant. Then they settled toward the water beneath. Smooth saw a torn wing sideslip like a huge bird. It twisted and planed, then up-ended and dropped. Flaming wreckage left fiery streamers to make their course downward. Smooth caught a glimpse of the broken hull as it hit the water and flew apart.

Smooth's pilot was diving. They raced toward the scattered bits of wreckage and circled them in narrowing curves. At times the pilot banked sharply to look at a floating object. He was searching for the bodies of the pilot and Rod Martell. But there was no sign.

At length he climbed and headed for Miami.

SMOOTH was suddenly conscious of Gilda's hands upon his arm. Her fingers were clenched tightly and when Smooth turned he saw horror in her eyes. She was looking back to the scene of the crash and her face was tilted toward him. He reached up and cupped a hand beneath her chin. For a moment he rested his cheek against hers. Then he shook his head and looked straight into the night.

That explosion had blown Smooth's schemes to bits. It didn't add up. There was no sense to it. For the past two days he had been playing the game of double-cross with Gilda and Rod Martell. The conversation he had heard in her room fitted perfectly with Rod's plan to get Smooth out of Havana. It checked with the conversation Fernandez had heard over Gilda's tapped phone.

Smooth was convinced Martell had not told Gilda the entire truth. While these two appeared to be working closely together, Martell had insisted he had no connections in Florida. Smooth did not believe this. He had meant to follow Martell when the planes landed. There was a chance he could locate the mob's headquarters in Coral Gables. Falero had mentioned them when they first met and Smooth was sure the Cuban had not suspected him at that time.

But now Rod Martell was dead. Perhaps it had been an accident. On the other hand it may have been part of a carefully planned scheme by some other member of the mob. Smooth didn't know and had no idea how he would ever learn. He watched the small islands slip quickly past beneath the plane and wondered if Gilda would now tell him what she knew.

When they went into a gentle dive that brought them to the surface, Smooth leaned forward and held his leather wallet before the pilot's eyes. The man nodded when he had read the credentials but said nothing. They taxied toward the landing and an attendant in a row boat pulled toward them with a line. It was hooked to the tail of the plane and they were hauled to the dock.

There were a few casual watchers who usually assemble at a plane base. But Smooth knew the accident had taken place well out of sight of the airport. He caught the pilot's arm and leaned toward him.

"Make your report only to the chief officer," he said quietly. "Don't talk about this until you are told you may."

Smooth's voice was crisp with quiet authority, and the pilot nodded.

"Will you come with me, sir?" asked the pilot.

"Not now," said Smooth. "Miss Garland will take care of that. She's my assistant."

"Very good, sir."

Gilda tapped Smooth's arm. "What did you tell him?" she asked quickly.

"I gave you a job," said Smooth. "He's going to make his report and you're going to make one for me. Tell them who I am and say you're my assistant. Then instruct them to say Martell did not leave Cuba —if there are any inquiries."

Gilda sketched a gesture.

"But I—"

"But, nothing," said Smooth. He stood up and helped Gilda to her feet. "I'll see you later. Now be a sport and go through with this."

Gilda nodded and followed the pilot toward the administration building. Smooth climbed the stairs that led to the Customs Department and showed his badge to the guards. Then he hurried toward the main office and looked about. No planes were due or scheduled to depart at this hour and there were few people in the building. Smooth walked leisurely toward a window above which hung a sign marked *Information*. He asked for a plane schedule and thumbed through it.

A MOMENT passed and a short, neatly-dressed man approached the window. Smooth moved aside and continued to look at the schedule.

The words of the neatly-dressed man came clearly to his ears, soft-spoken though they were.

"Did Mr. Martell arrive on that last plane?" asked the man.

"Just a moment," said the clerk and walked to a telephone at the rear of his office. There was a short conversation and the clerk returned. "We have just been informed Mr. Martell did not leave Cuba tonight."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's odd," said the man. He paused for a moment in indecision. Then he nodded. "All right. Thanks."

He hurried toward the gravel walk in front of the airport and Smooth followed. A single taxi was standing near the door and Smooth crossed to it. The man he was watching walked to a car parked not far from the entrance and climbed in behind the wheel.

Smooth jumped into the cab, slammed the door.

"Follow that car," said Smooth to the driver. "Don't let it get away from you and you'll make yourself a five dollar tip."

The driver nodded and started his car. They swung out of the airport and turned right on a paved avenue. For five minutes they continued in the direction of Miami and then turned left on a road that led to Coral Gables. Smooth knew the section well. They passed a few real-estate developments that had foundered when Florida's boom petered out, turned into a main highway that led through the single street village of Coral Gables and headed west. They passed the City Hall and continued on Coral Way until they reached County Club Prado. Here the leading car turned north and swung into a driveway.

Smooth tapped his driver on the shoulder and told him to circle the block. He noticed that the house where the car had turned in was set well apart from any other. There was a vacant lot to the south of it where tangled vines and shrubs had made a miniature forest. To the north was the wide lawn of the adjoining estate. When the car reached the back street Smooth found that empty lots

faced the rear of the house also. He stopped the driver and reached through the window to pay him off.

"Pull down the street and wait for me," he said. "I won't be long."

The driver nodded, carefully folded the five dollar tip and stuck it in his pocket. Then he drove to the corner and parked. Smooth found a weed-covered path through the lot and followed it. Soon he was standing in the wide yard behind the house on Country Club Prado. He walked cautiously forward to where a light was coming from a pair of screened windows. Against a fawn-colored wall he saw the man he had been following.

He was pacing slowly across a richly-furnished front room, shaking his head with every step.

"I don't get it," he said "Martell said he'd arrive tonight. What made him change his plans?"

"Maybe the boss needs him," said a voice. "I wouldn't worry about it, Tommy."

Smooth moved closer to the window and caught sight of the second speaker. He was Wright Deveron—a gambler Smooth had known in New York. Deveron had always been on the lookout for a fast dollar and it did not surprise Smooth to find him running with Martell and his mob.

"I'm not worrying," said the man called Tommy. "I'm going to town and do a little serious drinking. Want to come along?"

"Sure," said Deveron. "But you can do the drinking."

The two men started toward the door. "Just don't be too serious about it," Deveron said.

THERE was a laugh and Smooth dropped down below the edge of the window. He heard the door slam and a moment later the car pulled out of the driveway. Smooth waited until it had turned a corner and then hurried around to the front door. It was locked. Further search showed the side and rear doors to be locked also. Smooth took out his knife and casually cut an opening in one of the screens. Climbing over the sill he snapped on the light and started a methodical search of the house.

The net result of his search was nothing. He seated himself on an antique sofa in the front room and tried to figure his next move. As he thought, he stared absently at the mantel above the wide fireplace. On it were a half-dozen nickel-plated fire extinguishers. Smooth wondered if Wright Deveron had suddenly become fire conscious. He walked to the mantel and examined one. It was a popular brand and evidently had been recently purchased. Smooth put it down and walked to the door. He stepped out into the night and circled the block. When he came to the cab he told the driver to take him to the airport.

The trip didn't take long.

Gilda had gone when he arrived. The officer in charge questioned Smooth at length and checked his answers with those given by Gilda and the pilot. He then handed Smooth a note that had been left by Gilda.

"I've gone to the Hotel Biscayne"—it read—*"Maybe I'm not quite so tough as I thought because Gilda is a little ill. Drop in and see me, Handsome."*

Smooth folded the note and slipped it into his pocket.

"How soon can I get a plane to New York?" he asked the officer.

"There's one leaving a half hour after midnight from the Miami airport. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes," said Smooth. "On the road to Hialeah, isn't it?"

"Yes. Shall I make a reservation for you?"

"Make two," said Smooth. "One for Miss Garland."

"Certainly."

"And now if you can let one of your men take me to Miami . . ."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

A Bird and His Tail

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Author of "The Sea's Way," etc.

A CRUSHED and broken human body was bad enough, and Dave McHugh had seen his share in many quartz mines. But an accident did something more to Dave than arouse compassion. It touched him as vitally as if he were the unconscious mucker now being lifted into an ambulance.

When the long car had been driven away, Dave glanced at the other hard-rock men of the Lost Indian. Their faces were grim, and he knew what they were thinking. They had been aroused by a succession of injuries and they intended to learn why the mucker had been hurt. And then they intended to act.

Dave was keenly aware of how ruthless that action would be. These men might be startlingly reckless in the world of the sun, but in the dark tunnelings they had dared drive so deeply their demand for safety was implacable. They would suspect carelessness, for they held it a greater menace than gas or flood or swelling ground, and they would have no mercy for the man whose vigilance had slackened.

Silently they went inside and gathered in their end of the "stope," or recreation room, of the bunkhouse.

"Third man this month," Biff Torney growled. "Looks like we got to run somebody out o' this glory hole."

Several heads nodded, and a chill swept through Dave McHugh's body. He had heard those words so often. But now the chill was followed by an unaccustomed anger he could not control.

"You'll run nobody!" he exclaimed savagely. "Don't go sounding off until you know what you're talking about."

Surprise downed resentment as the miners stared at him. In the two months Dave had been in the Lost Indian Gold Mine they had found him a likable young chap who could pull ground with the best of the ten-day stiffs, but who did not boast of it. Suddenly they remembered he had never boasted about anything, or had even talked about himself.

"What you know?" Jack-hammer Burke demanded. "You're not in that level."

"I know plenty!" Dave retorted. "If you want the bird who was careless, he went in the ambulance."

"Don't go pickin' on—" Biff Torney began.

"You're doin' the pickin'!" Dave cut in, and suddenly he found in the defense of another a release for the pent-up resentment of five years. "Alec Finlay is timbering in that drift. It's blocky ground. Think old Alec wouldn't have a set within five feet of the breast by noon?"

"I never supposed Alec—" Jack-hammer began.

"Then why didn't you find out?" Dave demanded hotly. "Alec's been beefin' to me about that mucker for a week. Jim McManigall is drillin' and every day Alec's heard Jim warn the bird. But the blinking fool said he couldn't see his number on a slab. Where do you get this running somebody out?"

He glared angrily about the circle.

"There ain't a safer team in blocky ground than Alec and McManigall," Dave challenged. "If they couldn't keep a fool mucker from getting hurt, which one of you could?"

His fire silenced them.

"Feller, for a bird who ain't hardly asked to pass the butter since he hit the layout, you sure can spread it on," Jack-hammer said admiringly. "And the mucker being that kind, it's safer for the rest of us to have him out o' this glory hole. If he couldn't watch out for himself he'd never 'a' been careful to keep somebody else from getting hurt."

The hard-rock men nodded, and thus was their decision reached. They were satisfied that neither mine, shift-boss, timber-man or miner was to blame because a block of porphyry had dropped on a mucker. No one need be driven out of the Lost Indian because of carelessness.

THAT settled, the miners turned curiously to Dave, for he stood suddenly revealed as having qualities they admired. "How about a little stud, feller?" and Jack-hammer thumped him across the shoulders.

"If we can take him," Biff Torney laughed.

Dave's spirit expanded to a fellowship he had wished for so desperately but had never known. "Come and get it!" he laughed exuberantly.

As the group moved toward a table the door opened and a bag of dunnage rolled into the room. A stranger strode after it and grinned when his quick glance found Biff Torney.

"Heard you was in Colorado," he called. "What sort of an outfit is this I've rustled myself into?"

"Good enough," Biff answered, and to the others he said, "This Sid Everitt is one of those stiffs that ain't seen a 'leven-day pay check since King Solomon quit diggin'."

The hard-rock men laughed. They had heard of Sid and in his friendly smile they found the basis of his reputation.

But abruptly that smile vanished. Sid's gaze was fixed on Dave McHugh. His body stiffened with that sharp immobility of a pointer dog.

The miners sensed the tension. Only their eyes moved as they watched the two men standing with locked glance. They saw Dave's face stiffen in resistance, until weary hopelessness engulfed him and he went down the hall and entered his room.

The men breathed again. Biff Torney turned to Sid.

"You've seen that stiff before."

"Stiff!" Sid snorted. "Call that phoney a stiff?"

"No man's a phoney who can pull ground like McHugh," Jack-hammer Burke said harshly.

Miners growled assent. Sid Everitt looked at the hard faces of strangers, but his own became harder.

"Pull ground!" he exploded. "Wait till he pulls a boner that puts you in a hospital like he did two others."

Level eyes searched Sid's face. The hard-rock men knew this was not grudge talk, and the accusation touched the core of their lives.

"Where was this?" Jack-hammer asked quietly.

"In the Two Dollar Mine in the Coeur d'

Alene. McHugh shot a round without bothering to bulkhead a manway. Just dumped a dozen ton o' rock a hundred feet onto two birds is all."

Few crimes are worse in the hard-rock world. The Lost Indian miners drew closer.

"You see it?" Biff Torney asked.

"I helped pack 'em out. McHugh hit the road that night. I ain't seen him since. And if a man gets careless once, who knows when he will again? I'd be a poor sort o' stiff if I didn't tell about it. McHugh's got no business in a mine."

Jack-hammer Burke nodded slowly. It was the stiffs' code, pitilessly uncompromising. Death must find no ally in the stupidities of their fellows, and a man's past must always pursue him. The stiffs express this with an old adage, and Sid Everitt broke into it now.

"A bird never flies so far or so fast—"

"—but what his tail always follows him," the others finished in a chorus.

DAVE McHUGH heard the words roar down the hallway. Alec Finlay, his roommate, glanced up from a magazine. "Some ten-day stiff's hit the layout," he grinned. "What bird's been caught up with by his tail now?"

Dave was behind him, stuffing belongings into a bag. When he did not answer, the old timber-man turned curiously.

"Me," Dave growled. "For five years I been jumpin' from one mine to another. Always a stiff shows up and I got to drag it again."

He did not ask for mercy. Repeated flights had taught him he could not hope even for understanding.

"You and all the rest were green once and made mistakes!" he exploded with an anger he knew was futile. "Every stiff out there in the stope has made 'em."

"Not fool ones that hurt somebody," Alec said.

"I didn't have that luck," Dave muttered.

"How come?"

"Forgot to bulkhead a manway, and two men happened to be walking under it in the drift below. Aw, I know. The shifter warned me about it. But it was my first shift with a machine. I wanted to show I was a stiff. I was slow, and got in a hurry."

"That's what gets stiffs patted in the face with spades."

"Don't I know it?" Dave demanded fiercely. "Didn't I see them two carted off in an ambulance? I'm as safe as anybody now. Only this bird and his tail business—"

He broke off, for suddenly he saw those five years stretching into a lifetime of running from the dread words.

"I've been in twenty mines from Canada to Mexico," he said drearily. "I've jumped two thousand miles sometimes, but it's always the same. May be a week, may be two months like here—then some stiff'd come that knew. He'd just look at me, the way the one out there did, and I'd have to drag it."

Alec closed his magazine. "You can't blame the stiffs," he said. "Men take enough chances just bein' in a mine. So they got to keep watchin', keep yelpin' for timbering, beefin' about broken ladders, runnin' out phonies and them that get careless."

"I'm no phoney!" Dave snarled. "You've seen me pull ground. And I'm twice as careful as anybody now."

"The stiffs can't look inside a man's head," Alec objected. "They've got to draw a line and keep it drawed. They ain't mean. They just do all they can to keep alive. You ain't got a chance aginst 'em. Only thing for you is to quit diggin'."

Dave had started toward the door but panic halted him. "Quit digging!" He remembered the dreary shell of an old stiff he had once seen in Colorado, a man doomed by injury to life in the sun. The passion that drives men to ceaseless burrowing, the black beauty of the earth's depths, these had gripped Dave as they have gripped all stiffs. The years would be desolate without them. His bag thudded to the floor.

"I can't quit digging," he said.

He stared past Alec, eyes dull yet grim.

"And a man can't spend all his life running!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I've run enough!"

Alec Finlay dropped his magazine. For thirty years he had known only mines and miners, and none understood better how futile was Dave's revolt.

"Those stiffs can do their damnedest!" Dave declared with sudden passion. "I've earned the right to a job in any mine in the country. I'm sticking."

THE next morning Dave McHugh went to work. His appearance in the dry room brought the dead quiet of complete astonishment. Every miner, timber-man, mucker, trammer and nipper had assumed without question that he would hit the road, would try to find a mine where he and his record were not known.

But as Dave undressed and went upstairs to get into his digging clothes he read his fate in the eyes of the stiffs. Their surprise had quickly given way to a fierce acceptance of his challenge. Dave knew it was a challenge, a defiance not only of their creed but of each man individually. And he was well aware that he worked in peace that forenoon only because they had no time in which to act.

At lunchtime he was ostracized. Even muckers moved away from him. At four o'clock, when he had fired his round, he went out to find a drawing on the rock wall of the main drift. Soot flows like paint from the flame of a miner's carbide lamp, and done in broad, crude strokes was a flying, tailless bird. A few feet behind, its tail was overtaking it.

Farther on, walls and timbering were adorned with his name and insulting references, but in the first flush of his resolve Dave's spirit was untouched. He stored courage for the storm to come.

It came the next morning, a hurricane of all the filibustering tricks known to hard rock men. Even the first blast was appalling. Dave found his pneumatic drill choked with sprawl, or fine chips of rock. Sending it to the shop would have been an admission that he was being ridden by the crew and that his usefulness as a miner in the Lost Indian was at an end. The struggle must be between himself and the stiffs. They might resort to any sabotage however costly to the mine, but he must keep his record clear. He could not retaliate, could only meet attack with a frenzy of exertion.

The clogged machine and the time lost in cleaning it were only the beginning. Steel did not come for his drilling. The tool car was missing. Ties and rails for the track did not arrive. The nipper did not appear and Dave was forced to run his own errands. The mucker refused to help set up the machine. Only by working as he never had before did Dave finish his tasks so that he could touch his lamp to the fuses at five minutes of four.

The second day was worse. The entire mine was against him in a silent, bitter war. Even Sam Grooper, the shift-boss, who had never found it necessary to make more than perfunctory visits to Dave's drift, came twice daily to oversee and criticize.

Dave released his hot resentment in a torrent of abuse backed by the true stiff's contempt for a shift-boss.

"Can me if I don't know my business," he snarled. "Toadying to the stiffs, eh? Tryin' to help 'em run me out."

"I'm getting complaints from the pencil-pushers about this drift," Grooper retorted.

"And you know what's holding me back. You're only trying to make it worse by standing here looking down my collar. Now get out o' here or I'll meet you behind the dump tonight and work you over into what a shifter was intended to be like." Dave shouted this, overwhelmed by anger.

Again Dave fired his holes on time. He did not feel the ostracism now for he had built a wall of anger against it. But he was tired, he could not always continue this pace, and he knew that each day he remained was only fresh defiance of the stiffs and of the unyielding laws of their invisible empire.

THE third morning Dave discovered that the miner in the night shift had "back-holed" his round. Instead of firing the lifters, or bottom holes, last, to throw the whole mass of waste clear of the breast, he had so arranged his fuses that the back, or top, holes exploded at the end and left tons of broken rock piled against the breast into which Dave must drill.

Sam Grooper, the shift boss, came and watched Dave in his heartbreaking task of clearing out the waste.

"All the pencil-pushers care about is production," the shifter taunted. "You're costing this mine money, McHugh."

Dave laughed.

"You're in the tough spot, gaffer," he said. "If you don't get out the ore, the pencil-pushers will can you. If you report I was 'back-holed,' the stiffs will have you out of this glory hole before night. The office tells you you can have a cigarette, but you got to ask the stiffs if you can light it. It sure takes a peculiar kind o' rat to make a shifter."

He turned to his mucking, and he was careful to hurl a shovelful in Grooper's direction.

Dave drove madly to make up for the lost time and at one o'clock he had only one more hole to drill. Suddenly the clangor of the machine ceased. Behind him air shrieked from a broken hose.

But not until an hour later, after he had been forced to go to the surface for a new hose, and after he had finished drilling, did he know he had been tricked. A gleam of metal in a breast hole told him. During his absence the stiffs had driven drilling steel into his holes. They had driven it in with double-jacks, machine-end first, and the chuck lugs were so solidly wedged in the rock no power could remove them.

A wave of hopelessness overcame Dave McHugh. Quick probing with a loading stick had shown that eight new holes would have to be drilled. Nothing else was possible. A round is a shift, and after four o'clock the deep passages of a mine are abandoned to the gases of blasting. The stiff who does not finish on time can no longer hold up his head as a miner.

"Only I *am* a stiff!" Dave exclaimed.

He looked at his watch. Ten minutes of two.

"I can lick the lot of 'em!"

Dave slammed a drill into the chuck. He rammed steel through solid rock. As if he were imparting his own fierce energy to the machine, he held the crank against its terrific vibration. And he found in the unearthly clangor an expression for his savage anger. At three-thirty he had finished.

Without pausing, Dave tore down his machine. He loaded the twelve holes, split his fuses. Panting, trembling from excitement and fatigue, he held his lamp to the first fuse as the mine began to rumble with the day's blasting.

Triumphant, with a swagger crowding up through his weariness, Dave McHugh walked into the station at four o'clock. Men stared in astonishment.

"Yeah, that's my round you heard," Dave snarled at them. "Three days you've tried to stop me, and three days I've spit on time. Diggin' coal is where you rats belong."

That sense of victory carried him up in the skip and through the change house. It carried him through the silence at the supper table that night. He dared to sit in the stope and smoke a cigarette. But later Alec Finlay came into their room.

"Listen, feller," he began gruffly. "You can't spit this round. Turn it into cash."

"I been spittin' it!" Dave retorted.

"Yeah, but tonight—they're cuttin' loose now."

"Cooked up something real, eh?"

"You know stiffs. They ain't natural killers, and they've given you plenty of chance to run. Now you'll be comin' up the skip under a blanket."

Dave looked at the old timber-man. This was as close to friendship as five years had brought him, and yet Dave knew friendship could not affect what lay ahead.

"May be," he said. "Only I won't be alone under the blanket."

AFTER breakfast the next morning, Sam Grooper, the shift boss, stopped Dave.

"I'm putting you in the seventeen hundred today," he said. "Pencil-pushers want an old drift opened up."

Dave wheeled on his foreman. The seventeen hundred foot level meant porphyry, "blocky ground," and an old drift meant a constant threat of death to the miner.

"You yellow gaffer!" Dave exclaimed. "So the stiffs told you to give me a morgue to drill in, eh?"

"A man can always get his time," Grooper retorted.

"Who'll timber?" Dave asked suspiciously.

"Best in the shift. Sid Everitt."

"You dirty, murderin' cur!" Dave snarled. "'Fraid blocky ground wouldn't drive me out, so you put in a timber-man who'll make sure. But you and all that bunch can't make me run. Let's look at her."

He went down with Grooper. Sid Everitt was in the skip. Three others clung to the bar. Their faces were grim as they stared past Dave. All knew the choice the stiffs offered. It was flight or a constant threat of death, terms hard as their lives, as uncompromising as the undeviating righteousness of their crusade for safety.

In silence the four men entered the drift, Dave, Sid Everitt, Grooper and the mucker, Fred Heath. Immediately Dave was warned of peril by the close, heavy timbering, but he was not prepared for what he found at the end. The timbering ended fifteen feet from the breast. He must not only work without protection but behind him was always the danger that huge masses of rock would fall and crush or imprison him.

"Why ain't this timbered up to five feet of the breast?" he demanded hotly of Grooper. "You know the state law."

The shift boss was careful not to pass the timbering.

"They've hit high-grade in the sixteen hundred," he said. "Orders straight from 'The Brains' himself to rush this drift. And I thought you claimed to be a stiff."

"You ain't even got sense enough to bait a murder trap," Dave retorted. "Why didn't you put in two or three timber-men or give this phoney a helper?"

"There's no state law keeping you here," Grooper taunted, and he walked away.

"A phoney, am I?" Sid snarled.

"If you're not you'd be rustlin' sets in here now," Dave answered as he lifted his scaling bar and went to work.

Standing beneath the timbering, he began to sound the back, or top, of the drift. Never had he done this so thoroughly, listened so intently after each thud, or pried so heavily when he could get his bar in a crack.

He knew porphyry, how air slakes talc in the seams and leaves slabs and blocks hanging without cement while still subject to the pressure of a third of a mile of the earth's crust.

And talc meant gas, too. Dave caught sweetish whiffs of it. Atmosphere had been working at the talc for a year.

"Lay that air line up to the waste," Dave ordered the mucker. "We'll need some wind in here."

When he had sounded as far as he could reach, Dave left the shelter of the timbering and resumed his testing. Two or three feet at a time, he moved on toward the breast.

Sid departed, mumbling something about going for timber. The mucker began work on the air line. Dave reached the breast after crawling carefully over the heap of waste left by the last round of shots a year before.

THE situation was even worse than he had expected. In the fifteen feet from breast to timbering the entire back was shaky. The terrific vibration of his heavy pneumatic drill, supported on a steel column wedged between sill and back, might start a cave-in at any moment.

Nevertheless, Dave brought in his machine and set it up. He knew he could demand inspection of the drift by shift-

boss, foreman or the superintendent himself. He could even hold up the work until an inspector had been summoned from the state accident-commission.

But Dave also knew that normal mining procedure no longer applied to him. The mine and the state had nothing to do with this. It was between him and the stiffs alone, and in defying them he had accepted the conditions they imposed. Always he had the alternative of quitting. The stiffs gave him that. But if he left the Lost Indian now the story of it would be carried into every gold mine and linked with his first transgression. If he quit now he must abandon mining forever.

He began to drill. The cavern echoed to the roar of his machine. His arm and body were shaken by his grip on the crank, and he knew those shocks were a hundred times worse on the rocks above him. After the back holes were drilled, he picked up his scaling bar.

"Watch yourself," Dave said to Heath. 'I'll sound after every three or four holes."

"What you scared of?" the mucker sneered.

Dave stared at the man. "You're a crook or a fool," he said. "Death is kissing the back of your neck right now."

Sid Everitt had brought in timber and was cutting it fifty feet down the drift. Dave walked back to watch him.

"You like to hang a man but you're afraid to grab the rope, eh?" Dave taunted.

"You'll hang yourself," Sid retorted.

"May be, only I promised I wouldn't be alone under a blanket when I go up. Want to come look at that back where a good timber-man would have a set up?"

"Get to drillin'," Sid growled. "I'll watch my job."

"I'll be shootin' a round tonight," Dave said. "If you don't get in some timber you'll have to dig out your mucker pal."

Again Dave sounded the back carefully, thrust the bar into cracks and pried. He lit a stub of candle and held it low. A foot from the sill the flame flickered out.

"If a slab falls on you, the gas'll get you sure," he said to Heath.

Dave drilled three more holes and repeated his soundings. He worked slowly. Only by extreme caution, careful inspection and eternal vigilance could he hope to escape.

He was no longer harassed. Steel came. The nipper seemed drawn to the drift by morbid fascination. The mucker did not delay his work. Silence still greeted Dave in the lunch place but men now stared curiously and with a touch of awe.

Dave had welcomed concrete evidences of hostility. They gave him something on which to whet his determination. Now the stiffs had left him to death itself, and against their pitilessness he could oppose only the desperate force of his purpose. He must risk life each instant. The stiffs need only wait.

AT THREE o'clock Dave finished drilling and took down his machine. He carried it out the drift and returned for his other tools. As always, when he left protection of the timbering, he glanced up at the back. Now he saw it was beginning to "squeeze." The mucker was laying slick sheets to receive the waste and apparently was wholly unconscious of what hung above him.

"Come here and look at this!" Dave burst out hotly to Sid Everitt. "It's getting ripe. Even a timber-man's helper would have had a set up by noon to hold it."

"Why don't you bar it down and muck it up?" Sid sneered.

"You know there's no time."

"Want me to cry about it?"

"Listen, you yellow crook!" Dave snarled. "I'll keep going for all you and the rest of the stiffs can do. But you got no right to put this mucker in the hole. Get that set up before the back falls on him."

"This is safe enough," Heath broke in.

"And what's this bird know about safety?" Sid scoffed. "When he near killed two men in the Coeur d' Alene."

The mucker and Sid laughed. "Yeah!" Sid jeered. "If you don't like it here, why don't you run some more?"

The massed anger of four days flared, but Dave choked it back and his tone was quiet when he spoke.

"I'm through running. I'll be the stiff who spits on your grave twenty years after you're gone."

He picked up his tools and started out the drift.

"We're getting him," he heard Sid say to Heath. "The rat'll run any time now."

"If you birds sit on it there much longer you'll both be packed out feet first," Dave called.

Heath watched Dave go and then looked up at the back. Dave's outburst had brought uneasiness.

"This has opened up since McHugh left," he said.

Sid studied the back as they both walked to the breast.

"Aw, she's stood for twenty thousand years," he scoffed. "Guess she'll stay up a day longer."

Back in the drift, Dave heard a mighty avalanche, a thudding, a roaring, a rending of timber. A breath of wind made his light flicker. And the two lights at the end of the drift were gone.

Dave ran, until his light revealed a drift choked with rock and splintered, shredded timber. He clawed at it, thinking only that men were beneath. Not until his hands touched a heavy post did he realize that the cave-in might extend ten or fifteen feet, that not only the unsupported back had dropped but that a set or more of timbering had been carried down.

Dave shouted, and he did not get a reply. But because a miner always hopes that trapped men are alive, he turned and ran to the main drift.

HE WAS panting, and still a quarter of a mile from the station, but he heard the rumble of cars. A motorman came around a turn with a string of empties.

Dave flagged him. "Turn back and get to the station!" he shouted. "Cave-in! Two men caught! Send a crew. Tools!"

The motorman slammed his train backward. Dave ran into his drift. He found his scaling bar and again attacked the heap of rock and timber. He pried a slab out, rolled it down. He hurled back pieces with his hands. He tugged at timbers.

Ten minutes later, when the first men arrived, Biff Torney stared in astonishment as Dave turned to face them. "What's happened?" Biff asked.

"You ought to know," Dave answered harshly. "Only it was Sid and the mucker you birds caught."

"Heard 'em?" a miner asked.

"No, but may be fifteen or twenty feet came down."

"How far's the air line go?"

"Ten feet from the breast," Dave said. "Maybe the end's covered and they still have room, though. But what you birds gabbing about? There's two men in there." Half a dozen leaped forward. Excited muckers crowded in with the stiffs. "Come out o' that!" Dave ordered. "You, there! Go get a car. Tell the motorman to have empties ready and keep the switch clear."

Dave pulled a husky young mucker back and turned him around. "And you go for tools," he commanded. "We need two picks and a double jack."

Sam Grooper came, issued an order, then saw Dave.

"Only thing missin' under that muck is you," Dave said. Grooper started to speak, but his lips were too dry. "Go rustle four timber-men and timber for false sets," Dave barked. "And don't come back here."

A car arrived. Muck sticks clanged against each other as men shoveled waste into it. "Take that side of the car, Torney," Dave ordered. "Idaho Swede, the other. Only room for two men."

More tools came. Dave sent a miner in ahead of the car with a double jack to break up slabs and blocks too large to handle. He placed a man with a pick behind each mucker to jerk out timber and loosen muck.

More men with tools were arriving. Dave selected another team of five and sent them in to relieve the first. "Four minutes and you'll be spelled," he said.

He selected a third team, and when he found it short he jumped in with the double jack.

The miners spent themselves utterly as they attacked the heavy rock and crushed timbering. They drew back gasping and reluctant when their short shift ended, waited eagerly for their next turn. Loaded cars thundered away, empties came clattering back.

Timber-men appeared. "False sets," Dave called. "Three feet apart. Need one now."

Alec Finlay stared at Dave an instant and turned swiftly to his task. The six by eight posts were beveled at the top and the heavy cap cut to fit and spiked on.

Three men lifted a set, Dave ordered the muckers out; and, with legs straddling the car, the frame was carried forward, lifted into place and wedged temporarily.

"Another!" Dave called as the miners leaped back to their work. "And get some lagging."

FOR half an hour the tense, mad pace continued. Every four minutes the shifts were changed. "How many sets of timbering went down?" Biff Torney asked.

"Don't know," Dave answered. "Last set was fifteen feet from the breast. A squeeze started just ahead of that."

"Then the back went down clear to the breast!" Jack-hammer Burke exclaimed. "Why don't we blast this out?"

The work eased up. Other men offered opinions. From the first they had accepted Dave's orders. Not only was he familiar with the drift but he had imparted the fire of his leadership. While they believed there was a chance to save life they had worked desperately. Now doubts came.

"They been dead since she dropped," a man growled.

Dave McHugh turned angrily, but before he could speak every man had ceased work and stood or crouched in motionless attention.

All heard that measured click on the air line.

"Alive!" miners gasped.

More madly than before, they attacked the tangled mass. Muck sticks, picks and double jack clashed and thudded. Loaded cars sped out. Timber-men crowded in false sets to protect the rescuers.

After ten minutes a miner looked up to see a black cavern above the heap of muck.

"They can come out over the top!" he yelled.

Dave called: "Sid! Heath! You can get out now."

No sound came from the barrier.

"They tapped just a bit ago," Biff Torney said.

"Gas!" Dave shouted.

The yellow flame of a miner's carbide lamp had turned red as he stooped.

"I smell it!" Biff cried. "It's got 'em!"

Work had ceased. A candle was lighted, and as soon as it was lowered to within two feet of the sill it flickered out.

"A man can't go in without a mask," Jack-hammer said.

"No masks this side of the top," a man down the drift called. "I'll get 'em."

"We can't wait for masks!" Dave exclaimed.

Idaho Swede started up over the muck. But when his light revealed great blocks hanging above him, he slipped back.

"She'll all come smashin' quick!" he gasped in panic. "We got to timber that."

"But those birds are down with gas!" Dave protested. "They couldn't get to the air valve to blow it out."

No one else spoke, and no one made a move. The twin dangers of gas and hanging back appalled them.

"Yellow!" Dave shouted fiercely. "The lot of you!"

He leaped forward to climb the mass of broken rock.

"You fool!" Jack-hammer exploded. "You goin' after the stiff that hung the bird-tail business on you?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Dave yelled.

He hurled Jack-hammer aside and climbed. Quickly he was on top of the waste but he did not pause to look at the

mass of rock hanging so near and so threateningly above him. He crawled on a few feet and tumbled down the other side.

He lay stunned for a moment.

Gas put his lamp out but he fell on a body in a rubber coat. Groping fingers found another, and felt on to learn that Sid had been trying to remove a big block that had dropped on the valve of the air line.

Had he been able to reach that, he could have flooded his prison with air.

"They're both down from gas!" Dave called to the men outside. "I'm bringing Sid."

DAVE was still panting heavily from his last frenzied shift with a double jack. Now, bending over the unconscious Sid, he gulped the sweet gas into his lungs. And as he glanced up he saw by the reflection of lights outside that there was not room between the pile of waste and the hanging slabs of rock to carry a man on his back.

Quickly Dave stripped coat and shirt from Sid's body. He rolled Sid face up and bound his wrists together with the shirt sleeves. Then, slipping his head through the circle of Sid's arms, he began to climb the pile of muck on all fours, dragging his insensible burden beneath him, slowly and painfully.

He got part way up. A rock turned and he slipped back. He tried it again. His lungs pumped frantically now. His head felt strange.

Somehow his arms and legs were slow in response to his commands.

He climbed three feet, and his head struck a big slab. It was too high to surmount and he tried to go around it. He was panting hard from his exertions, gulping gas.

"I can't—" he tried to call, but no words came.

Dave and his burden rolled back to the bottom.

HE DID not know when he struck or or how long he lay there. He opened his eyes to find sunlight and a winelike air flowing through the open window of his room.

He smiled feebly.

"A stiff don't mind a bit o' gas," Alec Finlay said. "Bad liquor gives you a worse headache."

Dave's eyes asked a question. "Both okay," the timber-man answered. "Biff Torney gave the rest a grand bawlin' out because they wouldn't go in after you till the masks came. But Biff went in and got you."

That night Dave tottered out to the stope. He was shaky and pale, his head throbbed far outside his skull, and he resented Alec's urging. But he was too tired to resist.

All the stiffs were gathered at their end of the room.

Sid Everitt was there, holding his aching head.

Men watched Dave curiously, and smiled with awkward warmth if he glanced toward them.

"Dave's goin' to lay up a day or two," Alec Finlay said. "It'll give Sid time to timber that drift."

The hard-rock men shuffled in embarrassment. But not Sid. "I'm draggin' it out o' here in the morning!" he exclaimed harshly. "And some more o' you stiffs, too. Go up Grass Valley way, Biff. You hit over into Nevada, Jack-hammer. I'm headin' for the Coeur d' Alene. We'll wind up in Colorado."

"Where you get that?" Biff growled. "I'm not stakey."

"You was ridin' McHugh, wasn't you?" Sid demanded with savage heat. "Everyone that had a hand in that is draggin' it out o' here. No hangin' around a layout, either. You stay just long enough to carry the tail ahead o' this bird. We're goin' to spread it from the Mother Lode to the Smoke Hole and from the Iron Dyke to Bisbee that this Dave McHugh is a stiff."

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THIS morning the city was sullen. Fog haunted the river and as the *Queen Mary,* England-bound, passed us her greeting was surly. Sitting at the desk we were not at all surprised to see a fantastic bug perched upon the window sill. It was dressed in forest green. When it saw us it tapped on the pane, but we stared at it coldly, believing it to be an omen of some kind that it would be best to ignore. The bug sat shivering for a moment and then, with a swift gesture, it flung its green cloak down into the roaring canyon below. Minus the disguise, it turned out to be our Ottokar, very tan from his summer in the woods. Ottokar is the rural one, you see; Hamilcar is more the city type, and probably vacationed at some sidewalk café.

Ottokar pressed his nose against the glass and began making horrible faces. We stared at him dispassionately, trying to pretend that we didn't know him. Our office, we felt, was enough of a shambles, what with Hamilcar dropping in all the time, and we didn't see any reason for letting Ham's country cousins run wild in the place. But Ottokar is a sturdy little fellow and when he began to beat on the glass with his fists we realized that he intended to break it.

We opened the window and, without a word of greeting, Ottokar stepped lithely in and started rummaging in a forgotten drawer of our desk. Presently he dragged out a suit of red flannels. He sprang into them and beat his chest and only then did he smile.

"Winter's coming," he cried. "In the woods the leaves are turning—colors a skeptic like you wouldn't believe. And soon there'll be snow and the cold wind'll blow."

We brightened. The city wasn't sullen any more. It was merely Fall weather—football-playing, chestnut-roasting weather. It was time to shed our summer cloak, too—one of bright purple lethargy in our case. And just as we were doing so the office boy skipped in with the final draft of the new Judson Philips serial. Appropriately, it's a football story and is scheduled to begin in the issue of October 23.

And now for the mailbag.

WILLIS CONOVER, JR.

A friend of mine who has been collecting fantasy fiction for years informs me that ARGOSY, under the management, is publishing an appreciable amount of imaginative fiction, and advises me to start picking it up regularly. The cover for the initial installment of Zagat's "Drink We Deep" assures me that pseudoscience is indeed on its way up again; and if you continue publishing similar tales you'll have your audience of fantasistes increased by at least one.

So long as weird or pseudo-scientific yarns find their way into your ancient and honorable pages, another dime will drop to the counter each week. I'm a new reader, so do your best to make me an old one as the years go by. . . .

Cambridge, Maryland

WHENEVER a pseudo-scientific crosses our desk we pounce on it. But fiction of this type has to jump a pretty high hurdle to find its way into ARGOSY'S pages. For, to our mind, there is nothing in literature quite so bad as a bad pseudo-scientific. We are glad to have Mr. Conover with us and we here and now thank him for his dime, which we have already spent to buy Hamilcar a bright new bottle of red ink for his morning bath.

NOW comes a nostalgic bit—a plea for that talented band of scriveners whose prose, weekly, used to flow through these pages.

E. C. CONNOR

During the past year many of your best authors have fallen off, or have disappeared entirely. I rejoiced when a couple of these vanished. The others, I would like to see a story by once in a while. A few are:

Seltzer, Cummings, Merritt, Gardner, Mason and Evan Evans. Also, how about John Wilstach? I would like to read another of his thrilling circus novels. His historical novels do not compare with those of G. Challis or Bedford-Jones.

And what has happened to these writers?

Gordon MacCreagh
R. V. Gery
Karl Detzer
Ared White

I am definitely against ARGOSY printing a quarterly.

Peoria, Illinois

THE criticisms are falling thick and fast. Now comes an archer of long experience who is not satisfied with the picture of the bow and arrow in the William Chamberlain story, *Battle Shouts Down the Wind*, which appeared July 17. After examining the illustration we immediately called in the artist who had done it. We rapped his knuckles severely and he is now standing unhappily in a corner while Hamilcar and Ottokar, with bows made out of matches and rubber bands, shoot arrows (pins) at him. He has repeatedly denied playing a cupid in the "ballet show" Mr. Wood refers to.

O. H. R. WOOD

I have been a reader of ARGOSY ever since it was published. I like most of your stories and don't have to read those I do not care for. I know you have to satisfy a large class of readers. I have, however, one criticism to make. . . .

In the story by William Chamberlain entitled "Battle Shouts Down the Wind" in the issue for July 17, the author knew his stuff, likely went to some trouble to be sure to have his background correct, and I liked the story. But where oh where did your artist get his ideas of bows and arrows?

As an archer of many years experience and as one who has made quite a study of the subject I want to say that no bow, even the composite Oriental, would assume the shape as shown when fully drawn. The picture shows the bow as it would shape up when not drawn.

Looking Ahead!

HELL-BENT FOR AVES

The tale of a fantastic crime planned by one of the world's most daring criminals. Aves was a lonely atoll set in the Caribbean. The schooner *Dawn* was tacking aimlessly about the sea looking for a buyer. Red Vane was flying his millionaire employer south to his island kingdom. Then, suddenly, the radios of the world started crackling. . . . A complete novelet by

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THE JUNKMAN CALLS

Even in the Legion, medals are not always to be found on the chests of heroes. . . . And yet probably nowhere but in the Legion would a green recruit risk his neck for another man's glory. A complete novelet of men who are more afraid to live than to die by

GEORGES SURDEZ

ADDITIONAL STORIES BY W. C. TUTTLE, EUSTACE L. ADAMS, BORDEN CHASE, BENNETT FOSTER AND OTHERS

but no bow, however made, or shaped, would assume the shape as shown in your illustration.

I once saw a ballet show where the little "Cupids" were armed with wooden bows with rubber strings, and the bows were not bent but the strings were stretched out as the arrow was drawn. Perhaps your artist saw the same show and got his idea of the subject at that time.

There is just as much sense and reason to show a baseball game being played on a tennis court as to show a picture like this to show the use of the most powerful bows ever made by men, not excluding the famous English long-bow.

Medfield, Mass.

SAMSON J. FINNER

I hope you will accept this communication in the spirit in which it was written—unalloyed bitterness. I make no mention, as I notice most of your correspondents do, of the length of time I have been buying the ARGOSY. But during that time I have always found your book a rock of integrity, a monument of firmness of purpose. Such, alas, is no longer the case. ARGOSY is acting like a ward politician, making fine ringing promises with a smile and much recklessness. It's getting so when ARGOSY says something, it hardly ever means it. A loud *tsk-tsk* to you, and a hearty *fie*.

For instance: Your *Men of Daring* department will bear beneath it the caption—*Coming next week: Emanuel Quill, the Mexican Matador*. Now that is a simple statement. It can mean but one thing. To wit, that in the following issue you intend to give us the lowdown on Mr. Quill. And what happens? Nine times out of fourteen, there is no *Men of Daring* next week at all. And the week following, while the world still waits for the Truth about Quill, you offer us a puny page relating the adventures of Zoraster Crabfoot who is given to flinging himself from high-buildings all wrapped up in his aunt's best silk umbrella. The fact that in comparison to Quill, Crabfoot is a rather dull fellow, has nothing to do with the case. Even if Crabfoot were a much more imposing figure than he is, I'd still want Quill. But when he does come along, six or seven months later, I, frankly have lost interest.

But that's a mere prelude to the burthen of my plaint. A sort of minor preamble. What really has got me flat on my back is the airy promise you made a while back that you would devote your summer issues to the sort of thing best read while reclining in a hammock.

So I bought myself a hammock, spent hours practicing to stay in it at will—and then what do you do?

If you think *Kingdom Come*, for example, is the kind of yarn that lends itself to hammock consumption, then all I can say is that you obviously have never even seen a hammock, let alone try to ride one. Keeping balance in a hammock requires complete mental calm and the most delicate sense of equilibrium. It cannot be attained while the occupant is witnessing—practically—his native land falling to bits around him, or while unpleasant Red-Sleeves are marching around seizing the lines of communication and blowing up bridges.

Our summer place is within sight of the Bear Mountain Bridge and I constantly found myself rearing up on one elbow to see if it was still there. And thereby being catapulted from the hammock like the Brother Zacchini shot from his cannon.

This in a smaller way was true of your other yarns. All I wanted to ask you was, please, next summer, either don't start that hammock-stuff again, or else give us the kind of yarns that most other books put out in summer—lightweight, gently dull, somnolent. You can never, it seems, put yourself to sleep by reading ARGOSY.

The Bronx, N. Y.

THE letter below—although we do deplore Mr. Finner's strange epithets—is one of the sprightliest to reach these columns in many a week. We regret that *Men of Daring* is occasionally omitted and that characters promised for *Men of Daring* sometimes do not put in an appearance when they are supposed to, but if we tell you that you will get *Emanuel Quill, the Mexican Matador*, you'll get him all right—sometime.

We have read over what Mr. Finner has to say about *Kingdom Come* several times and have come to the conclusion that it is—in its odd way—sort of complimentary. We really have no intention of publishing a magazine that will put people to sleep in hammocks, or anywhere else. We feel—off the record, of course—that in *Kingdom Come* Martin McCall was trying to *wake* people. If Mr. Finner reads anything beside ARGOSY—the newspapers for instance—he will recall that at the time *Kingdom Come* was on the newsstands the United States Senate was (and still is) investigating the activities of the German-American Bund.

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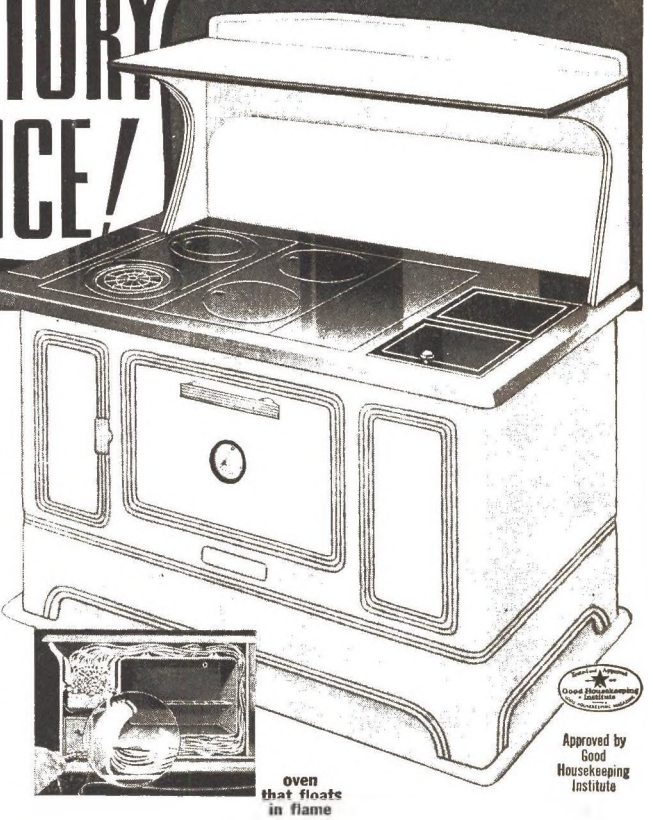

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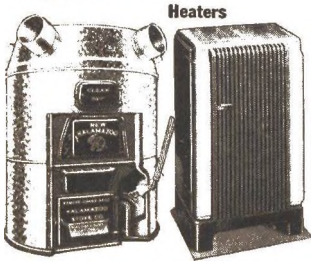

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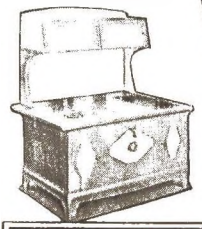

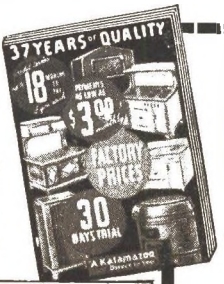

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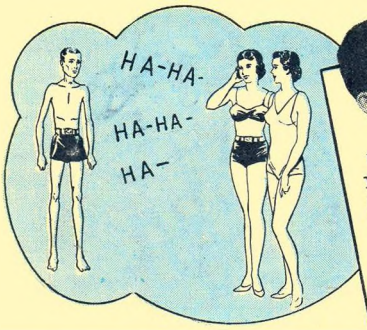
THE GIRLS LAUGHED AT HIS SKINNY FORM!



Irvin Echard

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They've taken this new, scientific formula, Ironized Yeast, which although perfected at the cost of many thousands of dollars, comes to you in pleasant little tablets which cost you only a few cents a day!

Why it builds so quick

Scientists have discovered that many are thin and rundown simply because they do not get enough yeast vitamins (Vitamin B) and iron in their daily food. One of the richest sources of marvelous health-building Vitamin B is the special yeast used in making English ale, world-renowned for its medicinal properties.

Now by a new and costly process, the vitamins from this imported English ale yeast are concentrated to 7 *times* their strength in ordinary yeast! This 7-power concentrate is combined with 3 kinds of strength-building iron (organic, inorganic and hemoglobin iron). Pasteurized English ale yeast and other valuable tonic ingredients are added. Finally, for your protection and benefit, every batch of Ironized Yeast is tested and retested biologically, to insure its full vitamin strength.

The result is these marvelous little Ironized Yeast tablets which have helped thousands of the skinniest, scrawniest people quickly to gain normally attractive pounds, natural development, peppy health.

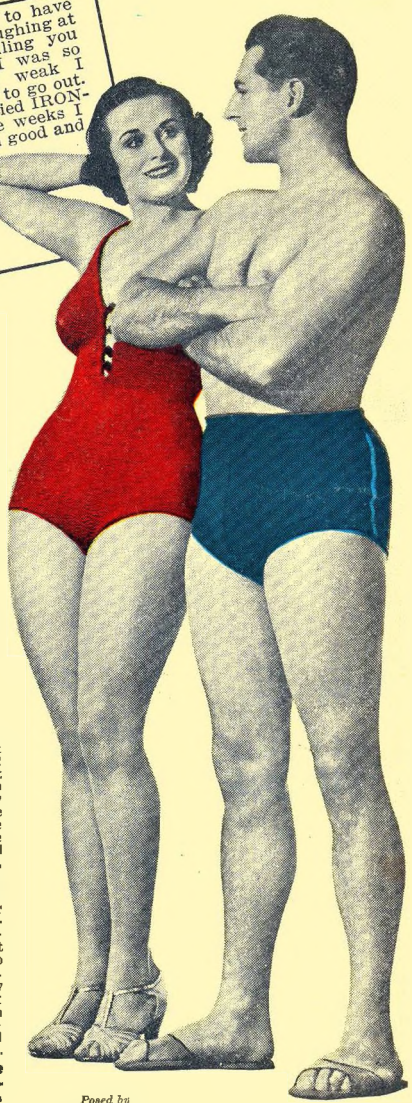
Make this money-back test

If, with the very first package of Ironized Yeast, you don't begin to eat better and to get more enjoyment and benefit from your food—if you don't feel better, with more strength, pep and energy—if you are not absolutely convinced that Ironized Yeast will give you the pounds of normally attractive flesh you need — your money will be promptly refunded. So get Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today.

Special FREE offer!

To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 3710, Atlanta, Ga.

WARNING: Beware of the many cheap substitutes for this successful formula. Insist on genuine Ironized Yeast.



Posed by professional models