BLUE BOOK

Magazine

April

Now 15c

RED TERROR

The flaming story of an American's terrific adventure in Russia, by S. Andrew Wood... Also Culpeper Zandtt, Frederick Bechdolt, William J. Makin and others . . . Cash Prizes for Real Experiences

Clarence Herbert New

THE author of the adventures of the Free Lances in Diplomacy, and many other fine stories, died on January 8th. We know our readers will share our deep regret at the passing of a man whose friendship was a treasure indeed, and of a writer whose work made him a unique figure in American letters. In this latter connection we are glad to announce that fourteen of his stories, accepted and purchased before his death, remain for us to enjoy for over a year to come. Some of these are stories of the Free Lances; others, like "The Star of Asia" in this issue, present different characters and were to have appeared under his pen name, Culpeper Zandtt.

Mr. New's own adventures would make an interesting story; but it was at home in Brooklyn in 1916 that he suffered a really serious injury when a Russian bear he was in the habit of feeding in Prospect Park Zoo snapped and tore his arm so that it had to be amputated. "Free Lances in Diplomacy" was interrupted by the mishap, one of the few occasions it was skipped. But he was soon back on the job—and gamely continued, with his one remaining hand, to type his own stories. The New York *Times* says of him, in part:

Clarence Herbert New, writer, editor, engineer and adventurer, and author of a novel, "Free Lances in Diplomacy," which has been running serially in Blue Book Magazine since 1909, said to be the longest novel in the world because it has already exceeded 3,000,000 words in length, died on Sunday at his home, 1 Parkside Court, Brooklyn. He was 70 years old. In recent years he had lived in seclusion, devoting himself to writing.

The son of Tobias and Lizzie A. Parmelee New, Mr. New was born in Brooklyn on Nov. 14, 1862, not far from his last residence. After a brief association in business with his father, who was a paper manufacturer, Mr. New struck out for himself, spending his time traveling, exploring and writing.

In 1880, on a voyage around the world in an old clipper ship, he had the first of a series of adventures which filled his life. He was shipwrecked off the coast of Australia, and despite a broken arm, managed to keep afloat for five hours.

After his rescue Mr. New rode more than a thousand miles through the wild Australian country, being wounded on the way when bushmen attacked a sheep ranch where he camped. Eventually he reached the Philippines, which he explored fully; went on an extensive tiger-hunting trip in Panay, and was rescued again from another marine disaster, this time a burning ship which was beached at Papua.

Mr. New started another trip around the world in 1891, during which he went on various exploring expeditions in Africa, the West Indies and South America. Most of the country he touched on these exploring expeditions had never before been visited by white men. Mr. New also traveled extensively in Europe. . . .

Mr. New wrote under his own name and also under the pen names of Culpeper Zandtt and Stephen Hopkins Orcutt. Some of his works were "Mysteries of the Sea," "Chronicles of Murphy's Gulch," "Memoirs of the International Bureau," "War Correspondent," "Mysteries of Today," "Deep Water Mysteries," "The Unseen Hand," "Deep Water Men," "Glowing Ember," "The Peculiar Resources of Pennington," "The Grigsbys," "Galt, M. D.," and "Buccaneers Limited."

Many of Mr. New's novels and short stories, of which he was said to have written more than 200, were adapted for the screen. He was noted especially for the accuracy of those parts of his stories dealing with geography and engineering. One of his most valuable possessions was a unique collection of topographic and hydrographic charts.

The Sportsman's Scrapbook
VI—Golf

By **EWING WALKER**

A RECENT news story told of a match at golf wherein one contestant used the orthodox clubs and the other a bow and arrow. Here's a somewhat older sports item: "In the same year, 1828, Captain Hope challenges Mr. Sanderson for a match, the Captain to shoot with a bow and arrow and Mr. Sanderson to use a club and ball, he being allowed to tee the ball at every stroke."

Clubs have changed, balls have altered, new ground rules introduced; a few new oaths and expletives possibly have crept upon the courses and even the name changed—they used to call it goff; but the time-honored and basic goldarnedness of the game is as it was centuries ago, as proved in an eloquent entry in the journal of President Forbes, the eminent Scot of Culloden on Nov. 1, 1728: "This day, after a very hard pull, I got the better of my son at the gouf on Musselburgh Links. *If he was as good at any other thing as he is at that, there would be some hopes of him.*"

Old James IV, who held sway 'way back yonder in the early fifteen-hundreds, denounced golf—probably after an unusually bad round, for play it he did. The Lord High Treasurer lets the cat out of the bag by an entry dated February 3, 1503: "Item, to the King, to play at the goff with the Earl of Bothwell, 42 shillings." Thus the doughty Bothwell, who gained fame through kidnaping and later wedding his queen, leading conspiracies and setting up and tearing down governments, merits even greater renown. A man who won, and then collected a golf bet from his king, was indeed a man!

The Scots rather like to claim parentage of the game, but the praise—or blame—goes to the Romans, the fathers of several other of our vices. They called the game "paganica," because the peasantry was so fond of it; and they used a leather ball stuffed with feathers, and clubs resembling a boy's shinny-stick.

England has had the game these many centuries, even before the Scotch. Ed-

(Please turn to page 3)

BLUE BOOK

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Two Specially Attractive Serials

Spirited Short Stories

Deeply Interesting Novelettes

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.

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(Continued from page 1)

ward III ascended the throne in that year of turmoil 1326, and they had been playing golf, or "cambuca" as they called it then, long before his time.

Prince Henry, eldest son of James I—this in the fifteen hundreds—was a rollicking youth who, by an old narrative, could mix humor with his golf: "At another time playing at goff, a play not unlike to palemaille, whilst his schoolmaster stood talking with another, and marked not His Highness' warning to stand farther off, the prince thinking he had gone aside, lifted up his club to strike the ball: meantyme one standing by said to him, 'beware that you hit not Master Newton': wherewith he drawing hink his hand, said, 'Had I done so, I had but paid my debt.'"

During one period in Scotland, golf was taught along with the three R's. In the "happie and golden tyme" of his youth—about 1566—James McInill relates that he and his fellows were "teached to handle the bow for archerie, the club for goff, the batons for fencing; also to rin, to swoon, to warsell, to preve pratticks, everie ane haiffinf his matche and andagonist bathe in our lessons and play."

Three hundred years ago, James Marquis of Montrose, a student at the university of St. Andrews, shows in his accounts many such items as the following:

The 19th of May for two Golf balls to my Lord 10sh:
Nov. eftirnoon, for my Lord's loss at the Golfe 10sh:
Item, for 2 Golf balls, my Lord going to the Golf there 10sh:

Indeed, by 1613 the amount of money expended for golf accessories warranted King James VI in issuing an edict calculated to keep this money at home.

Its insidiousness, it would seem, is as old as the game itself. Away back in the misty golfing past, there lived one "Auld Reekie" wight who just couldn't leave the course. Throughout the e'en he'd trudge the rocky, rolling links, and even when night overtook him, there on the Bruntsfield course, he'd continue his game by the feeble light of a lantern. His harassed and neglected wife strove in vain to shame him home by sometimes sending him his supper and at other times his nightcap!

Red Terror

The tremendous adventure of an American architect and an American girl in Russia today—that strange land of the Five Year Plan and the sinister Secret Police, where the observance of Christmas is forbidden, where everyone works for the State—and where a Deity is denied.

By S. ANDREW WOOD

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

KOREGORVSKY took the four *dossiers* which he had withdrawn from the portfolio, and spread each one carefully open upon the desk before him. Each one he smoothed flat, with large hands that looked all the whiter because of the black hair at the wrists. Over the typed pages, the green-shaded lamp spread a cheerful glow which caught the bald Tartar cranium of the Deputy to the Public Prosecutor, and made it shine with effulgence.

"Shall we have each *précis* read aloud? It will be simpler, I think. One visualizes better."

He nodded to his bullet-headed Georgian secretary, who began to read in a gentle, monotonous voice:

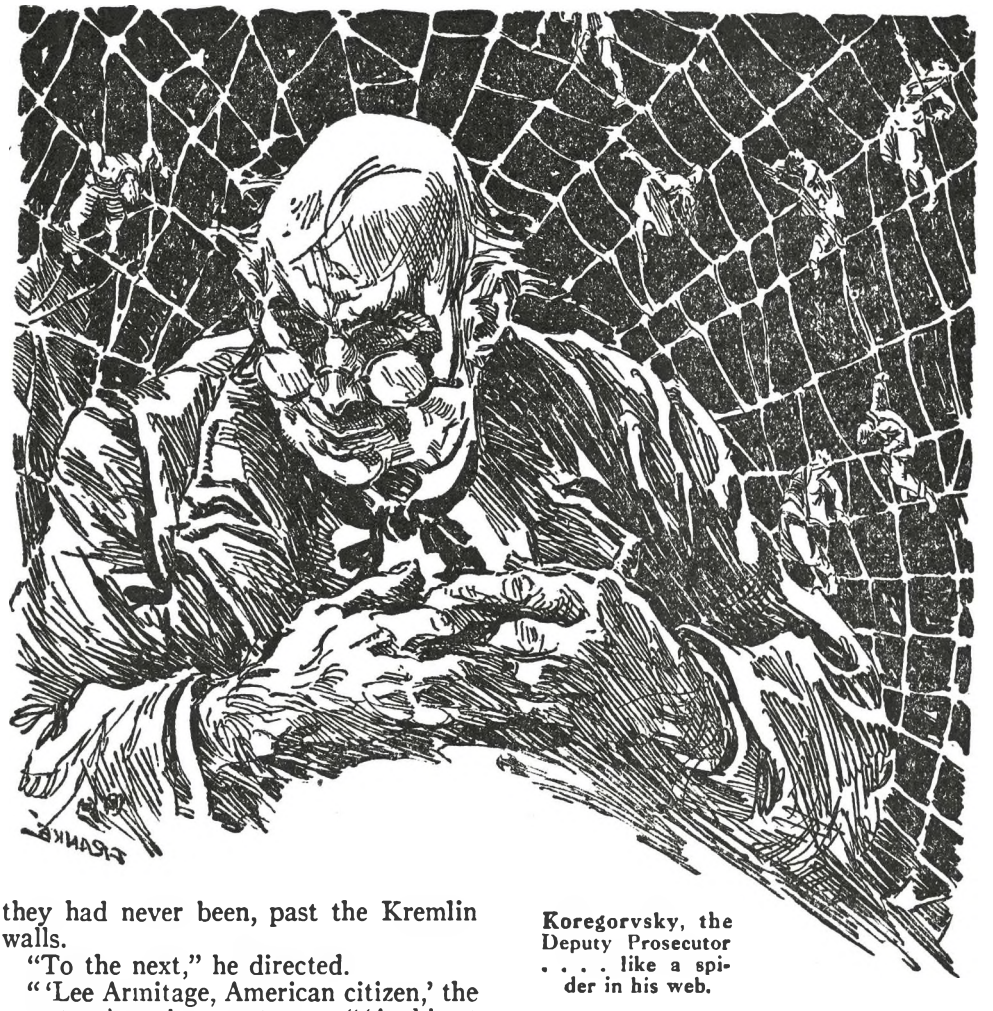
"'Prohackai, a Mongol of the Kinghan Mountains. Priest in a Buddhist Monastery. Abandoned religion and preached the Brotherhood of Man in 1927. Moscow 1928; then propaganda in the East. Greatly successful. Lenin Institute 1929, and leader of the Asiatic Comrades. Praiseworthy work in Manchuria and Turkestan, where he was called "the Flame-thrower." Reputation flawless. Agents' reports on his movements all favorable till early this year. Proved then to be receiving heavy bribes from counter-revolutionaries in Asia. Vanished three months and was seen in Kabul with agent of British India. For details see *dossier* "Espionage GPU".'"

The Deputy to the Public Prosecutor tilted his chair back slightly. He widened his eyes to look over the horn-rimmed glasses on the bridge of his nose. It gave him the look of a benevolent and happy ape.

"I don't think we need do that."

His glance cocked at the clock, and he seemed to listen. The palatial new buildings of the GPU, which guarded the Revolution and the State, were within earshot of Red Square. When the crowd that queued before Lenin's Tomb was larger than usual, Koregorvsky could hear its low murmur in his comfortable room.

This evening, the foundations of a new skyscraper which was to tower higher than the Kremlin spires, were being laid amid much jubilation. It was also March the twelfth, the fifteenth anniversary of the Fall of the Autocracy. The America of the East was taking shape, and within six months the virgin white ferro-concrete of the Asiatic Palace would begin to rise above the seas of blood which ran, invisible now as though



Koregorvsky, the Deputy Prosecutor . . . . like a spider in his web.

they had never been, past the Kremlin walls.

"To the next," he directed.

"'Lee Armitage, American citizen,' the secretary's voice went on. "'Architect and consultant designer of the Schnitzler Building, New York. Engaged under the Five Year Plan to design and assist in building the new Asiatic Palace. Was in Moscow during the Revolution. Speaks Russian and knows Moscow like a native. Difficult under surveillance. Has no political opinions, but is Capitalist in ideology. Works conscientiously. Agent reports that he is enamored of a woman of his own nationality, Ishbel Dane, who belongs to the Party in Moscow (see *dossier).* No friend of the Revolution. Possibly dangerous. Watched closely.'"

"An American," murmured Koregorvsky, "and even modestly famous in his own country. With the impertinence to be able to become Russian at will. Now the third *dossier.*"

"'Lidoshka Wei, artiste of the Eastern Propagandafilm. Chinese girl revolutionary (see GPU Agents). Girlhood spent among armies of Chang. Counter-revolutionary General Tse died while L. W. was in his tent.'" ("Judith and Holofernes!" commented Koregorvsky, wagging his head). "'Brought to Moscow as reward and became cinema-star. No flaw found in her devotion to the State. (See *dossier* of Asiatic Comrades for various uses of L. W.)'"

"A lotus-flower, I understand," said Koregorvsky, "though on mere hearsay. I seldom go to the pictures. And now—"

"'Ishbel Harrison Dane, American citizen. American woman of society who has thrown up her possessions to come to Moscow. Does not live among American Communist colony, but with the artiste Lidoshka Wei (see *dossier).* Enthusiastic but untried.'"

"Short but—ah—sweet, I imagine," said Koregorvsky.

A YEAR before, the Deputy to the Public Prosecutor might have rubbed his hands together and sent a sly glance at his secretary. But during the fourth

year of the Five Year Plan, a new dignity had come to him. Perhaps it was merely that he had bought a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. Perhaps it was that the secret police had retired more discreetly underground, and the Black Crow prison-vans no longer careered the streets so shamelessly. There were even fools in Moscow—in the *Politbureau* itself—who would have shaken the State from the grip of its secret police, the Three Letters. Idealists whose humanity outstripped their discretion, of course. They pointed out that the *bourgeoisie* was now mostly dead or converted. Nobody planned to leave Russia now. Capitalist Europe was ill, and only waiting for Revolution to break. Even capitalist America was sick and delirious in the fever of trade depression. Which was all true enough; but there had always been secret police in Russia, and always would be. The GPU would see to that.

"They are all in the apartment of Lidoshka Wei?"

The bullet-head nodded.

"At this very moment."

"Prohackai is to speak at the foundation-stone-laying of the Asiatic Palace?"

"He was."

"The past tense. But it is only eight o'clock yet. It is unwise even to anticipate certainties, Kaplan. Put the *dossiers* away, my friend."

Koregorvsky closed his eyes sleepily. When his secretary had gone, only the faint click of typewriters penetrated the room. The silence was suave and velvety. It was like the office of any other factory in Moscow. True, there were machine-guns in cunningly-hidden embrasures overhead, and in the tower of the new GPU Building, there was a gallery from which tear-gas bombs could be dropped at any time. Such things had not been forgotten even in these days, and friend or enemy who tried to handle the hedgehog would find it very prickly. But Koregorvsky's room, as he watched the clock from beneath one drooping eyelid, was very quiet and peaceful, as was the rest of the GPU Building. The telephone apparatus glittered by his side as though waiting.

Dusk and eight o'clock of a spring evening. The square-faced clock on the sideboard of the apartment which Ishbel Dane, late of Rochester, New York, shared with Lidoshka Wei, once of Pekin and the armies of Chang, said so. A steady glow behind the drawn curtains, from the flood-lighting of Lenin's mau-

soleum in Red Square, and the muffled clang of the Kremlin clocks, corroborated it. Lidoshka Wei had just closed the curtains and made fast the double-windows—for the March wind, in Moscow, was still piercing. Now she glided into the center of the room with a lighted brass lamp cupped in her hands, and trimmed its flame as she set it down. The movement gave her the look of a slim, tawny acolyte.

"Much better than electricity," she murmured. "Prettier."

None of the other three people heard her. Prohackai was talking in his rich and mellow voice, and it was spell-binding. He was dressed in a black patterned *rubashka* and leather breeches, and his head was like that of a black buffalo. Prohackai was originally a commissar from some Turkestan province, an Oriental, with his up-slanting eyes and big, soft mouth. But the Kremlin had brought him to Moscow, to lecture to students of the Lenin Institute, upon the place of the Orient in the New Civilization. His voice boomed, deep and mellifluous as Paul Robeson's. Upon a million gramophone records throughout the Soviet Union that exquisite music spoke its ecstasies to uncounted people.

"The new civilization will begin in the East. Nay, it has already begun. Life is all pendulum, my friend. East, West; West, East. *Tick, tock.* The pendulum

hangs midway at the moment—over Russia. It swings eastward now. It matters nothing whether you in the West like it or not. There it is."

"Guess I've heard something of the kind before," said Lee Armitage dryly.

"And it bores you?" Prohackai had a liquid laugh—he raised his giant head, where he squatted on the cushion, and splashed it softly. "Even that is a sign. You are blasé, tired. The West calls it a sense of humor. We are fresh and fierce. We have no sense of humor in the East."

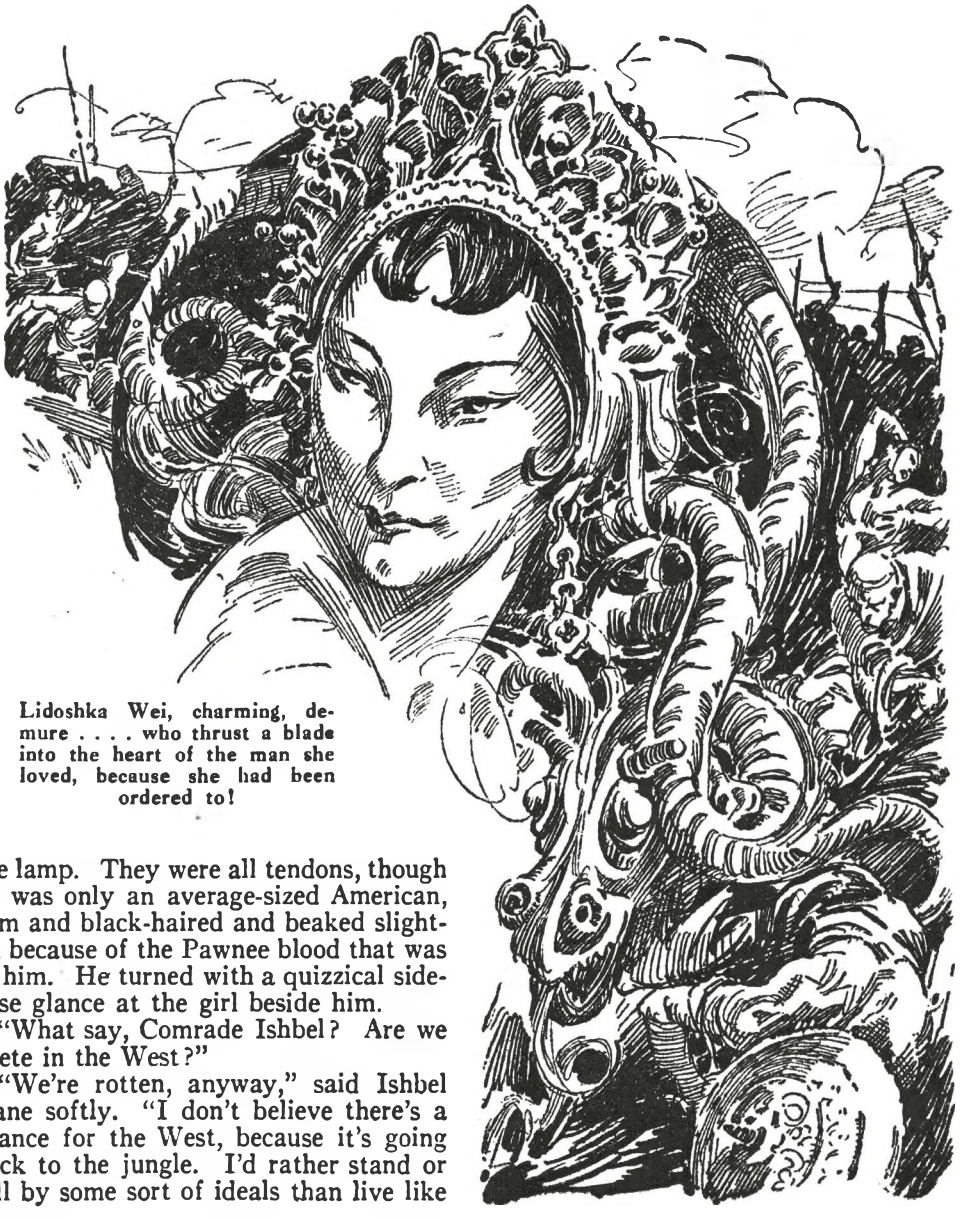
Armitage looked at his hands thoughtfully as he stretched them out toward the lamp. They were all tendons, though he was only an average-sized American, slim and black-haired and beaked slightly, because of the Pawnee blood that was in him. He turned with a quizzical sidewise glance at the girl beside him.

"What say, Comrade Ishbel? Are we effete in the West?"

"We're rotten, anyway," said Ishbel Dane softly. "I don't believe there's a chance for the West, because it's going back to the jungle. I'd rather stand or fall by some sort of ideals than live like a female tiger. I'd rather be laughed at for it, if the sense of humor demands it. We're supposed to be anti-God in Moscow. I'm twenty-three, but I never found a God till I came here, Lee. But it's a different God."

"I'm not laughing," Lee Armitage's voice was grave.

He could see her flushed cheek where the red-gold hair hung straight upon it, cut Robot-fashion. It was strange to look at the American girl and then at Lidoshka Wei. West and East. Ishbel Dane had been the spoiled daughter of Harrison Dane, President of the Dental Supplies Corporation, until she had



Lidoshka Wei, charming, demure . . . . who thrust a blade into the heart of the man she loved, because she had been ordered to!

turned Communist girl and come to Moscow. Lidoshka Wei, on her fourteenth birthday, had been stripped and slowly roasted by a drunken Chinese general, somewhere outside the walls of Pekin. The skin, from left thigh to foot, was the work of one of Moscow's cleverest plastic surgeons, and only a tiny limp in Lidoshka Wei's butterfly movements remained. It had not prevented her from becoming the Oriental star of a score of Soviet propaganda-films.

Lee Armitage rose with a grunt and threw himself upon the plush couch with obvious relief. Cushions on the floor made his knees ache. The long, moody silences which always occurred in Russian conversation turned him uncomfortable, though he was used to them.

"Tide's rising in Red Square," he said, listening.

That noise always sent a thrill through him—the noise of surging crowds. There was brass music and the clop of horses' hoofs and then a deep, moving murmur that rose and fell, but always continued. It went on invisibly beyond the curtained window, like some underground river whose shallows gave out little cries and shouts.

"I call that sound the Russian National Anthem," said Armitage.

"It is." Ishbel Dane looked at him swiftly. "You're pretty quick, Lee, in spite of being a hopeless capitalist. I'd call it the National Anthem of Asia in this case, since they're going to lay the foundation-stone of your Asiatic Palace. Won't you be proud when it's finished, Lee?"

"My job," returned Armitage dryly. "Guess I'd help do a marble palace for Mussolini just as well, and with less chance of being shot for sabotage. Prohackai is going to give an address out yonder, isn't he?"

"Yes. We're all going out in a minute or two."

"I've never heard a Chink's voice through a microphone," said Armitage, "though his is more like an African tribal drum."

Prohackai had lounged now, with his brilliant smile, from the room, and Lidoshka Wei was in the tiny scullery, making coffee. In the cluttered and steam-heated room, with its faded carpets and heavy tapestries impregnated by the scents of Russian cooking, Ishbel Dane and Lee Armitage alone remained, enclosed by a silence which the noise of the crowd outside washed against like waves of the sea.

"Cheap, Lee," she said. "I wish you wouldn't. It makes no difference out here if you think of a man as a Chink. You don't understand. Prohackai's a wonderful creature. I'm nearly frightened of having him up here, the Kremlin looks upon him as so precious."

There was silence again, save that, outside, a loud-speaker began to marshal the crowds in a brazen and inhuman voice.

"Wish you'd quit this Flowery-Land-in-Moscow business, Ishbel, and come back to America with me."

HER blue eyes glimmered. Then they hardened a little.

"It's no use, Lee. Russia's got me. I'm an American Communist-girl in the Soviet States, and I glory in it. I'm hopeless from your point of view. I believe all that stuff about the new paradise, and I want to be there when it happens. I've got religion. Oh, don't you see? Short of blowing up the old world and starting all over again, there was no chance there. This part of the world was blown up before I came, and I'm in at the rebuilding. It's great."

"How do you know it won't smash to smaller smithereens than ever?" asked Armitage slowly.

"We shall have tried," breathed the girl, all firm mouth and chin and shining eyes.

"So you won't marry me—even in Moscow here?"

"Never, Lee. There's—somebody else."

"Guess I ought to have known. A Communist guy?"

"A Communist guy." Her chin went

up, dangerously; and then she laughed, though a flush stayed on her cheeks. "Are you afraid for my morals, Lee? You ought to know that the morals of Moscow are the best in the world now."

IF it was a shock,—and it was that, though he had half known it,—he absorbed it impassively, while a squadron of airplanes droned out in the dark purple of the night overhead, and the bright lamp on the floor flickered slightly. . . .

"It's a darned cruel rebuilding, in my humble opinion. Blood for mortar and willing slaves for labor. The Brotherhood of Man. All the world eating the same mess of pottage—cabbage-soup and black bread—from China to Chicago. And the Gay-pay-oo to see you don't complain."

"What a picture!" mocked Ishbel. "Gay-pay-oo! And blood! That's mostly hooey, Lee. I haven't seen much of either yet. I expect I shall have to go back to New York when the gangs and the police are out, if I want to. It makes me tired. And it's nearly time we got out into Red Square."

As she came to her feet, Armitage felt a thrill of almost savage concern for her. She was so unlike the white-faced and burning-eyed women of Moscow—yet. In that bleak country where scarcely anybody save the very young laughed, she looked too happy and glowing. But she had their whipcord soul. He, Lee Armitage, was outside her pale of dreams, though it included all mankind, and one other particular one. He could guess who it was.

"I was a darned fool to meet up with you again, Ishbel."

"Why?" Her warm hand touched his. He would never understand the fierce fascination of that great city, suffering for the millennium, the surge of grubbily nourished crowds waiting for a dawn to break, the rose-leaf softness of Lidoshka—the sense of fetters left far behind. "Why, Lee? We've been great friends. And you're not going back to America till the Asiatic Palace is built."

"They want to fire me now, for some reason. Never mind that. . . . Are that Chinese girl and Prohackai in love with each other?"

From the little scullery came the tinkle of coffee-cups. Lidoshka Wei was singing in a sweet, quavering, doll-like voice.

"They're married. Last week. Though Prohackai stays as a guest of the Kremlin."

"Marriage *à la* Russe, I suppose. By a dirty-nailed clerk at two rubles a time."

"Cheap again, Lee," Ishbel murmured with a frown. "It's marriage as it should be in every country. Partnership."

She called "Lidoshka!" and the Chinese girl came fluttering out from the scullery. Though she had on a blue frock, and silk stockings glinted above her little polished jack-boots, she moved glidingly, and set the coffee on the table like an animated doll. The lamp on the floor set all manner of shadows dancing on her tiny features but left her eyes glittering little matrices of jet. Armitage thought they looked at him, searched him curiously, from a mask that was centuries old.

"Where is Comrade Prohackai?"

Lidoshka sat down on a small Manchurian stool. She smiled with her carmined lips.

"He will not be long. The people are waiting in Red Square for him. But he keeps them waiting—always. He is in my room. There is a figure of Buddha in my room—beheaded. Comrade Ishbel does not like it. She says it is gruesome,"—an apologetic shrug of lissome shoulders. "But one must have symbols. Prohackai was once a priest in a Buddhist temple. It was he who cut off the Buddha's head and left the sword hanging above the idol. He calls it the Sword of the Future. It pleases him to stand before the Buddha now, and set the head in place, and kow-tow a little, mocking, with laughter, and then knock the head off again. He told you the East had no laughter, but there is that kind. He will be here in a moment."

ARMITAGE was conscious of a jar, but he smiled back. He thought of the raftered sun-parlor of Harrison Dane's house that looked out on the blue of Long Island Sound, and this Oriental-scented apartment in Moscow where, it was said, the steel of a new civilization was being forged.

"Ishbel!"

She had moved to the window, drawn the curtains, and opened its double casements. The wind came in like a cold knife to touch her face, which was as absorbed as a child's, but stronger, far stronger. Her hand fell on his arm as she pointed.

Moscow poured in upon them; clamor of people and threadwork of lamps, towers of the Kremlin against one pink slit

in the black sky, motionless sentries by the flood-lighted Iberian Virgin, clanging tramway-cars and a gout of flame on the horizon where the furnaces of the Amo factory licked their flame. And Red Square, filling as a gigantic lake might fill, with the radiant island where the mummified remains of one, Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov, who called himself Lenin, lay.

"Shut it!" said Armitage, with a touch of something that approached harshness.

It was almost grotesque to stand behind the fastened window again, in the stifled sweetness of the apartment, Lee thought. He was jealous of Moscow, jealous of this grim, striving Russia. Yet he wanted badly to get out of this bagnio-smelling place, even among the unwashed crowds, the lean and oily workmen. The room was so suavely quiet, though the tumult murmured outside. A thin, spicy scent emerged from the inner-room. Perhaps the Mongol was burning some sort of blasphemous incense before his Buddha. Armitage gulped his coffee with an almost comic feeling of disgust at the thought. But Lidoshka Wei sipped hers daintily on the stool, with porcelain fingers holding the cup, patting her mouth with carmine after each sip.

Armitage suggested clumsily. "I guess Prohackai—your husband—will be late if he hangs round much longer."

"Fetch him, Lidoshka," said Ishbel. "Otherwise we may have Mr. Armitage's friends of the Gay-pay-oo up to see if anything has happened to him."

THE Chinese girl rose with a faint titter behind her exquisite smile. The lamp flared in the wind of her skirt and her shadow danced on the heavy curtains that hung the room. She turned the brass handle of a closed door and opened it gently with a birdlike cry. Holding it slightly ajar, she put her head into the room. A small white hand rested on the jamb and, watching it, Lee Armitage saw it suddenly shrink and tighten. It slid limply down, with a slight scratching sound.

Armitage found himself across the room. He reached Lidoshka Wei as she backed slowly and turned a face from which every expression save terror had been wiped.

"Lee!"

"Keep back, Ishbel. There's something in there."

Later, Lee Armitage remembered that one of the airplanes, tumbling and zooming over Red Square, clattered down close over the house just then and some old woman, watching from a window screamed nervously. But he was staring into the inner room where the broad shoulders and shapely torso of Prohackai, the Mongol, seemed to be kneeling over something. Thick smoke-wisps curled about him from a brazier that burned near one big foot. Crouched forward, something seemed to be clasping him close, some dark, shining figure, all belly and crossed legs. A small, furry dog bolted forth—Lidoshka Wei's Astrakhan terrier which, as a "luxury dog" allowed to an artiste, had a blue card of its own.

"A trance of some kind," muttered Armitage.

BUT he found his eyes transfixed by a piece of metal that gleamed dully against the dark folds of Prohackai's *rubashka,* beneath the left shoulder. It might have been a buckle, but it was not a buckle. Nor was the steady *drip-drip-drip* either rain or an overturned water-bottle. The metal was a sword-hilt and the blade had passed through Prohackai's bull-body, spitting him to the wooden Buddha,—its head had fallen off again now,—while the drip was Prohackai's blood that was creeping to the burning brazier and set the hot metal of it hissing with a faint sound. . . .

Armitage bent over the great shaggy head and looked once at the still face, but not again. An expression of great alertness came upon his own face. His eyes, cold and astringent, went to the small window of the room.

"It's open, Lee," came a voice by his side. "Is Prohackai dead?"

"As Buddha. Don't go near, Ishbel. Somebody came through that window and pinned him as he was doing his mumbo-jumbo. This is the back of the house, isn't it? And that's the sword which he hung over the Buddha, I guess. Short, but long enough. A neat job. Two hands and a downward lunge. Queer that his head's just where the Buddha's was before he cut it off."

"Listen!" said Ishbel. She was as pale as alabaster, but cool. Through the slightly open window the giant sounds in Red Square had taken on the semblance of an impatient murmur. A band finished the "Internationale" and started it over again. A loud-speaker bawled something.

"They want him. They're waiting. I shall have to go and tell them what's

The blade had passed through Prohackai's body, spitting him to the wooden Buddha. . . . A neat job!

happened. You don't know what they think of him. He's a—a sort of minor prophet. Oh, it's all ghastly, Lee. Some enemy of Russia must have done it. Who—"

Armitage drew her out and closed the door of the inner room.

"No use touching him. Do they know he's up here?"

"I don't think so. He goes—he went everywhere. But we must call the police."

"The Gay-pay-oo," said Armitage thoughtfully. "It'll be a case for the Three Letters."

A little bead of perspiration glistened on his forehead. He saw that the Chinese girl sat huddled in a chair looking at her skirt upon which was a faint red paw-mark. The little dog, whining at her feet, must have passed through the pool of blood on his way out of the room, and printed it on her knee. It was all fantastic beyond belief in that city of machines and card-indexes and bleak efficiency—just as the colored towers of the old Kremlin would be fantastic against the flood-lighted iron and concrete of the Asiatic Palace.

"You're terribly frightened of the Ogpu," said Ishbel, though her voice shook. "You've been listening to the tales of some old *bourgeois*. That was long ago. They're humane and sensible now, for—

for a new country. They wouldn't think of—"

Her eyes widened. She did not finish. Lee Armitage had gripped both her hands. There was a faint, metallic smile about him now. He seemed leaner, grimmer, but gentler.

"I'll argue about the Brotherhood of Man with you, kid. But not about the Ogpu. I'm prejudiced. Listen: What is that mob outside going to do when they learn that Prohackai has been stabbed up here? Three of us and no more than an open window to prove we're innocent. They won't stop to take photographs and fingerprints. A whole regiment of Red Guards wouldn't succeed in escorting us halfway to the Butyrka Prison. We've got to beat it from here. And quick."

"No! It's cowardly. We didn't kill him, did we? I shall stay and—and explain."

JUST then Lidoshka Wei lifted her head. She had been like a crumpled flower till then, sitting in a still, Oriental grief, a tragic fatalism, that shut out everything else, while the little dog licked his paws by the stove and whimpered at the taste. But now, the Chinese girl swayed to her feet and began to move toward the door of the apartment. Her hearing was quicker than her two companions and she had caught some sound on the stairs; footsteps which detached themselves from the ever-present noises of the building, the crying baby overhead, the emery-wheel of the cripple who, having no legs, polished phonograph-pins for Berlin and London and earned his black bread at home.

Ishbel held her breath. She found her fingers clasped on Armitage's wrist as she watched. The footsteps drew nearer and louder. There was a heavy knock at the door. With a shimmering smile, Lidoshka Wei opened it. An exclamation left her.

"Prohackai, the Mongol, my husband? But we were just coming out into Red Square to hear him speak. He has not been here all day, though I am Lidoshka Wei, his little wife."

She pouted, though her smile was charming, demure. She opened the door invitingly and Ishbel felt a movement as though Armitage moved to his hip-pocket but controlled himself. There was a small throng of men and women on the landing, perplexed and touched with indignation.

"No? He must be somewhere. We are coming out in a moment. Prohackai will not fail the people, never fear."

Lidoshka Wei closed the door softly and the deputation went clattering downstairs. She waited a moment with the smile dying from her face, and then, ashen-faced, her eyes closed and hands outstretched, came across. With a sort of obeisance, she crumpled down at the feet of the American girl, and beat her breast softly, wholly Eastern in her grief and panic, in the oval, haggard mask of her face, whereon fear indelible was written.

"Do you hear? There are five thousand, ten thousand—more. They wait in Red Square. Men and women. The women will be worst when they find that Prohackai is dead, up here. Dead with his own sword. The women were worst in Yenchang. Did I tell you, Comrade Ishbel? The soldiers threw down little Jessamine, who was my friend, from the window of the old temple where we hid. The women caught her. She had on her silk bridal gown one moment—for she knew she must die—the next she was naked, and the next—"

"Be quiet, Lidoshka. You told me."

"Then come. There is time—just. Before they return."

CHAPTER II

TO Ishbel Dane, Moscow, until then, had been as friendly and nearly as commonplace as New York. Life was nearer to the bone than in America, electric with energy, roseate with dreams. It was adventure, but sane and absorbing adventure. History had turned over the blood-blotted pages and she was in at the rebuilding of a new world where all the old shibboleths went for nothing.

Youth's chance.

She wanted to make some commonsensical protest as she passed out into the street, with Lidoshka's fingers on the sleeve of her wolfskin coat. This was flight from murder—but a murder that could have taken place in any other city. She said:

"It's all mad, Lee—Lidoshka! We must go to the police."

"Presently. But not yet."

The Chinese girl spoke sibilantly, soothingly, with the nostrils of her small nose stretched wide. In spite of herself, Ishbel felt a twinge of unreality, almost of delirium. They had reached Red

Square, now, and a complete purple dark was in the sky, save where the red tail-lamps of the airplanes slashed it as they cavorted only a few hundred yards overhead. All about them, the people still surged their way. There was a slight fog which hung in wisps above the blinding floodlights. The pale marble of Lenin's Tomb was red-lighted and tiny figures were visible on the top of it—Comrade Stalin, himself, perhaps, and other members of the almighty *Politbureau.* On the far side of Red Square a gigantic picture of Lenin, with eyes like cupolas, hung upon some building.

A VOICE said, magnified to a thousand proportions, but still suave and detached as the icy wind blew it about:

". . . . *New Asiatic Palace. . . . The home of a giant bureau to train Asiatic comrades in Marxian Self-improvement, a beautiful skyscraper upon the* Amerikanska *plan to hold a thousand offices. . . . Comrade Prohackai, the new President of the Asiatic Cell, has sent a message: He is stricken down with a sudden sickness and cannot come himself. But he trumpets this message—*"

"Good God!" muttered Lee Armitage, very badly startled. But he began to feel mechanically cool now. It was impossible that the brazen voice should know what had happened to Prohackai no more than fifteen minutes before, unless. . . . but political assassinations were over in Russia nowadays. Finished all over the world since Sarajevo. In Russia, a white-hot multitude, straining for the Plan, took out traitors and transgressors, high and low, and executed them. . . . unless that had been an execution.

A little moan came from Lidoshka Wei. She leaned against the wall, her face an oval of chalk.

"Prohackai speaks! Listen!"

"It's a gramophone record," said Ishbel, unsteadily. "Only a gramophone record, poor Lidoshka! We'd better move away from Red Square, I think. Can we go to your rooms, Lee? Poor Lidoshka's badly shaken and so am I for that matter. I'll leave her there and then go and tell the police. You needn't come. I can tackle this. I'm of the Party."

Self-possessed, even a little hard, she frowned at him, setting him aside, gently, but firmly. The crowd had poured past them, and the three of them were almost alone. Lidoshka Wei's small head was hanging. Presently she lifted her hand to her forehead and Armitage stared at it. The flesh of the soft palm was torn and still bleeding. He exclaimed clumsily, before he realized—

"Hullo—your hand!"

"It was one of the coffee-cups which I broke in the scullery," said Lidoshka Wei, wearily and with a long shudder. "There is blood everywhere today. It is like my childhood."

Ishbel placed her arm about the shoulders of the Chinese girl, and held out her hand in silence for Armitage's key. Even then he experienced the tiny flame of resentment which her hardihood always lit in him. But he made no protest, for his thoughts were galloping. (A little white hand torn to the bone by a broken coffee-cup!)

"Better not be seen together. I'll come along in a few minutes."

He watched the two girls cross the street and vanish beneath the arc-lights. By now, the stentorian record of Prohackai's voice, that canned larynx of a dead man which set his nerves on edge, had finished. A droshky, its horse white with frost crystals that covered it like pale armor, tinkled by. The massed bands blared again in Red Square, the reverberation beating up like fire from the pink brick of the Kremlin walls.

Armitage began to walk in the shadows, back to Lidoshka Wei's apartment.

IT reared, gaunt and yellow, the old mansion of a rich merchant who had long ago starved to death in its basement with his stomach full of rags and paper, while the New World marched overhead. At most times, it was a warren, but now the excitement in Red Square had emptied it.

The chipped and soiled staircase took him silently. Armitage picked his way through the litter of primus-stoves and boxes, perambulators and dustbins, without accident. Only an abandoned baby cried, and the emery-wheel of the cripple upstairs went on doggedly. (If the sword-hilt that lay like a buckle in the Mongol's shoulder was broken or roughened enough to tear the palm that held it. . . . What strength the girl must have!)

He was sweating when the key slipped into the door. Luckily he had been the last out and kept hold of it! A chill passed through him as he stepped inside and the fœtid, exhausted scent of Prohackai's brazier met him in a whiff.

The inner door was ajar. He was creeping, involuntarily on tiptoe, toward it when he stood stock-still at the realization that every electric bulb in the apartment was alight.

"Sit down, Armitage," a quiet voice said.

Armitage managed to spring back. But the door had clicked close behind him. He spoke through his teeth, in the ugly and incredulous shock of surprise.

"Valentine! What the devil are you doing here?"

"In the name of the Government, Armitage. You'll sit down?"

There was deep amusement in Erik Valentine's quiet voice. It was a lean, languid face that looked quizzically up into Armitage's and a delicate hand that slowly lowered a Mauser barrel from his breastbone. He was pulled gently down to the settee.

"So you're Gay-pay-oo?"

"An unnecessary question. Not always a wise one. Sit still and watch, my dear Armitage. Actions speak louder than words. But don't move."

ARMITAGE sat with the blood beating in waves through him. He was trapped, he knew. But—the trapper! At some of the precious studio-parties of Greenwich Village, Erik Valentine, the artist, drawling revolution and hell-fire for the Capitalist, in immaculate suit and perfect dress-tie, had been a figure of fun, like the cubes and prisms and stringy nudes he painted to illustrate the Class Struggle in America. Even in Moscow, where Armitage had bumped up against him like an apparition, his long limbs and dainty gait made him a deer in a herd of striving bullocks. Now, with a pistol butt hanging negligently in his manicured fingers, he was unbelievable.

"I forgot you were half-Russian, Valentine."

"Altogether Russian now, Armitage. But watch."

Armitage perceived that there were half a dozen other men in the apartment, blue-bloused workmen. Four of them came at a brisk walk from the inner room where Prohackai had died; they were carrying an oblong deal box upon their shoulders.

Two more followed with something wrapped in a red baize curtain. The lamp which Lidoshka Wei had left burning upon the floor smoked and flared as their boots fanned past it. Armitage's strained eyes caught the glint of black, polished wood beneath the red wrapping.

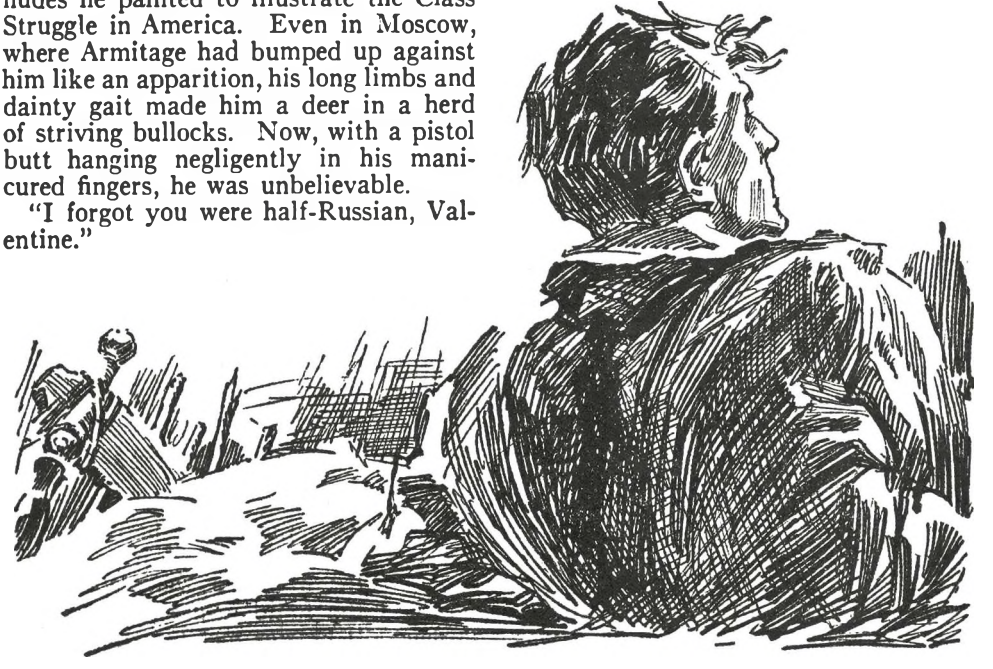
"That's the Buddha," he said.

"Exactly," Valentine nodded. He brushed back his long, fair hair. "Prohackai is inside the box—which, to be momentarily unpleasant, is a coffin. I believe the Chinese woman's dog is also in it. The little brute made a noise when we came in. . . . This is a clearance of the débris, you must understand, Armitage. One of my men even has some sort of dope for cleaning the carpet. There is a covered van waiting outside. The bill will go in to Lidoshka Wei. Cleaning and removal. —Cigarette?"

Armitage shook his head.

"No. You know who killed Prohackai?"

"You'd think little Lidoshka was hardly strong enough. But she is. Little



weasels have wiry bodies, you know. It was a downward blow, and I expect she wanted to get it over quickly, because she loved him. She had a heart . . . . but one mustn't grow sentimental. She'll have her reward at Prohackai's funeral. It'll be a magnificent one. He died of apoplexy. It's peculiar to Mongols."

"Was he a traitor?"

"So you feel better at last, comrade?" asked the boy. "I am Sasha the Frog. . . . . We were liquidating your case just now."

"One presumes so," said Valentine, negligently.

Erik Valentine had long, slim fingers, with extraordinary spatulate tips. He squeezed his breeches leg with one hand as a contented cat works its claws. Armitage watched them fascinatedly, with his thoughts racing. He had stumbled into some deep and secret frame-up of that most secret thing, the secret police. That jarred him enough. But this studio-lizard, this velvet Communist he had laughed at in New York and smiled at in his Moscow transfiguration jarred him still more. Scratch a Russian, you found a Tartar. Scratch a half-Russian, you found God knew what. . . . There was no bottle-green uniform, no jack-boots. Erik Valentine wore ordinary clothes with a touch of foppishness seldom seen among the plain and dour proletariat.

"AWKWARD, this"—Armitage's lips tightened. He sent a quick glance at the Mauser. "I've stumbled on a political frame-up of the Ogpu, I judge. No use promising to keep my mouth shut, Valentine?"

"Afraid not, Armitage. Too big. The job I mean, not your mouth."

It was damnable, hearing the man speak cool English.

"There'll be a hell of a row when they find my body. *Amerikanska,* you know. And some architect, also."

Valentine smiled.

"We'll get another architect in. In the matter of the body—well, look at Prohackai. He'll be buried in the foundations of the Asiatic Palace, like the Greeks of old buried their great men."

"Then shoot the works, you half-breed whelp! . . . Sorry, didn't mean to lose my temper."

The gun slipped from Valentine's fingers to the carpet. The thought flashed across Armitage that the man meant it, to give him a chance of a hold-up and escape. He knew the thought for the damfoolery it was an instant later, when he ducked to snatch at the weapon. As he bent, the spadelike finger-tips clamped at his throat, the lean figure beside him, kicked stiffly and dropped upon him silently. If there had ever been an execution in Moscow, this was one. . . .

The room swelled and burst into a jigsaw of swimming ceiling and furniture, of two blue-bloused men who stood still, watching and waiting. Through an insensate rage, Lee Armitage felt the pressure of those slim hands kneading at his throat while the stucco ceiling of the room turned red, then blackened to nothing. His last thought was that he had never dreamed death by strangling to be so much like a cordite explosion. . . .

Valentine, on the pavement outside, turned to watch the tail-light of a small pantechnicon-van that waited for a tramcar to clang over the crossing in the distance, and then vanished.

A girl came swaggering out of the dim doorway of some underground café. Her carmined lips broke into a provocative smile as she thrust a cigarette between them. She was no light o' love. There were no such in Moscow, now. Women were emancipated and loved without payment, when they had time to spare from work, if they were inclined that way. One registered on Friday, and paid a rouble or two for divorce on Monday. There were magnificent *crèches* for the children, if any.

"A match if you please, Comrade Longshanks," she said, impudently. "And Lidoshka and Comrade Ishbel have gone to the American architect's rooms on the Moskva Boulevard to await him there."

"He has already gone home," replied Valentine. He lit the girl's cigarette for her, watching the flicker of light on white cheekbone and tawny eyes.

She passed on. Perhaps she understood, perhaps not. The Gay-pay-oo was like a jungle—a thousand eyes watching each other as well as their prey, in order that the New Brotherhood of Man should be preserved. It gave him an icy tingle of excitement. Long ago, he had sloughed the last skin of Erik Valentine, of New York. But he could still enjoy that deadly secret thrill, that sense that he was a Knight of the Hidden Blade.

RIGHT on the flaming edge of Red Square, where the crowd roared and teams of Tartar horsemen were chariot-racing their dapple-gray ponies past Lenin's tomb, there was a telephone-kiosk. One spoke a word very softly and the hum gave place to a velvety, private silence.

Koregorvsky himself answered to the code-word. His voice had the impatience of one who had waited in boredom. But he whistled softly.

"Armitage? What fingers you have, Valentine! I always suspected they could do more than paint pictures. And wits! You shall have the Order of the Red Flag for this, always assuming that

you wear it tattooed on your skin for secrecy, eh? It is all excellent. And Comrade Ishbel—hum, that is a private affair, *n'est-ce pas?* A celibate's blessing go with you, my dear Valentine!"

VALENTINE could see the spider screw up his face, there in his web. But he was evidently pleased. Within half an hour the bull-body of Prohackai would be in the embalmer's hands; the loud-speakers, next morning, would be regretting his death from apoplexy, and trumpeting of the cherry-blossom of freedom that would spring for the East from his tomb. As for Lee Armitage, designer of the Asiatic Palace—

"Mortician!" Valentine's face was dark and triangular with suave but grim mirth.

Flakes of soft wet snow were beginning to fall softly. His steps quickened. They took him along quiet streets to a huddle of old but massive houses, on a brightly lit boulevard by the river. In the pillared doorway of one of them, a bleareyed concièrge blinked and watched him go up the broad staircase. . . .

"Erik!"

The girl whose pale but alert face showed behind the cautiously opened door threw it quickly open.

"Hullo, little cuckoo in the nest! This is unexpected." Valentine entered and looked round. Though he laughed, his expression was one of quick, hurt jealousy. "Armitage here? I want to pull him out to a little party I'm throwing. . . . Why, Lidoshka!"

Ishbel Dane looked at his frowning and astonished face. A little drift of color came into her own cheeks. She went close to Valentine: an ivory Galatea who had not yet come to life, the man thought. She had eyes like the Caspian, and the slim shoulders and throat of a goddess; her mouth was red with unawakened passion, yet trembling on the verge. Russian women of 1932 never trembled on the verge. They either wrapped themselves aloof in cold ideals, or plunged in. That was why he loved her—for he had always been an epicure.

"Prohackai's dead. He was killed in our—in Lidoshka's apartment—murdered. We were all there. Lidoshka, I, Lee Armitage. Have you seen Lee?"

"No."

He caught her arm, and lowered her to a chair. While Ishbel talked in a low voice, Lidoshka Wei stood very small and stiff, her tiny hands hanging, and her almond eyes looking at him. She had the look of a woman who had been deflowered of everything that life held. Behind her was Lee Armitage's small bedroom. And from the arras-hung doorway at the back of the building came a curious crunching and roaring sound. It was the Moskva River, swollen with floes and chunks of melting ice, surging past like the Revolution itself.

"—So we came here. I couldn't leave Lidoshka to go for the police. She's in a terrible state. She carries some tablets about with her. He was her husband, you know. I was afraid—"

Lidoshka Wei came slowly forward with something almost hypnotic in her gait. Her oval face was like old ivory. She laid light fingers on Ishbel's shoulders. A little perfume with which she touched her nails reached Ishbel.

Valentine spoke. "The police must never know that any of you were in the apartment, Ishbel. You understand that?"

"But why?" Her eyes widened. Then she winced. Upon a traffic-island of the Moskva Boulevard, directly opposite the apartment, the Propaganda Committee had built a giant figure of the Proletariat, and put a loud-speaker in his chest. Above the grinding of the ice, the canned voice of Prohackai, liquid but tremendous, spoke red-hot words. A whispered wail left Lidoshka.

Valentine took Ishbel's hands in his. He was a splendid actor, and he had turned fierce with anxiety. His glance burned a little. A warm thrill passed through Ishbel's bewilderment and fear as she caught it.

"The Three Letters would not be very tender with any of you. How could they be? They're police, after all. And this murder was political. Prohackai was assassinated by some enemy of Russia. It's all too big for you, Ishbelovna."

"We're all innocent," Ishbel frowned. "I hate showing the white feather, Erik. I do wish Lee would come!"

"Armitage can look after himself. It wasn't his apartment. It was yours and Lidoshka's."

"Where is Lidoshka?"—swiftly.

SHE had thought Lidoshka Wei still stood behind her; but the Chinese girl was nowhere to be seen. A sick premonition stabbed through Ishbel. She sprang to the curtain of the bedroom and passed through. It was dark, save for the glow of the lighted sky at

the big French window, which swung wide open. And Lidoshka stood poised upon the small balcony.

"Lidoshka!"

The Chinese girl turned and smiled. She made a sort of obeisance—listened a moment. The sound of the rushing ice-fragments directly below her was like a rolling-mill. But through it came the liquid voice of Prohackai's voice from the phonograph, thick, but piercing, from the chest of the Proletarian on the Boulevard. . . .

Lidoshka vanished. Ishbel found herself hanging to the rail of the balcony. Liquid steel that boiled and poured forward, one moment, watered silk that caught the lights of bridges and streets, the next, the ice-strewn water passed onward, frenzied with its newly-found freedom. The floes ground against the green stones of the building, but there was no Lidoshka Wei. Only a little black velvet cap carried for an instant on one of the ice-slabs before it turned over.

"Ishbel!"

"She's gone!"

Her teeth were closed tight to stop them from chattering. She was aware that Erik Valentine's arms were about her, and that she was desperately glad of their strength.

"Why—"

"She was an Oriental. It's terrible. But no one could have stopped her, Ishbelovna. She walked alone. Don't tremble, little girl! This is Russia, the New World. It hasn't cooled yet. Death and work and love are all fierce things here, and live together. She went into the river because Prohackai is dead. But also, I think, to save you."

"Let me go," said Ishbel slowly. She sat on the table, her head in her hands.

"I love you. I worship you. You know it."

She lifted her face.

"What's the use of that, just at the moment, Erik? It won't take us out of all this nightmare."

HE caught up her furs and put them across her shoulders. As he did so, his glance fell upon his own strong white hands. Death and work and love in both of them!

"We must wait for Lee."

"We mustn't. He's safe. Ishbel, listen! Lidoshka is in the Moskva. It was very quick for her, tender-heart. She left you for me to save. If the agents come, I shall swear that you were with me in my studio by the Tverskaya since three o'clock this afternoon. You'll be there this evening when the guests arrive. We shall tell them—"

ISHBEL came, with a touch of exhaustion, to her feet. The hollow voice in the Boulevard had stopped. Only the crunching ice went on.

"What?"

"That we're registered—married."

Valentine was drawing her close. Deep into his eyes she looked, telling herself that she had loved him since she came to Moscow, and before. Some squeamishness had held her back, some tinsel of dreams from the old world hampered. In no other country could woman give her love so freely and remain her own master. Yet she had withheld it. His hot lips were on hers—sweet, intoxicating, full of the animal strength without which the crippled world could never be shattered to bits and remolded nearer to the heart's desire. . . .

"Not yet. I'm still *bourjoi*—a bit. Tonight I'll pretend. If you think it necessary, you can tell them. But until tomorrow, or perhaps next week—"

"All right, *bourjoi*. Come!"

Ishbel felt deadly tired. It clogged thought. Lidoshka had thrown herself into the ice-broth of the river; she, Ishbel Dane, was fleeing from the Ogpu (that name which, in New York, had always reminded her of a jolly golliwog of some sort). She might be charged with the killing of Prohackai, the Flame-thrower, she who had come to Moscow full of icy enthusiasm for the Brotherhood of Man. It was mad; and she had always fought, body and soul, against the notion that anything in Moscow was mad.

Ishbel sat in Erik Valentine's studio an hour later, while people drifted in. They talked. Everybody in Russia talked. They ate meat and *kasha* and sandwiches, and drank brandy, sitting among Erik's unfinished canvases on the plush settees and the worn carpet. They swelled before her tired sight, and smiled gravely when Erik, with his arm on her shoulder, told them that they were to register; that she had been all day there making the apartment ready for two lovers and married people. . . .

It was long past midnight when the last of them went.

"Ishbel!"

"No, I'm tired. I don't want to talk.

I don't want to do anything. You're not —you're not too Russian yet, Erik?"

She curled up on the couch almost before he could answer. The straight candor of her eyes, the faint, ironical smile, sophisticated yet virginal with strength, disarmed him.

"Tomorrow, then."

"Soon, Erik. Poor Lidoshka. I can't think tonight."

She was asleep, though his lips were on hers. He rose with a deep breath to his feet. Something foxlike faded out of his eyes, and he laughed. There was no woman in Moscow, but this one. She came with a red-hot soul and innocence, and both were his for the leisurely taking. Two o'clock, and the "Internationale" floating through the cold air from the Kremlin clocks. Prohackai would be neatly embalmed; the news of his sudden death from apoplexy would be tapping over the telegraph-wires of *Pravda* and *Isvestia*. Armitage's body would not be found yet. Lidoshka, who had thrust a blade into the heart of the man she loved because she had been ordered to!

Valentine held back a shiver.

"Damned cold!"

He went into the inner room, closing the door carefully behind him.

CHAPTER III

ONE can come from the borderland of death, back to Moscow or any other city, without a jar.

Sometimes sheer languor cushions the shock, as with Lee Armitage. He lay wrapped in some thick blanket, languidly watching the glow of a hurricane-lamp upon a circle of strange, solemn faces. It was underground. He could hear the drip of melting snow above the earnest *bumble-bumble* of voices. Now and then a ragged figure came down the roughly-dug staircase, and took its place on some upturned box among the circle of strange, solemn, wolfish faces.

Some involuntary sound of weakness left Armitage. It was the signal for the half-dozen faces at the table to swerve round and look at him. He saw then that they were all children. Not one was more than fourteen years old. But such mingled wisdom and cunning, drollery and bestiality, Armitage had never seen on human faces outside a Dostoievsky novel.

"So you feel better at last, comrade? I am Sasha the Frog, the chairman of the *komintern*. We were liquidating your case, just now."

It was a small, impish creature with the body of a cretin and the face of a Botticelli angel who addressed Armitage with dignity. Understanding began to flash upon him. Sasha yelled, and a hunchbacked little girl with a golden aureole of hair came forward carrying a plate of hot *bortsch*. The sour, steaming stuff set the blood moving in Armitage's veins. He made an effort.

"The *Bez Prizorny* have befriended me then, Comrade Sasha?" he asked.

The boy replied with a cherubic grin. A large astrakhan hat all but buried his head. A long-tailed coat with brass buttons trailed about his short legs, which, encased in big boots, made him look like a portrait of the *Artful Dodger* by some Russian Cruikshank. He made no attempt to hide Armitage's gold snake-ring, which shone upon his knuckly finger.

"They call us by that name, the Kremlin, the Komsomols and the Social Workers shock-brigadiers, who would catch us and put us in a cage. We call ourselves Freebooters of the Five Year Plan. It matters nothing, comrade. We found your body lying in the snow above, seemingly dead. Somebody had placed it there, so we brought it down here. It was a disagreeable surprise to find you still breathed, though the devil himself seemed to have been squeezing your windpipe."

"Why worry? You got the loot. I beg the *komintern* to kee, it with my blessing, Comrade Sasha."

Lee Armitage trod upon the deadly weakness which assailed him. He must keep his brain clear. These were *Bez Prizorny,* the ditch-delivered brats of Chaos who still lived Ishmael-like all over Russia, in this, the last year of the first Five Year Plan. The State built schools and *crèches,* and made of the bodies and souls of its children clean and healthy beings. *"I have Taught my Grandmother the Brotherhood of Life and Work"* was written on posters in a thousand schoolrooms. But when winter came, the orphan horde of young beggars and robbers, the clubfooted and hunchbacked spawn of past famine and death, came in from the countryside, burrowed into the ground and built snow igloos, governing themselves jealously, running like quicksilver out of hands that would have imprisoned them in schools and given the hopeless ones the lethal chamber. . . .

"WE drew lots while you were ill, comrade." Sasha's unwashed angel's face grinned. "Some of them wanted to let you die, you were so obviously *bourjoi.* But I am a cunning one, you understand. They put me in an institution once, and taught me to read. When I saw in *Pravda* that the *Amerikanska* architect Armitage had unaccountably disappeared, I said: 'No. This is he. We will kidnap him and hold him to ransom as the gang-men do in his country. The Kremlin itself shall deliver five trucks of meat and vegetables, for ransom.'"

"The Kremlin won't, Comrade Sasha. The GPU won't allow it." Armitage sat up, his head in his hands. He had been delirious, he knew. But for how long? Those fingers of Valentine's—he must have a throat like steel. He felt it and found his chin to be covered with a stubble of beard. "Tell me, has the funeral of the Mongol Prohackai taken place yet?"

"Two days ago. He was buried in the foundations of the Asiatic Palace. The Freebooters sent a deputation, though Stalin did not receive them. They got"—Sasha with a chuckle squirmed his misshapen little body that was so like a rat's, and took up an armful from a tin box: wallets, a cheese, a bottle of champagne, a shirt, a Red Guard's bayonet—"these, and other things."

Armitage closed his eyes. A cold and steady rage poured over him. One thing was certain: Erik Valentine, that secret agent, thought he was dead. No doubt, in the dockets of the great GPU building by the Red Square, the decease of the man who had stumbled upon a forbidden sight was marked and approved. If he came to life again, that life would not be worth a moment's purchase. While Russia marched to the millennium, the Gay-pay-oo would come behind him and strike firmly, this time.

ISHBEL! He tried to smile wryly. Ishbel Dane did not believe in the Gay-pay-oo. Ishbel, who had for her friend Lidoshka Wei, the Little Lotus, and Erik Valentine for her lover, her husband perhaps, by this time. . . .

Perhaps he slept, in that den of boy-and-girl bandits. He knew he must make it his hiding-place, precarious as it was, until he could find strength. By guesswork, it was the cellar of some big mansion, on the outskirts of Moscow, razed in the revolution, perhaps, and not yet built upon with the steel and concrete that was to make an American city of the capital of the Soviets. . . .

He awoke, feeling stronger. He must crawl out of that den, and reach Ishbel somehow. Warn her! She was so fearfully innocent, so fearfully and perilously fierce in her beliefs in this New World she had found. But one had to have Russian blood to understand it. Since the Revolution he, Lee Armitage, had been to and fro in that underworld of dreams and paganism, but understood it not one whit, yet. . . .

"Comrade Sasha!"

The lamp was doused. A fire burned in a brazier-bucket. Beside it, in heaven knew what dreams of thwarted childhood, crouched Sasha, chairman of the *Bez Prizorny komintern.* He moved his stunted legs and turned his cherub's face.

"It is night, Comrade Armitage. They are all gone out on their business."

"And you guard me?"

The boy looked back at him with eyes like a little rodent in his beautiful face.

"I guard Maria Vassilissa. She is poisoned."

Armitage bent over and met the gaze of a pair of feverish blue-black eyes that stared at him out of its red kerchief from a bed of straw in the corner. Sasha slowly put down a clasp-knife, but seemed to keep it within reach. His impish look had all gone. There was a savage fatalism on his child's face.

"It is her arm. She tore it upon a spiked fence. The *komintern* say she is certain to die slowly, and therefore it must be hastened. . . . It is the law of the Freebooters, but they must first kill me. They drew lots. One will come back. I am waiting for him."

ARMITAGE unpinned the dirty bandages about the girl-child's arm, and she watched him from a drawn, olive face. He frowned at the swollen and septic limb, which, at a glance, would be gangrenous within twenty-four hours. In his day he had performed much rough surgery with queer instruments and antiseptics. This was bad enough, and urgent too, but not hopeless. Weak as he still felt, the American issued curt commands to Sasha, who sprang, with his underlip quivering, to obey. . . .

It was an hour before Armitage finished. They worked hard. Maria Vassilissa had not winced under the sterilized clasp-knife, but lay like waxwork. The wound was clean and dressed, for in the loot of Prohackai's funeral there was a Red Cross box purloined from the very shoulders of one of the ambulance militia, as he saluted the cortège.

"She should go to the hospital now. It is cleaner there."

Sasha took up Armitage's hand and kissed it quickly, fiercely. He had stuck on his astrakhan cap, and flapped about the cellar like a little jackdaw again—an angel's head upon the tadpole's body. He spoke with the gravity of a Commissar.

"It is against the law. The situation is such, comrade. The Freebooters must have no dealings with the State. We are our own proletarian revolution. We are our own State. This is the classless socialist society. In summer we live in the countryside; in winter we come to Moscow. The clinics and the hospitals are our bitterest enemies, because they would enslave us—we who were born in freedom. As for the hospital,"—Sasha the Frog grinned again,—"I will fetch the hospital to Maria Vassilissa. There is no place that I cannot loot and get away clear from. Even the prisons!"

"Speaking of which, I must get away clear from here, Comrade Sasha. I don't intend to be held to ransom."

Sasha the Frog lit a cigarette. He still kept the clasp-knife handy, with an occasional wary glance at the stairway, and remained close to the bed of Maria Vassilissa, who now slept peacefully.

"The *komintern* decided that the gangmen of America are not according to our ideology. But remember that somebody killed you and left you to look like a victim of the *Bez Prizorny*, comrade."

"I remember that, little frog," replied Armitage grimly. "There is little chance of forgetting."

"We shall meet again, I think. The weasels know the forest better than the wolves. Moscow is my forest. Come."

Sasha the Frog flapped his long sleeves with a grandiloquent gesture. He dipped into the loot chest and handed Armitage a wad of ruble-notes which the American, after a moment's hesitancy, accepted. Then he padded through the dimness with a lamp. The steps were long and winding. But even at the top of them, the stars were not visible. Armitage understood why, as he caught the trickling sound of melting snow. Over the entrance to their burrow the Freebooters of Moscow had built a large snow-house, and the spring was thawing it. In the low doorway a little figure sat huddled in a sheepskin. He was very tiny, very young. A heavy clubfoot sprawled from beneath the sheepskin. The rusty rifle that had rolled against his cheek was twice his length. And a gentle susurration of sound told that the sentry of the Freebooters of Moscow was fast asleep.

Sasha rolled him aside and looked out.

THE piercing air made Armitage dizzy for an instant. It was the early dark hours of morning, and Moscow lay in the hollow below, a myriad clear lamps, the deserted glow of Red Square, the Kremlin fretted against the glare of furnaces on the horizon. In the near foreground was a wilderness of waste lots and garbage heaps, made mysterious by the bright starlight. But something moved among the slushy shadows of the landscape—various things. . . .

"Still!" hissed Sasha the Frog.

The whisper of car engines. Three objects—unfamiliar nowadays—waiting on the outskirts of the lot. Three Black Crow prison-vans. A lighter van that looked like an ambulance. A dim lamp shone on the cherry-colored cap of one of the militia, and on four women, gaunt and big in their cloaks against the sky, before they were merged into the shadows of the ground. The lot was surrounded.

Sasha pulled Armitage back into the igloo.

"It is a raid," he said quietly. "Po-

"Ishbel!" The voice floated down from above, and she felt the fire-escape vibrate. . . . . This room seemed empty; she dropped inside and pulled the window down.

lice and nurses and schoolmistresses, may their bones rot! They will not leave us alone. . . . Maria Vassilissa will get to the hospital after all. How about you, comrade?"

"It's death in earnest for me, if the Gay-pay-oo are there, Comrade Sasha, I think. They will not trouble to make a useful citizen of me."

"The Gay-pay-oo are always there—somewhere. They are lice. Quick! I have a plan."

They were back in the warm, smoky cellar again. Fantastically the figure of Sasha the Frog shambled to an alcove, vanished, and emerged with an armful of clothing—blue blouse and trousers, soiled overalls, scarf, a glazed cap.

"There is a factory card, an identification number, a photograph—everything." The waif was panting with excitement. "The photograph is cracked down the middle, by the grace of God,—my mother believed in the God-machine, I am told,—and you are nearly bearded already. The situation is thus: You are Feodor Petrovitch, a laborer at the Red October Steelworks. It is all on the card. . . . Little Dmitri the Cat brought the clothes in a few nights since. What became of the real Petrovitch I know not; perhaps he was frozen, who knows? Drink from this bottle of vodka, and take it with you. You must smell as if you are drunk, understand? You slept all night in one of the rubbish-pits."

"But you—"

"They will catch the Freebooters as they come home from their night's work. It matters not a kick in the belly. They will all escape again with loot of some sort. Me, it is my ambition to get hold of a Gay-pay-oo secret badge. It would

be very useful on occasion. I shall probably get one from the next green bottle who tries to carry me to a hostel."

SASHA the Frog stuck his fingers between his teeth and choked his own whisper. A red streak of dawn was showing in the eastern sky, turning the derelict lot to a bleak No Man's Land of gutted walls and piled rubbish. Armitage, with the vodka singing in his brain, saw small running figures, chased and corraled by larger ones, heard the snap of a small pistol, followed by a man's husky laugh and a squall like a captured catamount. The returning Freebooters were being bagged.

"Now go. And good fortune, Comrade Feodor Petrovitch."

"The same to you, Comrade Sasha. And thanks, little frog."

Bending low against the dark ground, the American ran a hundred yards across the derelict land, before straightening himself sheepishly in the light of one of the headlamps that glared and blinked at him. He grasped his black bottle, rubbed his eyes sleepily, and put a lot of comic terror into his expression as three militiamen dashed at him, from the ring of vans and ambulances.

Then he was clear. The militia-sergeant helped him with a kick. Obviously this fish was too big, too alcoholized.

A kind of sick exhilaration came upon Lee Armitage, as he lurched, with an unsteadiness not altogether assumed, into a street of barracklike tenements which was already lit by the dawn. It was some raw, unfamiliar suburb. In a workman's restaurant he ate cold fish and drank coffee. The night gangs of workmen streamed in, and he stayed among them; as filthy and oily as any, and as lean and haggard, too. But the exhilaration persisted. Presently he glanced at the smudged identity-card in his pocket. *"Feodor Petrovitch, aged 28, metal-worker, employed at Shop 32, the Red October Metal Works, living at 194Y, Little Sretinka, registered with Lisa Semenovna, machinist."*

"Guess I'll beware of Lisa!"

It was but a glancing thought, for Armitage could not foresee the future. Ishbel! He felt an odd emptiness of dread. . . . Feodor Petrovitch must reconnoiter on behalf of Lee Armitage.

AN hour later he reached the boulevard where the rooms of Lee Armitage, the American architect, had been. The traffic of people and vehicles already hummed like a dynamo. The day came to Moscow without any preliminary yawn, because Moscow, the nerve-center of a sweating country, never slept. On the traffic-island the giant figure of the Proletarian had begun to boom its morning's news and propaganda. There was one foreigner who would never again draw his bedclothes over his head and curse its brazen voice that began so early.

An impulse to try his disguise on the concièrge came, though there was a chance that the fellow was Gay-pay-oo. But as he approached, the concièrge was engaged. He was occupied in conversation with two people, a man and a girl, and a suffocating beat of the pulse came at the sight of the trim tunic and skirt, the glint of the girl's bright, high-poised head. It was no other woman in Moscow but Ishbel Dane. He had stepped blindly forward, before he became aware that her companion was Erik Valentine.

"Nothing." The concièrge's voice held guttural sympathy. "There is no news. When there is, it will be in the newspapers, comrades, never fear."

THE girl turned slowly, her lips compressed, eyes distressed, and the man put an arm gently through hers. The grimy workman in the doorway stood back, staring at them, but neither saw him. They stepped together into the thronged street. The Proletarian, giant hand resting upon Hammer and Sickle, and giant head upraised, sent his bull's voice over the moving people:

"'Europe, financed by the hegemony of American imperialism, is tottering to its fall. We alone are safe, the chosen people of the future,' said Molotov, speaking of the political ends of the second Pyatiletka. . . .

"Latest news, latest news, latest news: The mystery surrounding the disappearance of the American architect Armitage, designer of the Asiatic Palace, has been solved. It is greatly regretted that there is no hope. A gang of Bez Prizorny in the suburb of Kurzstroi have confessed to robbing him and throwing him down a disused well. Early this morning a raid was made upon the wild children's lair, and property belonging to Armitage was discovered. The lair was destroyed, and the children taken to State homes, to be trained as useful citizens. The guilty children are to be suitably punished."

"I thought there were no *Bez Prizorny* left," said Ishbel. Her throat felt dry and suffocated. She was glad of Erik's nearness.

"A few. Just as there are gangs and kidnapers in the American cities. You poor kid, it's knocked you over, hasn't it? No wonder! But I was afraid something like it had happened to poor Armitage."

Ishbel's teeth closed tight. She only glanced sideways at the Proletarian as she and Valentine hurried past it. Till then the fire-signs and loud-speakers of Moscow had thrilled her. Bright trumpets of the new civilization, they had seemed. Now it seemed a beastly and brutal way of giving the news. For one moment Ishbel Dane saw Russia as a yellow-fanged Asiatic, with a giant head scooping the brains of the West and making of them *Frankenstein* monsters. . . . No doubt she was unstrung.

"This and Lidoshka, Erik! I'm not so hard-skinned as I thought."

Valentine caught sight of her pale cheeks, and stopped a passing droshky. He felt warm and exhilarated. His lean and languid face had a delicate color. He glanced down at his long fingers. *Finis, Armitage!*

"You're shaken. Take a day off with me, little one. It'll give you back your nerve."

"No. I shall be better at the clinic."

HE wondered how much longer he would enjoy the sweetness, long drawn out, of her elusive mood. She had promised to register with him, once she knew Armitage's fate. But he did not remind her, just then.

Ishbel let Valentine brush her lips in farewell, and ran across the pavement into the clinic, rather blindly. Among the sun-lamps and the gleaming dio-thermy apparatus with which she worked, with the other white-overalled girl shock-brigadiers of science, she might forget Lee Armitage's fate. What had Erik said? "This is Russia. . . . Death, and work and love are all fierce things here."

But even in the white-enameled wards where the jaded workers of the Plan were made fit for the rank again, her thoughts would not stay put. She had witnessed Prohackai's magnificent funeral. Erik had painted the great watered-silk banner that covered his coffin and was buried with him in the foundations of the Asiatic Palace. Why had they kept secret the manner of his death? And Lidoshka—when Ishbel went to Koregorvsky, the GPU deputy, about Lee Armitage, unknown to Erik, he had asked her gravely to keep secret the fate of Lidoshka Wei, too. . . . She did not like Koregorvsky. He was like some suave spider that tried to weave a sticky strand of web about her, while she sat there. . . . She wondered, a little wearily, why, in a land of such dreams and ideals as had never been known before, there should have to be secret police and political expedients. . .

Lee! Had his end been a political expedient?

"You idiot!" she murmured.

THE pang of terror hurt her, though it did not last. She was thinking the sensationalism of the capitalist press, Ishbel told herself, vehemently. But when at last the day came to an end and she could put off the white clinic handkerchief from her throbbing head, she was glad.

Glad, too, to see Erik Valentine's slim and debonair figure waiting for her in the hall. The girls from the other wards of the huge clinic—all *komsomolkas* of the Party, fervid with revolutionary passion—came crowding about her. There was a lecture at the hostel on, "The Liquidation of Sex Sentiment by Biological Common-sense." Perhaps she was tired and slightly hysterical. But she wanted to laugh at the bright-eyed, metallic creatures.

The night was all rain and ice-mush and blurred fire-signs that climbed the sky. There were other automobiles in Moscow now, besides the splendid darting automobiles of the Kremlin. One stood by the curb, and Erik opened the door. The *komsomolkas* stepping out into the slush shrugged their shoulders at the sight. Erik Valentine was an artist, and privileged. And Comrade Ishbel, after all, was from America, in which bloated and rotting country the women were deliquescent with decay.

A workman skulked in the shadows of the clinic wall and watched the mud hiss from the car-tires as it slid away. He grinned in the friendly manner of the proletarist, at little blonde Xenia of the Ear, Nose and Throat Department, as she trod daintily past him.

"That is Valentine, the artist, is it not, comrade? I know him, for I stood stripped to the waist and perishing with cold, as his model for a poster. No offense, but I bet that is his little tart,

as sure as my name is Feodor Petrovitch. He was one for the women."

"His wife, comrade," reproved Xenia, with a cold frown, and then smiled forgivingly. This was a well-set-up workman, though rough and not too clean. But for his foolish grin, he was handsome, and quite in accord with the ideology of Biological Common-sense. She liked handsome workmen, and to keep to the *spetz*, the specialists of the clinic and the men-students, was only class consciousness. "At least she is to be that, since they have announced it. There was an American—the architect Armitage. I knew him. He called here for Comrade Ishbel now and then. I threatened to take him from her." Little Xenia blushed and giggled. "You know what I mean. But he was robbed and killed by the wicked little brats. Poor fellow!"

"I heard the loud-speakers tell of it. This Valentine has won, eh?"

"She loves him," said Xenia, boldly using the foolish word, and working her eyelashes like any woman of the reactionary countries.

Disappointingly, the workman nodded and slouched away. Xenia looked after him, and tears welled into her cornflower-blue eyes as she realized why she had felt so friendly toward Feodor Petrovitch. Something about him reminded her of the architect Armitage, whose tragic death had made her weep over her instrument-sterilizer several times that day.

She sighed, and went slowly toward the hostel and the lecture on "The Liquidation of Sex Sentiment by Biological Common-sense."

IT was a slack hour in the Sverdlov District Office for the Registration of Marriage and Divorce. An old woman was sweeping the floor, and the marriage clerk was enjoying a well-earned cigarette with his colleague of divorce beneath the posters on sexual hygiene and birth-control which were plastered neatly on the wall, along with Molotov's latest manifesto that *"Children are the Shock Troops of the Future."* They both looked up as the door opened and two young people entered. A fleeting grin flitted across the rather pimply face of the marriage clerk. They were his meat, obviously. He was racing ahead today.

"Erik Valentine, artist, 10 Okhotny Riad, aged 28, an unmarried man, and Ishbel Lorna Dane, American subject, clinic worker and student, K.K. hostel, aged 23, an unmarried woman."

The clerk's hand moved very deliberately over his registration-book on the polished desk. Ishbel Dane watched it fascinatedly, with her dark blue eyes.

"Ridiculous, isn't it? You'll cost me two rubles, Ishbelovna," murmured Valentine. His eyes were burning behind his light laughter. He looked like a faun. He smelled of new leather and of scented tobacco. Ishbel forced herself to look up and laugh.

"I'll pay one of them. I insist."

His hand crushed hers where it hung by her side.

"I love you, love you, love you!"

SHE smiled unsteadily again. All at once she thought of a church and orange blossoms and organ-music. The decadent picture seemed to float over the head of the divorce clerk who had slipped down from his stool to attend to a shrill and sullen young woman who wished his services. . . .

"Is the ceremony over, Erik?"

She put a ruble down quickly on the counter, and laughed, though there was a strange tightness about her throat. The clerk grinned as he reached for a booklet but put it back hastily at a look from Valentine. A Red soldier and a little fuzzy-haired Georgian girl were waiting impatiently behind them, the girl with a baby in her arms, hard and triumphant, the soldier embarrassedly humming a song.

The traffic of the street roared at them as they passed out. Valentine lifted a face that looked luminous and gently predatory in the lights. At that moment his aspect was entirely Russian, and the girl thrilled to it. He laughed again.

"Great marriage-music, Ishbelovna! It was machine-gun fire and the apocalypse, in this very street, only twelve years ago. Now hear it. Better than any damned organ in New York."

"Much better," agreed Ishbel steadily.

He caught her where they stood at the curb, beneath some winking traffic-signs that turned both their faces to an orange glow.

"How I've waited!" he said.

A little pulse began to beat at Ishbel's temples. She tried to keep her wits poised coolly, but the effort was a failure. This was a marriage of such freedom between man and woman as no other country had ever known before. She was still Ishbel Dane, a worker for

the New World, though she was also Erik Valentine's wife.

"No droshky. It's anti-proletarian. We'll walk."

HER laugh sounded rather suffocated to herself. A droshky would have taken them to Erik's studio in five minutes. But to her faint alarm she wanted to dawdle. In a shop-window she caught sight of her own face, and had an illusion that it was pale and scared-looking. That was the dirty glass, no doubt. There was no question about her loving Erik, she told herself sedately. It was probably because she could not shed the clutter of foolish old romantic ideas, all at once. . . .

The orange-painted portico of Erik's studio, an old Batoum bronze lamp lit and swinging above it, oddly like the days of Nicholas; but Erik was an artist, and privileged. It opened, for Erik kept a servant, an ancient woman in black bombazine and an amazingly filthy lace-cap.

"Mine!" A little touch of hoarseness came into his low voice. Involuntarily, while he stifled her, she struggled to free herself and said, "Don't!" standing tongue-tied and almost enraged with herself when he obeyed. Looking up as she stood against the wall, there seemed something panther-like about Erik. His mouth was open, laughing softly and tenderly. He looked like something made out of tensile steel, covered with velvet. An extraordinary feeling swept across Ishbel. Perhaps it was some great presentiment. Perhaps only sheer, crude homesickness for America and American things. . . .

It lasted but a moment.

"Sorry, Erik!" she said forlornly, wondering where all her *komsomolka* coolness had gone. Valentine took both her hands and let them fall again.

"*Bourjoi!* It's because there's no confetti on either of us, isn't it? You know where your room is. I'll wait for you in the studio. And listen—there'll be a surprise for you."

As she ran up the paneled staircase, Valentine's greenish eyes followed her, but Ishbel reached the little room, unaware of them. She wanted to swear at herself softly. What was the matter? A grim little laugh left her. This was their bedroom—hers and Erik's. In Moscow—in the United Soviet States of Russia!

Her furs came off slowly. She rubbed color into her cheeks. Then she became conscious for the first time of a faint elusive perfume. Erik? No, he had not that Continental habit. But the scent was familiar; the sweet ylang-ylang of the East. Ishbel Dane found herself staring with dilated eyes at the dressing-table, where a tiny handkerchief lay. . . .

Presently she stirred. The whole house was very quiet. Quieter than Lidoshka's apartment after her Mongol lover had been pinned to his Buddha. The stuffy warmth of it, laden with paint and Erik's tobacco, came up, as she opened the door. Of course! The door opened upon the gallery where Erik worked at his canvases and propaganda posters. Below was the living-room. Ishbel stumbled against the model-throne upon which sat, now and again, a brawny workman, or some black or yellow man who had been mutilated by Imperialist soldiery. She reached the rail, and gripped it with tight fingers, and looked down.

There were three people below. Erik, and a little man with a bald, shining pate which he stroked now and then. And Lidoshka Wei, the Little Lotus!

Erik looked up. His eyes, green as a cat's with love and laughter at that moment, overflowed with light. He gestured.

"Come down, Ishbelovna," he called.

AT the foot of the little stairs of the gallery he met her. The bald-headed man—Koregorvsky, Deputy to the Public Prosecutor—rose with a half-solemn, half-droll bow. Lidoshka Wei, too, came to her feet. A little tinkle of laughter seemed to be torn from her. She lifted a small glass of koumiss and said, in her soft, liquid voice:

"I hope you and Erik are to be very happy together, Comrade Ishbel."

Koregorvsky also raised a glass, a benevolent and happy ape behind horn-rimmed glasses, the mantle of his dignity trailing from him.

"Drink this brandy, beloved," said Erik. "This is a shock. But Russia is the land of shocks, Ishbel."

Ishbel shook her head. A great coolness crept upon her. Lidoshka Wei ran across with the tiny limping gait the Chinese general had given her, and dropped upon one knee. The almond eyes, jet-black and shining, slid round to Koregorvsky and then rested upon Ishbel's. She looked like a piece of porcelain in the flowered frock she wore; as fragile, yet as delicately real.

"Pardon the deceit, Comrade Ishbel. The river did not drown me. I have swum the Black Irtysh, when it was a torrent of ice. The Moscow river is only narrow. I did it to leave you with Erik." Lidoshka stretched out pink finger-tips and looked at them. "It was all part of my Three Letter work, too."

Ishbel stared unbelievingly.

"Three Letter? You mean the GPU?"

"I am of the GPU."

"So am I, Ishbelovna my wife," said Erik Valentine.

"And," said Koregorvsky, rolling his red eyes drolly behind their glasses, though they watched Ishbel like darting flames, "it is commonly rumored that I am also. Little bride, this is Napoleon brandy. Your husband is a sybarite. But we will not tell Ivan of the Blast Furnaces."

ISHBEL sat very still. The studio seemed to contract, to close her in. Erik was watching her closely. So too was Lidoshka.

A lean hand, with black hair at the wrists, reached out and touched her lightly. It was like some amiable wolf that put forth its paw in friendship. Koregorvsky dated from the early days of the Revolution. Men had toppled from the Kremlin; Lenin had died and been embalmed. But Koregorvsky remained. It was said playfully that Koregorvsky weighted up every neck he saw, from his long habit as a public executioner, and even the big men of the Party passed him on the other side of the street. . . .

"This is Russia, little *Amerikanska*. The flame of freedom is here. But there are *saboteurs* who would put it out; there are traitors; there are enemies who would betray us to the capitalist. Behold, therefore, the secret police. The men and women in it esteem the privilege. They are devoted. They give body and soul to build and guard the New Paradise. Take Lidoshka Wei, the Little Lotus—"

A shudder ran through Lidoshka. But she sat like a red-lipped, olive-skinned idol on the floor, with one arm on Ishbel's lap.

"Prohackai was a traitor," said Koregorvsky in a soft voice that cut through the silence. "He hawked the State to its enemies. But to the Asiatic proletariat, he was a god, a prophet. He died because of one, and was accorded a magnificent funeral for the other. His name—ah—liveth. The Little Lotus

loved him. But she loved the Cause better. From her childhood she has done so. Therefore—"

"No!" whispered Ishbel. She felt Lidoshka's fingers wind themselves into hers, and heard her breathe, "Yes!"

"Tut!" said Koregorvsky paternally. He looked across at Erik Valentine. Something about his wizened good-humor was terrifying. It had steel behind it. He was a spider, and Lidoshka and Erik two flies that hung in his web. He was the Caliph of the Gay-pay-oo, sitting good-humoredly among his helots. Desperately, Ishbel fought to keep her brain clear of the images. She fought for something else, too. For outward coolness, for something to hide the horror and disillusion which dazed her!

"I never dreamed that Prohackai was a traitor," she murmured.

"Nor does the rest of Russia dream," said Koregorvsky gravely. "You are one of the chosen few in the secret. The wife and comrade of the good Erik, here. There is no oath in the GPU, Madame Valentine. One—ah—slides into the Three Letter Corps."

He paused, saturnine for a moment.

"One seldom sends in one's resignation," Koregorvsky said, and sipped his brandy.

LIDOSHKA'S fingers gripped tighter. A faint smile passed over Erik's face, though there was a touch of moisture upon his upper lip.

Ishbel found herself smiling back into the weasel-face that smiled at her. She put mystery and sophistication into her smile.

"How beautiful!" Koregorvsky came to his feet. A little waft of perfume stirred as Lidoshka Wei followed his example. "And this is your bridal night. Myself, I have forsworn beauty. It is necessary. An old bachelor, Comrade Ishbel."

He bent over her hand—lean, shriveled, shabby. Ten years before, stripped to the buff, he had spent an hour each day in the execution-pit of the Lubianka, with a hot revolver in his hand. Now he guarded, with radio and airplanes, with secret men and women, with gas-bombs and execution-warrants, the edifice of the Brotherhood of Man.

"Good-by, Comrade Ishbel," Lidoshka said. "I am making a picture tonight. You will not come and watch, no?" She laughed prettily, but her eyes were black and haunted nicks in her exquisite face. "It will be lonely living without you. But I am used to loneliness."

THEY were gone. Somewhere a car purred, taking Koregorvsky back to his lair.

"It was a surprise, as you promised, Erik."

She stood quite still, while Valentine's arms went about her, and drew her to him. That way, she could look more intently into the faunlike, magnetic face. He was a little white, as though it had been some sort of ordeal for him, too. Then he smiled.

"You took it well. Another woman might have flopped under the shock of seeing Lidoshka. By God, you're tough! Koregorvsky thinks you're a fit mate for me."

"Will he—use me?"

"How do I know? He's not going to use you as one of his Beautiful Ones, I'll see to that, anyway."

"I suppose the GPU is necessary. It's rather thrilling. . . . What happened to Lee Armitage, Erik? Was that—the Three Letters?"

"Perhaps." His cheek was pressed against hers. Looking over her slim shoulder, he could see the strong lean fingers that had pressed Armitage's throat.

"Didn't I tell you," he said, "about the three fierce things in Russia: Work, love and death? We'll forget two of them, Ishbelovna. . . . How light you are!"

"Put me down, Erik," she said sedately; and then, standing on the stairs of the gallery, smiled down at him, before scuttling lightly up.

It must have been a very pallid smile, Ishbel thought, looking for a fleeting instant into the glass, once within the little room. She must have seemed to Erik a shy, alabaster bride.

But she felt as desperately near to a trapped and betrayed animal as a human being had ever felt. Turning the key in the lock, she shook a small blue-steel automatic from her handbag, then put it back. No, no shooting. The Three Letters was a living, ugly thing; but no shooting.

The window was a full forty feet from the lamp-dotted street. Valentine's studio was at the top of a high stone tenement, pullulating with life. Ishbel peered down at the many-windowed precipice. A fire-escape zigzagged down, but it passed close to a dozen windows. Some were open, for she caught the buzz of a primus stove, the sound of a phonograph, grinding some ancient jazz, two women scolding each other on one of the landings. She crushed back an insane desire to laugh at a mental picture of a score of heads popping out at her passage downward.

And then there came a tap at the panel of the door.

"Wait!" she called faintly. And she looked about her. . . .

She was good at monkey-work. At a *spartikiad*, the athletic sports of Communist Youth, she had climbed a fifty-foot pylon and unfurled a star-spangled banner and a Red Flag at the top of it. Strangely enough, the memory of it brought a sob to her throat at the first feeling of crashed ideals. The door was rattling. . . . She was on the fire-escape. It was greasy with the warm drizzle that fell out of the flushed sky. Below, the two women squalled like cats, then were silent. In the street, the sound of passing footsteps stopped. Somebody had seen her.

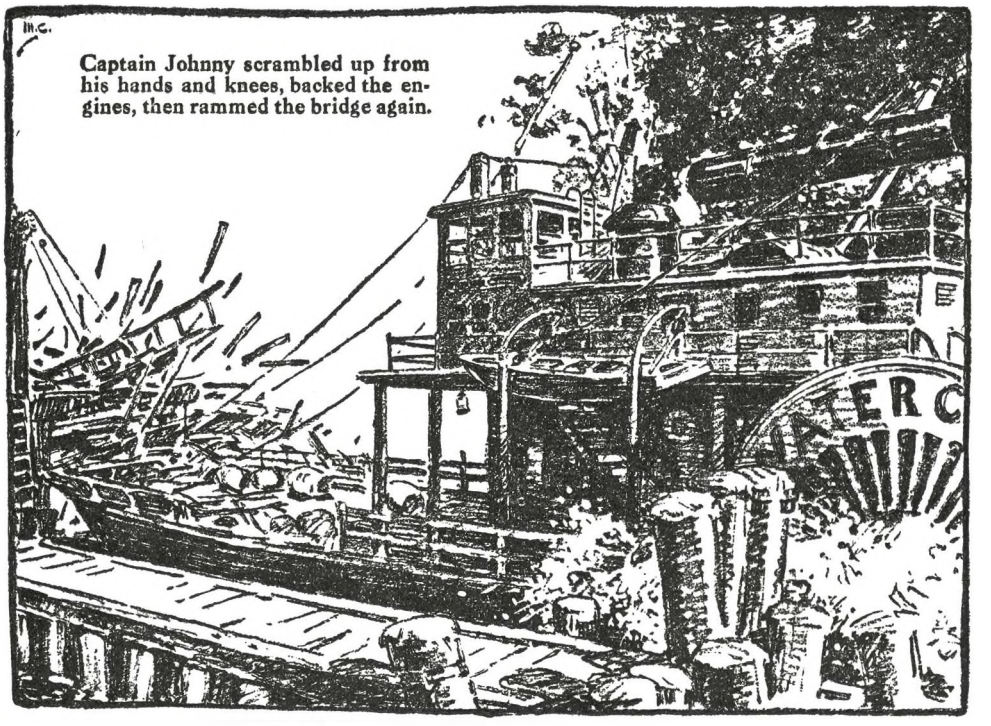
But she was already halfway down the escape. There was a smell of frying sausages. A man in shirt and trousers crouched earnestly over a stove as she went swiftly past before he could look up.

"Ishbel!"

It floated down from above. She felt the fire-escape vibrate. That part of the wall was in shadow, but there was the wide-open window of a dark room. Till then, she had not felt terror, but only cold rage and disillusionment. Terror touched her sharply now. She hung by the dark window. The room seemed empty.

Ishbel dropped lightly inside, and pulled the window down.

The next installment of this thrilling novel by the author of "Comrades of Chaos" will appear in the next, the May, issue.



Smoky Joe

The story of the steamboat known as Smoky Joe and her captain; of the great race-horse Barbarossa and his lovely owner; and of two surprising races.

By MILLARD WARD

Illustrated by Monte Crews

THE moment the side-wheel steamer *Tidewater Champion* (popularly called *"Smoky Joe"*), was securely moored at Hall's Landing, Captain Johnny Purnell ran down the gangway and started at a quick walk along the road from the wharf. He had changed from his uniform to a suit of fresh seersucker, so that the weight of the afternoon sun did not affect him. He was a tall young man, with deep-set blue eyes and smooth brown cheeks.

A hundred yards from the pier, he turned into a side road that swung away from the water and led up a long, pastured slope to a grove of maple trees. Part of the broad roof and the end of a gray stone kitchen wing was all that showed of the house in the grove.

Beyond the green fence row to the left and well back from the main road, a wide pasture sloped down to the shore of the creek. At the water's edge, half in the shadow of a low willow tree, a gigantic roan stallion was grazing. He raised his head as Captain Johnny passed, overthrowing somewhat in even that simple act and recovering poise carefully. Captain Johnny did not seem impressed by the show of excess power; his eyelids drooped contemptuously and he walked on.

He held his gaze on the ground until at a turn in the road between steep banks, a girl on horseback nearly rode him down. Her mount, a dainty-footed chestnut mare, shied noiselessly on the soft roadside, then wheeled under a

Captain Johnny stepped back over the door sill, slammed the door and locked it.

steady rein and stood with her muzzle touching Captain Johnny's shoulder.

The girl slid cheerfully out of the saddle and came forward, her hand held out.

"You're ahead of time again," she said. "Can't you hold *Smoky Joe* down yet?"

Captain Johnny took her hand and held it gravely. Because of her slenderness and square shoulders and short dark hair, the eagerness of her gray eyes and wide, flexible mouth seemed in a constant, deprecating way to be claiming her own womanhood. She wore a man's white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, jodhpurs which, close at hand, seemed to have been made very cleverly from ordinary khaki trousers, and no hat at all.

"I didn't try to hold her this time, Mary Emily," Captain Johnny said. "I wanted to be sure to see you." He drew back a step and looked at her critically as if glad to change the subject for a moment. "You're riding bare-headed again. Don't you recall you're in Virginia and not the State of Maine?"

Mary Emily grinned. "Won't hurt me now. Summer's most over, and I've given up worrying about my freckles anyhow. But why did you want to see me specially, Johnny?"

He passed his left hand slowly over the mare's shoulder, which shivered receptively.

"Because the *Smoky Joe* won't be coming in here any more, or anywhere else, I reckon. The company went into receivership yesterday. Trucks and busses finally ran them out of business and they're done."

IN a long silence the chestnut mare sniffed faintly and made reflective marks with a forefoot in the shell road.

"The *Smoky Joe's* been coming in here for pretty close to fifty years, hasn't she?" Mary Emily asked at last.

"Fifty-two last June," Captain Johnny answered. "Old Man Crockett had her thirty-eight years; Billy Thomas twelve, and this was starting my third. She's good for thirty more, though, at the least. That steamboat's all cypress and liveoak—what isn't iron. Look at her stem sometime: one solid chunk of liveoak, twelve inches square."

"And there won't be any boat at all after this?"

"I reckon not. The M. & V. is the last of the lines to go. Nothing left on the bay now but double-ended ferryboats for hauling automobiles. When they get the bridge built, there won't be even those."

"What's going to happen to you, Johnny?"

"Fired, of course, along with the rest. But I'll fall into something somewhere. I've got enough money saved to carry me for a good while. I was saving it for a different purpose, though."

She looked at him with wide, clear eyes. "As good a sailor as you are won't have to wait long."

"I'm no sailor," Captain Johnny growled. "I'm a steamboat man, or was one. But it's you I'm thinking about, Mary Emily. How's it going to hit you? That truck line won't come within twelve miles of here or any of the places on the back creeks."

Mary Emily pulled off her gloves and hooked the mare's reins lightly in one elbow. "Can you come back to the house, Johnny, for a glass of lemonade or something?"

The *Smoky Joe's* whistle, a spurt of white steam above the willows along the shore and an accompanying groan, answered her. The stallion, at the water's edge, paid no attention to the noise, but, catching sight of Mary Emily, began to trot toward the fence.

"Freight's aboard," Captain Johnny said. "But I thank you just the same."

Mary Emily turned toward the landing. "Then I'll walk down with you, Johnny, if you don't go too fast."

"You haven't got to worry about that very much."

She smiled again, this time abstractedly.

Wiltz shot backward, driving Sam's breath out as they hit the wall together.

"If the truck line really won't come any nearer than the State road," she said, "it's going to be harder for us. We've always had so many horses around, and been so close to the steamboat landing that we've never needed an automobile on the place. But if we have to haul all our crops twelve miles by horse and wagon we won't have time for much else. They'd say, I suppose, buy a truck now, but the truth is—"

The stallion reached the fence-row beside them with a sudden pounding of hoofs and stood there, rigid and magnificent.

"Get away from here," Captain Johnny snarled, "before I bust your no-account sheep's-nose!"

"Don't talk that way to him, Johnny," Mary Emily said resignedly. "He's young and nervous. I believe he tries to run when he's in a race, but somehow he just can't. It must be the other horses, maybe."

"He could run if he wanted to, the big ox," Captain Johnny muttered. "He runs here all right, doesn't he?"

"He was clocked again on our track last week. You know we can't keep it in any kind of condition, but even so he broke all known records for a mile and a sixteenth. The secretary of the Maryland Jockey Club held the watch himself and he says if I want to enter Barbarossa in the Preakness, he'll get him in somehow. He'd heard about him, of course, but it happens he's never seen how he

acts at the barrier or he wouldn't want him within a hundred miles of Pimlico."

"You're not going to put him in, then?"

Mary Emily's voice softened regretfully. "What's the use? We know he wouldn't run, and it costs a thousand dollars to enter a horse in that race. I was just going to say when he came butting in that he's cost so much the past year or two that I couldn't even buy a second-hand truck to haul stuff to the State road."

Captain Johnny's feet were hardly moving.

The *Smoky Joe's* whistle howled a second time, but he paid no attention.

"Maybe if this truck line knew how we're fixed they'd run a branch up here," Mary Emily said.

Captain Johnny shook his head. "You're not the only one caught. Major Johnston, Mr. Greer and Judge Oliver been to them already. Nothing doing. Wouldn't pay. But in order to get the business of the places that can choose between the river and the road, this Blue Streak bunch killed the steamboats outright. Now Blue Streak says if a lot of people have nothing at all, that's their tough luck."

"I suppose it had to come some day, though. What do they call it, Johnny, speeding everything up? March of civilization?"

Captain Johnny bounced a pebble off Barbarossa's startled flanks. "When civilization marches so fast it begins to fall over its own feet, it's time somebody stepped in. That's all I know."

They did not speak again until they reached the pier. Then Mary Emily drew the chestnut mare closer.

"Good-by, Johnny. Let me hear where you land."

He nodded shortly. "You'll hear, all right. Take care of yourself."

She swung into the saddle again, but held the mare motionless at the end of the pier until the *Smoky Joe* rounded a bend in the creek.

THROUGH all the rest of the trip down the Rappahannock and into its tributaries, Captain Johnny kept up a swift series of shore excursions. And that night when the *Smoky Joe* was waddling northward through the open Chesapeake he sat hour after hour in his cabin digging patiently with a chewed pencil at the backs of a pad of old requisition-blanks.

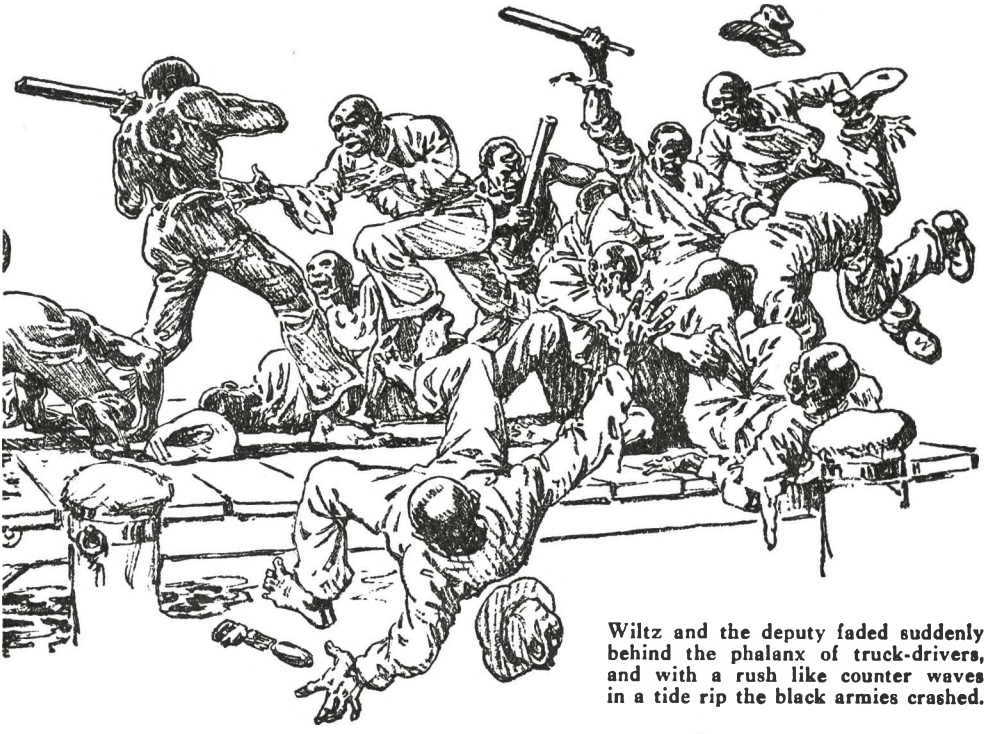
The next morning at the mouth of the Patapsco he called his officers and engineers one by one into the cabin, and while passing Fort Carroll he made a brief speech to the deck hands and coal-passers beside an open cargo port on the lower deck.

Two days after that in a one-room office above a rickety Light Street pier, the Rappahannock Navigation Company opened for business. Its president and treasurer and general manager was Captain John Purnell; its fleet consisted of the *Smoky Joe* and one condemned coal barge for bunkering her; its payroll was indefinite; its capital next to non-existent, and its sour determination unshakable.

And besides his other duties, Captain Johnny remained in command of the *Smoky Joe,* and every man of his former crew stuck.

On Friday, just as she had done for two generations, the *Smoky Joe* stopped at Hall's Creek Landing, and was greeted by a celebration among the natives. One of the first on board was Mary Emily Hall. She met Captain Johnny on the forward ladder and returned with him to the pilot-house where they leaned their elbows on the frame of an open window, and smiled down together on the familiar activity on the pier.

Mary Emily's riding habit was a little more formal this time, with boots and breeches and a short-sleeved blouse



Wiltz and the deputy faded suddenly behind the phalanx of truck-drivers, and with a rush like counter waves in a tide rip the black armies crashed.

deeply open at the neck. The color of her sun-gilded arms and cheeks seemed oddly impermanent and meaningless beside the whiteness of her throat.

"Is this what you meant when you said I'd hear from you all right, Johnny?" she asked contentedly.

He nodded. "I couldn't come out with it until I'd talked to people more. Now I got promises from Greer and Johnston and Oliver and all the rest on the back creeks. That was enough to start on, but if I'm to keep going I've got to get anyhow some of the ones that can reach the road, too. They wouldn't do anything but back and fill so far; but I'll keep after them. And if I do make out for a month I got a mail contract promised. There ought to be enough business for one boat anyhow."

"IT'S the most exciting thing ever happened around here," Mary Emily said. "Do you really own the *Smoky Joe* now?"

Captain Johnny laughed sardonically. "I own one deck plank and a piece of the stack. The rest's mortgaged. I had to give some demand notes, too, for stores, but the people who got them have known me a long time and won't close down, I reckon. Anyhow, it made me feel pretty good to be taking *Smoky Joe* down the river again, while all the rest of the old company's boats are headed for the boneyard."

"And it made me feel pretty good to see her coming around the bend down there. But did it honestly take every cent you all have got? You couldn't beg, borrow or steal any more?"

"Listen, Mary Emily, all fooling aside, did you ever try to buy a four-hundred-ton steamboat when you were twenty-seven?"

She laughed delightedly. "I just wanted to be sure. Because now I can tell you that I'm going broke, too. Otherwise I couldn't."

Captain Johnny's face was grave.

"What do you mean, Mary Emily?"

"I've been thinking about Barbarossa," she said simply. "He's not ugly by nature; he's very gentle, all things considered, and he likes me. He's got some trouble on his mind when he goes to race. I don't know what it is, but since it's not in his heart he'll throw it off some day—maybe when we least expect it. And we never had a chance to run a horse in the Preakness before. So I'm going to get that thousand dollars somewhere."

"I'll haul your stuff free until you do," Captain Johnny said. "I always wanted that raggedy-tailed billy-goat to get in a race where some real horses would run right over him."

"If he had a fair chance he'd show you," Mary Emily said quietly. "And I thank you for your offer. Since it's only for three weeks, I'll accept it. If Barbarossa loses again, of course, we'll have to break up the place anyway and I can pay everybody at once."

"Gosh, Mary Emily," Captain Johnny said, "if you only knew how you make me feel when you talk like that. If you'd only said something last week I'd never have bought this boat—and you could've had my last nickel. Don't you know that?"

Mary Emily turned and smiled at him. "I know it all right. But this time Barbarossa's going to run. He was born on our farm and he's had a good time there. He won't let the place break up."

Captain Johnny's lips parted bitterly; then he closed them again and half shook his head. "This is not the movies, Mary Emily. I only wish it were."

"Anyhow," she said, "I'm going to put him in. It's as good a way to end as any. But you're going to win out on your job, aren't you?"

"Can't tell. Blue Streak's fighting me mighty hard."

MARY EMILY sighed. "They've got I don't know how many thousand miles of lines already, working fine, but nothing will do but they must make a mess of this eighty in here. I just can't understand it."

"I couldn't myself at first," Captain Johnny said soberly. "Until I met up with Mr. Wiltz, the manager of this district. Then I recalled we had become acquainted before."

"How was that, Johnny?"

"Happened two or three trips ago. You know the drawbridge way down where the State road crosses this creek just before she empties into the Rappahannock? Well, we were passing through the draw on our way down river and a good many trucks and cars were backed up waiting on us. It's an old lateral draw, you know, about ready to fall to pieces and it works by hand pretty slow. There was a big gray coupé right up against the gate on the east side and I was standing outside the wheelhouse door not twenty feet from it as we passed. Some fellow put his head out of the window of the coupé and yelled at me, 'We won't wait for you much longer, you old crab-smasher!' I didn't like his looks or the tone of his voice. The hands happened to be washing down the boat deck at the time and there was a hose lying with its nozzle stuck down in a scupper-hole at my feet. All I did was give it a little kick and the stream smacked that window amidships. I forgot all about it; just thought it was some stranger around here needed to learn manners. Well, naturally, it was Wiltz himself."

Mary Emily shook her head. "You're too old-fashioned, Johnny. Nobody minds being called names nowadays. Now you'll surely have to fight."

"Can't help it," Captain Johnny said.

FOR two more weeks the *Smoky Joe* managed to hold her own. There had been no profits, but the mail contract was at least that much closer and things were running well enough.

On her fourth trip under Captain Johnny's ownership, however, as she came into Hall's Creek Landing, he was waiting to jump ashore when the guards touched. He found Mary Emily on the pier.

"Mary Emily," he said, "is that Barbarossa still down there in the pasture, or have I got the D.T.'s?"

Her smile was soft with perfectly controlled hurt. "It's Barbarossa, all right, Johnny."

"You don't need to tell me about horses, I reckon, but if the Preakness is tomorrow he ought to have been in Baltimore long ago."

"He's not going to Baltimore, Johnny," Mary Emily said. "I miscalculated just a little."

"Couldn't you raise the thousand?"

"I raised it, but that was the last penny I could. I'd forgotten I had to get him to the track after that. People around here have already lost a lot of money on Barbarossa, and they weren't as helpful as usual. I tried to get the Blue Streak people to let me have a truck on credit; they have a lot made specially for horses, but they wouldn't. They were pretty nasty about it, in fact. So I'm afraid it's all off."

CAPTAIN JOHNNY drew a long breath. "Mary Emily," he said, "I always thought you were a smart girl. Go on now, get your jockey and a couple of boys, and put on a dress and load that plug on *Smoky Joe* and we'll all go north together. I'll get him there in time to run; a boy can ride him right up from the harbor. It's some miles to the track and the boat ride may not suit him, but he was going to lose anyhow. Go on now. Don't stand there talking."

Mary Emily poised on tiptoe. "All right, if we can get him on board. When we sent him away before it was always a terrible job to get him into the truck; he hated to leave the farm so."

"I'll get him aboard," Captain Johnny said. "I'm feeling just the right way."

Yet half an hour later, when the *Smoky Joe's* men had knocked together a stall between four stanchions on the lower deck, and Barbarossa had been led out to the end of the pier, he walked up the cleated gangplank and in through the cargo port with no more than a guiding hand on his bridle. His red, glowing shoulders, as high as a man's head, moved with docile care, his great muzzle was lowered attentively. Captain Johnny, watching, tilted his badge cap forward over one eye and slowly scratched the back of his neck.

Then Mary Emily reappeared wearing a small black straw hat and a threadbare coat of gray tweed over a blue linen dress. Captain Johnny took her handbag silently and led the way on board.

Just as the last sacks of potatoes and crates of apples were rattling into the lower deck with hands standing by the mooring-lines fore and aft, a cloud of dust blew up from the road half a mile away and swept toward the landing.

"Hold her," Captain Johnny said. "Somebody trying to make the boat."

THE dust cloud held the car almost invisible until it ran down the planks of the pier; a long coupé, itself the color of bright dust. Two men leaped out and came running to the *Smoky Joe's* side; one of them was Mr. Wiltz of the Blue Streak Transportation Company; the other, coatless, wore the bright star of a deputy sheriff pinned to one strap of his suspenders.

"Sorry to tell you, Cap'n Johnny," the deputy shouted. "You can't sail."

In dead stillness Captain Johnny walked across the lower deck and down the gangplank.

"Why's that, Sam?" he said.

"Because Mr. Wiltz here has got notes on your vessel due when called for and he's calling for them now. You can't sail until you clear them up."

"Can I see those notes?"

"Yes," Wiltz said. "At a distance. Look them over."

After a minute Captain Johnny nodded slowly.

"Mind telling me how you came by them, Mr. Wiltz?"

"I paid double for them, if you want to know. But to me they're well worth it."

Captain Johnny took off his cap and ran his fingers awkwardly through his hair.

"You got me, all right. I didn't know times were so bad those fellows would sell me out for money. But I reckon I didn't know how bad they were."

Wiltz laughed briefly without replying.

Captain Johnny looked about him helplessly. "But listen here," he said at last. "Let me make this one trip and then I'll surrender. I give you my word of honor on that. I got a horse on board that's to run in the Preakness tomorrow. He belongs to a young lady, Mr. Wiltz."

The deputy sheriff also turned appealingly.

"That makes a difference, don't it, sir? And if Captain Johnny passes his word, I reckon you'll find it good."

Wiltz looked at them with perverse innocence. "All he's got to do is pay these notes, and he can go wherever he wants to."

"I can't pay them," Captain Johnny said.

Wiltz spread his hands. "Then you can't sail. Words of honor've got no cash value with me."

Captain Johnny took a step closer. "Well, don't shame me before all this crowd," he said in a low, desperate voice. "Come into the office over here on the wharf and I'll see what I can offer. That horse is bound to run."

The office was a tiny room in the outer end of the covered part of the wharf. It had only one door and no window except the iron grill through which steamer tickets were sold. Captain Johnny went in ahead of Sam and Wiltz, but stood with his back to the door after it was closed.

"About all I can do," he said humbly, "is to renew those notes for what you have paid for them and double the interest."

One hand fumbled his cap; the other, behind his back, worked the key noiselessly out of the lock.

WILTZ stepped forward impatiently. "You're just wasting time. I can't stay here—"

"Can't you?" Captain Johnny said.

His forearm straightened like a piston rod against Wiltz's chest. Wiltz shot

backward, driving Sam's breath out as they hit the wall together. Captain Johnny stepped back over the door sill, slammed the door and locked it.

With the imprisoned uproar breaking out behind him, he went calmly on board the *Smoky Joe* and tossed the key over the offshore rail.

"Let go for'ard. Let go aft."

THE engine bell clanged sharply and the steamer's bow slid away from the wharf.

She was well clear before Wiltz and Sam broke out of the tiny office. Wiltz stood an instant on the pierhead, then swung back. Just before the distance became too great, the frantic grinding of the office telephone carried over the water to the *Smoky Joe*.

From the wheelhouse Captain Johnny whistled down to the engine-room: "Tell those firemen to put their backs into it, chief," he said steadily. "I want to see open water as soon as it's any way possible."

Mary Emily stayed in the pilot-house with Captain Johnny, the second mate and the quartermaster.

"This is my day for breaking regulations," Captain Johnny said. "I'll have who I want up here."

Abaft the tall, reeking smokestack the walking beam swung hard up and down; the wake drove hissing through weeds and cat tails on both shores ten feet beyond high-water mark. Half a mile above the last bend, Captain Johnny began to blow for the draw to open, but when the *Smoky Joe* swept into the final straight stretch of water, the bridge was still closed. There was no one within twenty yards of the big iron cranks which worked its antique machinery, but in the road on the right bank, Wiltz's coupé was drawn up with five or six of the Blue Streak's biggest trucks at its back.

In a compact body at the beginning of the bridge stood Wiltz, with the deputy sheriff and twelve or fifteen huge black truck-drivers, armed with wrenches, jack handles and crowbars.

CAPTAIN JOHNNY, without speaking, jerked the engine-room bell twice, and with her engines stopped, the *Smoky Joe* drifted slowly nearer.

The deputy sheriff's hail reached her. "Give it up, Captain Johnny. You'll be in real trouble if you keep on."

"He's right, Johnny," Mary Emily said quietly at his side. "I won't let you land in jail on my account."

Captain Johnny's voice was slow and apologetic.

"You got to excuse me for this, Mary Emily—but will you please go sit on that bench against the bulkheads there and keep real still?"

Then he spoke to the second mate. "Cold Steel's still boss down below, I reckon, Al?"

The second mate grinned.

"Nobody showed up to take his job yet, sir."

"Send him here to me."

When Cold Steel appeared on the ladder, his bare black shoulders filled the pilot-house door from side to side. Most of his growing had been done in five years aboard the *Smoky Joe*, but even when he first appeared as a clumsy boy of nineteen, he had said ingratiatingly that nobody ever called him anything but Cold Steel. The small eyes in his scarred face were bright with intelligence.

Captain Johnny pointed to the bridge ahead. "They won't open the draw, Cold Steel. Would you be so kind as to take your boys ashore and do it for them?"

Cold Steel turned, two hundred and twenty pounds balanced like a dancer, and squinted ahead.

"Ten," he said, "twelve, sixteen. Won't take no more than four minutes, Cap'n. Just come alongside easy, that's all."

A capstan with a beautifully polished brass head stood in the bow of the *Smoky Joe*, and in racks against the rail near it were laid eight oak bars, four feet long and three inches thick, for working it.

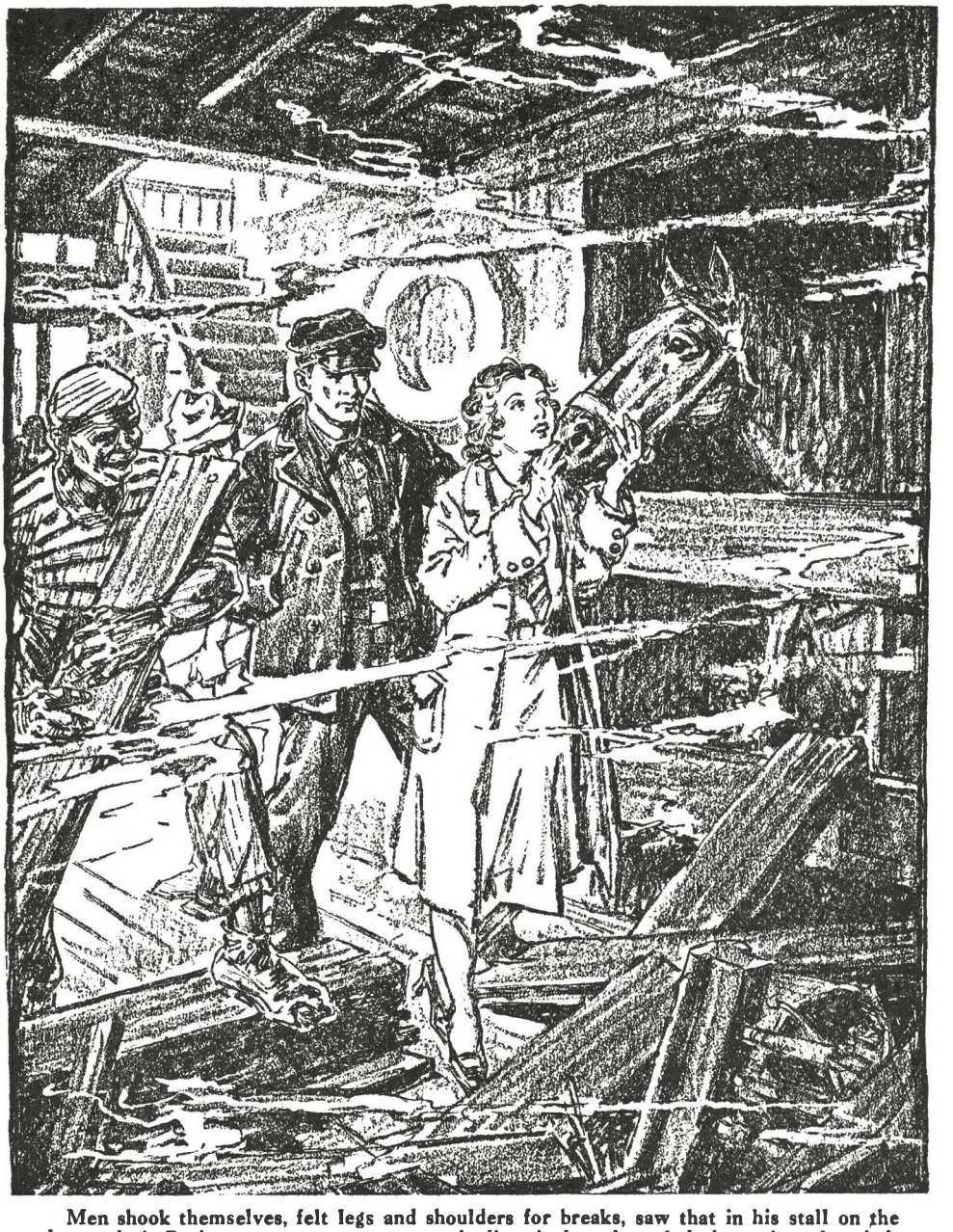
Cold Steel himself and seven chosen men took these bars, while a handful of reserves carried deck swabs and squeegees and a few odd slice-bars from the fireroom.

Captain Johnny held the wheel in his own hands, easing the *Smoky Joe* down on the piling in mid-channel upon which the bridge could swing sidewise like a turntable.

"I'm telling you, Cap'n Johnny," the deputy yelled again, "don't make no trouble here."

"Won't be trouble," Captain Johnny answered, "unless somebody tries to stop me opening that bridge."

At the same moment the *Smoky Joe's* bow touched, and the shock troops



Men shook themselves, felt legs and shoulders for breaks, saw that in his stall on the lower deck Barbarossa was not even much disturbed, and settled themselves for their last run together. "Will you have to go to jail now, Johnny?" Mary Emily asked naïvely.

swarmed down over her guards onto the timbers that connected the mid-channel piling. Wiltz and the deputy faded suddenly behind the phalanx of truck-drivers, and with a rush like counter waves in a tide rip the black armies crashed together at the side of the bridge.

For a moment, in their better position, the truck-drivers held. There was no yelling, only the slash and crack of weapons, the scrape of feet on sandy timbers and at short intervals the splash of bodies dropping overboard. These either pulled themselves back on the footway, or in the more serious cases were pulled back and stretched out restfully on the planks.

Soon, however, the capstan bars made the difference; there were no other weapons on the bridge at the same time so long and heavy, and no eye and arm as good as Cold Steel's.

The scant half of the truck-drivers who were still on their feet turned as

if at a signal and broke for the woods, while from behind them Wiltz's gray coupé shot away across the bridge.

Captain Johnny leaned far out of the pilot-house window. "Let 'em go, boys. Let 'em go."

But in the center of the bridge the coupé was stopping. The deputy sheriff leaped out, ran to the side, and with no one near him detached the big hand cranks of the bridge machinery and dumped them into the deepest part of the channel, past diving for. The bridge was locked in place, and the coupé on its way again before anyone moved.

After a bare instant, Captain Johnny cupped his hands from his window. "Come on back, Cold Steel. You done enough."

When the crew had scrambled on board again, carrying some minor casualties with them, Captain Johnny rang the engines astern.

WHILE the *Smoky Joe* backed carefully up the fairway he called the chief engineer on the tube.

"In about a minute, Chief," he said grimly, "I'm going to give you four bells and a jingle. Open her wide and have all hands stand clean of anything that can hurt 'em. I'm fixing to ram that draw."

On her bench against the after bulkhead, Mary Emily started to speak, then cowered down on the cushions with one bright expectant eye watching Captain Johnny's back.

The bridge itself, a quarter of a mile ahead, was weathered timber, heavily beamed but beginning to be loose in the joints, and now at high water its floor was less than six feet above the surface of the creek.

When Captain Johnny yanked the engine-room bell, the *Smoky Joe* picked up headway sharply, heading straight down the starboard side of the channel. Her driving paddle-wheels left the whole width of the creek pitted with yellow foam, her pouring smoke threw a band of shadow half a mile across the country, and under the thrust and pound of her engines' vibration climbed the lofty stack to shake it into a perilous dance.

The bridge rushed up and toward her; at the last second Captain Johnny jammed the wheel aport. The force of her striking snapped the side beam of the bridge, ran her blunt bow a dozen crackling feet into the planks. At the same instant her stack carried away at the base, crushed a skylight and the port life-boat, then tilted irresistibly over the side.

An unbroken stay dragged the stack momentarily alongside, and parted, letting it plunge clear to the bottom of the channel, and leaving the boat deck smothered in dense smoke and red-hot cinders.

Captain Johnny scrambled up from his hands and knees, backed the engines and struck again. At the second blow an out-thrust timber wiped away the whole forward rail on the port side and cut deeply into the paddle box before it exploded in a shower of ten-foot splinters. As the steamer's weight reached full resistance, a shouting crash came from the machinery well on the bridge, huge iron gear wheels shot twenty feet straight into the air, and the whole mass of wreckage began to swing heavily aside.

The *Smoky Joe* kept shouldering in, doubled the harm to her port paddle box, and lurched clear below the bridge, her smoke cloud wrapped close around her and only open water of river and bay between her and Baltimore. Men shook themselves, felt legs and shoulders for breaks, saw that in his stall on the lower deck Barbarossa was not even much disturbed, and settled themselves for what they understood would be their last run together.

On her bench in the wheelhouse, Mary Emily sat up unsteadily. "Will you have to go to jail now, Johnny?" she asked naïvely.

"Don't you worry about that, Mary Emily," Captain Johnny answered. "I'd about as soon go to jail as start all over again at sea, and that's what I'd have to do."

ALL night, with her crippled paddle wheel and bad fire-room draft, the *Smoky Joe* trudged up the bay. Two men on her boat-deck never stopped playing a fire hose over the planks to keep the pouring sparks from catching hold. And all night Mary Emily slept on her bench, with a quartermaster hunched over the wheel at her feet and Captain Johnny and first the chief, then the second mate on watch at the forward windows.

The following day at noon when the *Smoky Joe* limped into her slip at Baltimore, another deputy sheriff, a police sergeant and two patrolmen were lined up on the pier to receive Captain Johnny.

They waited considerately until Barbarossa had started by quiet streets for the Pimlico track, his colored jockey already ablaze in green and gold silk.

Mary Emily was to follow by streetcar.

"I'm going, Johnny," she said, "but whatever happens, I'll be back."

"Sure," Captain Johnny said. "Go on now, or you'll be late."

At the station-house a magistrate shuffled papers and looked at Captain Johnny curiously.

"Well," he muttered. "Resisting an officer, inciting to riot, destroying State property and so forth. It looks to me, Captain Purnell, as if you tried to wreck the whole State of Virginia before you started up here last night."

"Can't help it, sir," Captain Johnny said. "I had a horse that was to run in the Preakness and they tried to stop me bringing him."

"That's an extenuating circumstance, all right," the magistrate agreed. "But I can't turn you loose on less than a thousand dollars."

"I'm broke," Captain Johnny said, "and expect to be worse."

The magistrate frowned. "That's too bad, because I'd say from the looks of things, if you can't pay plenty of damages you'll be in for a stretch somewhere. However, I'll give you the afternoon to raise bail in. Hang out in my office if you want to and use the telephone. But if you haven't got it by night, we'll have to move you into one of our rear apartments."

Captain Johnny waited in the sunny, comfortable office, but he did not telephone. From time to time through the half-open door the clang of metal from a block of cells at the back of the building carried into the room. Captain Johnny got up finally and closed the door. After that, because he had stayed on watch all night, he slipped down in his chair and went to sleep.

THREE hours later, when the sunlight outside had begun to soften, the sound of Mary Emily's voice beyond the door roused him. He was standing beside his chair when she came running in. Tears were shining on both sides of her nose, and at the same time she was laughing excitedly.

"He did!" she gasped. "He did! You've seen the extras, haven't you?"

Captain Johnny shook his head. "I've been asleep. I reckon I still am."

She caught his sleeve and tugged it as hard as she could. "You're not. He won by six lengths. Tab was holding him back at the finish and couldn't get him stopped for another furlong. Oh, Johnny, he's one of those horses—the kind that happen once in twenty years and when they do, other owners just sit back and wait for them to die."

"So whatever was on his mind," Captain Johnny said slowly, "he got it off today."

Mary Emily nodded. "I've been so thick-headed. I don't deserve anything. Even today I didn't realize until after the race what the matter was. He's scared to death of automobiles. We'd all forgotten that horses ever were, I suppose, but four men tried to get him into a truck to take him home and he nearly killed them. You see he's lived all his life in that back pasture by the creek. We never had any automobiles around the place and he never got used to them at all, while *Smoky Joe* had run right under his nose twice a week ever since he was born. It was the trucks that spoiled him before; after a ride in one, he couldn't run for weeks. And now I have fifty thousand dollars and could sell him in half a minute for five times that, if I would."

"That's pretty good, Mary Emily," Captain Johnny said.

SHE laughed delightedly. "*Smoky Joe's* all right, too. Naturally I pay all costs of bringing my horse up here, no matter what they come to. And that's not all!

"Colonel Waterman, who's got four thousand acres right on the river, and Mr. Prideau, with two thousand, and a lot of the others from down our way were at the track and they all put bets on Barbarossa in spite of everything—and he paid eighty-three to one. They all said afterward there was evidently only one way to ship from tidewater and they'd use it in future. I've got five thousand here for Cold Steel and the boys too, Johnny. And after we're married—"

Then she stopped and looked at him dazedly.

"Johnny, you've never said anything about being married. Why should I have thought—"

His arms were released and strong about her shoulders.

"Because you are a smart girl, Mary Emily. That's why."

Three Dead Camels

A terrific adventure of the hardy Intelligence officer known as the Wolf of Arabia.

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

THEY lay on the hard, gritty surface of the desert, three mangy yellow heaps with long legs sprawled absurdly. A vulture, like some obscene sentry, had perched itself on a sand ridge near by. Lazily it spread its wings, blinked an eye, and settled down again to that watchful posture.

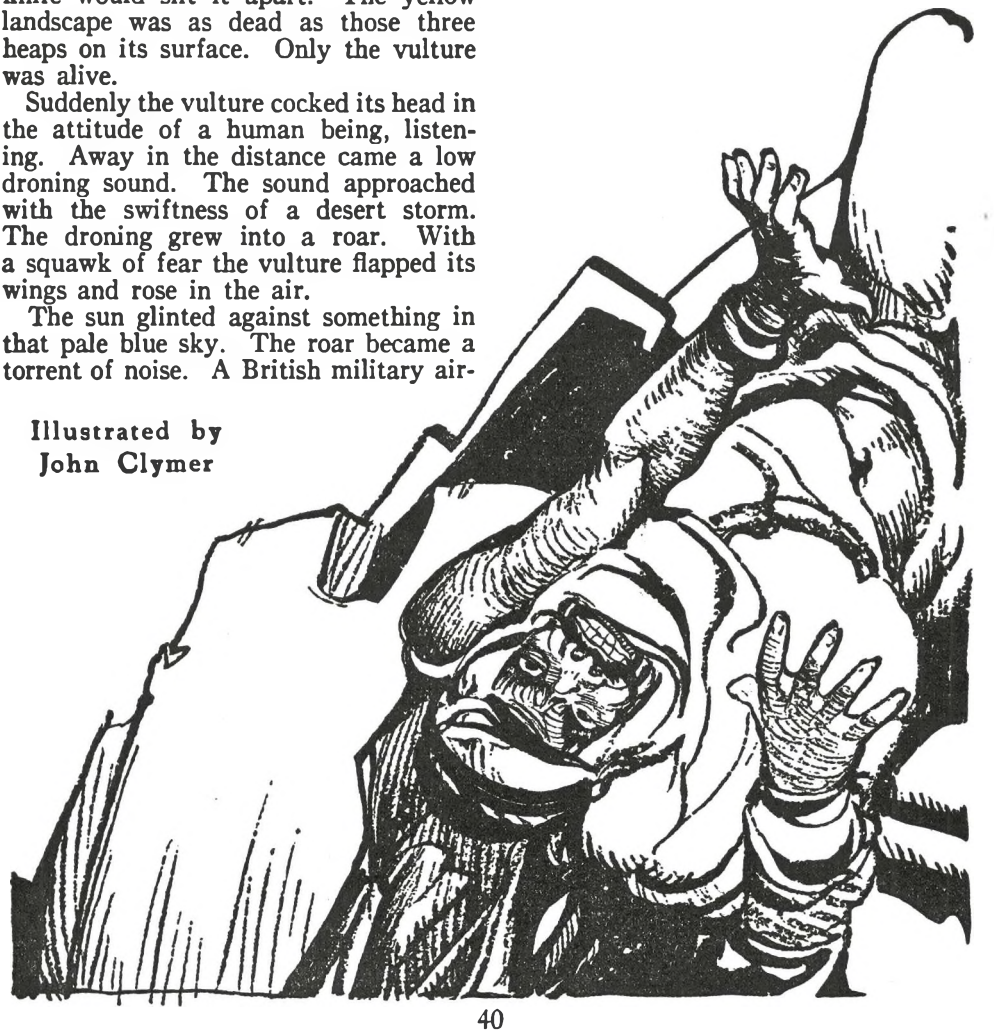
The afternoon sun beat down upon the three dead camels. No breeze stirred the loose sand. The pale blue silk of the sky seemed stretched so tightly that a knife would slit it apart. The yellow landscape was as dead as those three heaps on its surface. Only the vulture was alive.

Suddenly the vulture cocked its head in the attitude of a human being, listening. Away in the distance came a low droning sound. The sound approached with the swiftness of a desert storm. The droning grew into a roar. With a squawk of fear the vulture flapped its wings and rose in the air.

The sun glinted against something in that pale blue sky. The roar became a torrent of noise. A British military airplane banked, then swooped low over the three dead camels. The next moment it had landed, turned round and taxied toward them. Then the engine was switched off while a leather-helmeted figure jumped out from the cockpit.

He stood regarding the three dead camels. As though puzzled by this strange sight he pulled the leather helmet from his head, revealing a flaming crop of red hair. The pilot of the plane had also jumped out of the machine,

Illustrated by John Clymer



With a yell of rage, the overseer brought his whip down upon Rodgers. It was too much for the man with the gray eyes. He caught the overseer by the throat and flung him to the ground, grabbed the whip and began to lash him as he lay there.

and now strode forward to join his companion.

"By Jove, Rodgers, you were right," cried the pilot. "How you came to spot these dead camels against the sand I can't imagine. You ought to join the corps as an observer."

Paul Rodgers—an Intelligence officer frequently referred to by the natives as the Wolf of Arabia—smiled slightly.

"It was good of you to give me a jaunt, anyhow," he said. "Flying over the desert is much more exhilarating than riding across it."

While he spoke his gray eyes were searching the loose sand in the vicinity.

"Well, what d'you think of these three dead camels, now that we've risked our necks landing in this God-forsaken spot?" asked the pilot. "I don't find the sight particularly edifying."

"Neither do I, my dear Wicks," admitted Paul Rodgers. "But three dead camels in the desert present a very interesting problem."

"Why? I suppose camels must die," said Flight Lieutenant Wicks bluntly. "And I admit that I wouldn't like to dig a grave for the beasts in this wilderness."

"Exactly," Rodgers agreed smoothly. "Neither would an Arab. But why? Because a dead camel is still worth something to him. The flesh would provide

more than three days' food, the hide is worth keeping, and even its belly, if split open, would provide him another day's water-supply. None of these things have been done to these three camels. Their throats have been cut; then the Arabs rode on. Why?"

"Blest if I know! Why worry about it?"

"Just because I'm curious," muttered Rodgers. He walked on a few yards, and bent down to gaze at the sand. Then he returned and eyed the camels speculatively. He began to speak as though thinking aloud.

"They were in a hurry. Two Arabs with four camels—racing camels. Why *four* camels? They must have been carrying something precious in addition to themselves."

"And why in a hurry?" interrupted Flight Lieutenant Wicks.

RODGERS looked up; his gray eyes twinkled.

"The spoor in the sand tells me a lot," he said, "but not everything. These camels have been ridden to death; they are as lean and scraggy as beasts that have been ridden through hell."

"They say hell lies beyond there!" nodded the aviator, his sun-wrinkled gaze fixed on the far horizon.

"The two men riding three camels alternately—and trailing a fourth—must have gone on night and day over the desert," mused Rodgers aloud. "The riders changed from beast to beast. But here, at this spot, one of the camels stuck in the sand and refused to go farther. It dropped from sheer exhaustion. And camels can be more obstinate than mules."

"So I've heard," Wicks grinned. "Give me a Camel of the Sky every time! But what makes you think these fellows were in a hurry?"

"Ordinarily," Paul Rodgers replied, "Arabs would accept the obstinacy of this camel as the will of Allah. They would have settled down with the rest of their beasts and camped until all were rested. It is related in the Koran that when Mahomet entered Medina on the back of his favorite camel, he told the welcoming people, all of whom wanted to shelter the holy man, that wheresoever his camel stopped, there would he stay. The beast nosed its way into the yard of two brothers, and they had the honor of serving the Prophet."

Wicks yawned, and lit a cigarette.

"But *these* two Arabs refused to stop where their failing camel stopped. They tried to lash the beast into action again. You can see the marks on its hide. It refused to move. At the same time, these two other camels knelt in the sand. They had been set a bad example—mutiny, if you like, among the beasts."

"It must have been rather comic," said Wicks.

"It must have been deadly serious," Rodgers retorted. "For the Arabs were desperate enough to murder their beasts—these three obstinate camels—rather than stay a scant hour or two resting in the desert."

"But why the hurry?" persisted Wicks.

"Probably they were being pursued. Perhaps a Bedouin tribe was after them, ready to slit the throats of the two Arabs for the treasure they carried. And here, within fifty miles of Aden, three of the camels broke down. Only fifty more miles to safety, with still one camel left. If they had not been in such a desperate hurry, they would never have killed and abandoned three valuable carcasses."

And Rodgers laughed at his own deductions. Wicks also laughed, but his eyes turned toward the sky a trifle impatiently.

"I say, Rodgers," he remarked, "we'll also have to hurry! The sun is going down, and I feel like having a whisky and soda. Let's flip back to Aden."

"Right you are, old fellow."

The Intelligence officer walked with the pilot toward the plane. While Wicks was coaxing the machine into action, he turned and eyed those camels once again. Then something caught his eye. He walked back and picked something out of the sand; it looked like a pebble. It rested in the palm of his hand for a moment. Then he dropped it carelessly into his pocket.

"Queer!" he muttered.

BUT there came a warning shout from Wicks, and Rodgers slipped quickly into the cockpit. A roar from the unthrottled engine followed, the plane began to race across the desert, and the next moment was droning skyward again.

As that droning sound receded in the distance there was a flapping of wings and the vulture swooped back to its watching position on the sand ridge. It blinked one eye at the setting sun. . . .

"My dear fellow, I can't stand it any longer. You're mad, and you're driving *me* mad!"

The pilot Wicks banged his empty glass on the table as he spoke. Paul Rodgers, seated before the piano in the R. A. F. mess, looked up in surprise.

"Mad? I don't understand."

WICKS, a grin on his handsome face, lounged over to the piano.

"Do you realize, Rodgers, what you've been playing with maddening reiteration for the past half-hour?"

The Intelligence officer's fingers slipped from the keyboard.

"No."

"'Three Blind Mice'. . . . *Three Blind Mice.* Just imagine!"

Rodgers laughed spontaneously.

"Not a bad theme, anyhow; Beethoven improvised wonderfully on it. *Three Blind Mice.* Well, it's a reflection of the idea that has been in my head all evening."

"What is that?"

"Three dead camels," replied Rodgers solemnly.

"Then you *are* mad," commented Wicks, with equal solemnity. "Why worry about three dead camels?"

"Who is worrying about three dead camels?" came a gruff voice from the beaded curtain of the doorway. A fattish man in a white drill suit lounged into the mess-room and flung his topee wearily on a cane couch. Paul Rodgers and Wicks recognized the chief of police, Captain Johnson.

"Hello, Johnson! Have a drink?" suggested Wicks.

"That's what I've come for," replied the chief of police. "A burra peg."

"Rodgers here is crazy about camels —three dead camels," explained Wicks, signaling for more drinks.

"Well, he might have been a little more crazy if he'd seen what I've just seen," growled the chief of police.

"What's that, Johnson?" asked Wicks.

"Two dead Arabs, hanging by their necks in a dirty little house in Arabtown," was the reply. "Cheerio, everybody!" the chief of police concluded, raising his glass and gulping it at one draught.

Rodgers lit a cigarette and regarded the fat figure in the white drill suit through thoughtful gray eyes.

"That's interesting, Johnson," he said quietly. "Have you got the murderers?"

"Not a sign of 'em," replied Johnson. "They've left no tracks. Some blood-feud, I suppose."

"Arabs don't hang each other in blood-feuds," commented Rodgers. "Wasn't it robbery?"

Johnson scowled, and held out his empty glass to be replenished.

"Not a thing in the house worth stealing. They only seemed to possess one camel between them. A scraggy beast, too—we found it with its belly slit, in the yard at the back of the house."

"And the camel was lame in the off hind leg," suggested Rodgers.

"So the tracker said," growled Johnson. Then he looked up in surprise. "But *I* didn't tell you that!"

Rodgers shook his head and smiled.

"No, I rather guessed it. Another thing, Johnson: Those two fellows whom you found hanging by the neck came into Aden only last night, didn't they?"

The chief of police put down his glass.

"Look here," he growled. "Who's been spilling the story of this murder all over the place?"

"First I've heard of it," said Wicks.

"And you, Rodgers?" asked Johnson.

"I've been with Wicks all day," replied the Intelligence officer, "and he'll tell you that nobody but yourself has talked to us of murder."

"Well, it's damned good guessing on your part," said Johnson. "Yes, the fellows only arrived last night."

"What's their tribe?" Rodgers asked.

"They've come out of the blue," replied the chief of police. "From the Rub 'al Khali."

THE Rub 'al Khali was the romantic wilderness of Arabia—a region of shifting sands, of lost oases, and buried cities. The land-blank area on the maps of the world. Only three white men had entered it: Bertram Thomas had raced across that desert with relays of camels. St. John Philby had spent three months in it. Paul Rodgers had once lost himself in its singing sands. The Rub 'al Khali was still a mystery desert.

"Probably the murderers came from the Rub 'al Khali and are now racing back to it," growled Johnson. "One might as well search for a pebble flung into the middle of the Indian Ocean as for an Arab murderer in that desert."

Rodgers nodded.

"Talking of a pebble, I'm interested in your two dead Arabs, Johnson," he said. "You're certain robbery wasn't the motive of the murder?"

"Might have been. But the room was bare of anything."

"Not even a pebble?" Rodgers prodded.

"Why the devil should Arabs collect pebbles?" snarled Johnson. "It's food they wanted, judging by their bodies—not stones."

"What have you done with the bodies?"

"I suppose they're being buried at this moment," replied the chief of police. "I had them taken to Headquarters and—"

He stopped; Rodgers had gripped him by the arm.

"Johnson, I'd like very much to see those fellows before they are put under the sand. Can't we go along now?"

"This is a damned morbid idea," growled Johnson. "In any case, I expect we'd be too late."

"We can be there in ten minutes."

There was something curt and commanding in Rodgers' voice. Captain Johnson eyed him uneasily. He was always uneasy where Rodgers was concerned; the fellow had an uncanny knack of mixing himself with high official matters. They said this red-haired fanatic knew more about Arabia than the Arabs themselves. And high officialdom was always behind him.

"Oh, well," he said wearily, "—if you must."

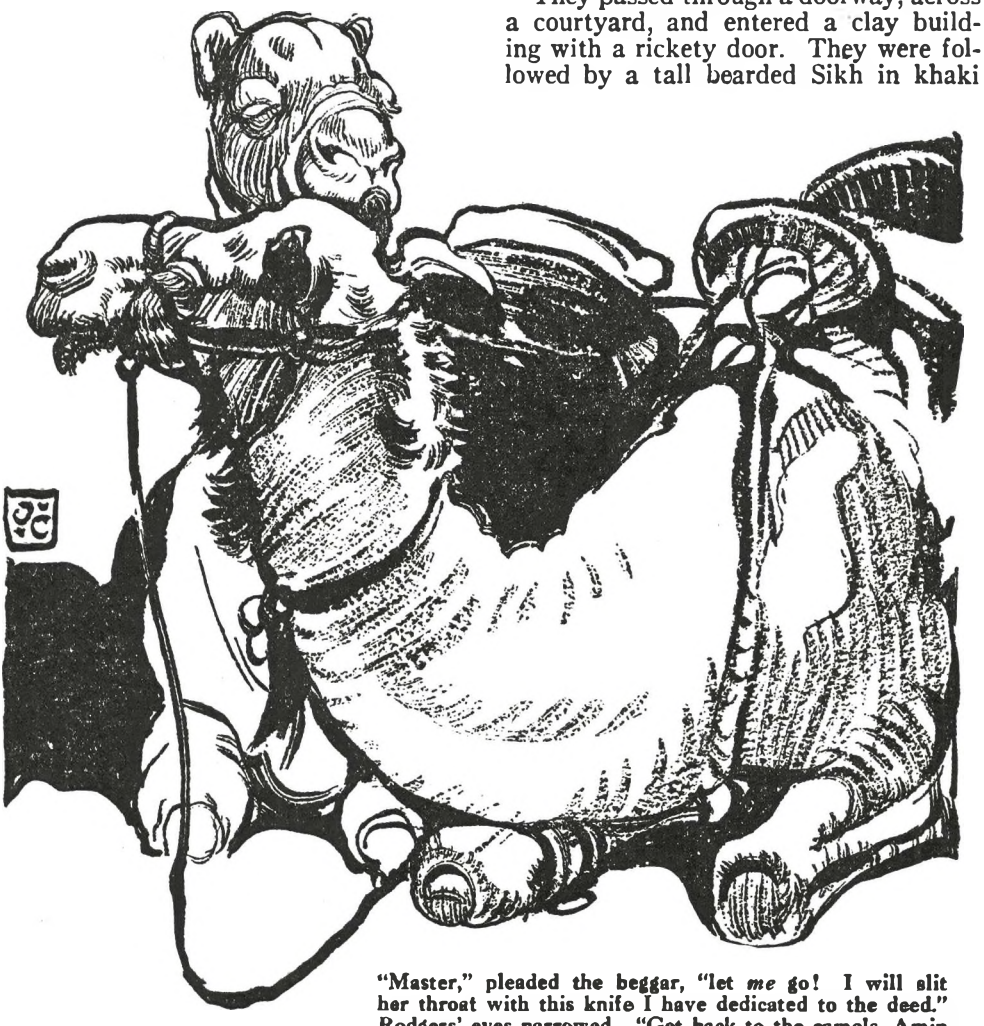
The chief of police drove in sulky silence to the squat brown building which constituted his headquarters. A khaki-uniformed guard presented arms as they entered. Johnson strode into his office, where a Babu clerk rose from behind a desk with an oily smile.

"Have they buried those two Arabs yet?" the chief snapped.

"Nearly, sahib," replied the clerk. "Very nearly."

"That means they haven't," grinned Rodgers. "Lead on, Johnson!"

They passed through a doorway, across a courtyard, and entered a clay building with a rickety door. They were followed by a tall bearded Sikh in khaki



"Master," pleaded the beggar, "let *me* go! I will slit her throat with this knife I have dedicated to the deed." Rodgers' eyes narrowed. "Get back to the camels, Amin Yusuf!" he ordered. "By Allah, I will be obeyed."

uniform, guard of this little mortuary in the tropics.

"Not an edifying sight, eh?" murmured Johnson.

Rodgers did not reply. He had doffed his topee, and with a lock of fiery hair dangling over one eye, he regarded the two figures stretched before him. They were half naked; from the waists of their brown bodies stretched the indigo skirts worn by the men of the Rub 'al Khali, and from beneath those skirts the dusty feet of the Arabs stuck out incongruously.

"Was anything found on the bodies?" he asked.

"Not a damned thing," replied Johnson. "They were as poor as sand rats."

Rodgers nodded, and eyed the bodies more closely. Then, to the astonishment of the chief of police, he hooked a finger in the waist of one of those skirts and stretched it away from the body.

"See that scar, Johnson?" he said quietly.

With a little grunt of disgust, Captain Johnson bent over the body.

"Yes," he nodded. "Looks like a knife-wound, recently healed. Probably the fellow was in a fight."

Paul Rodgers shook his head.

"When Arabs fight with knives," he said briefly, "they go for the heart—or the throat. No, this fellow wounded himself."

"D'you mean to say that the Arab deliberately stuck a knife in his own thigh?"

Rodgers, without replying, turned to the statuesque Sikh in the doorway.

"Give me your knife!" he ordered in Hindustani.

"My fellows don't carry knives—only rifles and bayonets," Johnson growled.

"Your knife!" commanded Rodgers, even more curtly.

"*Aatcha*, sahib," replied the Sikh, and with the swiftness of a conjurer he produced a gleaming blade from his khaki uniform.

"Good! Now get outside and see that we are not disturbed," ordered Rodgers.

"Yes, sahib." The Sikh saluted, and turned his back on the two bodies and the two white men.

"How did you guess that fellow had a knife secreted on him?" Johnson asked.

Rodgers did not reply. He was testing the edge of the blade. "It's sharp enough," he muttered. Then he strode toward the bodies, knife in hand.

"Good heavens, Rodgers, what are you going to do?" gasped Johnson.

"Just a little post-mortem," Rodgers said, hooking his finger once again in that indigo skirt.

"But I can't allow this."

"You've got to allow it," said the Intelligence officer briefly, as he bent down over the dead Arab.

He made two deep incisions. Sickened but fascinated, Johnson watched. He saw the slim fingers insert themselves into the wound, and a moment later they emerged holding something between them that glittered strangely in the dim light.

"I thought so," murmured Rodgers half to himself.

"What is it?" Johnson asked.

"A diamond—and worth a small fortune," said Rodgers. "It's something the murderers missed when they hanged these two Arabs. This fellow knew that the safest place to hide treasure was in one's own body. It's an old trick of diamond-thieves. But the murderers forgot it."

"So these two Arabs were robbers?"

"In a way, yes." Rodgers was still musing over the rough uncut stone which he held in the palm of his hand.

"But who possesses diamonds in that God-forsaken desert?" insisted Johnson.

Rodgers smiled.

"Ever heard of Ophir?" he asked.

"Ophir! Isn't that supposed to be the treasure-house of the Queen of Sheba?"

Rodgers nodded.

"The old Arab writers insist that the land of Ophir is hidden in the Rub 'al Khali—rich mines smothered in sand."

"Well?"

"Maybe these two men come from Ophir," said Rodgers quietly; "and this diamond is part of the treasure that they brought with them. —Have a cigarette?"

Johnson produced his case. "And what now?" he asked.

Rodgers blew a little cloud of smoke into the air.

"I should see that those two fellows are buried at once," he murmured, and with a nod he strode out of the clay house. The Sikh policeman saluted him smartly.

Only when Rodgers had crossed the courtyard and disappeared, did Captain Johnson realize that the diamond also had disappeared.

THE stillness of the evening had descended upon Aden; only that eternal shuffling of naked feet in sand continued. Seated on the veranda of a hotel, bathed in electric light, Paul Rodgers sensed that movement in the darkness beyond, as a sailor senses the murmur of the sea. *Pad—pad—pad.* It was the sound of men prowling like beasts beneath the glittering stars that covered this extinct volcano known as Eden.

Paul Rodgers was in white evening dress, a black cummerbund about his waist; his red hair was smooth and glossy beneath the electric light. Above the smoke of his cigarette his gray eyes were narrowed in thought. Occasionally he sipped from the little cup of coffee at his elbow.

Before him, on the table, was a sheet of paper with some lines of typewriting upon it. He scanned it for the twentieth time. It was a list, an incongruous list. It read:

8 motor cars (six-cylinder type)
2 gold-framed portraits of Napoleon
1 pair brown boots (size 10)
1 pair spats
1 gold-knobbed malacca cane
5 life-guards' uniforms
50 cases of cigars
4 mechanical pianos

"Yes, a queer collection," muttered Rodgers to himself. "But also very illuminating." And then with a faint smile he read the note at the end of the itemized list:

"This, as per your instructions, is the most complete list we have been able to obtain of goods landed at this port within the past three months, F. O. B. for use by H. H. Sheik Abdulla Marabout, and conveyed to him at his camp in the desert. The total cost would be about £10,000.

"Your obedient servant,
"Sharmaki Ali
"Customs—Mokalla Port."

"EXCELLENT information," Rodgers mused. "The two portraits of Napoleon are significant. Sheik Abdulla Marabout is becoming ambitious! Vanity, too, is suggested by the spats and the malacca cane. But where has the money come from? Ten thousand pounds! Few sheiks accumulate as much as that in a lifetime. But this information comes at an interesting moment. Can I fit it into this strange jig-saw puzzle? Do the five life-guards' uniforms go with three dead camels—and now two dead Arabs?"

The smoke of his cigarette swathed the keen, sunburned features. The eternal shuffle of feet in sand continued. . . . It forced itself into the consciousness of Rodgers as a blind Arab beggar squatted in the sand below the veranda. His

sightless eyes and scarified face gazed up at the man in white evening dress. He whined dismally for alms and presented a dirty paw.

"Alms, O Master!"

Still keeping his eyes fixed on that sheet of paper, Rodgers fumbled in his pocket and dropped some coins—one . . . . two . . . . three—in playfully methodical fashion into the outstretched palm.

"May Allah protect you!" whined the blind beggar.

"And open your—ears," murmured the other incongruously.

The blind man half rose, shuffling in the sand.

"I have news," he muttered.

"Tell it in whispers," said Rodgers in soft Arabic.

"It is as you guessed, Master," continued the blind man. "She has been seen in Aden. Her name has been whispered. That name has been carried like grains of sand by the desert wind—the Woman of Antioch."

"So!"

The face of Rodgers twitched. Excitement burned within him. Once again that strange woman of the East was crossing his path. It seemed that Fate was determined their terrible enmity should not be allowed to fall into the limbo of forgetfulness.

The Woman of Antioch! Again and again, when the Wolf of Arabia came to grips with that strange underworld of yellow, brown and black stretching from Alexandria to Cape Guardafui,—the whole length of the Red Sea region,—he discovered that this strange woman was the sinister genius behind the scenes. And again and again he had thwarted her plans. . . .

"It is well," he murmured exultantly.

But rage distorted the features of the man crouched at his feet.

"May the thousand and one tortures rack her body," he cried. "May the goats suck her blood until she swoons with the pain. May her screams ring through the empty desert. May—"

"Softly, softly, Amin Yusuf!" replied Rodgers. "Why must a blind man babble so loudly? There are ears everywhere."

"Yes—and eyes," snarled the beggar. "Eyes that see! Allah gave me eyes to see—and with laughter on her cruel face the Woman of Antioch ordered them to be torn from me! I had failed; she had no further use for me. She made of me the poor thing I am today. The last thing I saw with my eyes was her gloating face. Then only my ears heard her laughter. Some day I shall hear that laughter change to a scream of fear. Then I shall know that her eyes have glimpsed me."

"Allah teaches us infinite patience," murmured Rodgers. "I, too, am seeking the Woman of Antioch. Give me your news quickly. How long does she stay?"

"She leaves tonight for the Rub 'al Khali. It is a long ride, and she has the finest camels," muttered the blind beggar. "Let us kill her tonight, Master, here in Aden."

RODGERS hesitated. Such a revenge was possible. But there were big forces at work: Rebellion was brewing—and there were the mines of Ophir. He sighed and shook his head.

"Let the mother jackal slink back to her whelps," he said. "The kill will be bigger for waiting."

"Her camels move fast," warned the beggar.

"But camels leave tracks in the sand," said Rodgers. "It will be easy to follow her."

"I am blind," sighed the crouching man.

"But worth two men with eyes," Rodgers observed. "Already you have helped me much. And now go you to the camel-market and buy me two beasts that are wiry and can travel fast. We also, my friend, will ride into the Rub 'al Khali."

"I ask nothing more, Master," whispered the beggar. "My hands can buy a camel better than the eyes of other men." The scarred face seemed transformed. "May Allah give us our desires."

"*Imshi!* Go to the devil!" cried Rodgers aloud in English—and the beggar cringed away.

So another piece had fitted into the jig-saw puzzle. The Woman of Antioch. Was it all a series of coincidences? Anyhow, the pieces fitted. Beyond lay the desert—and in that desert Rodgers knew that he and the Woman of Antioch must settle accounts.

A strange woman. A vision of her glowing dark eyes and her parted voluptuous lips appeared before him. A pale, yet exotic face. She was a Syrian, with all the seductive appeal of her race. But how describe her? . . .

The Woman of Antioch, as she was known to the blackguards of the Middle East who worshiped her, was dangerous. Her one aim seemed the overthrow of European influences east of Suez, and that aim had become a fanatical monomania with her. All her days and nights were devoted to the cause. And where was the source of her fortunes? Antioch? That town could not keep a revolt going for a week! And sheiks were buying motor-cars and mechanical pianos. They had been well bribed. That treasure-house must be in the Rub 'al Khali—Ophir—the mines that had sweated forth the treasure for the Queen of Sheba, and later lost in the sands, were now providing treasure for the Woman of Antioch. Two Arabs had looted those mines. With a chest filled with precious stones, and four camels, they had galloped into the mirages and singing sands of the Rub 'al Khali. They had been pursued; the Woman of Antioch had realized that these two blunderers would disclose the source of her wealth.

Well— Rodgers gazed down at two pebbles glittering dully in his palm. One was the diamond discovered in the desert. The other he had taken from the wound in the dead man.

"A dead man and a blind beggar shall be my allies against you," he whispered to that strange vision of dark glowing eyes and voluptuous lips, that hovered in the darkness.

Idly he lit another cigarette.

THEY were in the desert. For ten days Rodgers and the beggar had urged their camels into that sea of sand known as the Rub 'al Khali. A blaze of stars at night, a brassy dome in the day. A ridge of sand climbing toward the sky. Their camels topped it, and with a faint whimper slid into the trough beyond.

Not a sound broke the awful silence of that desert. It was the stillness of death.

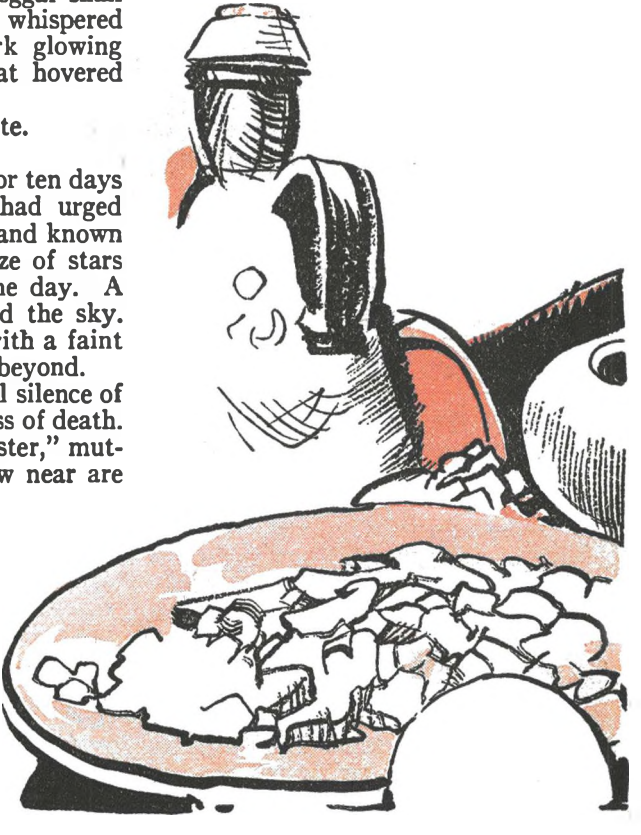
"This is the tenth day, Master," muttered the blind beggar. "How near are we to them?"

"They are one day's march ahead," replied Rodgers. "You must be patient, Amin Yusuf."

Wrapped in a burnous, and mounted on a scraggy camel, Rodgers had eyes only for the sand. He was reading the tracks with all the cunning of an Arab. Those little hollows that went over the dunes and beyond had become familiar to him. He seemed to know intimately the three men and the woman whom they were pursuing. He blessed the stillness that had brought no wind sweeping away the tracks in the sand.

The four were traveling fast. That was apparent from the signs. Rodgers had noted that the impressions of each camel were level. The curved line of the near forefoot was alongside the straighter line of the off hind foot. That meant they were traveling at least seven miles an hour. This was good going, for the desert, where few Arabs traveled faster than three miles an hour.

On the second day Rodgers had seen the impression of the Woman of Antioch. It stood out from the other tracks at an oasis—the stride shorter. He exulted at the sight. The account between Rodgers and the Woman of Antioch would soon be settled! When he had



Slaves digging for diamonds! So it had been in the days of the Queen of Sheba, and so it was today. The mines of Ophir were being looted again of the stones and pebbles that meant power in the great cities of civilization, while the Woman of Antioch watched greedily.

first glimpsed that sign, he had urged his camel forward. Then on second thoughts he curbed it. He knew that at the end of each day's march one of that party of four would go back for an hour in their tracks and scan the desert behind them to make sure that they were not pursued.

Those ten days of riding in the desert had demanded every ounce of endurance that Rodgers possessed. He had to live like an Arab in the full sense, which meant that he drank a little of his camel's milk every three days, and nothing more. He and Amin Yusuf lived on a scanty ration of rice and dates. A strange couple they made as they squatted in the sand each evening—a blind Arab and a red-haired European!

"So you have kept count of the days, Yusuf?" asked Rodgers.

"I can sense the passing of day better than you with your eyes, Master. And if you will only tell me of the signs in the sand, I will read you more of those whom we pursue."

"Nay, I am no child in sand-reading," replied Rodgers. "I learned in the Bedouin camps."

At the same time he was astounded at the uncanny perception this blind Arab seemed to possess, once they had entered the desert. It was as though those ridges of sand and sunset mirages had cleared the scales from his scarred face. Amin Yusuf rode his camel with confidence. His ragged burnous, more like the shroud of a corpse, wrapped him from head to foot; but there was a grim tightening of the mouth, a lowering of the head, that suggested a beast nosing the trail.

IT was in one burning, blistering noontime when Rodgers was half dazed with the sight of those endless tracks in the sand, that Amin Yusuf raised his head and sniffed the desert air.

"There is a change coming, Master," he said. "The jinn of the desert are roused from their long sleep."

"A change is welcome!"

"Aye, but the change is wind," went on the blind man. "And wind will sweep away the tracks. We must get nearer to them, Master." And with a kick of his hairy legs the beggar urged his scraggy camel forward.

Tired and dispirited, Rodgers followed. He wondered whether it had not been just foolish egotism to follow this woman and her three Arab guards—to pit himself and a blind man against their ferocious determination. It would have been easy to tell Captain Johnson that the murderers of the two Arabs were even then in Aden. And when the Woman of Antioch and her three guards had ridden away into the desert, it would have been possible to persuade Wicks to fly along their trail and swoop down upon them.

But this was a personal combat, and Rodgers had decided to settle the affair himself. There was also that treasure-hole in the desert. Each day, each hour, they were drawing nearer to it. From that treasure-house the sheiks were being paid to revolt. . . .

So all that afternoon, until the setting sun stabbed them in the back, did Rodgers and the blind beggar urge their tired beasts over the wastes of sand. The evening star appeared in the sky.

"We must be less than five miles from them," groaned Rodgers, his bloodshot eyes still gazing at the tracks.

"And the winds are gathering in the desert," said Amin Yusuf.

"We will camp here," Rodgers ordered, as his camel stumbled for the fifth time.

The blind beggar sighed, but slid out of the saddle.

In silence the two men ate a little rice. There was nothing to drink. . . .

Paul Rodgers had changed in these ten days; no longer was he the white-garbed European, sitting over his after-dinner coffee. His red hair was splayed over a face blackened with sand and sun. His body had shrunk through lack of food and drink. But there was still determination in those bloodshot gray eyes. The pursuit must continue—the account between him and the Woman of Antioch must this time be squared.

His head drooped wearily. Like a chasing shadow, night was rushing across the desert. He unslung the Bedouin rifle that he carried across his shoulders. He couched himself in the sand, and with a sigh covered his red head with his burnous.

"Sleep, Master. I will watch," murmured the blind man.

The incongruity of the remark appealed to Rodgers. He laughed, but in laughing fell asleep.

Half an hour later, crawling on all fours through the sand, the blind beggar disappeared into the desert wastes.

THE grayness of dawn awoke Paul Rodgers from his sleep. He found the blind man squatting at his side.

"There are men, many men, groveling in the desert like sand rats five miles away," murmured Amin Yusuf at the first stirring of Rodgers.

This news caused the white man to sit upright.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I heard them, in the darkness of the night," said the blind man patiently. "While you slept I crawled beyond the sand ridges and suddenly discovered a hole in the desert—a big hole where jinn are born. But men were digging."

"Digging!"

A steely glint came into the gray eyes of Rodgers. So Amin Yusuf had found a hole in the desert! It meant that a blind man had gazed upon the secret mines of Ophir, the mines where slaves had sweated and died that treasure might be emptied into the lap of Sheba.

He decided quickly. His feet slid into his sandals; his hand crammed a few dates into his mouth.

"We must part here, Amin Yusuf," he said quietly.

"Master!" whimpered the blind man.

Rodgers turned his blackened face to where the sun was streaking the sky.

"You will stay here with the camels," he said. "I am going to dig with the sand rats in the big hole."

"But the woman, that daughter of Shaitan?" protested Amin Yusuf.

"She must be sought stealthily," replied Rodgers. "A man with eyes must seek her. When I have found her, I will return to you."

"And if you do not return?" asked the blind man.

PERHAPS it was the cold morning air that caused Rodgers to shiver slightly. But he knew well that the Woman of Antioch was a dangerous enemy; if he was caught there would be no mercy.

He fumbled in his burnous, and drew forth paper and pencil. There, at dawn in the great empty quarter of the Rub 'al Khali, he scrawled a message. Dirty and crumpled, it might reach its destination in Aden. If it did, the man who read it would know that he, Paul Rodgers, who was known as the Red Wolf of Arabia, had died a miserable death. But those few words would also reveal a great conspiracy that was brewing in the desert. Other men would take up the trail.

"If I do not return," said Rodgers quietly, "you will ride these camels back to Aden. Do not delay. In Aden you will seek out Captain Johnson, the chief of police. You know him?"

Amin Yusuf spat in the sand. He knew him.

"And how long do I wait?" asked the blind man.

"Unto the second night."

"If you do not come, Master, I shall know—" He hesitated.

"You will know that I have failed," replied Rodgers. *"Insha'allah!"* And he turned away.

But there was a sob behind him. The man with the scarred face had brought forth a cruel Arab knife. It gleamed in the first rays of the sun.

"Master," pleaded the beggar, "let *me* go! I will find her and slit her throat with this knife that I have dedicated to the deed."

Rodgers' eyes narrowed.

"Get back to the camels, Amin Yusuf!" he ordered. "By Allah, I will be obeyed."

The blind man cringed in the sand. Then he lifted his sightless eyes and stared in the direction Rodgers was taking. . . . The blind man shivered.

"Allah protect him," he muttered.

SOME two hours later Rodgers lay within the shade of a sand ridge, gazing down upon the most amazing sight that he had even seen in the desert. To reach his point of vantage he had had to slither past two watchful sentries—typical Arabs of the Rub 'al Khali, with their indigo skirts swathing sturdy legs, and the rest of their bodies bared to the sun and wind of the desert. Each sentry carried a rifle of modern pattern.

But they had failed to notice that slinking form in the sand. And now Rodgers was perched on the edge of the big hole in the desert. Beneath him the sand had been swept away and revealed cliffs that descended several hundred feet. Swarming on ledges, digging into sand, hewing and hacking with primitive tools, were hundreds of Arabs. Against the cliffs they seemed like ants or maggots, worming treasure from the earth. Each man had a basket, and into these baskets stones and rubble were tumbled.

A cracking sound came to Rodgers' ears, and he glimpsed whips. Each group of workers had an overseer with a whip in his hand, and the whip was used frequently on the bare backs. The men worked furiously. Much work must be done before the brassy sun climbing the

"And such is the thirty-seventh punishment," cooed the woman of Antioch. "A miserable and painful end, my dear Rodgers."

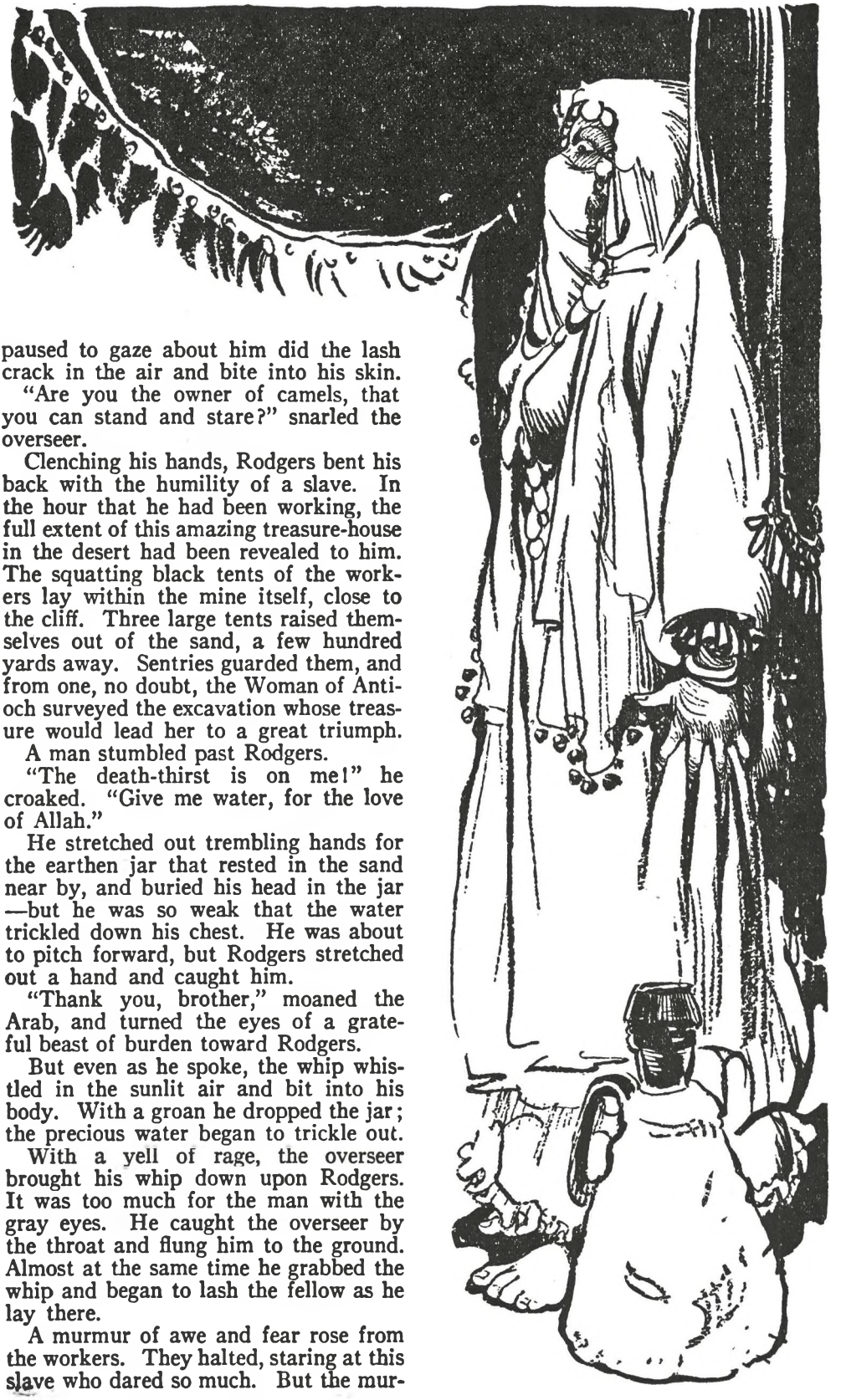
heavens made work impossible, so the diggers were urged on to their task.

Slaves digging for diamonds! So it had been in the days of the Queen of Sheba, and so it was today. It was another woman, ruthless in her desires and implacable in her hatreds, who now demanded this sacrifice in blood and sweat for the stones and pebbles that meant power in the great cities of civilization. The mines of Ophir were being looted once again, while the Woman of Antioch watched greedily.

With one quick glance over his shoulder, Rodgers began to slither down the cliffs. . . .

The man lay in the sand. His brown body, slashed and broken, was stepped over by workers staggering beneath heavy baskets of stones. An hour ago a whip had lashed him—but already the man was forgotten, and the sandaled feet of the treasure-diggers spurted sand as they passed over the lifeless body.

No one noticed that his basket, which had rolled aside, had been taken up by another Arab, bare to the waist. No one noticed that this Arab had gray eyes deep-set in his blackened face. He worked doggedly; only once when he



paused to gaze about him did the lash crack in the air and bite into his skin.

"Are you the owner of camels, that you can stand and stare?" snarled the overseer.

Clenching his hands, Rodgers bent his back with the humility of a slave. In the hour that he had been working, the full extent of this amazing treasure-house in the desert had been revealed to him. The squatting black tents of the workers lay within the mine itself, close to the cliff. Three large tents raised themselves out of the sand, a few hundred yards away. Sentries guarded them, and from one, no doubt, the Woman of Antioch surveyed the excavation whose treasure would lead her to a great triumph.

A man stumbled past Rodgers.

"The death-thirst is on me!" he croaked. "Give me water, for the love of Allah."

He stretched out trembling hands for the earthen jar that rested in the sand near by, and buried his head in the jar —but he was so weak that the water trickled down his chest. He was about to pitch forward, but Rodgers stretched out a hand and caught him.

"Thank you, brother," moaned the Arab, and turned the eyes of a grateful beast of burden toward Rodgers.

But even as he spoke, the whip whistled in the sunlit air and bit into his body. With a groan he dropped the jar; the precious water began to trickle out.

With a yell of rage, the overseer brought his whip down upon Rodgers. It was too much for the man with the gray eyes. He caught the overseer by the throat and flung him to the ground. Almost at the same time he grabbed the whip and began to lash the fellow as he lay there.

A murmur of awe and fear rose from the workers. They halted, staring at this slave who dared so much. But the mur-

mur was lost in a growl of rage that came from the other overseers who rushed, whips in hand, to the attack. They fell upon the recalcitrant one and began to beat him. Paul Rodgers reeled and the sunlit sky went black.

"Stay your hands, men!"

A calm voice petrified them into inaction—a voice that unquestionably commanded—above all, a woman's voice. Lying in the sand, Rodgers twitched at the sound more than at the lash of the whips. The Woman of Antioch!

"Lift up this bold slave!"

Rough hands dragged him to his feet. Dizzy with pain, his blackened face smeared with sand and sweat, Rodgers found himself gazing into eyes whose dark depths had on more than one occasion displayed hatred, passion and even a queerly distorted love. They gleamed now. Did she recognize him? Her gaze did not waver as a torrent of Arabic explanations came from the overseers. Her white-clad form had a subtle grace amidst those toil-racked bodies working against the cliff.

"This slave is brave. He has the strength of ten men in his body," she said quietly.

"By Allah, he has!" groaned the overseer who had been hit by Rodgers. He had raised himself from the sand and stood humbly before the half-veiled woman in white.

A gleam of amusement came into those dark eyes above the veil. Beneath the veil, however, the rich lips must have twisted cruelly. She turned to the overseer.

"If he has the strength of ten men," she said, "then it is for you to see that he works like ten men! Such bodies are rare. Do not spoil them. Work them to death, but do not lash them to death. See that this slave works the whole day without rest. And when the day's work is finished bring him to the tent of the Sheik Abdulla Marabout."

"It shall be as you say," grunted the overseer, a leer crossing his face.

AGAIN those eyes glanced at Rodgers. There was the soft sound of laughter, laughter such as the blind beggar heard even in his darkness and could never forget. Rodgers gazed back boldly at those eyes, searching them for some sign that he had been recognized. But there was only a gleam of amusement in them. She passed on.

Once again the whip cracked. Rodgers bowed his bruised body and took up the basket. . . .

Eight hours later a bent and toil-worn slave was dragged by the overseers to one of those three tents that lay beyond the cliffs of diamonds. His gray eyes salty with sweat, his body bruised and battered, he was thrust forward into an atmosphere of soft rugs, a luxurious divan, and the tinkling of a piano.

A piano!

Paul Rodgers lifted a weary head at the sound. In that tent in the heart of the great empty quarter of Arabia, some one was playing Chopin's *Marche Funèbre!* He stood listening; then his mouth twitched with the semblance of a smile. It was a mechanical piano—one of those ordered by the Sheik Abdulla Marabout.

FOR nearly a minute Rodgers and the overseers stood within the tent while the solemn music surged somewhere beyond a hanging wall of silk. The men with their whips shuffled uneasily. And as the march continued with an implacable sonority to the end, Paul Rodgers felt a chill of apprehension at his spine.

The "Funeral March" ended. Then a woman's voice spoke sharply:

"Leave the man. Wait outside the tent."

Bowing to that unseen voice and with a final leer at the prisoner, the overseers withdrew. Even as they shuffled into the sand outside, the silken wall was dragged aside and the veiled Woman of Antioch entered.

"Chopin, I am told, was always your favorite composer, my dear Rodgers." She smiled cruelly.

So she *had* recognized him! A great weariness overcame Rodgers. For once the miasma of defeat swirled about him.

"And this," went on the Woman of Antioch, "is the music that you people of the West trumpet over a corpse. Much good it does the corpse! But on this occasion the dead man has the pleasure of hearing his own funeral march."

"The dead man being—"

The Woman of Antioch nodded.

"Yourself. You are, my dear Rodgers, practically a dead man. Allah does not send you into my hands a third time merely to escape."

Rodgers moved his racked body a step toward her. Simultaneously her hennaed fingers appeared, grasping an automatic pistol, with the barrel pointed at him.

"Very well," sighed Rodgers. "Shoot and have done with it."

Once again the weariness of conflict was upon him. In that fleeting moment as he faced his worst enemy, the fact that he had failed did not sting him with bitterness, for he realized that though the man had failed, the great game would go on. Eventually the real failure and bitterness would be for the Woman of Antioch; to others, sitting comfortably in the club at Aden at this moment, there would be an ultimate triumph.

"No, no, my dear Rodgers," smirked the Woman of Antioch. "Your lethal weapons of the West, though sure and certain, are too lethal for us of the East. To a man like the Wolf of Arabia such a death is easy. In Arabia our enemies are punished with slow death. That Chopin music was only the beginning; there will follow the thirty-seventh punishment."

"The thirty-seventh punishment?"

'Rodgers looked into those cruel dark eyes; there was no mercy there.

"Yes. Shall I read it to you?" She began the singsong chant of the mosque: "'And the man shall be buried up to his neck in the sand. Only his head shall remain above the surface. He will drown in the sand. The sun that withers and scarifies the earth will blaze down upon him. He will undergo the tortures of the damned and cry out for mercy. But there must be no mercy. *Allah O Akbar!* Great is Allah!'"

Rodgers swayed—he was about to leap forward in a last desperate effort to rid the world of this woman who hated the white race so fiercely. But as though she sensed the desperation in his gray eyes, she cried out—and instantly the overseers shuffled in. Their hands grasped his bruised body.

"And such is the thirty-seventh punishment," cooed the Woman of Antioch. "A miserable and painful end, my dear Rodgers. That you, the first of all white men, should discover the long-lost mines of Ophir only to die, is indeed sad. There will be no lectures to those staid geographical societies in London and New York—no honor to heap upon you. Only your skull will lie rotting upon the surface of the sand, a thing for the jackals to lick and grin at."

Rodgers hung limply in the hands of his captors.

"But at least your great plan will fail," he said quietly. "Already the news is being taken by fast camel to Aden. All this treasure that you are digging, and the creation of this puppet the Sheik Abdulla Marabout, will be useless. When that message enters Aden, the lethal weapons of the West will be set in motion. Airplanes will hover over the palace of the sheik. Bombs will be dropped. And the Woman of Antioch will find even the empty quarter of Arabia no safe hiding-place."

Impulsively, the hand that held the automatic pistol struck him across the face. Blood trickled from his mouth. The cry of rage that came from the Woman of Antioch died away at the sight of that blood. A strange gleam, almost of pity and love, came into her eyes. A caressing hand stretched out toword him; then the hand hesitated.

"Take him away!" she ordered in Arabic. "Let him dig for treasure until the noonday sun tomorrow, and then bury him to the neck in the sand. He must work for us before he dies."

The overseers dragged Rodgers out of the tent. When he had gone the Woman of Antioch flung herself to the divan. Sobs shook her body.

IT was finished. . . . Numbed and half dead, Paul Rodgers was buried in the sand up to his neck. His flaming crop of hair, and keen-featured face lay on the surface of the desert almost like a decapitated head. They had placed him on a sand ridge overlooking the mines of Ophir.

"In Europe the heads of traitors were spiked as a warning outside the gates of the castles. Your head will be a warning to those who dare advance through these sands to our treasure-hole."

So the Woman of Antioch had spoken, as she turned her back upon this dreadful deed and walked slowly back to her tent. It seemed that for once the Orientalism of her nature could not endure the sight of that face suffering the agonies of blazing sun, thirst and torture. Rodgers was left alone.

He was like a man drowning in a boundless ocean. But it was an ocean of fire. The sun beat down mercilessly upon his head; his limbs were clamped fast by the weight of the sand. The desert seemed to be dragging him down into its fiery embrace. And always the torturing sun beat down.

With parched and blackened lips he prayed for the sun to set. Not that it would end his agony—but he was thinking of the blind beggar Amin Yusuf, and of the order he had: to ride to Aden with that message. It was important that

Captain Johnson act swiftly. This treasure dug out from the mines of Ophir would be used to buy guns, ammunition, and all the necessaries of a great revolt in the desert. At the moment the Sheik Abdulla Marabout had left the camp of the treasure-diggers for his own land; he was to bring men and machines. Only the Woman of Antioch remained to control the treasure-cave.

Hour after hour went by with agonizing slowness. Rodgers became delirious. He began to sing snatches of melodies; he laughed loudly. One of the sentries stared suspiciously at this head in the sand that yelled to the brassy skies:

"Three blind mice . . . . see how they run!"

And each song was followed by a cackle of laughter from the red head in the sand.

Toward sunset only a queer croaking sound came from the throat against which the desert sand lapped so tightly. And as darkness came racing across from the horizon like an army of men on black camels, the sentry slipped his rifle beneath his arm and slithered down the sandy slope to where the evening meal was being prepared.

THE eyes of Rodgers looked down upon the mines of Ophir. The mines of Ophir! He croaked his despair at the sight. Whipped slaves, a revengeful woman, and boxes of diamonds. . . . And his own miserable carcass being strangled by sand. In the last glimmer of consciousness, he saw a slave crawling up the face of the cliff from the mine beneath. The slave moved cautiously, and yet stumbled. Through his half-blind eyes Rodgers dimly conceived the figure to be familiar. Amin Yusuf! Could it be? Had the blind beggar disobeyed his orders? Wrath rose in the half-dead body of the Intelligence officer.

The continuous manner in which the slave climbed, and that occasional stumble, revealed that the man was blind. It must be Amin Yusuf! And now he was moving away in a direction that would take him a hundred yards from the man choking in the sand. Rodgers realized that he must attract the blind man's attention. It was his only chance.

He raised his voice to sing; but only a horrid croaking sound came forth. His voice was gone—even to attempt to shout tortured his throat. But the blind man, now moving swiftly, was going in another direction. Rodgers made a last convulsive effort.

"Three blind mice . . . . see how they run!"

It came forth in a thin scream—the absurd melody that had tortured his brain and now tortured his throat to give forth. And as the trickle of sound went across the desert, Rodgers saw the blind man hesitate. Once again the imprisoned man croaked forth that nursery song. Then darkness, the darkness of night, swept over the desert.

FIVE minutes later, the half-delirious Rodgers sensed the blind beggar digging with his paws like a dog in the sand. But it meant hours of work in the darkness before Amin Yusuf dragged forth the numbed body. Then another half hour of feverish massaging of the limbs, before Rodgers could stumble into the desert, guided and sometimes carried, by the strangely quiet Amin Yusuf.

"Why are you not on your way to Aden?" croaked Rodgers.

There was a moment's silence in the darkness; then Amin Yusuf spoke.

"I came back to find that daughter of Shaitan, the Woman of Antioch," he said. "I have a long account to settle with her."

"And did you find her?"

The answer of the blind man was a sob of disappointment.

"I learned that she had ridden into the desert, an hour previously. It is said she goes to visit the Sheik Abdulla Marabout with important news."

This time it was Rodgers who was silent. He realized that, for once, the cruel brain of the Woman of Antioch had failed her. She dared not trust herself to see this man, whom Fate had placed in her hands, die from the torture in the sand. For, mingling with the passion of her hatred was the passion of love.

"At last the camels, Master," murmured the blind man.

Like a sack, Rodgers was lifted into the saddle. The blind man tied him to the beast, so that he would not fall.

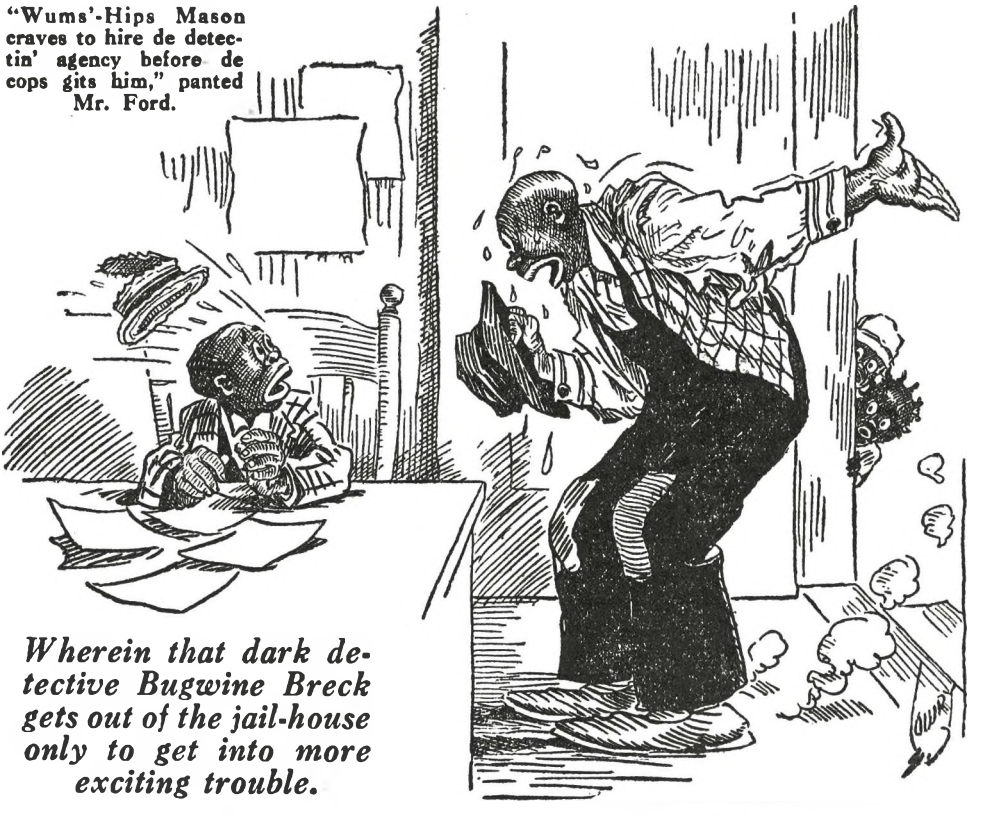
"Where do we go?" asked the beggar.

"To Aden!" croaked Rodgers.

At the same time his hands felt the two rough diamonds at his waist. He dragged them forth, and tossed them carelessly into the sand.

"Diamonds of many deaths!" he cackled, and his knees instinctively urged the camel forward.

Another of these gripping stories of the Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.



"Wums'-Hips Mason craves to hire de detectin' agency before de cops gits him," panted Mr. Ford.

Wherein that dark detective Bugwine Breck gets out of the jail-house only to get into more exciting trouble.

Settled out of Court

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

"AND *now* whar is you been, for de last three days?" The gangling head of the Columbus Collins Private Detective Agency, for Colored, glared down upon the firm's five-foot junior partner and janitor, "Bugwine" Breck.

"In de jail-house."

"*Again?* Aint Chapter Fifteen of de detectin' book say de sleuth's job is to *put* in de jail-house—not *git* in it?"

"All I knows," muttered Mr. Breck gloomily, "is eve'y time I goes round de courthouse wid a case, some de white-folks all time leads me down a hall. Den somep'n say *'Clang!'* and dar I is—in de jail-house again!"

"Dat whut you gits for all time lookin' like a defendant!" Mr. Collins' disgust deepened. "—On top of bein' so dumb you whistles when you thinks!"

Mr. Breck eyed his flap-crowned all-seasons' straw hat, his faded overalls, the two left shoes that ever added mystery to his tracks in Demopolis' dust. "All time gits mixed up round a courthouse," he mumbled resentfully. Then, more loudly, "Cain't nobody help lookin' like a defendant, on de wages *you* pays me—when I gits it. Takin' all de agency's money to buy yo'self perfume wid, so you'll sniff noble to Worms'-Hips Mason's gal!"

Columbus shoved his fall model—fall of '28—greenish-black derby on the back of his head and planted himself belligerently between his aide and the door. "Look here, shawt dawg!" he rasped. "Keeps on tellin' you dey aint no money *in* detectin', way it is now. And besides, Lucille Summers is my gal—not Wums'-Hips'—from now on. Dat gal crazy

about automobile-ridin'—and Wums'-Hips cain't run his car no more, excep'n' along back streets in de dark."

"Huccome he cain't?"

"Old license done expire out on him, dat why. Start out in dat car now, and he'll wind up whar you all times does—in de jail-house."

"Gits mixed up round courthouses," mumbled Mr. Breck explanatorily.

"Courthouses aint all!" snapped his chief significantly.

"And aint Lucille still got de license for dat car of her'n whut dey combs out de cow-catcher of de engine after she aint see dat train last month?" Bugwine had his thought-for-the-day.

"Jest keeps on showin' how ign'ant you is in de head!" Columbus ruined it at birth. "You aint know no law! In Alabama, you cain't swap licenses round from one car to another. Dey is standard equipment on de car: got to stay in de family. Dat's whut is got Wums'-Hips hawg-tied—and me settin' pretty! Lucille been lookin' lovin' at me ever since his license done run out on him."

Bugwine blinked uncertainly. There was liable to be more—and worse—in the wind here.

"Fact is, I been aimin' to improve up de agency some—git it to makin' more money," Mr. Collins confirmed his fears, "so me and Lucille can make marriage befo' Wums'-Hips can git up enough money for de new auto-license. Hit costs 'leven sevumty-five, and he aint accumulated but six bucks all summer."

The apprehensive look on Mr. Breck's features deepened; so far as he was concerned, past bitter experience was that any change proposed by Columbus would be for the worse.

"De detectin' agency," his superior continued to think aloud, "all time been barkin' up de wrong tree, payin' 'tention to de wrong thing."

"Whut dat?"

"Cotchin' crooks—"

MR. BRECK'S blinking speeded up. Here was heresy!

"And whut happen den? De crook gits in de jail-house, but de *lawyers* gits his money. Aint nothin' left for de detectin'-boys whut jailed him."

"Sho aint!" recalled Bugwine fervently. "Old lawyers cleans 'em like a cyclone pick a rooster!"

"And *dar*," returned Mr. Collins conclusively, "is whar-at you smacks de right baby on de nose, for once! Gittin' a case into court is jest like leadin' de lawyer right smack up to yo' pocket-book and turnin' yo' back. After he gits through, aint 'nough money left for nobody else to buy peanuts for a germ."

Bugwine saw everything except where Columbus was heading.

"Which is whar-at *you* comes in," his chief further lifted the veil. "I decides us organizes a legal department in de agency—and puts you in charge of it. On top of still bein' de janitor."

"All time gits mixed up round courthouses," demanded the stunned Mr. Breck defensively. "And says yo' ownself I aint know nothin' 'bout de law—"

"Ex-actly! Older you gits, de dumber you gits—and you's aging fast! Whut I means is, de legal department do's adjustin', an' blocks off de lawyers, by settlin' de cases out of court. So you aint need know no law: jest do like I tells you. Den *I* collects de money—and lets Wums'-Hips Mason smell de gas when me and Lucille rides past *him*, walkin'!"

OUTSIDE the Collins Detective Agency later, Bugwine looked at white letters newly painted on its dingy window. He could not read, but three reliable authorities had agreed that they spelled *"Mr. Breck, Mgr. Legal Dept."* Sure looked noble, admired Bugwine—like the *Report on Fish Hatcheries, Vol. 8,* that constituted the law library on his, or the legal department's, end of the agency's table.

All that the agency—and the legal department—needed now was a case! . . . With that Baptist Hill combination of three-star extra and town crier, Willie Ford, already pedaling furiously down the center of Hogan's Alley to supply it.

"Wums'-Hips Mason done got hisself in a tight spot!" panted Mr. Ford. "Craves to hire de detectin' agency before de cops gits him."

Bugwine reacted instantly. Entering the agency, he reached with one hand for the bear-trap that was pinch-hitting during the depression for handcuffs, while with the other he assembled the collection of hardware that ever clanked at his belt while professionally employed: T-square, yardstick, lantern, and lenseless magnifying-glass frame.

"Whar-at Wums'-Hips?" he clarioned as he flicked a final sleeve over his saucer-sized tin star. "Bugwine Breck always gits his man!"

Mr. Ford's eyes widened in mingled perplexity and admiration.

Outside the Collins Detective Agency later, Bugwine looked at white letters newly painted on its dingy window.

"Wums'-Hips aint crave to be got," he pointed out anew. "Cops is waitin' for him to come out now, is huccome he hollerin' for de detective agency. Got his business in a jam."

"Come out of whar?" questioned the *Watson* of Hogan's Alley.

"Preacher Daniels' barber-shop."

"Whut he done wrong in dar?"

Willie hesitated, as though in the face of imminent skepticism, then plunged: "Wums'-Hips done drove he car into de barber-shop—and now he cain't git it out."

"Drove he car *into de barber-shop?*"

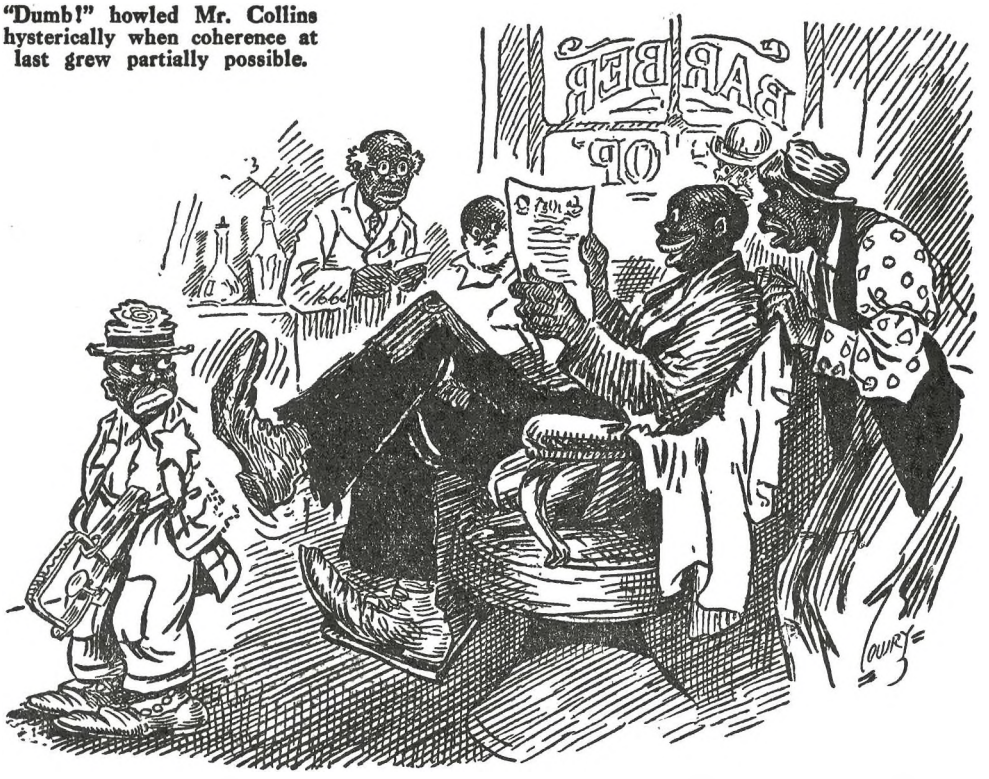
"Both doors was open—and he seen de po-lice comin'," elucidated Mr. Ford illuminatingly. "Now de trouble is, Wums'-Hips's all right as long as he stay in de shop—but de minute he drive out de cops gits him for havin' his car on de streets widout no license on de back! Dey is layin' for him outside now."

Mr. Breck's brain strained at its leash as possibilities presented themselves. Columbus knew that Worms'-Hips had six dollars, and he desired them as a fee to finance his own courtship of Mr. Mason's sweetheart Lucille. Yet Columbus would also wish for Worms'-Hips to remain in the barber-shop and in trouble while he, Columbus, consummated that courtship. Conflicting aims calculated to rack and practically wreck a one-man legal department mentally. Bugwine's feet developed a tendency to limp in worried circles under the overload at the other end of him.

ARRIVAL at the scene of Worms'-Hips' sorrow was no help. Everything Willie Ford had reported was true, plus. Just inside, and blocking the front doorway of the outraged "Preacher" Daniels, —who presided in an uncertain pulpit on Sundays and at Number One chair of his barber-shop week-days,—stood a battered and licenseless car.

Just previously, "—Aint keer is dey *six* cops waitin' for you outside, I says drive dat car on out of here now, and gimme room to shave de customers!" Daniels had been declaiming heatedly. "Doctor still sewin' on dat boy's ear, whar I jumps when you comes bustin' into de shop in a car!"

The luckless Worms'-Hips rolled his eyes obstinately and stuck around. Outside the law waited, and he knew it. Coming out into daylight in that car had been a mistake; driving it into the barber-shop had been another—but driv-



"Dumb!" howled Mr. Collins hysterically when coherence at last grew partially possible.

ing it *out* of there now would be the greatest error of all!

"Stays here twel gits me a license," he mumbled mulishly.

A resolution no sooner voiced than overwhelmed by a stir and honking in the street without, as Columbus Collins drove noisily past—with Lucille Summers giggling admiringly beside him.

Worms'-Hips fumbled wrathfully but futilely at the razor-string about his neck. The case called for machine-guns, he sighed. Columbus was making hay with his girl Lucille, while the sun was in eclipse, so far as Mr. Mason was concerned.

Then, with a clatter like a shipment of hardware, succor was at hand! In full cry, fettle, and feather, Detective Breck burst upon the scene.

"Whar-at de case?" clamored Mr. Breck in the doorway.

"Here me," responded Worms'-Hips feebly from the rear.

Bugwine sized up and seized the situation. "Don't move, nobody," he ordered as he unlimbered his yardstick, "twel I measures de door here, and 'xamines de footsteps clues."

Awed glances were exchanged among the hangers-on. Not every day did the commonalty see a famous detective at work!

Mr. Breck slapped his yardstick rapidly along the threshold, then shifted it to the denuded back of Worms'-Hips' car. "Jest like I thunk," he pronounced impressively as he finished: "old car done been driv' right in through de door!"

Admiring murmurs ran through the room. Presence of the car was already proving the correctness of the great sleuth's deductions! Only "Preacher" ruined it, with: "Who say it *aint* been driv' through de door? And whut comes in can git out again. Step on de gas and git dat boat out my barber-shop befo' I starts somep'n my ownself, you hear me?"

"Craves to see de client confidential," interjected Mr. Breck importantly. "Law say a boy cain't leave de scene of a accident jest beca'ze a barber starts hollerin' at him."

"Git confidential in de back room, den," grumbled Mr. Daniel. "But is dat car still in my shop at noontime, I calls de dawg-wagon for it!"

In the rear room, client and sleuth came to conference. "How much money is you got?" Mr. Breck put his finger unerringly upon the important point in the case.

"Six dollars. And cain't move de car widout a license for it whut costs eleven

sevumty-five," summarized Mr. Mason dully.

Bugwine fished in his overalls and emerged with a pencil, and a square of soiled wrapping-paper which he unfurled. Fifteen minutes of mathematics minus luck ensued. "Aint *no* way you can figure it!" he reported despairingly.

"Figure whut?"

"To git six bucks you *is* got come out bigger dan de 'leven sevumty-five whut you *aint* got."

"Come out de same way for me all last week, too," confessed his client mournfully. "Old 'rithmetic aint budge. And dat aint all, neither!"

"Whut aint all?"

"Preacher Daniels git me for parkin' my car overtime in de barber shop, is I aint git it out by noontime: po-lice git me is I *is* drive it out widout a license; and now my gal done gone ridin' wid dat fast-workin' Columbus Collins while I's in de jam."

BUGWINE scratched his head sympathetically. "Been better for you," he suggested helpfully, "is you aint been born."

"Too late to do nothin' about dat now," objected Mr. Mason gloomily. "Besides, whut I gits me a detective for is to git me *out* de jam—not jest to tell me I is in one. I got to git it settled—"

Something clicked, then clanged in Bugwine's skull. An idea, vibrating in response to a familiar word. *Settled!* Settled out of court! Gears enmeshed: *that* was his new function! And he already had a case so to settle. All he had to do was to get an eleven-dollar-and-seventy-five-cent car-license for Worms'-Hips—plus a profit for the agency—out of the six dollars that his knob-eyed client had. Where mathematics had failed, Bugwine Breck must succeed. Otherwise, there was Columbus, his chief, to live with. . . .

"Park yo'self, Wums'-Hips!" Bugwine wheeled suddenly on his customer in an impressive bit of back-to-the-wall stalling. "Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, *always gits his license!*"

"Done parked. Here twel noontime—den in de jail-house, is you aint do yo' stuff," Mr. Mason issued his itinerary—even as there again arose outside the return-trip honking and back-firing of a gentleman taking another gentleman's lady-friend for a ride.

But once more in the street, Mr. Breck sagged in soul and the seat of his trousers. Making promises was easier than making good. Returning to the agency failed to help matters; for Columbus was already there, it proved, and inclined to be critical of the help.

"Lucille gwine down to de barber-shop, directly," volunteered Mr. Collins complacently, "to git herself a laugh at dat shrimp Wums'-Hips, like I tells her to. As a client, he might do; but as a husband for a sweet gal like Lucille he'd make a swell cawpse at a funeral! —And Willie jest tellin' me Wums'-Hips is done slip up and retain *you* to straighten out his business."

"You aint help it none, ridin' round wid a client's gal while I is handlin' de case!" muttered Bugwine morosely.

"Gwine *marry* his gal while you is straightenin' out his business," corrected Columbus caustically, "and raise me a whole mess of whiskers besides; beca'ze straightenin' out Wums'-Hips' business is my idea of a life job. Whut you aim to do?"

"Settle de case out of court," quoted Mr. Breck vaguely.

"Well, you sho better step on yo'self, den, beca'ze dat boy gwine be in court about four minutes after he try to drive dat car out de barber-shop widout a license on it. And you stay away from courthouses: remember who got locked up last time you messes round one! All time gittin' mixed up in courthouses."

Bugwine remembered; but what could a boy do about it? However, in case of doubt, try a dose of barbecued pork, had ever been his remedy. Hence, shortly, "Bees'-Knees" Thompson had a customer, low in stature and spirits.

MR. THOMPSON was bent over a big-type circular, and didn't see a credit customer at first, so absorbed was he in current quotations on transportation. "Sho is cheap to ride on de train dese days," he volunteered when at last he lowered his eyes to Bugwine's physical and social level.

"Eve'ything done got cheap—'cept'n' debts," sighed Mr. Breck.

"White-folks tellin' me cash money quit talkin'—and gone to hollering," small-talked Bees'-Knees as he drew a cup of half-and-half—half coffee and half chicory. "Even de taxes gittin' less, up at de courthouse."

"Stays away from courthouses," Mr. Breck reiterated his platform, as he reached for the cup. "All time gittin' mixed up when I messes round dem."

Then suddenly in the midst of swallowing his beverage, Bugwine loosed a yelp and splutter indicative of a large cause for so noisy an effect. Bees'-Knees mistakenly plied him with ice-water before the real reason for the outbreak emerged, and even then it lacked details.

"*Hot dawg!* It's wuth it!" howled Bugwine.

"Whut is?"

"Old idea jest hit me! Sees de light! Gangway for de legal department!" And Mr. Thompson was left regarding with puzzled amazement the place where Bugwine had been.

INTO Preacher Daniels' barber-shop where nothing had changed, burst a Detective Breck for whom everything had changed—from the ears up.

"Whar-at Wums'-Hips?" he queried loudly as he squeezed past that client's car, still parked inside the blocked doorway.

"In de back," indicated Mr. Daniels sourly, "whar he cain't see de cop so good."

Bugwine shouldered past him to where Mr. Mason still sat on the edge of a tub—"*Baths 15c*"—and eyed his future dismally.

"Whar-at de six dollars?" the legal department of the Collins agency came instantly to the point.

"Why?" Mr. Mason made no move. A boy who had six dollars on Baptist Hill in 1933, no matter what he wore, always had kilts on underneath.

"Eve'ything gittin' cheap!" bulletined Mr. Breck exultantly. "Old depression done hit de courthouse! Jest git a notion from readin' a railroad 'scursion circular in de barbecue-stand. Eve'ything half off for cash dese days—and *you* is got de cash; six bucks of it. So you stays here wid de car while I gallops to de courthouse wid yo' six bucks—"

"License for dat car costs 'leven sevumty-five," croaked Mr. Mason hopelessly.

"Used to was, you means. Tells you cash quit talkin' and gone to hollerin'. Show de white man six bucks now'days and he aint let you git out wid it. Sell you de *courthouse* for six bucks, way things is in Alabama *dis* year!"

Worms'-Hips jaw dropped; his eyes brightened. Bugwine Breck didn't have any sense, but he was talking sense now. Weren't even the railroads selling excursion tickets for what they could get, instead of for 3.6 cents a mile? Then why not a county putting on a few bargains to coax out the coin, as well?

Mr. Mason began disinterring his six dollars. . . .

Into the civil court clerk's office shortly shuffled something small, dark, and close to the door—bearing six soiled dollar-bills, and feeling skittish but safer. It was in the other, or criminal, end of the building that a boy was all the time getting led down a hall!

Mr. Breck looked about him. There were a lot of brass-barred windows set in the partition that ran the length of the big room. Over each window was a name, but Bugwine didn't bother. Not only because he could not read but because he did not have to. Long experience was that any white man behind any brass-barred window would always take money. He approached one where a white man wrote busily.

"'Scuse me, white-folks," he opened hat-in-hand negotiations, "but is dis here whar-at a boy gits a license?"

"Sure. What's your name?"

"'Taint for me, suh. Gittin' it for boy name' G'awge Mason. Eve'ybody call him 'Wums'-Hips.'"

"Little short fellow, and runs a junk-pile he calls an auto?"

"Yas, suh; dat him! Takes one dem 'A' licenses on it, unless'n you got some-p'n more smaller."

"Yep, I know him. About twenty-five years old, and looks like the Missing Link on a bad day. Owes me two-bits now. Goes with that yellow girl Lucille Summers, that's maid up at the Seminary."

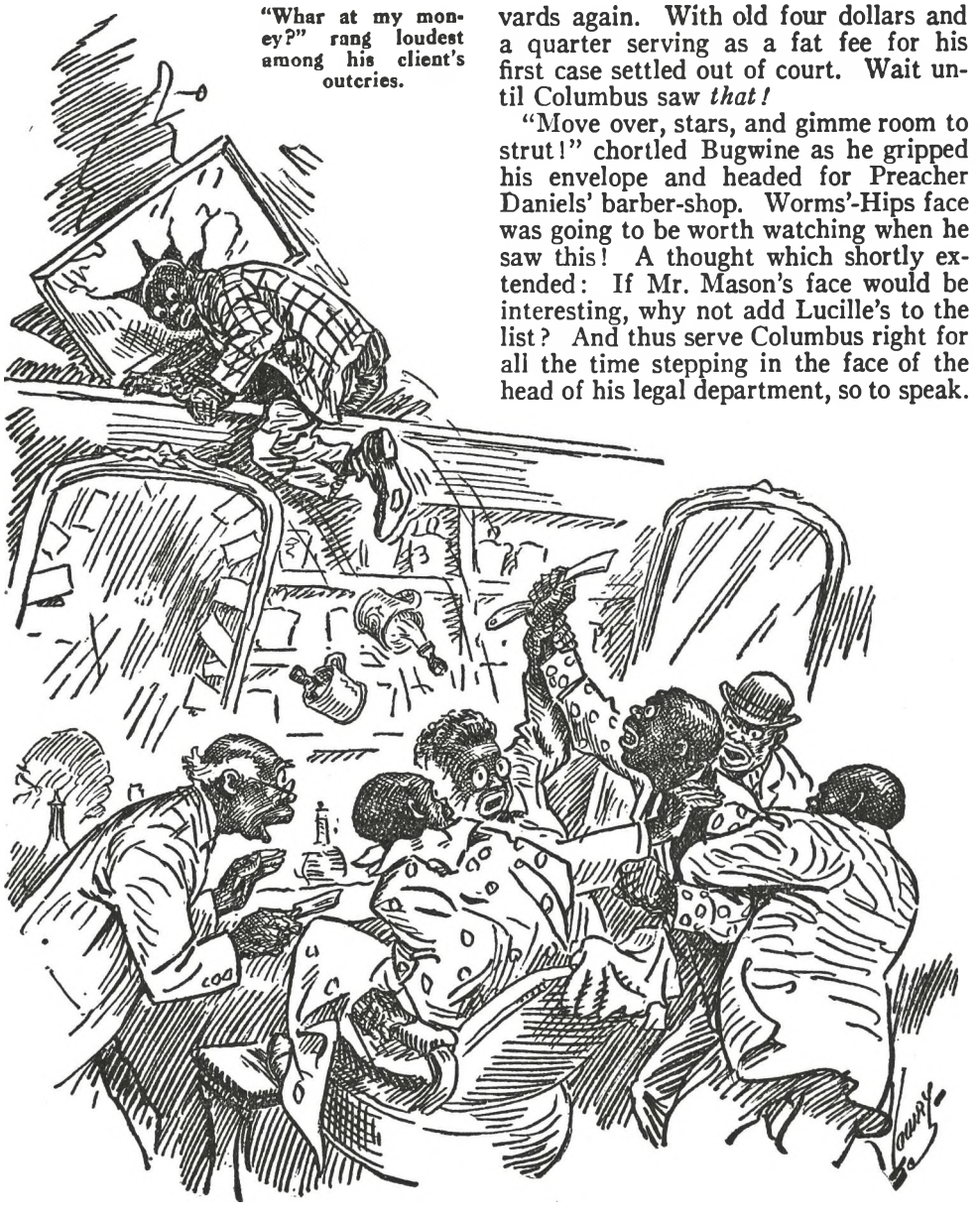
"Yas suh! Dat him!" Mr. Breck hoarsened with delight. Everything was going fine. "G'awge fixin' hisself to marry dat Lucille."

Then the crisis: The clerk pushed out the paper. Would six dollars swing it, or would Marengo County hold out for the full price? Bugwine pushed in his six dollars, while his heart speeded up.

"Wait a minute—that's wrong!" objected the clerk.

BUGWINE gulped hard; it was now or never! "Eve'ything gittin' cheaper, Cap'n," he launched his plea. "Six bucks is all G'awge is got—and de cops and Preacher and Lucille all waitin' outside for him to come out now. Colonel, dat boy jest *'bleeged* to have dis license quick, and cheap for cash, suh. And he aint got but dis six—"

"Six?" The white gentleman seemed



"Whar at my money?" rang loudest among his client's outcries.

to be reading things into the situation of the besieged George that tickled him mightily. "Well, if George is in a shotgun jam like that, never let it be said that Marengo County hasn't got a heart! In a special case, and on account of the depression, then, we'll make it not six—but a dollar seventy-five for cash. So, here's your change—four and a quarter—and the papers in the case that'll make everything regular."

Mr. Breck staggered, then straightened. As a financier, Andrew Mellon had nothing on him! And what he had in this big flat envelope was what it took to put Worms'-Hips back on the boulevards again. With old four dollars and a quarter serving as a fat fee for his first case settled out of court. Wait until Columbus saw *that!*

"Move over, stars, and gimme room to strut!" chortled Bugwine as he gripped his envelope and headed for Preacher Daniels' barber-shop. Worms'-Hips face was going to be worth watching when he saw this! A thought which shortly extended: If Mr. Mason's face would be interesting, why not add Lucille's to the list? And thus serve Columbus right for all the time stepping in the face of the head of his legal department, so to speak.

"Brains, rally round!" re-chortled Mr. Breck in higher key and glee. "Courthouse done tamed!"

Meanwhile, Lucille sat on her front porch and reviewed her pedestrian plight. Of her own car, nothing was left but the license-plate. And the law made license-plates nontransferable outside the family. Yet Lucille was a product of the automotive age. Burning gas was her idea of joy. And now she was walking, unless— Inexorably invisible scales in the mind of Lucille began to tip toward Columbus. Worms'-Hips might have "It"—but Columbus had a car, and a license to run it.

Then into the alley and picture scuffled the exuberant Bugwine, waving a big envelope and *en route* to settlement of his first case out of court.

"Whar-at you gallopin' to now, shawt dawg?" Lucille hailed him curiously.

"To git Wums'-Hips out de barber-shop befo' Christmas," Mr. Breck mangled a once-famous slogan, "—wid dis license-tag in here."

Lucille lost no time. "Git my shoes on, and I's right wid you," she indicated her intentions. Columbus had started looking good to her, it was true; but if Worms'-Hips was about to be restored to circulation and the boulevards—

An irritated Preacher failed to welcome further sightseers to a shop that had been cluttered with them all morning. Among others, Columbus Collins had just arrived, with the air of one who comes eagerly and early for a ringside seat at a slaughter. In the rear, Worms'-Hips Mason continued to perch on a tub-edge and refused to issue forecasts. Outside lounged the patrolman on the beat.

And now came the triumphant Bugwine, the shining-eyed Lucille. "Prop back dem doors!" ordered Mr. Breck noisily. "Old car fixin' to roll!"

Columbus' brows drew sharply together. Agency loyalty flew out at the window if Bugwine brought a car-license in at the door. Then they smoothed. Mr. Mason—or Bugwine—had never had over six dollars at one time!

FROM the bathroom in the rear shuffled hopelessly forth a still-skeptical Worms'-Hips. Getting a car-license for six dollars was too good to be true; but if it *were* true, there was yet hope for him with Lucille. Lathery patrons joined Preacher Daniels in looking at a clock that lacked five minutes of striking twelve.

"Hollers which down dar?" demanded Mr. Collins loftily of his underling.

"Says settles de case *out* of court, but *in* de courthouse!" clarioned Mr. Breck defiantly. "Done tamed old courthouse now! Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, always gits his license! Gangway while I delivers!"

"Bugwine sho is got it dis time!" confirmed Lucille proudly as she drew nearer to Marengo County's latest license-owner, the newly emergent Worms'-Hips Mason.

"Lemme see it," Columbus died hard. If Bugwine *had*—

Mr. Breck flourished the big flat envelope, and thrust it into his chief's dubious hands—his chief who was all the time stepping in an aide's face. "Read it and weep!" he directed ringingly.

MR. COLLINS opened the envelope and read. But as he did, the effect was gratifying in size but devastating in character. His expression grew startled, then startling. Tears came to his eyes, it was true; but the tears were of laughter! Peal after guffaw of it, while Columbus rocked and rolled uncontrollably —triumphantly—to the risibilities of something Mr. Breck could not grasp.

"*Dumb!*" howled Mr. Collins hysterically when coherence at last grew partially possible. "Dumb to de gills, and back again! Turn *you* loose in a courthouse and you aint never miss; all you ever plays is hell wid de bark on! All time gummin' up eve'ything!"

"Aint gum up nothin'!" the indignant Bugwine stood his ground perplexedly. "I slips de white man at de window de money—cash money—and he slip me de envelope wid eve'ything in it; say eve'ything regular from now on."

"Whut white man? At *whut* window?" Mr. Collins turned toward a Lucille who must soon be his by bungling and default—bungling by Bugwine and default by Worms'-Hips.

"Caint read de writin' across de top of it," returned Mr. Breck doggedly, "but I tells him 'bout Wums'-Hips, and he know de car. Know Lucille, too. Slip me de license dar widout no argufyin', cheap for cash—"

Columbus choked interruptingly. He yearned—then desisted: some juryman might consider Bugwine as human life. "And so you gits Wums'-Hips a car-license is you?" he asked instead. Yet there was a cat-and-mouse quality about this question that was disturbing.

"Sho is."

"Den whar is it?"

"Whar *is* it?" Bugwine whirled in amazement. "I jest hand it to you."

"Dis?" And then, indeed, Columbus' cacklings crescendoed! "Den, boy, you aint tamed no courthouses *yit!* And you's still gummin' 'em up! Dis aint no car-license—it's a *marriage*-license! For G'awge Mason and Lucille Summers, it reads. And Lucille aint never gwine make marriage wid a boy whut'd git jailed de minute he even try to run his car out de barber-shop! —Is you, honey?"

Mr. Breck gulped, crowed, staggered, while his eyes revolved independently, like a stunned steer's. So *again* he had become mixed up around a courthouse! In settling his first case out of court, he hadn't settled anything; rather, he had made it worse, far worse; played right into the perfidious Columbus' crafty hands! For, to a car which he could no longer use, Bugwine's client Worms'-Hips had now added to him by Bugwine's blunder a nontransferable marriage-license that he could not use without a car, either!

Then upon the sufferings of Mr. Breck was superimposed the clamor of Mr. Mason as the extent of his disaster swept him. A Mr. Mason whose hopes had no sooner been raised than they had been doubly dashed to earth by this full and frenzying glimpse of the facts. The anguished and angered Worms'-Hips was shortly being held by four friends while he stood upon a fifth and implored a five-foot detective, treed upon the top of the shop's shaving-mug case, to come down and be massacred.

"Whar at my money?" rang loudest among the client's outcries. "I gives you six bucks, and all you fotch back is a wrong license whut aint no good to me nohow, in de shape I's in!"

"Aint gwine on no hoof-honeymoon wid nobody at all," corroborated Lucille meaningly.

"Kick in wid dem six bucks now, or I pins back yo' ears and swallers you raw!" roared Mr. Mason in fresh anger at this confirmation of his own fears.

Aloft, the ashen-gilled Mr. Breck regarded the wreckage and shivered. Here, it flashed over him, was a situation that must be saved instantly or not at all. And raw material for salvation was conspicuously lacking, while all about him lay the makings of personal disaster. Groans racked him as he recalled all that had happened—and contemplated that which was yet to happen—to *him*—if he failed to find a way. Courthouses were still fatal to him, after all!

IN the neighborhood a clock began to strike twelve. Bugwine opened his mouth in agony—and found himself convulsively "cuckoo"-ing twice, too, before he suddenly saw comets, stars, and—daylight!

He had it! Not a second too soon—but he had it—

"Brains, pick yo'self out de white meat!" he rewarded that often-disappointing organ aloud. "Sho is rally bad fo' I's ruint!"

Then, as below, Preacher Daniels moved ominously toward the car-blocked doorway, there burst from the top of the mug-case a triumphant voice. "Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound," rang from beneath the rafters, "—always gits his license!"

"Which is more dan yo' clients ever is," rasped his chief derisively from below. "Come on, Lucille; let's git gwine befo' Bugwine gits no dumber!"

"Jest a minute," interrupted Mr. Breck imperiously from his altitude. "Wums'-Hips fixin' git de license on de back of he car, and drive right on out wid it. I fixes eve'ything while I is round de courthouse. Bugwine Breck aint never miss!"

"Aint never miss makin' a mess, you means!" jeered Columbus.

BUT the puzzled Worms'-Hips had halted in his grim preparations to climb the mug-case. His mouth hung open, the better to hear. Lucille and Preacher stood indecisive.

"I manages de legal department of de agency," declaimed Bugwine in increasing voice, as his open-mouthed audience grew more bewildered. "Settles eve'ything noble, out of court!"

"Listen to him good—beca'ze you's listenin' to his *last words!*" growled Worms'-Hips bloodthirstily, as fresh realization of his own ruin at Bugwine's hands swept him.

"—So," continued Mr. Breck exultantly, "jest uses de marriage-license instead de car-license! And—"

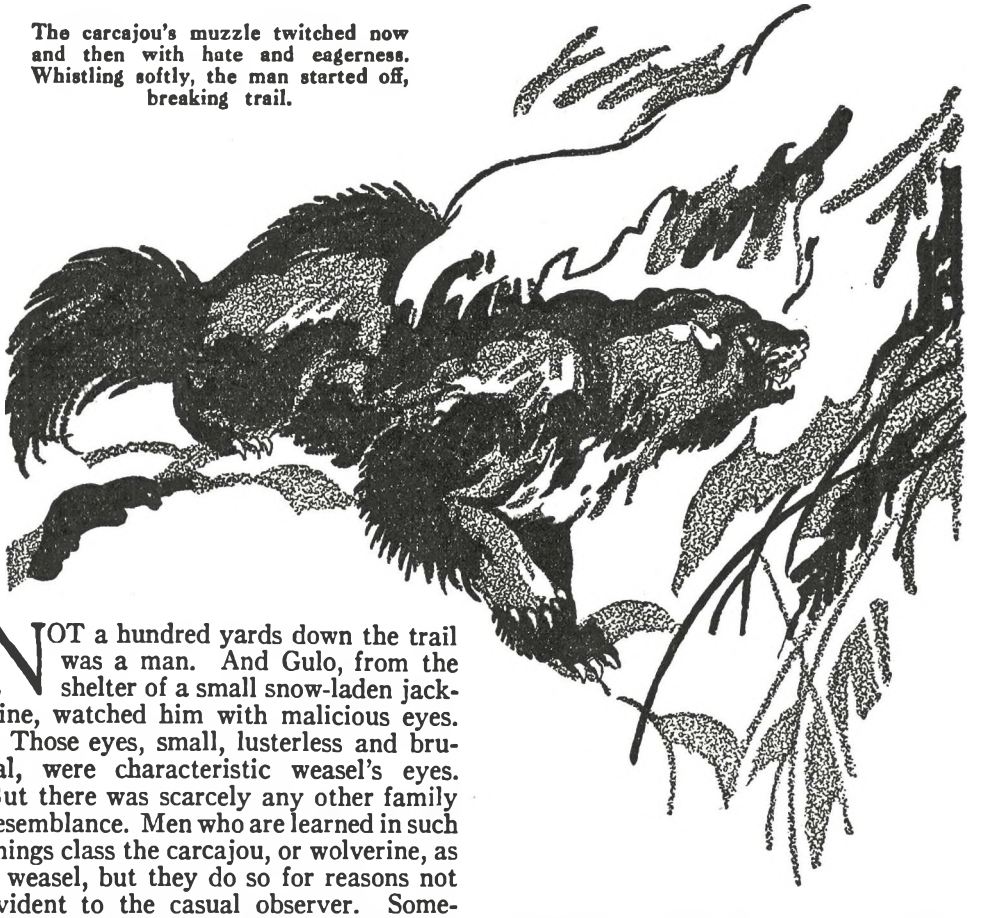
"Somebody git de white-folks, quick!" interrupted Mr. Collins brutally. "—De one wid de cap and butterfly net, on de cuckoo-wagon—for Bugwine! His brains is done busted down on him. I done took up de whole mawnin' tellin' de little stunned half-wit dat de law aint *let* you put your license on somebody else's car, unless dey is—"

And here suddenly it was Columbus' turn to be stunned, as he too saw the light—the same light Bugwine had seen!

"—Unless," the resurgent Bugwine was already taking the words—and credit—out of his mouth, "dey is both in de same family.... Which is whar Wums'-Hips and Lucille—and his car—*will* be, jest as soon as Preacher here lay down dat shavin'-bresh and starts tyin' of de nuptial knot whut'll make Lucille's license good again—on de back of *Wums'-Hips' car!*"

Butcher of the Bush

By SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT



The carcajou's muzzle twitched now and then with hate and eagerness. Whistling softly, the man started off, breaking trail.

NOT a hundred yards down the trail was a man. And Gulo, from the shelter of a small snow-laden jack-pine, watched him with malicious eyes.

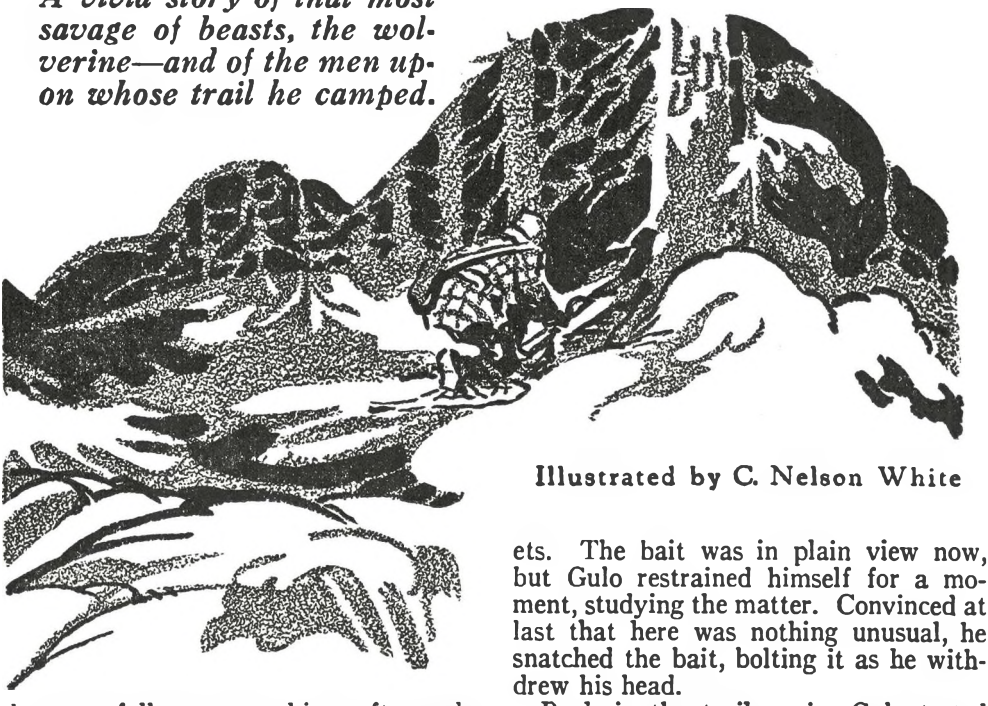
Those eyes, small, lusterless and brutal, were characteristic weasel's eyes. But there was scarcely any other family resemblance. Men who are learned in such things class the carcajou, or wolverine, as a weasel, but they do so for reasons not evident to the casual observer. Something over two and half feet long from the point of his nearly black muzzle to the tip of his short brownish-black tail, Gulo more nearly resembled a bear than a weasel, the mink, the fisher or any other member of his tribe. His body was short and powerful, instead of long and sinuous; his legs stubby, and armed with powerful claws. The carcajou is the most powerful mammal of its size in existence, the most cunning animal in all the North Country, and the most vicious.

The man Gulo was watching straightened up from his work, and cast a glance back along his trail, as though he had felt those malicious eyes upon him. But he did not see Gulo, hidden as he was by the snow-weighted boughs of the little jack-pine.

Gulo had not hidden because he was afraid of man; for properly speaking, he was not. He hated man, and he knew that man had a weapon that struck down ruthlessly from a great distance; but he was afraid of no man, and of no work of man save the rifle. The scent of this man and the scent of his dogs were strong in the carcajou's nostrils, but he was not afraid. His muzzle twitched, now and then, with hate and eagerness, but that was all.

Whistling softly beneath his breath, the man tramped back to his team of dogs and started off, breaking trail, the

A vivid story of that most savage of beasts, the wolverine—and of the men upon whose trail he camped.



Illustrated by C. Nelson White

deep new-fallen snow making soft sounds, "*ump—ump—ump,*" as it packed beneath the webs of his snowshoes.

Gulo swaggered out of his hiding-place and made his way without haste to the spot where the man had been working. Here, at the base of a large jack-pine, between two arching roots, was a little pen, constructed the fall before. It was roofed over with a thatch of needled branches, and in front was a narrow door, through which came the enticing odor of bloody meat.

But the carcajou knew what a marten would not know: that the little innocent twig upon the threshold, if touched, released sudden disaster. Gulo, with his ruthless claws, had wantonly torn to bloody shreds the carcass of more than one fine marten caught in just such a deadfall.

The fresh, bloody bait was, however, tempting. One of the carcajou's names, in the country where he is known, is "the glutton." There were few times in Gulo's life that he was not hungry—and there never was a time when the lust to kill and destroy was not hot and strong in him.

Calmly, with the confident air of one who has a task to perform and knows exactly how to go about it, Gulo made his way behind the little pen, and with two swift strokes of his mighty paws tore away a half-dozen of the guardian pickets. The bait was in plain view now, but Gulo restrained himself for a moment, studying the matter. Convinced at last that here was nothing unusual, he snatched the bait, bolting it as he withdrew his head.

Back in the trail again, Gulo tested the wind and found it clean. He paused, looking around him. The snow was soft, except in the trail, and it would not be easy going. Gulo preferred to take the easiest path, always. Besides there would be other interesting things to do along this man-made path through the bush.

Unhurriedly, Gulo wandered on down the trail.

All in all, it was a very profitable day for the wolverine. He robbed nearly a score of sets; cunningly sprung and rendered impotent nearly an equal number of steel traps. Gulo was an expert with traps.

The iron was easily scented, regardless of how much it had been rusted in hemlock water, smeared with blood or otherwise treated. The scent of iron was always there, if one took the time and trouble to ferret it out—and if, of course, one had a nose like Gulo's.

ONCE the trap was located, Gulo dug cunningly beneath it and lifted it from its covering. Sometimes he contented himself with leaving the trap there in plain sight, so that nothing more valuable or intelligent than a rabbit or a moose-bird would venture into it; but just as often he flipped the trap over with his paw, the weight of the trap itself pressing down on the pan and re-

leasing the trigger, so that the iron jaws came together with a vicious snap, in a little flurry of powdery snow.

The last set he uncovered that day made Gulo considerable trouble. There were three traps, he discovered, set in the form of a triangle. One of them was poorly concealed; the other two were hidden very carefully indeed.

THE cleverness of the set aroused no admiration in Gulo. It merely made him angry; as angry as though he sensed, in some way, the fact that this arrangement had been for his particular benefit. Gulo had been working along this particular trap-line for over a month.

Very carefully he dug out and sprung the first two traps; the third, the one that had been scarcely concealed, he did not deign to notice; nor did he touch the bait. Instead, he left upon it plain and offensive evidence of his contempt for the crudity of the attempt—a common trick of the carcajou. Then Gulo plodded along toward the downing sun and the little lay-over camp that he knew very well was only a short distance away.

Gulo did not come close to the camp. He particularly hated the smell of woodsmoke; and besides, the camp was in a little clearing, where there would be no protection for him against the superior weapon of the man, should he be seen or scented by the loud-mouthed dogs.

But in the bush there were many things to be done. The big white hares would still be in their forms; and while Gulo had the contempt that all the bush has for rabbit-meat as steady fare, the red blood was a good sight upon the soft white fur. There would be mice, too, if he cared to dig down to their snug nests.

And then, of course, there was the matter of sleep. Gulo slept when he felt like it; whenever he was sufficiently gorged. He worked diligently half the night before he wearied of his killing, and curled up for rest with a dark muzzle pleasantly dabbled with fresh blood.

GULO was on the trail an hour before dawn. He would have preferred to wait until the man had broken trail for him, but he was hungry, and he knew that in the traps ahead of him there would be food ready caught; some of it warm and still full of fight, and therefore better than the baits the man would leave.

The first set was a half a mile from the camp; a pair of steel traps before the upthrust roots of a fallen tree. Back against the roots was the carcass of a porcupine—the great weakness of the fisher. And there was a fisher in the traps, a foreleg in one of them; both hind legs in the other. The fisher had been there but a few hours; he was still fighting, the merciless chains clinking softly as he struggled.

Leisurely, sure of his victim, Gulo sauntered down to investigate. The fisher spat like a cat at the sight of the carcajou, and Gulo bared his teeth in a snarl. Desperately, the fisher tugged at the traps, leaping into the air, twitching his long, snow-bedraggled tail, rolling in the trampled, bloody snow, shaking his sinuous body, his little round eyes red with fear and hate.

Gulo came up cautiously. He knew the fisher, and respected him. The fisher is a weasel, and there is no member of that family that is not a bloodthirsty fighter.

But the fisher had no chance at all. Hampered as he was by the traps, and wearied with his long hours of fighting them, he was easy prey. Gulo leaped suddenly, one huge paw raking aside the snarling head. His strong teeth closed over the muscular neck, wrenching their way through the hot flesh. The fisher quivered and went limp.

LEAVING behind only bloody rags of fur, Gulo wandered on. The next two traps were empty, so the wolverine contented himself with robbing them neatly of their baits, and digging the traps out of the snow.

There was a fox in the next trap, but he had been caught for several days, and was frozen stiff. He would be poor fare, so Gulo merely ripped the beautiful tawny pelt into shreds, as a sort of casual gesture.

An unfortunate rabbit, crouching unsuspiciously in his form near the trail, was Gulo's next victim. Gulo located him on one of his numerous excursions off the trail, to explore the wind.

The man was on the trail again, but far behind him. Gulo knew very well that should the man come dangerously close, it was only necessary for him to leave the trail, and cut into the bush. No man would be fool enough to try to run down a carcajou. The carcajou is not fast, but he possesses stamina and endurance beyond all belief.

Shortly before noon the wolverine heard, very faintly, the angry shouting of the man as he urged on his dogs. Gulo turned and considered. He had fared very well; he felt comfortably gorged. Deliberately, he turned and struck off into the bush.

In the soft snow Gulo's huge furry feet served him nobly. He did not hurry, but he kept on without pausing, and mile after mile flowed behind him.

IT was not a straight trail that Gulo left—he meandered from side to side, to scent the wind from different angles, and to investigate interesting trails and scents. He picked up another rabbit and a family of long-tailed mice in the first few hours, and later in the afternoon, near the shore of a great lake, he came upon a fresh, floundering trail that caused his eyes to glow with sudden savage lust. Here was meat worth the killing!

It was a well-marked trail that he followed, the trail of three moose. One set of tracks was large, and Gulo would not have followed had these been all; but there were smaller tracks, and in the smallest was the stain and the scent of fresh blood. Gulo knew what that meant. He had pulled down wounded animals before. Probably a stray wolf or two had attacked this cow moose, her calf and the yearling, and wounded the calf. But the wolves had been beaten back, and had gone elsewhere, to better hunting.

Gone now was Gulo's lazy indifferent swagger, and the dullness from his eyes. He was on a hot trail with a big kill at the end. His short powerful legs swung swiftly in a dogged, untiring trot, and his eyes glowed hungrily. The trail beneath his wrinkling muzzle grew fresher with every passing moment.

Like any good hunter, Gulo considered the wind. It was fresh in his face, and hence there was no danger that it would betray him; the scent of the moose came to him strongly, and he knew that the end was not far off. Skirting the lee side of a long ridge, he came to a point from which the moose were plainly visible. They had angled off down the side of the ridge, toward a broad stream, and were now feeding slowly on the tender twigs of some young birch trees.

Gulo turned back into the bush, swinging in a wide circle, and approaching the unsuspecting moose at right angles to the wind, and with a heavy growth of

underbrush to screen his movements. The snow was soft, and without the suggestion of a crust, so that his approach was utterly noiseless. Gulo did not hurry now; he knew the value of caution when stalking prey. Crouching, dragging his furry belly in the soft snow, he crept toward the moose.

The cow moose and the calf were side by side, feeding from the same tree; but the yearling was several yards behind, astride a sapling he had ridden down for the purpose of securing some choice bits.

Gulo wormed his way stealthily, inch by inch, toward the cow and the wounded calf.

Timing himself to the instant, the wolverine leaped just as the cow was about to move on. His great teeth met and tore through the tendons of the calf's thigh, while one taloned forefoot clawed deep into the long hair of the animal's side.

The calf bleated loudly with pain and terror, leaping sidewise—and Gulo took advantage of the movement to wrench his teeth deeper, swinging his stocky body in such a way as to tear open the wound. Snorting in fury, the cow wheeled and stamped the snow, while the yearling stared in confusion. Then, suddenly, the

cow turned and trotted away, the yearling following swiftly. . . .

In a dim sort of way Gulo despised the enemy he had so easily vanquished. His own mate would have fought till there was no strength left in her, no matter what the odds, had her young been attacked. But moose, as Gulo knew, were different. Even the mother moose uses her formidable hoofs only when she herself is attacked, and leaves her young to fight their own battles.

IT was an easy victory. The calf went down; it tried to rise again, but the wolverine had another hold now, one which made escape impossible. His teeth met in the soft warm tissue of the throat, and the calf fell again, and presently was still. The carcajou proceeded to gorge himself, greedily picking the choicest morsels. When he had finished, he spoiled the remainder of the carcass for any scavengers who might scent the kill, and wandered on.

Gulo knew exactly where he was. Not far away, in the direction he was traveling, he would cross again the trap-line that he had been robbing for many weeks. His wanderings had simply brought him straight across a wide-flung loop of traps.

Not far from where he intersected the trail there was a big camp; larger by far than the little lay-over camp where the man had stopped the night before. A headquarters camp, where the fur was cached, and where, as Gulo knew perfectly well, the man spent one or two whole days of each week.

For a long time Gulo had intended to visit this camp during the absence of the man. The wolverine had a great curiosity about the belongings of men, and an instinct, at times almost overpowering, to steal and hide these belongings.

Why wolverines possess this urge has never been explained; but it is a typical trait of their kind. Gulo was a destroyer, a killer. When he had tired of killing, it interested him, and satisfied his lust for destruction, to hide the possessions of other animals, to destroy them.

When the wolverine came across the trap-line, he turned to the right and swaggered directly toward the big camp, silent and white and deserted in the midst of its clearing. . . .

Cautiously, Gulo circled the open space, studying the wind. It was clean, and his eyes and ears warned him of no lurking dangers. He approached the camp, making his way with some difficulty through the soft snow.

A huge diagonal drift obscured one end of the eaves, leaving visible just one corner of a high square window. The carcajou sniffed for a moment at the frosted panes, and worked around to the gable end of the camp. Here the drift was not so high, and he paused before the door, studying it with eager eyes. This was the way the man entered; Gulo had watched him, from the edge of the clearing, more than once. But how?

Tentatively, the wolverine hooked his sharp, powerful claws into the crack of the door, and pulled. It gave not at all. That, then, was not the way.

The latch caught his attention; it projected; it was different. It was rank with the odor of man. Gulo reached up and struck at the projecting bit of wood —a sharp, powerful downward sweep of his mighty paw.

A strange thing happened. The door, weighted with the snow packed against it, swung open swiftly and silently when the latch was released; the drifted snow gave way sharply beneath Gulo's feet, and spilled across the threshold.

Alarmed, Gulo leaped back. He ran a few steps and waited, tensely. The scent of the place was strong, now, with the door open, and it was a scent that had in it a dozen hated odors: iron—woolens—fire—cooked foods—brass—man—tanned leather—all smells that Gulo hated. Cautiously he crept up to the doorway and peered inside.

NOTHING moved; there was nothing to move. And the hated scents were stronger than ever. His eyes gleaming redly, Gulo slid down the soft drift across the threshold, and entered. The room was big and dark and odorous. To the left was a stove, rather rusty, and smelling of iron and the ashes of wood-fires. Beside it was a long shelf covered with cans, some of them old and worn smooth, others new, and flaunting brightly colored labels. On a string above the stove a few odd garments had been left to dry.

Under the window was a little table, covered with hacked, discolored oilcloth. At the far end of the room was a bunk, mattressed with needled boughs. There were a few pictures cut from magazines tacked to the unpeeled log walls; and suspended by bright brass snare-wire, high overhead, were a number of bales, neatly wrapped in sheets of birch-bark.

Gulo studied the room and its contents with savage interest. He leaped up on the stove, and thence to the shelf. The cans he sent banging to the floor with powerful thrusts of his paws. He did not pause until the shelf was empty.

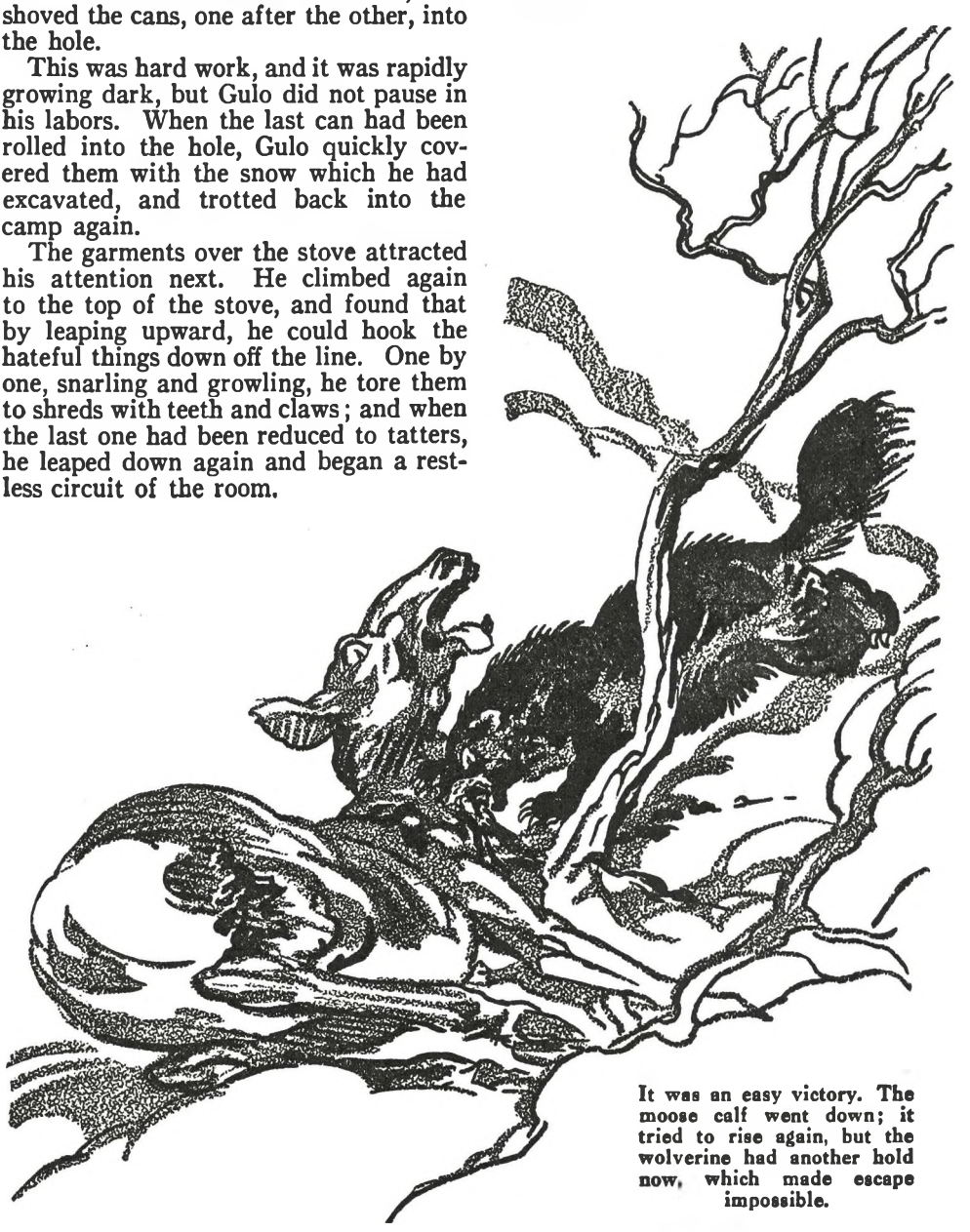
On the floor again, Gulo busied himself with the cans, dragging them, pushing them, slapping them along the floor, one at a time, toward the door, snarling at intervals, with a sort of cold hate. These things that he was stealing belonged to man, and man was Gulo's most hated enemy.

With his powerful paws he dug a deep hole in the drift beside the door, and shoved the cans, one after the other, into the hole.

This was hard work, and it was rapidly growing dark, but Gulo did not pause in his labors. When the last can had been rolled into the hole, Gulo quickly covered them with the snow which he had excavated, and trotted back into the camp again.

The garments over the stove attracted his attention next. He climbed again to the top of the stove, and found that by leaping upward, he could hook the hateful things down off the line. One by one, snarling and growling, he tore them to shreds with teeth and claws; and when the last one had been reduced to tatters, he leaped down again and began a restless circuit of the room.

It was dark outside now, but the lust to destroy had Gulo in its grip, and he ignored even his growing hunger. Some small trinkets from a little shelf over the bunk he carried to the stove, and buried them in the ashes of the hearth. A big mixing-spoon he carried to the edge of the clearing and hid at the base of a towering jack-pine. There was one old blanket left on the bunk; and Gulo was busily at work tearing great holes in this stout fabric, when something warned him that all was not well. He raced across the littered floor, and paused for a moment in the moon-cast shadow beside the cabin.



It was an easy victory. The moose calf went down; it tried to rise again, but the wolverine had another hold now, which made escape impossible.

Earnest, low-voiced conversation came clearly to the wolverine's keen ears .... "We must do what we came to do, and go away quickly — if your blood has not all turned to water!"

Right! He could hear the voices of men—soft, lowered voices, coming down the trail.

Silently, swiftly, the wolverine circled the cabin; with the structure between himself and the approaching men, he hurried off into the bush and circled to get the scent of his enemy. There were two of them, and neither was the man to whom the camp belonged. Gulo did not wonder about that. They were men, and that was enough. Men had guns.

And besides, it had been several hours since Gulo had gorged himself. Now that the moon was up, the big white rabbits would be moving along their clearly marked runs. A good hiding-place, with the wind in his favor, and the matter of a meal could be easily settled. Unhurriedly the wolverine sauntered through the black-barred bush, seeking a favorable location for his enterprise.

WITHOUT paying any particular attention to the two men whose coming had interrupted his activities in the camp, Gulo kept himself informed as to their movements: They came directly toward the camp and paused at the edge of the clearing; the sound of the earnest, low-voiced conversation came quite clearly to the wolverine's keen ears:

"But the door, it is open, do you not see?" The words were in careless French *patois*, with the guttural intonation of an Indian or a half-breed.

"Yes, certainly, you fool! And if you look, you can observe the trail of the one who opened it. See?"

"A carcajou!" There was surprise and a degree of consternation in the voice. "That is a bad omen, my friend. There is no good luck in that one; it may be this is a sign."

"True!" There was impatience and bitter contempt in the voice. "It is a sign that we must do what we came to do, and go away quickly—if your blood has not all turned to water!"

The other man mumbled something under his breath, and the pair moved on toward the house. A big white hare came hopping down the run, all unaware of the fate that awaited him, and Gulo's dull eyes lit suddenly. An instant later there was a sudden flurry of snow, a sharp squeak, and the carcajou busied himself with his meal. Leaving but little for any scavengers who might come after him, Gulo moved on to another location, farther from the camp. He found a likely spot not far from the trail down which the two men had come, and settled himself to wait.

He had been there but a few minutes when the erratic night wind informed

him that still another man was coming down the trail. The wolverine's muzzle twitched angrily. That made three of them—and there was still the man to whom the camp belonged. It was not good to be so close to many men. One could watch one man, or two men, but many men armed with rifles constituted a menace, and Gulo knew it. However, he waited where he was, resolved to gorge himself before he took any definite action.

Whoever the newcomer was, he was moving very slowly, and coming in Gulo's direction, toward the camp. The only sound he made was the soft, weary whisper of his webs in the snow; and suddenly even this sound ceased.

THE wolverine looked around swiftly. Man was most dangerous when he paused. Still, this man was a considerable distance away, and hidden from even Gulo's sharp eyes.

The two other men were returning from the camp. Perhaps it was the sound of their muffled voices that had caused the third man to stop and wait. In any case, Gulo felt that he must be on guard; three men with rifles were dangerous.

He could hear the two men from the camp quite plainly: one voice low and doubtful, the other voice raised in sharp impatience.

"But of course I shall go through with our plans!" the doubtful one was saying. "Am I not here, and am I not packing my half of his fur? But at the same time, these Redcoats—"

"How many times is it necessary that I tell you this!" interrupted he of the impatient voice. They were nearly abreast of Gulo now; he could see them quite distinctly, striding down the trail with bulging packs and rifles swinging in their hands. "We turn off presently onto the lake, where there is much ice swept bare by the wind. We lose our trail there forever. And to be even safer, is it not arranged that we destroy these old racquettes, so that even should a print remain to be remembered, there will be no evidence?"

Gulo wondered, with contempt in his mind, that these two should be so close to the lone man who had paused and was waiting, and still be, apparently, unaware of his presence. Men were—

"Drop those guns!" commanded a sharp, sudden voice. There was a chorus of surprised exclamations, but the man who had been lurking beside the trail had stepped into Gulo's line of vision, and his rifle was at his shoulder.

The two men with the heavy packs hesitated only an instant; then they let fall their guns, and slowly lifted their hands.

"But—what ees eet that M'sieu' does?" whined one of the pair, speaking now in a different tongue. "We have—"

"I heard you coming—and I've got French enough to understand what you are up to. Back to the camp, you two, and take it very easy. I'm tired, and my temper's pretty short. Get, now!"

"Did I not tell you the carcajou was bad luck?" groaned the doubtful one, speaking swiftly in his guttural French. "I knew—"

"Bad luck?" The man with the rifle laughed wearily. "For you, yes. But it was the trail of the beast that brought me out alive. That was rather a bad storm, and I lost my bearings, but I knew that the carcajou would head for the easy pickings of a trap-line sooner or later, so I followed." The man spoke in a low, tired voice that died away swiftly as the trio plodded back along the trail toward the camp. "I guess it was a good thing I did. You two have Burke's whole winter catch there, I'd say. Go slowly and carefully, now; I wouldn't need much of an excuse—"

GULO turned his attention to a much more interesting sound—a rabbit was working its way along the run. The wolverine dispatched the animal neatly, and fed ravenously upon the smoking flesh.

Two men—one man—and still another to come along this trail in a day or so. That would be four men—with guns.

Gulo swaggered along the trail to the spot where the pair had dropped their weapons. Working with difficulty, for the snow was soft and deep, he dragged the two guns down to the shore of the lake, and hid them in the midst of a clump of red willows.

He paused then for a moment, considering, his brown eyes lusterless, his muzzle crinkled thoughtfully.

One man, or two men, Gulo did not fear. But four men—no.

And so, not understanding, the wolverine pointed his blunt, bloody black nose to the north, and unhurriedly started on his way to another region, where there were men to rob and torment, but —not so many.

The Star of Asia

ANY comprehensive narrative of the Washburn affair should begin, I think, with the discussion between Deputy Commissioner Drayton and Chief Inspector Brandt, of Scotland Yard, and their American friend Carlton Hammond, at Hammond's house in Tedworth Square, Chelsea. The South African diamond syndicate had picked up a rumor concerning a great stone of gem quality, weighing one hundred eighty carats, said to have been recently cut by the Van Amdens of Amsterdam for some unknown owner—the assumption being that the diamond had been found by a Kafir and sold for a small fraction of its value to an illicit diamond-buyer—and the syndicate had requested Scotland Yard to run down the man who had it, if possible. Hammond is a man of wealth with several pet hobbies—among which are a scientific interest in crime-investigation, and an expert knowledge of precious stones. He had upon three or four occasions worked out by inference and deduction the solution of crimes which up to that time had baffled the Yard—consequently Drayton and Brandt dropped in for a discussion with him whenever they had a case upon which he might offer expert advice, as in the matter of this immensely valuable stone.

During the conversation, they admitted a belief that the present holder of the stone might prove to be a New York multimillionaire named Silas Washburn, known as a collector of jewels and other beautiful things, who was spending several months in London—having taken a furnished private house in Cadogan Gardens in order to avoid the publicity involved in stopping at hotels. This man proved to be an old friend of Hammond's, and the Chief Inspector supplied him with Washburn's telephone-number.

A few moments after his Yard friend left him, Hammond reached for his telephone and asked to be put through to Sloane 10693. When a pleasant voice with but a very slight accent came over the wire, he said:

"Carlton Hammond, of New York, speaking—could you put Mr. Washburn on the wire?"

"Who knows when the Star of Asia will be seen again?" said Brandt.

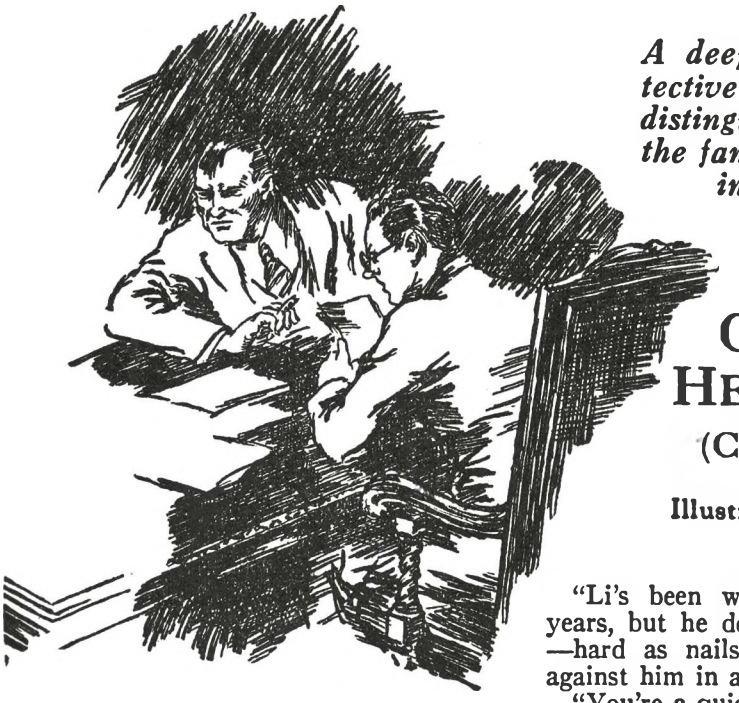
Evidently the name and voice were familiar to the other person. After a moment's silence, some one else spoke.

"Is that Carl Hammond talking? By Jove! . . . That's telepathy for you! I was just wishing a few moments ago that you were somewhere in a short radius—got something I'd like to go over with you! Er—anything special on hand for the rest of the evening? Where are you now?"

"Not more than a dozen blocks from you, here in Chelsea. Walk will do me good if you want me to come around at this time of night."

"That's bully—come ahead! Lucky there's not much fog. You ring a bell at the door in the brick wall—house sits back from it in a small garden. The house on the north comes out to the building line, but my left-side neighbor has a wall like mine—brass numbers on the white doors in it. We'll be listening for the bell."

This bit of description Hammond



A deeply interesting detective novelette by the distinguished author of the famous "Free Lances in Diplomacy."

By

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

(CULPEPER ZANDTT)

Illustrated by Arthur Lytle

found rather intriguing—it seemed to insure the occupant of such a house the sort of privacy which he himself made a point of obtaining when he could. Walking through the narrow twisting streets up to the better-lighted King's Road, he went along that to the Royal Military Asylum and turned north up Cadogan Gardens. Presently he came to a brick wall along the frontage of two lots, and finding the number he was looking for, rang the bell. In two minutes the door was opened by a fine-looking Chinese who addressed him by name in perfect English with very little accent.

"We were beginning to wonder if you'd have any difficulty in finding us, Mr. Hammond—fog is likely to come up from the river at any moment. One never knows just when."

"By Jove! Li Sun H'sien! Seems good to see you again, Li! Looking fine, too!" And they shook hands cordially. "How's Washburn?"

"Fit for anything he wishes to do, one would say. You come in, Mr. Hammond—he's very pleased you are in London—yes sir!"

From Washburn's cordial manner, it was quite evident that Li H'sien knew what he was talking about. After the dignified Chinese had placed refreshments and tobacco on a table and left the room, Hammond commented:

"Li's been with you about sixteen years, but he doesn't look a day older—hard as nails. I'd hate to run up against him in a scrap!"

"You're a quicker and a trickier shot, Carl—but once Li got his hands on you I guess you wouldn't last. He knows all there is to know about jujitsu, and he carries about with him little pieces of carved ivory containing Oriental poisons you never heard of in all your crime-investigation. I think Li has almost as much affection for you as he has for me—you're one of the few men who never make a mistake as to his caste, and his sort are proud as the devil of their ancestry. The average person, to whom all yellow men are alike, takes him for an educated Chink, but drawn originally from the coolie class—whereas Li Sun H'sien is pure Manchu, as you know. My very good friend, and yours—not in any sense my servant. He's protected me from death or injury a dozen times; long ago he wiped out that little debt in the Yunnan foothills when I put seven bullets into a beast of a tiger before it quite reached him—when Li had a broken leg and couldn't move. He's always been comfortably well off, but I handed him half a million in gilt-edge securities, five years ago—to save a lot of taxes and death-duties if I left it in a will. Well—let's get down to what I had in mind when I thought of you at dinner, this evening. Got something I want you to look at!"

"Weighing a hundred and eighty-odd carats—bluish tinge?"

"Now where the devil did you pick that up?"

At that moment the woman rose and turned to a mirror set in the wall. As Sam caught sight of her hair, he gave a snort of disgust.

"You know that Scotland Yard suspects you of having it, don't you? Know the syndicate are determined to get the thing—one way or another?"

"Oh, I'd discounted that possibility, of course! Look here, Carl—you talk as if you knew some of those boys at the Yard. Do you?"

"I know the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Inspector very well—they dined with me this evening."

"Suppose they'd care to come around for a look at that stone? Eventually, it'll be Joan's—that's why I had it cut just now—and I don't want any fool questions raised about it; better settle the matter at once! Call your friends on the phone—see if they'll come."

As both men had gone directly from his house to Scotland Yard, Hammond had no difficulty in locating them and arousing their interest sufficiently to drive out at once. They reached the

house in twenty minutes. After introductions to Washburn and Li Sun H'sien, they sat down to hear what was wished of them.

"Of course Hammond wouldn't tell you over the wire what I had in mind, gentlemen—but I think you may consider it worth the trip. It's a recent acquisition of mine, really worth seeing."

Leaving the room for two or three minutes, he came back with a square of white velvet which he spread upon the table between them. Then he took from an inside pocket something wrapped in Japanese tissue, which he rolled out upon the velvet under the light from the table-lamp. It was a brilliant-cut lump of living fire with a slight bluish tinge which would not have been perceptible had the velvet been dark blue instead of white. Scintillating, flaming, glowing prismatically, according to the way the light fell upon the facets—the most gorgeous jewel that either of the two Yard men ever had handled or seen.

"This stone has been in the 'rough' for upward of a hundred and fifty years since it was found, and no name has been given to it. But as it is of gem quality, I've christened it the Star of Asia—there being no other stone of that name. Here is a photograph of it in the rough—exact size. On the back you will notice a few lines of writing in Hindustani—a statement by the Maharajah who gave me the jewel as a souvenir of service I once rendered him. He certifies it to be an accurate photograph of the stone he gave me—and that it has been in his family ever since his great-grandfather obtained it in the days of the 'John Company,' before British rule. I photographed this writing in Hindustani, myself—here are prints of that and of the stone, which I'd like to have you file at Scotland Yard. The diamond was a gift to me. I've had it cut as a present to my daughter who has been traveling on the Continent and is now with friends in Paris. This is her picture on the table. Now if you can think of any doubts as to my *bona-fide* ownership, I'd be glad to hear them. If you can't, I'm relying upon you gentlemen to protect my daughter in her ownership of the stone—with your personal testimony and in any other way that may be necessary. I've been under no obligations to offer you these proofs. Of course the syndicate has absolutely nothing to say concerning any but South African stones. We'll just ask Hammond where the stone came from."

"Hmph! . . . . No question whatever as to its having been found at or near Raolconda—where most of the so-called Golconda diamonds really came from," said Hammond decidedly. It's an 'Old Mine'—no possible doubt as to that! There's a cold gleam in it which doesn't occur in gems from any other locality—the quality which gives it most of its gem-value."

After admiring the stone a few moments longer, Drayton and the Chief Inspector went home. It was now close to midnight. After promising to dine with his friend two nights later, Hammond left but a few minutes after them. Just before he left, Washburn swung out a section of book-shelving built into the wall at the right of the fireplace, and placed the diamond in a small but up-to-date safe concealed by it.

BACK in his own house, Hammond, his mind drowsily filled with reminiscences of old days with Washburn, got into pajamas and went to bed. An hour later, a dictaphone on a small table at the head of his bed kept repeating his name persistently, in a low tone, until he wakened and answered.

His man Jenkins' voice came through: "Your telephone has been ringing for the last five minutes, sir. I answered from the extension downstairs. It's Li Sun H'sien, at Mr. Washburn's; I think it's something urgent."

Slipping his feet into moccasins, Hammond passed out to the phone in his study adjoining.

"Hammond speaking, Li! . . . What's wrong?"

"Something very much wrong, Mr. Hammond. Could you come around at once? I will have some hot coffee ready for you."

Hammond knew the Manchu had said all he considered it advisable to say, and that he wouldn't have called at that time of night unless something very serious had happened, so there was no point in further questioning over the wire.

He reached Cadogan Gardens in a few minutes, being driven around in his car by Jenkins. Li H'sien admitted him impassively, and led him directly into the library where they had been admiring the great diamond less than two hours before.

Hammond knew it was a habit of Silas Washburn's, when not particularly sleepy, to read a mystery story before going to bed—and now his friend ap-

peared comfortably stretched out in his big chair at the side of the table, with legs extended upon the adjustable foot-rest and his eyes open as if reading the book in his lap. His facial expression was entirely tranquil. But there was an ominous stillness about the figure.

Hammond, who had picked up a good deal of medical and surgical knowledge with his other investigations, made a few simple tests, but to no avail—Washburn was dead. As far as Hammond could see, there was no trace of a wound, or any evidence of disturbance about the room.

With a sigh of regret, the American sat down in a chair at the other side of the table, and motioned for the Manchu to draw up another chair.

"Tell me about it, Li. Did you come into this room again after we left?"

"Yes, Mr. Hammond—I was at that moment mixing one of the mint-juleps Mr. Washburn long ago showed me how to make. I fetched it in—he thanked me—made himself comfortable with book—said good-night most pleasantly, as usual. I go to my room—undress—get into my bed—sleep a little—not so good. I have an impression that my ancestors whisper to me—think it must be something they wish me to know. I ask myself if it could be anything in which Mr. Washburn is concerned? Ancestors whisper yes. I am no believer in jinn or spirits, as you know—much better educated than that. But I have what in American they say is a 'hunch.' So I put on a bathrobe and come down here. I find him as you see—still quite warm. I have some knowledge of anatomy, surgery, drugs—of course. I make the few obvious tests. Then I call up the exchange and request that they put me through to your house. They ring a long time, it seems to me. Your man Jenkins answers at last in very low voice—says he will call you. That, I think, covers everything."

"What do you suppose caused his death, Li?"

"That, my friend, does not explain itself to me. For before we leave New York, three months ago, he had his physician of many years go over him completely. Doctor Amberton said he was absolutely normal and fit—splendid condition—no organic trouble of any kind."

"Yes, he told me about that. As far as I can see from this hasty examination, he died from heart-failure. But what caused it? To me, his death from any sort of heart-trouble is an impossible proposition, judging by his account of what Amberton said—unless some outside agency stopped the functioning of the heart! Let's go into the surrounding conditions a bit, Li! There's something in this proposition which doesn't match up with anything we knew of him. How many persons are there on your regular staff? That is—how many who have any business in this house?"

"There are Mrs. Bundy, the cook and laundress—Sarah Glenn, the housemaid and waitress. Sam Wong, the chauffeur and gardener—one of my own people who always accompanies us; I will answer for *him*, absolutely. And Mrs. Murphy, a charwoman who comes twice a week for heavy cleaning. The women, of course, we obtain from an agency wherever we settle down for a stay of weeks or months—but they must be most highly recommended."

"The 'char,' naturally, lives out. What time did the others go to bed?"

"Mrs. Bundy and Glenn went out last night before nine—Bundy for a house-party with relatives, where she spends the night—Glenn, for a friend's at Hampstead, where she also remains. They are to return by seven in the morning—plenty of time for breakfast. Sam Wong went to see friends in the dock neighborhood—East End. Sometime during night he will return to sleep here."

"Who else might be in the house besides yourself and Washburn?"

"Nobody—we were alone after the women left until you and other gentlemen came, and alone after you left."

"Sam Wong might be from Pekin or Tientsin, I suppose? Don't think I ever asked what his province was, before."

"Born in Nanking—but his people are the big Yunnan breed from the foothills of the Himalayas."

JUST then they heard the front door open quietly. Li was on his feet and across the room to the hall-door, in what seemed one swift, noiseless motion. Then he spoke calmly to the person who had just come in, switching into the Yunnan dialect for a couple of minutes, telling what had happened.

The big chauffeur came slowly into the room, bowed gravely to Hammond and bent over the dead man to study the still face. Then he straightened up.

"What kill Masteh, O Tuchan?"

"Probably heart-failure — we don't know. There is no wound on his body."

"You come in, Mr. Hammond—Mr. Washburn is very pleased you are in London."

"Heart-failel no can happen—Masteh too healthy. Some bobbery—no can see! What foh Salel Glenn go that side this time night? She not go Hampstead like she say?"

"Glenn has not been in house since nine o'clock, Sam!"

"No, Tuchan—I come up thees side street—see Glenn othel side—think bad pidgin—walk same side in dalk. Glenn go King's Load side—down little lestaulant wheah open all night. I see go in—then come back this side. How can happen? What she do?"

Hammond's face puckered in a puzzled, thoughtful expression.

"Hold on a minute, Sam! . . . . Let me get this straight. Sarah Glenn is the housemaid here—she left about nine for a friend's house in Hampstead, where she was going to spend the night. Now *you* say you saw her going into an all-night restaurant on King's Road? How far from here?"

"Foh—five block'. Not fa'."

"How long ago?"

"Nine—ten minute'."

"You saw her come out of this door in the wall?"

"No—not see lat. See othel side of stleet!"

"But you're sure it was Sarah Glenn?"

"Walk like Glenn—swing shouldel like Glenn—flont-edge face like Glenn."

Hammond did some quick thinking.

"Look here, Li! . . . . We've got a situation here that needs a lot of explaining, if you ask me! It doesn't seem as though we can afford to overlook a single possibility which may have some bearing on the affair. If one of your servants is in a King's Road restaurant when she's supposed to be at Hampstead—makes no difference whether she's eating or meeting somebody there—we'd better get some sort of line on her actions for later reference. We can't leave Washburn's body alone in the house—so you stay with him while I go around to that restaurant with Sam and see if there's anything which looks suspicious in the housemaid's actions."

"You're quite right, Mr. Hammond—I think, myself, this is very odd!"

IT took them less than five minutes of brisk walking to reach the basement restaurant. When nearly there, Hammond stopped Sam in a patch of shadow—for a man was standing by the street railing, peering intently through the restaurant window. With the lights shining directly upon him, they could make out every feature distinctly—also the clothes he wore and the absence of a finger from his left hand. Presently he seemed to think he might be attracting notice, and moved off down King's Road.

In another moment, they stood where he had been standing. They had a clear view of the room through the window. Two men were eating at tables nearest them. In the farther corner, a woman sat eating. Her back was toward them—and Sam Wong nudged the American with his elbow. Just at that moment the woman rose, fished a small comb from her handbag, turned to a mirror set in the wall, and pulling out the edges of her felt hat a little, proceeded to straighten the hair over her temples and ears. Powder and lipstick followed. As he caught sight of her hair, Sam gave a little snort of disgust—put a hand on Hammond's elbow and gently started to pull him away. But the American resisted for a moment; the woman's face was a handsome one in a hard, striking sort of way—and it intrigued him just long enough to get the features fairly well impressed upon his memory.

When they were walking back, he asked Sam why he had started away in

hardly more than a minute after they reached the window; and Sam grunted again disgustedly.

"Sam Wong lose face—velly solly! Not like foh to lose face weeth Tuchan! Bad pidgin foh Sam Wong!"

"But what's the matter, Sam? . . . . . What's it all about?"

"Make mistake — woman *not* Salel Glenn! Glenn hab haiah like new Manila lope—allee same yellow, like Yangtse watel. This woman dalk blown—black haiah. Edge of face plenty like Glenn—but not same woman!"

"Oh, that's all right, Sam! She was coming from the direction of Washburn's house—and you say her profile and movements were like Sarah's. It was a natural enough mistake to make."

THEY had been gone from the house not over twelve minutes—and found Li H'sien smoking in the library when they returned.

Hammond shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that was a washout—though a perfectly natural mistake for Sam to make on a poorly lighted street. The woman was nobody he ever saw before and there's nothing to show that she was ever nearer than the width of the street from this house. Personally, I don't imagine she was any innocent babe—there was a man outside looking through the window at her much as a cat might keep a luscious mouse under observation."

"Mr. Hammond, I've been thinking, as I waited here for you and Sam," said Li slowly. "As far as we can see, Mr. Washburn died a natural death. But—well, I don't believe it and you don't believe it. If not natural death—then unquestionably murder. If it was foul play, then my position is not so good—alone in the house with him. So my suggestion is that we have your police friends around here as soon as possible, with their surgeon—see what they think! Eh?"

It seemed a sound idea. If the police surgeon considered it a natural death, there would be no question whatever of implicating the Manchu. On the other hand, Hammond knew that no such verdict would satisfy either Li Sun H'sien or himself. So he called Drayton's house and then the Chief Inspector's.

While waiting for them, it occurred to Hammond that they could examine some of the second-floor rooms to see if they might happen upon something which seemed unusual or out of place. In Washburn's bedroom over the library, to their amazement, his desk indicated that it had been hastily ransacked by some one who had made no attempt to put anything back in its customary place. And the suits in the wardrobe had been overhauled; a wallet which Li said was habitually in the left inside pocket of a certain sack coat had been replaced in the right inside pocket. In a corner under it, was a scrap of manila paper, evidently torn from a pad, upon which was penciled: *"27-53-71."* When Hammond showed this to Li, he recalled it as a memorandum of the new combination which employees of the company recently had set on the lock of the concealed safe in the library below.

"I suggested to Mr. Washburn that he'd better memorize this and then burn the paper, but I suppose he forgot, and left it in the wallet. It would be of little use to a burglar—there is a second dial which is set with a word only Mr. Washburn knew. Without the word—no opening possible. Here is something else I picked up behind the tub in bathroom. Woman's handkerchief with monogram embroidered in corner—noticeable scent. You smell! . . . Know what that is? A flower which grows in Indo-China. Flower has no scent—but cut the stalk, and you get strong sweet smell. Smell too long, very dangerous—produce coma and death! But extracted and retained in perfume-base, it is practically harmless—makes an agreeable, elusive scent. Very expensive and rare—only at certain perfumers. I think this has been blended with some other scent."

Hammond sniffed several times, trying to differentiate between them. Then he asked:

"Do you know whether the deadly properties of that juice have any trace of cyanide in them, Li?"

"They have not. I can say most positively, because I had some of that sap analyzed by the best chemist in Shanghai. He gave me a formula which I cannot remember accurately, but it contained one of the other reactive toxins—not cyanide. How did that occur to you?"

"The faint underlying odor is that of bitter almonds. Take another sniff and you'll recognize it—but don't inhale. There still may be enough to be dangerous! If it wasn't in the original scent, my guess is that this handkerchief has been for a few minutes in an atmosphere fairly well impregnated with

cyanogen gas, and in that way absorbed a trace of it. —There's the outside bell. Must be our friends from the Yard."

When the three police officials stepped into the library and saw that silent, motionless figure in the easy-chair, they were too amazed to speak, although death was by no means an unaccustomed sight. Drayton and Brandt recalled the man's intense vitality as they had seen him a few hours before. The police surgeon was rather perfunctorily examining the body when Hammond requested him to make the investigation as thorough as possible.

DR. COLES looked at him in considerable surprise.

"Of course—if you wish, Mr. Hammond! But this seems to be an obvious case of heart failure."

"Well, as you know—there are several external causes for heart-failure. I agree to that as the probable cause of death—but what produced it? Here's a man who three months ago was carefully gone over by his personal physician, with all the usual tests—and found absolutely healthy. There is, however, more than that to it. Mr. Washburn's friend, and mine, Li Sun H'sien—who has lived and traveled with him for more than sixteen years—has given me a description of the household which includes two women and a Chinese chauffeur—the women not having been in the house since nine o'clock. As far as Li knew, there was nobody but himself and Washburn on the premises when he felt uneasy and went downstairs to see if everything was all right. Yet we have just found —much to our amazement—that a woman was searching the bedroom above, sometime this evening. Before I left, Washburn put a diamond worth two hundred thousand pounds into a concealed safe in this room. In a wardrobe the woman was searching, upstairs, we found this scrap of paper with half of the safe combination on it. In the bathroom, Li H'sien found this woman's handkerchief. He thinks the woman, and possibly some unknown male accomplice, unquestionably were after the diamond. So far, we're not dead sure that anybody killed Washburn—but it looks that way to us!"

Brandt seized upon the obvious point.

"First thing is to find out whether the big diamond is still in the safe. An' that means waiting until the safe comp'ny can send down some of their experts—"

"H-m-m—perhaps not, Brandt. Washburn had a very sensitive microphone to connect with that dictaphone on the corner table. Knowing half the combination, it's possible that by listening to the fall of the tumblers, with that microphone, I can get the word on the other knob which opens the safe. Let's get out the microphone and have a try at it, anyhow. The sooner we know whether it was murder or natural death, the better chance there is for catching the scoundrel!"

Placing the little microphone-transmitter firmly against the steel just over the combination-knob, Hammond turned it very slowly around the alphabetic dial until a faint click indicated some change in position on one of the tumblers. The pointer was on the letter "J". He nodded—and turned the knob in the reverse direction, hearing another click when it reached the letter "O".

"The devil! . . . . This is altogether too easy—I'm surprised that Washburn risked it! But he naturally figured that nobody would have the numerical combination as well."

Spelling out the word "Joan," Hammond turned both knobs at the same time and the door swung open. Upon the floor of the safe was the crumpled tissue in which the wonderful stone had been wrapped; on one of the shelves was the square of white velvet. But of the jewel itself, there was no trace whatsoever. There were Bank of England notes for six or seven hundred pounds—presumably for current expenses—but nothing else of any particular value. Securities and documents, naturally, were kept in safe-deposit boxes.

"The fool!" Hammond exclaimed. "With the description of that stone broadcasted everywhere, she'll have no more chance for selling it than she would of living after she struck the ground in a jump from the Eiffel Tower! And she'll be facing a murder-charge if she even shows it! She can't even chip it down to small stones without any diamond-expert recognizing the combination of color, water and cold light which no other large stone in existence has!"

"You're sure of that, Hammond?"

"Positively! Here are four of us who have carefully examined the stone—Li H'sien has seen it by daylight, as well. Also the three Van Amdens and their cutter."

"And you consider that proof that Washburn was murdered?"

"It's at least object enough for half a dozen murders, isn't it? The Koh-i-noor has had a number of murders chalked up against it since it was mined —so have the Regent and the Orloff! Washburn was an absolutely healthy man at midnight; now he's dead—and there's a faint suggestion of cyanogen gas about this woman's handkerchief."

"Do you fancy that either a man or the woman opened this safe the way you did?"

"Not for a second! Probabilities all against either of them knowing how to use this microphone in that way. They might or might not have known he had a daughter, or what her name is—but they wouldn't be likely to figure on his using it as a combination-word for this safe."

"Then how the deuce did they get into the safe?"

"I'm not at all sure that they did. There are two possible ways they might have got the diamond. The woman may have been known to him—she was certainly hunting through his furniture as if familiar with his personal belongings. Suppose she calmly walked into that library after getting what she was after and found him playing with the stone—not being able to resist its fascination. He shows it to her. She goes out—but slips in again later, conceals herself behind curtains or divan, and manages to kill him suddenly, in his chair—then closes the safe, which he had left open intending to put the stone back, and quietly goes away. Or the man might have been watching through one of the windows and followed out the same procedure. Or they might have been working together."

"Aye—quite possibly that's what happened. But it's equally possible that he was dead from heart-failure, with the stone in his hand, when they came into this room."

Li H'sien shook his head.

"I do not think he died from natural causes, Chief Inspector. All evidence going before is against that possibility —also my opinion and Mr. Hammond's. It seems to me there should be autopsy —at once. I am myself under suspicion, as you doubtless are thinking. Will Dr. Coles perform such autopsy?"

"Seems to be the only man available. Who's the best expert you call in, Brandt, on cases where you want to be dead sure?"

"Sir Forbes Whitton—one of the leading toxicologists an' surgeons. But he's by way of bein' expensive, an' I fancy he'd not get out of his bed at this time of night."

They heard the front door open quietly.

"What's his fee?"

"Two hundred pounds."

"Washburn's estate would pay for anything of this sort if it's charged against the executor—but I'll personally guarantee it, anyhow! Make it three hundred pounds, and ask him if he'll come at once!"

SIR FORBES reached the house in half an hour—rather irritable, but obviously interested in a case for which they offered an extra fee. After a preliminary examination of the body in the library, he looked puzzled, shook his head, and made another test.

"Ninety-nine practitioners out of a hundred would give a certificate from natural causes. But—let's take him upstairs and see."

As Dr. Coles had had very little of this expert work in his practice, he was frankly uncertain as to the results obtained—but Hammond nodded when Sir Forbes held up a glass jar containing lung-tissue, with a strip of litmus-paper—saying:

"Enough hydrocyanic gas taken into the lungs to kill an ox! Probably the

Li was on his feet and across the room in one swift, noiseless motion.

first whiff produced enough shortness of breath to make him inhale deeply in the effort to breathe—and that of course just filled all the air-passages with the gas. He couldn't have retained consciousness ten seconds. Of course we saw that the lips were slightly blue—but that often occurs in perfectly natural death."

Sir Forbes somewhat gruffly complimented the American.

"There really wasn't any necessity for getting me out of bed, gentlemen! Hammond recognized what we had in these jars as quickly as I did, and Coles could have performed the autopsy equally well. However, I suppose all of you preferred having two expert opinions instead of one. I'll be interested when you find out just how this was done."

While they were all intent upon the autopsy, Li H'sien had gone to his own room to search for something, and when Sir Forbes had left, the Chief Inspector said brusquely:

"I fear we've lost the Chink! I noticed suddenly that he was missing, and went out to set a patrol about the place—but of course he'd had time to get clean away!"

Hammond's face was troubled, and there was an edge to his voice when he spoke.

"Look here, old chap! . . . . Don't you make any mistake in regard to Li Sun H'sien—and don't *ever* let him hear you refer to him as a 'Chink.' He's pure Manchu; he was Washburn's closest friend—and is one of mine. Washburn saved his life in Yunnan some years ago, and Li has been devoted to him ever since!"

"That's all very well, Hammond—but he's gone, isn't he? Suddenly—without saying a word to any of us!"

"He's probably in the house at this moment—if he went outside at all it was to do something useful in tracing this crime, and he'll be back very shortly. Don't overlook the fact that it was Li who insisted upon the autopsy! You'd have been entirely satisfied with 'natural death'—which would have automatically removed all suspicion from him."

While they were speaking, Li came into the room with a paper in his hand.

"I've been searching in my boxes, gentlemen, for the formula of perfume which is on the woman's handkerchief—a formula given me by a friend who is a top-side chemist in Shanghai. As I thought, there is something in the formula which may be most important. I explained to Mr. Hammond, after finding the handkerchief, this perfume is extracted from stalk of a plant which grows in Indo-

China—the flower of which has no perceptible odor. This extract from the sap, in concentrated form, is highly toxic; but attenuated in a perfume-base, it is quite harmless and of a delicate, haunting fragrance. I ask my friend the chemist to analyze it for me—and he say—my chemist friend say—that the sap from this plant is strongly alkaline and contains noticeable percentage of magnesium. Both of these properties have neutralizing effect upon the hydrochloric-acid or potassium-cyanide gases—in fact they are used as antidotes for mild poisoning by the salts and acids. In one of his tests, a cloth sprinkled with this perfume and placed in a box with a live rat, neutralized cyanogen gas, introduced into the box, sufficiently to prevent its killing the rat. Without the perfume, the rat couldn't have lived fifteen seconds. —You follow me, gentlemen? . . . Yes? Very good. My deduction from this is that whoever killed my friend Washburn held that handkerchief to the nose while liberating one of the hydrocyanic gases near his head—and so was not affected by it. What is your opinion?"

DRAYTON remembered enough of his chemistry to follow the point Li was making—and Brandt grasped the fact that a handkerchief soaked in the perfume might act as a gas-mask. Hammond, of course, understood the chemical reaction thoroughly—and it gave him a hint for their next move.

"Brandt, I wish you'd instruct your men outside that if they happen to come upon a length of small rubber tubing—say, eight or ten feet long—about the grounds or neighborhood—to be damn' careful not to get it within three feet of their mouths or noses! Will you go out and tell 'em that right away? . . . . We don't want any unnecessary casualties here! Tell them also not to attempt any search of the grounds or house until daylight. We don't want any traces destroyed by careless walking about in the dark. When you've done that, come back into the library."

The Chief Inspector nodded, and in five minutes he was back. Then he said:

"What I don't comprehend is how anybody could administer the gas you suspect to've been used, without Washburn's knowledge! They would have held him while they put the stuff under his nose—but the expression left on his face would have indicated a struggle for life. There's not the slightest evidence of anything like that—no indication that he knew another person was in the room. The book was open on his lap—the position of his eyes and lids exactly as if he had been reading at the second he died. So how was it possible to administer that gas without his knowing it?"

"H-m-m—I can answer that better when we've gone over this room much more carefully than we did at first." Hammond switched on all the lights and took Washburn's four-cell flashlight from a drawer of his desk. "First, we'll concentrate upon the half which was more or less behind him. This parquet-floor has been recently waxed. A rubber heel will noticeably dull the high gloss of a waxed floor, and any nail in a shoe will make a slight furrow in the wax. . . . One window is four feet behind the high back of his chair—the other one, opposite his right elbow, he could have seen by turning his head. There are curtains of dark red velour, partly draped back to hooks on the window-casings and white shades, but no inner curtains. Suppose we examine the floor, sill and window-casings back of those velour curtains—closely."

With the aid of the flash-light, they found distinct traces of small rubber heels in the recess behind the curtains—in such a position that the wearer's back was to the window, and in no other position. On the opposite side of the recess, they found the slightly muddy print of a man's shoe parallel with the window, as if he'd thrown a leg over the sill and stepped inside—and near it, fainter prints of both feet, under the edge of the curtain. The window was unfastened, and there were scratches on the sill.

Brandt jumped at a conclusion.

"The two of them were in this, up to the neck—working together!"

"Doesn't look that way to me, Brandt," Hammond demurred. "See here? The man hauled himself up to the window-sill, outside—knelt or stood there until he could shove back the window-fastening with a knife-blade and lift the sash without making any noise. These scratches between the sashes near the fastening show that. Well—if the woman was standing there at the time, he would have seen her and waited until she went away—or else she would have unfastened the sash and shoved it up for him, because she could have done it more easily and more quietly. From the

position of his footprints under the curtain-edge, he was about to step out into the room—yet there isn't the slightest trace of his broad rubber heels beyond those curtains. On the other hand, there are faint traces of the woman's heels, coming in the hall door, walking around the room, stepping in behind those curtains—three sets of them between the window and the back of Washburn's chair. If we sprinkle fingerprint powder over the floor in the morning they'll show up much more plainly—but I'll mention, now, that she was wearing a narrow Louis heel at least two and a half inches high."

"Er—how the deuce do you get that, Hammond?"

"She stood for some time behind those curtains—long enough for the warmth of her feet to get through the thin soles and slightly tarnish the floor-wax. That blur doesn't look like a footprint because the impression is only from the ball of the foot—from the large joint of the big toe forward to the tips of the toes. If her weight was resting only on the ball of the foot and that pin-heel, you can easily reconstruct the height of heel which would hold the foot in that position. I'd say—rather positively, I think—that she and the man were not in that window recess at the same time, and may not even have been in the room, together."

"Then you fancy that both of them knew about his big jewel when even we at the Yard hadn't the slightest evidence of it? It's possible, of course—but I don't see how Washburn's possession of the stone escaped the secret service of the diamond syndicate if this man and woman knew about it. The syndicate have some clever chaps, you know!"

"LET'S see if we can't figure out what the woman's process of reasoning would be," said Hammond. "I doubt if she could suppose for a moment that a man would carelessly leave a million-dollar diamond in an unlocked desk or wardrobe. If she knew anything at all about safe-deposit boxes, she wouldn't imagine his leaving the key of such a box in such places—it would be on a key-chain he habitually wore about with him. If she knew about this safe behind the book-shelving—which I consider doubtful—and was hunting through desk and clothes for the combination—she'd have missed that scrap of paper dropped on the floor of the wardrobe, and hunted for it before leaving the room. Taking all these points together, I'd say rather conclusively that she knew nothing about the diamond and was searching for something quite different—something which naturally would be put in a desk or the pocket of some garment. This implies a letter, memoranda or formulæ which had a very large money-value, a contract with some person or corporation, or a paper containing damaging evidence against herself. Had she seen the big diamond from some place of concealment about the room, would she have killed him to get it? The very size of the thing might lead anyone to suppose it merely a rock-crystal model of some famous jewel. Figuring on a purely psychological basis, I'd say 'no' to all those questions."

"You'd be vastly mistaken, Hammond! A jewel such as we saw tonight has a powerful hypnotic effect—blinding certain temperam'nts to reason an' every other consideration. My word! . . . . Look at the blood known to have been spilled for the possession of all the older famous stones!"

"In the past, yes—in days when but few persons had seen or could describe the stones. Today—when every large stone is known intimately to every jeweler in the world—no! Mention a single instance where any one of the famous stones has been stolen, or has caused a murder, in the last forty or fifty years? Of course the Russian imperial jewels are in the hands of the commissars—but the entire lot of them were taken bodily during the revolution, without killing for any particular one of them. However—getting back to the woman—what she was after seemed to her sufficient excuse for killing Washburn—presumably to stop his mouth about something, possibly political—or to prevent his putting through some far-reaching scheme that he had decided upon. And my slant on the man would be this: Either he'd heard of the stone, and was going to let her get it, if that's what she was after, and take it from her afterward, or else he may have been some communist agent told off to eliminate this big Wall Street man for some political reason. He could have climbed over the wall from the balcony of this adjoining house and dropped inside. The woman could have climbed over the wall in the same way. There would be no difficulty in getting out of that door. By the way, let's consider the handkerchief again."

He drew it from his pocket and spread the dainty thing on the table, where they all examined it closely. The Chief Inspector was inclined to think it no different from thousands of others which might be purchased in the shops—but the Deputy Commissioner disagreed with him.

"This handkerchief is the finest grade of lawn that is made anywhere, Brandt. There'll not be above four or five shops in the city that keep this grade of stuff. If you look closely, you'll see that the monogram is embroidered by hand. In fact, this handkerchief is so far out of the ord'n'ry run that I fancy we might even trace it—eh, Hammond?"

"Yes, there's a fairly good chance of it—but I think our best shot will concern the perfume. How many shops in London would be likely to import and stock it, Li?"

"Glennhaligons, Limited, in St. James' Street—or Habra Brothers, in Mortimer Street—are the only houses I think of at the moment. The Habras are Oriental merchants dealing in many goods from that part of the world. Glennhaligons import from everywhere. And one of our Chinese houses would have it: the firm name is English, but only the families of the original heads are still living—the entire management is now Chinese. I think it would be well to inquire of them first—Swire, Jardman Company, Limited, in Well Court, E. C."

"We'll do that, after breakfast. H-m-m—look here, you fellows! It occurs to me that something which might have a bearing on this affair came up just before I phoned you the second time." And he proceeded to tell them of Sam Wong's mistaken report of seeing Sarah Glenn in the all-night restaurant.

"NOW," he went on, "we know from the evidence we've picked up that an unknown man and woman were in this house tonight, and unquestionably killed Washburn. Appearances indicate that they were not together—that the woman wasn't even aware of the man's presence. Well—here's a woman of just the type we suspect. Here's a man—following and watching her—as we've figured this one was doing. We know they were just across the street from here, whether they came out of this door or not. What price that man and that woman aren't the identical individuals who were in this house? When we found the woman wasn't Sarah, she seemed to be of no further interest to us. But upon reflection I'm not quite so sure about that!"

"My word! . . . . It's strongly probable they were this pair, old chap! Such a woman never would be prowlin' about on foot at this time of night without dev'lish strong reason for it! If only we had photographs of her an' the man!"

"Wait a bit! . . . . It's possible I may be useful in that line. I noticed a large pad of thick linen letter-paper in a drawer of Washburn's desk. Of course I don't claim to be an artist, but I sketch fairly well—and I've a clear mental impression of just how those two faces looked. Suppose I try a portrait-sketch of each!"

HAMMOND rested the top of the pad against some books on the table to give it the slant of an easel and prevent foreshortened distortion. Then he thought a minute, visualizing the lines and curves of the woman's head with and without her hat. The first and second attempts did not suit him. In the third sketch, he blocked in the shadows and smudged them with his finger—worked up the outline detail—nodded, and started sketching the man. As he'd seen this face at close quarters, lighted from the restaurant window, he got it first time.

"There, gentlemen! . . . . Photograph these and distribute the prints among your men. I think they're close enough for identification."

Drayton and the Chief Inspector stood the sheets up against books on the table, in a good light, and backed off for a general view. Suddenly Brandt cried:

"I fancy you're more of an artist than you claim to be, Hammond! That man is unquestionably Andy Peterson—also known as 'the Nutcracker'—and other names. Jewel-thief an' safe-burglar—he did a seven-year stretch in Dartmoor, and has been tried for two murders but acquitted from lack of sufficient evidence. Unless Washburn was supposed to have considerable money or valuable trinkets in this house tonight which Andy would be likely to know about, he must have been, almost unquestionably, after the big diamond. Prob'ly he wasn't sure, but had a tip about the stone which he considered at least possible. He didn't kill Washburn—that's not in line with his methods. Nothing as subtle as this hydrocyanic gas would occur to Andy."

IT was now daylight—and an idea occurred to Hammond.

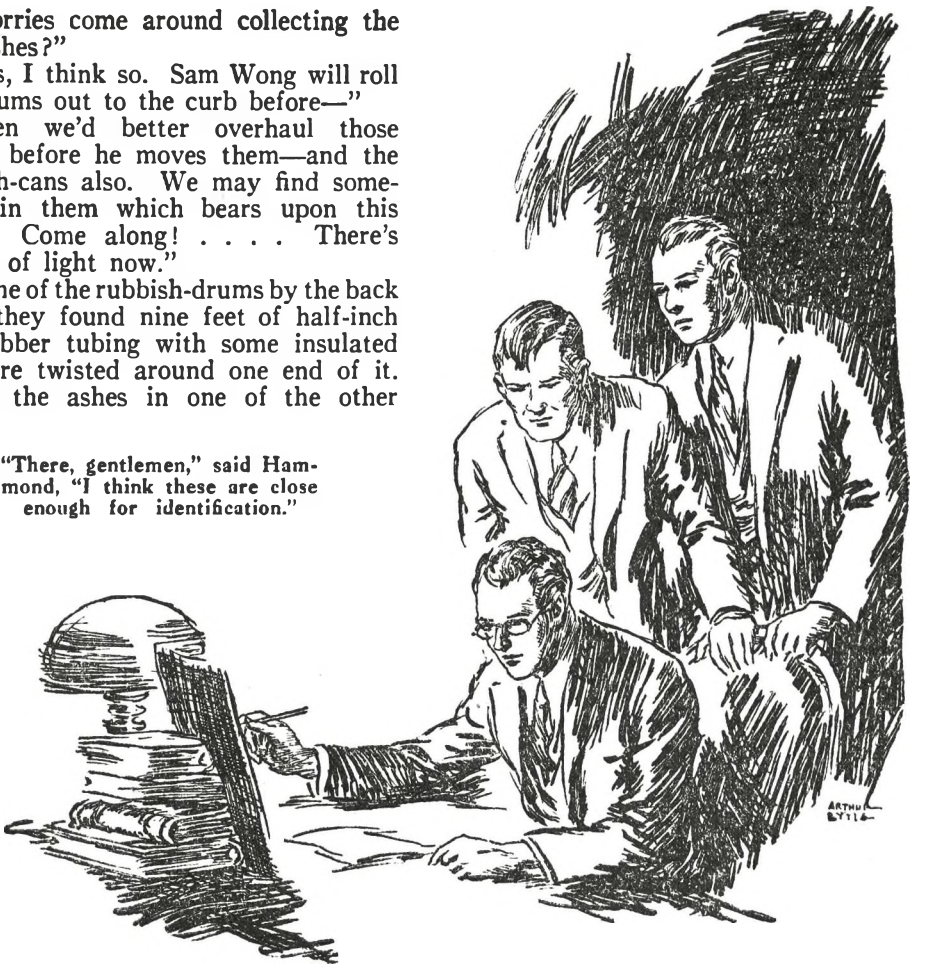
"I say, Li, isn't this the day when the

city lorries come around collecting the coal-ashes?"

"Yes, I think so. Sam Wong will roll the drums out to the curb before—"

"Then we'd better overhaul those drums before he moves them—and the rubbish-cans also. We may find something in them which bears upon this affair. Come along! . . . . There's plenty of light now."

In one of the rubbish-drums by the back door, they found nine feet of half-inch red rubber tubing with some insulated bell-wire twisted around one end of it. Under the ashes in one of the other



"There, gentlemen," said Hammond, "I think these are close enough for identification."

drums, they came upon a perfume-atomizer with a rubber bulb and four-ounce glass container. One of the nozzles was plugged with a broom-straw. This, and the tubing, Hammond carried into the library, after withdrawing the stopper from the atomizer and holding his breath until he could place it under a garden-hose tap,—and quickly step aside,—rinsing out the glass container thoroughly and letting water run through the tubing as well. Even as it was, he got enough suggestion of the gas while stirring up the ashes to make breathing difficult for several minutes. . . .

In the library, he moved Washburn's chair out from the side of the table into a better light—examining the varnish along the arms and rear framework. In a moment he found the little scratches he was looking for.

"Hmph! . . . . That just completes the picture! The woman fastened one end of this tubing under the left arm of the chair with the wire—in the shadow of the table. Of course he never thought of moving the chair. Everything behind the chair was in deep shadow,—no illumination but the table lamp,—and Washburn wouldn't have noticed that tubing along the floor if he went to one of the book-shelves or the safe. Then, behind the curtain, the woman saturated the handkerchief with the perfume—tied it around her face over nose and mouth—shoved the two nozzles of the atomizer into the other end of the tube and began squeezing the bulb slowly and regularly, so it made no noise—the gas has some expansive force of its own and would travel through the tube anyhow, if it couldn't get out at her end. Washburn never noticed a thing until enough of that gas had come up under his left arm to kill him in about two whiffs! When he was dead, she opened the windows wide and dropped tube and atomizer on the flower-bed outside—keeping away from the body until the air was safe to breathe, but with the

handkerchief still over her nose, just in case. Then she went through his pockets, table and desk—every place she could think of looking. We don't know whether she got what she was after or not—but she certainly insured his silence as to anything he may have known about her—for all time. I'd say she probably got into the room and fastened that tubing while he was letting us out through the door in the brick wall—because that was the longest time she had. Possibly the man came in through the window while she was searching,—but perhaps after she'd found the diamond,—stayed behind that curtain, watching her. I'm betting he followed the woman when she came out—undoubtedly, he came back again after we'd gone, and let himself in with his duplicate key."

"That seems to me a pretty good reconstruction of the crime; it indicates that the woman got the diamond, even if she didn't turn up the other thing she was after. Fancy we'd best advertise a description of the stone, first thing we do—and the fact that it has been stolen."

"No, Chief Inspector; that will defeat your object," Li H'sien objected. "Let newspapers say 'natural death from heart-failure.' Then the murderer will think his tracks are covered. And it seems advisable not to mention the stone at all! Nobody knew Washburn had it—nobody should know if Miss Joan gets it back. I shall put some of my own people after this man and woman; they may find—where the police can not."

"Well, you're makin' a good point, Li H'sien. On the whole—perhaps we'd best let it go for the present as natural death. When will Miss Washburn get here?"

"I will talk with her on the telephone directly after breakfast—in time for her to catch the second morning plane. Sam Wong will meet her at Croydon with the car. They should reach this house by two o'clock."

"Then what do you say to goin' with us to look up the perfume question after you've telephoned? . . . . Say between ten and eleven? Hammond's sketches are bein' photographed at the Yard now, and one of our men should be here with the prints by ten at the latest."

IN the counting-room of the big warehouse in Well Court, E. C., Li Sun H'sien was most affably received by Kun Tang Fo'kien, the head of Swire, Jardman Co., Ltd., and himself a Manchu. Conducting the party to a small room beautifully decorated in Chinese motifs, Kun Fo'kien asked an intelligent-looking *comprador* whether he remembered selling any of the perfume in question to a well-dressed, aristocratic-looking woman answering to a certain description. The *comprador* was quite sure he did—about a week before—he remembered she had poured some on her handkerchief and held it about six inches from her nose. On being shown the telltale handkerchief, he identified it and the monogram. When he saw the print from Hammond's sketch, he was positive. But none of them knew the woman's name or her address—she had been recommended to them by Glennhaligons, Ltd., in St. James' Street, where she usually purchased the scents she used.

At Glennhaligons' shop, Brandt went directly to the general manager, introducing Drayton as the Deputy Commissioner, and showed the handkerchief and the photoprint—then quietly told him in confidence that it was a question of murder and that they wished all the information the manager could give them concerning the woman.

It was evident that the manager was casting about for some way of avoiding any direct identification. Finally he said earnestly:

"In the first place, gentlemen, quite regardless of any circumstantial evidence you may have, you're making a serious blunder. I couldn't identify the lady positively from this photoprint. There's a general resemblance, I admit; but this certainly cannot be the woman we know, and have known for some years—one of our most valuable and respected customers. We recommend a number of persons to the Swire, Jardman Comp'ny for Oriental perfumes which only they handle—so it's quite impossible to pick out one from the lot. This customer of ours was once a Russian grand duchess, who escaped to England after the grand duke and the rest of the family were murdered in cold blood. She is received at the best houses in the country! Can't you see, Chief Inspector, that it may ruin us with the class of people who make up the bulk of our trade if we identify her an' trouble comes of it—when we know she must be innocent!"

"Surely you are unnecessarily disturbed," Brandt retorted. "If your distinguished customer can prove that she was not in a certain house last night—which should be a very simple matter

for anyone of her prominence—there isn't even a question of arrest. But don't overlook the fact, Mr. Seldonbury, that we can arrest *you*, right now, for deliberately obstructing justice, if we decide you are doing that. Now, Mr. Seldonbury—the name and address, if you please, of the woman you sent to the Swire, Jardman Comp'ny for that particular perfume—the woman who closely resembles this photoprint! We're quite in earnest, sir!"

"Oh, very good! I fancy you may not be so very wide of the mark if you call upon Madame Olga Stefanovitch—in Stanhope Square, Kensington. I've not the slightest doubt as to her ability to account for every moment of her time on any particular night—if she happens to feel in the mood for doing so. As a matter of courtesy an' fair play, I trust you'll not bring our name into this. An' I'm going to say one thing more, Chief Inspector: It's fairly easy to make mistakes in a matter of this sort, d'ye see. Again—we've sent many of our customers to that Chinese importing house for perfumes. The woman you are after may be easily one of these others."

AN idea drifted into Hammond's mind —as far as he knew, an utterly groundless one, but as the manager finished speaking, he asked:

"How much time does the lady usually spend in London, sir?"

"Well, that varies. Prob'ly two or three months, in the 'season.' She's often back again in the late summer or fall—sometimes in midwinter. And she is frequ'ntly in Paris, Berlin or New York —we've known of her making purchases from our branches in those cities."

"How many times has she been in here, this year?"

"Possibly two or three."

"And how long before that, since she was in?"

"Why, she appears to have been traveling a good bit—might have been eight or ten months between her previous visit an' this one."

"Notice any change in her general health or manner?"

"Aye—she'll have put on some weight, I'd say, and has improved in appearance an' manner. It must have been rather frightful, when the grand duke was killed an' she escaped from Russia—took some time to get over that. But she's picked up a bit as time goes on—seems a good five years younger."

"Er—know where she banks?"

"Barclay's—at present. Had an account with a Russian house when she first came to London, but they got into some diffic'lty with the F.O. an' she transferred to Barclay's."

A momentary gleam showed behind Hammond's glasses — but he merely thanked the manager courteously, and changed the subject.

WHEN they were again outside, Brandt went to the nearest public telephone, called up Scotland Yard, and sent three men to keep the house in Stanhope Square under observation, finding out all they could from neighbors and tradesmen about Madame Stefanovitch. Then he was about to go and call upon her, but Hammond suggested a call at Barclay's bank first.

When they arrived here and asked for one of the assistant managers, Brandt gave him his card and said they'd like to ask a few questions about one of their depositors. Mr. Evans was courteous—but without making any promises or agreements until he'd heard a good deal more of the matter. It's a rule with every first-class bank to protect a depositor as far as it possibly can. But the Chief Inspector nodded to Hammond, who asked:

"Have you recent signatures by Madame Stefanovitch, Mr. Evans—and also a specimen or two written a few years ago?"

"We've a receipt from her for some vouchers which she got last week—naturally, we'd have nothing before she came to us, more than a year ago. Or—wait a bit! It just occurs to me that we're keeping some old vouchers for her in one of our vaults—checks drawn upon Colovitch Frères by her and paid by them on her account."

"Would you mind comparing eight or ten from one of the bundles with that recent signature?"

"Fancy she'd have no objection to our doin' that on our own account—but showing 'em to anyone else would be a breach of confidence, wouldn't it?"

"Suppose you were called upon to refund every penny you've paid out on her account?"

"My word! You're by way of hintin' at possible forgery—eh? Scotland Yard wouldn't do that without some grounds! Really, you know, I—I fancy I'd best comply with your request, Mr. Hammond."

A bundle of vouchers was fetched up to Evans' office—ten of the checks being compared with the receipt which Madame Stefanovitch had recently signed. At a casual glance, there seemed no difference whatever in the signatures—but under a magnifying-glass, three of the old checks—for small amounts—appeared to have been written with a somewhat unsteadier hand than the later receipt. However, Evans discounted this as serious evidence.

"She may have written those in a space too cramped for her elbow to rest comfortably. In fact, I now recall that the check she gave us for forty thousand pounds, when transferrin' her account, was signed on a corner of my desk with her elbow off the edge, an' the writing was noticeably unsteady even viewed without a magnifying-glass. Yet Colovitch Frères paid the full amount on it without a question. Have you really any doubts about these signatures, Mr. Hammond?"

"Well, the point's this: When one writes a letter or check and signs his name, he does it unconsciously, and therefore smoothly. He is paying no attention whatever to the writing itself. On the other hand, when one is copying anything, every stroke of the pen or pencil is a study with one eye upon the original as it is made. Under conditions of that sort, it's impossible to write unconsciously or with entire smoothness until that copying has become a fixed habit. Your point as to cramped position of wrist and elbow might produce much the same result, I suppose. Suppose we let it ride for the present—possibly seeing you at some other time about it. Eh?"

FROM the bank, Brandt drove them west to Stanhope Square. Rather to their surprise, they were told by a most thoroughly correct butler that Madame was at home. When she presently came down to them in the drawing-room, with the Chief Inspector's card in her hand, there was a puzzled expression on her face. Either they had made an absolute blunder, or the woman was a consummate actress.

"You wish to see me, Chief Inspector? I must confess I don't quite understand."

Her English was faultless, without a trace of accent—her manner unaffected yet dignified.

Drayton took over the questioning in a courteous manner.

"We have some reason to believe, madame, that you were a guest in a certain house last evening. If this proves to be a mistake, some woman is impersonating you—with just what object, we don't know. If you can tell us exactly where you were during every moment of the night, it will be impossible for such an impersonator to do you any actual harm, because we shall know just whom to look for. If you can't, she's quite likely to get you into serious trouble. I'm assuming, of course, that you can check up with little difficulty."

Brandt, sitting behind the table, was holding one of the photoprints under the edge of it, out of sight and comparing it, closely, with the woman's face.

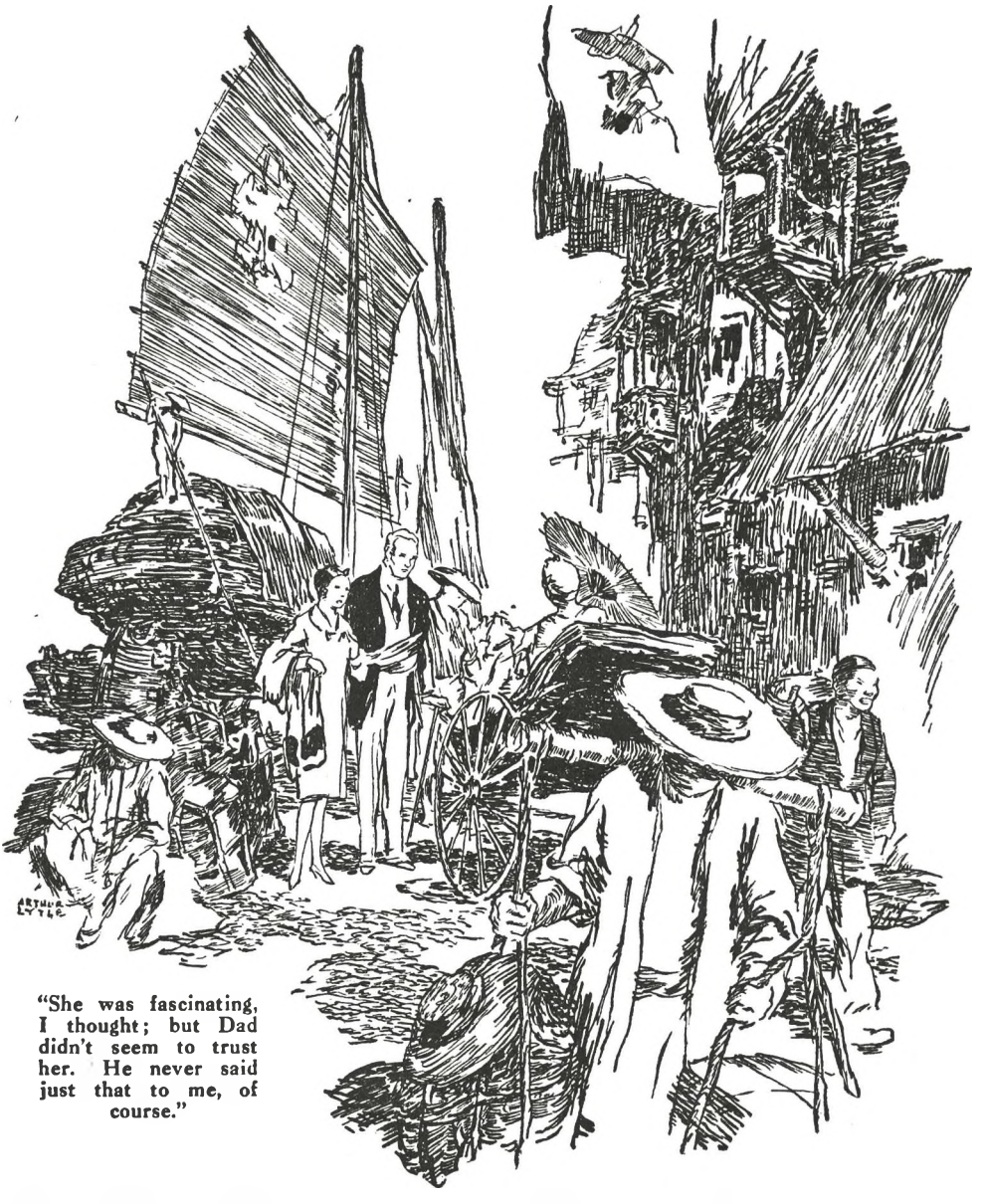
"Why, I fancy that should be a simple matter. My secretary—a cousin of whom I'm quite fond and who goes about with me a lot—can tell you where I was up to past midnight. My maid was undressing me and drawing my bath after that—and she knows I was in bed when she got up this morning. —Just a moment. . . . . I'll call them both."

The secretary—a handsome girl with pleasant manners but with an underlying suggestion of cool hardness—gave a detailed account of Madame Stefanovitch's movements upon the previous day, from tea-time through dinner, the theater and dancing—until retiring. The maid accounted for everything except the hours between three and seven A. M.—which were immaterial. Madame suggested telephoning the house where they had been dancing—which Drayton did, with a casual explanation. Their hostess was of the impression that they had reached her house about eleven and left at two. She had paid no particular attention to them during the three hours. When the four men had thanked Madame and taken their leave, Brandt said glumly:

"Washout! . . . . That alibi is watertight—if they all stick to it on cross-examination!"

Hammond agreed with him.

"Sure is! . . . . And yet—it really isn't worth a damn! If the woman is a 'red,' as I suspect—then her entire household and the two dinner-guests are 'reds' also. You couldn't accept their statements on oath! As for the people who gave the dance—*that's* the reference that Madame would see was absolutely respectable—but her hostess says she was paying no special attention to them during that time. If the men and the secretary were in evidence, Madame easily could have slipped out and been in



"She was fascinating, I thought; but Dad didn't seem to trust her. He never said just that to me, of course."

Cadogan Gardens without being missed —probably wasn't over five or six minutes' walk. . . . I saw you looking at the print, Brandt—what do you think?"

"Hmph! . . . On that point I'm on firmer ground! Considering that the woman was some sixty feet from you when you saw her through that window —an' that you don't claim to be a finished artist—I'd say she is almost undoubtedly the original of your sketch. But in spite of that fact, I doubt if it would convince a British jury. With that alibi she has just sprung on us, I see no chance for arrest unless we can get a suspicious *dossier* on everyone in that house. I handed my pad to her an' to the secretary when I asked 'em to sign their statem'nts as I took them down —so I'm hopin' I got some fingerprints on the waxed underside of it. There are several prints from the woman's fingers in Washburn's library an' bedroom—our photographer will have been gettin' 'em during the day."

When they returned to Cadogan Gardens, they found that good negatives had been made of various fingerprints and the marks of the woman's rubber heels,—one of these had a small chunk of the rubber gouged out from one of the countersunk screw-holes, and the other had a noticeable cut across one corner,—both plainly identifiable. After he examined

them, the Chief Inspector sent his pad to the Yard for negatives of the waxed underside. As the two womenservants had been out of the house during the entire night, Brandt saw little to be gained by questioning them. Hammond, however, asked Sarah Glenn a few questions which occurred to him. How often were Sarah and Mrs. Bundy alone in the house during the day or evening? Well, not so often—but Mr. "Lee-sin" occasionally went out when the master was not at home. Yes—two or three persons had called at such times. Only the week before, a rather tall woman had called to see the master and was talking with Sarah at the front door when he came in. They had gone into the library; Sarah was laying the table in the dining-room adjoining, and couldn't help overhearing snatches of the conversation. The woman wanted him to give her some papers he had—then she'd do whatever he wished. But the master had said no—if he gave her the papers she might break her promise. He would keep the papers, and she must keep her agreement. Sarah said the woman had wept.

After studying Hammond's sketch, Sarah said it was "that one," all right; she "could swear to it!" At that point, Sarah remembered something, and ran up to her room. In a few moments, she came down again, fetching a pair of woman's shoes with high Louis heels—the rubber on the underside of which was unquestionably what had left the traces in the library. In the toe of one was stuffed a pair of rubber gloves—of a sort Hammond never had seen before. On the tips of each finger and thumb, very thin little patches of rubber had been cemented—their surface etched or molded into facsimiles of finger-whorls that had been photographed upon them—so that anyone wearing the gloves produced upon anything she touched fingerprints that were not her own. Sarah said she had found the shoes under her bed that morning, to her utter puzzlement.

Hammond commended her and disgustedly wrapped them up in brown paper—obviously this destroyed about half the evidence that had been obtained.

JOAN reached the house from Croydon at two. She'd had time, on the way from Paris, to accept the fact of her father's death and get herself in hand. And shortly after her arrival, she asked Hammond and Li H'sien to come into the library and give her the whole story.

Li did most of the talking, except where Hammond mentioned this or that additional point. Drayton and Brandt had gone back to the Yard for a time.

When the girl was handed the photoprints, she studied them closely, though saying she knew nothing whatever of any Madame Stefanovitch and never had heard her father mention such a woman.

"But this face you have sketched, Uncle Carl, is—well—a bit familiar—though I certainly never saw the original in England, or at home. Wait now; let me think over some of the trips I made with Dad—trips through the Orient, possibly. We seemed usually to drift in with English society, in the out-ports. H-m-m—wait! . . . . I have it! The Honorable Mrs. Jephson-Hornby—presumably the daughter of a woman peer who had married a wealthy commoner and afterward buried or divorced him. Yes, that's the woman—unquestionably! At Government House in Hongkong! Dad had met her before, in one of the cities in Central Europe. . . . She was rather fascinating, I thought. His Excellency and Her Ladyship were quite taken with her, but Dad—I felt instinctively that there was something about the woman he didn't like—he didn't seem to trust her. He never said just that to me, of course—Dad was mighty careful as to what he said about anyone."

"Joan, how sure are you that this sketch of mine is pretty close to the woman you met in Hongkong? You're only visualizing a memory, you know; you had to think a few minutes before you could place her."

"Yes—but the face was *familiar* at first glance. Of course it's not an exact portrait, feature by feature—but you did get the essential characteristic lines so closely that anybody who saw the Honorable Mrs. Jephson-Hornby in Hongkong would recognize your sketch."

"Humph! . . . Each of us had a chance to compare a print like this with Madame Stefanovitch's appearance at a distance of not more than five feet—and we're fairly certain that she must be the original. Did the Hongkong woman ever mention her birthplace?"

"Oh, yes—she said her people were of Buckinghamshire. Said she was born on the family estate and owned a house in London, given her by the husband."

"You think, then, that he may still live?" asked Li H'sien.

"Well—I do, and I don't! I remember

having some vague impression, out East, that possibly he never had existed."

"Hold on a second!" Hammond exclaimed. "You don't s'pose the woman can be in the telephone-book, do you?"

"If she spends the 'season' in her London house, undoubtedly she would be."

Hammond consulted the directory.

"H-m-m—*Jephson, Captain G. W.—Jephson, Mrs. Harriet—Jephson-Hornby, Mrs. Irma K.*, Montagu Square, Mayflower 10487. Suppose that's the woman, Joan?"

"Must be! . . . Her name was 'Irma,' I'm quite sure."

"Say—look here, Joan! Either this resemblance to my sketch is pure coincidence—or it's not. We can't afford to pass it up as coincidence unless we're *sure!* For one thing, we ought to know where this woman was last night; that may settle the matter entirely, as far as she is concerned—or it may turn up a pretty suspicious clue. Now, it won't do for a man's voice to call her on the phone, because if she's the one we're after, she'll get suspicious and beat it before we can reach her house. It won't do for Joan to call her own name, because that locates the voice in this house—which again would be suspicious. H-m-m—was there any other woman in Hongkong, Joan—with a London house—whom this woman knew fairly well?"

"Why, yes—one or two. Lady Violet Ackersley was one."

Hammond reached across the table for the telephone, looked up the number in the directory, and asked to be put through. A man's voice said that Lady Violet was in Scotland. Hammond thanked him, and rang off.

"That'll make it all right, Joan. You call up Mayflower 10487—say you're Lady Violet Ackersley—and ask for Mrs. Jephson-Hornby."

It was evidently the butler who came to the phone. No—Mrs. Jephson-Hornby was not at home. She had left town a week before to visit friends in Sussex—Sir Robert Twombly's family, not far from Horsham—and not expected to return for ten days or a fortn't. When Joan replaced the phone on the fork, Hammond nodded in satisfaction.

"That's a bit of unexpected luck! Sir Robert happens to dabble a bit in some of my pet sciences, and I know him quite well. He's up in town three or four days each week—lunches at his club, the Cavendish, in Piccadilly—and sits around in there for an hour or so afterward."

Lifting the phone off the frame, he asked to be put through to Grosvenor 1246—and told the steward's office he wished to speak to Sir Robert Twombly.

"I say! . . . Are you there, Hammond? Glad to hear your voice! What can I do for you?" said Sir Robert's voice after a short wait.

"I'd like to get a bit of confidential information, Sir Robert—and—er—well, it might be a rather important matter."

"I see! You may depend upon my keepin' mum—oh, entirely so!"

"Well—er—Mrs. Jephson-Hornby is one of your house-party this week, I understand—at the Firs in Sussex?"

"Oh, aye—quite so. Came to us a week ago yesterday. Deuced good comp'ny, y'know—capital shot—rides anything—first-class bridge—all that."

"That's just about as she was described to me—must be the same person, I think. One of my best friends met her out in Hongkong a year or two back and has been trying to get in touch. I suppose the house-parties are fairly lively down in your neighborhood—something going on every night, eh?"

"There will be, for the next fortn't—my word! A lot of young people down, at one house or another. Not much goin' on durin' the past week, d'ye see—our lot haven't been out more'n one evening, I fancy, but we've gotten through with a lot of bridge an' billiards—an' dancin'."

"Well, that covers all I wished to know, I think. Thank you very much. Please don't mention to Mrs. Jephson-Hornby or anyone else that I was inquiring about her; she'd undoubtedly consider it an impertinence on the part of a total stranger."

"Oh, I'll keep mum—absolutely. See you around at the Royal Institution some evening before long? What?"

LI H'SIEN smiled slightly as Hammond hung up the telephone.

"Most baffling case, Mr. Hammond! We run up against the alibi in every direction. Doubtless Andy Peterson, mentioned by Chief Inspector Brandt, can prove he was in the chorus at Covent Garden last night!"

"Hmph! . . . As a rainproof alibi, this one of the Jephson-Hornby woman's isn't worth a curse. She easily could have run up to Kensington from Sir Robert's place in Sussex inside of an hour—parked the car anywhere along here in Cadogan Gardens, while she was

in the house, and let herself into the Firs when she got back, without disturbing anybody. But we'd have to have pretty convincing proof to get by a British jury against that alibi, just the same."

While they were discussing the information they had just dug up, the Chief Inspector came in.

"Well, I fancy it's all over but the arrestin' an' chargin'! Our men report that the woman hasn't left the house—and I've the warrant in my pocket. The fingerprints on my pad and those we found here are identical! The woman was Madame Stefanovitch! My word! Quick work—eh, old chap? What?"

HAMMOND unrolled his brown-paper bundle and handed Brandt the shoes and rubber gloves with their remarkable tips, explaining where they had been found. It took but a minute for the Chief Inspector to catch the point. He pulled a long deep sigh.

"It's all in a policeman's job, of course—but frequ'ntly it's a bit exasperatin' to build up a mass of evidence, point by point, an' then see it dissolve into thin air! I fancy not one of us had the least doubt as to Madame Stefanovitch's bein' the woman who was in this house last night! There were conflictin' bits of evidence, to be sure. The assistant manager at Barclay's bank, an' the manager of that big scent-shop were both quite positive as to her social position—kept warnin' us we were ridin' for a fall. Yet in spite of that apparent alibi, all the rest of it clicked in. She certainly was recommended to Li H'sien's Chinese friends for that unusual perfume, and purchased it from them—the handkerchief she had in her hand when we saw her was an exact duplicate of the one found here in the bathroom—three diff'rent persons unhesitatingly identified her from Hammond's sketch—and I got jolly fine impressions of her fingers on the waxed underside of my pad, impressions identical with those we found here—which would appear to settle it. Now we find those impressions cemented to rubber gloves worn by the actual murderer—an' we're quite as much at sea as we were at the start! Those manager chaps were right! Madame Stefanovitch is definitely out as a suspect. Our fingerprints an' rubber-heel prints aren't worth a brass farden!"

They told him about the close resemblance Joan thought she saw between Mrs. Jephson-Hornby and Hammond's sketch—also the information they had obtained.

"Well—there you are again, d'ye see! . . . On the face of it, another hard-an'-fast alibi! To be sure, I quite agree with Hammond that it is entirely-possible for the woman to be a guest at Sir Robert Twombly's place in Sussex an' yet have been here for two or three hours last night. In fact, I consider that watertight alibi the most suspicious thing you've told me about her—because it's exactly the carefully thought-out detail the woman who cemented those prints on the rubber gloves might work out in advance if she intended to commit this murder in such a dev'lish clever way. But the chances are a hundred-to-one that she'll have witnesses to account for every minute of her time during every evening. Even if she hasn't, it'll take some doing to break that alibi! Nobody has seen her in London, except Hammond—which by itself, at that distance, isn't evidence enough for an arrest. We couldn't prove either the handkerchief or the perfume against her."

"Where are you figuring Andy Peterson in all this mess?"

"As an enterprising but innocent burglar, who held the bag. The woman undoubtedly got the diamond—but I don't fancy the 'Nutcracker' even saw the thing. He prob'ly did see her searching that library, but he had no possible way of knowing whether she got the stone or not—though he prob'ly believed she did get it, somewhere—else why the dead man? Undoubtedly he followed her as far as he could when she went out, and he could testify against her—but that would spoil his chances for getting the stone from her. Sarah's story is proof enough that she knew nothing whatever of Andy."

"You think Andy couldn't possibly have taken the stone?"

"Well, I'll not go so far as that—no! His sense of hearing is abnormally acute, an' he's a wizard at safes. If he had any idea there was such a thing behind those book-shelves he could have opened it much as you did, but with his own ears instead of a microphone—and he'd take off his shoes in that window-recess. I've still a partly open mind concerning the diamond. Madame certainly didn't know about it, unless Washburn had it in his hands when she killed him. . . . It'll help a lot when we find where she bought the atomizer, the rubber tubing, and the

little lump of cyanide crystals covered with hydrochloric acid, which you said were in that container."

There was a sound of voices at the door. In a moment, one of the constables who had been detailed to watch the house in Stanhope Square came in with a rather amazing report for the Chief Inspector:

"Actin' upon orders from Headquarters, sir, I was watchin' the Stefanovitch house in front while P. C. Brenner was doin' the same from an alley in the back. Detective Sergeant Grinling is drivin' by in one of the Yard cars an' spots me. I walks around the corner into another street where I finds 'im waitin' for me. I tells 'im about the detail I was on,—actin' under your orders direct, sir. The Sergeant considers this most peculiar—because, says he: 'I've been a-watchin' that 'ouse, an' Madame, with three good men, day an' night, for the past fortn't—actin' h'under orders from the Commissioner his own self!' So I says as' 'ow I'd tike it up with you, sir, as soon as I was h'orf-duty—w'ich I am now h'orf-duty an' 'ave done, sir."

The puzzled expression deepened in Brandt's face.

"Very good, Bolling—I fancy I have all the facts. Just report at the Yard and await further orders, will you? No use keeping a double watch on that house, as far as I know."

AS soon as Bolling left, Brandt rang through to the Commissioner's office and was lucky enough to find His Lordship in. He reported the situation in Stanhope Square, and asked for instructions. His Lordship evidently was much surprised.

"Do I understand that Drayton and you discovered enough evidence in the Washburn case to be certain it was murder—and had enough suspicion of Madame Stefanovitch to interview her with some idea of an arrest, and to keep her household under espionage?"

"That about covers it, Your Lordship. Until three o'clock this afternoon, we were convinced she was the murderess."

"My word, Brandt—that's simply astounding! . . . And quite impossible! I know her Royal Highness personally—knew her when I was attaché at the Petersburg Embassy before the war. An' the most amazin' feature of all this is the fact that it was Mr. Silas M. Washburn himself who asked me, two weeks ago, to give Madame sufficient police

protection, night and day, to insure her safety! He was a man who was at home in nearly every country on the globe an' had sources of most accurate information. Somewhere, he had picked up a hint that she was in constant danger of abduction or murder—or possibly both—and made a point of communicating with me at once. H-m-m—until we know more about the circumst'nces, I fancy you'd best carry on with your own espionage as well as mine—but only with the idea of protecting a woman of the highest possible standing, who has dropped her title only because she no longer has a country. You follow me, I trust? Quite so—very good!"

As Brandt replaced the telephone, the bell rang again. The operator was putting through a call from the Avenue Exchange—Barclay's bank in Lombard Street. Mr. Evans was speaking.

"Er—are you there, Chief Inspector? Ah! . . . Very good! I called for you at Scotland Yard an' they suggested my trying this Sloane exchange number. Er—there's a matter of some importance to us. . . . When could I see you—and where?"

"You're just about closing, I fancy? Shall you be there at the bank for another hour or so? . . . And can I get in if I drive across the city at once? If it's anything to do with the matter we were discussing this morning, I fancy it may be an advantage to see you at the bank."

"Why, we'd really prefer that—if it's not putting you out too much. You'll have no trouble in being admitted when you come."

Brandt picked up his hat and gloves, beckoned to Hammond, and gave them the message he had just received.

"It's something to do with the Stefanovitch account, of course—may turn up just the hint to put us on the right track. We need your head in this, Hammond. Come along!"

At the bank, Evans took them into his private office and spread six checks upon his desk—with a couple of others opposite, and two signed notes from Madame.

"Gentleman, when you were in here this morning I showed you the vouchers of some checks drawn by Madame Stefanovitch upon that Russian bank before she transferred her account to us—and a recent receipt from her for the check-vouchers drawn upon this account. It was an irregular proceeding, but done at the request of Scotland Yard. I could see no possible difference in the signatures—but Mr. Hammond pronounced some of them forgeries, though he never had seen the signature before. —Accept my compliments, sir!

"This afternoon, Madame came in and handed me these six vouchers, saying that she had no record whatever of having drawn the checks. She couldn't swear they were forgeries, and the signatures looked so like her own that I fancy she was a bit frightened—wondered if possibly she was losing her mind, perhaps. But the total amount was too serious to be dropped without a pretty careful investigation—something over ten thousand pounds altogether. I told her I would take it up with Scotland Yard at once—and she seemed to fancy that was all that could be done for the present. Of course we arranged for little identification-marks in the signature and gave her a check-book we have for just such emergencies. Apparently, it is exactly like all our other check-books of the same size—but the water-marks in the safety-paper are just a trifle different. No checks of hers will be paid hereafter without those little identification-marks in the signature and the proper water-mark, which has tiny consecutive numbers along one end, which would show her if any were missing since she drew the last one. Have you gentlemen any idea as to what really happened?"

Brandt looked at Hammond, who nodded thoughtfully.

"I think we may admit this much to you, Mr. Evans—in strict confidence, you understand. This morning, we had almost enough evidence to hang Madame Stefanovitch as a murderess—supposing that she was impersonating a grand duchess who recently had taken the risk of returning to Russia and had been shot in attempting to escape. At this moment, I'm rather of the impression that it may prove to be the other way round—that Madame Stefanovitch is the genuine article, and some other woman may have made herself up to resemble her—forging her signature as part of the game. I rather think that with the organization behind the Chief Inspector, and possibly my own line of investigation, we may be able to run this woman down before long."

THE next development Scotland Yard got, three days later, was the burglary of Mrs. Jephson-Hornby's house in Montagu Square. Whatever other persons may have occasionally spent weekends in the house or met there in the evenings, there was no question as to the household servants being anything but what they seemed—straight British, with ultra-respectable references. The chauffeur, however, was a Continental. He was with her in Sussex.

The housemaid had gone into her mistress' well-stocked library after breakfast, to dust. She found a lowboy moved away from one wall and the concealed safe behind it opened—the contents dumped out upon the floor—drawers ransacked—whole rows of books pulled out in a search for something behind them. The maid, alarmed, had called the butler, and with him searched the second floor. None of the silver had been taken —Mrs. Jephson-Hornby had with her such jewelry as was not in the safe-deposit boxes. They couldn't discover any object missing—but instinctively called in the police. Hammond accompanied Brandt to the house and made one or two discoveries which the Chief Inspector had overlooked—presumably because he was trying to spot clues to a burglar instead of evidences that the place might be a political rendezvous. Meanwhile, the butler had telephoned his mistress. Much irritated, she asked to have the Inspector put on the wire. She told him there was really nothing in the house of any appreciable value and that she much preferred dropping the matter without any further investigation. He gathered

that, like most of the British aristocracy, she had a horror of newspaper publicity —and since nothing of value had been lost, she hoped he would be able to hush the matter up. When he and Hammond got back to the house in Tedworth Square, the American said:

"I don't know what's running through your mind, old chap—but I'm thinking of Andy Peterson!"

"That safe looked like his work—when he hadn't time to be fussy and do a nice job—but the rest of the house looked a bit too thorough for him. Whoever it was didn't overlook any possible hiding-places—an' certainly wore gloves."

"Which convinces me still more that it was Andy. And if I were in your place, I'd send four good men down to that Sussex house at once—by the fastest cars you've got!"

"On just what grounds? Suspicion only?"

"No—the certainty that Mrs. Jephson-Hornby won't be alive tomorrow morning if you don't! Andy is now convinced that the big diamond isn't in her house. Catch the point? And I don't want her to die prematurely—that's all."

"I say, Hammond! Back up a bit an' let's consider the evidence. Up to the time Miss Joan reached Cadogan Gardens the other day, you were convinced —I'll admit the rest of us were also— that Madame Stefanovitch was the murderess. Contrary to the usual circumst'nces, we had, inside of twelve hours after the murder, enough evidence to arrest her and go before a jury. You were convinced—not?"

"I certainly was convinced that she was mixed up in Washburn's murder, somehow. Then, when Joan told us about this other woman in Hongkong, and I'd located her here in London,—found she was in Essex, and checked up on her through Sir Robert,—I saw that where Madame Stefanovitch came into the affair was in her resemblance to some other woman whom we've not seen, and in Washburn's getting police protection for her. Obviously the other woman must resemble Madame so closely that she can actually succeed with the impersonation among Madame's own servants. Evidently something was going on, of which Silas Washburn had inside knowledge, and he wasn't the kind of man who could be frightened into keeping his mouth shut. Now when one woman resembles another as closely as that, it amounts to coincidence. But *three* such resemblances, with all of them worked out in a single scheme like this, is stretching probability beyond all logic. Hence the inference that if Madame Stefanovitch did not kill Washburn, Irma Jephson-Hornby did—and *vice versa.* It's a logical and mathematical assumption complicated by the intrusion of Peterson—who didn't see Washburn killed or know how he died, but who did have some happen-chance hint that he was in possession of a huge diamond. And Peterson was positive the Jephson-Hornby woman did get it—somewhere in Washburn's house—before she left."

"Deuce take it, man! . . . Logic, says you—things have to happen that way, because they can't happen any other way! But it simply doesn't do for us. We have to pile one fact on top of another fact until we get a case, d'ye see. An' as yet there's absolutely no case against the Jephson-Hornby woman—not a thing beyond a fancied resemblance to your sketch, an' the fact that Washburn knew her in Hongkong!"

BRANDT didn't take any stock in the possibility that the woman was in immediate danger—he thought he knew from old acquaintance the Nutcracker's fear of consequences and mental slant. So he postponed until the following day a decision to send his men down to Sussex—and when they reached the Firs, a terrified maid had just discovered a fresh murder-case. The woman had been strangled—her face was a frightful sight. Everything about her room and belongings had been ransacked. The small safe in Sir Robert's study had been opened, and five hundred pounds in Treasury notes taken. There were no fingerprints —no clues.

When Brandt and Hammond returned to London, the American's manservant Jenkins had a message for them to get the Deputy Commissioner and go at once to the Washburn house in Cadogan Gardens. There they found Sir Francis Lothair, Permanent Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, with Joan and Li Sun H'sien, awaiting them. Taking a typewritten document from the table drawer, Joan flattened out the creases and said:

"Li thought I'd better see Dad's London solicitors,—Bramey, Sloat and Wisdell, in Lincoln's Inn,—as they had a duplicate copy of his will and might have some communication for me. Mr. Bramey let us read the will—gave us a

list of documents and securities in his charge—then said that Dad had boxes in two safe-deposit vaults here—Chancery Lane, and the Pall Mall, in St. Albans Place, Regent Street. He said he knew Dad had left instructions in them both for me and for Li H'sien, and he suggested that we take Dad's keys—I had them with me—and see what there was in those boxes, at once. As Dad had property in England, it would be necessary to probate a copy of his will here, which Bramey already was preparing to do. Well—we overhauled the boxes, and among various papers, documents and securities, we found this. I'll read it to you—and Sir Francis will see at once why it was necessary to have the Foreign Office represented."

The document read:

To My Daughter, Joan Washburn, and My Friend, Li Sun H'sien.

To be opened and read after my death.

As I am in presumably more or less personal danger, quite aside from the usual risks in being a multimillionaire, I have decided it is advisable to make this statement—though physically and mentally I am absolutely sound.

Some years ago, I met a woman in Tiflis who called herself at that time Irma Dorgatsch. Rather a fascinating woman, and handsome—but as cold-blooded as a venomous snake. A vehement and bigoted communist, with no possibility of ever growing out of that frame of mind.

In Hongkong, three years later, I saw her again as Mrs. Jephson-Hornby, presumably the widow of a wealthy candy manufacturer, from whom she inherited money and a house in London which I have since learned belongs to Russian agents; it has secret passages in its walls and a secret cellar, though kept up as a thoroughly respectable English house. I did not admit remembering her, but I hinted to the Governor what she was.

My private inquiry agents have ascertained that she and other communist agents plan to abduct and murder a former Russian grand duchess now living in London—then impersonate her, using her house, servants, and so forth, in carrying out several outrageous plots against the British Government.

I called upon this woman in Montagu Street—told her I had names and documents proving the whole plot, and gave her one week to leave the United Kingdom. I said I would take no further action as long as she kept out of every British possession and the United States, but that if I died unexpectedly or she refused to leave, the whole story, with documentary proof, would be published in at least four of the largest London newspapers. My daughter or my friend, Li Sun H'sien, will give this statement, with the documents, to the editors I mention, with copies to the Foreign Office in case I die suddenly.

Silas M. Washburn.

WHEN Joan had finished reading this communication from her father, Li H'sien remarked he thought Washburn's reason for not turning over his proofs at once to the Foreign Office was the belief that it would be hampered by the present Labor government in taking any serious action against alleged communistic plots, and was convinced he could get more effective results himself.

The Chief Inspector had been considering the statement, and now he observed:

"Well—all of the mystery in the case except the identity of the man who saved us the trouble of hanging that woman seems to be cleared up. And yet, in spite of Washburn's statement, sufficient evidence to have warranted her arrest is still lacking. We've absolutely no proof that she ever was in this house, except Sarah's description of that interview with Washburn, and the shoes and gloves found under her bed, which might have belonged to anybody—"

A sudden thought came streaking through Hammond's brain.

"Er—hold on a bit! Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "Do you know, old chap, that remark of yours seems to give me another slant on this. Just let me consider a point or two over again—see where I may have got switched. If this Jephson-Hornby woman was going to impersonate Madame Stefanovitch—why in thunder was she leaving a trail of evidence to frame her as the murderess of Washburn? Hold on now! . . . I think I've got it! It is known that somebody has been forging Madame's name and impersonating her. All right! Our friend Irma succeeds in abducting Madame, and puts her in a suburban house where the police are going to find her and get her fingerprints. Then, impersonating Madame in her own house, she publishes a statement that some one who seems to be her twin has been forging her name and impersonating her in banks and shops. The fingerprints

"Quick, Brandt!" he cried. "Snap handcuffs on her! The woman's strong as a wildcat!"

prove that the woman found in the suburban house is unquestionably the one who murdered Washburn—and that of course cinches her also as the forger. Criminal in one way—bound to be the criminal in the other way! That part of it is clear. *But*—in that case Mrs. Jephson-Hornby never would have taken the risk of committing this murder herself! Consider: She knew damned well that Washburn was having her shadowed by efficient detectives—who most assuredly would see her getting in or out of this house and nail her as the criminal if anything had happened. Well, that would be only a detail to her—because she wasn't acting on her own in this affair. Instead of that, she was one of the top executives in a communist or bolshevik gang which probably numbered at least a dozen or more. So one of the other women—about her build and that of Madame Stefanovitch—is told off to do the killing. She may have been clever enough herself to work out this cyanogen-gas method—or the Jephson-Hornby woman may have coached her. Anyhow, this other woman—presumably by herself—got into this house without being seen—and took her own time to commit the murder. Irma never set foot in the house—that's why we had no evidence, and a perfectly good alibi, in her case. . . . H-m-m—I wonder if possibly

Sarah might recall something more about the woman who called to see Washburn —something she forgot to tell me before? Would you mind calling her in, Joan?"

In a few minutes the housemaid came into the library.

"Sarah, about how tall would you say that woman was who called one afternoon and had the interview with Mr. Washburn?"

"Why, I really couldn't say, sir. About as tall as me, I fancy."

"Well, how tall would that be in feet and inches?"

"I'm just five feet seven, sir."

"H-m-m—that would help a bit. Er—stand over there against the window, please—so we can get a general idea of the woman. Thanks!"

Hammond walked reflectively around the maid, then stepped between her and the window. Suddenly he grasped her arms, drawing them around behind her —and a veritable cyclone broke loose in the room!

"Quick, Brandt!" he cried. "Snap handcuffs on her! The woman's as strong as a wildcat—and with about the same disposition, I'd say!"

IN a few moments Sarah—her clothes torn and her hair disheveled—was securely handcuffed, and her ankles tied.

"What the deuce? . . . I say, Hammond! How—" Brandt began, protestingly.

"Oh, it struck me that we had nothing but Sarah's bare word for the other woman's interview with Washburn—or that she had found the rubber gloves and shoes under her bed. Of course, with her keys, she could come and go as she pleased in this house. The night I went with Sam to look at that unknown woman in the restaurant, the top of her head was exactly even with a little cross-division in the mirror, when she was touching up her complexion. Afterward, I went around and measured that little cross-division from the floor—it was exactly five feet, seven. . . . Now you watch her while I go upstairs with Li and investigate her room—there hasn't been any reason for doing that before."

In fifteen minutes they came down again with a bobbed wig of dark brown hair—(Sarah was a Russian blonde, in coloring)—and an actress' make-up kit. While two of them held the woman, Hammond carefully adjusted the dark wig and touched up her face. When he had finished, there was before them a living double of his pencil-sketch—it was fairly startling.

WHEN two constables had taken Sarah away to Scotland Yard, Brandt said regretfully:

"And she's had several days to send that wonderful diamond out of the country! Who knows when the Star of Asia will be seen again?"

Joan glanced at Li H'sien significantly.

"Oh, but—I really wasn't robbed of *that*, you know!"

"Why, what do you mean, Joan?"

"Li saved that for me. As he figures it out, Dad must have taken the stone out of the safe again, right after you three had gone—and then went upstairs for something before sitting down with his book in the library. While he was gone, that fiendish murderess must have sneaked in from the little reception-room across the hall, arranged the rubber tubing, and hidden herself behind the window-curtains. Owing to the high back of the chair, she couldn't have seen anything he took out of his pocket to gaze at—and she knew nothing about the diamond, anyhow. When he breathed in that frightful gas, the diamond must have slipped from his hand and rolled around behind his back. She searched his pockets for the documents, but naturally had no reason for feeling around behind him. Li's search was much more thorough. He found the diamond—and he quietly put it away in a safe place. We put it in the safe-deposit box, when we went there."

"But—but, good Lord, Joan! . . . Brandt and I combed every conceivable place in this room—searched everywhere except in Li's pockets! Suppose that we'd found the thing on him—or hidden somewhere by him?"

Joan smiled faintly.

"Li isn't as simple as all that. He gave Dad this ebony humidor on the table, you know—had it specially carved and inlaid with sandalwood for him, in Yunnan. Like all Chinese caskets, it has its little secret drawer—which you couldn't have discovered without smashing it. The Star of Asia has been on this table, fairly under your hand, until yesterday. Li fetched it to me before I'd been in the house an hour—but we thought this the safest place to keep it, until we could get to the safe-deposit vaults."

A story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy by Mr. New will appear in the next issue.

Dusk Hour

A vivid drama in which that essentially American type, an old prospector, is the central figure.

By ROLLIN BROWN

IN any mining country you'll find them. Old men they are, shambling figures for the most part; yet sturdy too, in the way of those who have at last learned to treasure the strength of their muscles, saving the full pace of morning to add to the step of evening. They form a strange guild, these many old men who have failed. Across tiny cooking-fires of sage root or piñon, tight-twisted brush stems or range dung they hold chance communion with themselves, two by two. Gold is the magic password of their order —free-milling gold, placer, rust-colored pockets in the seams of quartz granite, high-grade, thick, yellow soft flakes waiting—somewhere—along the buried bedrock of a storied creek bottom. Young mining men today are engineers; these others live in the dusk hour of the past.

Gold! Is there some strange magic in the word? For thirty-nine years, from mature manhood into the present, it had led John Dillingham over the rough spots of the earth; for thirty-nine years he had toiled as only a strong man can toil and still live. In a hundred dank underground shafts, tunnels and inclines he had mucked and timbered for the wage that would turn him free again, with a grub-stake on a plodding donkey before him, or a dog-sled—and once even, in the Andes, on a train of llamas.

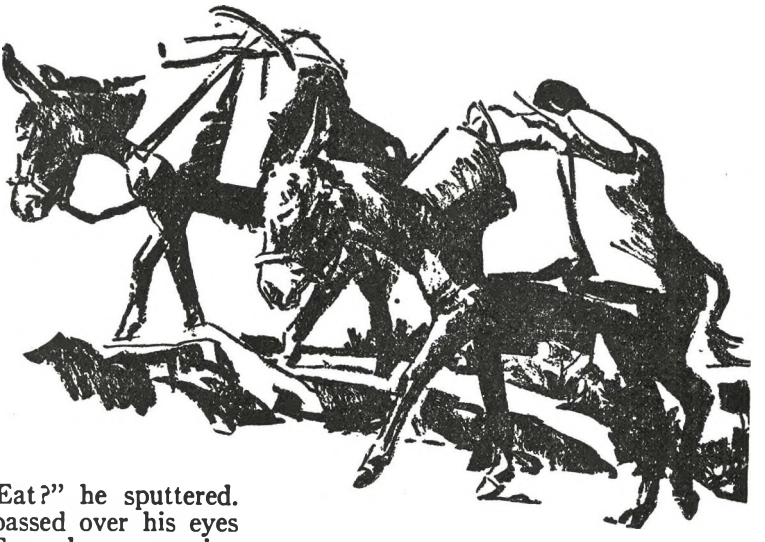
Now old John was hitting back—first along the highways where motorists smilingly stared at him, then into by-roads that turned, finally, into winding, twin white ruts that led into desert towns. Back into the arid country that he and Walatoka Charley, partners, had once prospected. The way was far. And something was wrong, now.

Occasionally in the white noontimes of the days just past he hadn't been able to see. Everything had seemed to blur before his eyes into a wriggling mass of weird lights. At first he put it down as the heat, the desert light again after the years, something temporary. Then, as it fitfully continued, he knew better. He began to save his eyes, as he hoarded the day's energy in his old body, closing them for long periods while he plodded on with a hand touching the guiding rump of the burro before him. Since this had happened, since he had first realized the truth, John had begun to measure time also, as he weighed out his strength, calculating into the future, saving an hour here and putting it somewhere else to better advantage.

He had it all planned out—the future, in hours practically. And at the moment Sarto came he suddenly realized that he wouldn't be able to make it alone.

It was an hour after nightfall that the big man loomed into the light of the trail fire, forgetful or unmindful of the customary salute. He stood over John, unseen, looking down. One of his big hands worked a bit below the sleeve. At length he said, with slow emphasis:

"Got a bite to eat there?"



John started. "Eat?" he sputtered. A trembling hand passed over his eyes and rested there. For a long, wavering moment he said no more. Then, "Yeah; sure, friend. Help yerself. Does seem, sudden-like, that I cain't see in the firelight neither. It aint come like thet at night before. I'll ask you to dish things out fer yourself."

AND John knew, then. Before the campfire was dead he had told Sarto all about it. There was a desperate note in the thinness of the old man's voice.

"It's a sure thing, friend. Sure—I tell ye. Walatoka Charley couldn't hev told me wrong; he couldn't hev made no mistake. Why Walatoka hed waited there in the County hospital fer three months—three months jist waitin' fer me. Sometimes he was clawin' the sheets, hangin' on tight with both hands full of beddin'; holdin' bedclothes, to keep from slippin' under. He hed doctors sayin' it was a miracle. But he was waitin', see? Waitin' fer me. He knew I'd show up some time.

"An' when I come, friend, he lived jist long enough to tell me. Jist thet long. Then his hands, which was white like I'd never seen 'em before, sort of relaxed; a smile come over his face, an' he said:

"'It's rich, John—so rich you wouldn't believe. Yellow wire-gold shot through the quartz. Lumps of the stuff bubble out when the ore's roasted. Gold! Gold, John! You git it. Gold—'"

For a long moment the old man was still, as though he gave tribute thus to the memory of his one-time partner. Then his face lifted, and he squinted hard across the fire embers toward Sarto, blinking his eyelids to clear the flickering sight.

"What d'you say, friend?" he asked. "I got to hev a pard now. I knowed it fer sure jist tonight—when you come, an' my eyes went stone blank fer a minute. What d'you say?"

Sarto's body, his big hands, were tense, as a man in a dream. He started, and his voice came, startlingly full: "Sure."

It was a verbal partnership. By the following dusk, Sarto retracing his steps, they were in the Walatoka Basin; a day later, at the town of Granite. A frenzy of energy had taken hold of Sarto. He cursed the slowness of the mule, the delay when the old man stumbled, the necessity of seeking water at a high spring two miles from the town. Yet this last was necessary, for water sold for money at the town of Granite. At daylight they went on again.

There followed eight days that drove Sarto, an underground man, little accustomed to the desert and its ways, close to madness. Twice they were forced to return to Granite; again he went alone four hours' journey to the west for water. Hours passed when old John was too weak to struggle on, when they lay in the scant rim-shade of some coulee wall. Curses became a monotone in Sarto's throat; his big hands, shot with desert rash bred from heat and stale water, opened and closed; his broken fingernails clawed at the stubble on his cheeks.

"You should have got a map," he told the old man, time after time. "A map! Any fool would know that. With a map I could go on and find it."

John chided him gently. "You fergit, pard, how it was at the end with Walatoka Charley. They was jist enough life

in him to squeeze them words out—fer me. No more. You fergit, pard."

Then, in the afternoon of the ninth day, hitting a new course out from Granite with fresh water, they found what John sought—a thread-like, devious incline winding up the face of a wall. A long, flat, barren ridge lay above and beyond. John's old voice suddenly trembled so that he could scarcely speak.

"No. It were in San Franciscy thet he got took down an' were sent to bed. He never got up—like I telled you. For a while he hed hopes, I judge; then he knowed. After thet it was jist waitin' fer me. Waitin', day after day. You see, he weren't goin' to trust nobody but me."

"Yeah, I see. Was there any witnesses to the fact he turned the claim over to you?"

"Gold!" is the magic password; two by two, or singly, these old men begin the trek, scanty packs on their plodding burros.

"Pard—pard, look keerful there. Kin you see—up there, half up the wall—where the trail swings? So—like thet. Then where it straightens. Look—look close, pard. Thet's like Charley said."

A throaty monosyllable confirmed it. Sarto's breathing was in slow gasps. He was already striding on.

"Wait," came John's voice; "wait, pard. I don't dare try workin' up there alone."

For an instant Sarto paused, undecided; then he returned and took the old man's hand. The energy of his big body was suddenly tremendous; he fairly lifted John on his back. He plowed through the thin brush of the trail, over the fall of boulders and the sand slips of its vague surface.

Two hours later, with daylight waning, they found Walatoka Charley's shallow prospect-hole.

THAT night Sarto requestioned John with slow emphasis.

"Now, look here: This Walatoka Charley found the claim—huh?—and worked it for a month or so, to uncover the vein and get a showin'? Then he hit for the Coast, to git backin' on his specimens and some ready cash, huh? He never come back?"

"They was—to jist thet much. A nurse. Charley he'd come to like thet nurse. She was the only one, I reckon, thet he let know anything."

For an hour, while the brush stems of the cooking-fire burned to quivering white ash, Sarto stared into nothingness. He paid no heed to the thin, occasional babble of the old man's voice. At last, with a slow, studied effort, he questioned:

"Say, by the way, I been meanin' to ask: you aint got no folks, have you, no kin or relatives? Me, bein' your pard, like this, I ought to know."

"No," said the old man slowly. "No, I aint."

"Suppose,"—Sarto spoke warily, as though testing an idea,—"suppose something was to happen to either one of us—me, say—why, the whole thing, the claim, would go to the other pard, huh? Me, I aint got no relatives neither."

"Sure," said old John instantly; "pards is pards. An' we're thet—like Charley an' me once was."

A new thought seemed to strike Sarto. "And people know we're pards, I reckon—don't they? People down at Granite—they seen us together." He turned to John accusingly. "You talked to some of 'em, didn't you? Talked, while I was over gettin' water. I seen you."

John blinked. "I did, but I didn't say nuthin', if thet's what you mean. You'd ought to know thet. I jist says thet we was kind of lookin' 'round—you an' me, us two. There weren't nuthin' in thet."

"But you mentioned we two was together, huh? That we was travelin' in company? An' they'd know that."

"I did—sure. One of them fellers was Tucson Joe, an' I knowed him way back—le's see—well, so long I ferget, I guess. The other was Porph'ry Stevens. I'm goin' to let them two in on this, soon as we git staked proper."

Sarto flared into quick wrath. "The hell you are! You keep shut. I—we're goin' to stake claims all over this whole damn' ridge. There won't be nothing left, see!"

"Nuthin' left? Why say, Walatoka asked me special to stake a claim right next this'n fer thet nurse of his. Why—"

"You shut up!" Sarto growled.

He lapsed again into brooding silence. Moodily he watched old John—far into the night, when the chill of the desert had settled down—shakily make for his blankets. All night Sarto sat over a cold fire, his head down in the two big palms of his hands, motionless.

BUT at morning some subtle change had come over him. He was suddenly solicitous of old John's health.

"Sleep well, pard? There's coffee here, soon as the fire flares a bit more about it. Climb out. We got work to do today."

They made out location notices, old John signing his shaky name below Sarto's, and the big man left, obviously to post them beside Walatoka Charley's monuments. They roasted bits of the vein ore in a hard-burning sagebrush fire. Bubbling bits of gold appeared on its surface, tiny thick-clustered pin-heads of rich yellow. There was a glazed excitement in Sarto's eyes; it seemed that he kept his body still, moved and talked as a normal man only by some great physical effort.

"Look there," he said. "Look there; can you see the stuff? Look—look careful."

"No." Old John squinted, pushing his eyes close against the bit of rock. "No—but it's there, aint it? It's rich, aint it? Awful rich. Ol' Walatoka knew, all right; he knew. They weren't no chance to go wrong. All we hed to do was to find the claim. I knowed thet, knowed it from the start."

"Yes, it's pretty rich," Sarto admitted. "It'll do. Look close, though; cain't you see nothin?"

"Not much."

"No? Say, what can you see, anyhow? Can you see the ground when you're walkin' along?"

"Some—yeah, some. It depends. They aint much shootin' of lights no more 'cross my eyes, but they seems to git slowly dimmer. It don't matter now, though; not no more. We got here; we made it!"

"Yeah," said Sarto uneasily. "Lookin' up, though, can you see me, standin' here? Can you see this far?"

The old man squinted and blinked his withered eyelids. "No. Jist kind of a blurred outline."

That afternoon Sarto asked the name of Walatoka Charley's nurse; he was going to stake a claim for her, he said.

TWO days passed.... "When, pard," old John asked anxiously, "are we goin' to record the claim notices? It seems time we did it."

"Yes,"—Sarto nodded,—"tomorrow. Or the next day maybe. I want to see more how the vein lies. Our water'll hold out till then." He turned. "I'll—I'll be workin' in the prospect this afternoon—in Charley's hole. Hear?"

"Yes."

"In the hole," Sarto repeated heavily.

Late afternoon came. Shadows lifted and covered the base of the wall, where Walatoka Charley's vague trail lifted from a coulee and wove precipitously up, zigzagged and climbed on up the cliff, to gain the long top of the ridge above. Elongated, great shadows crept across the open, hard-packed bottoms of the desert. A twilight wind began to fan softly from the north, gently shaking and rattling the thin top stems of the brush.

On the ridge top old John dropped a last painful armload of fuel to earth, and called waveringly into the dusk:

"Sarto—Sarto! Hey!"

The jinny mule hadn't been that afternoon, either, for her daily pail of water and scant ration of grain. He wondered where she was. Maybe Sarto had taken her for something. He called again—a shrill voice, quavering and long.

"Sarto! Hey, pard!"

Sarto ought to be able to hear him over at the prospect. It wasn't far. He cupped his hands to his mouth and called again. Not far. Then it occurred to him that Sarto wouldn't be in the hole now;

it would be too dark, in even the shallow cup of Walatoka Charley's old digging. Sarto wouldn't be working there now, not this late. They had no candles.

Before he started to feel forward, on slow, unsteady legs, the other thought came: Something had happened there in the hole, something that had kept Sarto. *Sarto was hurt!*

His progress became frantic—falling, stumbling, fighting his way headlong.

"Sarto! Sarto!"

Then a faint answer caught his ear, guiding him.

At the mouth of the tiny tunnel he heard Sarto's words plainly, yet as coming from a great distance, slow, painful.

"John—pard—get help—somehow. It's you—aint it, John? Get help! Somehow—get help!"

"You're caught? Hurt?" The words lumped in John's throat. "Sumthin's fell on you?"

"It caved—caved to the top and side."

"I'm comin' in."

"No—no. You can't do nothin'—nothin'. Try to—try to make it to Granite. Get help! It's the only way!"

FOR the space of ten seconds old John was silent. Then, "God helpin', I will. So—so long, pard."

He turned, stumbling back toward the camp. Walatoka Charley's trail down the ridge wall lay beyond, the trail that went off narrowly into nothing, clogged with boulders and sand slips, zigzagged and fell on. That was the way back to Granite.

And the mule hadn't been in for water that afternoon. She'd strayed off, maybe found a seep-hole somewhere, hiding out. On a last forlorn hope he felt his way into camp and beat her water-bucket with a stick. That might bring her.

He waited a precious ten minutes—ten minutes more, the blood pounding across his forehead. She could have guided him; urged, she would have plodded straightly into line, across the sand flats and wastes, the barrancas, into and out of the false-sided coulees and washes, for the town. She'd been there before; she'd have known what was wanted.

Old John beat the bucket furiously. . . . . Then it slowly slipped from his hands, clattering to earth, and he felt for a canteen of water. He turned, moved slowly forward. His sense of direction was right, whether he could see or not; the years past had made it that, something almost a sixth sense. He was steady now. What remained from the past—waning energy, feeble strength, yet a staunch coolness of mind bred from narrow situations—was mustered now for what lay ahead. He couldn't fail; Sarto's life depended on him.

When he thought himself close to the edge of the cliff he fell to his old knees, crawling on inch by inch, feeling before him with gnarled, work-twisted hands.

"MORE dead than he's alive," pronounced Tucson Joe. "An' I don't believe he kin see the hand before his face. I can't make heads nor tails of it. He keeps babblin' thet his pard's done, caught in a cave-in at the prospect-hole."

"That would be that big young feller what come in here with him last week, huh?" suggested Porph'ry Stevens. "That feller what I heared was canned off the Amalgamated, over in the Walatoka, a while back, charged with swipin' company tools."

"Yeah," said Tucson dryly, "thet's the feller, I s'pose."

"You can't get nuthin' sort of more definite out of John?"

"No, thet's all. Just them words: 'Pard caught—cave-in at the hole. Pard caught—cave-in.' It's all he remembers. Now the boardin'-house woman's give him two sleep-pills, an' he's quiet."

"Nuthin' but to back-trail the mule then, and trust to luck."

"Thet's all. Let's git goin'."

They went—Tucson Joe, Porph'ry Stevens and a prospector newly drifted in from Tonopah. The dainty shell-shaped tracks of the burro, and following, a strange, stumbling, dragging line of footprints were easy to follow. By mid-afternoon the three had halted before a long barren ridge that was chopped off, high up its side, into a lateral face of cliff—eroded, rotten, crumbling stuff. Stevens eyed it skeptically.

"From the tracks the mule was tied down here," said Tucson. "Over in thet coulee. You kin see where she hed fretted around, back an' forth. Tryin' to git loose, an' hit into camp fer water, I reckon. This is where John got her."

"Yeah," said Stevens, "funny place to picket a jackass. They's some sort of a trail up the cliff there, Tucson. 'Reckon thet's our way. John's left such a mess of tracks here that you can't make head nor tail of 'em. We must be close." He called a long halloo, and the cliff wall answered with a shaky echo. "Let's get up," he ended sharply.

It took fifteen minutes to gain the ridge. They found the camp, set under the thin, feathery shade of a mesquite clump—the remains of the frugal pack, untouched, a five-gallon can of water, half-full. Some instinct guided Tucson Joe straightly on to the prospect hole. He had been within and come out by the time Stevens and the prospector from Tonopah, circling, arrived. He spread his hands in a gesture.

"Nothin'."

"Nothin'? Nothin', you say? No sign of a slip in the rock, a cave-in?"

"Nothin'," Tucson repeated. "A little new work inside, uncoverin' the vein. Thet's all. Nothin's happened here."

It occurred to them, then, that there might be another hole, some other digging along the ridge; and they searched until dark, hallooing from time to time.

"Claims," said Stevens, over a night fire, "claims everywhere, all made out in this Sarto's name. None is to John. An' the vein is rich, richer'n hell. They's somethin'," —he paused,—"somethin' queer in the look of it."

Tucson nodded slowly. "Do you s'pose," he asked, after a time, "do you s'pose— No, it aint possible; it's unthinkable," he ended, shaking his head.

BUT at daylight Tucson began cannily to work out the trail sign, tracing step by step, under the maze of their own footprints, the trails of those other two—old John's tracks, wavering, stumbling. Finally where he had crawled close along the rim, feeling for the trail down. And in one spot—Tucson saw plainly, and called the others—a big, striding, heavy boot had crossed over these. It was Sarto's track, the same that crisscrossed the ridge, in staking claims.

"John said at the hole, didn't he? It happened in the hole!" The three men looked into each other's eyes. "This track has followed John's—coverin' it—sometime after he left."

They looked into each other's eyes, and Tucson said slowly: "Here's where he stood after John had left for help, listenin' down over the edge, waitin' fer somethin' to happen on the trail below—"

Stevens' gaze suddenly narrowed and centered on the shelved edge of the rim before them. He stared, and finally pointed a quivering forefinger.

Yet the thing was plain enough. They saw where the big track had stepped one pace nearer the edge; the tiny limb of brush that had tripped it. They saw, closely, where a hand had clutched drunkenly onto the rim, and taken a handful of pebbles with it. . . . . Then far down, after a time, the unnamed prospector from Tonopah, creeping forward, made out a boot sticking up from the mass of rocks and brush at the cliff's base—a heavy, large boot made little by distance.

THE secret remained with the three—Tucson Joe, Porph'ry Stevens and the prospector from Tonopah.

"We was too late," Tucson told old John. "He'd died. But it were a quick, painless death, John, because he didn't live long, I reckon, after you'd started fer help thet night. You did your best, John."

For there was no need, Tucson had told the other two, in telling John the truth—not about the man he'd once called pard. No, John wouldn't believe it. Who'd want him to, if he would?

"I guess we'll call 'er 'the Sarto' now, sort of in memory," old John told Tucson, after a time. "I was goin' to name 'er the 'Walatoka Charley,' but I guess it hed better be the 'Sarto' after this. We'll call the nurse's claim the 'Walatoka.' We'll—"

"We?" Tucson's voice hesitated.

"Yeah. You seen it, didn't you, Tucson? Wire gold shot through the quartz. Little oozin' lumps of the stuff come out when the ore's roasted. Gold! Gold, Tucson! You saw it!"

"Yeah."

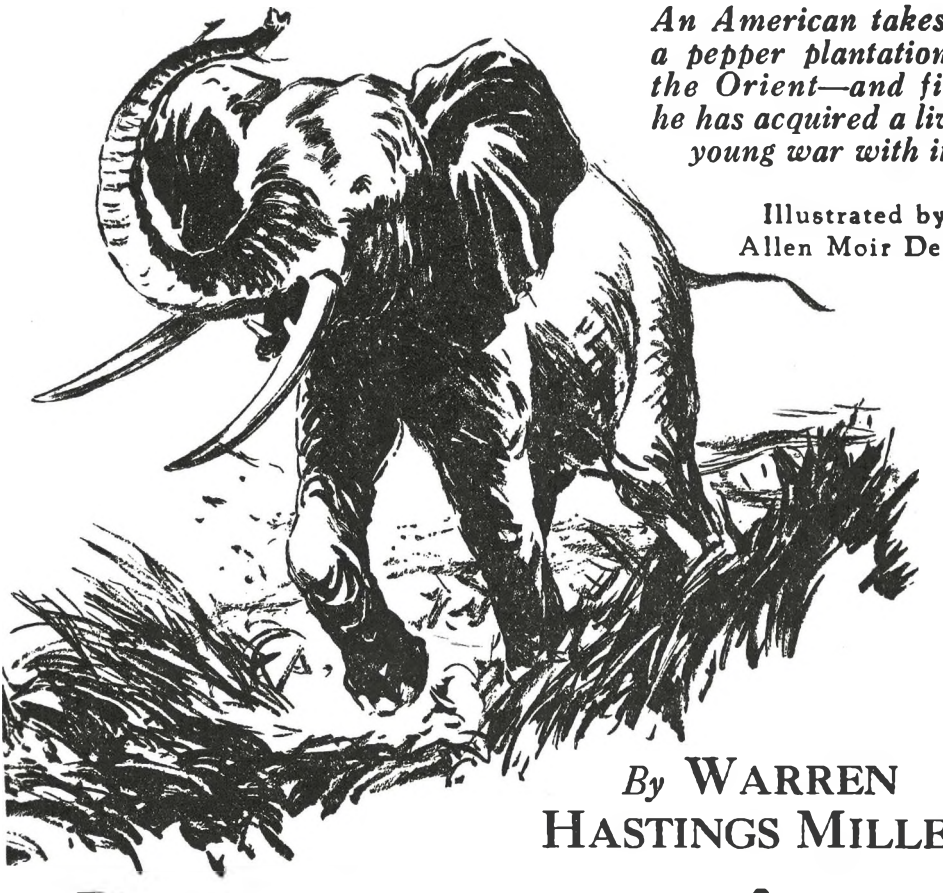
"Well, I cain't run 'er alone. Sarto, now, like Charley, is gone."

"No," considered Tucson, "no, I s'pose not. I reckon you'd need help."

"You git in there, Tucson. Git on the ground, an' take Porph'ry Stevens with you. An' Tucson, let the news out gentle, see? Let it seep out, kinda, among the boys. Let the news go soft among them you can trust."

They form a strange guild, these many old men who live in the dusk hour of the past. Across tiny cooking-fires they hold chance communion with themselves. "Gold!" is the magic password.

A strike to the southeast of Topatopa; pay-dirt in the Rocking Basin country. To the south, something rich! John Dillingham's "Sarto." The name of Walatoka Charley enters in—Tucson Joe, Porph'ry Stevens. South! At a town called Granite. . . . . *Two by two, or singly, they begin the trek, scanty packs on the plodding burros before them.*



An American takes on a pepper plantation in the Orient—and finds he has acquired a lively young war with it.

Illustrated by
Allen Moir Dean

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Giants on the Warpath

"CHINKAREEN, Tuan! Must be. *Gajah* no like!" Liok Hap, that human gorilla who was Moore's plantation foreman, pawed the atmosphere with one arm and made flapping motions with hands cupped to ears. *Gajah* meant elephant. And you always had to consider the elephant in Malaya if one roamed into the picture. Moore gathered that his recently purchased pepper plantation—he hadn't even seen it yet—was developing elephant troubles.

"God help the benighted ass trying to grow pepper in upper Quedah!" fervently exclaimed the Honorable Billy Cheake. "Yank, didn't anyone in Penang tell you about the Leng Tho wild-elephant herd? They have eaten up that plantation of yours twice during the last three years!"

He was the British Resident appointed to Siamese Upper Queda for subtle diplomatic reasons—one of those capable young John Bulls who seem to have a habit of popping up in charge of the various white man's graveyards scattered along the Equator—if there is money to be won out of the cemetery, so to speak. George Moore, American planter, who knew his pepper from much raising of it on corporation capital in Sumatra, had come to the Residency first off upon decanting in a sampan from the coastal steamer touching at Kwala Quedah. He had brought Liok Hap with him from Sumatra—one native expert that the corporation could not retain. With his own saved-up capital Moore had bought this Quedah plantation from a suave Hindoo broker in Penang. There was nothing the matter with it: "Noa, sahib! Owner come die, is all. Yess, cheap; good soil, sahib. The tax is low. He need not be pay for three years."

How well Moore remembered the persuasive ease of that fat Bengali! It looked like a good buy. His pepper was

not thirty miles from Singora station on the Bangkok Railway. The tax allowed a bigger margin of profit than anything to be bought in Sumatra. George's capital changed hands. Also, he and Liok Hap were so sure of themselves as to engage an army of *kongsies* under their China-captain to follow on a coolie boat.

But this first low-down from the Resident on the spot left him blank and speechless. No one could grow pepper if a herd of wild elephants had the habit of marching in any old time and eating up crop, profits, bungalows—the entire establishment!

Liok Hap, however, was not impressed. "Can do, tuan!" he insisted with waving arms. "*Chinkareen!* In the days of gran'fathers man-man plant *chinkareen* with pepper in Sumatra. *Gajah,* him no like."

BOTH men turned on the gorilla whose turban of blue and gold, his violent sarong and pajamas of green and yellow, and his assortment of belligerent cutlery alone distinguished him from an ape. A light of hope grew in Moore's eyes. In Quedah, it seemed, man proposed and the elephant disposed. He dined, largely, on anything you might raise, including the roof of your house. Anything like a stockade massive enough to keep him out would put an overhead on this plantation that would kill it on the balance-sheet before he even started. But this *chinkareen,* whatever it was—

"Most important, if true," commented the Honorable Billy, who was son of Lord Cheake but had no use for London. "Playful little brutes, that wild herd! Some day I shall build a stockade and bag the lot. The Rajah of Mysore is offering ten thousand rupees apiece for trained ones. State industry, what? But their tastes are omnivorous in plantations. I never heard of anything that they did *not* like."

Liok Hap became excited at this white tuan's denial of his assertion. A torrent of twanging Melayu burst from him. Both the Resident and the planter understood it well, or they would have been sunk. The *chinkareen,* they gathered, was a slender and thorny bush that gave forth a bad smell offensive to an elephant's sensitive nostrils.

"Having a nose two yards long, I should think so!" remarked the Honorable Billy dryly at that point.

Liok Hap blinked at him, incapable of comprehending a joke. "Mighty is the Lord Elephant, tuan!" he rebuked the Resident. "In Sumatra there were many, once. He trampled flat our gardens and ate our pepper, so that the people starved and the rajahs grew poor. But *chinkareen,* he no touch. So our fathers learned to plant it instead of using bamboo vine-poles for the pepper to grow on. Thus were our crops saved and the rajahs grew rich."

Cheake smiled at the unconscious irony of that, "the rajahs grew rich." No one else did. They were a pestilence here in Siam too, those rajahs around the sultan's throne of the various Malay States. Each had his district, and each was intriguing and starting rebellions, with a view to grabbing the throne for himself, on one pretext or another. You could not but laugh; but it was serious when white men came into the country to start anything useful like a mine or a plantation. He said:

"Seems to let you in, Moore! I'll go along with a guard of Sikhs, if you don't mind, and have a look. There's a jolly row on over in Singora, so it's not quite safe. The war might slop over into Quedah, and some near-sighted rebel kriss you in your youth and innocence. The Rajah Si Payong is getting the wind up over there, I hear. Shall we have tiffin, while the escort is making up? Jolly glad you're coming in, really."

Hospitality, the helping hand, the cordial welcome. There was a brotherhood in the East, of planters, miners and administrators, all working together to develop the untamed jungle.

Moore said:

"Thanks, Your Excellency. That Hindoo seems to have sold me an insurrection as well as a wild-elephant herd, but I'll make out."

"Quite." The Honorable Billy clapped his hands; his Sikh *havildar* appeared on the Residency veranda. Orders for the march up-country; then tiffin was served for the two, Liok Hap waiting decorously on his master as is the custom, a resplendent bearded Sikh, in overpowering khaki, silk turban and scarlet cuffs on his jacket sleeves, behind the Resident's chair.

AS the morning drew on to noon, the blue wall of the mountains dividing the Malay Peninsula rose before them. Over those ridges lay Singora in its usual state of turbulence; on this side, orderly Quedah, that all the world hoped would

Ireful trumpetings shrieked — a din of noise; then the herd came on!

some day be ceded to the Malay Federated States. Moore's plantation lay somewhere up in those hills, not far from the boundary line.

"*Kebun ladoh, tuan!*" The native guide ahead was pointing it out, George's plantation. A ruined bungalow lay tumbled in heaps halfway up the hill; around it stretched far and wide the beginnings of second-growth jungle, but with a regularity of outline in straight lines following the contours of the ground that betokened the industry of man here once. So this wreck was what he had bought from that Hindoo in Penang!

Moore made a wry face; then he grinned. "The king liar of the East, that broker! But I seem to have left me a plantation of two-year roots, anyhow."

"Stout fella!" commented the Honorable Billy at that brave making the best of what prospects there were. "You seem to have more. Mind the top of yon ridge! It looks extremely like a stockade to me, if you don't mind."

It was tiny as seen from here. But it was a freshly built Malay stockade, and it commanded all this region its pointed uprights told the world.

Cheake fumed as he gazed at it with unfriendly eyes. "The swine! Fancy setting up housekeeping in my district this way? Or is he? Boundaries are rather vague, y'know, Siam having set up no markers. Have to go up there and talk sense into him, *ek dum*, what?"

"You know him?" Moore asked, astonished at the youthful Resident's grasp of native politics in Malayan Siam.

"Rather! It's the Datu Si Payong, He-of-the-Umbrella, of course. He inherited one."

That seemed somewhat indefinite as a cause for glory, so Cheake enlarged some more on it. "Wallace, y'know—our great naturalist of the '80s. He was here in '73, and forgot his umbrella. I've seen it. Stout, old-fashioned thing, with his name still in it, on a white strip of tape." The Resident laughed. "Shows what distinction a trifle like that will make in this benighted region! Si Payong inherited it from his grandfather. Now he claims the throne of Singora on the strength of Wallace's forgotten umbrella! He has not the shadow of a right to the sultanate, mind you. Just the prestige of owning a white man's umbrella, but he jolly well knows how to use that prestige! Yon's a sample."

He waved a hand up at the ridge, while Moore laughed over this fantastic tale of the creation of a datu. But he could

envisage the dignity that an umbrella, with real steel ribs and a brass wire catch to it, would confer on its owner anywhere in Malaya. The rest was gathering a party of disaffected spirits to himself, an imaginary pretension to the sultan's throne, and you had an insurrection born overnight. The evidence lay up there on the hill.

"I'll go up with you, after we've looked over the job," said Moore. "I'm interested in that stockade too! If there's going to be a war in my back yard, I ought to have something to say about it, hadn't I?"

"*Very* stout fella!" approved the Honorable Billy. "We'll deal with this blighter, presently. Meanwhile, about your prospects, old thing—"

The prospects were discouraging. Their party was coming out of primeval jungle almost imperceptibly, so far had the second-growth encroached already on what man had cleared. Planting rows developed in the underbrush, rotted bamboo poles, struggling pepper vines. They had been "turned down;" that is, the two-year vines had been pruned and forced into the soil around each pole so that a circle of fresh roots would sprout. It gave famous pepper in the next season.

The going was very bad under foot. Holes as big as your hat and a foot deep were everywhere. The Leng Tho elephant herd had been all over this plantation, those tracks showed, eating with carefree abandon whatever pepper vines they fancied as an aid to digestion. They had attacked the bungalow, because a lot of good dried lunch covered its thatched roof. The way to get at it, with convenience, was to pull out all the posts and bring the whole thing down. A mess of tramplings about the house signified that this had been done with complete thoroughness.

AND then Liok Hap gave a squeak. "*Chinkareen,* tuan *Dari-sini!* Much-much!" The expert was pointing hither and yon. Tufty bushes having luxuriant green shoots were plentiful all about—the *chinkareen,* they gathered—a wild spiny bush regarded as a nuisance. The irony of it was that they spelled elephant immunity for this plantation, had the former owner only known it. The pepper vines in their neighborhood grew luxuriantly, untouched by the prehensile elephant trunk.

"Thus and thus man-man make-do, tuan!" Liok Hap was demonstrating with all the vigor of a high-powered salesman. He hacked at a bush with his kriss, and came away with a dozen tall green shoots. Without ceremony he pulled up and threw away the broken bamboo vine-poles near by and rammed in his *chinkareen* shoots in their place. He packed in the soil around them with prehensile toes, and made wavy motions with his brown fingers.

"Him take root, tuan. *Gajah* no like!" Liok Hap cried exultantly.

MOORE'S spirits rose. It would not take much work to transform this plantation into an elephant-proof garden with the invaluable *chinkareen!* The only question being to get them started before the wild herd wandered this way again. . . . He could set his men to work right now, were it not for that hostile stockade on the hill-top.

"I'll not put up with it, that's what!" Cheake was saying with heat. "Have to go up there and talk some sense into him, what? If you have seen enough of your plantation for the present, old thing—"

"You're not going up there *alone,* with but five Sikhs at your back, are you?" Moore asked, aghast at the appalling temerity of him.

"Quite. Fancy lugging his beastly insurrection over on my side of the fence! It isn't done; abso-bally *not,* y'know! Come on with us!"

Nonchalant as paying the gentleman a call, these eviction proceedings! Moore did not see how they had the least chance of getting out of it alive.

They climbed up through the ruins of thousands of pepper vines which were fighting bravely for mere existence but desperately needed clearing. Then jungle, an elephant-path, that kept the Malays ahead busy with their parangs. That gave way to typical laterite scrub as they reached high ground on the hill flanks, thorny and dry. Sambhur deer tracks; a leopard, who left a branch overhanging the trail and slithered out of sight with astonishing dexterity. They came out into open cleared space, and were being shouted at, with venom, by turbaned heads which moved along the points of the stockade. A closed gate rose, forbidding, before them.

"Open!" shouted the Honorable Billy, who was not pleased. "Tell ye the Datu Si Payong that the Resident of Quedah will have speech with him!"

The gate opened about a foot as they closed up on it. Within stood Wallace's umbrella, and under it a flaming rajah in red and gold, who glowered glumly as he snapped out: *"Tabek,* (greetings) tuan!" There was quite a war party at his back.

"Tabek, ya Datu," returned Cheake, pressing in. The *havildar* and his Sikhs shoved at the door authoritatively. There was resistance behind it, but uncertain and hesitant. The Resident stood tapping his thigh with his swagger-stick. Moore behind him with rifle in the crook of his elbow, Liok Hap at his back. The crowd in there looked black. The ceremonial flap of the girdle covering their kriss-handles was thrown back, a sure sign of hostility in Malaya. Moore wondered how they were going to get out of it without violence. Cheake had seized command of the gate by his prompt invasion, and that was one strong point in their favor. But there was going to be a show here, any way you figured it.

"Apa khabar di Singora?" Cheake opened up, asking what news there was over in that sultanate, though he knew it already.

"Bad, tuan. Thy servant was forced to flee to the mountains. Yea, to protect our lives had we to build this here," said the Datu grimly, with a wave of his hand around the stockade interior. A tame elephant stood tossing hay in a corner—evidently the animal that had set these posts. There were attap-and-bamboo huts, such as every Malay constructs in a few hours with his parang, even if only camping for one night. A larger building, open on one side, was undoubtedly the Datu's *balei* or council-room. Si Payong waved courteously toward it.

"Deign to accept my poor hospitality, ya tuan," he said. "There is much-much talk, before men may see the right between me and this monster of a sultan. I would that Your Highness bear witness before me to the King."

THAT meant they were not going to start anything just yet, nothing more. The Tuan Resident held the gate with his Sikhs; let be then, there were a quantity of handy ways of dying in the East. Moore knew enough not to eat anything or drink anything offered as they moved toward the *balei.* Cheake had posted two Sikhs at the gate, but things looked rather threatening as the Datu's warriors formed an escort of two lines, liberally armed. A complete massacre could be staged here in just the time it takes to draw a stab with a kriss.

"Jolly go, what?" said Cheake with cheerfulness as they neared the *balei* steps. "The chap will talk for a week, so long as I do not mention his clearing out of Quedah. But he's got to, y'see. The sultan's forces will be coming along, presently. And I can't have them rowing all over your plantation, can I?"

Moore laughed. "Not too hot! I'll arm my men and run 'em off, once we get started. Hadn't we better wait till then?"

"Not while I'm Resident," the youthful administrator retorted grimly. "The nerve of this blighter, y'know! It isn't done. Cheerio! I've command of his gate anyhow."

CHEAKE was in a study over that situation as they were waved to a long bench to the right of a large Canton cane chair that was the Datu's throne. His warriors squatted in ranks down the council-hall, silent, sullen, waiting for the conference to develop for peace or war. The *havildar* and three Sikhs stood on their arms back of the Resident; old Liok Hap, also with kriss-handle uncovered, guarded Moore.

"This tyrant sultan," the Datu began amicably, "is no longer to be borne by the people of Singora. His jails are full. His taxes take all the poor man's rice. He abases whom he wills and raises up those he pleases, as if he were Allah himself. There is no justice. The village rice-barns are empty—"

"I had not heard of it," interrupted Cheake shortly. "What says the King?"

"Who can have speech with the King in Bangkok save this lying sultan?" asked Si Payong bitterly. "Therefore the people turned to me. We rose in revolt. We fled to the hills. We have built this stockade till we become strong enough to venture a battle. Will the Presence deign to lay these facts before the King, in a letter, perhaps?"

He was a pestilent adventurer, clothing his revolt in the usual patter about tyranny and taxes. There were no such conditions in Singora, Cheake knew. On the contrary, it was beneficently governed, for a native state. This artful move to enlist the Resident of Quedah on his side was of a piece with the rest of it.

Cheake replied, suavely enough: "A letter to the King, from a powerful datu

The brute whirled and—*crack!*—smote the flail of that chain.

like yourself, Si Payong, would have his ear. If the mail is searched, one sends faithful messengers. There will be investigation by the King's ministers instead of uprising and war. Yours are the old ways, ya Datu, and not good. Also you have built this stockade on the Quedah side of the boundary, on this tuan's land!"—indicating Moore. "What say you? Can his coolies work in the pepper-vines with civil war raging in the hills?"

The Datu turned to Moore with a slow stare. "I am thy guest, ya tuan. For a little while."

Moore, thus suddenly thrust into the picture, did not know what to say. The Malay had pronounced the words claiming inviolate hospitality in the East, and it was a matter of life or death to refuse. He might precipitate the signal they were all expecting if he told him brusquely he could not allow it.

But Cheake was quick to seize the opening.

"Also the Tuan Moore and I are *your* guests," he said. There was uneasy movement among his warriors. The hand was ready to flash to kriss, but something in the young Englishman's steady eyes bade Si Payong postpone his signal. The Sikhs stood like statues, four of them in a row behind him. Those long Enfield bayonets were unhealthy steel to be reckoned with!

The Datu did not make the awaited reply. Instead he pursued the original difficulty of his stockade. *"Aiwa!* Not for long, tuan. There will be no trouble. The Sultan cowers at Kwala Singora. The people come to me daily, more and more. We march—maybe one week, maybe two—and the tuan may then have our stockade."

Lies. They weren't getting anywhere with this. What would more likely to happen to Moore would be a wholesale plundering of his coolie lines and a looting of his administration bungalows if they let this gang of malcontents stay. Or else plain thievery, the shadowy Malay in your room every night in the week. They were intolerable neighbors. And the stockade would remain here month after month, become a village, a petty state, a menace.

CHEAKE stamped his foot. "Enough! I cannot allow it, ya Datu! Ye will march *now!* Lo, the gate is open. Back into Singora—"

They leaped to their feet with a yell. Krisses flashed out as they surged in a body toward the Datu's throne. The bayonets of the Sikhs and Moore's rifle leveled in a threatening rank of steel.

Cheake had drawn his revolver with that utimatum and was covering the Datu with it. The latter's brown hands were poised for the sharp clap that is the signal for almost everything in the East, but his warriors had forestalled him. Men quick to wrath, the Resident's brusque order had stung them all to instant violence, to a precipitate massacre of this small party of intruders.

"Stop them! On your life, Datu!" Cheake's tones were imperative, his finger tensed on the trigger. The foremost of the warriors had recoiled for an instant before those bristling bayonets. There was a breathless instant, while the life of the Datu, many lives, hung in the balance of that reckless dementia of anger that causes a Malay to go *amok* and kill, kill, kill, while breath remains in him.

AND then—*Cra-a-a-ck! Pop! Pop!* Portentous sounds of rending timbers broke on the ears of men at the height of the human drama caused by this clash of their wills. Moore spared a glance over his sights—to see with shocks of alarm, a stout teak post being pulled bodily out of the stockade by a gray trunk wrapped tautly around it. A forest of waving trunks and pink snouts waved dustily over the pointed row of palings opposite the open side of the council house. Many of them were already grasping these obstructions by prehensile gray trunks thrust through the interstices. The Leng Tho wild-elephant herd! It was here, had been marching silently out of the jungle while they talked! A menace inconceivable to all of them. . . .

The post pulled out came soaring over, flung with careless abandon. It landed with a huge crash against the eaves. Its butt-end swung on inward with all the violence of a thunder-clap, carried away ten feet of bamboo rail, and smote like the cane of a giant through the massed Malay warriors. There were hoarse cries of terror, groans, men falling, the roof threatening to come down on their heads.

Crack!—Pong! Crack! Crack! The stockade was coming down bodily, sagging outward crazily in lengths where its vine lashings still held. The wild elephant herd had often been driven into stockades constructed by wily Malays bent on capturing a few of them to tame and sell. They were outside of this one, but it made no difference; the correct technique was to pull up all the posts and escape. Besides, there was lunch on the other side of these palings, nice dried attap thatch intended to be roofs. . . . They were industriously removing these obstructions to lunch—the only trouble with it for human beings was that the air was full of flying logs that hurtled and crashed down into the compound, wrecking everything they touched.

The Datu was eying Cheake's steady revolver bore, piteous with terror, his shaking hands still outstretched for that hand-clap that had never come. The Resident had not moved, nor his guard of Sikhs. They paid no attention to the thundering cataclysms up above that were hammering the roof and smashing its poles so that they shrieked with the whine of splintering bamboo. The Datu's men were melting away—could be seen swarming the opposite stockade wall like monkeys on sticks. They were brave, when it concerned human quarrels to be settled with kriss and gun, but they knew too much about the elephant and his ways to be found here when over two hundred of him marched in!

"You're under arrest, Datu," said Cheake briefly. "You can tell the King all your troubles when I send you to Bangkok. Bind him, *havildar*."

The sergeant of the Sikhs was quick and thorough. A surge to the Datu's aid by the few remaining loyal ones was stopped before three determined bayonets and Moore's rifle bearing full on the foremost.

"Get out of this and tend to *gajah* next, what?" said Cheake as the last of the Datu's men vanished.

BUT the *balei* roof settled down on them at that moment, in a complicated cannonade of snapping bamboo purlins, announced by a ponderous thump that must have been a teak post eighteen feet long landing on the ridge-pole. They were trapped, in a kind of hen-coop having vast areas of thatch that ran up slanting to a broken ridge and was full of rat snakes.

"Cheerio! Raining hard outside," observed Cheake as Moore and Liok Hap and the Sikhs disentangled themselves from the wreckage and they all assembled in what space was left. "Anyone hurt?"

There were numerous cuts from sharp bamboo splinters, but they did not matter. What did matter was the ponderous tread of *gajah* coming in like an avalanche over the prone logs of that

north wall. The ground quivered and snapped with trodden bamboo, as massive bodies weighing five tons apiece milled around outside. They weren't saying much, neither trumpeting nor squealing. The air vibrated with a deep purring rumble like a bass drum being rubbed. Moore thought that it meant that they were about to begin on lunch and had not winded them—yet. He released a breath pent up by fear. He was surprised and somewhat humiliated at that fear, the effect on a mere human of the nearness of even one wild elephant. And there seemed to be a number just outside—say two hundred or more.

"Not a hope!" Cheake answered to his whispered suggestion that they cut a hole in this roof somewhere and fight their way out. "We'd all be trampled flat, after being spiked with tusks. Wait. They mayn't wind us in all this dust and pomatum scent left by our Malay friends."

THE rip and crash of posts being torn up by their roots told them that the Leng Tho herd had discovered more stockade surrounding them and did not approve of it. They had postponed lunch. Later they would dine on the roofs of all the huts including this *balei*, but at present they were leveling the stockade into its original components. Moore laughed nervously. . . . They were like a fire out of control, an immense primeval force that would be turned instantly on this little group, should they be discovered here!

"I really shall have to get up a drive and bag the lot, y'know," Cheake was saying with vexation. "They're a nuisance to the State of Quedah, that's what! They won't stay in Singora or Trenganu. Shall have to make representations to the King about it."

He did not seem to be worrying about getting out of this alive! Just then one of them thrust a vigorous trunk through a hole in the thatch, curled it around an armful of poles, and tugged like a steam winch. He was evidently tired of work and thinking now of his hunger. . . . The roof moved bodily with the strength of that heave, in a vast sigh of creaking bamboo and rattan. They all dodged the flailing studs of wall spanking down on them as released, and then came a flood of light through a ragged opening. Moore saw, right above him, a huge knobby head and fierce little red eyes over a gaping red maw that hung open in a curved and pendant lip for the load of hay about to be thrust into it. The load hesitated, was tossed aside; a gleam of discovery came into those enigmatic pig eyes. For a moment Moore's mind severed all diplomatic relations with his legs. He stood paralyzed, rooted to the spot, rifle gripped tensely, the legs inclined to fly, to burrow into the thatch somewhere, the mind fighting for the command of reason.

"Now!" it said. *"Shoot!* He'll gore you in about a second; he'll give the alarm to the others anyhow!"

Like an electric flash, that decision. The rifle leaped up through the hole like a steel tongue, stabbed out its stunning crash. The great mountain of flesh above him began to lean and fall. "Shoot-*ing!*" he heard from Cheake at his elbow, and then both were climbing through the rent, followed hastily by the Sikhs. The roof settled flat under the elephant's weight as they made it. An ungodly squeal like a factory whistle howled from him as breath expired; then the herd turned and saw them all. An ocean of great gray bulks, huge ears flapping, trunks being curled tight for the charge—bright ivory tusks, long, curved, pointed, sharp. Blasts of ireful trumpetings shrieked in a din of noise; then the herd came on!

Moore, Cheake, the Sikhs, fired from various vantage-points around their dead elephant; over a hollow in the huge neck, around an enormous bony forehead, from behind giant hocks and knees. Under that deadly barrage the leaders sagged and fell. But there was no hope of frightening them off—they were too many; and an insensate fear takes possession of any wild herd, a fear expressed by the instinct to charge and kill.

Moore saw flimsy huts being knocked aside like straw, and the bulk of them turning to charge the ruins of the *balei*. Already their trunks were curling tight.

AND then their leader whirled about, his trunk went out like a pointing finger, and a neigh of challenge rang out from him. Moore's eyes followed that point through the dusty hut gables and he saw—Liok Hap.

A duel between Titans was coming! Liok Hap sat astride the neck of that work-elephant they had noticed tethered in the compound, and was now urging him forward, the great gray bulk looming tall and enormous down the hut lane. A trumpet of challenge came from him,

the toss of a trunk. Moore saw that while his tusks had been sawed off short, he bore a more formidable weapon still, some ten feet of chain grasped by his trunk, chain that was massive enough to anchor a ship, and had a hook on the end. Moore had seen unruly elephants flogged by their fellows provided with a similar length of chain. Liok Hap had here a weapon to his hand more likely to succeed than any amount of killing.

The tusker charged, his sharp tusks curving out, the momentum of his tons of weight driven by his huge stamping legs. Moore heard a high-pitched shout from Liok Hap; then his elephant braced back, heaved with a terrific swing of that bright arc of chain, and—*crack!*

The tusker howled, reared up, recoiled on his fellows. Both tusks were broken off short by the lash of that chain. Instantly it swung back and—*thunk!* came a belt across the bony head that knocked him down sidewise. The rest circled in a ring of menacing tusks, legs braced for the thrust, their great bodies poised, wary. It was all they knew; but they hadn't a chance against that chain. The shout, *"Peha klung!"* came from Liok Hap. His brute backed, whirled, and—*crack!*—smote the flail of the chain as two of them lunged together at the spot where he had been. They squealed with pain, terror, gave back, pushing the others with them.

LIOK HAP was driving them now, the wild ones becoming panic-stricken with their first experience of a whip that could hurt. Their squeals gave the alarm to the others and were answered by all the herd. Into them pell-mell fled the flogged ones, Liok Hap's elephant pursuing with blow on blow. Panic ran through the herd like a fire; there was a trumpet-call of alarm from an old female who was their leader, and then the whole drove was moving, following her, accelerating into a wild flight for the jungle.

The white men had given up shooting at the first sign of hesitation, for Moore's pestilent Malay had much the better way. He had gone on in a cloud of dust, beating the rear guard unmercifully—one man in charge of a trained elephant mastering a wild herd that was more than a match for a dozen rifles. It was the way of the East, the preposterous East—and the white men laughed. The Sikhs were giving pious thanks to the gods. They could see nothing amusing in this deliverance from the Leng Tho herd!

"This here good *gajah,* tuan. Is wanting piecey sugar-cane for *re*-ward."

Liok Hap had come back from pursuing that herd, and he waved an expressive arm toward the cloud of dust rising over in Singora and still moving. "Why laugh the tuans? Here are much good posts for make bungalow," said Liok Hap, dismissing the subject of the Leng Tho herd with that wave. "Is it an order for pick up and carry down hill? Can do!"

He leaned over and tickled the nether lip of the lumbering creature that stood swaying and rumbling above them, and reaching out a pink snout at intervals for the sugar-cane that was not forthcoming. Moore looked at the demolished stockade in a kind of daze over the swift turn of events likely to happen any time in Malaya. An hour ago he had a rebellious Datu and a formidable fortification on his hands. Now it lay flat, and the Datu's people had taken to the woods, thanks to an irresponsible wild herd that roamed where it pleased. It had been driven off this time by his native's knowledge of what can be done with one tame elephant, but they would forget all about this and come wandering back some fine day. Oh, well—all in the day's work for a planter in Malaya! With the invaluable *chinkareen* bush planted for his pepper-vines to grow on, the crop that was the financial basis of everything would be safe. And if Cheake would get on with his drive—

"It was well thought-up, Liok Hap," he said. "No, let the posts lie. I guess our army ought to be arriving about now from that coolie steamer. Let's get back to the pepper, Cheake."

"Quite." The Resident looked regretfully at the slain elephants. "Fancy potting good elephants worth ten thousand rupees apiece, dash it! I really must wangle an appropriation to build a big stockade and bag that herd, Moore. . . . There come your blighters, I take it," he added after a glance downhill.

THE blighters were arriving, an army of conical-hatted china coolies pouring out of the jungle below. They bore tools, hardware in kegs, corrugated sheet iron in lengths carried antwise over a sweating head, all the paraphernalia for starting another of these enterprises of the incomprehensible white man.

Liok Hap grunted and gave the sin-

gle order, *"Terhum!"* to the elephant under him. It was one of those words of the elephant language that originated misty ages ago in ancient China. Mahouts all over the East used it in talking to their beasts, Malay, Hindoo and Annamite alike. The elephant responded by raising a ponderous knee. With it as a footstep, Moore climbed up and took seat on the big neck behind Liok Hap. It was thus that he should come to his own, in the native foreman's philosophy; invested in the majesty of the elephant, feudal lord of this domain and its army of retainers under their China-captain. Also he did not propose they should overlook that Liok Hap was this tuan's right-hand man.

Cheake crowed: "Topping! It's the way to meet them, Yank. I'll give you an escort, to do the thing up O-jolly-K."

With which British version of Andy Jackson's well known contribution to the English language, they started down-hill. There were ceremonies as the coolies were mustered, a musketry salute from the Sikhs, division into gangs, work. Cheerful homelike sounds of axes and hammers and saws as the coolie barracks went up. Burning piles of brush, where jungle weeds were being cleared in the pepper-lanes. Lines of tufty green bushes that betokened *chinkareen* shoots replacing the old and rotted bamboo posts. Their one work-elephant went off under a Chinese mahout to set aright temporarily that collapsed bungalow so Moore could live in it.

He and Cheake sat smoking and chatting in the center of things. *"The* very best to you, old chap!" the Resident was saying over a stinger of whisky and soda. "I'll be back, *ek dum,* to see to that wild herd of yours. Money in it for the State, if I can get the King to see it, what? Meanwhile, carry on does it. You'll have a month or so free of them, after the flogging they got this time, what?"

"Hope so!" Moore grinned. He smoked on contentedly, planning, figuring, looking ahead with courage, as is the way of the white man starting a new thing in the Orient. Within three months he would be shipping pepper by pony train down to Kwala Quedah; or by the Bangkok Railway to Hongkong and 'Frisco, if Singora quieted down. His tools were natives of childlike minds, his friend was the soil, his enemy the jungle. It took the white man to build up an industry out of that combination.

A Ride

By LELAND

A vivid tale of high adventure in a storm-harried sky, by the air-mail pilot who gave us "With the Night Mail—1932."

IF it had been an isolated storm, a summer "thunderhead" with its creamy sun-glinted crest towering to twenty thousand feet above a dark base from which black rain poured in torrents,—rain with a sort of yellowish hue in the background,—Tom Parker very quickly would have turned aside and tried to go around, despite John Duggan's orders to go through. Failing in getting around, he would have gone back to the last suitable field and landed, there to await the passing of the storm. For he would have known, from that strange coloring of the rain, that death lurked there.

But this was no isolated storm. It was midafternoon of a warm summer day; and since morning here and yonder thunderheads had slowly formed, their snowy tops climbing in the sky and spreading fanwise in a thick gray cirro-stratus overcast. Slowly one cloud joined another, and a small storm became a larger one; then this large one in turn merged with some other of equal size. And so at three o'clock the sky was black from west to east as far as Tom could see. It rained, an inky, violent torrent from the heavens; but from where Tom was then, thirty miles away, he couldn't see this rain. For since the day had been extremely warm, the cooling moisture formed dirty scud just off the ground, which hid the dangers lurking far back within the heavy clouds themselves.

Tom was flying a new Clipper biplane. You never heard of it, and the reason you haven't was this storm, that afternoon, which the Clipper tried to whip. The storm won. But that comes later. The thing now is that Tom Parker saw ahead of him a roll of scud, low clouds that

in the Rain

JAMIESON

Illustrated by Arthur Lytle

dangled streamers of thick mist right in the trees. It began, just then, to rain where Tom was. The ceiling became a hundred feet or less. The visibility was a half a mile before Tom hit the scud, and it went to nothing instantly when he nosed on into that mixture of wind and rain and mist. Unable to see the ground, he pulled up, blind.

He shouldn't have done that—shouldn't have gone on. But how was he to know what lay ahead, obscured in the clouds? And this was a very special flight; it was, in fact, Tom's entire job to fly this Clipper, with Wayne Mitchell and John Duggan in the front as passengers, from Atlanta to Detroit. He had a thousand-dollar check in his pocket which he could cash after Duggan countersigned it in Detroit. And if for any reason he failed to get to Detroit at a stipulated time,—which was midnight of this day,—he wouldn't get a cent. He'd promised to get through. And he needed the money.

But he didn't get there—and when it was all over the Clipper was about the smallest pile of junk I ever laid my eyes upon. . . . John Duggan was dead; and Wayne Mitchell hung by his shroud-lines unconscious in the trees. Yet Tom got his thousand dollars, and in addition he got a steady job, which he had been looking for ever since dysentery had laid him low in Managua three long and hungry months before.

Hard luck had seemed saddled heavily upon Tom when, two days before, with eight dollars and seventy-six cents in his pocket, and a game grin on his pale, lean face, he had tackled Duggan for a job. And by some miracle, the vice-president and general manager of Dundee Aircraft had a job for him.

But it hadn't been as easy as that. He had walked out to Candler Field from a cheap hotel in Atlanta—walked the eight miles because he could walk for nothing, but couldn't eat for nothing—and asked to see the manager. The girl at the desk appraised him coldly, told him to wait; and Tom sank his six feet of bony frame into the soft leather of a lounge and looked around the room. Dimly he heard the sounds of the factory through the thicknesses of several doors; at least, he thought, there was work here to be done, if he could get a chance to do it. He saw the twelve etchings of the Wright Company depicting, from their formal mountings, the evolution of man's progress in the air. A picture of Lindbergh, three feet in height, hung aloof and lonely in the center of one wall. The furnishings were mahogany and leather, the floor an expensive waxed stone composition.

"Mr. Duggan," the information-girl stated, "will see you now."

Tom rose and followed her direction down a corridor. Duggan, rather tall, slightly built, with gray hair and a small, drooping mouth, turned to face him from a window.

Tom introduced himself—sat, presently, in the chair that Duggan offered. Duggan seated himself behind a massive desk and lighted a cigarette. Already

Tom felt discouraged by Duggan's manner of condescension, but he was desperate. Pilots were many and jobs few. He didn't, he realized, present a desirable appearance.

"Well," Duggan began, not unpleasantly, "what's *your* trouble?"

"I'm a pilot," Tom said, knowing he looked like a bum. "I want a job."

Duggan leaned back in his chair—a signal that his interest was at an end.

"I'll explain a few things, if you've a minute," Tom said doggedly. "I was with Pan-American-Grace—Central America—good job, doing fine. Then the earthquake at Managua—bad water—worse food. I got sick—almost checked in. Had to come back to the States—couldn't seem to get my strength back down there. I really can fly, and I've a record I'm not afraid for you to investigate. Down there a year, and test pilot for Graubee on the Coast before that. But I've had a hard break, and look like it. If you've anything I could do—test work—or know about anything—"

"Any—ah, credentials?" Duggan asked noncommittally.

PARKER grimaced. "A letter from Duntin, of Pan-Am—I lost everything else in the quake. But if you really have a job, I can wire several men to get in touch with you about me."

Duggan ground out his cigarette. "If you're what you say you are, I have. Foster, my test pilot, got nicked by a prop this morning, and I've got an important job—new design, never been in the air. We're quite excited about it," he added, smiling faintly, "for—various reasons." He rose. "Come along and take a look at it."

The Clipper biplane was the ship. It did not much differ, Tom thought, from a dozen or more similar types by other manufacturers. Yet when he examined it more closely, he found evidence of radical design in several ways. The fuselage looked like steel and fabric, but in reality was thin duraluminum, stamped in two great halves and riveted together. The ship was light, and looked fast; the question worrying Tom just then was, "Is it strong enough?" But it had been built by engineers who were supposed to know their business. It was, by calculation and the formulas of design and stress, strong enough for whatever load it might lift off the ground.

Duggan, his inevitable cigarette in hand, even in the factory shop, explained: "We built this ship for mail. Night mail—big loads and a fast cruising speed. It's got to be delivered in Detroit by midnight tomorrow night—daylight at the latest. We're bidding on a contract."

TOM shook his head slightly. "It's never even flown, you say?"

"Not yet. And that's where you come in. You're to fly it—run the tests—and get it to Detroit by tomorrow night. I'm going with you."

Again Tom Parker shook his head. "You'll never make it. I've tested airplanes before. It takes time—days, maybe, if something's wrong."

Duggan's face was stern. "Listen, son," he said. "There's not going to be anything wrong! Hear? It's *got* to be right. I've got to have that contract!"

Tom looked at him steadily, said at last: "The way to get it isn't to push your test work. You've got to take enough time to be thorough. You can't jump to conclusions, and make changes until you've really found what's wrong. If the ship isn't right, it won't stand competition."

Duggan lighted a fresh cigarette from the ember of the last one.

"I know all that!" he snapped. "Too well! But we've had delays and delays. We're late in finishing the job—and haven't been able to help ourselves. So we're going to do the best we can."

Tom thought of the eight dollars and seventy-six cents in his pocket. But, he remembered, he had his reputation too.

"I won't touch it," he said. "Lord knows, I need the job, but I won't test it and say it's right unless it *is* right."

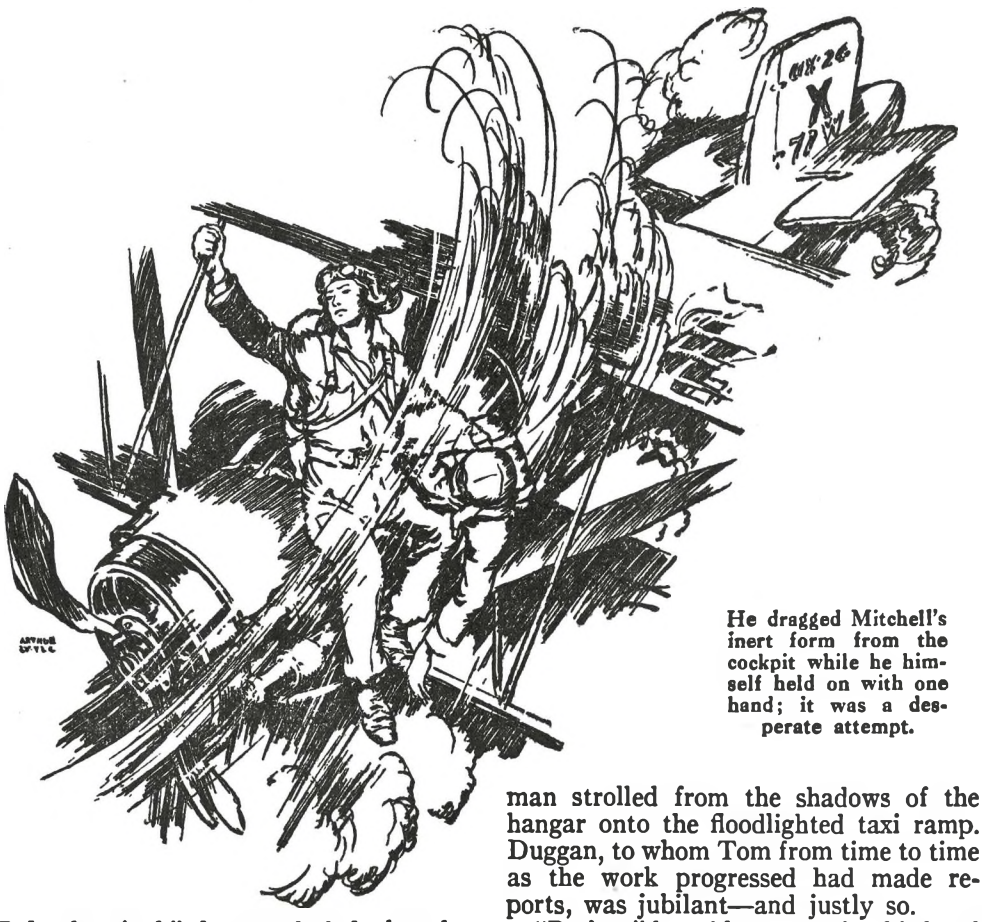
Duggan swore. He started to walk away, turned back to where Tom Parker stood.

"A thousand dollars for the job—test it and deliver it in Detroit before tomorrow night. I'll sign the check when we get there."

Tom grinned ruefully. "What if it won't pass test?"

Duggan grunted. "Gamble on it," he cajoled. "If it passes test and gets to Detroit, it will get the contract—I'm sure of that. If it does, a thousand dollars will be cheap for the job. And if it doesn't, I can't afford to pay you anything."

"So," Tom laughed, "maybe I've a job and maybe I haven't! I hope your engineers know their stuff—and did it on this crate. I'll want every rigger and designer waiting here for me each time



He dragged Mitchell's inert form from the cockpit while he himself held on with one hand; it was a desperate attempt.

I land. And," he concluded thoughtfully, "I want a parachute."

But he needed no parachute. The Clipper got off, empty, in four times its length, and went up like a free balloon. It was fast, gentle, easy on the controls —"sweet," as pilots call the touch it had. And it would carry weight, Tom learned that afternoon. With six hours' gasoline in the tanks in the wing butts and the center-section, it got off under a seven-hundred-pound load in fourteen seconds.

There were some "bugs," of course; there are bound to be in any new airplane. But these, as the day passed, were gradually eliminated. Night came, and Tom still worked; and with him worked the entire crew of Dundee Aircraft there at the west side of the field. At midnight Tom came down from his climb-and-altitude test and pronounced it, while not perfect in every detail, suitable for any practical test which might be called for.

He was just climbing from the cockpit, worn out from fatigue, dirty beyond even the appearance he had made that morning, when John Duggan and another man strolled from the shadows of the hangar onto the floodlighted taxi ramp. Duggan, to whom Tom from time to time as the work progressed had made reports, was jubilant—and justly so.

"Parker," he said now, resting his hand on Tom's weary shoulder, "this is Mr. Mitchell—Wayne Mitchell. By good luck Mr. Mitchell was passing through Atlanta, and stopped to see the Clipper. He's a stockholder in Northwall Aviation, the company that's buying ships—I hope day after tomorrow I can say *our* ships. And I've invited him to ride north with us in the morning."

"Good," said Tom, too tired to be cordial. "We'll have a nice ride. Better pull out at eight o'clock."

"No earlier than that?" Duggan protested.

"I'd say six, Mr. Duggan, but I'm going to get some sleep. I'm still not quite as steady on my legs as I used to be."

They took off at eight, on the minute. Tom climbed leisurely, leveled off at two thousand feet and cruised at a hundred and fifteen miles an hour. This first Clipper was built for passengers rather than mail—for the purposes of demonstration. The open cockpit, wide enough for two, was just beneath the upper wing; and Duggan and Mitchell rode there now. At Tom's insistence they all wore para-

chutes; he had refused to go without one.

The day was warm, and even in the early morning, thunderstorms were brewing. Thirty miles from Chattanooga, Tom ran through one of some intensity. The ceiling dropped from three thousand to half that much, and the rain gushed down in torrents. Because of the plane's speed through the air, the rain seemed to fall almost horizontally; it pelted back at them. The air, as is the case in almost every thunderstorm condition, suddenly was rough; and Duggan proved himself a poor air-man by becoming sick. So after they had brushed through that rain, and approached another one, Tom turned aside. Duggan's comfort, he considered, was worth more than the ten minutes thus thrown away.

BUT they came to still another thunderhead; since this looked small, Tom decided to plunge through. The rain was a black column from the base of the clouds to the ground; the visibility inside the storm was nothing. But the poor visibility and the rough air were suddenly of no importance. The motor began to cut—to miss, dropping a cylinder now and then. Tom tested each magneto, decided that water was leaking past the engine cowling and was drowning out the mag's. So when that rain was behind them, and Chattanooga loomed under the brow of Lookout Mountain, Tom slipped down and landed at Lovell Field, there to put grease on the mag's and prevent further trouble from the rain.

The field looked solid. Water from a recent passing shower glistened here and there below the grass, but Tom gave that no thought. He picked a spot which looked bare of grass, and hard. And no more had they hit the ground than the wheels sank to their axles, the plane bogged down and stopped in thirty feet. So quickly it happened, that the tail whipped up, quivered in indecision for a moment and flopped down again reluctantly. They almost went over on their back.

There they stuck, and there they stayed for five hours. Tom removed the nose cowling and greased the magnetos thoroughly; and at long last a tractor lumbered out from town and hooked on to the Clipper and snaked it out. Tom had explained to Duggan why he landed here, that it had been necessary to prevent a forced landing in the next heavy rain encountered. And now he asked:

Tom tugged at Mitchell's rip-cord, heard the crack of the pilot 'chute; an instant later Mitchell disappeared in the thick mist.

"How do you feel? I'll avoid these storms so you won't get sick again."

Duggan did not, he asserted, object to getting sick as much as to losing time.

"A straight line's the shortest distance between two points, isn't it?" he demanded. "As the crow flies! Well, you fly that way, regardless. We've lost too doggone' much time already."

"Some of these storms get pretty rough," Tom warned.

"We're just as tough as they are—aren't we, Mitchell?" Duggan declared

cockily. And when the jovial, round-faced guest had laughed as in agreement, Duggan went on: "You go straight through. Don't turn out for anything. We're not sight-seeing on this trip, remember."

Tom grinned. "But we'll see some sights, most likely," was all he had to say.

He took off from muddy Lovell Field, using the taxi strip this time to keep out of the mire, and turned north once more. It was now past two o'clock; Detroit, while less than five hundred miles away, could not be reached before six that evening. Tom planned on going through non-stop; and he meant to take Duggan's instructions literally and plow into anything he met along the way.

It was not necessary to do this, he well knew, for they could go into Detroit as much after dark as they chose; but Duggan was the man who hired him, and if Duggan wanted to go through, he would well be taken through. It was with that attitude that Tom took off this second time, which perhaps accounted in some minor part for what transpired shortly afterward.

They roared out of Chattanooga, bucking a slight headwind. The Tennessee River wound like a silver snake three thousand feet below. To the left, above the mountains on Mid-state's route to Nashville, the clouds marched in a grim black line; but ahead it was open, with blue sky flecked by fluffy, drifting cumulus. Yet already, from that valley, as they slipped above Dayton, Tom could see the dark fringe of a vast overcast ahead. He was, at that time, more than a hundred miles away from it.

IT looked, from this distance, like a high thick cloud, with moderate rainfall. Lightning flashed repeatedly somewhere within its bosom, but there were no livid streaks of darting flame. Each time it flashed, a sudden evanescent glow transfused darkness into sullen light on the front of the entire storm, which died in the instant it was born. So rapid were the flashes for some minutes that the cloud-front seemed like a massive screen silhouetted against a flickering light.

But as Tom approached, the lightning expended itself, the frontal area of the storm grew dark once more, the veil of scud shadowing its face. So to Tom it did not appear violent, simply because there wasn't anything to see but the wall of mist clinging to the ground. Then it began to rain where Tom was, and the visibility dropped almost to nothing. Abruptly the plane nosed into the scud, and the visibility did become nothing in the winking of an eye. And because he was trying to follow Duggan's instructions, and because he held no suspicion of what really lay ahead, Tom pulled up, blind. Ten minutes, he thought, should put him through, into clear air on the other side.

Darkness seemed suddenly to enshroud the earth, so thick were the clouds, so heavy was the rain. A bolt of lightning, a belated flash from somewhere up ahead, pinpointed every molecule of mist with brilliant light; it startled Tom, but his reaction came after the glow was gone and the ship was driving on again in almost total gloom.

THEY crashed into the upthrust of the first current of the storm—pilots call it a "windshift;" and Tom felt the plane shudder beneath him at the impact. The controls thrashed in his grasp, grew stiff and rigid from the velocity of the plane. The air-speed needle jumped and hit the peg and broke. Then they rocketed. A gale, blowing not along the surface of the earth, but upward, smashed them from below. The ship had been flying through the air at more than a hundred miles an hour; and it suddenly overtook a wind blowing sixty-five or seventy miles an hour. For a brief time, then, the actual air-speed of the plane was its own plus that wind—nearly two hundred miles an hour. It must be admitted that the Clipper was strong. It is remarkable that it didn't lose its wings right then.

But it bore that shock and rocketed at more than three thousand feet a minute. Tom had, just before going blind, been flying at the very ground, trying to see in the blinding rain that fell. Suddenly he was booming upward at a crazy speed. The altimeter wavered upward on its dial; the motor raced wildly, released momentarily of its load; the climb-indicator showed them going up at nearly four thousand feet a minute.

All about—up and down and to the sides—the mist was solid, thick, dirty, black as night. It rained from nowhere, for the rain was mist and clouds, the clouds were rain. Water fell so viciously that Tom could hear it beating at the wings even above the shrieking of the wires and the fluctuating snarl of the propeller; could feel the ship struggling, shuddering against it despite the blast

of wind that racked and strained every member. The great drops pelted back and struck the windshield violently and shattered into mist, to leap away and join again the clouds whence they came.

This was, it flashed across Tom Parker's mind, no ordinary thunderstorm. He had been in many kinds of wind and weather in the States and in the tropics, but never had he encountered anything as wild as this. True, there had been conditions of such intensity before, but he had avoided them. A muscular rigidity seemed to seize his solar-plexus; he almost ceased to breathe in his tenseness of concentration on his instruments. He hit the wind, and the fury of the plane's reactions drew his full attention.

You are blind when you can't see anything, when you're in the clouds; and you fly blind mainly by a gyroscopic instrument called a "bank-and-turn." It has a needle which swings to left or right as your plane turns to left or right; it has a steel ball in a curved glass tube which, by gravity, is centered when your plane is flying straight ahead, and level. Put a wing down while flying straight ahead, and the ball rolls that way. There are other instruments, the climb-indicator, compass, tachometer, air-speed, artificial horizon and another one or two; but none of these replace the bank-and-turn.

Tom's problem, when he hit the violent wind, was to keep the ship flying straight, and flying level. As long as he did this, and didn't lose his wings, the plane couldn't spin. And as long as he did this, sooner or later he would burst through on the other side. It might take ten minutes, twenty, thirty—even more; but he knew a storm like this couldn't last, ordinarily, more than fifty miles.

He gave, for a moment after the air got rough, some thought to turning back. But he had plunged deep into the storm, and to go back, he would have to cross again the wind-shift line. He doubted if the wings would stay on for two successive shocks of such intensity. There was nothing, he thought, except rain and violent air ahead of him to penetrate. So he went on.

With every thought and muscle taut, he concentrated on keeping the turn-indicator needle in the middle, the steel ball in the center of its tube. Side gusts smashed them; the turn-needle flirted through its arc and back again; the ball leaped dizzily. The pelting of the rain, the hysterical shrieking of the wires, came distantly to his senses—as also the

Tom located Mitchell, hanging from a

racking pound and hammer of shocks that shoved the Clipper up a thousand feet at a blast and battered it down again.

Each slowly passing second convinced Tom that he was in for a bad ride. Each crushing downthrust of the storm left bruises on his thighs where his belt kept him from being hurled from the cockpit. He wondered, vaguely, how Duggan and Mitchell were faring up in front; he could not see them through his windshield and the driving rain.

Suddenly he heard a new sound from his propeller, a deep-throated, angry snarl, like a buzz-saw biting under protest into hardwood. Something whanged

out a devil's tattoo, a dull staccato on his wires. A gruff, hard rattle sounded from the Clipper's wings.

Hail!

Nature's two most deadly dangers to an air-man are ice and hail. Ice is perhaps the more dangerous of the two, for its danger is almost constant in the Northern Hemisphere in winter; but ice as a rule allows some warning if the pilot is expecting it. With ice, even iced until the plane won't stay in the air, the pilot has some chance to jump if he doesn't hesitate. Hail is rather rare, and it can, in most cases, be avoided. You can tell it, if the fall of it and rain is clearly visible, by the slightly yellowish hue the rain seems to possess. But

tree by his shroud-lines, unconscious.

if scud hides the fall of rain, or you don't look for trouble, and plow right into a heavy hailstorm—and if, as the final condition, you are not successful in turning back almost when the first stone strikes your ship—you are into the worst air-trap of them all.

For you can't jump. Hail of all sizes to as large as a baseball is smashing at you, may knock you out or kill you in one blow before you ever leave the cockpit. You are imprisoned as effectively as if you had no 'chute at all; and you can be certain that the plane won't stay together five minutes, if that long.

Tom got into this hail before he had the most remote idea that it was there. His first reaction was to turn around—the only thing he could do with any safety—and he tried to turn. But the compass was spinning badly; the air was so rough he couldn't follow his turn-indicator with any accuracy at all; he turned, or thought he turned; yet the hail grew heavier. The Clipper hit another upthrust at that time, one more violent even than the first. They rocketed again. The altimeter showed them now at five thousand feet; then it went up to ten. If there was any change, the hail grew larger.

The air temperature dropped to freezing, fell below that, as they went on up in the grasp of the violent wind. The Clipper, distressed and badly battered, began collecting ice. Tom had no idea of which direction they were flying; his whole thought was to escape that murderous barrage of hail. At last, with a sudden thought, he helped the wind, hoping to break out on top of the storm and thus escape; he climbed the ship as fast as it would go.

For by this time holes were appearing in the fabric of the wings as if a machine-gun shooting shrapnel had found their range. A stone half as big as his fist starred the shatterless material of Tom's windshield. The leading edges of the wings were crumpling back, depriving the Clipper of lift, and to a limited extent, of full control.

So they must climb. Their only hope, if Tom could not break through this storm of hail and reach safety on the other side, was to climb over it. Last night, in his test for climb and ceiling, he had put the Clipper to eighteen thousand feet, with a larger load than he had now. With a desperate hope he climbed as rapidly as possible.

It would be more accurate to say that he was blown up there, than that he climbed. Hail is formed by violent vertical air-currents which whip rain to a freezing altitude, let it fall some distance, and then drive it up again. You have seen the layers of a large hailstone; it is interesting to know that each of them represents one time that stone has fallen toward the earth, to be picked up by the wind and hurled back up to freeze more mist and water to its outer coat. This wind is, most certainly, of great force; it has to be, to lift a piece of ice against the counterforce of gravity.

And while this wind was forming hail, it lifted the Clipper up as easily, or more easily, than it lifted the rain from which

the hail was formed. It hurled them up to nineteen thousand feet like a piece of paper, took them more slowly to twenty-four thousand—six thousand more than the Clipper would reach of its own power—and shot them out above the storm.

IT shot them out, and then dropped them as they crossed beyond the current which had borne them up. But for an instant Tom could see; he saw that the fabric was almost gone from the wings of the Clipper, that the leading edges were battered and twisted, that two flying wires had snapped under the quick strains imposed upon them. The Clipper was now almost wholly wrecked; they would be fortunate if Tom could get it down at all.

As soon as the hail stopped and the rain subsided, as soon as they popped like a cork from water out above the clouds, Duggan raised his head and looked back at Tom. He was wild-eyed from fright and from amazement. But before he could cry a question he had framed to utter, the plane ran into a down-draft of force equal to the one which put it up above the storm. They sank into the gilded crest of a great cloud, and disappeared into a welter of rain—and again, more hail.

When the first spatter of hail hit them on the way down, Tom saw, through the broken glass of his windshield and the haze of storm, a figure emerge suddenly from the cockpit. Instantly he cut the throttle and yelled, with no effect whatever:

"Stay down!"

For he knew that death would claim any of them who tried to jump.

But the figure reached the wing and suddenly disappeared. Tom could not see whether it was Duggan or Mitchell; he hoped the man had escaped long enough to pull his rip-cord.

A second figure appeared in front. But he did not get out. His leg was half out of the cockpit when suddenly he slumped back down. Nor did he get up again. And Tom knew that a hailstone had struck him in a vital place—that he was either dead or unconscious.

Another wire on the wings snapped like a pistol-shot in the turmoil of other sounds that filled the world. The engine labored, weary of its attempt to run at all; and there was a new sound now to the propeller—the edges of it had been bent, the tips curled out of line by numberless impacts on rocks of hard ice. The Clipper shook from the vibration of the engine.

Tom's chief fear now was that the fabric would be torn from the wings, that the Clipper, almost entirely without lift to support it in the air, would plunge on down, still in the hail. If he could break out into only rain, he could jump.

But he thought, suddenly, of that other man up there, helpless. He couldn't jump, either; he would have to ride the plane down, come what might. The hail continued, and as the seconds passed the wings continued to disintegrate.

They were at ten thousand feet when the hail stopped as suddenly as it had started. The rain still pelted back; the clouds still enshrouded them; the wind still racked the pitiful remainder of that sweet ship of ten minutes ago. But they had a chance now, a bare chance.

Tom weighed the situation for an instant before acting. The scud, he knew, quite possibly still stretched below them right to the ground; and if this was so, there would be no chance to crash the wreck while it remained under any semblance of control. Such a crash, at the speed with which they would strike the ground because of the loss of fabric, would certainly be fatal. The only recourse lay in jumping.

SO Tom cranked his stabilizer to hold the nose up as much as possible. He cut his gas off, and without waiting for the engine to starve out, snapped the switches. With his goggles raised above his face he started to climb from the cockpit, got his feet outside and found the steps upon the fuselage. But as soon as he was outside, the pressure of the wind against his body swung the ship violently in a turn. He felt this, and climbed part way back into the cockpit and tried to straighten it out. They were going down like a rock, to strike a gust of air, and pause and be shoved up again, and then start down once more.

Tom made the wing, hanging on fiercely against the rush of air and the cutting pelts of rain in his face. He inched forward on the wing until he reached the cockpit, found the body of a man and tried to haul that man outside. It was almost impossible, against the force of wind, but gradually he made it. He held the man—Mitchell—facing him, put his left arm around Mitchell's body, under the armpit. He dragged Mitchell from the cockpit the remainder of the way, while he himself held on with one hand;

and then, when he was ready, let go his hold and shoved himself backward with the full force of his legs.

It was a desperate attempt. The mist of the clouds swirled around him as he fell, clutching frantically at Mitchell's inert form. He had to fall some distance, to be sure the plane, in circling or perhaps spinning down—he didn't know what it had been doing when he left it—would not strike either of them when their parachutes were open, and their descent be thereby delayed.

AN instant after he had left the wing something struck him a crushing blow on the leg—the tail-skid or an elevator-horn. His perceptions were garbled, whirling, indistinct. He held one clear thought, which was to delay the action of their parachutes. . . .

Tom had no idea of how far they fell. He did not try to count, for he was busy with other things. But the time came, and he tried, with his right hand, to reach Mitchell's rip-cord. He learned, with some surprise, that it was no task at all to hold the other man, once they were in the air and falling. They fell together, and it was a matter only of keeping Mitchell from drifting away from him. Mitchell's body had no weight; it was suspended in free air,—the effect was that,—and Tom could push him around at will. So he found the rip-cord with no trouble. The trouble came when he tried to pull the rip-cord at Mitchell's side.

For even the tug Tom gave the ring pulled Mitchell's body upward, in effect, instead of releasing the parachute. This was something Tom had failed to think about. The cord, ordinarily, is not hard to pull—it requires, against the safety thread and the friction of the mechanism, from ten to fifteen pounds of force. But this was more force than Tom could exert, for he had nothing to pull against.

Finally he grasped the ring, let go completely of Mitchell otherwise, and shoved down on Mitchell's shoulder. At the same instant he tugged at the ring. It was thus that the parachute was opened. Tom heard the slight crack of the pilot 'chute; a brief instant later Mitchell was torn from his grasp and disappeared in the thick mist. But Mitchell's parachute would save him when he reached the ground.

Tom's own 'chute opened with a jerk that ripped his trousers. The whistle of wind—his falling through the air at a hundred and twenty miles an hour made that—abruptly ceased with the snap of the silk above his head; and he drifted slowly down, waiting for the ground to loom below.

Less than a minute after he started riding pleasantly down he heard the boom of the Clipper as she crashed. Four minutes passed; then a tree-top slipped up through the fog. Tom touched the ground with scarcely a jar, then waited for the sound of Mitchell's landing; and when that sound came, a breaking of branches in the trees some yards away, Tom slipped from his harness and located the other man hanging from a tree by his shroud-lines, still unconscious.

Mitchell revived presently. It was an hour, however, before he was well enough to talk. A hailstone had raised a lump above his temple. It was remarkable that he had not been killed by the blow.

"Duggan jumped," Tom said, as much to himself as to Mitchell. "I hope he got down—afraid he didn't, though."

"It's hazy," the other said. "I don't just remember what happened. I remember Duggan kept yelling in my ear to jump out, and I saw him go—decided myself it was the thing to do. That's all I recollect. I don't see how I'm here now, if I was knocked out up there."

Tom found a cigarette. He was, he discovered, almost exhausted. Briefly he told Mitchell what had happened. And before Mitchell could voice the amazement and gratitude he felt, Tom added: "I'm worried as can be about Duggan. Even if he got down all right, we'll never find him in this fog."

They had landed in a wooded district in the foothills of the Smokies. Houses are scattered, and few; but at last they wandered upon a winding road, and eventually a passing motorist obeyed their hail.

So they reached Sparta by nightfall, and told their news. But it was not until two days later that Duggan's body was found, his parachute unopened.

THAT, of course, was the end of the Clipper. The factory calls them by a different name since that tragedy in the hills. Mitchell owns the place now; Tom Parker was, I think, responsible for Mitchell's interest in the deal. The Clipper really was a ship of quality.

And Tom, besides being test pilot, and a few other things around the place, is now also junior partner in the firm.

Breakers

By FREDERICK

Illustrated by

The Story So Far:

"*DEAR Sir,*" the letter read. "*If you are Lawrence Hall, the son of Thomas Hall, who formerly lived some fifty miles down the coast from Monterey, you will find it to your advantage to answer this, or call in person at my office.*

"*Very truly yours,*
"*A. L. Barton.*"

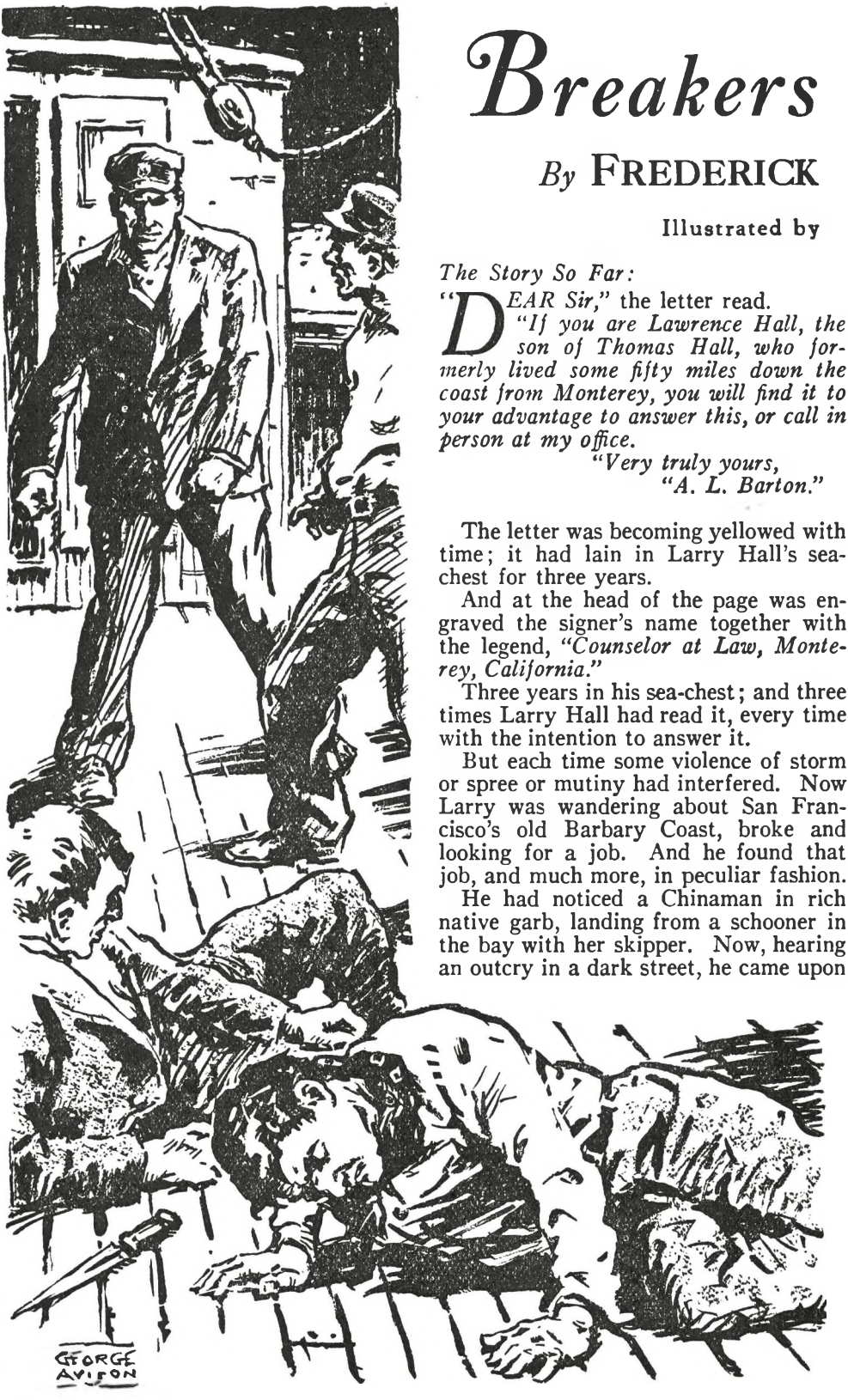
The letter was becoming yellowed with time; it had lain in Larry Hall's sea-chest for three years.

And at the head of the page was engraved the signer's name together with the legend, "*Counselor at Law, Monterey, California.*"

Three years in his sea-chest; and three times Larry Hall had read it, every time with the intention to answer it.

But each time some violence of storm or spree or mutiny had interfered. Now Larry was wandering about San Francisco's old Barbary Coast, broke and looking for a job. And he found that job, and much more, in peculiar fashion.

He had noticed a Chinaman in rich native garb, landing from a schooner in the bay with her skipper. Now, hearing an outcry in a dark street, he came upon



It was then Larry came up the cabin stairs; he had made the flight in two leaps.

Ahead!

BECHDOLT

George Avison

The climax of this deeply interesting novel of adventure at sea and ashore, by the able author of "Youth Rides Victorious" and other noted stories.

the Chinaman and the ship-captain beset by thugs, and sailed in himself. There was a fine fight—and at the end of it the thugs took to their heels, but the skipper was badly hurt.

So it happened that Larry got that schooner captain's job and found himself taking the *Katherine* out of the bay bound for Ensenada in Mexico. There he picked up a strange and distasteful cargo—eighty-six Chinese, who were to be delivered to one Bradley Hall at Trinidad Head, some forty miles below Monterey, along with a sack of gold to pay Bradley Hall for the further conveyance of this living contraband.

A strange cargo—and a strange voyage northward, for one night the first mate was lost overboard—struck down, though Larry did not know it, by a belaying-pin thrown from the shrouds above. . . . At Trinidad Head, Larry was received by his namesake Bradley Hall in a fine if lonely house on the hills overlooking the sea, and completed the business transaction. Yet the affair had only begun.

For one thing, he was enabled to rescue Hall's ward Madeline from the attack of a savage dog Bradley Hall kept to guard the place; and this episode, curiously, won him the friendship of not only the girl but the dog also. Then Larry decided to spend the two days necessary to take on his next cargo—lime from Bradley Hall's kilns—in visiting Monterey and calling upon that lawyer who had written him three years before.

His host Bradley Hall loaned Larry a horse, and he set out. . . .

Where he was riding, the hillside was steep, and the trail was narrow.

A shout sounded behind him, and a rattle of hoofs. He started to draw rein. But his horse had already leaped forward in fright.

A rope of rawhide, stretched taut! The strands caught the rider under the chin. His head flew back as abruptly as if he had been struck by a clenched fist and he was swept from the saddle.

Two Mexicans sent by Bradley Hall to murder his namesake Larry! They hesitated at using the knife on the unconscious man, however, and carried him to a flaming lime-kiln, intending to throw him in. But the young sailor was tough, and came to his senses in time; and surprise, plus the help of the great dog Toro won for him the fight that followed—and that cost one of the assassins his life. . . .

Again it was given to Larry to rescue Madeline—this time from a queer half-breed crew who had kidnaped her and proposed holding her for ransom from Bradley Hall. For as all the countryside knew, she had been Bradley's promised bride since childhood. And the wedding had been set for next day.

The news of this soured Larry's triumph. It was hard indeed to believe. And next day he marched up to the great stone house to see for himself. It proved all too true: the wedding ceremony was about to begin. And—Larry Hall strode into the crowded room, knocked down the protesting bridegroom, and bore Madeline off to the schooner and set sail. *(The story continues in detail):*

THE afternoon was drawing to a close. Out here upon the open sea, the long gray swells swept on in endless succession under a drab sky; the wind was cold upon the *Katherine's* deck; it droned through the taut rigging, making a mournful sound. The schooner lay with her lee rail buried in the foaming waters, beating her way up the coast; and at the end of every leg, she halted briefly; then she came about, until her long masts leaned at a new angle and her decks took a new slant; the other rail was plunged into the billows.

Down in the dingy cabin, where a suit of oilskins slapped drearily against the bulkhead to the movements of the vessel, and the kerosene lamp swung slowly against those same movements in its brass rack, Madeline was crouching on the locker. Her wedding-dress of silk

glowed, and her hair shone under the lamp's dim flame.

Here where Larry had brought her when they first came on board, she remained, waiting for his return. For his return and for some word from him—some word which he would speak, to comfort and to reassure her now.

He had left her in the confusion of those first few minutes. And she had sunk down on the locker, watching him as he hurried up the steep narrow stairs which led to the quarterdeck. Without so much as looking over his shoulder, he had said: "I'll be back soon!"

And that was all.

But the hours had dragged by, and he had not come. Once the little stairway had been darkened by a bulky form; and she had raised her eyes in hope, then let her head fall again; for it was Riley. The mate had paid no heed to her; he had stamped into his stateroom, banging the door behind him.

So she crouched there on the locker, with the noises of the vessel all about her: the straining of the timbers, the endless creaking of the mast outside the forward bulkhead; the thump of feet on deck; the rattle of the sheets and the loud banging of blocks when the schooner went about. And every now and then the hoarse bellow of a voice up there.

She was not seasick. If she had been, it would have been perhaps more merciful than the wretchedness which the movement of the ship had brought to her. For as it was, she could still think clearly. And she was lonely and sorely frightened—frightened in her thought of what was to come.

WHAT had taken place that noon had been bewilderingly swift. During the action, she had been buoyed up by the fact of her escape. Now that it was done,—and she was here alone,—the thing was happening to her which always comes to one when an ordeal is past. And as she thought back on those tense moments—which in their largeness seemed much longer than they really were—she had the memory of Larry's face, black-browed and terrible; and the memory of his arms, hard as steel when he had grasped her and carried her away.

Now she was alone. The strange noises of the ship were in her ears. And she was thinking how little she knew of him. Only what he had told her of his rovings on the Seven Seas. How little she had known! Yet she had trusted herself to him without a word, and she trusted him still.

Since she had been a little girl, she had been living with the knowledge that, when she grew up to womanhood, she was destined to marry a man whom she abhorred. And then, at the moment of her despair, when she was standing by Bradley Hall's side, this other man—for whom she longed—had snatched her away.

But where was he going to take her? What lay ahead?

THE mast creaked, and the feet of the seamen pounded on the deck; the *Katherine* swung and rolled and dipped to the heave of the huge swells. The lamp swayed in the rack, casting dizzy shadows, and she heard the great dog Toro whining in the stateroom close by. When they had first come here, Larry had opened the door and put the brute within, and before he closed it he had patted the streaked head and spoken a soft word or two. But no soft words to her—only that curt announcement thrown over his shoulder as he climbed the steep stairs. . . .

Evening now. The door of Riley's stateroom opened, and the mate came forth. His eyes widened as they fell upon her, here in this same place where she had been when he last saw her. But he said no word. She did not know this was because he could not conjure up ready speech for a girl, in her wedding-dress, wan-eyed and distressed. He sat down at the table, and presently the cook came in from the alley which led forward to the main deck, bringing the steaming dishes. Riley's gaze went to her again, and he managed to ask:

"Hungry, ma'am?" And then he added with the brusqueness which belongs to men of the quarterdeck: "Better eat a bite."

She shook her head.

"Thank you. No." He nodded, and paid no more heed to her, but went on with his meal in silence, frowning heavily all the while. And after it was done, he thrust a match between his teeth and chewed upon it thoughtfully, while the cook came and removed the dishes. Presently he rose and stamped up the stairs.

Larry was pacing back and forth at the break of the poop when he came out on deck. The young skipper halted and turned to face him. They exchanged a few words as to the vessel and her course, the wind and the sail which the *Kath-*

erine was carrying at the time. Their manner was awkward with the constraint which had come between them. Then Larry's jaw seemed to grow squarer and his brows heavier in the dim twilight, and he stepped a little closer to the mate.

"I'm sorry for this, Riley," he said, "but it couldn't be helped."

The other shoved his hands deep into his pockets and looked his skipper in the eye.

"You're runnin' the show," he replied quietly, "not me."

"If it had been," Larry said steadily, "a matter of ship's business, I'd not have spoken. But it wasn't; and the way things stand, I know I'm making a nasty situation worse. Lord knows 'twas bad enough before, with this crew of ours."

"Well, now that you've mentioned it," —Riley shrugged his big shoulders,—"a woman on board aint going to help, and that's a fact. But I am standin' by, sir."

Larry laid his hand on the mate's arm.

"I take that kindly of you, Riley," he said. It was their last word on the matter; and as far as they were concerned, their understanding of each other was as complete as if there had been an hour given to full explanations. And then, as Larry was about to go below, Riley drew his hand from his coat pocket and brought forth his revolver.

"Long as you didn't lay hold of one yourself, I'm thinkin', sir, it might be just as well if you'd turn this over to our passenger. If trouble comes, she's going to need it more than me or you will."

And in order to forestall thanks, he went on quickly:

"Fur as I'm concerned, I've never yet seen the seaman I couldn't handle with my two fists."

LARRY went down the stairs feeling better than he had since he had come aboard. For all of that, his mind was weighed down with worries. He had embarked on this business, as he had embarked on many another in days gone by, without so much as a second thought, and without a single look ahead. But during all these hours, while he had been here on the deck, with the safety of the schooner and all on board to look out for, he had had abundant opportunity for reflection. As to what had taken place —he would do it again just as he had done it this noon, were he confronted by the same issue. No doubt of it. But that did not help him now.

The future certainly looked ominous. Ever since they had weighed anchor, he had smelled trouble. For foremast hands are about as transparent as so many children; and if he had any knowledge of the breed, these in the schooner's forecastle were on the verge of mutiny. They had shown it as soon as Riley had gone below; the minute Larry had given his first order—a look from one and a muttered word from another.

And Madeline down in the cabin!

So he had taken the initiative then and there. Before that first order was fairly off his lips, while the recalcitrants were still hanging back, he had made the main deck in a single leap, and he was among them with both fists swinging; and before any of that bunch had time to realize what had happened, two of them were lying asprawl on the deck. The prospects of trouble were over for the time being.

During the rest of the afternoon there was little opportunity for the men in the watch on deck to put their heads together. Their skipper was riding them as they had never been ridden before. But all the time, while he was volleying his orders,—while they were jumping to the sound of his voice and the sight of him standing at the break of the poop with a belaying-pin in his hand more than once,—during all that time he was well aware that the men down in the forecastle were doing their own talking among themselves.

So now, when he came down the steep little stairs, into the cabin, he was thinking of Madeline—of the danger that lay ahead of them, and of how he had brought her into this. He had picked

her up and carried her away with no more ceremony than he'd have used with a sack of grain.

Well, he had brought her into it: it was his business to get her through.

And so he was scowling with the weight upon his mind, as he came down into the cabin. And he saw her there upon the locker, in the same spot where he had left her hours ago—sitting, in her wedding-dress of gleaming silk, in this dingy place, with the oilskins on the wall and the sea-boots in one corner; and danger waiting for her.

He stood before her looking down upon her, and she looked up into his face. And there was an instant then when he was very near to taking her in his arms, and whispering his love into her ear; but the sense of his responsibility for her ugly predicament was strong upon him. And he said lamely:

"I'm sorry." And then he paused. She was leaning back against the bulkhead with her two arms rigid, the hands on the locker; and her eyes were troubled, searching his. How could he know what she was longing for then? That she was waiting for him to tell her of his love, and of his hope to marry her. He went on doggedly:

"I did not know—not until the last minute. And then, when I learned—that you were to marry that man—it was the only thing to do—to take you here. And so I did it. And now—"

He paused again. It was hard to tell her—of the danger she was in.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"The ship," he told her, "is bound for San Francisco."

"San Francisco—" She said it as if she were speaking to herself. And her eyes continued searching his.

"I could not let you marry him!" he cried. And then he was seized with a sudden fear that she did not care for him at all—that he had outraged all her feelings beyond hope of forgiveness.

So they remained, during a long moment.

Then the silence was broken by a sudden scuffle of feet on the deck above their heads. A voice came to their ears, a choking exclamation.

The stairway was darkened by a form. It hurtled down the narrow flight and crashed upon the planking at Larry's feet.

Riley! And the bone hilt of a sailor's sheath-knife was jutting forth between his shoulders.

CHAPTER XIX

RILEY was on the quarterdeck when the mutiny began. It started in the forecastle. The two honest hands were turning in, for they had just come below after the change of watch. A burly pair, slow to think and just as slow to act; but like most of their breed, they were not easy to stop, once they were aroused; and when it came to strength, either one of them was a match for any two of the conspirators.

Of these latter there were four here below; the others were on deck; the Greek and his two bullet-headed companions were among them.

The *Katherine* was beating up the coast, working her way into the wind by a series of those slow zigzags which make a tacking vessel's course. Now, as she came to the end of her leg, the mate shouted the order:

"Stand by, to go about!"

Up here on deck the hands went to their places. The helmsman was the smaller of the shaven-headed pair who had been with the Greek from the bloody beginning of this affair in the Chinatown alley. He jammed the wheel down hard, and sang out: "Helm a-lee!"

That call, which marked the moment when the schooner came up into the wind —the beginning of a brief interval during which the banging of blocks, the slatting of canvas and the tramp of feet all united in an uproar—had been agreed upon as the signal for the mutineers down in the forecastle to overpower the two honest hands.

The *Katherine* slowed to a halt as her bow swung up into the wind. So she remained for a few seconds; and the headsails lifted with a noisy shaking of the heavy canvas. The men up forward eased away the sheets; the sails began to fill; she pivoted into the landward tack; the hands eased the sheets on home. And Riley called:

"Belay!"

The bullet-headed helmsman shifted the wheel. He held his eyes on the sails, to see that they were being fed their proper share of wind. He juggled the vessel, with the movements of his hands. And all with the utmost care. So, with those up forward: they bent their backs, and they strained their arms, and they held their eyes upon their work. By the force of long habit they did this, even while they strained their ears to catch some sound from the forecastle, by which they might learn of the progress of the ugly work down there below.

Then the schooner started down the landward tack, and the crew waited for what seemed a long time. Of a sudden they got their tidings—more news than they had looked for: the mutiny on the *Katherine* was begun in a manner quite beyond the expectations of those who had conceived it.

FOR things had not been going smoothly down there in the forecastle.

One of the Norwegians had risen to his feet and was pulling off his shirt; the other was still sitting on the bunk's edge. And the four mutineers, standing at the foot of the steps in a tight group, were making awkward pretense of being engaged in argument among themselves. The man with the shirt got it over his head; his arms were free, and he cast the garment from him on the bunk; he stood there bare from the waist up, and his companion spoke a low word to him in their own tongue, a word of warning; for there was that in some of those faces by the stairs which would awaken suspicion in a slower mind than his.

The conspirators looked toward the pair whom they were to overpower, and finding these regarding them so narrowly, they shifted their eyes to one another's faces. More minutes passed. At length the man who had been sitting on the bunk's edge got to his feet.

One would have thought, if he had seen them then, that the pair of ox-eyed giants were the aggressors, and the quartet who faced them were standing at bay. The noises on the deck increased; and here below there was an interval when no one spoke.

Then the four leaped, as one, upon the two. And the brief space between the bunks was crowded with struggling men. Through the noises on deck there came the clip of fists on naked flesh, the growl of oaths, and the thump of bodies flung against the stanchions.

THE kerosene lamp swung slowly in its sockets, throwing now a shadow and now a gush of yellow light. A knife-blade flashed. A belaying-pin banged against the bulkhead. One of the Norwegians was down, and two mutineers were jostling each other as they swung their booted feet into his face. The second Scandinavian burst through his assailants with a roar, and leaped up the stairs.

At the deck he stopped abruptly and wheeled around. A mutineer shot up after him, bent almost double in his haste, and in his hand a sheath-knife. The giant seized him and lifted him as if he were a child; the knife described a wild arc seeking his throat; he paid no heed to it but hurled its bearer down through the scuttle; and the man crashed upon two of his companions. The three of them went down in a heap beside the bleeding giant on the floor.

The fourth mutineer ducked aside as they swept by him. He picked up the belaying-pin and leaped to the deck.

The fight below had been going on for about the same time that the telling takes; so swiftly did the action follow action, cramming assault and mayhem and all the ugly changes in the tide of struggle into a measurement of seconds. And when the Norwegian burst forth from the forecastle, the hands were bending to their various tasks. The man at the wheel was standing wide-footed, with his eyes fixed on the sails, and his mind —even in this moment when he was waiting for the first news of the mutiny —absorbed in the little problem of holding the ship to the proper course, where she would get sufficient wind.

Then the blond giant shot upon the deck, stripped to the waist, bareheaded, in his stocking-feet. He came into the dimness, where the men were scattered at their stations, and he ran straight aft. For the moment they did not comprehend just what had happened. He raced in silence, and those who were the first to get sight of him fell back and stared open-mouthed.

Almost at once the lone pursuer appeared, the belaying-pin in his hand—a lean-bodied man, with a blotched face, and his hair was patched with gray. As he sped through the brief pool of light that flowed up out of the forecastle scuttle, his tobacco-stained teeth were showing like an angry dog's. It was the sight of him that made those here on deck realize that things had not gone according to the arranged plan.

The blond giant was amidships, when one of the hands leaped from the shadows to intercept him. He flung the man away with a backward sweep of his arm that sent him sprawling into the scuppers, and leaped on.

A voice came from the forecastle head. It was the Greek's.

"Head him off!" The lanky pursuer bent almost double, striving to get within arm's-reach. The Norwegian was well abaft the mainmast now. Riley heard the tumult from the quarterdeck, and took a step forward to see the better.

A shadowy form appeared from the shadows of the reefed mainsail; a leg was thrust out into the runner's path. He tripped and fell, but was up again at once. He gained the first step of the little flight which led to the poop, when the lean pursuer overtook him. The belaying pin swept up and crashed down. The huge body thumped upon the deck. The murderer whirled in his tracks and fled toward the bows. . . .

Riley had wasted no time listening; he knew the thing had come, the thing which he and Larry had been dreading. He knew that in the next few minutes it would be the two of them against the crew. He saw the murder done. The dying man rolled over and lay still. The mate stepped back, and thrust his head into the doorway of the low deck-house to shout the alarm.

All this time the helmsman had been holding his hands upon the spokes, his eyes upon the sails—until Riley turned his back. Then he dropped the wheel; his bone-handled sheath-knife was out; he took two swift catlike steps and plunged it in.

CHAPTER XX

IT was then that two things happened which, in their time, were to bring large results.

With the release of the rudder, the *Katherine* had paid off before the wind; and now she was without a guiding hand. While the men upon her decks were engrossed in the bloody business of battling for her possession, the schooner was zigzagging wildly through the night, with none to hold her or to choose her course, save herself and the elements that drove her on toward the land.

The other occurrence took place in the darkness of the bows. The Greek was standing here. And he was thinking fast. In these moments, while the air about him reeked with violence, he saw his opportunity, and he shaped his action toward it. By that determination

which he followed out, he did his full share to bring about the end.

There is an old saying whose utter lack of truth was never better exemplified than in the case of the conspiracy of which he was the head: "Honor among thieves," it runs. As in all plots, whose purpose is to gain loot by violence or by stealth, so in this one—the brains behind the plan were working for one man alone. And from that evening in the Chinatown alley, the Greek had been shaping his campaign with a single idea:

That big canvas sack of twenty-dollar gold-pieces was to come into his hands.

Let the others do the rough work, and in so doing, run the risk. He knew enough to feel certain that, before they had carried out the wild work of mutiny, there would be losses. And if he got possession of the plunder in the beginning,—and kept his head,—the chances were that in the end he would find himself alone with it.

When the Norwegian burst out from the forecastle, bringing the news to those on deck of the miscarriage of events, it was the Greek who comprehended first; and his shout of warning stirred the other mutineers to action. Only for him, the victim would have reached the quarterdeck unharmed.

Just what had happened, he did not know. But one thing was clear; the issue was swaying in the balance. And in the next few seconds it was going to swing one way or the other. The man who had struck the victim down came racing forward, the belaying-pin in his hand. The others hung back, staring through the dimness, a little appalled. The Greek brought them to their toes with another shout:

"Now's the time, lads!"

The sound of his voice turned their irresolution to a sudden flame of ferocity. They started aft with a rush. The pair from the forecastle had joined them now. Six of them headed for the quarterdeck, and the others ran up the alley where the cabin door opened to the main deck. Of these latter the Greek was one. For he was thinking of that canvas sack of gold.

It was when the rush was starting amidships that Larry came up the cabin stairs. He made the flight in two leaps.

The bullet-headed helmsman had been striving to pluck forth his knife from Riley's back, putting all his strength into the effort. Then the mate had plunged down the flight, tearing the hilt from

He was between her and the door. "Oh, no," he said. "You got to stay below."

his fingers, and the *Katherine* rolled at the same moment, throwing him toward the rail. He was still struggling to regain his balance when Larry appeared.

The two of them dived for each other, heads down and arms outstretched. They came together, and the arms of each clamped tight upon the other's body; their legs were locked. For a moment they stood swaying, and their feet stamped the planking.

Suddenly Larry thrust his body forward; and his hip slid behind the other's buttocks. He had his opportunity—an instant in whose passing it would slip away from him if it were not seized.

His arms flew up and he took a new grip, higher on the thug's body. He gave a mighty heave, and the man's feet left the deck; he came upward over Larry's bent back; he catapulted through the darkness—cleared the break of the poop and crashed upon the rails of the main

deck. There was a dull splash as he struck alongside, and the water closed over him; the schooner raced on by.

The six mutineers who had started for the quarterdeck were still in the midst of their rush. Here under the break of the poop they halted, as they saw the body of their companion flying, arms outspread.

One of them—it was the lean seaman with the patches of gray in his hair and the discolored teeth who had struck down the Norwegian—leaped forward, brandishing the belaying-pin. He shrieked an oath at his companions, and they surged on after him. He gained the head of the poop ladder, and the darkness in front of him was cut by a flash of orange. It vanished as suddenly as it had appeared; the crack of a revolver followed. The leader fell back, spattering his blood upon the men behind him.

They stopped in their tracks.

Larry stepped forward to the head of the ladder and looked down upon them. The revolver was in his hand, and the reek of the powder-smoke was still in his nostrils. Riley's weapon! Only a little while ago, the mate had handed it to him! And now Riley was down there in the cabin with a knife between his ribs. In that large moment when Larry confronted them, he was thinking how this man had perhaps sacrificed his life when he handed over the revolver. He spoke, and his voice was quiet, but it had an ugly ring in it which made the nearest of the group give way, until they pressed back against the others.

"Get for'ard. Lively now!"

They shrank from him, step by step; and if they had been the only ones with whom he had to deal, the issue would have been decided then and there.

But while he held the weapon leveled on them, he heard a footfall, and turned his head in time to see a new danger behind him.

CHAPTER XXI

FROM the cabin had come the sudden change in the tide of the fight.

When the Greek and his two companions rushed in from the alley on the main deck, they halted just within the door, bewildered by what they found before them. At the time the *Katherine*, with no hand at her helm, had paid off before the wind, rolling to the heave of a long swell; the kerosene lamp swung in its sockets, and the light shone, now on the mate lying at the foot of the steep stairs with the knife-hilt jutting from between his shoulders; now on the girl, where she crouched on the locker, gazing at the intruders, wide-eyed and silent.

The Greek had come a pace behind the others, for he had been expecting to see Larry facing them when they flung the door open. And now, instead, he saw Riley lying like one dead, and the girl, whose face was as white as the wedding-gown she wore. In the moment of that discovery his lips parted, and he sucked in his breath with a sharp hiss.

WHILE the three were standing there, they heard stamping of feet on the planks above their heads, where Larry was wrestling with the helmsman. The Greek was first to take in the situation, and he saw the chance to turn it to his own account.

He pointed to the stairs.

"There's the skipper! Come on!" The three of them surged through the cabin, past the girl, whose terrified eyes followed them as they leaped over the mate and up the narrow flight. But the Greek went last.

The struggle on the quarterdeck was over when the foremost of the trio thrust his head from the cabin scuttle. The sharp report of the revolver brought him to a stop. And so they stood, the three of them, during the seconds that followed—until that moment when Larry had his back to them, facing the main party of the mutineers below the break of the poop. Then the two who were in the lead stole forth, leaving the Greek alone upon the stairs.

They had left the shelter of the low superstructure and were within two yards of him when Larry heard them and turned. The revolver spat a fiery streak into the night, but the shot went wild; and before he could pull the trigger again, the pair had leaped upon him, with arms outstretched, like a pair of players on a football field tackling the man with the ball. He went down before their weight, and the deck resounded with the heavy tramp of feet as the others, whom he had been menacing with the weapon a moment before, surged aft once more.

But the Greek was not up here. He had, for reasons of his own, remained below. In that flood-tide of their fortunes, when the schooner was in their hands, he was following the example

which had been set for him by thugs since the world began.

For here was the loot. And now was his chance to get his hands on it, while his companions were doing the fighting.

A bag of gold—and a girl!

He had forgotten all about that girl during the swift changes in the tide of action. And when he saw her crouching on the locker, his surprise was almost as great as it had been when he had seen her being brought aboard at noon.

He glided down the narrow stairs, soft-footed and swift in his movements as a big dark cat, and his eyes hung on her. There was but little time for him here before the others would come trooping down, and he was doing some fast thinking.

Madeline had got to her feet. She was going toward the door that opened to the main deck, steadying herself against the schooner's roll with one hand upon the bulkhead. Since she had seen him in the doorway behind those other two, looking over their shoulders at her, she had not uttered a sound. So now she remained silent, watching him, as she strove to escape from him.

He stepped over the prostrate mate and was halfway across the cabin in two quick strides. The table was between them. He leaned over it, thrusting his swarthy face toward hers. His lips were parted, and his teeth showed white behind them. Before she had made another yard, he was around the table end. He stood between her and the open door.

"Oh, no," he said. "You got to stay below." And as he was breathing the words in a husky half-whisper, she sprang away from him. He seized her by the wrist, and his fingers sank into the soft flesh. His eyes shone, hard as two black marbles, under the swinging lamp. They remained upon her for an instant, then they roved swiftly about the cabin. The ugly tumult on the deck above them drowned her scream for help. In that interval of seconds, while the lamp swayed dizzily and the bulkheads seemed to reel about her, while the noise of trampling feet and the report of the revolver assaulted her ears, she was thinking how Larry had come to her, those other times when she had needed him. She was hoping against hope that he would come now.

The Greek's eyes went to the door of Larry's stateroom.

"Tha's the place. I'll stow you away there."

He dragged her toward it, and for one moment she struggled with all her strength against him; then she remembered what was in that room. She ceased to fight. His hand was on the knob; and he had turned it, before his ear caught a sound behind the door that brought to him the sudden memory of another whom he had forgotten for the time.

It was the eager whining of a dog.

Even if he had known how formidable an enemy was waiting in there, scoring the woodwork with claws and teeth in his eagerness to get out into this tumult, it would have been too late. The door had swung ajar, and before the Greek could let go the knob, it was burst open. The great dog leaped out, with a roar.

The Greek went down under him. But his quickness saved him for the time. As a cat whirls in falling, he twisted beneath the brute's impact; and before the gleaming teeth could find his throat, he was out and on his feet once more. He sprang toward the cabin stairs.

He was halfway up the flight when Toro overtook him. And Madeline sank back upon the locker covering her face with her hands. Man and animal came down the flight together; there was a snarl, and then a scream that died into a hoarse strangled gasp. And then the girl looked up again. The body of the Greek lay huddled at the foot of the stairs beside poor Riley's form.

The dog was gone.

CHAPTER XXII

THEN the shifting fortunes of the fight on the *Katherine's* quarterdeck swung to their final change.

To Larry, in these last moments, there was no such thing as time; for every space to which the clock ticked off seconds was crammed with enough of action to make it seem large as hours.

Here in the instant of his victory—while he had seen the main party of the mutineers backing away from his leveled weapon—he had gone down, with one man's arms clamped tight about his legs, and the fingers of the other clawing for his throat. And as he lay beneath the two, striving to wrench the hand which held the revolver from under the knee of the man astride his chest, the rush came from the main deck. The faint light above him was blotted out by their crowded forms. Some one kicked the

The *Katherine's* masts lurched crazily against the sky; they swept in a wide arc —and the sea closed over her.

weapon from his fingers. He heard a voice growl:

"Put the boots to him!"

They were jostling one another in their eagerness, and their heavily shod feet scuffled on the planking as they crowded in about him; he felt a glancing blow, and the warmth of flying blood upon his brow. Then the bitter knowledge of his helplessness came to him: the realization that he was about to become an inert piece of flesh, for them to do with as they pleased.

He thought of Riley down there in the cabin with the bone handle of the sheath-knife jutting from between his shoulders and the blood spreading on the blue cloth of his coat: and of Madeline, crouching on the locker, silent, wide-eyed. And how he had carried her away. Only a few hours ago, that was. And in a few hours hence—what then?

He threw all his strength into a mighty effort. One man, who knelt astride his chest, another with arms enwrapped about his knees. He flung the former from him, as a bucking horse throws his rider. He tore one leg free. He drove the foot into the other's face. And he was on his hands and knees with half a dozen raining kicks upon him, when the dog Toro came up from the cabin.

He heard the brute's deep roar, then a yell of utter terror. And after that—with a suddenness that made it seem unreal—the space about him was cleared.

He staggered to his feet. The clatter of sea-boots on the main deck. A voice, gone shrill with fear, an oath from the shadows by the mainsail. And down there in the dimness, a glimpse of fleeing forms.

The mutiny on the *Katherine* was done.

LARRY'S toe struck the revolver; he stooped, picked it up, tucked it into his waistband. Where the yellow lamplight gushed from the forecastle, three of the hands showed for an instant, bent double as they ran; and in the passing of the instant they jammed the narrow entrance, blotting out the radiance of the lamp; they dived below like hunted rabbits. He heard the dog's deep-throated roar where the maindeck canted upward to the weather rail; and then a man calling to a companion from the shrouds.

Some one spoke close by: "Captain!"

"Who's that?" He turned as he asked the question. It was the Norwegian who had gone down before the mutineers in the forecastle at the beginning; his heavy woolen shirt was in shreds; his face was swollen with livid bruises, smeared with blood.

"I come aft through the cabin, sir. It was the only way," the man said steadily.

And it was the presence of that seaman, the dull methodical manner of him as he stood there, bruised and battered and bleeding, yet unshaken by the wild tumult that had gone, reporting here for orders—it was this that brought Larry back to their common purpose, the purpose of all sailors, whether they be officers of the quarterdeck or foremast hands—the safe and proper handling of the ship.

And he answered quietly:

"Right, Larson! You take the wheel. I'll go for'ard. That dog would kill you. So I'll mind the jib; and you'll sing out the orders when you're ready."

"Aye-aye, sir," the other said, and started for the wheel.

"And I'm thinking," Larry added, "we got to be lively and bring her around on the other leg. For she's liable to pile up any minute." He hurried forward as he spoke.

And now it was these two against the schooner and the driving wind. For the *Katherine* was heading on the landward tack. She was holding to it roughly in a zigzag line, now beating up into the wind, striving to go about of herself, without her helm to help her, until she had the breeze almost dead ahead. Then in the few moments of her effort to make the other tack, halting like a horse when the rein is pulled tight. Halting and backing a little, while the headsails fluttered and the blocks banged. And in the access of the effort, failing because of the weight of the seas against her and the keel beneath. Failing and falling back. So for a few minutes, while the sails slapped and the loosened gear rattled loudly. And after that, she paid off before the wind, to swoop onward at a new angle. A series of zigzags, some long, some short, and ever keeping toward the rocky coast.

Now the two men began their work to the end that she would go about—turning her bows from the land's ugly threat toward the safety of the open sea. They were the only living ones upon the deck, save the great dog. And as Larry bent to the jib sheets, he was conscious of the brute's presence at his heels.

Larson's voice came from the quarterdeck:

"Stand by!"

"Aye-aye," Larry answered.

Then the Norwegian bellowed:

"Helm a-lee!"

Larry eased the sheets as the helm went down. The canvas slatted, and the *Katherine* slowed toward a halt, swinging her bows up into the wind. Another thirty seconds, and it would have been done; she would have been running toward the safety of the open sea. But she had already come too far.

A SHOCK of sudden stop—so sudden it threw Larry upon his face. The schooner shivered, and the tall masts swayed. There followed the deep rasping groan of rending planks, and the loud complaint of twisted timbers. Larry leaped to his feet.

"She's struck!" he shouted. And mechanically: "All hands!"

There was no answer. The schooner lurched until the decks were canted to a steep angle. She righted herself and sank down into the trough of the seas. She struck again. The mainmast cracked, and a snapped stay sang like a magnified fiddle-string. There came once more the ugly sound of splintered planking.

And Larry knew the *Katherine* was gone; no use to try and save her now—the sea had her for its own. There came to him, abiding for a moment as he stood here on the slanting deck, the keen stab of sorrow which a good seaman feels for his ship when she is stricken; and after that, the sudden deep sense of failure which is the bitter portion of a skipper when the man-made creation of wood and iron and spreading canvas, so like unto a living being, has come to her end with him in charge of her destiny. It passed before a graver responsibility. A dread, more poignant than he had known before, roused him to action.

Those two back there in the cabin: Riley, helpless, dying perhaps. And Madeline!

The dog growled, and he seized the collar of steel links. . . . Now the sailors were slipping to the main deck. From weather shrouds and from the forecastle, they came, the survivors of the bloody business that had gone. He raised his voice against the noises of the breaking ship:

"Stand by to man those boats!" And he added: "The first man makes a move to lower away before I give the order, I'll shoot him down."

They trooped in silence to the skids, and set to work. You would have thought, to see them then, that there had never been an issue raised between them and their officers. Larry went on aft. He passed the body of the blond giant who had been first to die, lying upon its back, a grim reminder of what he had gone through—of what he had so narrowly escaped. Larson was on the quarterdeck, awaiting orders.

Larry found a bit of line and tied the great dog to the taffrail.

"Lend me a hand with Riley," he bade the Norwegian, and the two of them hurried down the stairs. Madeline was at the foot of the flight, on her knees over the mate; and Larry drew a quick deep breath when he saw the bloody knife lying on the cabin carpet. She looked up into his face.

"I think,"—her voice was shaking a little, and her lips were quivering,—"the way it felt when I pulled it out, it must have struck a bone. It was this that stunned him." And she pointed to a gash where the matted hair came down over the forehead. "He must have struck his head when he fell down the stairs."

"You are brave." Larry saw her eyelids droop as if she were weary as he spoke, and it was then that he noticed the body of the Greek, where the dog had left it. He reached out and took Madeline's hands, and he helped her to rise. "Brave," he repeated, and there was a catch in his voice. Then he nodded to Larson: "All right! Lay hold."

They bore the mate's senseless form to the deck, and the girl followed them. Three of the hands were busy with the yawl.

"You men go for'ard with the others," Larry bade them. When he had helped Larson to launch the boat and had got the mate and Madeline aboard, with the Norwegian at the oars, he bade the latter to stand by alongside. He was gone for some time, and finally he appeared again at the rail. He had the canvas sack of gold, the sextant and the logbook with him; the dog was at his heels.

The forecastle hands had got their boat off up forward. He scowled as he saw it rising on the crest of a swell against the starlit sky. Then he lowered the canvas sack and the sextant into the yawl, and stood there waiting for a moment while Larson held the little craft close by, while the sea lifted it slowly; and at the proper moment he dropped between the thwarts.

"All right. Shove off." There was a splash alongside as he gave the order, and he reached over the gunwale to haul the dog aboard.

Larson was bending to the oars. They had a hundred yards of open water between them and the ship, when a deep explosion seemed to shake the very sea. In the dim light they could see the hatch flying like a bit of cardboard lifted by the wind.

"It's the water, sir. Got at the lime," Larson shouted.

The *Katherine* settled swiftly; her masts lurched crazily against the star-flecked sky; they swept in a wide arc, and a moment later the sea had closed over her. Only a few bits of flotsam remained.

There came to Larry then a strange feeling of relief.

A strange feeling, that, for a follower of the sea. He had not thought that ever in his life he would be glad to see a good ship go under. For sailormen love the vessels that they man against the elements. And for the sea they have always the feeling that one holds for a mighty antagonist.

Yet the relief was strong upon him. And now he knew the cause. With the passing of the *Katherine,* his responsibility for her was gone; the stern necessity for his undivided attention, by which he could secure her safety of those aboard of her, was no longer facing him.

From the time when he had lifted Madeline across the rail, that constant demand upon him had stood between the two of them. He had been obliged to leave her down there in the cabin, without a word of comfort or so much as a look to reassure her, without a word to tell her of the love that was in his heart.

Now all of that was done with. Here in the yawl, with the great gray seas rising above their heads at one moment, and in the next, when they soared to the hissing crest of an oncoming swell,—with the peril of the wind and water close beside them,—he had her with him. He could minister to her.

The Norwegian pulled at the oars, keeping the boat's head to the advancing seas, holding the little craft so that it rode securely up the flanks of these hills of water, so that it swooped down into the valleys without shipping a drop. His voice came through the darkness, interrupting Larry's thoughts.

"Breeze is freshenin', sir; and the way the current sets along this coast, we'll drift to the so'thard, fast."

And it came to Larry then—he was as sure of it as if the course were set and they were in a well-manned vessel, heading down the coast—that when the dawn disclosed their position to their eyes, they would find themselves back at Trinidad Head.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE guests who had come—some of them from as far away as Monterey—to be present at the wedding of Bradley Hall and his young ward were gone. For a long time the great house of white stone at the summit of the mountain had been silent. The swarthy wine-drinkers and the men about the barbecue-pits had departed to their little cabins of split redwood boards, among the tawny hills. But the windows of the long living-room were ablaze; the lights in here still burned bright.

Bradley Hall paced back and forth. Now and again he flung himself wearily into one of the soft upholstered chairs, only to rise within a few minutes and resume his ceaseless walking.

The anger which was eating into his heart, the chagrin and the hate which had ridden him ever since the moment when Larry had walked into the flowered courtyard and carried away the girl who in the passing of another minute would have been his wedded wife—these passions were less than the fear which had been settling over him. The man who can plan cold-blooded murder is very often a physical coward; and this was the case with him. Ever since he had first laid eyes on Larry he had his own good reasons to be afraid; and now, after what had taken place in the last few days with its climax at noon in the flowered courtyard, the dread had kept increasing. Dread of the man whose death he had sought, the man whose very presence, with his breezy insolence of manner and his seething strength of youth, had made him flinch, whose future living was a

menace to him. He felt a premonition that the young fellow would return.

And if he did come back, and when he came, learned certain facts which had remained for a long time buried?

Back and forth and back and forth, across the peacock-blue rug. From the wide window which overlooked the hidden sea, to the wide fireplace where several long logs were slowly burning down to coals. Again and again, and always with the bitter regrets for the ugly plans that had miscarried. Always with the haunting thought of the men who had failed to carry out those plans —men who could talk now, if anyone were to start an inquiry. Always with the memory of the facts which he had kept hidden for years, facts whose coming to light was forever imminent, so long as this young fellow was alive.

The dawn began to whiten the eastern skyline. It flowed across the summits, and the first brightness of the coming sunlight flooded the western sea-rim. The gleaming streak of water widened and crept landward. Bradley Hall halted before the wide window. He stood there for a long time.

No doubt of that speck upon the distant swells. It was real and not born of his imagination. A boat, and heading toward the land.

And now when he turned from the window, to walk across the room for the binoculars which he kept in the table drawer, he was as sure of what those glasses were to reveal to him as if he had already pressed them to his eyes.

Back again to the window. And the lenses brought the yawl before him plainly. The mate, the seaman and the girl. He barely glanced at these. It was that figure in the sternsheets that held his eyes.

As to what had happened to bring this about, he had no idea; he did not even try to speculate. It had come, just as he had been fearing it would come. He had to face this young fellow again—to face him, and to face the danger that he would bring with his presence.

He let the glasses fall. He stood there with his dry lips working.

And then the fear that was within him crystallized to its full deadliness. He made up his mind.

He turned his back to the wide window, and walked to the door at the room's other end. The old Indian woman was beginning her day's tasks out in the flowered courtyard, and she heard his call.

"Go get the men," he bade her, "—every one of them."

He waited for their arrival, his head thrust forward, his eyes leaden flecks.

They were coming now. He heard their footsteps on the veranda, and he hurried to the door. They stood there with the courtyard behind them where the birds were chirping among the flower beds; and they listened to what he told them; a swarthy group, ignorant riders of the hills, and stablehands, but honest in the main. It seemed right to them, these instructions; they did not wonder at his final words:

"The others—let them be; they have done nothing. It is this one, the captain of the schooner, whom you are to get; and bring him here, to hold him while I send the word to Monterey."

He finished, and they trooped off across the courtyard. The blind door of the wall closed behind them. They went on down the long hill road that led to the beach.

CHAPTER XXIV

"TRINIDAD HEAD," Larson announced from the sternsheets.

And Larry nodded, pulling at the oars. "We'll change places now," he said.

Riley was sitting up forward, holding his chin in his cupped hands; he raised his head at the Norwegian's shout, and the bandage showed all bloody upon his forehead.

"So we've fetched up here!" His voice was listless and, as he moved, he sucked in his breath sharply with pain.

The dog Toro growled in the narrow bow, where he lay tied and the tawny hair on his neck rose.

"You'd think," the mate went on as if to himself, "that he understood, and didn't like the idee."

Larry and Larson were making the change; and the former was passing Madeline, when the boat lurched. His hand went out and rested for a moment on her shoulder. She looked up into his face. He should have seen the softness of her eyes then; perhaps he did; but the feeling of self-reproach was strong upon him now; and he had put the thought of love from him, making the sacrifice which he believed inevitable.

For to his way of thinking, he had failed. All he had done, in this wild work, had been to carry her away. Now he was forced to bring her back again. To bring her back, when he had lost his ship and, the chances were, his ticket with it. When he would stand, as a disrated man, without a berth, without the means of livelihood, without the right to speak to her of love.

But one thing remained accomplished; and now she brought it to his mind.

"You're going to land there?" she asked, and he nodded silently.

"But why?" she persisted.

"Well,"—he strove to answer lightly, —"it just happens to be the only place there is for us."

"With the whole coast—"

"A nest of rocks, until you're way down off Port San Luis," he told her gently.

She was silent for some moments, and the only sounds were the steady thumping of the oars, the swishing of the water under the side, the occasional impatient slapping of a stubborn crest against the gunwale. Presently she spoke again, looking into his eyes.

"Here—there is danger for you."

He laughed; and she shook her head, frowning.

"You think I don't understand," she cried. "You know that man—and he has the law behind him—"

"I'm not worrying about him." He smiled as he said it.

"You are landing here," she told him steadily, "for me. Because you don't want me to run the risk—and stand the hardship of going farther down the coast. If it were yourself—you'd never come ashore in this place."

And then she read the truth in his eyes. For he could not hide the sudden wistfulness, the deep tenderness, the longing that he had for her.

She spoke again.

"I want to ask you something."

"Yes?" His eyes were hungry, looking into hers.

"Why did you carry me away?"

Then he was very close to telling her; and she read in his face the depth of his longing, the struggle he was going through.

And it was that question of hers which brought to his mind the one thing that he had done: the single victory which he had won.

"I want to ask you something," he said swiftly. "I could not let you marry that man. No matter what might come of it—anything was better than that. You're coming back now. I guess it's luck or fate or whatever brings these things about. But you won't go through that—"

She reached out and let her hands rest on his. He clasped them while she made her answer.

"I will never marry him."

"Then it's all right." As he spoke, he looked into her face; and what he saw there brought the words which he had been keeping back, so close to his lips that she knew how he was stifling them.

MADELINE was silent. But now she began to understand the reason why he had not spoken. He was coming to the land, to face disgrace and trouble. And so he felt he did not have the right to her.

Disgrace and trouble—and she had been the cause!

The land was growing nearer. The trees upon the headland revealed their twisted shapes. The roadway showed on the mountain's flanks, and little dots of black, where men were hurrying down its course.

Now they were past the promontory's rugged end where the yearning breakers leaped up the granite cliffs, and the beach showed all white before them, dotted with the waiting men. Larry looked upon them, and he threw back his head; his reckless smile had never made him look so handsome as he did now, bareheaded, and erect.

"Riley," he called; and the mate answered: "Aye!"

"If there's trouble when we land, it'll be along of me."

"We're standin' by," the mate interrupted doggedly, but Larry shook his head.

"You're steering clear. Understand? I've brought enough on you, the way

things are. And if anything does come I want you to see to it that the owners get this canvas sack. And the logbook, and the instruments. And there's one thing more, when it comes to reporting what's happened—one thing I wish—"

He halted, not knowing quite what to say, but the mate took it up for him.

"No need to talk about it," he said. "We'll look out that no word is spoken about that."

And Madeline knew that it was she of whom that silence was to be kept. . . .

The land drew closer and closer. The boat shot through the last easy swells where they curled to crests of foam. It grounded on the sand. Larry took Madeline's hands and helped her to the land. The men upon the beach were walking toward them. He looked down into her eyes and smiled; and then he left her alone. He went to meet them and they closed in around him.

The great dog Toro remained alone in the yawl's bow. He threw his weight against the rope. Then, when the men began to walk away with Larry in their midst, he fell upon it with his teeth, as if it were a living enemy.

CHAPTER XXV

THE little crowd of captors crossed the stretch of sand dunes and went up the road. The redwoods at the cañon-mouth closed in behind them and their prisoner. Here on the gleaming beach several spectators remained, a group of brown-skinned men, clad in the faded blue denim which is the uniform of those who toil with their hands. Lime-burners from the hills and laborers at the landing where the tramway buckets emptied their loads; and among them was the grizzled old mongrel who had knelt on the sand at noontime yesterday, to pour his confession into Larry's ears. He looked at the three who stood hard by the grounded boat: the bruised and battered seaman, the mate with the reddened bandage about his brow and the dark patch where the blood had stiffened the fabric of the blue coat, and Madeline, her silk wedding-gown all stained with the salt water.

"This," he said sententiously, "is no business for honest men, my friends. Better we go to work."

"As to that captain of the ship," another asked in the local Spanish patois, "what will they do with him, Vicente?"

"For that," the old lime-burner replied, "you should go and ask the old man Hall up there in the big house. But this much I know and can tell you truly: that captain of the schooner, he is one bad fellow."

"I hear," a third chimed in, "that they will send to Monterey for the sheriff's deputies. I do not like to see a young man like him taken to jail."

"Well, and why not?" Vicente demanded sternly, "when a young man goes to carrying off women like a pirate, breaking up the wedding and spoiling the good time. What are jails for?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Me, I go to the kilns. Nobody is going to find me mixed up with this business."

And he was starting off, when he heard his name called. He wished then with all his heart that he had been quicker in departing, for this was Madeline's voice; and she was coming toward him.

"You have a saddle-horse, Vicente." She spoke in English and he replied in the same tongue, but with hesitation.

"Well—yes, ma'am." And he added hurriedly: "But he ees no good—that hoss of mine. He ees gone lame."

She looked him in the eyes.

"I'm afraid that you're lying," she told him. "You never rode a lame horse in all your life. Go bring him now to me."

"Eet ees the old man," he answered sullenly. "Maybe he will not like thees."

"Listen, Vicente." She laid her hand upon his arm. "This is for me. Do you refuse me, when I need it?"

"Sure no. I go and bring him queek." And he was off at once.

She went back to the two ragged seafarers. And her face was set; all the weariness was gone. For she was spurred by a deep fear.

"There is more back of this than you know," she said; "and more than I know. But I've heard enough to make me sure of one thing: It isn't for the law, that man up there wants Captain Hall. And if help doesn't come for him—" Her lips were trembling, and she was unable to go on for some moments. "I'm certain he's in danger of his life," she cried.

Riley spoke then. "Just say the word, and we'll do what you ask, ma'am."

She had recovered herself now, and she smiled her gratitude at them.

"I knew you would. One thing that *I* can do, and that is, ride. And I'm going to get the word to Monterey. There is one man there, who may be able to help now. And if you two will

wait here—and watch that house until help comes—"

"It's Bradley Hall—you're afraid of what he'll be doing?" Riley asked, and she nodded.

"He tried before to have him killed. I'm sure of that."

"We'll stand by," Riley assured her, and looked at Larson.

And the Norwegian growled:

"Aye-aye, sir."

Shortly after that, the grizzled Vicente appeared upon his saddle-horse. For a lame animal it was doing remarkably well. One would say, in fact, that it looked as sound and supple as a young colt. He swung from the dilapidated saddle, and with the instinctive grace of the men of the dark-skinned races, he bowed to her as he handed her the reins of braided rawhide. She sprang to its back, crooking one knee over the big horn—for the silken dress was too long and clumsy for the riding astride to which she had grown up as a girl—and rode away. The old lime-burner rejoined his companions.

"Me," one of these said, "I would not like to be in your boots, my friend, when the boss hears of this." But Vicente shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you do? Tell her, go to the devil? And besides, maybe the old man Hall he does not win this little game yet. Who knows? Anyhow, I go to work." And he plodded off.

IT was nearly twenty miles up the narrow trail to the beginning of the wagon-road that led on to Monterey. And twenty miles over such a rough path is slow traveling. But the horse was fresh, and the rider had the strength that comes with fear. And while she rode, she had before her the picture of that soft pale face, with its leaden eyes and loose bad lips. It was from this even more than from the little things that she had heard, that the fear came. She rode hard, sparing neither herself nor the animal.

At the ending of the trail where the wagon-road began, there was a ranch. The people here were of the old Presidio Spanish stock, a kindly family, and they had known her since she was a little girl. When she slipped from the saddle, she was weak with weariness; for despair had kept her sleepless one night, and last night the wild events of mutiny and shipwreck and the hardships of the open boat had driven away all rest. But when they wanted to take her into the house, she shook her head.

"It is a fast team I need," she cried. "For this is life or death. I must get on to Monterey."

"Then," the woman said, "my man will drive you. For you could not hold the reins another mile." She turned to her swarthy husband. "Go now and hitch them up, the two roans. It is no time to stand here, asking questions."

And when the buckboard rattled up the rough road, the mother, who had come to the great stone house the day before and stood there in the courtyard among the other wedding-guests, stood now among her children, staring after the girl who rode away from them, still in her bridal dress.

Early morning, when Madeline had started from the little cove at Trinidad Head. It was high noon when the driver pulled up the buckboard on the crooked main street of Monterey. High noon, and the offices were all closed. At two o'clock, according to the easy-going custom of the little town, a secretary came down a second-story hallway to the office where he worked, an office whose door bore the printed sign:

A. L. Barton, Counselor at Law.

And before the door he found a white-faced girl, in a wedding-dress of pale silk, who asked for the lawyer.

"He's in Salinas for the day, in court," the secretary replied.

Nineteen miles to the county seat! And the dirt road was winding and dusty.

The little courtroom in the old brick building was drowsy with the heat of late afternoon, and half a dozen witnesses were lounging in the spectators' seats, listening to the dreary progress of a civil suit, when the judge on the bench, who was the only person in the place to be facing the doorway, sat up stiff and rubbed his eyes as if to make sure that what he saw was real and not a dream.

Madeline's silken dress was shrouded with gray dust, and dust was filming her hair. She came on straight to the railed enclosure and hesitated for a moment at the little gate; then she saw the man whom she was seeking. He was seated at the long table where the lawyers kept their yellow-bound books before them; the same grizzled sallow-faced man with many little wrinkles around the corners of his eyes, dressed all in black, who had looked so curiously

"If the court please," he said, "this is a matter of importance that calls me. It may be a case of life or death."

at Larry when the young fellow entered the flowered courtyard yesterday noon. She hurried up to him and whispered into his ear. For a moment he looked incredulous; then he nodded and rose to his feet.

"If the court please," he said, "this is a matter of importance that calls me. It may be a case of life or death."

And before the last words of the clerk, announcing the adjournment in the customary formula, were spoken, lawyer and girl were well on their way toward the courtroom door.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE old Indian woman whose tasks brought her in and out of the great stone house at all hours, did not do much thinking as a rule; but today she was doing her share. For there was something about this business which would worry even a more stolid one than she into cudgeling her brains for a meaning behind it.

For had not the master of the house said in her hearing to those men who went down the hill in the morning to secure the captain of the schooner, that he wanted this one held for the officers at Monterey? And, after these had brought back their prisoner, and sent word to Bradley Hall, the latter had not left the big living-room, but had given her the instructions which the men were to carry out—

To bind the man and lock him up in one of the outbuildings which lined the side of the walled enclosure behind the courtyard; and when, the padlock had been made fast, to bring the key to him.

And then, when anyone would have thought that, with so desperate a ruffian as this young pirate in custody, the custodian would have hastened to send word to the sheriff—then Bradley Hall had done just nothing.

So during all the morning and well along into the afternoon. Until the sun was slanting well down toward the western skyline. Then at last Bradley Hall had bidden one of the vaqueros to saddle up and ride to town. This also in her presence, as it had been in the morning when he spoke to the men. And so she heard the message to the county authorities—

To hasten here to Trinidad Head, for the prisoner was desperate and the quarters where he was held were none too strong; and Bradley Hall feared that he might escape, unless help came speedily.

Not being overly quick of reason, the old servant could find no cause at all for so inconsistent a proceeding. But she had a feeling, more definite as the day wore on, that tragedy was in the wind. As she went about her duties,

she looked over her shoulder frequently, and now and again she crossed herself.

And there was a distinct atmosphere of impending tragedy in the stone house. Bradley Hall sitting there in the living-room. Looking straight before him, with those leaden eyes of his; and his bad soft face had never seemed so like to a dough mask as it did now. Was he—the old servant asked herself—in fear of something? He looked as one who saw a ghost.

There was another thing that she had noticed; and she had not spoken of it to the master of the house, for why run the risk of bringing more trouble by delivering ill tidings? It was the sailor man, with the mop of flaxen hair and the hideously bruised face, who had climbed the hill soon after Larry's incarceration that morning, to take his stand in the gateway down by the stables, and to remain there during the hours of daylight, regardless of the vaqueros and the others who came and went. And when evening fell, there came another, with a blood-stained bandage about his forehead, and the stiff stain of congealed blood upon the back of his coat; and the first man departed, leaving this one in his place.

That surely looked like trouble, she told herself. . . .

The dusk grew still deeper. The old woman shuffled into the living-room and lighted the lamps. She had brought in Bradley Hall's evening meal to him sometime before; now as she removed the dishes, she saw that he had barely tasted the food. He remained there when she closed the door, huddled in the big overstuffed chair, staring straight before him as if he were looking at a specter.

She had occasion to remember that. For it was the last she ever saw of him, alive. . . .

A murderer should be a man without imagination if he wants to have any peace of mind during the ugly interval between the conception of the crime and its execution. And visions of impending calamity kept confronting Bradley Hall—visions of some interruption, at the moment when he was engaged in the act itself; visions of the hand of an officer on his shoulder years afterward. Trying to shut these visions from his thoughts, he went over the plan again and again.

Tied hand and foot—and those vaqueros knew the trick of knots.

Locked in, and the walls were strong; there were no windows. . . .

Well, then, when he had come and the thing was done, he must untie those knots.

And after that, he must break the padlock staple. There was an iron bar, a crooked bar made for tearing spiked planks from their places; they kept it in the tool-house, hard by. He could do it with that.

And he must remember to smear over his tracks in the dust. He must be sure of this.

Then the body. And that would be a heavy task. To drag it to the cliff and throw it over, into the deep inlet where the sea boiled between tall walls of granite! For any wounds that it might bear, the ragged rocks would get the blame.

And after all of this, then go to bed. And when the officers came from Monterey, let them be the first to discover the "escape."

Sometimes, while he was thinking, there would come to him a sickening conviction of the horror of it all. Not the horror of the deed itself, but the horror of the danger he would run. Then he would remember the alternative—

The other danger he would run if this were not done. And remembering, he would force his mind to going over the details again.

HE had set midnight as the time. For by then all the household would be asleep. There had been a long stretch in daylight when the hours had seemed to drag. Now, after the darkness had come, they sped. His hands were wet with sweat. His brow was dotted with big beads of water. And—it seemed to have arrived all of a sudden—the clock's hands said twelve.

The silent way to do it was with a knife. This would leave blood, but the floor was of earth; and only a few days before, the men had slaughtered a hog and tied it up in this place to bleed.

He rose from the soft chair and went to his own room. He came forth with the weapon in his hand; a long-bladed hunting-knife with a buckhorn hilt.

He crossed the little courtyard where the perfume of the flowers was heavy on the night air. He opened the door in the rear wall and he stood there for a moment looking down the long enclosure. Black dark, but the moon was near the sky's edge. He had forgotten the moon! No time to lose now!

He started on.

Something was moving there ahead of him. He halted. . . . No sound. No sign of any living form. He shook his shoulders to steady his nerves, and he resumed his catlike walk. The door of the outbuilding where the prisoner was lodged was some three yards away when Riley stepped out from before it, confronting him.

Then the panic which he had been fighting all these hours—the panic of the man who has lived with thoughts of the noose for company—took utter possession of him. He turned and fled back through the courtyard door, and slammed it behind him.

He made the turn toward the veranda, and he halted again. Voices there in the living-room.

He waited to make sure. No doubt of it. A man's voice, and a girl's. That would be Madeline. Come back to him! But who was with her? He listened intently. The man was speaking now. Bradley Hall's heart seemed to stop beating. He knew that crisp, dry voice. That was the one man whom he dreaded more than any other save Larry.

"This way." It was the old Indian woman. And he heard their footsteps; the door opened to the veranda, and the lamplight gushed into the courtyard.

He must not be found here. Blind panic seized him. He slipped through the door in the adobe wall which led out into the open.

Something moving out here, a shadow among the black patches of chaparral!

The fear that gripped him turned everything to shapes of dread. To him that form that stole on toward him was as a man crouching behind the brush clumps.

And he was sure then that they had been watching him; watching him, waiting for him to begin—waiting to catch him in the act.

That shape was near the road. It blocked his escape there. He turned to the cliffs; here was the pathway to the beach. He fled down it.

AND afterward, when they found his body, none knew what had frightened him into this. For it was the great dog Toro that Hall had seen skulking through the brush—Toro, seeking to track the man he loved.

The discovery was made late the next day. It was under the cliffs they saw the ugly thing, floating in the surf. And the Indian vaqueros followed the tracks down the steep path along the mountain's cliff-scarred flank. They read the trail, and they told one another how Bradley Hall had been running hard when he reached the spot where the path was wiped out by a falling boulder—

That same boulder which had come so near to killing Larry had been the means of dashing this one to his death.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE old Indian woman was doing little sleeping that night, for the presence of the fear that rode the master of the great stone house was upon her too. And she heard the metal knocker the first time it fell. She looked forth from her window and she saw the two forms out there before the door of heavy planks; a man and a woman. And she recognized the dress that gleamed in the first faint light of the rising moon.

She raised the window softly and she heard her name called. No doubt of that voice: It was Madeline come home.

She hurried from her room and unbarred the heavy door. The lamplight fell on the girl's face, and the old woman cried out, in pity and alarm. It was the lawyer, Barton, who silenced her.

"Where is your master?" he demanded. She shook her head and pointed to the big overstuffed chair by the living-room table.

"He was there, when I saw him last. He was there all day long."

"The captain of the schooner—" Barton spoke sharply now. "Where is he?"

And then the old servant led them out through the courtyard. They found Riley, and they heard his story. And after that, they set to work to free the prisoner. It took some time. And it was a good half hour later when the lawyer told Larry the reason for certain things which had taken place during these last few days. . . .

In that little conference, the man of law sat with the others before him: Larry and Madeline and Riley. And after the exasperating manner of his profession the world over, Barton went into the business slowly, one detail at a time, each meticulously set forth and fully disposed of before he started on the next.

Before he even began, he made Larry tell his story from beginning to end—and by his manner during that recital he indicated more than once his complete disapproval of the illegal features,

which were numerous enough to horrify any civil lawyer. Then, when he had cleared his throat and shaken his head for the last time, he started on his own narrative—according to the timeworn method of his craft—by backing into the subject instead of going head foremost to the point as a layman would have done.

"In the matter of the vessel and what took place prior to the wreck, I have my doubts about there being more than a perfunctory inquiry. It will probably amount to a report of her running aground—in other words, a whitewash.

"You see, the owners are very evidently in no position to demand any investigation. Rather they would seek to avoid one. And they have influence. I happen to know that.

"This is the more apt to be the case if they get the bag of money of which you speak. And I think it would be wise if you were to turn that over to me and let me attend to the matter." He cleared his throat. "So that if there should be any necessity of—ahem—bargaining, I'll be in a position to do it.

"Well, then, to go on with the investigation. The testimony will undoubtedly rest with you two here and the seaman Larson. The rest of the crew won't show their faces—you may be sure of that. So, even if this were a case where a poor man's standing were at issue, I would look for exoneration. And in your case—"

He paused and eased himself in his chair before he went on.

"Well, in your case,"—he looked at Larry,—"the situation is different. Some years ago when I wrote that letter—if you'd come to my office then—or if you'd answered as I asked you—why you would have saved a lot of trouble. But that can't be helped.

"You see, my predecessor was administrator of the estate of Thomas Hall." He noticed Larry's movement and he shook his head. "Not your father. But *his* father, and the uncle of Bradley Hall. His estate was settled nearly twenty years ago, if I remember rightly. Well, I came into the firm and my predecessor died; and one day in overhauling some old papers, I happened on something which made me feel there had been a fraud practised in the distribution of the estate. No fault of the administrator's. But there had been perjury. And Bradley Hall had committed it.

"At that time of the distribution, your father was dead. To this Bradley Hall had given his oath, all properly. But he went one step further and he swore that you too were dead, which would make him the only living heir. Now your father and he had parted in anger and the former had never communicated with anyone down hereabouts. So none was the wiser, when he told that lie under oath.

"That was the reason I wrote you. Rather, I wrote seeking you. And when I failed to get any answer I believed that you too must have died or disappeared.

"All of which amounts to this: The property which Bradley Hall now holds is only half of it his; the other half belongs to you."

When he had got this far he looked from Larry to Madeline and back again.

"There's one question," he said at length, "I'd like to ask, Captain Hall."

"Well?" Larry waited to hear it.

"Why was it you carried this young lady off? And on my horse, too? Which gives me the privilege of asking."

Larry rose from his chair. He came beside Madeline.

"I think," he said, "that I would like to tell her first."

"Very well,"—the lawyer smiled,—"I'll leave you here to do so." And he and Riley departed from the room.

BUT it was not here Larry wanted to say it—not in this room whose associations were so unpleasant. And that was true with Madeline. So without waiting for him to ask her, she rose from her chair and went out with him through the big plank door into the open. Then, when they were standing where they had stood that first evening while he told her of the old sea days, he took her hands in his and told her that he loved her.

And then she was able to let him know the love that was in her heart. . . .

The great dog found them here—as Larry took her in his arms.

So it came about that, here on the mountain-top where she had stood listening to the sailors singing far below her on the beach, longing for some adventurer to come up from the sea to her—here where he had come to her that first night, she came to him now.

And the letter in Larry's sea-chest, all yellow with the years, was answered at last.

THE END

REAL *Held for*

By ROBERT

THIS is not a "confession story," though it may start like one. It was the toboggan slide for me, in more ways than one, once I hit China, back in the days of my youth. . . .

Our company mascot and best-loved possession was Spike, a large white dog whose only fault was an unlimited capacity for friendship. Spike visited all the legations in turn; but all Peking knew that he belonged to us. Consequently, when several days passed without sight of Spike, we Americans began to look about; and this time located him in the Austrian legation.

Now, the Austrians and Americans had never been too friendly. So, instead of a single man going down and bringing Spike away as a matter of course, a delegation went and demanded him as a matter of justice. In the ensuing mix-up some eyes were blacked. Finally the Austrian guard in waiting was called out, and escorted us outside the gate. Spike remained in the hands of the enemy.

Followed one of the many feuds that made endurable the monotony of old Peking. There was a pitched battle in the alleys of Hattamen, and after that, a sort of guerrilla warfare. Men of both nationalities went about in groups, eying each other, the Americans usually with clubs or bricks concealed about them to offset the bayonets that were part of Austrian uniform. A couple of Americans were stabbed, though not seriously.

Which was the situation when I staggered into it. For several days I had been drinking steadily and I was in a decidedly evil temper.

I was in Schultz's place on Hattamen, drinking a hot whisky, when I heard what sounded like treasonable talk from two other American marines seated near by. I arose and swaggered over to them.

"What you fellows talkin' about?" I demanded. "You fellows say the Austrians are in the right?"

They were quiet chaps, and as I see now, very sensible ones. They hesitated a bit before one replied:

"No, not exactly that. But we were saying that there is a bunch of good fellows among them, and it's too bad we're on the outs with them. That's all."

"That's enough." I slammed my fist down on the table. "They're thieves an' stabbers, the lot of 'em. What've you got to say to that, now?"

"Go tell the Austrians about it. Don't tell us."

"I'm tellin' you now. An' I'll tell the Austrians too, if I like. I'll tell 'em in a way they won't forget."

"Why don't you, then?"

"I'm goin' to. I'm goin' to this very night. I'm goin' down to Korean Charley's, an' the first Austrian I meet, I'll—"

I slammed the door behind me, and there came another blank.

I STIRRED, moaned, rolled over, started to get up, fell back again.

My head throbbed; my mouth was parched. I reached out—and touched a stone wall. I felt in the other direction and found another. I was lying on a stone floor. I was in a cell!

Then I discovered I had no shoes. Why had they been taken away? I felt around the walls for a window, but could find none. Just then there sounded, high and clear, the first notes of the Austrian reveille. At that sound, a terrible fear

Murder

J. PEARSALL

Nearly everyone has had some hour of his life so full of excitement that it seems worth describing in print; and for this reason we each month offer prizes for the best stories of Real Experience submitted. (For details see page 159). Here a one-time Marine tell us of the time a dog saved him from an unjust accusation of murder in Peking.

gripped me. I had left Schultz's place hunting Austrians, and I had evidently found them. What had I done?

While I stood trying to remember, a door in the end of the cell opened and an Austrian captain entered, with two privates close behind him.

I advanced a pace, saluted, which salute was punctiliously returned. Then the officer asked my name and rank.

"Do you want to send any message to your commanding officer?"

"I don't know. I would like to ask, sir, what you are holding me for?"

The Austrian captain looked puzzled. "Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"No sir, I don't."

"But that's incredible. You know you killed Corporal Barretti of our guard."

"Killed?" I gasped. "But Captain—"

"I can tell you nothing more. Do you want to send a message?"

I thought a moment. "No. Tell him I am here. That's all."

Left alone, I leaned against the wall in sudden weakness. Horror was my strongest feeling. In European military law, there is little quibbling. Whether I would be tried by an Austrian or an International court didn't matter much. For murder, the penalty was death.

I buoyed myself up with hopes of extenuating circumstances, until, hours later, the cell door opened again, and Captain Naylor of our legation entered, looking very worried.

"Well, Pearsall, you seem to have got in pretty bad. What's your side of the story?"

"I was drunk, sir. I don't remember anything. I know I'm in for murder, but that's all I do know."

The officer looked at me a little doubtfully. "The commanding officer has appointed me as your counsel. I want you to tell me the absolute truth. If it's against you, it'll go no further."

"I'm telling you, sir. I don't remember a single thing. For God's sake, Captain, tell me what happened."

The Captain seemed to believe me.

"I'll tell you the case against you. It was about eleven that you left Schultz's, threatening to go to Korean Charley's and 'fix' the Austrians. Fifteen minutes later the Austrian patrol happened to enter the courtyard of Korean Charley's. Almost at your feet lay an Austrian soldier, Corporal Barretti, dead. By his wounds, it seemed that some one had knocked him down and then deliberately jumped on his head, crushing it against the stone floor. His face was torn and mashed. Ground into the flesh were prints of shoes. And the shoes on your feet were soaked in blood. They fitted the prints in the flesh. That's all the evidence they have against you."

"All!" I groaned. "It's enough."

"Nobody else was in the courtyard. And the occupants of the building seemed asleep. No one knew what had happened until the Austrians found you."

There was a little pause. Sick with horror, I stood with downcast eyes.

"I killed him, did I? Let them do what they like. I deserve it."

"Nonsense, man!" said the Captain more kindly. "You were drunk. We'll do what we can to save you. And you'll want some blankets and your clothing, of course. I'll send them over. Anything else?"

"No. Thank you, Captain."

Captain Naylor turned and left. The cell door closed again; the key turned harshly in the lock; and I was alone.

There followed some terrible days, during which I nearly went insane trying to remember, to reconstruct the scene of the murder, to convince myself—even if I could not convince others—that I had had provocation, that I had killed in self-defense. Fear of death was bad enough; but to do myself justice, remorse was worse.

Then one day, after about a week of this, a startling thing happened.

All this time, I had been in near darkness. Shutters in the door, that furnished me air, furnished the only light. I was pacing the cell when suddenly an incandescent globe near the ceiling, that I hadn't known existed, flared into radiance. For a moment I stood with blinking eyes; then the cell door swung open. Some one was shoved through it. Then it closed again.

The newcomer was an enormous Chinese—a freak in strength and size, shaped like a gorilla, with long arms, short and twisted legs, and a slightly stooped but incredibly muscular body. His slant eyes, small and cunning, stared at me with the frightened ferocity of a trapped animal.

Then he seemed to recognize me, most unpleasantly. He uttered a low, gasping cry and drew back trembling, seemingly struck with some sudden fear.

A movement outside the door drew my attention. Some one had been peering through the shutters.

THEN the door opened again, and the Austrian commandant stepped inside, closely followed by Captain Naylor.

I stood erect, at attention. The Chinaman shrank back.

"Private Pearsall," said Captain Naylor formally, "the commandant of the Austrian legation requests me to inform you that you are released from confinement."

I started, reeled, caught myself, stood erect, saluted.

"Very good, sir."

I managed to pick up my belongings and follow the Captain out into the good fresh air and sunlight without another word. So far did my soldier's training carry me; but as we passed through the gate, military discipline went down before impatient curiosity.

"Didn't I kill him, Captain? Am I free? What does this mean?"

And the Captain told me:

"You have Spike to thank for your release more than me. When I got back to the legation from seeing you last time, I found that Spike had come home—that he had come limping in during the night, covered with blood, and with one leg and a rib broken.

"Naturally, I thought that was worth investigating. The Austrians would never have harmed him. I looked him over, and found that he had not been cut, so the blood was not his own.

"I looked in his mouth. Between his teeth I found a few threads of coarse blue cloth. I then went back to the Austrian legation and found that Spike had been taken out by Barretti, the man whom you were supposed to have killed.

"But Barretti's body bore no marks of a dog's bite. Neither, as I learned from the Austrian doctor, did yours. There was but one conclusion—that there was a third party in Korean Charley's when Corporal Barretti was killed. And the threads of cloth were of the texture worn by many Chinese coolies.

"The rest was easy. I found that Barretti had had trouble with a coolie that worked for Korean Charley—one Yuan Shi. What the trouble was doesn't matter. I looked up this coolie, and found marks of Spike's teeth in his shoulder.

"This is the way I figured it out: He and Barretti had met in the compound. He had killed Barretti. Spike had taken sides in the struggle, and had bit the murderer, and been injured himself.

"You may have been there already sleeping, or you may have come directly afterward, too stupid with drink to see what had been done. Anyway, Yuan Shi saw a chance to shift the blame to you. He took off your shoes and pressed them down on the already crushed and bleeding face of Barretti. Then he put them back on your feet.

"It was plain enough in my mind, but I couldn't make the Austrian commandant see it my way, and I couldn't make Yuan Shi confess. So I suggested that we throw him unexpectedly into your cell, and watch the meeting through the shutters. He did, and Yuan Shi's fright was as good as a confession. But really, as I said before, it was Spike that saved you. And now, Pearsall—"

He looked at me sideways. I thought I knew what was coming, and decided to head it off.

"Captain," I said determinedly, "from this day on, I'm on the wagon!"

A reporter sits into the game while a real detective utilizes an amusing clue to catch a criminal.

By
FRANK H. EVANS

The Wise-cracker

ASSOCIATED for several years with the press in Chicago, I had ample opportunity to view life from humorous as well as tragic angles, and the case of Alfy K,—known then as the Wise-cracker,—in which my friend Detective Mooney drew lots of credit, furnishes me with many a smile yet.

The powers that be never knew just how the detective came to make that arrest in such record time. And he never enlightened them—just took the credit and kept silent like a sensible man. I too kept silent at his request, for I knew the source of many of my scoops. Now that he is retired, I will tell of it.

One Wednesday night early in December I came east on Randolph Street and overtook Mooney, who was making his nightly stroll about the Loop. We turned south on State Street and the detective gave a grunt.

Having grunted, he came to a halt at the edge of the sidewalk and gazed abstractedly at the passing traffic. I did the same, wondering what was in the wind. I knew the signs: he had seen something out of the ordinary. Nevertheless I was too well trained to gaze curiously around, so just stood at his side viewing the traffic.

"At the news-stand on the corner," he said at last. "That guy with the scenery."

Cautiously I glanced at the news-stand, looking for some one all dressed up. Sure enough, there stood a young fellow about twenty-four, all decked out in a new gray suit with large checkered design, a gorgeous yellow-and-gold tie, brown shoes, a brown raincoat wide open and a green felt hat.

"Yeah!"

"That's Alfy K—"

I had never heard of him and said so, but Mooney said no more. We stood there for about thirty minutes acting the part of detecting without being detected in the act, when suddenly the loudly dressed young man came toward us, smiling broadly.

"'Lo, Mr. Mooney! Figgered it was a shame to keep you standin' here in the damp any longer, watchin' me. I aint doin' anythin', honest."

The detective flushed angrily. I scratched my chin and tried hard not to grin at his chagrin.

"Not doing anything, eh?" he snapped. "Who said you were? Where in thunder did you spring from anyhow, Alfy?"

"Been at the news-stand for half hour, Mr. Mooney, an' you been watchin' me," smiled Alfy. "But honest, I aint up to a thing. Been straight since last stretch."

"What you working at, Alfy?" asked the officer casually.

"Drivin' a taxi, morning shift, Mr. Mooney. Good money in it, too."

This Alfy looked to me like a harmless sort of fellow, good-natured, weak, no ambition or aggressiveness. His eyes were never still, and when you caught them they somehow gave you the impression, a fleeting one, of a young child or at least an immature person. Whoever Alfy K— might be, I did not think him a dangerous type.

"Mr. Mooney," he went on, becoming earnest, "I want to ask you a question. You won't get mad?"

"Go ahead, ask!"

"Well, Mr. Mooney, what hand does you stir your coffee with?" asked Alfy.

"I'll be damned!" suspiciously rumbled the detective. "What hand? Say, moon-face, what's on your mind?"

"Just a question, Mr. Mooney; you said you wouldn't get mad. Now didn't he?" Alfy turned to me for backing.

"All right," snapped Mooney ungraciously. "If you want to know, I stir my coffee with my right hand."

Alfy shook his head sadly, the care-free smile breaking through the serious look on his face. "Tsh! Tsh!" he teased. "You can't help it, I guess; but Mr. Mooney, why don't you start using a spoon?"

Laughing as loudly as his shrieking clothes, Alfy went his way.

I grinned at Mooney. "Who is he?"

"Small-time crook," growled the detective. "Done five stretches for petty larceny. In a way I'm sorry for the kid; he hasn't got an idea in that head of his, just made a goat of by others. They bring him in on a deal, give him a small cut, make him work like a horse, and if necessary put the gaff on him while they get clear. In the underworld they call him the Wise-cracker—always working some wise-crack to death until he hears a new one. What hand do I stir my coffee with, eh? The rat!"

"What seems suspicious about him?" I queried.

"Usually he is the shabbiest mortal you ever saw. Yet tonight he's all decked out like a Christmas tree. Where did he get the cash? Taxi-driver, nothing! He can't drive a car!"

TWO days passed; I did not see Mooney again until Saturday night. I was at Central Station when a call came in from an eating place on West Madison just over the bridge. A hold-up! Dashing over there, I found Mooney and two uniformed patrolmen surrounded by excited persons.

The owner was talking to the world:

"They didn't come in together. One sat near the door, the other toward the rear, and the other near the cashier's desk. After eating a meal, the one near the desk came up and covered the cashier and me; the other two rose, pulled guns, and robbed the patrons. They took six hundred and sixty dollars that I had in the safe, looted the cash drawer, and I have no idea how much they took from the customers."

The officers were busy taking down names and addresses.

The men customers sang a continuous refrain about the slickness of the hold-up, and complaining that such things could be possible in a busy location like this, where were the police and so forth. Mooney turned to me.

"Not a trademark about the job at all. Our known crooks usually leave some incident, some method or twist that brands them and narrows suspects down to a few. But here there is no trademark, not a thing pointing to any known crook. Yet too slick to be a first job."

An elderly, quiet sort of man spoke mildly of his experience, not addressing anyone in particular. One of the bandits had sat at his table.

"Seemed a decent sort," said the elderly man. "Jovial, too—never would have thought him a bandit. Pulled a fast one on me—ha-ha!"

Some one absently asked him what.

"Well," continued the man mildly, "he asked me what hand I stirred my coffee with—"

I glanced at Mooney; he glanced at me with an exultant gleam in his eyes. He started for the door with his cigar set at a truculent angle. I followed him. The mild man was still holding forth, and his voice floated after us.

"—I told him I used my right hand; and he suggested that I use a spoon!"

The detective snorted. The owner approached.

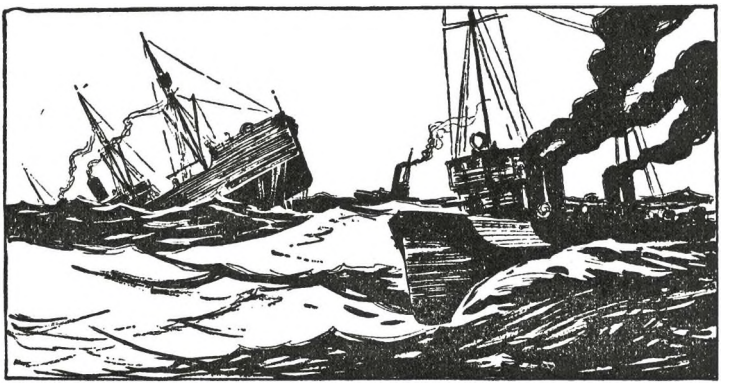
"Outa the way!" snapped Mooney. "I'm in a hurry!"

The arrest of Alfy K— in less than an hour after the hold-up surprised the powers of officialdom; and when Alfy quickly broke and told the officer who the other two were, two transient crooks *en route* south from Detroit, officialdom was loud in its praise of "as smart a piece of detective work as we've seen in years!" And the papers were loud in their praise too.

The detective took the praise and honors with his tongue in his cheek; and to compensate me for my silence threw part of the credit my way, to his "reporter friend." The two transient crooks who had drawn Alfy into the hold-up were arrested before ten o'clock that night in an apartment near Wilson Avenue and Sheridan, where they had felt quite safe. Alfy drew the shortest sentence, for which I was somehow glad.

I was at the station with the bunch to see the trio off to the pen, and the last thing I heard from Alfy as he climbed the coach steps was his care-free drawl with that wide smile.

"Say, guys!" he called out to us. "What hand does you stir your coffee with?"



A sailor-man still in the navy presents his version of the sinking of the U. S. S. Covington—and what happened to the crew.

The Thirteenth Ship

By H. HONEYCUTT, U. S. N.

IN June 1918 I was serving aboard the U. S. S. *Covington,* doing transport duty, and in this particular instance carrying a draft of troops and naval men. The Navy supernumeraries were *en route* to naval headquarters—France. Little or nothing has ever been written of those daring aviators who went sixty to one hundred miles seaward to escort a convoy of troop-ships to safety, through the submarine-infested area of the Bay of Biscay. But that is another story.

There was nothing unusual as far as our ship was concerned, or any other ship of the convoy, for that matter, in making ready for sea.

On June the 13th we steamed out of Hoboken with thirteen ships in the convoy—daring fate, disregarding superstition, and defying the elements and the enemy U-boats. Some of the ships were camouflaged; ours was not. There were some half-dozen U. S. destroyers who accompanied us out to sea, but what a lonesome feeling we experienced when the morning came after they had turned back! Perhaps those in charge realized this, for the word was passed: "This ship has the best gunnery crew in the Navy."

Nearly two weeks of nothing but water —except for an occasional false alarm when some unfortunate porpoise was mistaken for a sub. —And then a tenseness gripped us: We were to enter the danger zone next day—the German U-boat-patrolled waters of the Bay of Biscay!

Smoke was on the horizon—slowly but surely drawing nearer . . . The sea was rough and many were seasick, some so sick that they weren't even interested in *what* we met.

An hour later we knew, for we were surrounded by U. S. destroyers, loaded with "ash-cans"—depth charges. These "greyhounds of the sea" had come from the other side of the world to convoy us through to safety. No man, on returning home after a long absence, was ever more happy to be greeted by his dog than we were when the greyhounds of Uncle Sam's Navy circled our ships.

Safely in Brest harbor, our precious cargo of troops and the men for Naval aviation were disembarked and sent on their way to duty. Our convoy of thirteen ships started taking on coal, making ready for the return trip. Thirteen would start, but only twelve would ever reach America again to bring back fighting men to France. And my ship—the U. S. S. *Covington*—was to be "the thirteenth ship"!

During 1918, I am informed, there were only eighteen days when it did not rain somewhere in "sunny France." The morning we started our return trip was typically murky, and the sky was low indeed—a type of day made to order for submarine advantage, as they depend chiefly on hiding as their defense. With U. S. destroyers accompanying us, we proceeded on a zigzag course back through the submarine area, all hands wearing the usual life-preservers. Routine duties occupied our time until about nine-thirty P. M., July 1st.

I was not on duty in the fire-room, and as I was not feeling very well, had retired early, removing my jacket, life-preserver and shoes, preparatory to sleep. (This was the usual manner of sleeping during the trip through the danger zone.) I was sound asleep when a terrific shock rocked the ship, throwing men off their feet. I was thrown from my bunk, my spine hurt. The smell of gun-cotton told all —the *Covington* had been torpedoed!

The torpedo struck the fire-room, and the main steam-line carried away, disabling the whole power supply. The ship was not only paralyzed from a standpoint of motive power, but was plunged into darkness as well. Despite our helpless plight, there was much less confusion than one would expect, as a well-seasoned crew carried out the commands of Captain Hasbrook, our commanding officer.

The torpedo had struck just about fifteen feet below my bunk, and instinct alone enabled me to respond when "General Alarm" sounded. I was "out on my feet," as they say of a punch-dazed boxer, as I staggered to my assigned station, without my life-preserver. I was clad only in my underwear and the dungaree pants I had kept on when I retired to sleep. The chaplain gave me a preserver.

Lieutenant-commander Gillette, under whom I worked in the fire-room, had lost three men; the water had rushed in so fast that the victims of the fire-room tragedy were washed up under the gratings and were unable to escape.

Upon reporting aboard any ship, each person is assigned to a particular lifeboat, so that in case of an emergency such as this, there may be no confusion. Each man knows which lifeboat is his, and on what part of the ship it is to be located. My lifeboat, however, was splintered against the side of a smokestack when the torpedo struck. As a result, I left the *Covington* on a "doughnut" raft—to float about two hours in a rough sea.

IMMEDIATELY after the disaster was known, the flag officer gave orders for Destroyer *Smith* to stand by to pick up the crew when they abandoned the ship, and to give any aid possible to the stricken craft. And the twelve ships of the convoy moved on toward home!

Because the *Covington* listed so far to one side, it was necessary to cut the belly-band on a lifeboat on that side, in order to launch it. The boat swung out, far over the water, and on the return swing it struck the side of the mother ship and threw three of the deck force into the water. They were never seen again, as their bodies landed in the water which was rushing into the hole in the side of the ship. They were caught in the suction and drawn in to join their three shipmates, who had met a similar fate in the fire-room a few minutes before. This tragedy brought the loss up to six out of over a thousand aboard the *Covington*—a miraculously low mortality when one considers that the torpedo had made a direct hit in the fire-room.

All hands were afloat in lifeboats or doughnut rafts, such as misfortune had given me—all except "the best gunnery crew in the Navy" and indomitable Captain Hasbrook.

They stayed aboard the *Covington* until the water had covered their guns, and then Captain Hasbrook and his gallant gunnery crew abandoned their posts and came to join the rest of the crew he had sent to safety some three hours earlier! The Captain has since been made an admiral and is deserving of any honor the Navy may be able to bestow. I am proud to have served with him.

A radio message was sent out, asking that a tug be sent to take the *Covington* back to France if possible. Meanwhile the destroyer *Smith* circled the *Covington* all night, dropping "ash-cans" at intervals of about an hour, to discourage any further attack on the helpless ship, which had settled on even keel after all open space was filled with water. It was two-thirds submerged then, and only the water-tight compartments kept her afloat.

The next morning Captain Hasbrook asked for ten volunteers to go with him to determine what, if anything, could be done to save the ship. The Captain went back with men he had selected himself—for the whole crew of over one thousand men had volunteered.

The *Covington* fought a losing fight for about thirteen hours, and finally succumbed to a heavy sea. After a bulkhead gave way, between the fire-room and the engine-room, (weakened, no doubt, by the blast of the torpedo) the *Covington's* bow pointed skyward as she slipped stern-first beneath the waters. The thirteenth ship had failed to complete her thirteenth voyage.

The *Smith* took us back to Brest, where it was discovered the injury to my spine was serious, and I was sent to Base No. 5 Hospital. After five months treatment at the hospital, I was declared fit for duty and returned to America.

A Doctor's Dilemma

What happened when a physician's car, with a patient in critical condition as passenger, slid into a deep river.

By BEN FRANKLYN, M. D.

ANY man who has practiced medicine for twenty years is pretty sure to have a number of exciting experiences. However, I do not consider being arrested on a false accusation of peddling dope, or being held up on a lonely highway and relieved of a watch and a few dimes, as nearly so exciting as some other things which have happened to me. I've picked what I believe to be the most terrifying experience that ever came my way, and shall attempt to tell it to you. And I feel sure that, when you have read this, you will agree with me when I say that it is extremely wise to heed the intuition of a woman.

On this particular night I had been called to an obstetrical case seventeen miles in the country. Of course it was dark and stormy, the rain coming down in torrents—youngsters will choose such nights to make their appearances in this world.

I stopped by and picked up one of the nurses who helped me on such cases. The going was not so bad at first, as the roads were gravel part of the way; but the nearer we came to the river, the worse they got. The steep hill leading down to the ferry was a veritable lob-lolly, the car skidding from one side to the other.

"I dread that old ferry more than any part of the road," Miss Martin, the nurse, remarked.

But I assured her that it was safe as could be. I had crossed on those logs numbers of times. The ferry was like those found on so many small streams—a flat raft of logs and boards, anchored by an immense chain.

I will admit, however, I breathed a sigh of relief when we had descended the slippery hill to the old ferry and were at last landed on this foundation of heavy timbers.

We crossed the river in safety, and finally reached our destination. But the patient was in a critical condition. And my first thought was of some way to get her to the hospital. I called Mr. Heard, her husband, out of the room, and told him how conditions were. He readily agreed to putting her into my car and taking her to town, where there was a good hospital.

BUT when this was mentioned to Mrs. Heard, she fairly shrieked her protest.

"Please don't take me—please don't! I've always felt that I was going into that old black river some night. I'm afraid to cross it," she cried.

Her husband and I tried to cheer her up by laughing at her fears. But up to the very minute we started, she begged to remain at home, telling us over and over that she was afraid of the river.

I noticed that Miss Martin was having

very little to say, and she seemed rather nervous as she moved about making preparations for the trip. Finally she called me to one side and said:

"Dr. Franklyn, you know that I have always carried out your orders just as you gave them; but somehow I can't help telling you this time that I feel sure you are making a mistake. That poor woman's fears may not be wholly unfounded."

I was a bit irritated that she should not more fully realize the woman's condition and the folly of attempting to deliver her there in the home. But I tried to hide this irritation by joking about superstitious women.

"It isn't superstition—it's intuition," she answered.

HOWEVER, we were soon on our way to the hospital—Miss Martin and Mrs. Heard on the rear seat; Mr. Heard and I on the front. The rain was still coming down in a slow steady drizzle. The darkness was so dense that it seemed suffocating.

"It's so dark. It's so dark!" Mrs. Heard kept moaning. "And I'm afraid to cross that old river."

We tried to crack a few jokes in an effort to get her mind on something besides herself and her fears. But the more we laughed and talked, the harder she pleaded to be taken back home. And when we reached the river and started onto the ferry, she began crying, and praying for God to protect us.

In a few minutes we had reached the opposite shore. The old ferryman fastened the chain and called to me to drive off. I drove off, and started up the steep incline. The wheels began to spin in the mud. I felt Mrs. Heard lunge forward, her breath coming in gasps.

"Better back and get another start," Heard suggested.

He scarcely had the words out of his mouth before I had thrown into neutral, and we were easing back.

"Don't! Don't back any farther!" Mrs. Heard screamed.

But the back wheels were already touching the boards. The next moment there was a terrific backward jerk, and the front of the car plunged into the river as the ferry shot out into the stream. The chain had broken.

I DON'T know just what did take place in those next few hectic moments. It seemed that the whole world was screaming in my ears. When I finally got my head above water, I found that the car was turned upside down. The old ferryman was yelling something about saving the women.

About that time Miss Martin's head bobbed up and I helped her get a grip on one of the wheels. The water was over her head, but came just past my shoulders.

I called Heard, just as he raised his dripping head out of the water, screaming in the most agonizing tones: "Where is Annie? Help me find Annie!"

The old ferryman had waded out and helped Miss Martin to shore, since she could not swim. And she kept screaming to us to tell her where to go for help. But we three men only half heard her, as we searched frantically for Mrs. Heard.

Those next few seconds seemed like an age. We made sure that she was not in the car. Our next guess was that she was crushed beneath it. Surely I shall never witness a more pitiful sight than Heard presented as he waded in the muddy river water searching for his wife.

It couldn't have been more than a few minutes, however, before I heard him cry out: "I hear her! Listen!"

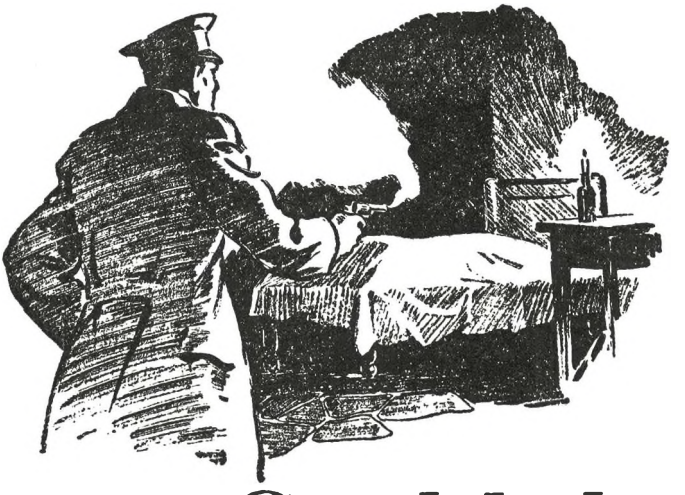
We raised our heads above water and listened. A distinct groan came from somewhere in the darkness. All eyes were turned toward the almost indiscernible raft, moving toward the opposite shore. Without a word we plunged forward and swam in that direction.

WE found Mrs. Heard huddled in a heap there on the ferry. She had not been in the water, but had leaped from the car when she gave that last scream, landing on the ferry just as it shot out from under the car.

We were all so relieved at finding her that everything else seemed inconsequential. I realized that she must be taken home as quickly as possible. There was no time for the trip to the hospital.

While Heard went off to the nearest neighbors, we got Miss Martin to the ferry and fished my bags out of the car. We just made it back to the Heard home in time for that bouncing baby boy to come into the world. . . .

It was just about daylight when I finally got to my own home. My wife met me at the door. "What on earth has happened?" she cried. "I haven't slept a wink, because I just felt that something terrible was taking place!"



An American intelligence officer in Italy sets out to trap a deserter — and enjoys an evening exciting indeed.

Scaldaletto

By GARRISON K. RUMFORD

FEAR is an odd thing. In the excitement of a riot, a brawl, a mutiny or a battle the sensation may not be present at all. You simply haven't time to think about it. On the other hand, a circumstance which is perfectly harmless—plus a mental state prepared to be alarmed—can give you as nasty a fright as you'd ever want to experience.

It happened in the last month of the World War, October, 1918. The place was a drab industrial town in the north of Italy: a little city called Novara.

Not an important dot upon the map, nor an agreeable resort. There once was a great battle there—nearly a hundred years ago; a Roman fortress commanded the valley—two thousand years since. Huge furrows in the earth mark the ditches and moats of that long-forgotten day; the vast blocks of stone which were once ramparts and bastions had been used to form foundations for more modern buildings—buildings only five or six hundred years old, perhaps.

The narrow, dark lodging house where I had taken a room for an indefinite sojourn must have been largely constructed from these stones from the time of the majesty of the empire. The outer walls were a good three feet thick, the windows were just wide enough for a man to get his head through, not his shoulders. The steep stone stairs to the third story angled up bending always to the right—a provision against an armored man's getting too free play for his sword-arm.

A stout, black Italian in stocking-feet had conducted me morosely to my room, getting his pay in advance.

But you couldn't blame him for that. I was dusty and travel-stained; I had been shuttling hither and yon from the Alps to the Adriatic in slat-seated third-class railway carriages; and I hadn't shaved for a week.

"*Eccolo,*" my host grumbled, displaying the cell.

"*Fa freddo*—it's cold!" I complained.

As I had entered the hotel down below I had glimpsed one of those devices for heating the homes affected by the simpler Italians: a copper brazier not much bigger than a soup-plate, with a few morsels of charcoal feebly glowing in it. Nevertheless I negotiated for its presence in my room. Four cents, was the agreed-upon price for this blaze.

I did not wait actually to revel in the luxury of the brazier's glow, though. I was not visiting fair Novara for pleasure alone. I was upon a mission:

An entirely undesirable citizen known as Memmo Poggi had emigrated from Italy several years before the war. The military authorities kept track of him, and upon Italy's entrance into the war, urgently requested his return to his native land; but our State Department was in one of its recurrent throes of nobility

and Memmo was allowed to claim sanctuary.

Signor Poggi was known to be a very articulate anarchist, a noisy speaker and a general disturber of the peace; but it was only suspected—and never proved—that he spent a spare hour or two fashioning clock-bombs, and a spare moment now and again planting them under the front porches of those whom he looked upon as capitalists.

Eventually a couple of children were killed and an old woman maimed; but there wasn't enough against Memmo for an indictment. He was a deft, convincing talker; and never suffered more serious damage than a stiletto nick beneath the chin.

But whatever contempt he may have had for local cops, he mistrusted the American army authorities when the draft came along. He might have fled to South America, following many a friend's example; but it is generally believed that it was made very well worth his while to return to Piedmont and Savoy; the enemy could always employ a slick tongue which could spit seeds of dissatisfaction broadcast. Before and after the disaster of Caporetto he made plenty of trouble—that was what the military attaché of the American Embassy suspected, at least.

THE man had really splendidly concealed himself, however—his method was afterward exposed. He had had the luck to be intimate with a middle-aged track-walker of his own race, a fellow not unlike him in appearance and size, though twenty years older. Memmo found his pal dead—or perhaps had hastened his demise—in his lonely shack one night. Thereupon he had helped himself to a perfectly good American passport with a picture—well, like most passport pictures, shaggy, vague, not revealing so minute a detail as the scar under the chin. The track-walker had only recently been transferred to this section, was all but unknown. Memmo neatly buried him and took his place for a few weeks, then chucked the job and sailed for Bella Napoli, an American citizen past military age. Fine!

Well, this was the lad I had been assigned to locate.

The Pittsburgh police had his mug and Bertillon measurements and record of suspected past activities, of course. But the Memmo Poggi they knew had not been an American citizen. The Italian army Intelligence and the Royal Carabiniere went searching for an Italian deserter—an Italian born in Gaeta, and thirty-two years of age. They didn't guess about Ugo Parlerini, naturalized American citizen, born in Bari, excellent record with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, fifty-three years old. . . .

Quitting that frigid stone cell, it was actually agreeable to get out into the downright drizzle of the gloomy night. As directly as possible I sought the slummiest section of the town and began a regular if leisurely combing of the meanest eating-places and wine-cellars. My American uniform and my facility in ungrammatical Italian, such a language as a youth raised in America might be expected to speak, got me a cordial enough welcome everywhere. I engaged mildly in interminable discussions about war. Most important, I had a dirty little wad of blue ten-lira notes to stand treat for the comrades pretty generously.

For a long time I found only the veriest amateurs, though, old fogies a little soft in the head, wounded fellows with grievances against inefficient officers and scant rations; a self-mutilated coward here and again. All in all about as dangerous as the average noonday assembly in New York's Union Square.

Then, in the tenth or twelfth dive, I found Memmo Poggi. Only—he found me first.

They were a group of four in a dark corner, down in a cellar *trattoria* behind a vast keg of wine. I had been farther out in the room with some unshaven soldiers on leave from the Piave, and two jolly fat girls with dirty faces and clean teeth. Begun to relax my vigilance, I suppose. Anyway, I went right over to the group behind the wine-cask when one called out to me: *"Soldat' American', viene qui*—come here!"

All in the same instant, I perceived the nick of the scar beneath the chin of the man who faced me, and felt the nose of a gun pressed against the base of my spine by one of his companions.

It wasn't a nice situation. That corner of the cellar was pretty dark, only the usual illumination of a single taper in the mouth of a wine-bottle. Our whole group was almost hidden from the rest of the occupants of the den by the cask and several piled-up beer boxes. The gun which promised to blow me in half was hidden beneath the edge of the table.

"Delatore—a spy," said Memmo Pog-

(Continued on page 160)

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gi shortly. *"Avanti, ninno*—up and at him, little one!" He nudged a huge bottle from the table, expecting the crash of its shattering to smother the report of the gun held against my spine.

I take no credit for acting promptly. It was just surprise, as a matter of fact, which made me promptly sit down.

The gun never went off at all. I must have bumped it out of "Ninno's" hand as I plumped into his lap. But my own right hand was inside my coat and blouse, fumbling for my own .45, too tight in its shoulder-holster.

Memmo Poggi's hand flashed back, and steel gleamed. The man I was sitting on was wrestling and jerking under me. And I was being tossed and bumped about as I tried to hold him.

Then almost immediately—Poggi was gone. I hit somebody back-handed, had got my gun out,—too late,—but was strategically well planted with my back to the huge tun of several hundred gallons of "red ink."

And outside there was a tumult in the street, and a truly terrible screaming.

Well that, I can hear everyone say, is a pretty flat adventure story! The mug goes after a murderer with his gun where he can't get at it, gets a little muzzy and wabbly, and only misses being shot because he's not quite steady enough to stand up when a gun pokes into his back.

Maybe that's a fair estimate. I got no decoration for the fact that a couple of Italian *carabiniere* patrolling the *Via Negroni* a hundred yards away caught a fellow ducking round the corner. It was not due to my efforts that the technical deserter and anarchist Memmo Poggi was identified shortly after midnight, and executed just before sunrise.

IT was what happened subsequent to the brawl in the *cave* which gave me the real jolt.

Coming up after the capture, and properly identifying myself, I was warmly thanked, it is true, by the local *carabiniere.* The captain opened up a pint of warmish champagne; and for an hour we smoked the terrible black stogies known as *Toscani* and talked about the Camorra—in those days, a real menace.

This Poggi was undoubtedly one of them. And when his arrest was noised abroad—the captain shook his head as to my future. So I was to be stationed in Naples? Oh, very bad! Or at Brindisi? *Poveretto,* poor fellow, much worse!

Altogether, what with one thing and another, I wended my way homeward none too cheerily. My height, something over six feet, and a birthmark on my cheek, make me peculiarly easy to identify.

The dangling left sleeve of my overcoat was a visible reminder of my narrow escape—the knife Poggi had thrown had neatly sliced through the armpit without my feeling it. The elaborate escort of plain-clothes operatives who dogged me back to my hotel was not reassuring. I mulled over the *carabiniere* captain's tales of the treacherous, skulking death which might leap out at me anywhere.

ONCE I had safely reached that domicile of mine I was supposedly safe, however. My heavily cloaked escort, looking like so many conspirators themselves, dispersed as I waved them goodnight. Silently I tiptoed up the pit-dark well of the stairs.

I had my gun handy now, I can assure you. Noiselessly I manipulated the huge brass key which operated the lock of my room. That ponderous door once behind me, I would be, for the night at least, safe.

Although I felt as if in a sepulchral vault, the room's very closeness and tomblike confinement lent me a sense of security. I lighted a candle and started to slough off my soaking overcoat. And then—I saw the outline of the bed.

In it was a long, massive shape.

Instantly I knew what had happened. An assassin identifying my lodgings had secreted himself in the bed, knowing that I must eventually return. Intending to kill me immediately I entered, he had waited long and thus fallen asleep.

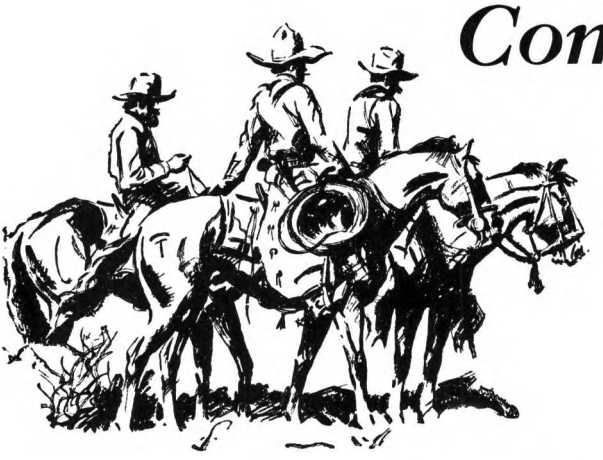
My .45 roared in the dark as I smoked a heavy bullet directly into the crouching figure.

Astonishingly, sparks flew. Had I detonated a mine in the bed? Yet there was no explosion.

The landlord came with a candle before my own taper was lit. Eventually it cost me nearly seven dollars to reimburse him for the bullet-holes through his blankets, and the complete destruction of his *scaldaletto*—the six-foot-long, trestlelike wooden frame, humped to a peak in the middle to keep the bedclothes from direct contact with the tiny brazier of charcoal—the ingenious Italian warming-pan.

But I did sleep in a dry bed.

Coming!



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